

**DOCTORAL RESEARCH SUPERVISION  
EXPERIENCES OF BUSINESS EDUCATION  
STUDENTS IN NIGERIA**

**MERCY OKOLI**

**2019**

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**MERCY OKOLI**

(Student No.: 212562336)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Education, College of Humanities  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Durban

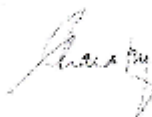
March 2019

Supervisor: Professor Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry

## **SUPERVISOR'S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT**

### **Statement by supervisor**

I, Suriyamurthe M. Maistry, as the candidate's supervisor, agree / ~~do not agree~~ to the submission of this thesis.



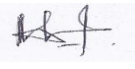
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Date

## Declaration

I, Mercy Okoli (212562336) declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted to any other university for examination.

Signed:  .....

Date: 28/02/2019 .....

## **Acknowledgement**

My unending gratitude first goes to the Lord Almighty God who sustained and preserved me all through the doctoral journey. I sincerely appreciate my supervisor, Professor Suriamurthe Moonsamy Maistry, whose valuable contributions made this work a success.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved husband, Daniel Chidozie Okoli whose sacrifice and support made this study a success.

## **Abstract**

Research supervision has been an integral process in doctoral education for the development of researchers or scholars. However, until recently this important pedagogical process has received little attention. The recent awareness of the centrality of research supervision in the development of new generation researchers and knowledge workers has been attributed to the global move towards a knowledge-based society where nations strive to produce quality intellectual human capital in order to be able to compete favourably at the level of the global knowledge economy. The persistent high rates of doctoral attrition and late completions, as well as the declining quality of research outputs has sparked debates about ways to improve the quality of learning, student satisfaction, and research productivity. Although most advanced countries, in an attempt to make all stakeholders accountable, have now placed the focus on what has hitherto been regarded as a clandestine relationship or the supervision relationship little is known regarding the contexts in developing African countries. Research evidence has shown that, even though doctoral students are central to the supervision and knowledge production processes, their voices have been under-represented. Available studies in that regard have mostly focused on contexts in developed Western countries. Thus, there is an acute lack of research on the experiences of doctoral students with respect to research supervision in developing African countries such as Nigeria. The aim of this thesis was, therefore, to explore the research supervision experiences of doctoral students in Nigeria. To this end, this study used an interpretive research design which specifically employed the phenomenographic approach with which to explore the experiences of a purposive sample of fifteen doctoral students selected from four different universities in Nigeria. The need to obtain a broad range of student experiences related to research supervision led to the selection of participants from different stages of their candidature. The study was underpinned by the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and draws on the Conceptual Framework of Research Supervision by Lee (2012) and the discourses of analysis of supervision by Grant (2005). The presented findings of my research thesis were based on the analysis of interview transcripts across the whole group of participants. The main findings of this study were that participants experienced research supervision in three qualitative ways – 1) as apprenticeship-like/power relationship; 2) as transacting in the social space; and 3) participants expressed a yearning for positive supervision relationship. These three ways of experiencing research supervision were found to be characterised by strong power dynamics that for the most part impacted negatively on the participants' learning experiences. These findings, therefore, have important implications for opening up debates on the subject of power in academic supervisory relationships within the African context. The study concludes that in order to improve students' learning experiences and productivity; and to align with international good practices, there is a need to disrupt the way in which supervision happens within the Nigerian context. By institutionalising and operationalising policies that empower postgraduate students to become more active in the supervision's proximal processes, the ultimate personal, institutional and national goals of undertaking a doctorate would be realised.

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## **List of acronyms and abbreviations**

FME	Federal Ministry of Education
N.C.E.S	National Centre for Education Statistics
NPE	National Policy on Education
NUC	National University Commission
USSR	University System Study and Review
VTE	Vocational and Technical Education

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

This chapter provides the background and context in which student experience of research supervision was studied. The chapter first highlights the rationale for the study, the research objectives and the critical question that guides the study. Then, international and national viewpoints/perspectives on doctoral (PhD) education and research supervision to contextualise the study are explored. The chapter then explains my motivation for the study, my role as the researcher, the research method used and concludes with a brief overview of the subsequent chapters in the study.

Intellectual human capital development is heavily dependent on higher education research and knowledge generation processes. One key process that has remained central to higher education knowledge production is the research supervision process (Ghadirian, Sayarifard, Majdzadeh, Rajabi & Yunesian, 2014), which enables research students (particularly at the doctoral level) to engage in high-level intellectual activities with the aim of producing new and useful knowledge and thus transform the novice researchers (doctoral students) into independent researchers/scholars (Neuman, 2002). With the increased international concern about high attrition, late completions and poor research outputs in higher education (Lovitts, 2008) which may largely be attributable to the quality of the supervision relationship, attention has heightened on providing quality supervision that can enhance better experiences for students (Baptista, 2011). Research evidence shows that understanding the perspectives of the direct recipients of supervision – the doctoral students, could contribute to the effectiveness of supervision (Hadingham, 2011). However, to date, the voices of doctoral students have been under-represented in research supervision scholarship, particularly in the Nigerian context (Hadingham, 2011; Okeke, 2010). Thus, the focus

is on exploring the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in the Nigerian context.

This study sought, through the analysis of interview data generated from the participants/doctoral students<sup>1</sup>, to identify and to describe variations in the participants' conceptions of their experiences of research supervision (the phenomenon of investigation) as well as how and why such experiences influence their learning and intellectual development in a particular doctoral (PhD) program.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

It has been established from the body of literature on research supervision that, although research supervision in doctoral education is central, it has not received adequate attention for several decades (Armstrong, 2004). Only recently have researchers begun to focus specifically on the experiences that postgraduate/doctoral students receive from the process in the African contexts (Ganqa, 2012; Hadingham, 2011; Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011). Research evidence indicates that there is insufficient knowledge of research supervision experiences of doctoral students (Hadingham, 2011), particularly in non-Western contexts such as the Nigerian context (Okeke, 2010). Notably, the available literature on postgraduate/doctoral supervision in the Nigerian context, for instance from studies by Adeniyi & Oladejo (2012), Agu & Odimegwu (2014), and Oredein (2008), mostly adopt the positivist approach (quantitative perspective) (Lahenius, 2013, p. 31) which is mainly concerned with generalisation. Although these authors contribute to our knowledge of research supervision, their studies fall short of an in-depth explication of supervision experiences from the perspective of doctoral students themselves (Lahenius, 2013, p. 31).

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<sup>1</sup>In this study, I use the term 'participants' and 'doctoral students' interchangeably to refer to the study's subjects/respondents.

Thus, the apparent lack of qualitative studies that privilege the voice of doctoral students (Golde, 2006) makes it a niche area for research. Also, considering the current academic ranking of world universities, whereby ranking criteria such as quality research outputs in the form of publications of articles in reputable journals, publications of books, and others are used (Chiemeké, Longe, Longe & Shaib, 2009), only one university among all Nigerian universities made a ranking in the list of the one-thousand best universities in the world (Awojulgbe, 2016).

Arguably, therefore, exploring the perspective of doctoral students could be an appropriate way in which to respond to an earlier call to re-evaluate research and supervision in the Nigerian higher education context (Bako, 2005). Further, without knowledge of the accounts by doctoral students, it may be difficult to develop and implement supervision policies that can improve their learning and overall experiences within the doctoral experience.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The deficit in senior academics in Nigerian higher education has drawn the attention of the Nigerian government to engage with problematic issues in this domain. Thus, there is an increased concern for the development of more doctoral/PhD fields and hence a greater number of doctoral students. However, examination of research supervision, which is a process that is globally recognised to be central to the raising of high-level intellectuals/scholars, has not received adequate empirical investigation. It is against this background, therefore, that the paucity of empirical research on research supervision (Bako, 2005), with specific reference to the experiences of doctoral students from the supervisory process, as noted by Okeke (2010) was echoed in a recent study asserting that “in many institutions it is not common to evaluate supervisory experience...” (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014, p. 3). Also, although issues of the unsatisfactory quality of research outputs, and the late/non-completions of doctoral programmes are said to have affected the nation’s competitiveness in the global knowledge economy (Chiemeké, et al., 2009), this

unsatisfactory situation has been linked to the quality of research supervision that students receive, as attested to by the fact that “...doctoral supervision has remained a ‘black box’ but also a privatised space...” (Leonard, 2010, p. 39).

## **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This aim of this study was to explore the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students from four different universities in Nigeria. Thus, the main objectives of the study are as follows:

- (a) To explore the numerous ways that doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision, in terms of the supervisory process, practices and relationship;
- (b) To examine how the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students impact on their learning and development in their doctoral experiences; and
- (c) To theorise doctoral supervision from the perspective of students, with a view to providing an insight into ways of improving the student experience regarding supervision.

In order to achieve the objectives stated above, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems theory was identified as a useful framework for addressing the issues. For objective one, Bronfenbrenner’s model offers a comprehensive framework that situates the developing individual within a system of relationships influenced by multi-layered environmental factors, which allows me to identify different experiences that participants have in the supervision space. For objective two, Bronfenbrenner’s model which explains how environmental variables exert influences on the developing individual who is also capable of shaping the environment (by-directional influences) enables me to understand the impact of supervision experiences on participants’ learning and development. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner’s model which is rooted in the constructivist theory allows me to draw some insights constructivist perspectives regarding research supervision perspectives of the doctoral students interviewed in this study.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

- (a) What are the ways in which doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision?
- (b) How do the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria impact on their learning and development in their respective doctoral programmes?
- (c) Why is it that doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision in the way that they do, currently?

## **1.6 The Research Context**

This study is located within the international, national and institutional higher education contexts with a specific focus on doctoral student supervision.

### **1.6.1 International context: developing PhDs/doctorates as an international agenda**

An increase in the global significance of knowledge (known as international knowledge economy) has resulted in the use of the knowledge production capability of a nation's higher education institutions as an important index with which to gauge their economic development and competitiveness (Delany, 2008; Leonard, 2010; Okafor, 2011; Užienė, 2014). Consequently, most countries in the world are moving towards mass higher education, in general, and an increase in doctorates/PhDs, in particular (Louw & Muller, 2014). The doctorate/PhD is "the highest academic [research] degree that a university can" confer on a qualified recipient (Green & Powell, 2005; Louw & Muller, 2014; Park, 2007, p. 4). Apart from the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy), other forms of doctorates (professional doctorate) have been introduced in recent times (Gill, 2009; Park, 2007). Notably, the idea of running a PhD/doctorate on the "notion of knowledge economy", whereby knowledge is commodified (as something of economic value), is considered to be a neoliberal agenda (Adkins, 2009; Hopwood, 2010b, p. 829; Neumann & Guthrie, 2002) which is changing the traditional framing of the doctorate/doctoral experience. Traditionally, the doctorate is centred on an original contribution to the body of knowledge (Lovitts, 2005; Neuman, 2002), and that plays a critical role in the career path of academics (Lovitts, 2008; Park, 2007). The concern now, is that running a PhD based on a market-oriented ideology/mentality where

knowledge is commodified could shift the focus of doctoral education to the mere acquisition of certification and which could, consequently, limit the quality of learning - “authentic learning” that is supposed to happen at the PhD level (Côté & Allahar, 2007; Waghid, 2006, p. 428). There are also debates about the nature and purpose of the doctorate/PhD (Leonard, 2010; Manathunga, 2005b) - whether a PhD should be about an original and a significant contribution to knowledge, or which it should about meeting the economic needs of the society (Albertyn, Kapp & Bitzer 2008, p. 750). It appears that most countries have tilted towards the neoliberal agenda of running a PhD. A study by Trigwell & Dunbar-Goddet (2005, p. 13) confirms that in the United Kingdom (UK), the PhD is now seen as a training for future researchers, rather than as a vehicle, within itself, for the generation of new knowledge. This has resulted in a “polarised debate” between a PhD as a product (focused on a thesis of high quality) and a PhD as a process (focused on developing the researcher) (Leonard, 2010, p. 40; Park, 2007, p. 6). But, with the current move towards a post-liberal ideology (Manathunga, 2009), the goal of doctoral education is increasingly recognised as being two-fold - “the production of creative scholars” and the completion of a thesis that makes “an original contribution to knowledge” (Khene, 2014; Lovitts, 2008, p. 297).

However, the major concern which has remained, statistically, as an international concern is the high rates of attrition and late completions in postgraduate/doctoral studies (Golde, 2000; 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Manathunga, 2005a), which are roughly calculated to be in the range of 40 – 50%. Research reports in the body of literature from various countries around the world provide evidence of this concern. For instance, a study conducted by Burnett (1999) revealed that nearly 50% of all the students who are enrolled in a doctoral programme, irrespective of the discipline, do not complete that programme. In the UK, a research study reports that between 40 and 50% of social science students do not successfully complete their dissertation/thesis (Armstrong, 2004). Similarly, research in North America shows that 50% of the students that entered graduate programs do not complete their program (National Centre for Education Statistics (N.C.E.S), 2000; Smallwood, 2004). In Asia, a study with a focus on one Malaysian university in 2005 reports the late completions of postgraduate and doctoral studies (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011, p. 16). Lastly, a study by Nkosi & Nkosi (2011) reports that approximately 45% of the students that enrol for doctoral programmes in South Africa do not complete the said programmes. Another concern is

the issue of quality of doctoral outputs, which for many developing countries is in decline (Louw & Muller, 2014).

These challenges have resulted in increased external pressure on higher education by governments and funding bodies. Governments in most advanced countries have introduced accountability measures (Manathunga, 2005b; Park, 2007). These involve the tying of higher education funding to performance criteria, such as quality research outputs and fast completions; introduction of strict entry requirements to doctoral studies, and the provision of more structure to the doctoral program itself (Clarke & Lunt, 2014). But, some authors “are concerned that an increased focus on external accountability is already threatening academic autonomy and innovation” (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 5). Other authors have questioned the use of students’ past successes in undergraduates and masters’ studies as the yardstick for selection - as the purpose of earlier undergraduate and master’s degrees differ considerably from that of the PhD/doctorate (Lovitts, 2005; 2008; Tobbell & Donnell, 2013). However, the use of criteria that measure intelligence and creativity have been found to be useful in screening prospective candidates (Sternberg, 2007).

Research response to these challenges has resulted in many studies that aim to identify causes and to proffer solutions to enhance completions (Murphy, Bain & Conrad, 2007; Lovitts, 2008). Some of the contributing factors that have been identified relate to the student, for example, their academic background and experience, personal life events, (for example, marriage) psychological features, socio-economic situation, and potential lack of confidence (Buttery, Richter & Filho, 2005; Ho, Wong & Wong, 2010; Khene, 2014; Wilson-Strydom, 2011). Leonard et al. (2006), in their extensive review of the literature, itemised the following student personal factors/characteristics leading to university drop-out:

- (a) the qualities of the student: persistence, time taken to decide on research topic, ability to write;
- (b) personal problems: marital breakdown, accidents, having a baby; and
- (c) problems inherent in the research: failure to gain results and having no alternative pathway with which to complete a PhD (Leonard et al., 2006, p. 36).

Although failures are usually blamed on the doctoral students (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; McCormack, 2005), research evidence consistently demonstrates that factors relating to the

institutional context, availability of infrastructure and research resources, the discipline and type of research, and the supervision also contribute to completion/non-completion of doctoral studies (Delany, 2008; Green & Powell, 2005; McCormack, 2005; Murphy et al., 2007). Lovitts & Nelson (2000, p. 49) argue that attrition problems may lie more with the institution/department than with the students. Lovitts & Nelson further explains that the institutional system that marginalises and silences students from voicing their complaints, account for most of the cases of attrition which go unnoticed. In another study that focuses on student performance, Lovitts (2008) finds that apart from the personal capital that students “bring to and develop during their graduate education”, other micro- and macro-environmental variables also contribute to students’ performance (Lovitts, 2008, p. 298). Thus, Lovitts recommends altering some of the micro- and macro-environmental factors in order to boost student performance.

Although many factors contribute to the success or failure of a doctoral student, it is widely acknowledged that research supervision is the single most critical factor. For instance, several authors argue that successful completion of doctoral studies depends almost entirely on the nature of the research supervision relationship, the quality of the supervisory process and the experience that students receive from that process (Abiddin, 2007; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Krauss & Ismail, 2010; Lee, 2008; Lessing & Schulze, 2002; McClure, 2005; Murphy et al., 2007; McCulloch, 2010; Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004; Petersen, 2007; Zhao, 2001). This awareness perhaps explains why most advanced countries now focus on what has hitherto been regarded as a clandestine affair – the supervision relationship (Manathunga, 2005b; Park, 2007), in order to “allow both the professor and the [doctoral] student to be thoroughly liberalised: to be rendered transparent, accountable, standardised, [and] observable” (Kendall, 2002, p. 137). Thus, this presents a critical area for in-depth investigation/research, particularly in African contexts where the research effort focused on research supervision is limited (Wilkinson, 2011).

### ***1.6.1.1 PhD/doctoral research supervision and students’ experiences***

Research supervision as a process of fostering the development of both the doctoral student research thesis and the doctoral students themselves is widely recognised as “the single most

important variable affecting the success of the research project” (Abiddin, 2007; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Krauss & Ismail, 2010; Lee, 2008; Lessing and Schulze, 2002; McClure, 2005; McCulloch, 2010; Murphy, Bain, & Conrad, 2007; Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004; Petersen, 2007; Wellington, 2010, p. 1; Zhao, 2001). However, until recently, this important pedagogical process has received limited attention and is still considered to be under-theorised or under-researched (Armstrong, 2004; Lee & Green, 2009). Over the last two decades, the research effort on postgraduate/doctoral supervision has increased significantly (Grant, 2005b and 2010; Chireshe, 2012; Golde, 2005; Krauss & Ismail, 2010; McClure, 2005; Walker, 2010; Wilkinson, 2011; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007). This is not unconnected with the recent changes in the international higher education landscape, brought about by the increased interest of governments in mass higher education and fast completions of postgraduate studies (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011). Studies that show how research supervision is affected by the wider political and social-cultural contexts have been well documented (Clark, 1998; Holligan, 2005; Taylor & Beasley, 2010; Ylijoki, 2008).

With the widened access to higher education and increased enrolment for doctoral studies, there are now concerns on how to improve the quality of supervision and the experience that students receive, because these factors have been linked to success/failure in doctoral outcomes (Adkins, 2009; Douglas, 2003, p. 213; Wisker, 2005). The traditional one-on-one supervision model between the supervisor (master/guru) and the student (protégé/disciple) is now to be considered inadequate in responding to the challenge of student isolation that is commonly reported in the fields of social sciences and humanities (Nulty, Kiley & Meyers, 2009, p. 696; Zhao, 2001). Considering that there is “a high proportion of doctoral students who do not fit the old mould” (Yeatman, 1998, p. 23), Grant (2003) argues that the traditional one-to-one mode of supervision practice should be stopped (Grant, 2003). Similarly, Deuchar (2008) notes that the changes in the higher education landscape will “impact on the style of research supervision that academics adopt for a new knowledge economy” (p. 489).

The research response to these issues has resulted in studies that propose supervision styles/approaches from which supervisors can choose a particular style (Burns, Lamm & Lewis, 1999; Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001; Lee, 2008; Maxwell & Smyth, 2010) - to be discussed in detail

in the next chapter. Also, alternative/complementary models of supervision have been developed, such as the team/group/co-supervision models (Hopwood, 2010a; Lee & Green, 2009; Pearson, 2000; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). Team supervision is believed to be advantageous, both to the supervisors in terms of relieving them, as they get to share supervision work with others (Manathunga, 2012), the mentoring of new supervisors (Spooner-Lane, Henderson, Price & Hill, 2007), and for the students in terms of enabling them to access a wealth of inputs. A study by Ives & Rowley (2005) finds that most of the study participants with satisfactory supervision experiences were those in a co-supervisory relationship, where supervisors provided support and actively engaged with the students. However, other empirical studies on the team/group supervision model showed varied results. Some of these studies report challenges relating to power issues, a lack of agreement among supervisors, the giving of conflicting feedback or varied views on student work (Manathunga, 2012; Wellington, 2010). This could explain why Rehn (2006) discourages the use of multiple supervisors. To address these issues, most authors emphasise the setting of ground rules and the alignment of expectations. Other writers provide important guides on how to manage such a relationship (Philips & Pugh, 1994, p. 116-118), although most of those guidelines are seemingly rather generic and they may not address specific issues in certain contexts.

Another model which has received wide acceptance for the social dimension that it adds to research supervision (Wisker, Robinson & Shacham, 2007), is the collaborative cohort model such as the communities of practice as proposed by Lave (1991). Critics of this model, however, regard it as an extension of the master-apprentice model and they argue that important knowledge resides in practice by the doctoral student rather than in the master (Lindkvist, 2005). Grant (2009) argues that the master-apprenticeship portrayal of supervision does not sufficiently "...shed light on the troublingly asymmetrical institutional architecture of supervision" (2009, p. 129). Overall, no one researcher seems certain of which model works best and in what context, as studies in the literature indicate that there is no 'best practice' of supervision or a "one-size-fits-all" model (Gatfield, 2005; Nulty et al., 2009, p. 695). In brief, it really is all about appropriateness, flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the students (Calma, 2007; Lee, 2008; McCallins & Nyar, 2012; Wright, 2007). Exploring different contexts may be correct pathway in terms of determining what works best in a particular context.

### **1.6.2 National context: Challenges in university education and development of a PhD/doctorate programme in Nigeria**

University education in Nigeria is underpinned by the National Policy on Education (NPE) which provides educational goals and policy framework for administering universities in Nigeria (NPE, 2013). A part of the objectives of university education, as stated in the policy, is to contribute to national development through the production of a high-level manpower resource and the generating of knowledge by paying specific attention to teaching and research (NPE, 2013, p. 26, 28). Based on these objectives, doctoral education (which evidently is concerned with the development of high-level intellectuals) occupies a strategic place in Nigerian university education. In terms of structure, a PhD in Nigeria can be said to be structured after the USA model, whereby the programme is composed of a coursework component and a research component (Park, 2007, p. 4). This is in contrast with countries such as the UK and Australia where a PhD/doctorate by research is more favoured (Park, 2007), although the UK has in recent times added a coursework aspect to the PhD process (Louw & Muller, 2014). It is argued that, although Nigeria adopted most of its higher education policies from Western countries, it fails in terms of maintaining international good standards in its practices (Okeke, 2010). In line with that, there have been calls to re-evaluate the state of Nigerian higher education (Bako, 2005). With the current drive towards an international knowledge-based economy, Nigeria - like other developing nations - is making efforts to compete on a global level and to address its challenge of an intellectual manpower shortage (Ogbogu, 2013; Okafor, 2011), particularly at the doctoral level. One attempt by the government, was the broadening of access to higher education through deregulation of higher/university education, which allows both state and private entities to become involved in the provision of higher education. Presently, Nigeria boasts of over 147 universities, which are owned and run by federal and state entities, and also by private individuals and organisations (Okebukola, 2015a).

Because of this broadened access, enrolment for a university education, particularly at the postgraduate/doctoral level, continues to rise and this presents another challenge - as there is no

proportionate rise in the numbers pertaining to a body of qualified manpower - those with PhDs/doctorates (Ogbogu, 2011, p. 35). The former president of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan, in his 2012 remark, deplored the shortage of qualified manpower in Nigerian universities as he noted that “60% of Lecturers in Nigerian Universities do not have Doctorate Degrees” (Adeyemo, 2012). This challenge is further complicated by the issue of a brain-drain - as “about 500 lecturers from Nigerian tertiary institutions have continued to migrate each year, particularly to Europe, America and other African countries” (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016, p. 115). This presents implications, in terms of limiting ‘mentoring’ of young researchers by established researchers, and in terms of reducing the quantity and quality of research outputs from Nigerian universities (Asiyai, 2013, p. 168). Also, the few qualified supervisors that are already overloaded with teaching and administrative work are now faced with the added pressure of supervision work (Douglass, 2003; Okebukola, 2002). Such disproportionate ratio of supervisor to student numbers may further exacerbate the issue of low research quality and research standards in Nigeria (Clark & Olumese, 2013; Chiemeké et al., 2009).

With the deregulation policy - which is still a subject of debate in some quarters (Godwin, Pase & Iheanyichukwu, 2011, p. 42-43), each university in Nigeria is autonomous and responsible for its own academic and administrative activities (Ogbogu, 2013). But, the federal government still reserves the sole responsibility for the monitoring and control of all universities in Nigeria. The federal government performs its monitoring role through the federal ministry of education (Ogbogu, 2013) and the National University Commission (NUC) which is a body charged with the responsibility of monitoring the establishment, accreditation of higher education institutions in Nigeria and ensuring quality (Godwin et al., 2011). While these structures contribute to the proper functioning of university education in Nigeria, it has been argued that the major challenge with realising the educational goal of universities in Nigeria is sometimes not so much about structures, but it is rather about the enactment and implementation of policies that are put forward by the federal government (Ogbogu, 2013).

The implementation of educational policies and the provision of quality education in Nigeria has been seriously constrained by funding (Okebukola, 2006). One of the reasons for the government’s deregulation of university education in Nigeria was the sharing of the responsibility for funding

university education between federal, state and private bodies (Ogbogu, 2013). For federal government-owned universities, undergraduate tuition fees are subsidised by the federal government, a privilege which most state-owned and private universities do not enjoy (Ekpoh, 2016). Despite the government subsidy, tuition fees are still considerably high, as most of the costs are shifted to students, particularly at the postgraduate level where students are made to bear the financial burdens of their education. Godwin et al. (2011) note that “there is no state or federal university in Nigeria that charges less than ₦ 100,000.00 thousand naira for its undergraduate courses” (p. 43).

In addition, an inadequate infrastructure that supports learning and research has been identified – common examples are ill-equipped libraries, obsolete books and journals, intermittent electrical power supply, poor research facilities - slow/intermittent internet connections and lack of materials, among others (Asiyai, 2013; Duze, 2010; Ekpoh, 2016; Ogbogu, 2011, p. 35; Okebukola, 2006). These factors increase the burden placed on doctoral students, who not only source for their own funding to pay their subscription fees, but also to provide research materials and resources for themselves. This is considered as a failure on the part of the Nigerian government in terms of investment in the development of its intellectual human capital, which is part of the reason that Nigeria has been unable to compete favourably at the level of the international knowledge economy (Akpochofo, 2009). This situation is said to be similar to situations in other African countries, whereby, doctoral students study within non-conducive environments (Harle, 2013, p. 6). However, most advanced countries are also experiencing funding challenges, due to the current system of mass higher education (Clarke & Lunt, 2014; Park, 2007), and their ability to invest heavily in higher education research has been rewarding in terms of positioning them as leading economies (Okafor, 2011).

With the issue of high rates of attrition and late completions in postgraduate/doctoral studies, funding presents a profound challenge in the Nigerian context in terms of national, institutional and personal costs (Agu & Kayode, 2013). This is further complicated by the excessively extended periods of stay in order to complete postgraduate programmes in Nigeria, which has been reported to involve periods of up to ten (10) and even to twenty (20) years, in some cases (Agu & Kayode, 2013; Ekpoh, 2016; Duze, 2010). Despite this alarming delay, very minimal research effort has

been directed in this regard. The available studies, which mostly employed the quantitative research approach, showed varied results, with some authors attributing the main reason for delay in postgraduate/doctoral studies to student-related problems which include student personal preparedness and student research and writing skills, while others found that institutional related factors, for example, institutional/departmental failure, and frequent labour-strike actions, contribute the most with respect to supervision-related problems being the least cited (Agu & Kayode, 2013; Aina, 2014; Duze, 2010; Ekpo, 2016; Etejere, 2006; Igun, 2010; Okebukola, 2015b). The conclusions arrived at in these studies may be due to the quantitative approach that was adopted, which focuses more on generalisation. McCormack (2005) cautions that “the focus on broad categories of factors has tended to obscure the complex interplay of the constellation of factors that comprise a category and the meaning these factors have for individual students in their lives” (p. 234). Arguably, earlier studies fall short of illuminating some in-depth understanding of how students experience the different variables at play in the supervision context and the impact on their learning.

Concerns about quality have led higher education institutions to focus on the quality of candidates they recruit into doctoral education. This is because recruitment in higher education has been linked with throughput and fast completions (Park, 2007). In Nigeria, the recruitment processes/procedures are formally outlined with well-stated criteria for admissions (in terms of qualifications, etc.), which in most cases are found on university websites. Okeke (2010) however, notes that one aspect of the admission process into doctoral studies in Nigeria that has been neglected is student participation in the selection of supervisors. This is usually not the case in most advanced countries, as student participation /involvement in the selection of supervisors is considered critical to the supervision experience (Edwards, Aspland, O’Leary, Ryan, Southey and Timms, 1995, p. 6; McAlpine & Turner, 2012). Exclusion of students from being part of the decision-making process in the choosing/selection of supervisors has been found to contribute largely to issues of mismatch and a lack of alignment between supervisors and supervisees in terms of expectations, research interest, etc. (Okeke, 2010). Furthermore, the admission processes into higher education in Nigeria are sometimes compromised, as desperate candidates and parents offer financial inducements to academic and administration staff to secure admissions (Okebukola, 2015b, p. 22). This may not be unconnected with the high unemployment rate in Nigeria, whereby,

students after completion of undergraduate degree are unable to secure employment and they have to enrol for postgraduate/doctoral studies in order to be better positioned for employment (Ekpoh, 2016, p. 70). But, such an extrinsic motive, which is merely for certification, has been criticised in terms of limiting student learning (Waghid, 2006).

This may have contributed to the corruption challenges in Nigerian higher education, which are noticeable in reports indicating cases of examination malpractices, forgery of certificates, bribery, lobbying, favouritism of candidates in return for gratifications, gratification and inducement to manipulate the system, and plagiarism, among others (Okebukola, 2015b). These practices not only threaten the quality of learning in higher education but they also clearly contradict the high moral standards that are expected from institutions of higher learning (Waghid, 2014, p. 1448). A recent study that focused on corruption in higher education in Nigeria, confirms that although issues of corruption did not originate from Nigeria and research evidences show corruption cases in other higher education contexts (both developed and developing countries), corruption is also well-seated in Nigerian higher education (Idoniboye-Obu, 2015). The author differentiates between systemic higher education corruption (where corruption is seen as a norm) and non-systemic higher education corruption (where it is limited to one department). Considering how “sorting” (a term which refers to bribery and other forms of corrupt practices) has become a cliché in the higher education context in Nigeria, it may be argued that higher education corruption in Nigeria is systemic. Akpanuko, (2012) argues that the issue of students engaging in “sorting” or “sleeping” their way through the system (probably to obtain certification) may not be unconnected with societal influences, given that “the university system is a mirror image of the decay in the wider Nigerian society” (p. 94). Similarly, another study emphasises the influences of ‘socio-cultural’ practices of the larger society on higher education, thus:

The corruption level which directly and indirectly impacts on academic integrity is high in Nigeria, more so in the last eight years. We cannot have a saintly university system in an ocean of corrupt larger community reeking with persons with dishonest attributes, where parents are key agents in “sorting” by inducing lecturers for marks for their children and wards and admission officers bribed to secure admission placements (Okebukola, 2015b, p. 22).

This probably explains why the quality of education in Nigeria is believed to have fallen (Chiemeké et al., 2009). At the postgraduate level, “academic publishing in Nigeria, the concomitant and index of scholarly research, has declined in terms of output, quality and regularity of publications” (Olukoju, 2002, p. 1). Despite such evidences of corruption in Nigerian higher education, which are mostly associated with examination mal-practices in taught programmes, research malpractices also do exist. This is noticeable in the alarming plagiarism level in some institutions where 25% of doctoral theses failed a plagiarism test (Okebukola, 2015b). However, only few studies have probed into issues of the corruption which might be happening in the supervision space in Nigeria, where knowledge is expected to be incubated.

### **1.6.3 Institutional context: Research supervision in the business education programme**

The Business education programme provides the immediate context for my thesis. Business education is a programme of study under the vocational and technical education (VTE) department which was first introduced into a Nigerian university in 1965, at the University of Nigeria, which was later followed by the University of Zaria, which introduced the programme in 1979 (Ekpenyong & Nwabuisi, 2003, p. 34; Okoro, 2013). In the past, enrolment for vocational and technical education programmes (inclusive of business education) was low due to the wrong societal perception of the course as a programme for the student drop-out population and that resulted in a shortage of business educators (Ekpenyong & Nwabuisi, 2003; Lawal, 2013). Over the years, awareness of the relevance of vocational and technical education to both personal and national economic development increased and that changed the societal perception and government attitude to VTE (NPE, 2013; Ekpenyong and Nwabuisi, 2003; Oriola, n.d.; Usoro, Okon, Usoro, and Akpan, 2013). This is noticeable in the increased number of universities that now offer courses in a business education. Currently, a business education programme is being offered in almost all of the government universities in Nigeria, and at least at the undergraduate level (Usoro et al., 2013, p. 4). Chukwurah (2013, p. 61) states that, based on the JAMB brochure of 1999, sixteen universities in Nigeria have a department of business education. Although only very few universities currently offer the programme at the doctoral level, enrolment numbers for

PhD have drastically increased (Usoro et al., 2013). Business education at the doctoral level is undertaken either on a full- or on a part-time basis and takes the form of coursework and dissertation writing (Ekpoh, 2016, p. 67). For full-time students, the coursework component of the programme takes one year to complete, after which the research component commences. It is common in a business education programme, as with other social science and humanities programs that doctoral students work individually to create their research topic under the supervision of a university-assigned supervisor until completion (Ekpoh, 2016). The relationship mostly takes the form of an apprenticeship that is characterised by a power imbalance. This is unlike the pure/applied sciences where collaboration between supervisors and supervisees and mutual dependency are fundamental to the success of the project. With the shared goals, it becomes more natural to build the relationship on trust, thus, there may be more of a balance of power in the relationship.

In terms of scholarships on doctoral research supervision, there is little research evidence of studies that focus specifically on business education in Nigeria. Instead, studies in this context have focused more on infrastructural challenges in business education programmes, supervisors' work-overload (Okereke, 2014; Okoro, 2013), improving teacher quality in business education (Amoor, 2010; Rotua, 2017), and instructional supervision of business education teachers (Amadi & Johnwest, 2016; Clark & Olumese, 2013; Ohiwerei & Okoli, 2010). A similar concern was raised in an earlier study in the UK (focused on undergraduate supervision) that supervision in management education has not received the most-needed attention (Armstrong, 2004). Arguably, issues of supervision present a challenge to business education students. For instance, a study conducted in Australia on supervisor-supervisee relationship (again in undergraduate business education) found that students encounter challenges in supervision, which range from unmet expectations to breach of contract by the supervisors, which results in the low satisfaction and well-being of the students, decreased motivation, increased stress and anxiety, and a negative attitude towards learning (Bordia, Hobman, Restubog & Bordia, 2010). A recent study in the UK, that explores doctoral business and management students, and their supervisor expectations, from the supervisory process, considers Business and Management (a related field) to be a 'niche' discipline (Bui, 2014, p. 13), where further studies are required. Thus, my research thesis can

contribute to the body of literature by illuminating an understanding of doctoral supervision in the business education programme.

## **1.7 My personal motivation for this student research**

My motivation for this student research is derived from my personal experiences and observations of the supervision process and practices during the duration of my masters' degree in a business education programme in Nigeria. Although I was not directly victimised by my supervisor, I observed that the general atmosphere in the department imbues fear in students in such a way, that I personally could not assert myself in the supervision relationship which I thought, and I still do believe, that I should have had with my academic supervisors. While reflecting on my experiences, I realised that I was deprived of learning opportunities that, by my being somewhat assertive, could have been afforded me. One critical incident that happened in the department, which I still remember vividly, was the day I was to defend my thesis proposal. As usual, we were three students who were scheduled to defend on that day. I was initially told that I would be the first presenter, but then I noticed that there were some arguments among the supervisory panel members, and they later decided that another student should present first. After her presentation, the usual interrogation by the supervisory panel began, and in the process, one of her two supervisors, who probably had unresolved issues with the co-supervisor, told the panel that the co-supervisor who super-headed the work should be answerable for the work. Hence, that resulted in overt accusations and counter-accusations between the two supervisors. Due to the tense situation that had arisen, the defence was put to a halt and students were asked to leave the venue and to wait outside. Immediately after coming out of the venue, the student whose defence was interrupted broke down in tears. While that was happening, I became nervous, stressed and confused as I was not sure of what would become of my own defence. After waiting for several hours, the panel reconvened and gave their verdict that the first presenter should be failed. It was during this nerve-wrecking atmosphere and high-level of anxiety when I was called upon as the second presenter to defend my proposal. Although I managed to defend my work successfully, I was so traumatised by what had transpired earlier, that the situation left me with an unanswered

question about what can be done to make supervision a better experience for students, which partly accounts for why I opted to study for my PhD outside of Nigeria.

These experiences and observations significantly shaped the focus of my present PhD study – exploring the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria. Although I initially thought that my PhD research thesis could, perhaps, fix the problem that I noticed in the education system in my home country, I later realised through the guidance of my present supervisor and also via a thorough review of the literature, that a PhD is not solely about proffering solutions, but about it is about problematising, conceptualising, intellectually challenging and also about theorising certain important issues. As I embarked on my PhD student research, I was also aware of the trend in the body of social science literature that is described as “a crucial bias” (Stanley, 2004, p. 2), whereby, studies on the doctorate are mostly conducted by supervisors and well-established academics, rather than by the doctoral students themselves. Notably, given the hierarchical nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship that I had previously experienced, which is also evident in literature (Okeke, 2010), I believed that by conducting my research as a doctoral student, I stood a better chance to have some ease of access into other doctoral students’ deep experiences of supervision than the supervisors who may want to research on this topic. The fear of the likely consequences of students divulging information about their supervisors could be a major hindrance to data collection for the supervisors. In line with this view, Lee and McKenzie (2011) posit that “it has been difficult to elicit sustained feedback from doctoral students regarding their experiences of working with an individual supervisor, or even a supervisory panel...” (p. 69). Unsurprisingly, it is argued that there is “far too little qualitative research on doctoral students, their work and training. [Thus] ...important aspects of higher education remain stubbornly invisible” (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000, p. 134).

## **1.8 My position within the research context – my outsider and insider roles**

It is necessary at this point for me to explain my dual position in the process of conducting this research (Reddy, 2010). As a Nigerian, studying for my PhD in South Africa positioned me as an outsider to my research context which is Nigeria. This outsider position was a major reason I had ease of access to the elicitation data from my study participants. Although some of the participants initially exhibited some fear that my kind of study is foreign/strange and could implicate them in something much deeper as a result, they later consented to be a part of my research. This was because they felt that since the recorded interview data would be taken outside of Nigeria, consequently, it will not be easily and directly traced to them personally. In that regard, my being an outsider worked well and to my advantage and as I had anticipated, it gave me ease of access to their knowledge about the phenomenon being investigated. On the other hand, being a Nigerian and having studied up to the masters' level of education in Nigeria positioned me well as an insider with respect to my research context and, as aforementioned, this formed part of my motivation for focusing on the Nigerian context. I acknowledge that my being an insider may have influenced the way that my participants responded to some of the questions I posed to them during my initial face-to-face interview. This could be noticed in the way that some of the participants sometimes responded in an informal manner, rather than by providing answers to questions posed to them in a formal manner. For instance, one of the participants, while listing some of the items she purchased during her defence presentations, used her local/native language to express certain things like "Afufu" which I could not easily transcribe. Other participants sometimes made comments like "you know what I am talking about" instead of providing detail explanation. To clarify some of these issues, a follow-up interview was conducted. Arguably, the critical issues playing out here are the tensions between the dual position that I was occupying - one of being a Nigerian myself (an insider) and the other of being a researcher outside Nigeria (an outsider).

## **1.9 Research design and method**

This is a qualitative interpretive study that employed the phenomenographic research approach to explore the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria. I purposively selected fifteen doctoral students as participants for this study who were drawn from the four universities in Nigeria which are offering the business education programme at the doctoral level when the data was generated. I used a semi-structured interview technique to generate data for this study, which is the main instrument for data generation in phenomenographic studies (Marton & Pong, 2005) and I used an open coding approach to analysing the data. This enabled me to arrive at a qualitatively limited number of ways in which the participants experienced research supervision.

Phenomenography has become an influential approach for research in many disciplines across the USA, the UK and Australia (Stoodley, 2009). Notably, limited studies exist to date that have adopted the phenomenographic approach to explore the collective supervision experiences of postgraduate doctoral students with such as: Bruce & Stoodley (2013); Franke & Arvidsson, (2010) who adopted the phenomenographic approach to study supervisors' experiences of supervision; and that of Lee (2008) that focused both on supervisors' and students' experiences of supervision being the only exceptions in this regard. The use of the phenomenographic research approach in the context of this doctoral student research provides a point of departure for my exploration of students' supervision experiences. Phenomenography provided a useful tool for mapping the qualitatively limited number of ways in which research supervision was collectively experienced by the participants in this study, and then presenting the information in the form of an outcome space (Cope, 2004; Marton, 2000), which other qualitative research methodologies failed to achieve.

## **1.10 Demarcation of the Thesis**

The thesis is demarcated as follows:

**(a) Chapter One - Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the rationale for the study and its context. It ends with a synopsis of the subsequent chapters which are constitutive of the entire thesis.

**(b) Chapter Two – Literature Review**

This chapter provides a picture of the earlier studies that have been carried out in relationship to the phenomenon under investigation and identifies where the current study is positioned in the extant work on doctoral research supervision.

**(c) Chapter Three – Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the research design and method that was used in the study. It introduces phenomenography as the research methodology and provides an insight into phenomenographic theory. It considers the critiques of this research approach and how it has been applied to the study of research supervision and identifies gaps in the literature reviewed. The chapter also discusses the measures taken to ensure the validity and credibility of the study and ends with a reflective account of the phenomenographic process and the use of phenomenography as a research methodology in the study.

**(d) Chapter Four – Data Analysis: Supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship**

This chapter comprises the first data analysis chapter in this study. This chapter focuses on the analysis of the first category of description – supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship.

**(e) Chapter Five – Supervision as transacting in the social**

This chapter is a continuation of the analysis part in Chapter Four. It discusses the analysis of the second category of description – supervision as transacting in the social.

**(f) Chapter Six - Students yearning for a positive supervision relationship**

This chapter is the last analysis chapter in this study. It concerns itself with the analysis of category three – students’ yearning for a positive supervision relationship. It the presents the outcome space of the phenomenographic findings.

**(g) Chapter Seven – Discussion of the Findings**

This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the literature on supervision and the theoretical framework.

**(h) Chapter Eight – Conclusion**

This chapter concludes s the thesis in its entirety. It presents an overview of the entire study detailing, among other things, the limitations, implications for practice and further research. The chapter then presents a model based on the study’s finding and a final reflection.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The first chapter detailed the context in which this study was situated by outlining international, national and institutional concerns around PhD/doctorate and research supervision. This chapter reviews and evaluates existing literature that is relevant to the current study by first discussing the concept of research supervision. The chapter then presents the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins the study – the ecological systems theory of development of Bronfenbrenner, as well as conceptual frameworks on research supervision drawn-on to situate the study. Considering that the literature on research supervision and doctoral education is extensive, due in part to the evolving nature of the doctorate/PhD as noticeable over the last two decade. It would be impracticable to include all studies on supervision in this literature review. Scholarships that provide guidelines for practice of supervision commonly referred to as handbooks have been well documented in the literature on research supervision (Cottrell 2014; Cryer, 1997; Delamont, Atkinson & Parry 1997; 1998; Eley & Jennings, 2005; Handal & Lauvås (2006); Leder 1995; Petre & Rugg 2011; Phillips & Pugh 1994 and 2005; Shannon 1995; Taylor & Beasley (2005); Thomson & Walker 2010; Christensen 2005; Walker & Thomson 2010; Wisker 2001; 2005 and 2008; Yeatman 1995; Zhao 2001). Further, these studies from the literature as well as studies on supervisors' training and development (Pearson & Brew 2002; Manathunga 2005b), and gender (Brown & Watson, 2010) are only touched on, in my thesis, in discussing the concept of supervision and/or the supervisory relationship. Since the substantive concern in this student research is to understand the perspective of doctoral students and by that improve the effectiveness of research supervision, which is also an important concern in higher education; studies that privilege the perspective of students have more focus placed on them. Also, research on learning and learning experience of doctoral students in their developmental pathway of the doctorate are reviewed, as these works relate directly to the objective of the present study. Certain works on

research/doctoral supervision that fall outside of the scope of this study were left out, for example, doctoral students with disabilities (Premia, 2004) were omitted. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the literature and its implications for this study.

## **2.2 The concept of research supervision**

The international literature on research supervision spans a wide range of conceptualisations. The different views expressed in each way of conceptualisation are underpinned by the perceived role and responsibilities that the supervisor is expected to perform (Kobayashi, 2015). Traditionally, research/doctoral supervision has been handled/treated as research (Bengtsen, 2014; Taylor & Beasley 2005; Qureshi & Vazir, 2016, p. 95). This probably explains why PhD/doctoral programmes, particularly in the UK, have been purely research-based; although that is changing rapidly as coursework components are being introduced in order to equip students with research and other relevant skills (Green & Powell, 2005). Within the traditional frame of supervision, the supervisor plays a minimal guiding role, which some authors consider as pedagogy of indifference (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000). “The problematic character of ideas of autonomy and the independent scholar that underpin the traditional practices of postgraduate pedagogy” as revealed in the work by Johnson, Lee & Green (2000, p. 135) has a finding that still affects the way that doctoral students experience supervision today. This is because some supervisors tend to consider postgraduate/doctoral students as ‘always already autonomous’ researchers (Manathunga & Goozee, 2007) that require minimum/no guidance from supervisors. This assumption has been questioned as some authors argue that, being a good course-taker in undergraduate studies may not automatically translate into a research capability at the postgraduate level (Lovitts, 2005). The role of the supervisor in terms of scaffolding student learning is increasingly seen to be important in assisting students to acquire relevant research skills and competencies at the postgraduate level (Bui, 2014; Halse, 2011).

Many authors now consider postgraduate/doctoral research supervision as an advanced or specialised form of teaching (Bruce & Stoodley, 2013; Firth & Martins, 2008; Khene, 2014;

Murphy et al., 2007, p. 228). This has also led to debates as to whether supervision should be considered as research or as teaching (Brew & Peseta, 2008; Wilkinson, (2011). In response to that, Lee & McKenzie (2011) posit that "...supervision is neither simply 'teaching' nor 'research' but an uneasy bridge between both" (p. 69). It seems obvious that recent conceptualisation of research supervision incorporates the teaching role of the supervisor. Although, Bruce & Stoodley (2013) posit that "little is known to date of the teaching lenses adopted by supervisors as they go about their supervision" (p. 1). Some writers have further argued that research supervision involves both teaching and learning aspects (Bengtson, 2014; Wilkinson, 2011). Research supervision is increasingly recognised as a process of facilitating or fostering the transformation to becoming a researcher, with the thesis as a tangible evidence of an original contribution to the body of knowledge in a particular field. In that sense, some writers conceptualise research supervision as professional work that is not separate from the teaching of courses (Halse & Malfroy, 2010; Khene, 2014). Leonard (2010) considers such work as "a specific kind of interactional work – 'management work'" (p. 38).

In recent times, arguments about supervision as pedagogy or critical pedagogy has gained considerable support (Hill, 2008; Hadingham, 2011; Zeegers & Barron, 2012). Borrowing from Lusted's idea about pedagogy, Zeegers & Barron (2012, p. 25) argue that, pedagogy is not just teaching of content but also about the method used for that teaching, how students learn, and the context of the learning. By considering supervision as pedagogy, the authors foreground the knowledge production process as one which involves "active engagement on the part of the teacher and the learner, producing knowledge together" (Zeegers & Barron, 2012, p. 26). This is akin to the idea of Halse & Malfroy (2010) with supervisors developing a "professional learning alliance" with students, whereby, instead of 'rules', 'principles' and 'right'; 'trust' and 'mutual interdependence' form the basis of the relationship (p. 83). This is a departure from the traditional notion of having passive students trained/taught the research craft of the discipline through an apprenticeship-based relationship with supervisors. Considering the work of Mortimore (1999) with a definition of pedagogy as "any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another" (P. 3), research supervision may imply some sort of mentoring, particularly at the initial stage of the research process. Supervision as mentoring not only focuses on

supervisors guiding and facilitating up to the successful completion of the project, but also the development of the researcher through empathetic dialogue (Pearson & Brew, 2002; Price & Money, 2002). However, Manathunga, (2007) cautions that the understanding of supervision as mentoring, suggests that the power relation is taken away from the supervisory relationship; whereas “the issue of power remains an integral part of any form of pedagogy” (p. 208). Manathunga believes that teaching and learning involved in supervision pedagogy has to be a balance between compassion (modelling scaffolding, mentoring/coaching) and rigour (feedback) (Manathunga, 2005b). The idea of balancing power in a supervision relationship is very much advocated, especially by feminist writers (Battlett & Mercer, 2000). More recently, research supervision is being conceptualised as a humanising pedagogy (Khan, 2014; Lee, 2012). But, how much of these shifts in conceptualisation may have influenced doctoral research supervision practice remains muted in many quarters – particularly the non-Western context such as in Nigeria.

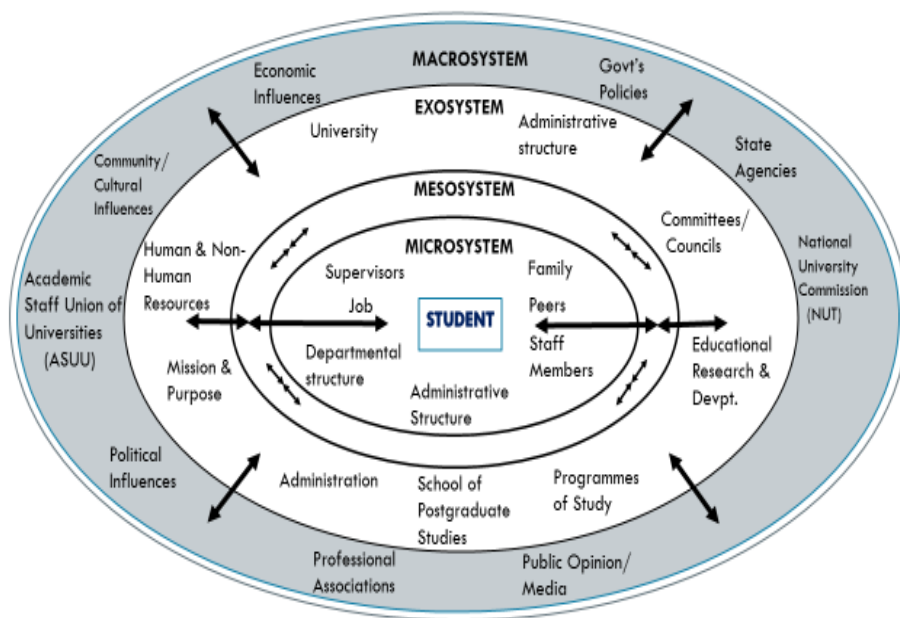
## **2.3 Theoretical and conceptual framework**

In order to situate this study, a theoretical framework was employed. Considering that “the practice of supervision for a PhD student is a complex multi-factorial process that encompasses issues at all levels from that of individual student and his/her supervisor, to institutional support and environment, to governmental policies, structures and procedures” (Wang, 2013, p. 8), it is important to employ a framework that can assist me, as the researcher, in mapping out the constellation of factors that shape the student experience of supervision. As such, the Ecological Systems Theory developed Bronfenbrenner (1979) is deemed fit to provide a useful framework to underpin the present study. The ecological systems theory explains that individual’s development occurs through relationships and interactions with complex environmental forces (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). This model portrays the complex environments in a multiple set of systems (each with various components) arranged in an inclusive order (with the first system nested in the second, and it continues in that order), namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Then, there is the chronosystem, which represents change over a period of time in relation to the individual and the environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Based on this model, direct influences are exerted from environmental factors that are

closest to the developing individual, known as ‘proximal processes’, while indirect influences are exerted from environmental factors that are distant from the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1999:5; Tobbell & Donnell, 2013, p. 126). The developing individual who is strategically positioned at the centre of the nested systems of multi-directional interactions and relationships also has an active role to play in shaping his/her immediate environment (Christensen, 2010). Bronfenbrenner in his recent work extended the ecological model to include the bio-ecology (personal characteristics) of the developing individual. In other words, the cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors come to play in an individual’s interactions with environmental factors and the kind of development that the individual can experience over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Rooted in the constructivist theory, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model reflects/foregrounds the constructivists’ perspective of learning, whereby, knowledge and realities are constructed through social interactions and relationships in which the individual actively participates. This contrasts dramatically with the behaviourist theory of teaching and learning that supports banking concept of education (where students or learners are receivers of knowledge rather than being co-constructors of knowledge). Constructivist theory of teaching and learning aligns with the post-liberal approach to research supervision (humanising pedagogy of supervision) that is now advocated for by most feminist writers, as discussed preceding section and expanded in subsequent sections.

Although the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner was initially developed to understand factors that influence child development, the theory has since received wide acceptance in different fields (Bone, 2015; Taylor & Ali, 2017). Most recently, studies in higher education have applied the ecological model to the understanding of the supervision of staff members in student affairs, the complexities in transition to higher education studies, and the experiences of part-time students, among others (Tobbell & Donnell, 2013; McLinden, 2017; Shupp & Arminio, 2012; Stelma 2011). In this study, the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner describes layers of environment within which the experience of doctoral research supervision is constructed. The context of supervision fits into that of supervisor-student relationships in the department (microsystem); the various interactions (with peers, staff members, etc.) within the department as well as those from the student’s own personal context (e.g. family and job) represent the mesosystem; and the context of department fits into the larger context of university

(exosystem); and all contexts into the largest context of societal culture (macrosystem). The diagram in Figure 1 below depicts the layered contexts and the multiple environmental variables that impact directly or indirectly on the doctoral student's supervision and development. The two-headed arrows in the diagram indicate that influences from the various environments are not unidirectional but are multi-directional. Earlier studies (although only inferred but not stated outright), appeared to have drawn from Bronfenbrenner's theory. For example, McAlpine & Norton, (2006) use the idea of a 'nested context' to develop a framework for retention and completions by doctoral students. Lovitts (2008) in a study on "transition to independent research" also identifies micro- and macro-environments in which students work; and argues that the micro-environment exerts the most significant influence on supervisor-supervisee relationship. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is used in this study to understand how factors within various environments/contexts shape the doctoral student supervision experience and student development as a researcher, and also the kind of influence that the student exerts in the supervision space (the immediate environment). The diagram below in Figure 1 shows the various variables in the doctoral student's environment:



**Figure 1. Various systems/variables in the doctoral student's environment.**

(Adapted from Schulze's (n.d.) an online lecture notes on the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model on Tennessee higher education system)

While Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a general framework that underpins my research, additional perspectives from the body of supervision literature were integrated to provide a specific and a deeper explanation of the complex web of proximal and distal environmental influences on student supervision experiences, the role of the doctoral student and the wider conditions that surround learning in the doctoral programme. Hence, I draw on the literature on research supervision, particularly the theoretical/conceptual constructs that have been used to represent postgraduate/doctoral research supervision. I draw largely on conceptual approach to supervision of Lee (2008, 2012), as it provides a holistic framework for understanding the underlying conceptions about the approach (or approaches) that supervisors are likely to adopt in the supervision process, in order to provide some insight into the specific experience(s) that doctoral students receive. Also, discourses on supervision is a study by Grant (2005b) summarises the different discourses in relation to power in supervisory relationships was drawn on. The explanation of the supervision frameworks are presented in the sections that follow.

### **2.3.1 Conceptual approaches to research supervision**

The framework is premised on the belief/inference that an “academic’s approach to creating a research environment will have an impact on how a student will do their research, and the academics’ approach to teaching will have impact on how those students develop” (Lee, 2012, p. 12). In developing the conceptual framework on approaches to supervision, Lee (2008; 2012) evaluated earlier work from the body of literature and popular models on supervision in order to be able to provide a holistic framework. These prior works include the supervision model by Acker, Hill & Black (1994) which identifies the “technical rational model” and the “negotiated order model” which is a model by Lovitts (2008) that presents the micro- and macro-environments in which supervision occurs. The empirical study of Gatfield (2005) was based on the Blake and Mouton Managerial Grid model (Blake & Mouton 1964). In her work, Gatfield used data that were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 PhD supervisors. The study finds support and structure along two axes, divided into a four-quadrant matrix – pastoral, contractual, laissez-faire and directorial. Lee paired each of the items in Gatfield’s model with her conceptual approach and

found some fit. For instance, pastoral was paired with the relationship approach; contractual with the enculturation approach; laissez-fair with emancipation; and directorial with functional; noting that Gatfield's framework neglected a core aspect of the supervision task – which is critical thinking. Another model evaluated by Lee was that of Murphy et al. (2007) which is similar to that of Gatfield in terms of so being a four-quadrant matrix. But, in this case, Murphy's model was found on one axis - guiding and controlling and also on the other axis - person and task focus. For Lee, this model is also similar to her model in some ways but, differing in terms of the merging of the core task of supervision (developing critical thinking) with the functional task of the institution (fast completions) in one of Murphy's quadrants.

Returning to Lee's conceptual approaches to supervision, Lee's model presents five different but interdependent approaches to supervision; including functional, enculturation, critical thinking, emancipation and relationship development. This model was based on earlier work by Brew (2001) that suggests that the conception of research held by supervisors influences the approaches they adopt for supervision. These supervision approaches describe the roles, responsibilities, expectations, focus of supervision, the dispositions of both the supervisor and the postgraduate student to the supervision relationship, as well as the likely activities that characterise the kind of relationship they engage in the research cycle.

The functional approach: this is regarded as the initial stage in the supervision process that describes the professional role of the supervisor (Lee, 2008). Based on this view, the supervisor provides “structure early in the candidature by clarifying the student's role, devising a monthly plan and developing an overview of the thesis” (Bruce & Stoodley, 2010, p. 9). Supervisors that adopt a functional approach to supervision are more directive in the management of the project, so as to ensure that the student progresses with the task as s/he goes through the research circle (Lee, 2008). The student in this view is obedient, organised and can negotiate. This approach appears to align with the current trend in higher education that is focused on completions (Sinclair, 2004).

The enculturation approach is viewed as a ‘social practice’ approach that exposes the research student to ‘a wide range of actors within the field’, where s/he learns the norms and values of the discipline and develops within the social context (Boud & Lee, 2005, 2008; Bruce & Stoodley,

2013, p. 4). Since the goal in this approach is to induct the student into the disciplinary community of practice (Lave, 1998), which according to Bengtson, (2014) is “about good research craftsmanship” (p. 8); the supervisor helps the student to identify writers in the field, opportunities for collaboration and/or joint field work, and looks for ways to advance the field through departmental seminars and conferences (Lee, 2008; 2012). The supervisor’s role is to diagnose deficiency and to coach the student and to be a ‘gatekeeping master to the apprentice’ s/he enables the student’s epistemological access. The student on the other hand, sees the supervisor as a role model as such serves as an apprentice (Lee, 2008, p. 272). The gatekeeping role of the supervisor raises concerns about the issue of power, whereby the supervisor is in a position to decide on the doors to open/close in terms of ‘learning resources, specialist opinion and networks’, and especially at the initial stages of the supervision relationship. There could also be possibilities for “power games and arguments about who ‘owns’ the research and subsequent conference presentations and publications” (Lee, 2008, p. 272). In the context of international students, learning within this approach may be a challenge/problem with “students who expect to receive instructions and believe that to do anything other than nod and agree with the teacher is poor behaviour” (Lee, 2011, p. 60). Some study subjects in the study by Waghid (2006) show this tendency. But, through an empathetic/humanistic relationship they developed their confidence.

Critical thinking is traditionally viewed as the core of doctoral supervision. In this approach, the supervisor focuses on developing the cognitive ability of the student by challenging her/him to be critical in evaluating ideas and arguments, so as to develop new ways of thinking. “In practice, this approach addresses such questions as what is the underlying conceptual framework, what are the arguments for and against, what has been considered and what has been left out” (Lee, 2008, p. 273). Under this view, the student is able to constantly make inquiries, analyse arguments and justify their view-points rather than accepting ideas uncritically. That way, the student gradually moves towards independence. However, some students have problems in terms of learning “the skills of critical thinking, to be able to formulate an argument, anticipate complex problems and put it coherently on paper” (Lee, 2012, p. 60). Lee cites a student in another study who found the supervisor’s coaching of her to mean writing one argument per paragraph to be of great benefit (Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt, 1999).

The emancipation approach ‘implies both support and challenge’ (Lee, 2010, p. 19). In terms of support, the supervisor plays a facilitative role, as suggested by Pearsn & Kayrooz, (2004), “which includes: progressing the candidature, mentoring, coaching the research project, and sponsoring student participation in academic practice” (Lee, 2008, p. 274). Mentoring appears to be the overarching role of the supervisor. Mentoring students in this case is achieved through a supportive and constructive manner, whereby the supervisor is seen as a critical friend, and a ‘non-judgmental adviser’ (Bruce & Stoodley, 2013; Lee, 2008, p. 274). The supervisor also challenges the research student to constant inquiry because a disorienting manner is believed to be transformational in terms of learning and development. In other words, the student is able to develop “self-awareness, autonomy and self-actualization” which fosters personal growth and ontological development in students (Lee, 2010, p. 22; 2012). It is believed that “towards the end of the doctoral learning journeys, supervisors embraced an emancipator approach in which they wanted the students to find their own research voice and writing style” (Odena & Burgess, 2017, p. 586).

In terms of supervision meetings, the supervisor can encourage emancipation through providing a supportive environment with feedback - “by the academic offering and seeking information and seeking the student’s opinions” (Lee, 2012, p. 94). The supervisor “will be acting as a non-directive mentor who offers challenge and support” (p. 95).

The relationship development approach is viewed as a method in which expectations between supervisees and supervisors are effectively negotiated, and the supervisor is genuinely concerned about the supervision relationship. Bruce & Stoodley (2010) opine that “when adopting a relationship approach, we emphasize personal interactions. The relationship approach is concerned with the interactions and needs of the people involved in supervision” (p. 10). In line with this view, the supervisor is willing to share his/her “own research methods, experiences and concerns.” S/he also shares ‘the interpretative process’, ‘publications and presentations’ (Lee, 2012). The supervisor, therefore, performs friendship and a nurturing role but at the same time they strive for quality. S/he has emotional intelligence with which to manage conflicts and to encourage the student to work as a team member. The student on the other hand becomes affirmed (Lee, 2010). Consequently, the relationship is influenced in a positive way. Lee (2012) cites a study subject displeasure about a supervisor’s judgemental attitude and negative commentary, and Lee posits

that students are more interested in knowing that their supervisors’ “critical judgement is good enough and their communication skills are clear enough to ensure that students understands accurately where they stand” (p. 65). In terms of practice, “there seems to be little research on how extensively it is practiced” (Calma, 2007, p. 93). Table 1 below shows Lee’s framework on supervision in terms of the research process.

**Table 1. Lee's framework in terms of the research process**

Adapted from Lee’s (2012, p. 14) framework to explore doctoral students’ experiences at the different phases of the research cycle.

Functional phase of managing research	Enculturation	Critical Thinking	Emancipation	Relationship Development
Framing	Looking at other examples in the discipline	Asking: What is excluded? What is assumed? Completing a risk analysis	Assessing where this approach could take the student both professionally in the career and personally	Discussing whether this is something that ‘we can work on together’
Negotiation	Asking who else in the department or discipline is doing similar work? What opportunity for collaboration might be approached?	Looking at collaboration and links to work in or across other disciplines	Who else in the society might be usefully included or involved in this study?	Discussions about the tenor of the approaches to be made and how to negotiate effectively
Generating	By reviewing the research methods most commonly used in the discipline. Looking for opportunities for joint fieldwork	By identifying and arguing for the most appropriate research methods. Creating new research methods	By exploring and understanding the methodological imperatives behind different approaches to research and the implications of these approaches	By sharing own research methods, experiences and concerns
Creating	Through team discussion, By analyzing data, looking for	By creating new models and theories and critiquing their generalisability	By linking advances to areas of personal growth	By sharing the interpretative process

	advances in the field			
Disseminating	Through departmental seminars and conferences	Through conference discussions, responding to referees' report, writing journal publications and books  Further grant applications	Through performance and open discussions  Wider publications (not necessarily just academic journals)	Shared publications and presentations
Reflecting	On epistemological progress. On how the team supported and were involved in the research process	On how knowledge is created/discovered On the appropriateness or otherwise of the implicit and explicit frameworks employed	On impact on self and ontological development	On impact on relationship development and ability to work productively  Also assessing the impact on friends and family

### 2.3.2 Research supervision discourses

Based on Grant's comprehensive review of the literature there are "four most powerful discourses competing for loyal subjects in arts, humanities and social sciences supervision... the psychological, the traditional-academic, the techno-scientific and the neo-liberal" discourses (Grant, 2005b, p. 34). These discourses provide particular ways for describing the supervisor, the postgraduate student and the supervision relationship between them. The first is the psychological discourse construct of the ideal supervisor – Psy-Supervisor as a caring, expert professional who motivates and supports the student (p. 34). The Psy-Student on the other hand, is constructed as someone that lacks experience with regards to independent research work, who therefore requires the supervisor's assistance. A proper Psy-Supervision relationship takes into consideration both the emotion and personality of the student, hence supervision is seen as a supportive interpersonal relationship where "the expert sensitively and flexibly guides the novice along a developmental

trajectory to maturity as an independent researcher” (P. 35). The supervision relationship portrayed by this discourse appears to be free of conflict and disagreements. However, Grant (2005b) notes that this discourse rarely matches any real life situation.

The second is the traditional-academic discourse. This discourse describes supervision as a conservative apprenticeship mode of learning, where the Trad-Supervisor is portrayed as a proven scholar and master of the discipline. The Trad- Student is constructed as a disciple or an apprentice who desires to take up the mantle of his/her master and therefore submits or is subjected to the supervisor’ training, usually marked by formality and distance (p. 35). The particular focus of this discourse on intellectual apprenticeship, makes the supervision relationship less of interpersonal relationship (p. 35), thus imbued with strong power relations. Grant argues that the supervision relationship within this framework “has been characterized as a pedagogy of indifference, or trial by fire from which only the fittest emerge”, as described by Williams & Lee (1999, p. 36). Okeke, (2010) suggests that “this discourse appears to be very popular in the Nigeria postgraduate supervision relationships” (p. 117).

The third is the techno-scientific discourse, which “originated with the rise of research universities from the late 19th century and the constitution of the social sciences in the image of positivist science” (P. 37). This discourse portrays the Techno-Supervisor as a trained and expert scientist’ while ‘the Techno-Student an inexperienced trainee’ (P. 37). According to this discourse “power relations mobilized are those of the expert’s close surveillance of the efforts of the Techno-Student who must be trained into the right methods of research” (p. 37). One important feature of this discourse that makes it attractive to governments, funding bodies and policy makers is the ease with which it can be aligned with the accountability imperatives. Grant (2005b) notes that the techno-scientific discourse projects supervision as a predictable and orderly process of research skills training; the “techno-student’s progress is subject to improvement and control by devices such as skills training or introducing incentives for swift completion” (p. 37). Due to its alignment with the positivist paradigm, Okeke (2010, p. 117) argues that the techno-scientific discourse is also prominent in the Nigerian higher education research practices.

The fourth discourse, according to Grant (2005b) is the neo-liberal discourse of supervision. This discourse constructs “education as a commodity, and educational institutions as commercial enterprises” (p. 37). The Com-Supervisor is portrayed as a service provider, while the Com-Student is constructed as a ‘consumer of those services’ (p. 37). The power relation depicted in this supervision relationship is that of consumer (buyer) and the service provider; in which case “the student, as the service chooser and consumer, has the power of the purchaser and expects value for money” (Hadingham, 2011, p. 49). The degree of power that the student commands in this discourse makes the view at variance with the supervision relationships in the Nigerian context (Okeke, 2010). However, Okeke argues that, with the proliferation of distance learning postgraduate programmes in Nigeria, this discourse may have some degree of relevance in terms of the commodification of higher education and its consequent focus on certification. He further argues that within this context, the supervisor projects him/herself “as one who is a ‘very scarce’ commodity can only be obtained with money and any other forms of gratification”, a situation which necessitated the Nigerian federal government to ban satellite campuses (p. 117).

## **2.4 Supervisory relationship**

The relationship between supervisees and supervisors form the basis/foundation for the task that needed to be accomplished in supervision; and the nature of the relationship is said to be a major factor in student progress, satisfaction and successful completion of the doctoral thesis (Ives & Rowley, 2005). Traditionally, the supervisory relationship is formal in nature and tends to be thesis-focused (Hemer, 2012), whereby, only the academically fittest of students will survive. Over time, the supervisory relationship is increasingly recognised as involving the interpersonal aspect (Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Goode, 2010), a view much is advocated by feminist studies on supervision (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000; Manathunga, 2005b). Thus, process and person-focused approaches to supervision have gained acceptance (Murphy, 2009). The interpersonal structure of the relationship is believed to change through the different phases of the research process (Prazeres, 2017). Some authors have challenged prioritising interpersonal issues over the thesis-task (Firth & Martens, 2008), indicating the need to balance between task and interpersonal aspect of the relationship. With the multifarious and complex nature of the relationship between

supervisors and supervisees, challenges of mismatch are commonly cited (McGinty, Koo & Saeidi, 2010, p. 519; Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 11); thus, the need to balance expectations has been identified (Eley & Jennings, 2005; Gill & Burnard, 2008, p. 668). In that regard, writers advocate supervisory contracts, good communication, regular supervisory meetings, the keeping of supervisory records, and openness (Finn, 2005; Gill & Burnard, 2008, p. 668; Holloway & Walker, 2000; Thompson, Kirkman, Watson & Stewart, 2005). Several studies have associated a positive relationship with successful completions and a negative relationship with failures, late completions and drop-out by students, which obviously would have detrimental effects on students (Holloway & Walker, 2000; Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom & Klabbers 2015; Taylor & Beasley, 2005, p. 69).

Some authors have turned to metaphor as a tool for understanding the complex relationship in supervision (Mackinnon, 2004, p. 395). Metaphors of apprenticeship, mentors, masters and slaves, coaches, friends, disciples, sisters and so on, have been used to explain the nature of the relationship, power issues, the role and responsibilities that each party takes in the relationship (Grant, 2008; Lee & Green, 2009, p. 621; Battlett & Mercer 2000; Nulty et al., 2009). Lee & Green (2009, p. 624) posit that the metaphors used in the body of supervision literature mostly conceptualise supervision as a dyadic relationship. Other forms of relationship that have been researched include joint supervision or co-supervision, group/team supervision, and cohort-supervision (Olmos-López & Sunderland, 2017; Watts, 2010; Mauthner & Bell, 2007; Govender & Dhunpath, 2011). Over all, the existing literature on supervisory relationships may fall under two main categories - power relationship and collaborative relationship. These two kinds of relationship will be further discussed in the sections that follow.

#### ***2.4.1 Power in a supervisory relationship***

The relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee is considered to be “structurally asymmetrical” and presents issues of power relation (Eley & Jennings, 2005; Green, 2005, p. 154). Most of the metaphors used in the supervision literature, to capture the supervisor-student relationship, represent or confirm the unseen inherent power dynamics in supervision. Research

has shown that power in itself is not a bad thing but, it can be used in both positive and negative ways (Grant, 2008). While the positive use of power in a supervision relationship could enhance student progress in terms of commitment to the thesis task and its quick accomplishment (Firth & Martens, 2008; Grant, 2008), the negative use of power could have detrimental effects on students in terms of the impact on emotional and psychological well-being (Martinko, Harvey, Brees & Mackey, 2013; Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom & Klabbers, 2015). There seems to be a consensus among writers that research students are the most affected by issues of negative power. Grant (2008) portrays the supervision relationship through the master slave lens and provides some useful insight on one of the ways, among others, that power in a supervisory relationship could manifest itself.

#### ***2.4.1.1 The master-slave relation in the supervision context***

The account of master and slave was originally given by Hegel (1977 [1807]) in his famous book “Phenomenology of Spirit” as being the lord and bondsman and was used as an allegory to explain how self-consciousness is birthed through inter-subjectivity. For Hegel, the self only comes to know itself through recognition of the other or through being recognised by the other (Crabb, 2016). This recognition, according to Hegel, necessarily happens through struggle - a life and death ‘struggle’ between two sets of self-consciousness, in which they both ‘create’ and in unity it does ‘alienate’ itself (Crabb, 2016; Grant, 2008). The primary essence of the struggle, however, is not for one self-consciousness to kill the other (as self-consciousness cannot perceive itself in the lifeless other); rather, it is for one self-consciousness through fear of death to surrender to the other (Grant, 2008). This unequal recognition between the two sets of self-consciousness is what Hegel framed as the master and slave relation.

The master-slave dynamic, according to Grant (2008), is in many ways similar to what happens in supervision. Grant argues that the supervisor and student are bound just in the same way that the master and slave are “bound together in an ambiguous and contradictory relation of domination and subordination. Yet, productively, knowledge of the self and the world is motivated by the

intersubjective desires mobilized through this relation” (Grant, 2008). Also, like the master who gained recognition and the right to speak in a Gurevitch (2001) interpretation of Hegel, Grant explains that the supervisor, due to his institutional position, has the right to speak in supervision, while the student signifies recognition of the supervisor by employing silence. From this point on, as in the case of the master and slave where the relationship happens through ‘things’ of the world and a triangular master-slave-thing relationship is established, Grant explains that, in supervision, a triangular supervisor-student-thesis relationship is also established. The relationship between the supervisor and student is mediated by the doctoral dissertation/thesis. Although, in line with the Gurevitch (2001, p. 92) interpretation of Hegel, the supervisor may not have any real interest in the ‘thing’ – the doctoral thesis; but, for the students it is a case of personal “blood, sweat, and tears”. As such, repressive silence could enter into the supervisory interactions. Some of the ways that repressive silence can be noticed in supervision interactions, as outlined by Grant (2008, p. 14), include “lack of preparation by the supervisor, interruptions at the office door, trivial feedback, receiving phone calls,” etc.; which students in-turn react to by “avoidance, appeasement, false agreement, or refusal” (Grant, 2008, p. 14). Based on the Gurevitch (2001) classification of repressive silence into ordinary repression and abusive repression, most of the examples of repressive silence identified in the Grant study may be considered as ordinary repression. More horrendous forms of abusive repression happen in a supervision/supervisee relationship, as discussed in the preceding section.

#### ***2.4.1.2 Abuse of power in the supervisory relationship***

Although power issues have been a subject of consideration in postgraduate supervisory relationships, studies that expose the blatant abuse of power have mostly focused on a workplace setting (Decoster, Camps, & Stouten, 2014; Xu, Huang, Lam, & Miao, 2012). Very few studies have looked into how abusive power relation occurs in supervisory relationship, which some authors refer to as supervisory bullying (Hobman, Restubog, Bordia & Tang, 2009; Williams & Lee, 1999; Morris, 2011). The Findings in a recent study by Yarwood-Ross & Haigh (2014) that investigated the supervision experience of PhD students in an informal setting (‘in an online postgraduate discussion forum’), that was conducted within the nursing context, listed ‘academic

bullying’ as one of the issues that students experience while still in a supervisory relationship. Other authors draw attention to extreme cases of power misuse including sexual harassment in ‘cross- gender’ supervisory relationships (Bull and Rye, 2018; Christie and Jurado, 2013). Wisker & Robinson, (2012) note the impacts of extreme instances of power relation as student marginalisation and silence. Lovitts (2001) links power issues that silence students to institutional/departmental structures and practices. A study by McKay, Arnold, Fratzl & Thomas (2008) suggests that institutional structures, culture and practices can support academic bullying. Borrowing the words of Gillies & Lucey, most students “have witnessed and / or experienced unethical behaviours and misuse of power that is sanctioned and sometimes even compelled by the structures and mechanics of higher education institutions” (Gillies & Lucey, 2007, p. 3). It is against this background of research that my student research explores the doctoral student supervision experiences in the Nigerian context - where institutional structures and practices silences students and supervisors are seen as ‘omnipotent in relation to the student’ (Idoniboye-Obu, 2015).

The next section addresses the collaborative relationship in research supervision and suggests that supervisory relationships, while they are obviously hierarchical and determined by certain institutional norms, practices and culture, are also able to be creatively negotiated.

## **2.4.2 Collaborative relationship**

The supervisory relationship can be a collaborative one, whereby all of the parties involved can mutually benefit from the relationship and share a sense of belonging (Sambrook, Stewarts & Roberts, 2008). This contrasts heavily with the power-laden relationship, discussed earlier in this thesis. The collaborative form of a relationship takes into account the emotional and social aspects of the relationship and is oriented towards empathy and pastoral care with respect to supervisees. Supervisors with this orientation are able to see the doctoral student not only as a supervisee (learner) but as a whole person – with academic, social, personal and family aspects of life (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 11). As such, they become “sensitive to the emotional

stages of the student, and understanding the complexities of students' lives and the factors outside their studies that have impact on their achievements" (Kobayashi, 2015, p. 196). Generally, the success of such a relationship, as considered by most authors, hinges on factors such as good communication, rapport, trust and mutual respect, and a deep interest in student well-being (Boucher & Smyth, 2004; Philips & Pugh, 1994; Wisker, 2001). With regards to good communication, Schulze (2012) explains that communication between supervisor and supervisee has to be a two-way system in order to allow for information sharing and for the exchange of knowledge to flow in both directions - i.e. from the supervisor to the supervisee, and vice versa. That way, collaborative supervisory relationship can be advantageous to both parties.

However, several authors issue caveats in their work deeming that a collaborative supervisory relationship can sometimes become too friendly and personally close that it could cloud the sense of judgement of supervisors - in terms of provision of constructive feedback and, as such, this could come in the way of accomplishing the thesis task (Hockey, 1995; Sambrook et al., 2008; Wisker, 2001). It is argued that a balance between a closeness relationship and a distance relationship, as well as a personal relationship and a professional relationship is critical, considering that doctoral students require both liberty and direction/guidance with regards to their identity development (Manathunga, 2007a; Sambrook et al., 2008; Wisker, 2001). To achieve that, emotional intelligence is required on the part of the supervisor (Bui, 2014). On the part of the student, Philips & Pugh (1994) emphasise the need for students to maintain a good relationship with their supervisor. Several authors see the supervisor's role in a collaborative relationship to be that of a mentor, coach and facilitator (Keane, 2016; Schulze, 2012). Lee (2007, p. 686) describes a mentor as 'a non-judgemental advisor'. Keane (2016) argues that by coaching (guiding) students, supervisors are able to enhance student self-efficacy. Schulze (2012) differentiates between a power-centred and a facilitation-centred approach to supervision, and suggests that a facilitation-centred approach is the key to empowering students. Overall, most authors see a collaborative supervisory relationship as one that is focused on participation, teamwork, partnership, engagement and mutual interdependence.

A collaborative supervisory relationship may extend beyond the supervisor-supervisee dyad to a relationship with others in the wider community of practice. The main supervisor role would then be to connect students with other academics, to allow students to enter into and to negotiate the culture of academic life (McGinty et al., 2010). Leonard et al. (2006: 32) indicates that students who are able to connect with “other academics” within and outside their discipline are more encouraged to continue with their programmes. Similarly, the findings in the Hadigham (2011) study demonstrate that, although supervisors play important roles in supervision, they were not central to the success of the study subjects, as they were agentic (controlling) in their learning and they were able to access support from other academics and colleagues - which points to the role of support from the wider community.

## **2.5 Learning in doctoral supervision**

Teaching and, particularly, learning in doctoral supervision can be understood within the strand of scholarship literature that identifies research/doctoral supervision as pedagogy (Hill, 2008; Zeegers & Barron, 2012). Most writers on this subject address learning from two viewpoints that are identified by Sfard (1998, p. 5) as the ‘acquisition’ viewpoint and the ‘participation viewpoint’. Based on the ‘acquisition viewpoint’, learning is considered as acquiring something (e.g. knowledge), and learning ends once the objective has been achieved. This view, according to Sfard, aligns with the traditional perspective of learning. On the other hand, learning in the ‘participation viewpoint’ is recognised as a “never ending, self-regulatory process of emergence in a continuing interaction with peers, teachers, texts” (Sfard, 1998, p. 6); and this view aligns with more recent/modern thinking about learning (the postliberal approach to learning). In doctoral education, learning is increasingly recognised not only in terms of acquisition and ‘production of knowledge’, but also in the ‘construction of identity’ (Foot, Crowe Tollafield & Allan, 2014; Green, 2005, p. 162).

In relation to supervision, Khene (2014) argues that doctoral students are likely to approach their learning based on the two main approaches to learning – the surface approach and the deep approach (Biggs, 2003, p. 20). She posits that a doctoral student who adopts a surface approach to

learning shows little or no initiative for learning, and prefers to be directed as opposed to being solely guided (Khene, 2014). Such a surface approach to learning is observed by Qureshi & Vazir (2016, p. 102). The authors report that the Pakistan graduate student they supervised showed low agency in their learning as they preferred that supervisors should provide feedback, which would specify corrections to be made, rather than those supervisors that questions their submissions or require them to give justifications for their viewpoints/arguments. Waghid (2006, p. 428), in the course of his study on postgraduate supervision, also observed that the postgraduate students in the institution where the study was conducted were mostly driven by certification motives. The author tends to see the neoliberal agenda that would focus attention on fast completions and employability as having an effect on postgraduate student motivation and non-critical attitude to learning. Similarly, Lonka (2012) finds that doctoral students who perceive their doctoral studies as an avenue towards acquiring certification, show a low interest and a low motivation. Considering the demand of doctoral education, higher cognitive learning that leads to the development of critical and autonomous thinkers, the surface approach to learning is said to be inadequate (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt 2011, p. 16). With regards to the deep approach to learning, Khene (2014) emphasises engagement, participation, relating, questioning, critiquing, theorising, and the application of concepts as important activities that doctoral students are to autonomously release of their own volition to their supervisors, peers, cohorts using the supervision process, and the study itself. This approach to learning seats well with Sfard's 'participatory view' of learning and also bears out Waghid's explanation of the necessary requirement for "authentic learning" - a high level of epistemic engagement between the supervisor and supervisee and the text (Waghid, 2006, p. 428). There is widespread agreement among scholars as to the necessity for doctoral students to adopt a deep approach to learning (Wisker, 2005).

Since, doctoral research cannot be rigidly structured as in undergraduate studies with a specific teaching and learning curriculum due to a number of factors - e.g. doctoral students having different entry points (Kobayashi, 2015); learning in supervision is likely to happen in unpredictable ways. However, some authors suggest that "the supervisory dialogue is most often (in the humanities at least) the primary teaching format available and applied during the doctoral process" (Bengtson, 2014, p. 16), and it is considered as "the heart of the research student's

learning” (Wisker, 2012, p. 187). Factors that affect the quality of supervisory dialogue, as found in existing body of literature, may be categorised in several ways, including those ways that relate to the personal capital that each party (supervisor and supervisee, respectively) brings to the relationship – e.g. the supervisory skills of the supervisor, communication and coaching skills, and empathy (Delany, 2008; Ghadirian et al., 2014; Gill & Burnard, 2008); and for the student, intelligence, knowledge, skills, competence, experience, commitment, dedication, and resilience are commonly cited variables (Lovitts, 2005; 2008). The continuous negotiation of expectation that happens at the various stages of the research and writing processes, which are based on trust and mutual interdependence, are equally important (Prazeres, 2017).

With regards to the writing process, the giving of feedback and the discussions of the thesis constitute key elements/aspects of learning in doctoral supervision have been well-considered in the literature (Parry, 2007; Manathunga & Goozée, 2007; Price, Handley, Millar & O’Donovan, 2010). In that regard, studies by Overall, Deane & Peterson (2011) and by Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt (2011) that identify the need for supervisors to provide a favourable/conducive climate that supports students in developing their own opinions and ideas. However, these studies emphasise the role of the supervisor in accomplishing the “core task of supervision” – developing critical thinking (Lee, 2012, p. 20); the onus is clearly on doctoral students to be resourceful, agentic, demonstrate initiative, and to exercise “self-direction or self-determination in learning” (Leonard, 2010, p. 39), in terms of being proactive in managing both their studies and their relationship(s) with supervisors. Several works have been undertaken with regards to different kinds of agency that students need to exercise – for example, ‘relational agency and ‘negotiated agency’ (Goode, 2010; Hopwood, 2010b; Jazvac-Martek, Chen & McAlpine, 2011; John & Denicolo, 2013). A study by Hadingham (2011, p. 68) in Wits university, South Africa found that doctoral students are “...capable of making decisions about their research without the need for direction... should they require...direction, they have the agency to ask for it”. However, some “students are not necessarily automatically aware of the need to develop their own agency” (Keane, 2016, p. 97), and they still require support, direction and guidance from supervisors in order to do so.

Learning in postgraduate/doctoral supervision has been considered from the perspective of teaching conception of the supervisor and their approach to supervision (Chiappetta-Swanson &

Watt, 2011). In terms of the supervisor perspective of teaching, this could be either teacher-centred or learner-centred (Brew & Peseta, 2004). Where the teacher-centred perspective to teaching is used, the supervisor who is believed to be more knowledgeable or more expert in a particular field uses the ‘transference or transmission model’ that focuses more on knowledge transfer rather than co-construction of knowledge between supervisor and student (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000, p. 196). The supervisor inducts the research student into the disciplinary codes and the student over time comes to learn the ‘craft’ (Yeatman, 1995, p. 9). This kind of relationship is commonly found “in the humanities and social sciences” (Dysthe et al. 2006, p. 299; Yeatman, 1995, p. 9). But, more often than not such a relationship has been perceived as domineering and dehumanising (Yeatman, 1995, p. 9), leaving the research student at the mercy of the supervisor (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim, 2006). Further, what transpires in the supervisory relationship is believed to be what takes place between autonomous persons, and this tenet has remained unquestioned and unchecked in many quarters (Fraser & Mathew, 1999; Zuber-Skerrit & Ryan, 1994).

With regards to supervisors’ approaches to supervision, Bruce & Stoodley (2013, p. 4) for example, argues that supervisors who adopt a skills-focused approach to supervision (functional approach) are likely to be concerned with training that could promote the development of research and writing skills of students. Thus, students learn to develop critical research skills. Also, supervisors who adopt the learning outcome-focused approach to supervision (critical thinking approach) are likely to be more concerned about enabling students to overcome difficulties in their learning. One study in the literature that explores threshold concepts in doctoral education finds that doctoral students experience conceptual difficulties, in terms of the development of strong and justifiable arguments in their thesis, and in arguing for ‘the significance of the findings’ (Kiley & Wisker, (2009. P. 435). The stage whereby the student learns to understand conceptually difficult knowledge, and crosses the learning/understanding threshold, is recognised as a necessary condition for learning – as it helps the student to experience a transformation and to acquire new ways of seeing (Bruce & Stoodley, 2013, p. 4; Kiley & Wisker, 2009, p. 432). Another approach employed by supervisors as identified by Bruce & Stoodley (2013) is the expanding awareness focus (enculturation approach). The authors explain that where expanding awareness is the focus, supervisors enhance student learning by exposing students to a wide range of experiences along the pathway to becoming independent researchers. The key idea about this approach is that

learning is seen as a socialisation process which happens within a community of practice. Learning in a community of practice follows the apprenticeship model of supervision, which some authors have criticised for not acknowledging that knowledge is in the process, but not the supervisor (Vikinas, 2005). With regards to a newcomer to the community - researchers/doctoral students begin as legitimate peripheral participating members, and gradually learn the disciplinary norms and values through engagement with established academics, and eventually the novice becomes a fully-fledged participating member (Dias & Paré, 2000 in McAlpine & Norton 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998); this may be through conference attendance (Eley & Jennings, 2005). It is also believed that group supervision plays an important role in supporting doctoral student learning (Fenge, 2012)

Another strand of work in the literature is doctoral learning in the wider context. Studies such as those by McAlpine & Norton (2006, p. 6) and Lovitts (2005), identify the multiple and complex contexts (department/faculty, institution and national contexts) in which doctoral learning is 'nested'. Within these contexts, various stakeholders, institutional structures and policies in terms of 'selection/admission', 'programme requirements', 'academic climate', 'disciplinary mode of research' are all important factors that shape student learning (Baptista, 2011, p. 3579; Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; Dysthe et al., 2006; McAlpine & Norton, 2006, p. 9; McFarlane, 2010). Also, it has been noted that not only do institutional structures, in terms of availability of infrastructure and important resources matter but the wider context of government policies are equally important (Abiddin, Ismail, & Ismail, 2011; Green, 2005a; Holbrook et al., 2014; Jiranek, 2010; Jones, 2013). Bitzer, (2011) notes that there has been so much research effort on increasing the effectiveness of postgraduate supervision but, limited attention has been given to the role that the institution/university play in learning and knowledge creation in postgraduate education. Gardner (2010) argues for research to pay attention to specific departmental context in which graduate students study. In line with the foregoing, my student research has a focus on a particular program within vocational and technical education programme (business education programme) in order to investigate the impact of student supervision experiences on student learning in the doctoral journey.

## **2.6 Doctoral student experience regarding research supervision**

With the increased demand for improved quality and quantity of research outputs in doctoral studies, which has been linked to doctoral supervision experience and satisfaction, understanding the perspectives of those directly involved in knowledge creation/generation has become imperative (Golde, 2000). Studies that foreground the student perspective have focused on the doctoral education and experience in general (Golde & Dore, 2001); doctoral learning experiences – with reference to relational agency of students (Hopwood, 2010b); doctoral supervision experience and learning in cross-cultural settings (Abiddin & West (2007), and specifically on supervision experiences of postgraduate/doctoral students (McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013), engaged in different modes of study – part-time study, distant learning and fulltime study. Different approaches have been used to understand the student perspective, for instance, Marsh, Rowe & Martins (2002) used student evaluation with the intent of obtaining informative feedback so as to improve supervision. Other authors use their personal reflections of their own experiences as students - mostly done by supervisors/academics (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009; Okeke, 2010). Traditionally, studies on doctoral education, in general, and on doctoral supervision, in particular, are conducted by well-established supervisors/academics (Stanley, 2004) but, in recent times research/doctoral students have begun investigating the supervision experience of other doctoral students (Hadingham, 2011). It is within this latter category that my student research is located.

Empirical studies that sought to understand various aspects of the doctoral student experience of supervision have focused on different contexts such as the UK, Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Malaysia, South Africa, and others. For example, McAlpine & McKinnon (2013) carried out their study in two UK universities using a longitudinal approach to examine the perspectives of 16 doctoral students with regards to the supervision relationship at different stages of the doctoral research process. The findings indicate that the participants were mostly satisfied with their supervision relationship, as issues that needed attention - that would not have been easy for others to address - were taken care of and resolved within the supervision relationship. With regards to negative experiences, the findings show that the participants experienced “frustration by lack of supervisory intellectual investment, unavailability of the supervisor, and tensions among supervisors...in co-supervisory relationship” (p. 278). The authors also draw attention to the way

in which the participants took agency for their learning in terms of being able to make their own decisions and to act independently of their supervisors – which, according to the authors suggests that although supervisors are ‘important’, they “are not paramount in the doctoral journey” (p. 278).

In the Australian context, Heath (2002) conducted a quantitative study on the PhD student perspective of supervision with a population sample of 355 students at the University of Queensland, of which 58% of the students were full-time students. One-third of the students were in a single-supervision relationship while the rest were engaged in a group/co-supervision relationship. As with the earlier study in the UK context, the findings show that almost all of the participants were satisfied with the expertise of their supervisor (p. 41). The findings further show that the participants had regular meeting with supervisors, attended at least one conference, and had one or two publications in the course of their candidature. In contrast, a recent study in Finland investigated the doctoral student perception of supervision and burnout – lack of well-being (Cornér, Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017). The study employed an online survey method, where open ended questions were used to generate data from 248 informants from the faculties of “social science, art and humanities, and natural and life sciences” (p. 91). The study found links between the unsatisfactory experiences of students with respect to well-being and attrition. For instance, the finding of the study established a relationship between “lack of satisfaction with supervision and equality within the research community and a low frequency of supervision” and the “experience of burnout”. Also, “experiences of burnout were connected to students’ attrition intentions”; and “attrition intentions were related to source of supervision” (p. 91). The authors recommend that further studies which employ a qualitative research method be carried out to provide deeper insight into the forces at play in the doctoral student experience. This points to a limitation of the methodology employed in the data gathering of the study, and the possibility of obtaining richer data through qualitative methodologies, which is also aligned with the purpose of student research.

A study based on the Malaysia context examined Malaysian postgraduate student learning experiences regarding postgraduate supervision in two public universities. The study used both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview as instruments to collect data. The finding shows

that students were, averagely satisfied with their supervision experience but, consider institutional support to be poor. This was basically due to the way that supervisors provided guidance at the proposal development stage, but towards the completion and writing-up stage supervisors offered little or no support which constituted a challenge for participants, as they indicated being inexperienced and lacking in the required skills in research. From the findings, some of the challenges stemmed from the lack of attention by supervisees to their studies (particularly regarding the part-time students); as well as from some supervisors (in terms of providing timely and constructive feedback). Within the same context, Ismail, Majid & Ismail (2013) “examined the role of supervision from the perspective of research students” through the use of a semi-structured interview with 4 participants from different institutions in Malaysia as study subjects. The study found that students encounter three major challenges with respect to their supervisors: (1) lack of positive communication; (2) lack of necessary expertise to give support; and (3) power conflicts (p. 65).

Wadesango & Mashigambi (2011) conducted a study to examine postgraduate student experiences and challenges with supervisors from two universities located in South Africa. The study adopted a mixed research method (qualitative and quantitative) by employing a case study research design, whereby, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 40 postgraduate students, and backed-up with a questionnaire to elicit data for the study. The findings show that the majority of the participants (75%) were unsatisfied with their supervisors due to issues relating to feedback on their submissions, supervisors’ “insufficient knowledge of the relevant field, change of supervisors due to transfer to other institutions, lack of supervisory support and supervisor’s other work load” (p. 31).

Another study by Govender & Dunphat (2011) explored the experiences of twelve participants engaged in a cohort model of supervision in South Africa, comprising of eight doctoral students that have had two cohort contact sessions and are at different stages of their studies; and four academics that recently completed their studies through the same cohort model of supervision. The study used open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face or telephonically undertaken interviews and focus group interviews to collect data for the study. The study findings show that, despite reports of some short-comings of the model in terms of conflicting commentaries from different

supervisors, the cohort model provided an opportunity for students to engage, collaborate and learn in a deeper ways than by using the conventional one-to-one supervision model.

The findings in a study by Heeralal (2015) that focused on an open and distant learning context in South Africa showed that, although students encountered challenges with the supervisory process - proposal writing, research methodology and data analysis, and supervisor allocation; majority of students are generally satisfied with their supervision experience in terms of timeous, detailed and critical feedback from supervisors and a positive relationship. A similar study on distance-learning-based doctoral students, showed that the matching of student and supervisor expectations is important in enhancing the completion of the studies (Orellana, Darder, Pérez & Salinas, 2016).

Increased internationalisation/globalisation has also encouraged students to study outside of their countries of origin, and research that foregrounds doctoral supervision experience in inter/cross-cultural settings contributes to our knowledge of different dynamics that play out in the supervision relationship (McGinty et al., 2010, p. 517). Abiddin & West (2007) employed survey method to investigate Malaysian PhD student supervision experiences in universities in the United Kingdom. Their study revealed that the majority of the respondents (66.4%) were satisfied with the progress of their study, while 20% of the respondents were very dissatisfied with their progress due to uncertainty in research, poor supervision, loss of motivation and interest, and financial difficulties. A similar cross-cultural study was conducted by McClure (2005), which explored research supervision experiences of newly enrolled Chinese postgraduate students in a foreign context in Singapore. Issues of mismatch in expectations due to cultural differences were found to contribute to negative experiences for students – feelings of being marginalised, inadequate guidance and attention, and language difficulties, especially at the early stages of the research process. The study emphasises the implications of the Chinese Confucian culture of respect for elders in supervisory relationships – in terms of how supervisees could view the fact of being assertive as being disrespectful to supervisors.

Other Chinese postgraduate students formed the population sample in a study by Leong (2010), who employed a survey method to investigate how Chinese postgraduate students experience mentoring in research supervision. The study revealed that the 27 postgraduate students that were

surveyed expected a supervisory relationship in which the ‘ideal supervisor’ becomes a mentor, a guide, a friend and a supporter who provides regular feedback on performances (p. 151). The finding diverges from a commonly held belief that, Chinese postgraduate students are less likely to seek a close and friendly supervision relationship with supervisors due to the aforementioned Chinese Confucian culture of seniority and respect for elders. Friendship in the Chinese context is, however, for moral education where self-transformation is the focus (p. 151).

Furthermore, another intercultural supervision study was carried out by Kidman, Manathunga & Cornforth (2017, p. 1208) in a New Zealand university that focuses on the supervision experience of 75 PhD students who were mostly international students in the first-two years of their studies. The study used a mixed method research approach to collect data (online survey, focus group, and interview). The study findings indicate that issues of stereotype, power, and ethnicity were found to be a hidden curriculum that impacted supervisee experiences of the supervision relationship and the kind of knowledge that is privileged. The study further shows that the international students were able to navigate intercultural interaction with supervisors through peer support from indigenous students in the faculty with whom they formed some alliance. They also “find ways of speaking out, often in highly coded forms, that complicate their subaltern academic status” (p. 1208).

In the Nigerian context, available studies mostly used the quantitative – survey method to investigate doctoral student experiences of supervision (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014), the attitude of supervisors towards research supervision, and the programme completion by postgraduate students (Adeniyi & Oladejo, (2012). With the exception of the Okeke (2010) study that employed the personal reflection approach to explore his personal experience of doctoral supervision, limited studies abound that explore the perspective of doctoral students, using qualitative methodologies. Some of the supervision challenges identified in the Okeke (2010) study include the lack of involvement of doctoral students with regards to the admission process and the allocation of supervisors. Thus, according to the author this increases the likelihood of a mismatch in research interests between students and supervisors, which contributed to delays in research topic selection by students. Another challenge relates to the process of approval of the research topic which starts with approval by the supervisor and then the final approval by the supervisory committee. The

author sees this as a mechanism to ensure that all topics approved for students are aligned with the institutional mode of knowledge creation (predominantly, the positivist tradition), otherwise, the topics are likely rejected by the committee. Other issues related to in-fighting among committee members during oral defence; the demand by the department that students provide refreshment for defence panel members; and intimidation by supervisors whose relationship with students are more like the 'master-servant relationship' (p. 123). Thus, the author recommended further investigation of these challenges. My student research thesis would add to this emerging body of work that has a focus on the Nigerian context, by exploring the supervision experience of doctoral students in the business education programme.

## **2.7 Synthesis of the literature and its implications for this research**

Doctoral research supervision as an evolving field of study which has a vast and growing body of work in the literature, which may be broadly grouped into three categories: theoretical work on the practice of supervision, research on the framework for supervision, and research that investigates/evaluates supervision and the student experience (Okeke, 2010, p. 115). The first strand of work provides a theoretical conceptualisation of research supervision, and guidelines for supervision practices in the form of handbooks/manuals. Although some of these handbooks have been criticised for presenting supervision in a simplistic manner, that fails to recognise its complex nature (Hadingham, 2011; Kamler & Thompson, 2008), they do provide relevant guides with regards to the supervisory tasks, roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the supervision enterprise (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 1997). This body of work also provides important guidelines for the research writing process (Parry, 2007), and management of expectations in the supervisory relationship (Nagra & Gopal, 2015), which are all critical to the practice of supervision.

The second strand of work focuses on the development of framework for supervision, and it is mostly based on empirical research evidence (Gatfield, 2005). Current authors of this strand of work recognise the complex nature of the supervision phenomenon, and these authors note the influences of institutional, cultural and societal context on supervision relationships. They note

that not one single framework is adequate to be a universal fit; rather, the appropriateness of a supervision framework should be determined by its flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of students (Calma, 2007; Lee, 2008). Thus, the need to explore the doctoral student experience of supervision in different contexts forms a part of ongoing discussions (Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2009). The third strand of work where my thesis is located, aims to illuminate understanding, and to improve the effectiveness of supervision and doctoral productivity by investigating, evaluating and/or describing supervision actions, activities, practices, relationships and student experiences (Abiddin & West, 2007). Although my student research does fall within the third strand of work on doctoral research supervision, it was necessary for me to draw on works from the first-two strands to provide the reader with a clear understanding of relevant concepts of research supervision, supervision frameworks and discourses, supervisory relationships, and learning which have now become the core of the supervisory process – as these are in line with the objectives of my thesis. Since in reality, the theory and the practice are both informed by each other, in the same light, the different strands of scholarship on research supervision are inextricably interwoven.

With regards to scholarship that examines/explores doctoral supervision experiences, research evidence has shown that writers within this frame mostly explore supervision from the perspective of supervisors and the institutions (Kobayashi, 2015). Leonard et al. (2006), in their review of the literature on PhD supervision in the UK, argue that a substantive amount of existing research on the supervisor perspective does exist, but, “there has been very little research done on the students’ perspective and giving students’ views of the doctoral experience ” (p. 5). The need to focus on the doctoral student perspective is consistent with an earlier argument by Bennet & Knibbs (1986) that, with the highly privatised process of PhD supervision it is better to consider the perspective of those directly concerned – the doctoral students who are the most affected by supervisory practices (Wang, 2013). Similarly, a recent review of the literature by John & Denicolo (2013) also draws attention to the lack of research into the doctoral research student experience. The authors argue that although this issue has been identified by the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2006; research work along this line is still very limited, thus making it an important area of research.

The existing body of literature has focused on different aspects of doctoral supervision experiences including doctoral students' satisfaction (Zhao, Golde & McCormick, 2007), supervisors' cognitive style (Armstrong, 2004), and alignment of the supervisory styles with student expectations and student stages of development (Abiddin & West, 2007). However, research has shown that most "of the research on supervision experiences in doctoral education is cross-disciplinary... Single university departments ... need knowledge on how to promote high-quality supervision experiences within one discipline..." (Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2009, p. 2004). Thus, Lahenius & Martinsuo (2009) investigated the supervision experience of doctoral students in a single discipline - Industrial Engineering and Management, in Finland.

Generally, there is a large body of literature that researched into doctoral supervision in the Western context but there are very limited studies in the developing African context (Hadingham, 2011). The Hadingham study builds on the Okeke (2010) work, as discussed in the previous section. Although the Okeke (2010) study provided insight into the supervision experience in the Nigerian context, the study is limited in that it only provided an individual's account of supervision experience within the Nigerian context. My student research thesis takes this a step further to explore the supervision experiences of a particular group (doctoral business education students) in a single department (vocational and technical education department). Also, while the Okeke study focus is only on the supervision experience at the proposal preparation stage, but my student research thesis extends it by exploring student supervision experiences all the way through the stages of the research process. Again, Okeke's study was only concerned with supervision experiences in terms of the struggles/challenges encountered; but, my thesis is concerned with the entire supervision experience of doctoral students (including the positive aspects). The assumption in my thesis is that, doctoral research supervision might be complex and challenging to the student and probably the supervisor as well. Also, my research assumes that doctoral supervision experiences would depend on the context. In other words, the context would play a part in the way that doctoral supervision is likely to happen.

Having provided an account of existing state of knowledge on research supervision practices in the world (from different environments, spaces and geographical contexts), the body of literature studied/reviewed so far has enabled me to gain understanding of the issues that play at the different

levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model of human development. In some instances, authors like McAlpine & Norton (2006) and Lovitts (2005) for example talk to the environmental variables at play in all the levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (the macro, exo, meso and micro-levels). I hope that using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to explore doctoral students' perspective in a Nigerian context would not only illuminate understanding of supervision experiences, but also produce discussions and debates on doctoral supervision. Also, I believe that my thesis will contribute to the body of literature on doctoral supervision, not only by adding the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students from the Nigerian context, which appears to have remained obscure and secret, my thesis would also contribute to the literature in terms of approach. By employing the phenomenographic approach in my thesis, doctoral student supervision experiences are collectively mapped in a qualitatively limited number of ways for easy an understanding of the groups' way of experiencing supervision in a given context. Whereas, the majority of existing studies that relied upon or employed other qualitative research methods are mostly concerned with reporting students' individual accounts. Given the diversity of doctoral students (each with different age, research skills and competencies, knowledge and intellectual abilities, and different modes of study – full-time/part-time) and the uniqueness of each supervision relationship, this may result in producing unending lists of students' personal experiences of supervision. In general, my thesis has the potential to offer insights for the selection/recruitment of new doctoral students (pre-doctoral preparation and supervisor selection/allocation) and for proposal development as a process and for public defence practices. My thesis could have the potential to illuminate the inherent power dynamics or students' abuses and the measures to counter these; as well as providing reasons for the possible improvement of institutional and national policies on supervision. Again, my thesis could provide insight into the induction of doctoral students into the world of academia and the re-conceptualisation of doctoral work as a knowledge creation process.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature that is relevant to the phenomenon under investigation in my thesis. This chapter, therefore, provides theoretical justification/basis for my choice of methodology and research approach. Notably, the main concern in the choice of a methodology is its appropriateness towards achieving the aim of the study which, in this instance, my own research aim was to explore the variation in the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in the Nigerian context and the impacts that such experiences have on student learning. This exploration, among other factors, sought to provide insights towards improving the experience of supervision. To this end, phenomenography - a research approach for gaining understanding of other people's experiences of phenomena (Marton, 1997), was deemed my me to be appropriate for my student research thesis. The discussion in this chapter starts with the description of the research paradigm within which my research aim was located; the rationale for the choice of phenomenography; meaning of phenomenography; the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of phenomenography; and how the phenomenographic approach was used in sampling, data collection, data analysis and interpretation in my research. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical issues, the validity and reliability of the approach (trustworthiness) and, lastly, the conclusions drawn from the other sections of the chapter.

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

This research is located within the interpretivist research paradigm. The fact that my research is located within the interpretivist paradigm means that I have taken a position in the divide between the mainstream positivist paradigm and the interpretive paradigm. Taking this position was a high

leap for me, considering my quantitative background prior to embarking on my doctoral research pathway, as I have only worked within the quantitative paradigm both for my undergraduate degree and for my master's degree. My decision to adopt a qualitative methodology was influenced, firstly, by the research topic that I have chosen for my PhD thesis and, secondly, by way of my supervisor's advice, which I quickly consented to since I was also interested in undertaking some fresh and different research topic. However, little did I know that my decision was not only about making a methodological change (from quantitative methodology to qualitative methodology), but it was about my ontological and epistemological shift. Hence, the transition was not an easy one for me, as I needed to overcome many issues, and especially at the initial stage of my study. Most of the time I found myself leaning towards the positivist orientation in my language usage and the way I position myself in relation to my study. For instance, in most of my initial write ups (for my proposal defence), I referred to myself as "the researcher" instead of using the personal pronoun "I". This was because of my orientation in the quantitative paradigm where a researcher is required to detach or distance herself from her study to avoid bias. Therefore, I had to learn and internalise the interpretivist discourse and its principles through my initial supervision engagements with my supervisor and also my personal study of the interpretivist research paradigm. I then realised that the application of quantitative – positivist methods of controlled observation and hypothesis testing with respect to social reality could limit understanding of the subjectivity and experiences of human beings, which the qualitative research approaches offer.

Another major factor that facilitated my transition to the interpretivist paradigm was my participation in the PhD cohort meetings organised by the university. The cohort provided a forum where supervisors and students come together bi-monthly to share ideas on varying aspects of the PhD process. One important feature of the cohort meetings was that students at the various stages of their studies were required to present their work, which is then critiqued by supervisors and fellow doctoral students. This process enabled me to deal with my self-doubt as I found that I was not alone in terms of any supposed struggle to understand the qualitative methodology. With the exposure and opportunities to interact and engage with various groups of students and supervisors working on different topics using different qualitative methodologies, I began to understand the value that the interpretivist approach provides in understanding the lived experiences of people.

The interpretivist paradigm is premised on the notion that there are multiple realities, which are subject to different interpretations based on people's interactions with their social contexts (Lloyd, 2005). Thus, knowledge is viewed as both subjective and socially constructed. By contrast, the positivist paradigm is premised on the assumption that there is an objective reality out there which is subject to detached observation, hypothesis testing and the use of statistical procedures to arrive at the findings which, thus, view knowledge objectively (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 17). With the interpretivist approach, researchers might be able to address questions that study meaningful social action or seek to understand the social nature of people. The interpretivist research paradigm offers a useful tool for studies that aim at gaining a better understanding of social contexts (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003, p. 92). This is so because it allows us to understand the people that make up the world and this makes it possible for meaning to be derived through interpretation of their interactions with the realities in the world, which are constructed as opposed to being discovered.

Within the interpretivist paradigm, realities are not seen so independent of the individuals. On the contrary, realities are constructed through the meaning-making process of individuals' interactions within social contexts (Creswell, 1994; Pickard, 2007). Thus, Terreblanche, Durrheim & Painter (2006), in succinctly describing the interpretive paradigm, assert the following:

The interpretive paradigm involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us (epistemology) and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyse information (methodology) (p. 120).

The interpretive nature of this research paradigm, particularly its interest in exploring and interpreting social interactions with its focus on people's subjective experiences, made it amenable to this study which sought to explore the supervision experiences of doctoral students. Also, the centrality of people's subjective experience, such as what should be focussed on, is a cornerstone in the phenomenographic approach.

### **3.3 Rationale for my choice of phenomenography as a research approach**

As a student researcher, the onus was on me to identify a suitable research approach that would allow for an in-depth focus of the subjective experiences of doctoral students as they relate to research supervision. Several qualitative research methods/approaches abound in the literature, such as phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory that could be used to study people's lives and environments. Notwithstanding, phenomenography - which is a research approach that describes the varying ways in which a group of people understand, conceive or experience phenomena (Marton, 1981) - was deemed by me to be the most appropriate approach for my thesis. Unlike other qualitative research approaches, whereby, the research focus is either on the phenomena (what is considered truthful about phenomena) or the theory development (as in the case of grounded theory) (Glaser, 1978), the phenomenographic theoretical perspective is useful in identifying variation in individuals' subjective experiences/conceptions of a given phenomenon and that is its object of research (Akerlind, 2007, p. 22). These conceptions or ways of experiencing are assumed to be understood and expressed in a qualitatively finite number of ways (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Phenomenography is also differentiated from ethnography, which is a research approach that is concerned with studying the participants' behaviour in their natural context, based on their culture or social groups (Wiersma, 2000) where the researcher becomes an involved observer (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001). Thus, Trigwell (2000) conceives of a phenomenographic study as:

...conducted in a real setting. It looks at issues through the eyes of the key players ...therefore uninvolved observer; and it is somehow able to better represent the complexity of educational settings and situations to produce meaningful and useful conclusions (Trigwell, 2000, p. 65).

The phenomenographic approach, which fundamentally seeks to map the variation in the subjective conceptions that people hold about any given phenomenon because of their relationship with that aspect of the world (Marton & Booth, 1997), articulates well with the focus of my thesis which explores the variation in the supervision experiences of doctoral business education

students. Understanding the way in which the participants in my study engaged with research supervision and the impact such a relationship has on their learning was central to the focus of my thesis.

Although it can be argued that both phenomenography and phenomenology focus on the lived experiences of people (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007, p. 59), a comparison of many factors portray how phenomenography stands out. Phenomenology focuses particularly on uncovering the essence that is the structure (Dahlberg, 2006) of a phenomenon, or ‘what is common in people’s experiences’ (Stoodley, 2009) and to describe it ‘as it is’ (which could be referred to as gaining the first-order perspective); whereas phenomenography focuses on uncovering variations in people’s experiences of a phenomenon and on describing it ‘as it appears to the experiencers’, also known as gaining the second-order perspective (Marton & Pang, 2008, p. 535). Marton posits that “...the descriptions we arrive at from the second-order perspective are autonomous in the sense that they cannot be derived from descriptions arrived at from the first-order perspective” (Marton 1981, p. 178).

In phenomenology, the object of inquiry is the “phenomenon” (in this case, research supervision), whereas, in phenomenography the object of investigation is not the phenomenon per se. On the contrary, it is the “many ways of experiencing”, viewing, knowing and understanding the phenomenon which, in this instance, is the research supervision (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007; Marton & Pang, 2008; Stoodley, 2009). Essentially, the researcher studies the intentional relationship and not the subjective meaning that participants construct. Phenomenology reports individualised experience of a phenomenon (that is, part of the whole); whereas, phenomenography reports a groups’ collective experience of a given phenomenon - that is, the whole (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007). This is particularly relevant when dealing with a complex phenomenon such as research supervision (Grant, 2005b) where “the potential for a complex range of responses is high (Stoodley, 2009, p. 56). Phenomenography provides a useful tool for mapping the variation in a groups’ collective experience, believed to be in a qualitatively limited number of ways (Marton, 1986). Given these differences, I believed phenomenography to be the approach that best suited my student research. Earlier studies have used phenomenography as an appropriate approach for examining different approaches to teaching and learning (Bruce, Stoodley & Pham,

2009). Also, phenomenography has recently attracted the attention of researchers within the domain of doctoral education. For instance, phenomenography has been used to explore the learning process of doctoral students (Arvidsson & Franke, 2013), supervisors' experiences of higher degree research supervision (Bruce & Stoodley, 2013); and supervision of doctoral students (Wright, Murray & Geale, 2007). These authors judge phenomenography to be an appropriate research approach for examining phenomena in the field of doctoral supervision, teaching and learning and they describe "it through the eyes of the learners..." (Marton 1994, p. 4425).

### **3.4 Overview of phenomenography**

Having discussed the rationale for the choice of phenomenography as a research approach for conducting my student research, this section discusses what the phenomenographic approach really entails, types of phenomenography, the methodology, ontology, epistemology and other critical elements of phenomenography.

#### **3.4.1 What is phenomenography?**

The word phenomenography originated from two Greek words "phainomenon" which means appearance, and "graphein" which means description (Pang, 2003, p. 145). This means that phenomenography is a way of describing how things appear to people. The name 'phenomenography' was first introduced by a Swedish educational psychologist by the name of Ference Marton (Harris, 2011) after he and his research group (Säljö, Svensson, & Dahlgren) conducted a series of studies with first-year students with regards to student learning at the University of Goteborg in Sweden in the 1970s (Harris, 2011, p. 110; Marton & Fai, 1999). In other words, phenomenography as a research approach that is located within the interpretivist and descriptive paradigms can be said to originate from studies of student learning in the university context (Marton 1994, p. 4425). Like other research traditions, phenomenography has been subjected to many criticisms, particularly with regards to the initial lack of clarity about its theoretical underpinning (Säljö, 1997). There has also been an ongoing debate among some of the

founding fathers of phenomenography (Marton and Säljö) “as to what the product of the phenomenographic approach actually represents” (Sadler, 2008, p. 75). Despite contentions within the tradition, there seems to be agreement among phenomenographers with regards to aspects of the research approach that have been well developed. For instance, the use of categories of description to map the qualitatively many ways of experiencing a phenomenon and the portrayal of the result of the phenomenographic study in an outcome space (Sadler, 2008). Research evidence has shown the enduring value of the phenomenographic tradition, which is grounded in its attention to mapping variations in the lived experience of people on the phenomena around them. It is not surprising then, that phenomenography persists and continues to grow in its influence and it has been applied to different disciplines outside of education where it was born (Pang, 2003), such as: information literacy (Abdi, 2014); environment (Loughland, Reid & Petocz, 2002); plus medicine and nursing (Dall’Alba, 1998; Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007).

Marton (1986) defines phenomenography as “a research method for mapping the qualitatively many ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspect of phenomena in the world around them” (p. 31). The major interest in this approach is the investigation and identification of the finite number of ways that people conceive of a specific phenomenon and in the description of the variation (Edwards, 2007). Phenomenography considers people’s experience, perception, understanding and ways of seeing as ‘conception’ (Carbone, Mannila, & Fitzgerald, 2007; Marton & Pong, 2005). Thus, conception forms the smallest unit of phenomenographic analysis (Harris, 2011). Stoodley, (2009) posits that:

Conception is not just a mental activity but one in which the perceiver of a phenomenon relates to the phenomenon out of the context of their whole experience, the phenomenon contributing also to that relationship through its own unique characteristics (Stoodley, 2009, p. 58).

The relational view of conception is underpinned by the non-dualistic ontology of phenomenography, which focuses research attention on how the *relationship between* people (participants) and a given phenomenon around them (research supervision) are conceived (Svensson, 1997). This also requires both observation and interpretation (Stoodley, 2009, p. 59) by the researcher, albeit from the perspectives of the people who experienced the phenomenon. In

my student research, I was interested in identifying and describing the various conceptions that my participants hold concerning research supervision, in order for me to be able to provide a rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon.

### **3.4.2 Types of phenomenography**

From the earlier work of Marton (1981), three lines of phenomenographic research have been identified. One of these is ‘pure’ phenomenography which is generally concerned with understanding aspects of reality about people’s day-to-day lives, rather than focusing on subjects that are learned in an educational context. The second is concerned with the qualitatively many ways of experiencing learning (conceptions about learning). Then, the third one is concerned with a specific discipline of study such as Art. Bowden (2000) categorises phenomenographic research into two types namely, traditional phenomenography and developmental phenomenography (Bowden, 2000). Bowden (2000, p. 3) provides the same definition for pure phenomenography as that of Marton. But, considers ‘developmental phenomenography’ as being concerned with a specific context in which individuals “experience some aspect of their world and then to enable them or others to change the way in which their world operates” (Bowden, 2000, p. 3). In this sense, in this thesis I sought to understand the varied ways in which participants experienced research supervision to offer insight to improve their experience in a way that aligns with developmental phenomenography.

### **3.4.3 Phenomenographic ontology**

In terms of ontology, phenomenography holds a non-dualistic and subjectivist notion about the nature of reality. Phenomenography is non-dualistic in the sense that it argues that there is only one world and there is no separation between individuals and the world they experience (Bowden, 2005). Marton explains this notion, thus:

From a non-dualistic ontological perspective there are not two worlds: a real, objective world, on the one hand, and a subjective world of representations on the other. There is only one world, a really existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective. An experience is a relationship between object and subject, encompassing both. The experience is as much an aspect of the object as it is of the subject (Marton, 2000, p. 105).

Since the subject (experiencer) and the object (experienced) are not treated as separate entities, the concern in phenomenography is not only about the ‘experiencer’ or the ‘experienced’ but also about the “internal relation” between the experiencer and the experienced (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 139). By implication, ‘experience’ which is the relationship between subject (experiencers) and object (experienced) is central to phenomenography (Linder & Marshall, 2003); Sandberg, 2000) and that only occurs when people become aware of certain aspects of phenomena in their world (Uljens, 1996). In describing people’s experience, phenomenography takes the second-order perspective (Marton & Booth, 1997) that is, as understood or experienced by the experiencers as against the first-order perspective in which a given phenomenon is described as it is or based on the researcher’s viewpoint (Marton & Pang, 2008, p. 535). A researcher working within this frame will have to first bracket his/her values and judgements about the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 120) to be able to interpret and describe the participants’ experience in the way that others can understand it (Reddy, 2010).

Regarding the subjectivist nature of phenomenography it holds that, although there is only one single world, people experience it differently. Usually, people hold different conceptions about life and so they are likely to experience a given phenomenon within certain contexts differently. Also, given a different context, an individual’s experience of a phenomenon is less likely to be the same. Hence, reality is the function of ‘internal person-world relationship’ (Säljö, 1997, p. 175). In phenomenography, an individual’s experience does not represent the whole of reality about a phenomenon. Rather, the different views, conceptions, experiences or understanding of a specific phenomenon are what constitute the phenomenon (Marton & Pong, 2005). This explains why phenomenography fundamentally seeks to map out the qualitatively finite ways in which a group of people collectively experience a given phenomenon, rather than presenting the individual experiences of people (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007). Based on the non-dualistic ontological stance of phenomenography, I consider my study participants to be internally related to the aspect of the world they experience (research supervision), and their individual experiences/conception

of supervision as only a part of the whole (which could also vary from participant to participant). With that, I sought to interpret and describe their collective experience as a group in order to illuminate understanding of the research supervision phenomenon.

### **3.4.4 Phenomenographic epistemology**

In phenomenography, both the ontology and the epistemology are based on the non-dualistic assumption and the notion of a second-order perspective about the world and as such they are interrelated and interdependent (Svensson, 1997; Uljens 1996, p. 114). But, to draw a distinction, ontologically, as stated earlier, phenomenography focuses on the nature of reality, whereas epistemologically, phenomenography concerns itself with the way in which people come to know that reality. In explaining the epistemological stance of phenomenography, Uljens argues that "...reality is considered to exist through the way in which a person conceives of it" (Uljens, 1996, p. 112). Such a 'conception' is formed through an internal relationship between the experiencer (an individual) and the experienced (a phenomenon), whereby the individual becomes aware of an aspect or several aspects of the world (Uljens, 1996). In line with this view, Svensson (1997) argues that "knowledge and conceptions have a relational nature..." Thus, phenomenography sees 'conception' as a way of describing knowledge (p. 165). It then means that people come to know reality through their experience (conception) of aspects of the world around them. The assumption is that although only one single world exists (based on the non-dualistic notion of the world), different people will experience differently aspects of the world. According to Marton (1996) "individuals are seen as the bearers of different ways of experiencing various phenomena and even as the bearers of fragments of differing ways of experiencing various phenomena" (Marton, 1996, p. 187). As such, they can describe what they have experienced or are aware of (Smith, 2010, p. 77). The key epistemological assumption of phenomenography is that the researcher takes the participants' ways of seeing a phenomenon to be what is real for them (second order perspective), as opposed to what the researcher or others see the phenomenon to be (first-order perspective). The variation in ways of seeing (knowing) is what phenomenographic researchers seek to map in a qualitatively finite number of ways to provide collective meaning of phenomena around the world.

### **3.4.5 Aspects of an experience**

In phenomenography, experience, conception, perception, understanding, and ‘ways of seeing’ are terms used interchangeably (Marton, 1997, p. 97) to describe the internal relation between the subject (the participant) and the object they are interacting with (the research supervision phenomenon) (Marton, 1997). The way in which a given phenomenon is experienced is understood to be constituted by two aspects - the “what” and the “how” aspects. The “what” aspect tells us what it is that is in the subject’s focus, the “how” aspect describes how meaning is created” (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007, p. 56). These two aspects became important frameworks in phenomenographic analysis (Harris, 2011). However, differences abound in the way in which researchers have used the ‘what’ and ‘how’ aspects in phenomenographic studies and these differences in the use of ‘what’ (referential aspect) and ‘how’ (structural aspect) were also noted by Marton & Booth (1997, p. 33), who are the founding fathers of phenomenography. In this study, the ‘what’ aspect (referential framework) relates to the data elicited from the participants regarding ‘what experiences they had in terms of research supervision’; and the ‘how’ aspect (structural framework) relates to ‘how participants’ supervision experiences impact on their learning’. This framework enabled me to construct a relationship between what participants experienced in terms of supervision and their learning in the doctoral programme.

### **3.4.6 Dimension of variation**

Usually, certain dimensions of variation exist in the way in which people conceive the world around them. These variations in people’s conceptions constitute the very object of research in phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997). Bransford & Schwartz (1999) stress the role of contract in terms of how it enables people to identify what to compare, the object they experience, with. As a result, “there is thus no discernment without variation; hence every feature discerned corresponds to a certain dimension of variation in which the object is compared with other objects” (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 336). The dimension of variation can be noticeable, either across all

categories of description that are arrived at by a researcher as findings, or in some of the categories of description (Akerlind, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997) and provides a means of linking categories to the phenomenon experienced in an orderly manner. In this thesis, the pursuance of two critical questions enabled the identification of the dimensions of variation with regards to the participants' experience of supervision. The first research question, dealing with the 'what aspect', is: what are the many ways in which doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision? In pursuing this question, I sought to identify the different and qualitatively limited number of ways in which the participants experienced research supervision and presented these in categories of description in line with phenomenographic orientation. This revealed the dimension of variation across all the categories of description. The second research question, relating to the 'how aspect' of their experience, is: how do the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria impact on their learning and development in the doctoral program? The concern here was to understand how different experiences of a phenomenon impacted doctoral student learning (Reddy, 2010) and, in this case, the experience of research supervision. This also revealed another dimension of variation across the various categories of description.

### **3.4.7 Categories of description and the outcome space**

The assumption in phenomenography is that people can only conceive of or experience a specific phenomenon in a qualitatively limited number of ways (Marton, 1996), and these different ways of experiencing are uncovered and mapped as categories of description. Notably, categories of description are the outcome of phenomenographic analysis in terms of the various ways that a given phenomenon has been experienced/understood at the collective level, rather than individual viewpoints (Åkerlind, 2008), such that each category of description represents a way of seeing that is distinct from other ways of seeing/experiencing. In emphasising the role of the researcher, Larsson & Holmstrom (2007) posit that "categories of description are the researcher's abstractions of the many ways of understanding, which have been identified" (p. 56). These categories are then presented in the form of an outcome space as shown in figure 4, which is the outcome of the phenomenographic study (Marton & Dahlgren, 1976). It is notable, therefore, that "typically, they form a hierarchy of increasing complex awareness of the phenomenon, though this is not

obligatory” (Stoodley, 2009, p. 65). The assumption is that the outcome space presents all the categories of description, arranged orderly and hierarchically, to illustrate the internal relationship between the categories of description, that is, the ways in which the different conceptions or ways of experiencing a specific phenomenon that are identified in the categories of description are related (Bowden & Walsh, 2000). In this thesis, the participants revealed different conceptions/experiences of research supervision which have been mapped into categories of description in terms of how they relate to an aspect of research supervision phenomenon that is investigated.

### **3.5 Research design**

In line with the theoretical underpinning of phenomenography, as established in previous sections of this thesis, this section presents the processes of data collection and analysis in this research. It first describes an interview as a tool for data collection in phenomenography. Then, it follows the sample size and the way in which the participants were recruited for this study, the demographic details of the participants, interview instrument development, pilot interview, main interviews, and data analysis.

#### **3.5.1 Data collection: phenomenographic interview**

In phenomenographic research, data are usually generated in an open and explorative manner (Svensson, 1997) with the interview being the major instrument for data generation (Åkerlind, 2005a; Åkerlind, Bowden & Green, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997). Such data are collected/generated from a specific group of individuals that have experienced the phenomenon being investigated within a given context (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999), using semi-structured interviews (Stoodley, 2009). In line with the phenomenographic mode of data generation, I used interviews, with specific reference to the semi-structured one-to-one interviews (Green, 2005b) to generate the data for my student research. The participants chose convenient venues for the interviews and my manner of conducting the interviews, I aimed at appearing

friendly and open-minded, as is recommended for phenomenographic studies (Åkerlind et al., 2005; Bowden, 2000). This was meant to create a relaxed atmosphere whereby the participants could freely express their experiences and they would feel that they are allowed to take any dimension they choose, to respond to the questions posed to them. Another important guideline for the conduct of phenomenographic interviews, as identified in the body of literature, is the bracketing of the researchers' ideas/preconceptions in terms of the choice of follow-up questions during interviews (Green, 2005b; Prosser, 2000b). According to Ashworth & Lucas (1998):

The phenomenographic epoche should entail a suspension of commitment to the accepted view of the subject matter in order to grasp the meaning of the material to the student, yet it is only through some knowledge of the material that the student can be understood. The key, as always, is that knowledge of the subject matter must not be allowed to impair entry into the life-world (p. 423).

This type of data generation, where the researcher is required to bracket or “set aside his or her own assumptions, so far as is possible” (Ashworth & Lucas (2000, p. 297), to be able to fully engage with the participants' lived experience, presented a sense of personal tension for me, which I have described in section 3.5.6 of this chapter. But, for the most part, I limited myself to the issues raised by the participants in seeking further clarification. Thus, I posed follow-up questions based on a specific participant's response or responses from other participants. I also followed the same principle in my execution of follow-up interviews with the same participants, as an additional interview was deemed necessary after transcription of the initial interview data in line with phenomenographic guidelines (Green, 2005b).

### **3.5.2 Participants: sample size and recruitment**

Considering the aim of phenomenographic studies which is to discover the qualitatively many ways in which a phenomenon can be understood or experienced, the selection of an appropriate sample size is important. However, there seems to be no consensus among phenomenographers with regards to the specific number of participants to be recruited. Larsson & Holmstrom (2007) observe that several phenomenographic studies that used a population sample with a maximum of twenty (20) participants were able to identify all the many ways of experiencing the phenomena

that was investigated. Also, Trigwell (2000) argues that a large sample size can constitute a problem to data management and as such, recommends a population sample having a minimum of ten (10) and maximum of twenty (20) participants, which he suggests would allow the researcher to discover a reasonable variation in the participants' experiences of a given phenomenon. In my research, I selected fifteen participants comprising of seven females and eight male doctoral business education students. My selection of participants from business education was based on the need to better understand the business education context I have chosen to make a home as an academic. Also, in line with phenomenographic sampling, which is usually purposive and based on convenience (Marton & Booth, 1997), I recruited the participants for this study purely on the grounds of interest and willingness on the part of the participants from four different universities (which were the only universities offering doctoral business education programme when the data for this study were generated). The participants who were selected were at differently positioned levels of their candidature, as shown in Table 1 in the next section, which was to enable me to generate data regarding all the aspects of their supervision experiences with regards to the research process. Thus, the individuals in the sample that I selected covered a broad range of the relevant population's characteristics, as suggested by Stamouli & Huggard (2007, p. 184), in terms of gender, stages of their candidature, and research process.

### **3.5.3 Participant demography**

To adhere to the issue of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used instead of the names of the participants and the universities they were drawn from. The demographic details of the participants, as shown in Table 2, reveal the type of study that the participants (doctoral students) were engaged in (full-time/part-time), the gender of the participants, the gender of their supervisors, the number of years they have spent on the doctoral programme, and the stage at which the participants were in regarding their studies.

**Table 2. Demographic details of participants**

S/N o	Participants (Pseudonyms)	Type of study	Gender of student	Gender of supervisor/s	No. of supervisors	University (Pseudonyms)	No. of years spent	Stage of study
1.	Participant 1 (Abel)	Full-time	Male	Female	One	B	Four years	Writing up
2.	Participant 2 (Benjy)	Full-time	Male	Female	One	B	Three years	Analysis
3.	Participant 3 (Cecelia)	Part-time	Female	Female	One	B	Four years	Writing up
4.	Participant 4 (Doris)	Part-time	Female	Male	One	C	Six years	Submitted, yet to defend
5.	Participant 5 (Endurance)	Full-time	Female	Male	One	C	Two years	Proposal preparation
6.	Participant 6 (Favour)	Full-time	Female	Male	One	C	Two years	Proposal preparation
7.	Participant 7 (Gabriel)	Full-time	Male	Female	One	D	Five years	Just completed
8.	Participant 8 (Haman)	Part-time	Male	Female	One	D	Nine years	Proposal development
9.	Participant 9 (Isaac)	Part-time	Male	Male	One	D	Two years	Proposal preparation
10.	Participant 10 (James)	Full-time	Male	Male	One	D	Two years	Proposal preparation
11.	Participant11 (Kenneth)	Full-time	Male	Female	One	D	Eight years	Just completed
12.	Participant 12 (Luke)	Full-time	Male	All male	Three	A	Two years	Writing up
13.	Participant 13 (Naomi)	Full-time	Male	All male	Three	A	Four years	Proposal development
14.	Participant 14 (Moses)	Full-time	Female	All male	Three	A	Two years	Proposal development
15.	Participant 15 (Oshua)	Full-time	Female	Female	One	D	Three years	Drop out

### 3.5.4 Interview question development

Since the aim of the study was to explore the variation in the supervision experiences of doctoral business education student in the Nigerian context, it was important for me to develop questions that would elicit answers in pursuance of that aim. The interview questions developed were guided by the critical questions that this study sought to answer, drawing directly from the theoretical framework adopted for this thesis. The interview questions targeted the uncovering of the participants' experiences of supervision through the research process which is also in line with Lee's (2012) conceptual framework on supervision drawn on in this study. The research process

was summarised into three main stages and as such, the questions covered the initial stage of topic selection; proposal development and defence stage, and the final stage of data collection and writing up. Insights from my extensive study of literature on supervision assisted me in the formulation/construction of specific interview questions that covered the three main stages of the research process. This was in conformity with suggestions by some phenomenographers that phenomenographic interviews are to: “(a) direct the interviewees towards the phenomenon, and (b) be broad enough to obtain meaningful responses in relation to the aim without forcing a particular structure or way of responding upon the participant” (Bruce, Pham & Stoodley, 2002, p. 5). The questions were developed using a simple and unambiguous language, as I was aware that “the primary purpose of each interview is to draw out the interviewee’s experience and understanding of the phenomenon” (Lipu, Williamson and Lloyd, 2007, p. 93). As such, the initial interview questions (included in Appendix I) were pilot tested, as discussed in the next section.

### **3.5.5 Pilot interviews**

To verify whether the interview questions set out in this study were clear and understandable enough to elicit the required responses from the participants and, thus, to achieve the desired purpose for which it was constructed, a pilot interview was conducted using interviews with three doctoral students. In administering the interview questions, I provided the participants with the opportunity to respond to the questions posed to them and to freely express themselves and to articulate their views/conceptions with regards to the phenomenon/phenomena they had experienced. When necessary, I used probe questions to clarify answers provided by the participants and I ensured that dialogue was established between us. At the end of the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to add whatever information they felt was necessary or to ask questions if they had any. Then, I listened to the audio-recorded interviews several times over and transcribed verbatim. With the pilot interview being my first attempt at conducting interviews, I did not expect it to be without flaws. Hence, I was open to learning how to conduct effective phenomenographic interviews. The major issue I identified from the pilot interview, which all of the participants also complained about, was the length of time it took to interview one participant – which was almost two hours in duration in each of the three cases. This was largely

due to my inexperience. Although I did not force the participants to respond in any specific way, I was interested in getting responses to all the questions on my interview schedule. In most cases, participants did not only respond to a specific question posed to them, and instead they simply expressed their experiences, based on what they felt was important to them. In doing so, they provided answers to several other questions. To address these issues I, first and foremost, consulted with my supervisor and we had discussions on how I needed to pay attention to careful listening and making of notes during interview sessions, and we concluded on retaining the interview schedule as it was. I also learned to sharpen my interview skills by engaging with the available literature, particularly the work of other phenomenographers, and through interaction with my colleagues on personal levels as well as during cohort meetings, where we shared our experiences and received valuable contributions from supervisors and students alike. With that, I was prepared for the main interviews as described in the section that follows.

### **3.5.6 Main interview: Interview sessions with participants**

Face to face open interviews allow participants the liberty to freely express themselves since there are no right or wrong answers (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Before each interview session, I assured my participants of anonymity and confidentiality of information released to me, as suggested by Akerlind (2005). I also explained the purpose of my study to the participants and my desire to have them talk freely about their experiences. The interview schedule served as a guide for me to pose the same questions to all of the participants (Stamouli & Huggard, 2007). I began each interview session with participants by asking questions about their biographic information. Then, I posed trigger questions to open-up discussion and focused the interview on the objectives of my study. After that, subsequent dialogues were based on the answers obtained from the trigger questions (Sjostrom & Dahlgren, 2002; Walsh, 2000). During the interview I aimed, as much as possible, to bracket my conceptions to allow the participants to articulate their views regarding their experience(s) of research supervision, as suggested by Ashworth & Lucas (2000) and Sjostrom & Dahlgren (2002). This was not an easy task for me, especially in instances where some of the participants provided explanations that were contrary to earlier assertions when probe questions were posed to them. Sometimes, I found myself reminding the participants of their initial

responses, which in a way aligned with my view on the phenomenon. But, in doing that, I had to remain conscious of my perspectives and I deliberately aimed at withhold my judgements and opinions and consequently I allowed the participants to freely take the dimension they wished to employ in responding to the trigger questions.

Also, in line with the explanation by Sjoström & Dahlgren (2002), that in conducting phenomenographic interviews, the interviewer has the responsibility of interpreting as quickly as possible so that s/he can probe further; I tried as much as possible to understand the responses given by my participants before posing further questions where necessary. But, the challenge I encountered was that while some of the participants were willing to respond to my probe questions by reflecting on their experience and providing well-articulated responses, others were not. Part of the reason for that, as explained by one of the participants, was that most of the students in the Nigerian context are afraid to express their views about the kind of supervision they are receiving, due to power issues between supervisors and supervisees. As such, despite the reassurance given to them about the confidentiality of information and of non-disclosure of their identities, some of the participants were still sceptical about divulging information about their supervision experiences due to their fear of being identified, given the fact that the interview sessions were audio-recorded. Hence, I realised that some of the participants were not familiar with the use of an audio-recorder as a tool for data generation, as they mostly used quantitative methodologies. To deal with these issues, I decided to have informal conversations with the participants after the formal interviews. This time around, most of them engaged freely and I got the consent of the participants to take down some notes. With that, I was able to establish a good rapport with them, and we even exchanged phone numbers. My ability to establish relationships and effective communication lines with the participants prompted me to arrange a follow-up interview with some of the participants after three weeks following the first interview. In line with Francis's view that "some pre-determined leading experiences and leading prompts are required to focus the interview appropriately for the objectives of the study in question" (Francis, 1993, p. 7). The follow-up interview and prompt questions were pre-determined and focused on aspects of the participants' experiences that were not clearly explained in the first interview. This interview was conducted telephonically, and with their consent it was audio-taped, as suggested by Ireland,

Tambyah, Neofa & Harding (2009). The follow-up interview was meant to probe further on information that was initially provided by the participants, which was successfully conducted. The next stage is the analysis of the generated data, as discussed in the following section.

### **3.5.7 Analysis of interview data**

Data analysis in a phenomenographic study is an ‘iterative’ and ‘interpretive process’ which requires careful reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts in order to identify and group essential aspects of the participants’ experiences into categories of description. This “allows each utterance to be understood from the participant’s perspective” (Cope, 2004, p. 6). Notably, there are divergent views among phenomenographers concerning who conducts the analysis (an individual or a team); managing a large data pool during analysis (whether selected quotes, large sections, or the whole transcripts should be focused on); categories of description; outcome space; and validity and reliability checks (Akerlind, 2012, p. 120-121; Richardson, 1999). With regards to categories of description, the arguments centred on whether categories should emerge from the data (discovery) or be constructed by the researcher. The idea of pre-construction of categories as against the emergence of categories has been criticised (Richardsson, 1999). In support of this argument, Akerlind (2005, p. 323) states that:

Phenomenographic interviews are typically audio taped and transcribed verbatim, making the transcripts the focus of the analysis. The set of categories or meanings that result from the analysis are not determined in advance, but ‘emerge’ from the data, in relationship with the researcher.

On the contrary, other phenomenographers, such as Sandberg (1997), support the view that the researcher should construct the categories of description in relation to the data. According to McKenzie (2003), the construction of categories should be a:

...reflexive process whereby the researcher constantly checks any potential interpretations against the data itself, and maintains a critical awareness of their prior knowledge at all stages in the research process.[...] The researcher is constantly reflecting on whether

interpretations relate to the experiences of the interviewees and not simply to the researcher's prior experience (p. 92).

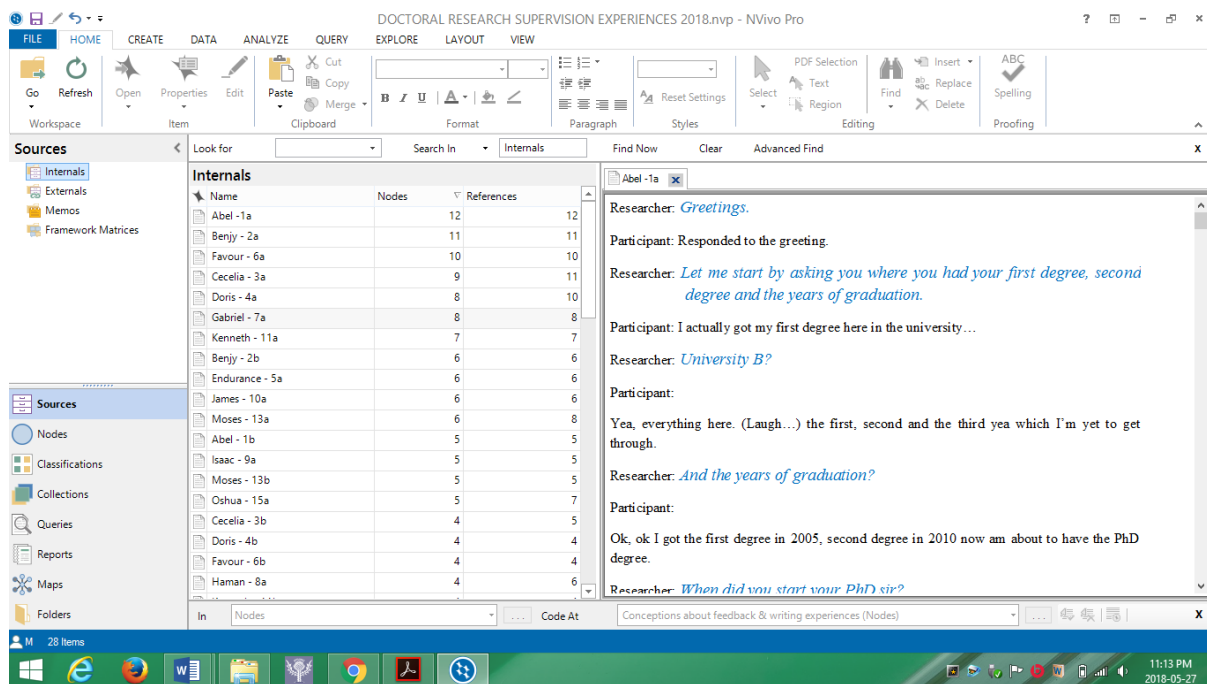
In line with this view, Mann, Dall' Alba & Radcliffe (2007) suggest that data analysis in phenomenography be both a 'discovery' and a 'construction' process.

In my thesis, I have chosen to follow Stoodley (2009) in the use of "selected quotes, as an individual researcher... [and for my study to be] validated by communicative checks" (p. 71). I also align with the Mann, Dall' Alba & Radcliffe (2007) view about data analysis and categories of description. Thus, the categories of description arrived at in my thesis are not pre-constructed. On the contrary, they are arrived at through a 'discovery' and 'construction' process; and are based on the following phenomenographic steps identified by Dahlgren & Fallsberg (1991, p. 152); Sjöström & Dahlgren (2002, p. 341) and described by Khan, (2014, p. 38-39):

- (a) Familiarisation step: in this step, the researcher reads through the entire transcripts several times to become familiar with the contents and to also correct errors in the transcripts.
- (b) Compilation step: the second step involves compilation of the answers from all the participants to a certain question and taking note of similarities and differences. The main task here is to identify the most significant elements in the answers given by each informant.
- (c) Condensation step: the third step requires the selection of meaningful quotes/excerpts that carry the main idea in the answers provided in the transcript and leave out parts of the answers that are not necessary.
- (d) Preliminary grouping: is the fourth step where the researcher identifies and classifies similar answers into preliminary groups.
- (e) Preliminary comparison of categories: this fifth step requires the researcher to revisit and revise/regroup the initial categories and try to compare and differentiate between one category with another.
- (f) Naming the categories: The sixth step consists of naming the categories to emphasize their essence.
- (g) The outcome space: this is the last step of the data analysis where the researcher discovers/constructs the outcome space which describes the internal relationships and the qualitatively finite number of ways in which a given phenomenon has been experienced. In most cases, the outcome space is presented in hierarchical order.

To achieve this, the audio-taped interviews were listened to several times and then transcribed verbatim (Stamouli & Huggard, 2007, p. 184). Thereafter, the iterative process began, whereby, I

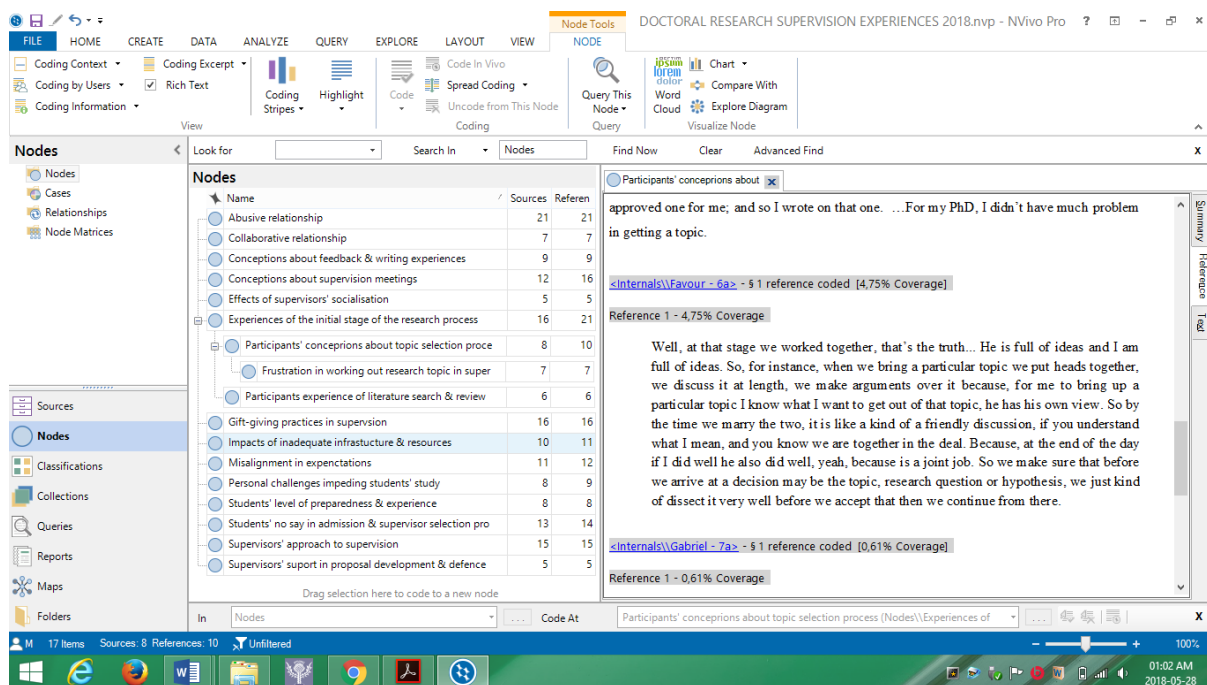
read through the entire transcripts several times and made some corrections (mostly of any typographic errors). After that, I employed the Nvivo 10 – a software developed to facilitate the organisation and management of a large amount of qualitative data (Richards, 2005). Some of the critical features of the Nvivo software is that it allows for many types of qualitative data to be imported into the software; and for the data to be coded and categorised into different nodes and sub-nodes. In Nvivo, the node serves as a virtual container for storing coded texts (O’Neill, 2013). Hence, I imported all of my interview transcripts into the software to begin the compilation process as shown in Figure 2 below, with one of the interview transcript displayed on the right for coding purposes.



**Figure 2. NVivo 10 - a software structure showing imported interview transcripts**

To compile the interview transcripts, I coded all responses to certain questions in the form of nodes. For instance, I created a node for all of the responses to the questions relating to the participants’ supervision experiences at the initial stage of the research process, which I labelled as ‘experiences of the initial stage of the research process’. The next step of the data analysis was the condensation step. In this step, I coded and selected relevant and meaningful parts of the texts of the initial nodes that contained the main ideas in terms of the participants’ responses/answers

which relate to a specific theme. For example, within the node labelled ‘experiences of the initial stage of the research process’, I created themes (sub-nodes) like, “participants’ conceptions about topic selection process” and a sub-sub-node labelled “frustration in working out research topics in supervisors’ domain” which were all supported with relevant coded texts/excerpts. This was meant to ensure that all the themes/groupings in a given node were “furnished with illustrative quotes” (Smith, 2010, p. 125). Figure 3. displayed the theme (node) “participants’ conceptions about topic selection process” on the left-hand side and the excerpts selected/extracted to support the theme on the right-hand side .



**Figure 3. NVivo 10 - a software structure showing nodes/sub-nodes on the left and supportive quotes on the right**

The themes were then classified into preliminary groups, based on their similarities and the context of the original transcripts the excerpts were drawn from. After this initial grouping, my attention shifted from the individual to the collective meaning expressed by the entire group. Thus, as argued by Marton, “each quote has two contexts in relation to which it has been interpreted; first the interview from which it was taken and second the “pool of meanings” to which it belongs” (Marton 1986, p. 43). The next step was the preliminary comparison of the categories, where I looked out for similarities and differences in the preliminary groups. It was at this point that I began to

consider how the final categories could be presented in an orderly and hierarchical manner (in terms of constructing the categories). This took the iterative process of reading through the transcripts again, grouping and regrouping the preliminary categories. At the end, three stable categories of description were settled-on and named category one – supervision as apprenticeship/power-like relationship; category two – supervision as transacting the social; and category three – students’ yearning for a positive relationship. Although the naming of the categories was my abstraction as a researcher, the categories described as closely as possible the understanding/experience of the research supervision phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants. These three categories of description form the outcome space, which describes the qualitatively limited number of ways in which the participants experienced research supervision. Although three categories in the outcome space were logically related, the hierarchical levels and inclusive structure of the categories was only present in category one and two, as category three did not fit in as the third hierarchical level.

### **3.6 Ethical issues**

To collect data for this study, it was necessary for me to obtain ethical approval from all four universities in Nigeria from which the participants were drawn. A written letter was sent to the department explaining the purpose of my study and the type of participants were targeted (see sample of the letter in Appendix A), and approval was granted by all the four universities (all four letters are attached to this thesis as Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix D and Appendix E). Upon receipt of these letters, I then attached the copies and applied for clearance from the ethical committee of my own university, and I was granted clearance to conduct this study (see the letter in Appendix F). The next step I took, was to seek the consent of each participant and to inform them of their liberty to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix G for the letter to that effect). Also, before analysing the data generated from the interviews, care was taken to erase any form of identification of the participant from the transcripts and pseudonyms were used to replace their names and the universities they were selected from to ensure their anonymity. Both the audio-taped and transcribed data are secure, as they are kept by me in a secret location until the full completion of this thesis.

### 3.7 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are terms that are commonly used in describing the criteria used for quantitative research rigour (positivist) and as such, the use of these terminologies in qualitative research has been debated in the literature (Akerlind, 2005). In explicating the main contention, Golafshani (2003) states that:

...the definitions of reliability and validity in quantitative research reveal two strands: Firstly, with regards to reliability, whether the result is replicable. Secondly, with regards to validity, whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure. However, the concepts of reliability and validity are viewed differently by qualitative researchers who strongly consider these concepts defined in quantitative terms as inadequate. In other words, these terms as defined in quantitative terms may not apply to the qualitative research paradigm (p. 600).

Since qualitative research is based on a different paradigm, most qualitative researchers use different strategies to ensure validity and reliability of their studies. Lincoln & Guba (1985) substituted validity and reliability with the parallel concept of ‘trustworthiness’ containing four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Authors such as Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2008) opine that the use of alternative criteria undermines the issue of rigour in qualitative research. They argue that verification strategies for ensuring rigour be built into the qualitative research process with the view that the appropriate use of the strategies will ensure the validity and reliability of the completed project. The verification strategies include: investigator responsiveness, methodological coherence, sampling adequacy, active analytical stance and saturation, collecting and analysing data concurrently, thinking theoretically and theory development.

Replicability is another criterion used by qualitative researchers to check for the reliability of the research outcomes. Replicability measures the extent to which another research can obtain results that are similar to the original research results. With regards to phenomenography, Marton (1986) argues that while it is logical for other researchers to be able to perceive the conceptions found in the original study when conducting a similar study, it is irrational to expect other researchers to make the same discovery. In line with this argument, Säj   (1988, p. 45) states that:

...phenomenography takes place in what Reichenbach (1938) refers to as the *context of discovery*, where the critical issue is one of providing concepts in terms of which the phenomena observed can be accounted for. It is thus not possible to prove that the categories are the best possible ones. The categories are the constructions of the researcher and there is always a possibility that another researcher would have arrived at a different categorisation. In fact, to be logical, it follows from a constructivist conception of reality that the possibility of interpreting reality differently applies to the activity of describing conceptions of reality itself (p. 45, italics in original).

Instead of replicability, Säj  (1988) argues for the communicability of categories of description in terms of providing details that allow others to identify similarities and differences as shown in the original research.

Several authors have argued that the major concern in phenomenography relates to methodological issues, in terms of the reliability of the researcher's interpretation, as the researcher could foist his/her personal idea/experience on the analysis, thereby, misinterpreting the participants' experiences. To address these issues, the phenomenographic stance, as summarised by Sandberg, (1997, p. 210), is that a study shows "orientation to the phenomenon and how it appears throughout the research process, conformity to the phenomenon of interest and communicability" (Sandberg, 1997, p. 210). Other authors add that the researcher should provide a full and open account of the study's method and the process of analysis, to demonstrate the use of phenomenographic strategies (Cope, 2004; Limberg, 2000); and bracket his/her preconceptions as much as possible throughout the research process, and also remain truthful to the data (Sin, 2010).

In this thesis, the above concerns have been addressed based on the suggestions provided by established phenomenographers. In terms of showing orientation and conformity to the phenomenon of interest – which in my student research thesis is research supervision, this entire student research has been oriented towards understanding the supervision experiences of doctoral students, from the development of the interview questions to the process of eliciting the participants' responses. During the interview, I endeavoured to bracket my own experience and I tried to see the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. Also, throughout the process of analysis, I drew on the descriptive quotes from the interview transcripts, such that themes and categories arrived at were well-founded in the participants responses (data). Finally, the outcome space, which is the outcome of the study was arrived at in line with the phenomenographic

convention. In terms of communicability, the results of my student research thesis have been presented at international conferences and cases of feedback were received and incorporated into this thesis.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Phenomenography was adjudged to be the appropriate method for my research and it enabled me to collect data and to analyse the same, in order to arrive at the qualitatively limited ways in which the participants experienced research supervision. However, as aforementioned, my use of the audio-recorder initially placed the participants in a tensed and uncomfortable position as the recorder created an awareness or a consciousness of an external present ‘other’ during the interview sessions. This suggests that although the use of audio-tape to record interview conversations remains a conventional practice, this device may pose a challenge (in terms of access to the participants’ lived experiences), particularly in a context such as Nigeria, where students are not familiar with the qualitative mode of data generation. This challenge was, however, addressed by me through reassurance and establishment of friendly relationships with the participants. In the next chapter, I focus on the analysis of the categories of description arrived at in this thesis.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Supervision as Apprenticeship-like / Power Relationship**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the processes of data collection and analysis in this research. The analysis involved an iterative process of reading, re-reading, sorting and grouping of the data from the interview transcripts, as well as describing the conceptions held by participants. This served to identify variation in the ways that the whole group of participants (doctoral students) understood/experienced research supervision and this helped to establish the qualitatively limited number of ways in which the phenomenon was experienced (Marton & Booth, 1997). In this chapter, therefore, the qualitatively limited number of ways in which participants/doctoral students experienced research supervision has been established and the analysis is presented in three categories of description with a special focus on the analysis of category one. The analyses of categories two and three are presented in the next chapters (Chapters five and six). The intention in this chapter and the next chapters is not to discuss the analysis of the findings in relation to the literature on research supervision as this will be discussed subsequently in Chapter 7. The focus in this chapter, therefore, is the analysis and description of the participants' ways of experiencing supervision (supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship). This involves the use of quotations from the interview transcripts to support various conceptions on the experience of supervision as expressed by the participants in this chapter. To this end, the chapter first presents an overview of all the categories of description. Thereafter, the analysis of various conceptions in category one follows, coupled with the diagrammatic interpretation of the findings (see Table 3) and conclusion is presented.

## 4.2 Overview of the categories of description

The variation on the participants' expression of the experience of research supervision in this study are presented in three distinct categories of description as follows:

- (a) Category one - Supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship;
- (b) Category two - Supervision as transacting in the social space; and
- (c) Category three – Student yearning for a positive relationship

Category one deals with supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship describes participants' conceptions on their supervision relationship with very powerful supervisors. It focuses on the institutional/departmental context in which the supervision relationship occurs and how variables that are peculiar to supervisees and supervisors shape supervision experiences for doctoral students. This chapter, therefore, probes into how the participants tried to understand their supervisors' domain and selected research topics that fit that domain; mismatch in expectations; and several other issues of power that play out in supervision relationships. Then, category two is presented, which deals with supervision as a transaction in the social space follows. This category reveals the participants' transaction in the university and in the personal social spaces. Thus, category two specifically describes how participants manage relationships in the social circle as well as the circle of their supervisors, and how several practices/issues arising from such transactions can enable/inhibit their learning. Lastly, category three deals with student yearning for a positive relationship. This category describes the many ways in which the participants expressed their yearning for a positive relationship. It focuses on the experiences/encounters that the participants believe enhanced or constituted a barrier to the development of a positive relationship, and how the participants sometimes manipulate the system in order to improve the relationship with their supervisors. As mentioned earlier, only category one (supervision as apprenticeship-like relationship) is presented in the subsequent sections.

### 4.3 Category one - supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship

The findings in this chapter indicate that the participants conceive of research supervision as an apprentice-like/power relationship. The response of one of the participants with regards to the researcher's follow-up question on the power relation between supervisors and supervisees indicates this conception thus:

*My supervisor is a god...O yes, he is somewhere up there and we are somewhere down here... the...relationship we have...is not quite friendly... And...you will always be aware that you are dealing with a prof. not just your supervisor... you know, ...I am a student and I know what I want... so I bend down to get what I want from him. So, is like a goat you know, kneeling down to suck from the mother's breast, you understand what I mean now. So, I am... getting what I want because I am patient...I know where...I am going...and so even when he is there as a god, I still worship him and adore him and get...the stuff I need...to progress (Favour, 6a).*

From the data presented here, which portrays the supervisor as a divine being, while the supervisee is portrayed as a suckling goat, it is clearly indicated that the participants perceive the supervision relationship as highly hierarchical/asymmetrical and power-laden. As shown in the data, the supervisor seems to be aloof and very concerned with his status. As such, the participant believes that the only way to receive guidance from her powerful supervisor is to humble herself, show reverence, honour and probably worship the supervisor. Although the participant appears to be coping and making progress with her study, as indicated in the data; this disturbing relationship has serious implications on both the quality of the thesis and also on the doctoral student/researcher that is finally produced. This is because, when supervisees feel disempowered and marginalised, they lack confidence to question the ideas/information transmitted to them by their powerful supervisors (gods), as also indicated in the data below:

*Who are you to challenge your boss... you will even say sorry sir, maybe I made a mistake somewhere... [Laugh] (James, 10a).*

The data here, which show that the supervisee must apologise for having a perspective/opinion indicate that the supervisees may simply receive instructions/directives from the supervisors and

passively act upon them. In other words, the supervisor denies the students the opportunity to make autonomous decisions, to exercise independent thinking, so that at the end of the day the doctoral students own their studies. The implication is that the goal of pursuing the PhD is limited to merely completing the thesis and obtaining the degree, without acquiring the high-level critical thinking skills that the doctoral study is meant to inculcate.

To better understand the experience in this category, the institutional/departmental context in which supervision happened is first considered. This includes how institutional/departmental practices promote power relations between supervisors and supervisees. Then the supervision interactions and encounters with supervisors at various stages of the supervision process are discussed.

### **4.3.1 Institutional/departmental context**

This section discusses the context in which the supervision relationship was established. The institutional context explains the practices that set the wider context for supervision relationship particularly the admissions and supervisor nomination procedure. The departmental context focuses on the immediate context proximal to the doctoral students and discusses the participants' experience with regards to the departmental practice of funding meals during defence presentations, scheduling of defence dates, and shortage of personnel and infrastructure.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Entrenched practices in admission procedure and issues of power in the supervision relationship***

One important practice that shed light on the university's context from which the participants were drawn, is the admission and nomination procedure of the supervisor. In the following quotations, that were extracted from an interview transcript with reference to the question on how the

participants got assigned to their supervisors, the participants revealed how universities handle admissions into doctoral programmes and the nomination of a supervisor, thus:

*It is the university that chooses. ... By the time you get your admission letter, your supervisor's name will be specified on the admission letter. So, I never had influence on who supervises me (Doris 4a).*

*...it is a tradition here for the department to appoint to every PhD student a supervisor, so I wasn't an exception (Abel 1a).*

*...it is when a supervisor's consent is sought that admission can be given to the student. And while that is going on the student is not part of the process (Gabriel 7a).*

The data presented above show that the universities prefer to practice a system whereby admissions into the doctoral programme are tied to the nomination of supervisors. Also, in the universities' admission procedure, the supervisors do participate in the selection process while students are denied participation and are completely excluded from the process. It then means that, with the simultaneous release of admissions and nomination of supervisors, students who apply to enrol for a doctoral programme in these institutions are at the mercy of entrenched practices, which they are unlikely to contest. This is because any contestation on the part of the students may be tantamount to risking or even forfeiting their admission, as one of the participants suggested, thus: *That's the system here; take or leave it...* (Benjy, 2b).

Therefore, it seems that the universities' admission practice privileges the voice of the supervisors who already possess some degree of power due to their institutional position but marginalises and silences the voice of the students. Thus, the institutions can be said to have structurally set the scene for power play in the supervision activity.

Power is not considered as undesirable when used positively, as shown in the quotations below:

*I know he is strict ... Some of my colleagues use to...ask me how I cope with him...and I tell them that, I even prefer working with him. ...He is a kind of person that will make you work hard and get your work done. So, I thank God that I have a supervisor like him (Doris, 4b).*

The participants here revealed the rewarding effect of the supervisor's power by explaining that the strict style of supervision adopted by her supervisor enables her to get the thesis task accomplished. In other words, the participant feels that if her supervisor were to be tolerant/humane, she probably may be relaxed and not be committed and dedicated to meeting set deadlines. However, it seems clear from the data that other colleagues of the participant did not subscribe to her viewpoint. This means that doctoral students understand similar experiences differently and the supervisors preferred supervision approach may not work well for all of the supervisees. Thus, issues of power can be perceived negatively by doctoral students. In line with this view, the participants in my study indicated that power plays out negatively in the supervision relationships, as captured in the excerpts below:

*...he will always make you know that you are just a student, and whatever you think you are, ends where you come from. Once you come into his office, he is your supervisor, and a prof in the university... I follow him patiently because I know where I am going to (Favour, 6a).*

*One of them [my supervisors] is making things difficult for me ... But, I feel that there is no point arguing with someone who prefers to make you look stupid and tries to show you that you don't know anything (Naomi, 14b).*

In the data presented here, the supervisors referred to appear to be aware of their institutional position, expertise and probably how the universities privilege them above doctoral students. Rather than use this power to create a conducive atmosphere for learning, they choose to use their power negatively to intimidate and ridicule students into silence. That way, they were able to establish their voices as masters in the supervision space and gain recognition by the doctoral students. On the part of the doctoral students, the data show that they quickly submitted to their supervisors, became obedient and silenced; probably because they recognised the marginal position into which the institutions have placed them. What seems clear here is that, although the institution may not be in support of the unprofessional approach employed by these supervisors to gain recognition from supervisees and enact their voices as masters; the institutional structure which privileges the supervisors allows that to happen.

#### **4.3.1.2 Participants' conception that inadequate resources and infrastructure in the department/university inhibit learning**

Research supervision does not happen in a vacuum (Delany, 2008; Green, 2005). On the contrary, it happens within a specific setting. As such, the quality of the department/university, in terms of organisation, practices and structure have enormous implications for doctoral students' supervision and learning experiences in the doctoral programme. Most of the participants in this research indicated that issues relating to the availability of infrastructure, facilities and resources in their university/department constituted a barrier to their studies and impacted negatively on their learning experiences. One of the facilities which is almost an indispensable tool for research students, in this modern information age, is obviously the internet. The internet provides an avenue for students to access information on various databases across the globe, to keep abreast with developments in their field of study. The following quotes revealed the participants' conceptions with regards to access to internet facilities:

*...the university offers limited browsing facilities for students and most of us complement that with...computer modems, so as to enable us browse for information (James, 10a).*

*I spent a lot of money on internet facilities. ...And you know that, is not every article that you can download for free... So ...I...go for the ones I can download for free... because I can't afford it. Even when you browse with the university internet you will discover that you will still need to pay to get some of the materials. ...Of course, it affects us, because they [the supervisors] feel you are not working hard enough (Oshua, 15a, b).*

Based on the data presented, access to information on the internet is a major concern for the participants. Seemingly, there is not so much commitment on the part of the department/ university to provide this facility, and probably because of the cost implications and other structural issues. Because of the grossly inadequate internet facilities that are provided by the university, students must make up for the deficiencies by purchasing computer modems to enable them to have access to necessary information on the internet. This means that the burden of providing internet facilities is shared between the university and the doctoral students. Because of the cost implications associated with accessing information on the internet, which impacts on the finances of the doctoral students, the data show that some doctoral students resort to browsing sites that offer free

downloads. The implication of taking such a stand is that doctoral students may be unable to follow trends of issues and debates in their respective fields of study. Thus, they cannot engage with authors and writers in their field to contribute meaningfully in pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in that specific field. Also, in terms of the supervision relationship, there is a high tendency of students failing to meet the supervisor's expectations regarding the thesis production, and this can result in friction and misunderstanding between the supervisor and the doctoral student.

Another participant revealed another dimension that was intensifying the students' challenge in accessing information from the internet, by asserting that:

*I had a hitch with sourcing literature because...we don't have regular light...so it was not easy for me to get to know about recent literature. ...I think there is a major problem here...because even when you have laptop, the infrastructure is not available as at when due, and then it costs so much (Gabriel, 7a).*

The participant here revealed that apart from the limited access to the internet and the cost implications arising there, the issue of an unstable electricity supply as provided by the university poses a bigger challenge to students. The participants are of the view that electricity is so central to the use of the internet that all other efforts that students made to alleviate their plight, in terms of accessing information on the internet - such as purchasing laptops, computer modems, and probably the data bundles for activating the modems, become absolutely useless without a properly functioning and consistent supply of electricity. Since it is unlikely for students to provide electricity for themselves due to the cost, it means that doctoral students in this context are likely to grapple with the issues of quality and productivity (in terms of being able to potentially produce research outputs in the form of publications in reputable journals, for example).

Apart from the internet, the library is another important aspect of the university infrastructure that is critical to doctoral students' research work. Traditionally, the library has been a major source of information for students in the social science disciplines. Unlike the pure sciences, where students conduct practical work in laboratories, students in the social science disciplines depend heavily on

the literature and other library resources. But the participants in my research revealed how the inadequacies in the library resources provided by the university/department impacted on their progress, thus:

*...you know our libraries, we don't have adequate materials. Sometimes the materials you find may not be very, very helpful (Cecelia, 3a).*

*The literature review chapter is not supposed to be a problem, if you can get the materials in the library (Kenneth, 11b).*

*The supervisor will not get the material for you, is it your responsibility as a student to find material for your study; anyhow you want to go about it, is your business. They [the supervisors] know how difficult it is to get these materials, they will not help you to know what to focus on. Instead, they allow you to beat around the bush and they keep cancelling your work. They even see it as a form of discipline... We already know that whatever you want to get in this place, you must suffer for it, even if it is a plain sheet of paper. ...Anyhow, we will cope (Naomi, 14).*

From the data presented, there seems to be an acute inadequacy in the university/departmental library's stock of materials and resources for the doctoral students they admit into the business education programme. One of the participants who indicated that the library in her school does not have so much usefulness to her, in terms of her research work, seems to suggest also that several other libraries in the country are in a similar dilapidated state. Hence, this means that universities admit doctoral students into various programmes and charge fees annually without providing adequate library resources. Ironically, the universities expect students to conduct their research work within reasonable time-frames. This failure on the part of the university shifts the responsibility of sourcing for literature back to students, most of whom are unable to write the literature review chapter of their thesis easily, as shown in the data. Notably, the data reveal that some of the doctoral students rely on their colleagues/peers from other universities to source for literature on their behalf or they take the pain to travel to different libraries themselves. This also suggests that the system of interlibrary loans in most of the institutions is not very effective, as one of the participants pointed out. Again, supervisors' attitudes of neglect and lack of support for students, which are considered as a form of discipline in the department, as revealed in the data, is an indication that such supervisors are distant and detached and are not concerned about the overall

wellbeing of their students. Arguably, this is because the supervisors know that the students struggle to acquire resource material for their research, but supervisors opt for turning a blind eye, without acting on behalf of students by taking on the responsibility of fighting for better conditions for their students. Therefore, it is unlikely that all of the doctoral students would be very bothered to cope with such a situation. Those students who are unable to quickly source literature for their studies may resort to missing supervision meetings and thus they avoid their supervisors. The implication is that the progress of such doctoral students would be delayed and that could lead to frustration and probably the student decision to leave their studies.

#### ***4.3.1.3 Impact of the shortage of academics (supervisors) on supervisors and supervisees***

Supervision, being a one-to-one learning relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee, is heavily dependent on the availability of qualified academics (supervisors) in an institution, department, or programme. The participants from all of the universities where the data for this study were gathered indicated that there is a shortage of supervisors in the business education programme where they pursue their degrees:

*We don't have enough supervisors... to supervise those of us doing PhD... it is based on the university rule that...only lecturers with PhD can supervise PhD (Favour, 6a).*

*...when you compare the number of PG students we have in the department with the number of lecturers, you find out that...it is not adequate at all (Cecilia, 3a).*

From the data, it can be deduced that due to the acute shortage of suitably qualified supervisors, the ratio of supervisor to supervisees is usually not proportional. This means that the available supervisors would be under serious pressure to read through students' drafts, give feedback and provide guidance to a diverse group of master's and doctoral students who may be at varying stages of their studies. Thus, supervisors would be overloaded. In line with this view, two participants revealed the supervision workload of their supervisor, thus:

*Considering their workload, the number of students they supervise every year...in all fairness, I think they (the supervisors) are trying... Imagine someone like my supervisor*

*who...is currently supervising - both masters' and PhDs... You know, it is not easy... (James, 10a).*

*I don't know the number, but I know he has a lot of students (Endurance, 5a).*

The participants here show empathy for their supervisors with regards to their heavy workloads. It is clear from the data that the universities admit more students than the capacity of its personnel allows and, probably, also more than the infrastructural capacity. Usually, when supervisors are overloaded with teaching, supervision and administrative tasks, they feel pulled in many directions and they are easily stressed and suffer burnout (a lack of well-being). That may significantly affect their effectiveness and efficiency in terms of the quality of supervision they provide for students, their ability to develop relationship with doctoral research students as well as delays in feedback and turnaround time. Consequently, that inhibits student learning, student progress and the quality of work that students produce. This raises questions as to why universities admit students beyond the available personnel capacity of the institutions.

One of the participants revealed the likely implication of the shortage of resource person to doctoral students, by saying:

*Of course, I will want to make choice if am given the opportunity... You cannot be talking about choice when there are very few supervisors. If you allow students to choose, the workload may be too much for one supervisor, while others will have less to do. So, what the university does is to assign students to the available supervisors (Gabriel, 7a).*

According to this participant, allowing students to choose their supervisors would mean that popular supervisors would get selected and be overburdened. This shows that inadequacy or shortage of resource personnel, as shown in the data, places doctoral students in a position where they have limited choice with regards to the selection of supervisor. This means that doctoral students' career trajectory and entire field of future endeavour could be affected by this kind of unilateral allocation of supervisors. Also, apart from the issue of mismatch in research interest that may arise between supervisees and supervisors, having a few supervisors in a narrow field has

implications. It means that new research may not be responding to what the world/society needs, but is linked to what the supervisor can supervise. This is a real problem as the new knowledge that is likely to be created may not be so useful or relevant.

#### ***4.3.1.4 Favouritism in the scheduling of defence date by departmental administrative staff***

The task of scheduling defence dates for research students in the business education programme is considered as the prerogative of administrative staff rather than supervisors. In the quotation that follows, the participants feel that the administrative staff sometimes do not go about scheduling defence dates for students in a fair manner:

*They kept on telling me to wait when others who came later have been given dates and some have even defended... One of them is already in the field collecting his data. And I am sure I submitted my name before him (Naomi, 14a).*

The participant here expressed displeasure that her right was wrongfully violated, as other students were preferred and they were given a defence date, even though she indicated her intention to defend earlier than all of the other students. This clearly shows that the administrative staff members engage in the practice of favouritism and possible nepotism with regards to fixing defence dates, which is also a form of exclusion.

A similar experience was revealed by another participant, which provides more insight about the procedure for scheduling defence dates, thus:

*...defence is not done as regularly as is supposed to be ...they need to get consent of a considerable number of supervisors to be part of the panel before fixing a date. So, when you submit your work to the people in charge of that at the admin, may be for proposal, seminar, or internal defence, you will be booked; and then you wait for your turn ... (James, 10b).*

According to this participant, the challenge with fixing a defence date for students arises from the

unavailability of supervisors to attend the defence sessions. One reason for this is the heavy workload of the supervisors. Considering the prolonged periods of time it takes for the department to organise a supervisory committee towards having a defence, the defence scheduling system becomes ineffective and unsatisfactory and the institutions' internal administration is weak. The implication is that students are likely to be delayed unnecessarily, and there may not be any consideration that students are usually given a limited time frame to complete both by their employers and the university. Again, considering that these students are also family people, unnecessary delays could keep them away from their families and friends for so long that their social lives could be affected. Consequently, students may potentially become so isolated and as a result they may also lose motivation for their studies.

A variation on how supervisees arrange for defence dates, as shown in the data below, further reveals deeper implications of the defence scheduling system in their institutions:

*There is a procedure you follow... in that procedure you will need to write your name on the list and queue up... because there are lots of people waiting to also get a date... But, you know, not everybody have the patience to follow the long process... Some give brown envelops to get a date as fast as possible (Oshua, 15b).*

*Is true...students try to beat the system [Laugh] ... that is why I said, the system too is not so transparent (James, 10b).*

The data here show that the long administrative procedure for scheduling defence dates puts doctoral students under pressure to quickly secure a date for defence. As such, some of the doctoral students tend to offer bribes to the administrative staff. With such a corrupt practice going on in the education system, it is possible that the staff who benefit from this practice may deliberately make the system more cumbersome, in order to frustrate doctoral students who may want to follow the correct procedure in being scheduled for defence. As a result, doctoral students may be forced to compromise. This suggests that there are unchecked structures operating within the system, that the institutions are probably unaware of (or otherwise, they are aware) which are detrimental to the system. In other words, if the system is being run effectively at the grass roots level, the issue of bribery may not have arisen in the first place and doctoral students will surely receive adequate

attention.

#### ***4.3.1.5 Departmental practice of funding meals at defence presentations***

Usually, doctoral students are given the opportunity to orally present their work to a supervisory committee/panel to make it possible that the feasibility, the credibility, the quality, or otherwise, of their theses to be judged be determined, and then have feedback provided to them. The participants in this study alluded to the fact that during such defence presentations in business education programmes, and vocational and technical education departments, it is common practice for students to fund the meals for the examination panel. This view is captured in the following excerpts:

*Is not something you do in secret... everybody knows that, those who are presenting are the ones to provide refreshment on that day. ...Your colleagues will be there to help you share it... at time students also get some snacks... So, I think it is more of a tradition. ...They [the department] will not tell you what and what to provide... they leave that decision to you [students], you agree among yourselves on how much each of you will be able to raise (Abel, 1b).*

*It is your responsibility to entertain the panel because, you are the one that gather them together. ...So they come because of you... (Oshua, 15a).*

The funding of meals, as revealed in the data, is a practice whereby the presenting students are required by the department to cater for the meals of all the panel members, and sometimes of other students who are also present at their defence presentations. This means that students who are financially buoyant are likely to provide better meals for the panel than those who do not have the financial ability to do so. Thus, there is the likelihood that some of the students may try to influence the panel's judgement by providing expensive meals. In this way, the attention of the doctoral students thus involved may be shifted away from doing thorough work in appeasing panel members, and when that happens the quality of feedback that students receive during their defence would be affected. This clearly shows that students' funding of meals at defence have disturbing

implications, as it could ruin the entire goal of the defence exercise, because any attempt to manipulate the panel would undermine the standard of theses produced in the department.

In the quotation below, another participant further revealed the practice of the funding of the meals in the department and the impact on students:

*I submitted my work in November, they were considering getting other people so that we can share the cost of entertaining the panel... ..at least we buy bottled water, get can drinks and a few things that the panel will take during the defence. Then after that, you take them to canteen to entertain them. ...they eat what they choose, you pay. ...So by February they got two other persons that were ready, so I had my faculty defence (Doris, 4a).*

The data here reveal a scenario where students who are prepared to defend their proposals/theses are unable to do so due to the financial obligations involved in the funding of meals during defence. Although the department is aware of how burdensome such responsibility is for an individual student, as indicated in the data, the department still prefers to group students together for defence, so that they can share the costs with their colleagues. Thus, the data show that apart from the financial burden on students and the high possibility of manipulations that the practice of funding meals creates, the practice of funding meals could also result in unnecessary delays for students (up to four months for this participant). This is because students do not always work at the same pace as students who are more dedicated and committed than others. Thus, grouping students together to share the cost of meals could hamper the progress of students who are working hard to complete their studies within record time. The implication is that some of the students could become de-motivated because of the unnecessary delays arising from the practice of funding meals.

### **4.3.2 Supervisee-supervisor relationship**

The relationship between supervisee and supervisors is believed to be central in accomplishing the

thesis task in supervision. Participants in this study revealed numerous factors that contribute to the kind of relationship that exists between supervisees and supervisors. This includes the level of preparedness of supervisees, supervisors' socialisation programme, issues of mismatch, and repressive silence which are discussed in the sections that follow.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Participants' level of preparedness and experience in conducting research***

The participants in this study revealed varied levels of preparedness and experience in conducting their research studies. The quotation below indicates that some of the participants lack the awareness about the demands of doctoral research prior to their engagement in the supervision relationship:

*... It was later that I realized that I did not have enough experience...of doing the actual research work. ...that's where the role of the supervisor comes in, to help in clarifying some of these things... (James, 10a).*

As indicated in the data, the participant seems to have come into the supervisory relationship as totally inexperienced and, probably, without adequate preparation. He seems to believe that his supervisor's guidance and direction would enable him to cope with the demand of the doctoral study. Considering that it took the participant a long time to realise his own incompetency, as shown in the data, means that the supervisor probably did not assist him to assess or appraise himself early enough. It also means that the supervisor too may not have employed relevant strategies to enable the participant to acquire the necessary research skills for the studentship. The implication is that it could result in a high degree of dependency on supervisors.

A variation in the level of preparedness and awareness of the demand of the doctoral study was revealed by another participant, thus:

*...the task, the intellectual work involved is not an easy one. That is why the university appoint supervisors for us; people you fall back on in terms of knowledge acquisition. They*

*themselves have been through this process, and most of them are now Profs in the department... (Haman, 10b).*

Here, the participant seems aware of the high level of intellectual demand of the doctoral study. However, the participant realised that he does not have the required cognitive competencies to undertake such a rigorous study. He seems to believe that since the supervisors themselves were once supervised in the same program/discipline, they should be able to render similar support to students. This clearly shows that some doctoral students lack certain competencies and they require help from supervisors to be able to acquire these competencies and to be socialised into the disciplinary mode of knowledge production.

Another variation with regards to the participants' level of preparedness in conducting their research study can be seen in the following data:

*I didn't request for any materials from him, but I know that if I request and he has them, he will give me (Endurance, 5a).*

*Thank God I am... I am computer literate and I work with IT... I have the web as my companion, I am always online. Apart from the textual materials that are available...what I do is to...search. I enter my topic, sometimes I break my topic into two or three and I get materials. ...So, I didn't have problem with literature review (Moses, 13a).*

The data presented here relate to the participants' ability to source for working literature and for literature review purposes for their studies. The participants here indicated that they did not require assistance from their supervisors with regards to any literature search and also the literature review chapter of their study. This is because some of the participants, as shown in the data, are experienced and they have already developed the skills and competencies of sourcing for literature on the internet. This suggests that the level of experience and competency with which the supervisees come into the supervision relationship could influence their level of dependence on supervisors.

#### **4.3.2.2    *Understanding and working in the master's domain in research topic selection***

The task of research topic selection is an important one that occurs at the very initial stage of the research process. When asked about their experience of settling on a research topic, the following texts are some of the responses given by the participants:

*...There were lots of challenges, key among them was getting a particular topic accepted... (Moses, 13a).*

*Sincerely speaking to settle on a topic was not an easy task... (Naomi, 14a)*

*...Really ...we have problems or challenges of getting a topic approved... the process of getting a topic through is cumbersome... I would say it is nothing to write home about... You bring a topic and they say no and the supervisor is not involved or suggesting anything... that is a great challenge (Benjy, 2a).*

From the data presented, the participants are of the view that settling on a research topic is one of the most challenging tasks for which they require assistance from the supervisors. But, from the data, most of the participants seem to be disappointed and frustrated due to the supervisors' neglect and lack of concern at that initial stage of topic selection. The data clearly show that the supervisors adopted a hands-off approach, whereby, limited or no guidance is provided to the doctoral students, whereas, the doctoral students actually needed direction. This shows that there is misalignment between the supervision approach that the supervisors adopt and the need of the supervisees. When that happens at the initial stage of topic selection when supervisees are probably not yet acquainted with expectations and demands of a PhD, students are likely to struggle.

One major factor that contributes to students' frustration in research topic selection, as revealed in the excerpt below, is the lack of understanding of their supervisors' domain:

*I went to all the institutions nearby to get topics... I will reframe, I will fine-tune and when I come he will just cancel all of them. So at a time I was embarrassed I said what does this man really want? ...a PG student told me that the man is interested in evaluation, that's his area of interest. That, if I'm choosing topics in other areas he may not tell me, but he*

*will not approve them for me. So I went and searched out three topics on evaluation and he approved one for me; and so I wrote on that one. ...For my PhD, I didn't have much problem in getting a topic (Doris, 4a).*

For this participant, her challenge in getting a topic during her master's study stems from two basic issues. First, is her inability to carry out a thorough investigation in her supervisor's field of expertise. As the data indicate, the participant went about wasting time reading and probably writing on research topics that were constantly rejected by the supervisor. Arguably, if the supervisee had investigated her supervisors' research interests, expectations, and probably who the supervisor really is as an individual, she might have found a common ground upon which to establish the supervision relationship. The second issue is the lack of information from the participant's supervisor to explicitly communicate his expectations to the participant. This resonates with the earlier analysis where the supervisor seems to be using a hands-off approach. But, what is noteworthy in these data is that, although the supervisor needed the participant to work within his area of interest, he did not appraise her on this expectation. On the contrary, he left the participant to discover it for herself without considering her struggles and how long it would take her to stumble upon her own enlightenment. Hence, in a way, the participant is being forced to abandon/alter her own interests to suit the supervisor's interests, instead of the supervisor accepting to work with the participant in her area of research interest.

In line with that, another participant revealed how he ended up working in his supervisor's field of study, as follows:

*I will submit and she will cancel... Well, she eventually gave me a topic herself. ... I didn't know what to do at a point, because my topic has to do with programming and I was not familiar with that... So, I started going to people who do computer programming... I paid for the training. ...She really didn't do anything about it, you know... this was the same person that gave me the topic but, she was not there for me (Haman, 8a).*

For this participant, the supervisor seems to show a level of concern about his struggles in trying to get a research topic and she simply gave him a research topic. This quick fix intervention by the

supervisor seems to have solved the immediate problem of getting a topic for the participant. But, as the data show, it also created another challenge for the participant, who did not have competency in the field of enquiry that his supervisor chose for him and, ironically, the supervisor could not provide the needed guidance. As such, the participant had to spend time and money to train to be able to handle the demands of his work. This shows that when doctoral students are not carried along and supported in the choice of research topic; they may be given topics for which they do not have the background and experience and, therefore, they may require a high level of dependence on supervisors. It then means that for doctoral students to understand their supervisors' domain and to work in it comfortably, expectations between the supervisor and the supervisee must be clarified. Given that doctoral students are the ones that are likely to subordinate their research interests to achieve congruence in research interests with supervisors, doctoral students are likely to struggle when that is not plainly explained to them. This also suggests the hidden power undertone in the supervisory relationship.

Another participant revealed variation in the supervisees' individual struggle to understand their supervisors' domain with regards to research topic selection, thus:

*...it took me up to five months before I could settle on a topic. I submitted more than twenty topics, but they were all turned down for reasons of technicalities and sometimes the supervisor tells me that the topic is over-flogged or is no longer relevant and many other reasons (James, 10a).*

In this case, the supervisor seems to have repeatedly communicated his expectations to the participant each time he rejected the participant's submission. Notably, the participant could not understand the feedback and was unable to receive meaningful direction. It is very likely that this participant had not learned his supervisor's style of supervision, and the participant might also have been operating below the required standard. However, considering the effort made by the participant, astonishingly, to have submitted more than twenty different topics and to have been doing the same thing for five months without any breakthrough. This raises questions as to the quality of communication, feedback and direction that the supervisor was providing. In that, one should consider that a student failing in his/her studies is likely concomitant with the fact of a supervisor failing in his/her duties. Notably, the supervisor was also not able to diagnose the source

of confusion in order to respond to it appropriately. This means that both supervisees and supervisors could contribute to the challenges associated with the research topic selection if they do not operate within the bounds of some reasonable standard. The implication is that the supervisory relationship between them could become strained.

Again, another variation was revealed in the quotations below, with regards to research topic selection:

*She said now that you are back for your PhD... this and this areas are pertinent and that is what we are going to focus on; and we agreed on the topic. So, I was involved in the whole thing (Gabriel, 7a).*

Although the supervisor here appears to be directive in terms of suggesting the research topic to the participant, the participant was, however, part of the decision-making process. This shows that supervisors could be directive and at the same time be collaborative in their approach to supervision, in that they are able to both structure the project and still include doctoral students in the decision-making process.

#### **4.3.2.3 *Influence of supervisors' socialisation on their supervision approach***

Another issue which the participants revealed in their expressions, aside from the institutional structure, is the issue of the supervisors' own socialisation. This can be noticed in the excerpts below relating to how the participants perceive their supervisors' approach to supervision:

*One of them [the supervisors at the panel] told me that 'I don't know where you people are rushing to, that she spent seven years doing her masters... (Abel, 1b).*

*...with all these things that government is telling them to graduate students, they don't want to listen, they don't care... They want to keep us here for donkey years... (Isaac, 9a).*

Here, the participants revealed how their supervisors tended to supervise them in the same conservative way in which they were supervised as masters' students. This approach to supervision

is seen by the participants as punitive, as it does not align with current changes in the higher education supervision landscape, characterised by increased government intervention and the need for fast completions. However, analysing the data critically, one could note that the major issue relates to the supervisors' socialisation. The supervisors who were socialised differently are now asked to implement new policies on supervision, contrary to their own socialisation.

Universities usually provide supervision policy guidelines that stipulate the roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved in the supervision, to ensure a profitable supervision experience. Often, the choices of the supervision approach are not based on the policy guidelines, as shown in the excerpts below:

*We do have supervision guideline. But, you know that things are not so streamlined here, for you to begin to say that this is what this fellow is expected to do, and so on (Gabriel, 7a).*

*Of course, there is... Nobody explains anything to you, there is nothing like that. You just take whatever you see. ... At least, I know my roles, I know my responsibilities... (Naomi, 14b).*

The data here show that although there were supervision policy guidelines, there seems to be little or no awareness on the part of the doctoral students, and also probably the supervisors, as to what they are. Because of that dilemma, there was no serious application of the policy in terms of guiding the supervisor-student relationship. Instead, as the data revealed, expectations were assumed or probably left to the whims and caprices of the supervisors. This has implications for both the supervisors and the supervisees as they are likely to have divergent or unrealistic expectations towards each other. That could also undermine/cripple the task that is supposed to be accomplished in the supervision process.

#### **4.3.2.4 Mismatch/misalignment in participants' expectations and supervisors' approaches**

Mismatch/misalignment could happen due to a lack of congruence between expectations and the supervision experience. In this research, the participants share similar views with regards to expectations from the supervisors, as exemplified by the quotations below:

*An ideal supervisor will attention to his students...He will be willing and ready to...listen to them...give them the required guidance and advice... and ensure that they are making progress... (Endurance, 5a).*

*He should be somebody that is welcoming and caring ...maybe assist me in getting relevant materials... should be giving me feedback that can help me move my work forward... Somebody that I can work with, that believes in me and encourages me... (Naomi, 14a).*

*...someone who is accessible, who considers that we are also human beings. ...good relationship is very important... because these things affect our morale and of course our study (Isaac, 9b).*

Based on the data, the participants expect their supervisors, in any ideal situation, to be good listeners, to provide academic guidance and support, to provide quality feedback, to be cordial, to show caring and consideration for the doctoral students' personality, to value the doctoral students' opinions, to trust their sense of judgement, and to be humane in their outlook. These roles and expectations and the supervisor qualities/attributes revealed here not only indicate that the participants want the supervisors to take into consideration both their academic and emotional needs, they also show the parameter/yardstick that the participants use to gauge the effectiveness of their supervisors. Thus, they provide insight into the conception that the participants hold about a positive supervision relationship.

Notably, the data below indicate that sometimes the supervision approach which the supervisors adopt does not align with the participants' expectations:

*All they do is to correct your finished work..., any other thing you are doing you should know it on your own... ... that is part of discipline we are getting here (Naomi, 14a).*

*...One would expect that they will at least suggest something... (Benjy, 2a).*

The data here show that while the supervisors are more concerned with getting their doctoral students to complete the chapters of their particular thesis (task-focussed), the participants expect input from the supervisors in the process of developing the said chapters (process-focussed). This shows that the provided guidance is minimal. This is because the supervisors view participants (doctoral students) as already autonomous researchers and as such they assume that the participants would not require some scaffolding to develop certain research skills. It also means that supervisors do not see it as their duty to look at work-in-progress or they do not have the time to do so. The implication for the doctoral students, particularly at the initial stage of their studies, is that they are not able to limit their studies to a manageable scope and as such they struggle and become exhausted, stressed, frustrated and potentially directionless.

One of the participants revealed how he experienced mismatch in his expectations with regards to contact with the supervisors to negotiate the supervision meeting and feedback times from the supervisors, and remarks thus:

*My supervisor is not too accessible. I don't see him as I would want to... ...what I feel should be the best is not what I am getting ...I think as a supervisors you should be accessible. ...sometimes files get delayed for two months or three months before you get feedback (James, 10a).*

The participant here shows dissatisfaction with his supervisor's inaccessibility, which sometimes results in two to three months' delay in getting feedback, which shows that the supervision meetings were erratic and there was a lack of sound communication between the student participant and the supervisor. In such a situation, the participant would not be able to get his supervisor to respond to his needs immediately, especially when he encounters problems with his study and, thus, needed to discuss with his supervisor or get feedback to resolve issues, and subsequently move on. Notwithstanding, when feedback is delayed by the supervisors for prolonged periods of time, students stand the slight risk of having their literature and data generated for their studies becoming outdated and/or superseded by fresher studies in the peer-reviewed literature.

The participants revealed some of the possible reasons for such misalignments, as reflected in the following excerpts:

*There are some days that may not be good days for them, they will not give you attention (Cecelia, 3a).*

*Sometimes they will ask me to come, and I will actually get to the University, but will realising that they have just left... (Naomi, 14a).*

*In a situation where you travel all the way from ... [a different state] ...to come here and they are not attending to you... that is why most of us are suffering running from pillar to post looking for people to assist us (Isaac, 9b).*

From the presented data, consultation with the supervisors, at times, depends on the mood and disposition and personal interests of the supervisors. In other words, supervisors sometimes handle supervision as a matter of convenience, rather than a matter of commitment and responsibility. As a result, supervisors could schedule supervision meetings with doctoral students, and suddenly renege from their undertaking, with no prior notice, in informing the doctoral students of the changes and probably without tendering any civilised apology. This shows that there is an absolute disrespect for the doctoral students and this indicates not only the supervisors' lack of care and attention, but also an indifferent attitude towards the doctoral students. With such a supervision relationship, it would be difficult to build trust, to develop emotional bond and a good working alliance that is necessary for accomplishing the task in the supervision.

A variation can be noticed in the quotation below, with regards to how the supervisors handle the issue of supervision meetings that result in a lack of congruence between the participant's expectation and their supervision experience:

*...sometimes, when we have appointment at nine o'clock, she will only appear at eleven o'clock, and she will be so much in a hurry, that she is having meeting with either the VC or... with one person or the other... whatever... I don't get her attention... (Oshua, 15b).*

As was the case with earlier reports that exposes supervisors' inattention to supervisees, the data here indicate that the supervisor referred to in this case may not have prioritised or regularised

supervision as part of her job. This is evidenced by her busy schedules and lateness for the supervision meeting as shown in the data. Also, it is likely that the university has not officially institutionalised postgraduate supervision, in a way that it is factored into the job description or workload of academics. Because of that, the supervisors may not put in their time and space for postgraduate supervision in the distribution of their time across the weeks. As such, doctoral students may be perceived of as constituting a nuisance and burden in the system, as result of which they then suffer ill-treatment, disrespect and neglect, contrary to their expectations.

Some of the participants revealed some of the implications deriving from the lack of attention from the supervisor, and remarked thus:

*I know if I were given the desired attention I should have graduated long ago... The level of inaccessibility almost retarded the work because I've been on the programme for seven years which I think is too long a time (Kenneth, 11a).*

*...when you...don't get attended to or when you drop your work...after two weeks or after a month...your work is still the way it has been without any sigh of correction or input... you know it affects the duration of the program (Moses, 13a).*

According to these participants, the supervisors' inaccessibility and inattention contribute to the negative supervision experience as it compromised their ability to complete the doctoral programme on time. Having stayed on the PhD programme for seven years, one of the participants expressed a high-level of dissatisfaction. This could be because of the financial implications of the elongated duration of study and the unnecessary pressure related to reworking and revisiting the study. Usually, when a study is extended for prolonged periods of time, as aforementioned, it has the potential of exposing the work to the state of being obsolete, as the literature becomes outdated, the methodology may have moved on, there might be new ways of doing the research, and data initially used for the study may also have become outdated. As a result, the student is under pressure to constantly rework and revisit the study. Notably, if the study was completed within the stipulated time frame, the student would have worked with a potentially fresh body of literature up to the point of graduation. This points to the need to rethink the rationale for keeping students for unnecessarily prolonged periods of time.

#### 4.3.2.5 *Repressive silence in supervision*

From my own personal observations, as well as the reports from the participants, repression and silence appear to characterise the supervisor-student relationship in this context. One typical example, that indicates a high level of repression, was noticed at the point of interviewing the participants to collect data for this study. Some of the participants, who were initially reluctant or even scared to divulge information about their relationship with their supervisors, clearly stated it, thus:

*We don't talk about our supervisors... because is very risky. ...You just have to pretend as if everything is fine [laughter] (Haman, 8a).*

*Is not that I don't want to participate in your study, only that some of the information you are looking for can put me into trouble if it happens to leak. ...My sister, I know what I am saying, I know the kind of people we are dealing with here (James, 10a).*

The participants here exhibited a high-level of threat and fear in revealing information with regards to their supervision experiences. This is because doing so, according to the participants, may end up exposing them to danger of victimisation by their supervisors. As such, participants only pretend or try to maintain a false relationship with their supervisor, as shown in the data. This shows how supervisees have been caught up in an unhealthy and unsatisfactory supervisory relationship, which brings on personal worry as they may have internalised the oppression. Furthermore, despite 'knowing' about it, supervisees have no choice but to tolerate this kind of unethical behaviour – which is somewhat disturbing, as it seems to remain a constant threat throughout the duration of the programme. This shows the extent to which the supervisees have been repressed into silence. The implication is that supervisees would not have the chance to develop trust and a mutually satisfying learning experience.

Other participants also indicated how they experienced a more disturbing kind of repression (abusive repression) at some different points in their supervision encounters, as shown below:

*A woman cried out of his office asking if she really looked stupid. I don't know what she did to him, she said he called her goat... I don't know if she later came back but I haven't seen her since then (Doris, 4a).*

*Let me tell you this... it happened in this university... somebody who is now a professor here was once doing his master's programme and when he came to his supervisor's house... he collected his file and threw the file away, so the papers...scattered everywhere. It was the supervisor's wife who came out and started picking the papers and she said 'oh father, why did you do this? This is a postgraduate student... it would have been better if you said you would not attend to him...' But what is the purpose of collecting the file and throwing it away... ...It was the woman you know...that has a caring heart (Isaac, 9a).*

The participants here revealed scenarios, whereby, as doctoral students go for consultations they are seemingly ill-treated by the supervisors. Based on the data, those supervisors disrespect and disregard the personhood of students, and blatantly abuse them by using derogatory animal remarks about those doctoral students which hurts their feelings. The data show how a doctoral student who attempted to consult with his supervisor at his residence was disgraced publicly by the supervisor, such that, the wife of the supervisor, who was empathetic to the doctoral student had to question the inhuman behaviour of the supervisor. However, the supervisor may justify his actions by claiming that he is entitled to his privacy and he probably wants students to respect that. But, it is unlikely that doctoral students would go to the extent of consulting with supervisors at their residences if supervisors are always available and accessible to students during official hours. This brings to light the height of oppression that goes on in supervision relationships in this context. This has implications on the emotional well-being of doctoral students as they are likely to lose self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy. Also, with supervisors' disdain, lack of respect and lack of empathy for doctoral students, it would be difficult for supervisors to build an academically nourishing and empowering relationship with doctoral students in order to scaffold learning.

Notwithstanding, the data further show how a doctoral student, who could not bear the terrible abuse, appears to have quietly dropped out of the doctoral programme, as revealed by another participant, who stated:

*When a supervisor put fear in the heart of students, what do you expect? What is he telling the student? ... That is why people do different kinds of thing. ... Sometimes students get to the point where they become frustrated and they leave (Oshua, 15b).*

This means that abusive repression in the supervision relationship could result in the loss of an important human resource, the doctoral student, who could have produced research outcomes that could push forward the frontiers of knowledge. Essentially, the analysis shows that abusive repression in the supervision relationship could have a negative impact.

However, since people react and respond to things differently; other participants revealed variation in their reaction and response to abusive repression. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

*You don't need to pick up offence because you did not meet ... [your supervisor]. Of course if you do that, you know you are not likely going to finish your programme. ... In most cases you won't get the apologies. You need to stomach it, if you really want to get through (Cecelia, 3a).*

The participant here seems to reveal that students who wish to complete their doctoral studies must endure humiliation and abusive repression. This means that such students may have to become passive and unable to assert themselves in the relationship. The implication for doctoral students is that, they may be unable to develop necessary qualities critical to the scholarly self they are trying to develop; and that may affect the knowledge creation process.

Another variation in conception with regards to supervisees' reactions to abusive repression is captured in the following excerpt:

*...To me, there is nothing they do now that will surprise me ... I don't depend on them any more... What is important for me is to develop myself and that is what I am doing. ... There is this prof that came to my department for sabbatical in my workplace... He has really been very helpful to me (Benjy, 2b).*

The data here show that, rather than being overwhelmed by the level of abuse in the supervision context, some of the participants could decide to look out for other sources of support outside of the bounds of the university-assigned supervisor. This means that some of the students do exercise agency for their learning and subsequently empower themselves. Hence, this suggests that the way

that power plays out in the supervision relationship, could also result in productive and rewarding effects for some of the doctoral students. But, the question now is whether the supervision relationship must be a gruelling experience or as eloquently described at the grass roots level in the words of one of the participants, thus:

*...it is like a camel passing through the eye of a needle (Isaac, 9a).*

#### **4.4 A Diagrammatic representation of category one: supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship**

As earlier explained in chapter three, phenomenographic analysis explicates a group's collective experience of a phenomenon in terms of the 'what aspect' (referential) and the 'how aspect' (structural) (Marton, 1997; Harris, 2011). Table 3 below presents a diagrammatic representation of the different supervision experiences of the participants, which was collectively grouped as category one - supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship, and the impact of those experiences on participants' learning (as discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter and further emphasised in chapter 8). Basically, Table 3 can be understood as being divided into two main parts. The first part of the diagram (upper part) shows the 'what aspect' of category one (supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship), with the different experiences that make up the category on the right-hand side of the table. Then, the second part (lower part) of the diagram presents the 'how aspect' - which represents the impacts of the different ways that the participants experience research supervision in category one on their learning (as shown on the right hand side of the table).

**Table 3. Participants' experience of research supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship and the impact on their learning and development**

(Adapted from Reddy, 2010, p. 78)

<b>WHAT ASPECT (REFERENTIAL)</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>WAYS OF EXPERIENCING RESEARCH SUPERVISION</b>
	Supervision as apprenticeship-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrenched practices in the admission procedures and power relation</li> <li>• Participants' conception that inadequate resources and infrastructure</li> </ul>

	like/power relationship	<p>in the department/university inhibit learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants' conception of the impact of the shortage of academics (supervisors) on supervisors and doctoral students</li> <li>• Favouritism in scheduling defence dates by departmental administrative staffs</li> <li>• Departmental practice of funding meals at defence presentations</li> <li>• Participants' competence and experience in conducting research</li> <li>• Participants' frustration in understanding the master's domain in research topic selection</li> <li>• Influences of supervisors' socialization on supervisors supervision approach</li> <li>• Mismatch in expectation between doctoral students and supervisors</li> <li>• Repressive silence in supervision relationship</li> </ul>
<b>HOW ASPECT (STRUCTURAL)</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>IMPACTS ON PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</b>
	Supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased commitment, dedication and resilience</li> <li>• Exercise of agency for learning and self-empowerment</li> <li>• Docility (mere receptors of information from supervisors) and high degree of dependency on supervisors</li> <li>• uncritical approach to learning</li> <li>• Limited intellectual growth and ability to exercise independent thought</li> <li>• self-doubt, lack of confidence and reduced level of creativity</li> <li>• Inability to keep abreast with development in the fields of study</li> <li>• Delay in progress and low productivity</li> <li>• Inability to build academically nourishing and empowering relationship with supervisors</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration and decision to leave the programme</li> </ul>
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## 4.5 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter have revealed the participants' conception of the supervision process as an apprenticeship-like/power relationship. The chapter found that the participants perceive themselves almost as powerless beings in relation to their supervisors, some of whom are considered as divine beings (or demi-gods). As such, the finding indicated that the participants had to humble themselves, to revere and to honour or probably to worship the supervisors, to be able to relate to them and thus receive guidance. Such a disturbing power relation between the supervisees and the supervisors, as revealed in the chapter findings, was/is encouraged by entrenched practices in the institutions where the admission and supervisor nomination process privileged the supervisors, to the exclusion of the students. Also, the findings indicate the inadequate infrastructure and resources in the institutions; departmental practice - students funding meals at defence presentations; unethical practices (favouritism by administrative staffs in scheduling defence dates) impacted on students' learning in several ways. Furthermore, the findings show that the students' level of assertiveness in the supervision relationship was shaped by variables that are peculiar to the supervisees (level of preparedness and experience) and the supervisors (supervisors' socialisation). Issues of mismatch in expectations between the supervisees and the supervisors was found to be common place in the context of my research thesis; and in most cases, supervisees had to align their research interest to those interests of their supervisors, by selecting research topics that fit into the supervisor domain or scheme of things. Thus, issues of students' marginalisation and repressive silence were found to be the major characteristics of the participants' experiences in this category.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Supervision as transacting in the social space**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Although the previous chapter outlined the three categories of description that have been established in my research thesis, namely: category one, which entails supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship; category two, which entails supervision as transacting in the social space, and category three, with student yearning for a positive relationship, but the chapter only echoes the analysis and findings of category one. This current chapter, therefore, is a continuation of the data analysis chapters in my study and, as such, it presents the analysis and findings of category two (supervision as transacting in the social space). The chapter uses quotations that were extracted from the interview transcripts to describe the participants' expressions with regards to their transaction in the social space. The findings show that doctoral students have two social worlds that they inhabit. One is the social world of the university. This social space involves transacting with the supervisor and a network of social agents (co-supervisors, supervisory panels, colleagues, peers, and friends; and sometimes it extends to academics and colleagues outside of the institutions where they conduct their studies). The second is the personal social world of home and family, whereby, family members have expectations of the doctoral students. Each of these elements are analysed in detail in subsequent sections and, lastly, there is presented a diagrammatic analysis that depicts the experience of supervision in this category in Table 4.

## 5.2 Participants' conception of supervision as transacting in the social space

The participants in this category reveal that, although the formal responsibility for supervision lies with university-assigned supervisors, guidance with regards to the development of the thesis is not limited to the guidance which a single supervisor provides to a supervisee. This view was captured in the response of one of the participants to the researcher's probe question on whether, or not, guidance on thesis development has to come from the supervisor:

*I think it is their responsibility to guide students, it is stated there in the guideline... But, they will not do your work for you; that is your own responsibility as a student. So, it is left for you to know how to go about your work, whether you need other people to assist you and so on... I get advice from my supervisors and also from other people; so, it is both (Naomi, 14b).*

The participant here indicates that the institutional policy guidelines for supervision stipulate that supervisors provide guidance to supervisees, but unfortunately that may not suffice to accomplish the thesis work. As such, the doctoral students may require additional assistance elsewhere to complement their supervisors' efforts. The participant also emphasised the role of doctoral students in terms of assessing their own capabilities in relation to the guidance provided by the supervisors and the demand of the thesis work. This reveals the participants' awareness that supervision extends beyond the apprenticeship-like relationship (where the supervisor is believed to be solely responsible for the provision of guidance), to one in which supervisee can transact in the academic social space and receive guidance from other sources. Hence, the assumption here is that students have the resources and skills to network with the existing community of scholars on their own.

A similar view was expressed by another participant who appears to be in an agentic state regarding her learning, thus:

*...doing this program has taught me that the whole world is my field...I meet as many people as I want, through the internet and through other sources, and then use the knowledge I gain to achieve my objectives.... So, I don't limit myself... (Doris, 4b).*

The participant here reveals how the doctoral experience has enabled her to develop learning relationships with others, besides her supervisor, whereby, she acquires relevant knowledge and transform such knowledge. This suggests that the participant had to learn the 'rules of the game' on her own as she journeys towards discovery/awareness of the academic world around her. This could be through seminars and workshop attendance. Therefore, the analysis here is that doctoral students who take their own initiative for their own learning, actually learn to engage with big thinkers in their field of study and, as such, they are less likely to be wholly dependent on the supervisor.

Another participant further emphasised the role of the doctoral student with regards to the issue of transacting in the social space, by noting:

*...nothing stops you from getting input from people out there... I have consulted a lot of people, lecturers, professors, and some of them are not even from this university... And that does not mean that I don't value my supervisors... I believe that for you to get to the root, to really understand what you are doing in order for you to do it well, you have to go all out to get relevant information and inputs... (Luke, 12a).*

According to this participant, the need for supervisees to build a strong knowledge base means to have a deepened understanding of the fields of inquiry and, thus, produce quality research output, and this necessitates transacting in the academic social space. In other words, the participant seems to believe that supervisees who draw from various sources to complement the guidance given by their supervisors are likely to acquire in-depth knowledge of their study, and that would enhance a deeper level of learning, as opposed to superficial learning. This, in a way, reveals the conception that the participants hold about the purpose of supervision, which is to develop a quality thesis, as well as a quality future researcher. It also indicates that supervisees have a key role to play to make that happen. But, the concern now is that not all students develop the capacity to transact in the social sphere on their own, as some may require their supervisor to scaffold their learning.

In line with this, the participants revealed two types of transacting – organic transacting (where the supervisor connects the student to key resources) and ‘forced’ transacting. In the data below, one of the participants reveal the role that supervisors play in connecting supervisees to sources of support, thus:

*I didn't have so much problem with my analysis... she [my supervisor] directed me to a very good statistician... not as if she doesn't know anything about it, just that, that aspect of statistics is not her area and you know they all have different areas of expertise. ...She was even the one that showed me how to do the interpretation (Cecelia, 3a).*

Based on the presented data, supervisors sometimes refer doctoral students to other experts in other fields, when the student lacks expertise in a specific aspect of student research work (in this case, the supervisor actually lacked statistical knowledge). From the data, the supervisor acknowledged her lack of expertise in statistics and, as opposed to claiming to be the source of all knowledge, the supervisor displayed an astute professionalism, by referring the participant to an expert in statistics. This shows how supervisors create the opportunity for the supervisee to receive inputs and to learn from other sources and, thereby, encourage quality work. One of the participants revealed the benefits of such an exposure, as follows:

*...I knew him [the statistician] through my supervisor...that was during my masters' program ... This time around, after I submitted my work, I went back to him on my own, and we made arrangement for me to take some lessons, and I started learning it. ... I don't want a situation whereby any time I want to do my work I will be going about looking for someone to do statistical analysis for me (Gabriel, 7a).*

Having been exposed to an expert statistician, this participant took a step further to acquire training in statistical skills in order to advance his career as an academic. This shows that when supervisors feel secure enough within themselves to refer supervisees to experts in the field of student study, they not only create the opportunity for quality service and better learning, but they also motivate supervisees to make themselves feel at home in the academic environment.

A variation can be seen in the excerpts below, which indicates that supervisees are sometimes forced to transact in other social spaces:

*...Support? Where? Nothing like support, I just have to sort it out myself. For example, ...my literature review, I have been on it for quite a long time... ...there is nothing like support or directing you to where you can find these materials. ...you have to rise up and look for... where to find help (Haman, 8a).*

*As a PhD student you get minimal support from your supervisor in terms of literature...What I have tried to do ... was to follow links in the literature ... with some of the ones ...provided by colleagues ... (James, 10a).*

The participants here indicate that they expected their supervisors to assist them in sourcing literature for their studies, and when that did not happen they were forced to explore other sources. This indicates that if these participants were supervised by lenient and thoughtful supervisors, who do not want the student to feel uncared for, the student may even not make enough effort to source for their own literature materials themselves. Although a lack of concern on the part of supervisors could result in delay in the supervisees' progress, as shown in the data, the expectations from the supervisors, indicated here (not only to guide but to also provide literature for supervisees), seems unrealistic, given the workload of the supervisors. This shows that some attitudes of the supervisors, which the doctoral students considered to be negative, could also serve a positive purpose, which entails directing doctoral students to the wider social space and, by that, discourage any heavy reliance on supervisors. But, the challenge with forced transacting, which is a situation where there is an absence of basic guidance from supervisors, is that there is no guarantee that the advice sought from others would be appropriate. That poses a risk to doctoral students who are faced with the high demand of making some original contribution to their field of study.

### **5.2.1 Transacting with university-assigned supervisors**

The relationship between supervisees and supervisors can either be empowering or disempowering. This relationship arises due to the task that needs to be accomplished in

supervision, which is the thesis development, as shaped by the supervision approach/style that supervisors adopt. Two participants noted this conception, by saying:

*It depends on whether you have something to present to your supervisor or not. At times, also supervisor availability also determines the frequency of supervision meetings (Kenneth, 11b).*

*All they want to see is your work and you must present it chapter by chapter... So, it is not regular at all (Naomi, 14a).*

Here, the participants reveal that contact with the supervisors (supervision meetings) depend very much on the rate of progress of the individual student, in terms of developing the thesis. In other words, the frequency of contact with the supervisor is tied to the ability of the student to develop at least a chapter of the thesis within a reasonable time-frame. This shows that the thesis is central to the supervision relationship. But, considering that students must produce a complete chapter before consultation, it means that supervision meetings will, as a minimum, be erratic. The implication is that doctoral students would be denied the opportunity of getting regular guidance from supervisors through constant exchanges, which entail receiving and giving feedback, which is critical to student development as newcomer researchers. Thus, minimal interaction/contact between doctoral students and supervisors could inhibit doctoral students' growth towards autonomy in learning, as the processes of learning that the doctoral students need to go through may be neglected.

Also, the data seem to suggest that although supervisors may be concerned with the development of the chapters of the thesis (thesis-focused), yet those supervisors cannot develop the thesis themselves except through the doctoral student. This means that the doctoral student is central to the success, or otherwise, of the tasks that are expected to be accomplished in supervision, in the same way that the thesis and the supervisor are both equally important. In line with this view, one of the participants revealed how the supervisor enhanced the success of his defence, thus:

*She actually sat us down for a period of three hours, asking us to present our work the way we would present it on that day...So everyone of us stood up and presented...After that, she looked at areas we have failed, and then gave some directives – 'this is not what you should*

*do' and so on. She also gave commendations that 'yes you are quite in order, sustain that tempo' and things like that (Abel, 1a).*

The data here show that for the supervisor to prepare her doctoral students for the viva proposal defence, she set aside time and gave each of her students the opportunity to personally present their studies to her. By so doing, she was able to carry out a diagnosis of their work, hence, she identified the strengths and weaknesses and then provided feedback to strengthen the weak areas. Looking at the data critically, it seems clear that the supervisor adopted a very directive and commandeering approach in giving feedback to her doctoral students, instead of providing some constructive feedback. Arguably, there is no provision for a two-way communication between the supervisor and the doctoral students, whereby students exercise independent thinking. On the contrary, the supervisor provides instructive feedbacks to students, almost as with an official and formal communiqué, which needs to be obeyed or acted upon. This raises questions with regards to ownership of the ideas/arguments/thesis.

Another participant revealed a varied way in which supervisors empower doctoral student, as follows:

*...she had told me that I need to belong to a recognised organisation/association. So, I went and registered with ABEN. So, since then, I make sure that, any time there is a conference, I attend and present a paper (Cecelia, 3b).*

In analysing the data, the supervisor tends to create an awareness for his doctoral student in order to understand the necessity of being a member of a professional body which is a community of practice. As a result, the doctoral student did not only become a registered member of Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), she became a participating member of that professional body. Therefore, this shows how a supervisor could encourage doctoral students to transact in the wider academic social space. One of the participants revealed the benefit of being in such a social space, thus:

*It has been helpful ... overtime, you feel more confident. You get to know more people, the big thinkers in the field (Kenneth, 11b).*

According to this participant, exposure to well-established and professional academics has developed his confidence. Usually, when doctoral students socialise in the wider academic social space through attendance of conferences and seminars, they become aware of the kind of knowledge that is valued in their field of study and how their study could contribute in this regard. By so doing, they deal with self-doubt and they develop confidence. This shows that supervisors can be instrumental to supervisees' personal and professional development.

A variation in conception is captured in the excerpt below, which indicates that some supervisor-supervisee relationships are characterised by strong issues of the power relation:

*We are not equal at all, they are up there and we are down here (Naomi, 14a).*

Usually, in an asymmetrical relationship, it is the voice of the master (supervisor) that is privileged. Most of the time the less powerful (student) only receives information/instruction and must act upon it. This is evident in the way that one of the participants experienced a proposal (viva voce or viva preparation) by her supervisor, as shown below:

*...my supervisor had seriously warned me not to exceed the time; that I should just mention the key points and jump to the next section. So, that was what I did (Favour, 6b).*

What is presented above, is in opposition to earlier reports where the supervisor arranged for a mock proposal presentation to prepare supervisees for defence. In this case, the supervisor simply advised the doctoral student with regards to time management. But, the tone with which the advice was given shows the authoritative position from which the supervisor speaks with the doctoral student. Thus, because of the disempowering relations which are seemingly attained between the supervisor and the doctoral student, the doctoral student may not feel confident enough to assert herself in the relationship.

Again, with regards to the thesis, which is believed to be central in the supervision relationship, as explained earlier, the participants revealed a variation in the way that supervisors and doctoral students view the thesis:

*...by the time you come to collect your file and find out that there is no trace of correction or anything, you will then know that he has been doing nothing about your work. But then, this person asked you to come, you know what it means... (James, 10a).*

*Most times they will give you appointment and when you go on that day you won't see them... So, one has to develop a kind of patience, you have to endure most of these challenges and you don't need to pick up offence... (Cecelia, 3a).*

The data here show that the way in which the supervisor views the thesis could be quite different from the way that doctoral students view it and relate with it. Notably, the thesis may not mean much for some supervisors, as they often do not think about it and they can afford to consistently miss appointments that are meant for the development and progress of the thesis. On the contrary, the data show that some doctoral students view the thesis as something that is worthy of their, time, endurance, and energy; and despite any discouragement and lack of commitment on the part of supervisors, doctoral students feel that the thesis is worthy of their resilience in their cause.

### **5.2.2 Participants' transaction with group/co-supervisors**

Although the participants from only one out of the four universities, from which data for this thesis were gathered, revealed that the group/co-supervision model was used in supervising them, their stories provide more insight on doctoral student supervision experiences in the business education programme in those four Nigerian universities. In the excerpts below, the participants reveal how co-supervision was practiced in their department, thus:

*I usually book appointment with them before I go to conference with them. ...No, I don't see the three of them at the same time, I only see one supervisor at a time... Because, there was no such arrangement (Moses, 13a).*

*You have to go and see them in their offices... when you finish with the first person, then, you go to the second person ... that's how we've been doing it (Naomi, 14a).*

The participants here revealed the formal setting in which supervision happens, which requires doctoral students to first schedule appointments with the supervisors before holding meetings with them in their offices. But, what is noteworthy in the data is the way in which the doctoral students consult with the group/co-supervisors, which seems like the concept of a random sequencing. The data show that doctoral students hold supervision meetings with individual supervisors, rather than having all three supervisors in attendance. As such, there is uncertainty as to whose point of view/decision should hold authority in the event of conflicting feedback. Also, there is no space for doctoral students to observe supervisors engaging with one another, which would have been a powerful learning space for the student to observe how supervisors construct and defend arguments. This shows that although the department uses a group/co-supervision model, the practice is still very much informed by the traditional solo model of supervision.

The implication of having separate supervision arrangements with individual supervisors is captured in the quotation below:

*When you notice that there are contradictions in the feedbacks you are getting from them, then it is your responsibility to draw their attention to it, so that they can look at it and decide on which direction they want you to go. ...It is your work so, you have to follow up on the matter or else you will not be able to move on with your work (Naomi, 14b).*

As shown in the data, one of the implications of holding separate supervision meetings with group/co-supervisors is that the doctoral student could receive contradictory feedback. The data also show that when that happens, the responsibility lies with the doctoral student to inform all three supervisors and ensure that the issue is resolved. But, given the power differential that is known to exist between supervisors and supervisees, it may be a daunting task for the doctoral student to manage the relationship with group/co-supervisors. The doctoral student may not be

able to convince all three supervisors to align their differing viewpoints and, as such, the doctoral student may be unnecessarily delayed. The participant further revealed how issues relating to conflict of interest between group/co-supervisors are handled, thus:

*...If there is anything that they are not able to agree on...it is now the responsibility of the major supervisor to take a decision... (Naomi, 14b).*

The participant here reveals that in a situation whereby there is conflict/disagreement between group/co-supervisors, the main supervisor has the authority to make a final verdict to resolve the issue. Since major supervisors are usually assigned based on their expertise in the doctoral students' area of research, they are likely to give a good verdict on a doctoral student thesis should there be any disagreement between co-supervisors.

Another participant shared a divergent view when asked if the major (first) supervisor and the minor (second and third) supervisors play the same roles in the supervision relationship:

*As far as I am concerned it is more of nomenclature... they all play the same role.... one has to be careful when it comes to some of these matters. You cannot say because he is your second or third supervisor, you will not consider his corrections...sometimes you can even get more inputs from the second or third, than you get from your first supervisor (Moses, 13b).*

It is noteworthy that, instead of focusing on the title or position of the supervisors (either as major or minor supervisors), this participant seems to focus on the inputs - corrections that the participant gets from all his supervisors. This participant clearly values the inputs and corrections he receives from his supervisors. But, this raises questions as to the role that the supervisor should play with regards to the development of both the thesis and the doctoral student. Thus, the concern here is whether the supervisor is to offer corrections or ask questions and guide supervisees to allow supervisees to take ownership and to develop independent thought. Notwithstanding, the participant's warning with regards to managing the relationships with group/co-supervisors also suggests that there is a high possibility of conflicts of interest between a doctoral student and group/co-supervisors. Usually, a conflict of interest affects relationships and trust between

individuals, and doctoral students need to be able to trust that they are not being exploited for the supervisors' own interest/gain.

In the data below, the participant further revealed how he was able to manage his relationship with group/co-supervisors:

*...what they advised me to be doing is that, I should first go to my major supervisor to pick up my work... He will ask me if I have seen the other supervisors and I will tell him no, I have not seen them, I want to see you first. He will say no, go and see the other supervisors. I will then go to either the second supervisor or the third supervisor, whoever is available... But most times when I get to the second and third supervisors and they give me my work, they will say don't go; go and see your major supervisor. ...Sometimes I would have seen him but I will not tell them, because I want to maintain good rapport amongst all of them. I don't want a situation where one will feel slighted by way of saying you have gone to see him before coming to me. ...sometimes there use to be this unhealthy disagreements... Honestly, sometimes I feel bad but to save situation and not allow myself to become the carpet for the elephants...I tell a lie, that no, I have not seen this person, whereas, my file will already be in my bag (Moses, 13a).*

The data here show how power plays out, not only between the participant and the supervisors but also among group/co-supervisors. From the presented scenario, all three supervisors would advise the participant to ensure he consults with the other co-supervisors and, based on this, one may conclude that the supervisors value inputs from each other. However, the data suggest that there may be hidden competition among the co-supervisors, as each supervisor may try to find out whose ideas/feedback the participant aligns his work with. It seems as if supervisor ego and personality take precedence over the need to contribute/create new knowledge and thinking via doctoral student work. As such, the participant revealed that he had to resort to 'dishonest' behaviour to maintain the 'peace' and avoid ill-treatment from his supervisors. The participant expressed a deep feeling of dissatisfaction and he believes that such disagreement and misunderstanding among his supervisors is unhealthy, counter-productive and unprofitable as far as his study is concerned. This means that conflict between co-supervisors could create a non-conducive learning atmosphere for

supervisees. It is noteworthy, however, that if conflict is handled in a way that is productive, there is so much that supervisees could learn about argumentation when supervisors differ.

The excerpt below captures how one of the participants views conflicting feedback from co-supervisors and the way in which the relationship can be managed:

*...there are some places in the work where this person will say yes and the other person will say no... sometimes...you give them chance, and let them fight among themselves and then make the selection of which idea to support. ...crisis arises, we resolve it and then continue. To me I see it as building me up not dragging me back. ...at the end, I am able to follow the right track. (Luke, 12a).*

While this participant confirms that doctoral students do receive contradictory feedback, and that this sometimes results in conflict between group/co-supervisors, the participant does not seem to view this as a challenge. On the contrary, he sees it as an opportunity for development. Notably, the data do not clarify how that happens, but the participant is an academic in the same department with his supervisors, as shown in the quotation below, in which he asserts that:

*...we work in the same department...I see them every day... (Luke, 12a).*

It means that the participant may have the opportunity to be part of his supervisors' discussions/debates with regards to his doctoral research. Thus, in the process of resolving their differences, his supervisor may have provided him with important learning points and given him direction on his work.

The participant further revealed the privilege he enjoys as a colleague of his supervisors, thus:

*... If I want I can arrange to meet with all of them, I can ask for that. So that, maybe after the days' work, we can all meet together and discuss my own matter (Luke, 12a).*

The data here support earlier conception that a supervision meeting with group/co-supervisors happens in a conventional solo manner. But, on the other hand, it indicates that the participant could request a joint supervision meeting, with all three supervisors in attendance. This means that

the other participants, cited earlier, may not have deemed it necessary to request a joint supervision meeting. However, given the fact that this participant is not only a supervisee but also a colleague of his supervisors in the department, he may have a different kind of relationship with his supervisors, which the other participants do not have. In other words, the case may not be the same for the other participants, who may not be as familiar with their supervisors as the other participant is, to be able to demand a change in the way that the supervision has been happening in the department. This means that his case could be an exception.

Despite the challenges that the participants experienced with regards to group/co-supervision, most of them still indicate their preference for the group/co-supervision model of supervision. This conception is captured in the participants' responses to the researcher's question as to the reasons for their preference of the co-supervisor model over a single supervisor model and vice versa:

*I think there are lots of advantages with having three supervisors. One is that, you get a lot of inputs. Each one of them look at your work from different angles, and they bring in different ideas... I had to go back to the drawing board again to incorporate all the ideas... to find enough justification for what I am doing. ...There were times when things would have gone wrong and only one of them will notice it and draw my attention to it (Moses, 13a).*

*I am happy with the supervisors I have, I have learnt a lot from their experiences... ...we rub minds together you know, and we are able to come up with new ideas... the quality work is will not be the same (Luke, 12a).*

Co-supervision, according to these participants is beneficial to the doctoral students, as it provides a richer pool of knowledge and, thus, enables access to a broad range of perspectives on their doctoral research work. Also, one of the participants, as shown in the data, reveals that group/co-supervision enabled him to discover serious mistakes/errors that would have ruined his student research. He tends to believe that because not all of the supervisors identified such mistakes, it then means that co-supervision contributes largely to the quality of theses that student researchers do produce. The participants also revealed that co-supervisors encourage collaboration, whereby, all of the supervisors can engage with the doctoral student in thought-provoking discussions and

share ideas and experiences with the doctoral student. In other words, the participants suggest that the use of the group/co-supervision model of supervision could widen epistemological access for doctoral students.

One of the participants, although not engaged in a co-supervision relationship, shared a divergent view with regards to the advantage of group/co-supervision model, thus:

*Looking at the problem we face here... I think it will be better to have at least two supervisors so that, if one person is not available, you can see the other person (Isaac, 9a).*

For this participant, the co-supervision relationship is advantageous to doctoral students in terms of dealing with the challenge of the unavailability of supervisors. Hence, the concern here is the issue of the supervisor's availability, instead of the supervisor's expertise. This suggests that the group/co-supervision relationship could provide some ease of physical access to supervisors. Furthermore, doctoral students could quickly get learning support from the supervisors. Overall, the participants seem to be saying that, if all the advantages revealed here are realized, the group/co-supervision model of supervision is likely to improve the quality of supervision experience for most of the doctoral students who are a part of the sample population in my thesis.

### **5.2.3 Participants' transaction with supervisory panel/committee**

The supervisory panel is a committee constituted by the department or the school of postgraduate studies. The panel is made up of supervisors from various sections and programmes of the department/faculty and they are responsible for all postgraduate student defence presentations. The excerpts below capture the role/function of the supervisory panel/committee, thus:

*You first of all settle with your supervisor, then you submit the three topics to the committee who are also supervisors in the department. Then, they will now select one topic for you (Oshua, 15a).*

*We do seminars and up to three defences, the proposal defence, internal defence and external defence... after presenting, they will ask you questions... give you chance to defend your work ...starting from your topic, your objectives, statement of problem, research questions and... It is now left for the panel to judge whether you can go ahead or not (Benjy, 2b).*

From the presented data, the choice of research topic is not only made between the supervisor and the doctoral student. It must go through various stages of scrutiny/screening and the selection of the topic by departmental/faculty panel members before approval is granted, as no student defence is required at this stage. The data further show how defence happens at various stages of the thesis development, whereby, the proposal defence happens at the initial stage of the thesis development; the internal defence happens at an advanced stage of the thesis development; and the external defence happens after the write-up stage and is handled by external examiners. During these stages, the doctoral students are afforded the opportunity to express their views, ideas and thinking orally and to receive feedback immediately, as indicated in the data. This means that doctoral students would be able to gain insight from the more-established academics all through the various stages of the research process. Thus, the interactions between doctoral students and supervisory panel/committee could also be a form of socialisation, whereby, doctoral students become aware of the disciplinary norms and acceptable modes of knowledge generation. However, the supervisory committee may be construed as playing a critical role in the developmental stages of the thesis and also of the doctoral student; the data also suggest an all-too-powerful committee. It seems that doctoral students are at the mercy of the committee, as they must settle on the topic that has been selected for them, even though it may not have been their first choice. This could be a problem if there is no consideration for the topic/focus being on what the field is actually needing, in terms of new knowledge.

This could be the reason why ninety percent of the participants in this study consider the committee's process of topic selection to be tiresome and cumbersome, as shown below:

*Really...we have problems or challenges in getting a topic approved...which has to go through one or two committees and in the end the topic is approved. ...the process of getting a topic through is cumbersome (Benjy, 2a).*

For this participant, the multiple layers of committee involved in vetting the topic seems to be time-wasting and, possibly, unnecessarily lengthening the process. It seems that the participant does not understand that there must be a quality assurance mechanism to vet topic selection and, probably, the doctoral student research process, the doctoral student research progress, and also the doctoral student research outputs. This shows that institutional structures that are put in place to ensure the quality of student research work could be wrongly perceived by doctoral students as obstacles to their progress. Although it is also possible for such quality assurance mechanisms to be the causes of the delays for the research students, if not properly monitored and especially when it takes so much time for the panel members to meet, deliberate and take decisions. Also, considering that doctoral students see the process as daunting and time-consuming, suggests that the doctoral students have not been sufficiently prepared/advised about these necessary steps. It is arguable, therefore, that had the doctoral students been appraised/guided about the public nature of academic/postgraduate work, they would then appreciate that such types of exposure are a necessary part of being accepted into the community of scholars.

Another participant revealed a variation in the experience with regards to transacting with the supervisory committee, in the following excerpt:

*...of course, not every defence is successful. If you are not able to defend your work properly for them to see that yes, this person has something new to contribute, they [the panel] will cancel it. ...they use to announce it that, 'please students, we don't want so and so topics again, go and look for topics in other areas' (Cecelia, 3b).*

The data here show that when students put out their research work to the gaze of the public (the supervisory panel/committee) during its defence, the committee scrutinises the work to determine its relevance. As such, some doctoral students have their topics rejected. This suggests that the supervision process would not have prepared the doctoral students sufficiently to argue convincingly for the significance of their proposed research topic. This could have a negative impact on student self-esteem as doctoral students may begin to perceive themselves as failures, when this might not be the case, per se.

Another participant indicated that sometimes the supervisory panel/committee constitutes a problem for doctoral students, as shown below:

*...the area we experience problem is where you come out for oral defence or proposal...if there are extreme issues between the lecturers...they try to transfer these things to students (Isaac, 9a).*

For this participant, the challenge was not only with the interrogation and critiquing, that is common in defence presentations. The data show a situation where members of the supervisory panel sometimes turn the defence venue into an arena for conflict and rivalry. As a result, the presenting student becomes a victim and bears the brunt of the conflict. This means that some of the panel members (supervisors/academics) could deliberately become harsh towards a presenting student, by asking difficult and challenging questions that they would not otherwise have asked had the panel members been collegial, friendly and approachable. It seems that personality, power and ego take precedence over the knowledge creation process/or whatever the field requires. The implication is that the presenting students could receive detrimental or undeserving commentaries on their student research proposal or oral defence that could frustrate or traumatise them.

Another participant revealed similar experience with regards to the issue of conflict between panel members, thus:

*I had that experience when I did my pre-data presentation...there were arguments here and there... that, at times the supervisors do not help... They just wants to present you and count the number of students they have graduated, and in such circumstance students are at the mercy of other examiners (Moses, 13a).*

From the data presented here, the participant indicates that conflict between panel members sometimes arises due to premature defence, that is, when students are underprepared. The data show how some academics make allegations that other supervisors are more concerned with output (counting the number of students they graduate), instead of focusing on knowledge generation as a process. In other words, by alluding to the fact that other academics/supervisors are expedient, the panel members tend to question the integrity of those supervisors. This suggests that the panel presentation process is a vicious space as opposed to a supportive, developmental space and it is

likely to become even more antagonistic if the panel members believe that supervisors are being expedient. It also points to the level of collegiality and professionalism at play among the academics, as the perceived problem created by the supervisor is not addressed to the supervisor directly, but is rather debated/contested/fought through the unsuspecting doctoral student. The implication for doctoral students is that their work could be rejected by the panel in order that the panel can effectively attack their supervisors. As a result, valuable research that could contribute to the body of knowledge may potentially be missed.

Another participant revealed a variation in conception with regards to the cause of conflict between panel members, as follows:

*One of them [the panel members] said, some of these students will not really go to meet their supervisors or...do...corrections given...to...them appropriately, and they will be hurrying their supervisors to present them for defence and when they come, you will see that the supervisors will just be thrown off-balance... because...other examiners...from...other sections of the faculty will want see how much work the supervisees have done...that...made the supervisors to be comfortable to present them (Abel, 1a).*

The participant here reveals how panel members sometimes blame doctoral students for pressurising their supervisors to present them for defence, and probably because they are only interested in obtaining the certificate. But, the question is, how much power do students really hold as a tool to pressurise supervisors? Given the earlier analysis in my thesis, which indicated that doctoral student in this context are marginalised, it would not be out of place to argue that supervisors who claim to be pressurised by a doctoral student do so to excuse themselves for not providing proper guidance to their students.

While some of the participants revealed negative experiences during defence presentations, others revealed positive experiences, as shown in the following quotation:

*It is compulsory... So, I have been attending other peoples' defence, I don't miss it. So, when it was my turn I didn't have problem. Because those things I learnt really helped me...but you know there is no perfect work anywhere, there were still one or two things they corrected (Doris, 4b).*

The data here show that postgraduate students attend the defence presentations to observe and to listen to their colleagues' presentations. This gives doctoral students the opportunity to learn how valid arguments are presented to avoid the kind of mistakes that students make and how the supervisory panel critique students' work, give feedback, and give advice and/or give corrections to students. This practice, as shown in the data, enables doctoral student to become better prepared for their own defence presentations. This means that the participants consider the departmental practice, whereby, research students have access to attend defence sessions, as an important learning opportunity and as a valid support system for doctoral students.

A variation is revealed by another participant with regards to his encounters with the supervisory panel, as follows:

*My internal defence was so tough, in short they grilled me... But, I thank God because it helped me to work harder... I did not just stop at the corrections they ask me to effect, I took my time to look at all the matter they raised on that day and I later discovered many other things myself, before I could submit it finally for external defence. ... I might have had problem with my external defence, because, the man was so thorough (Kenneth, 11b).*

For this participant, the defence exercise was both overwhelming and empowering. The concern here relates to why the participant considered the exercise as gruelling as opposed to being a robust academic debate. From the data, it seems that the participant was underprepared for the defence and, as such, he might have received harsh comments from the panel. However, the data indicate that the participant was able to reflect and to learn from the experience. The participant probably reflected on the questions asked of him during the defence, the critiques, harsh comments, oral and written feedback from the supervisory panel, and he then might have used these to challenge himself towards improving and becoming better prepared for his external defence. This shows that the ability of a doctoral student to be open to criticism could evoke critical awareness of himself

and also the world around him. Here, the experience of internal defence awakens the participant to the need for him to be diligent and committed to his work, and it also awakens the consciousness of the absent-present reader of his thesis, who is the external examiner in this instance.

#### **5.2.4 Transacting with peers, colleagues and academics outside the university**

During the doctoral programme, doctoral students engage in informal interactions/relationships with their peers, colleagues and sometimes with academics outside their institutions. For all the participants, such kinds of relationships develop during the one-year coursework component of their programme, whereby, they meet regularly in formal classroom settings, as indicated in the quotation below:

*We don't meet regularly again as we use to meet during our coursework. So, if you need assistance from anybody now, you have to contact the person and make arrangement on how you will meet with him or her (Endurance, 5b).*

The data here show that the research component of the doctoral programme isolates students from their colleagues and peers but, based on informal relationships that are already established, most students find ways of connecting with and assisting each other. This shows that informal relationships could become strong and supportive in the student research context. In the excerpts below, one participant revealed an interesting way in which the supervisees develop and maintain supportive relationship with each other:

*...he has kept Mondays for PG students and that Monday you have to be...on time because he is really a disciplined man. When you come you write your name, it is first come first serve. ...every Monday he will be there. ...we liaise with ourselves as PhD students we interact because every Monday we meet in front of his office, so is a forum for seeing one another. ...we ask questions and help one another...We even have each other's phone numbers... (Doris, 4a).*

The data here show how the supervision arrangement made by a specific supervisor - in which the supervisor consults with his postgraduate students only on Mondays, provided a forum for his

students to develop an informal group. According to the participant, this forum enables the doctoral students to meet as would-be supervisors to share their academic concerns and burdens with each other and to then encourage each other. In this way, they seem to create a sense of group belonging with respect to each other. This shows that the doctoral student transaction in an informal social space with student peers and colleagues could contribute both to student academic wellbeing and student emotional wellbeing.

Similarly, some other participants revealed how they provided support for each other, thus:

*...we are all like our brother's keepers... Any time I come across something, may be some materials that are beneficial to me I share it with my friends, they also do the same thing to me. (Cecelia, 3b)*

*...What I have tried to do...is to follow links in the literature that I've downloaded or links provided by my colleagues... (James, 10a).*

*I communicate with other doctoral students in other universities, specifically university of 'D', to see if they can help me source for material. Sometimes I give them my e-mail address so that if they get any material they can send it to my e-mail (Moses, 13a).*

*...I use to...ask my fellow students (Kenneth, 11a).*

For all of these participants, their peers and colleagues were important sources of support in terms of sourcing for the literature for their student research. The data show that some of the participants not only wait to be helped by their colleagues, as they also position themselves to support others, by sharing valuable material and links to internet resources, with their colleagues. This shows how doctoral students build strong networks of peers that make invaluable contributions to their student research.

A variation can be seen in the following excerpt, with regards to how one of the participants developed an informal mentoring relationship with an academic outside the university:

*At a point I said... supervisor or no supervisor, I have to make this thing work for myself...What is important for me now is to develop myself and that is what I am doing. ...There is this prof that came to my department for sabbatical...in my workplace...I approached him and...we became close... He has really been very helpful to me. ...In fact even in my research work, I get more stuffs from him ... when he was to go for the conference that was the international conference...he asked if I can join him... I am happy I went (Benjy, 2b).*

Based on the data, the participant initiated an informal supervision arrangement with another established academic (a professor) outside of his university-assigned supervisor relationship. The professor, of his own volition, consented and this demonstrates his willingness to support the participant by being accessible, communicating freely and sharing his experiences with that participant. Thus, the participant believes that this personal informal supervision arrangement proved to be more valuable to him than the official supervision arrangement dictated by the university. It is likely that the informal nature of this relationship - where there are no issues of power play common in supervisor-supervisee relationship, allows for fruitful engagement between the two parties. As a result, an informal mentorship relationship developed. This suggests that when the supervision relationship is developed on the grounds of friendship, trust, collegiality and consensus, it would be more beneficial and rewarding to doctoral students.

From the foregoing, it seems that the informal kind of supervision was going on in a parallel manner to the formal supervision. This suggests that successful supervision experiences may probably not be dependent on any one of the social agents involved in the life of the doctoral student, but rather there is a variety of agencies, in various interactions with each other that influence the way that supervision enables/constrains epistemological and physical access and learning in doctoral education/research.

### **5.2.5 Influences of university/departmental context on doctoral student transaction in the social space**

The ability of the doctoral student to transact in the university/departmental social space is normally influenced by institutional structures and programmes of activities. The participants in the population sample in my student research thesis indicated that their institutions provide platforms for supervisees to transact in the university/departmental social space, as captured below:

*...they do organize programmes for us whenever there is need for that... the department or PG school is responsible for that... ...[defence] attendance is compulsory for all PG students. The idea is for us to learn from our colleagues and avoid making the same mistakes that other students have made... ...In fact, I have benefited a lot... (Doris, 4b).*

The data show that the department or the school of postgraduate studies of the institutions creates contexts to support doctoral students by organising seminars and workshops, and sometimes by making defence attendance mandatory for the doctoral students. Based on the data, the participants perceive these forums as enabling, in terms of providing an opportunity for them to learn from both students and supervisors, and to receive further guidance with regards to their theses. Therefore, in a way, the university/department is involved in the task of socialising doctoral research students in order to develop academic/professional identity. But, considering that some of the arrangements are compulsory, and not happening when doctoral students request it, means that it might only help with generic issues, instead of addressing specific needs of doctoral students who might be at various stages in their different fields.

Also, extenuating circumstances of the institution sometimes affect the ability of supervisees to operate in the university's social space. This view is captured in the experience of one of the participants with regards to interruption of her defence due to student unrest/strike:

*I finished my proposal early 2013 and I was warming up for my internal defence, if not for the problem we had in the university I would have completed it around June this year. So right now because of the closure of the university, because of the riot that students had*

*some weeks ago, I'm still waiting. When the school resumes, that will be done by the grace of God. ... .. You don't expect them to supervise students from their homes. As far as they are concerned, it is an opportunity to have a break and you cannot interrupt that. So everything is at stand still. (Cecelia, 3a, 3b)*

The data here show that the sudden closure of the university due to student protest halted the programmes of the entire university. This circumstance, according to the participant, did not only affect her defence which could not be held, but also resulted in her supervisor not being physically present at work. This doctoral student believes that her supervisor took advantage of this opportunity to be away from work. In other words, the supervisor simply withdrew her services and her supervision stopped even though postgraduate students were not on strike. Since doctoral students may feel powerless to request supervision during the time of disruption, it then means that they may be left to proceed without guidance, and that could break their research momentum. Obviously, the situation presented here is clearly beyond the control of doctoral students. I would, therefore, contend that if the institutions that are responsible for the quality of education do not introduce measures to enhance positive academic and non-academic experiences for students, the supervision relationships could be affected negatively.

Notwithstanding, another participant further shows the effect of such institutional extenuating circumstance on doctoral students, by noting:

*...we are the ones suffering it...paying school fees and all that... (Haman, 8b).*

As shown in the data, some of the implications for doctoral students are hardship, additional financial burden, and prolonged study periods. Despite these stressors, the institutions may not factor these circumstances into their programme of activities and they may still require doctoral students to complete their research within specified time frames.

### 5.3 Transacting in the personal space: Influences of personal social life on the supervision relationship

The findings in this study show that many factors which are peculiar to the personal lives of the participants contribute to the complexity of the supervision relationships. From the cases cited by the participants, most of the personal issues were not envisaged at the on-set of the supervision relationship and, sometimes, the issues are beyond the control of both the supervisor and the doctoral student. The following excerpt exemplifies how the participants experienced extenuating personal circumstances:

*...my only brother from my mother ran down from Jos [a northern state] with his kids due to crisis in the state. ... I had to take care of them with the wife. ... When I went to my supervisor, he was like 'others are moving and you are not moving'. I said sir, please something is holding me, a family problem that I cannot escape ... By August that year, a man came and said he wants to marry me. See me o! [Laughter] ...so we went to different places for a lot of interviews and there were lots of distractions (Doris, 4a).*

The participant here reveals how an unforeseen circumstance, which in this instance was a political crisis in the state displaced her brother's family. The participant, as shown in the data, felt a deep sense of obligation to secure the safety of her brother's family and because of her commitment to ameliorate this family challenge, her attention shifted away from her student research. As a result, the participant revealed that her supervisor compared her with other students and simply concluded that she was not making progress. That kind of comparison and comment about the participant's progress is an indication that the supervisor is either unaware of his doctoral student's plight, or did not care to enquire of her, before drawing the wrong conclusion. This shows that supervisors could be insensitive to doctoral students' personal circumstances, such that they develop a wrong perception about doctoral students. When that happens, the supervision relationship could be impacted negatively. Again, from the data, another personal circumstance indicated to the effect that the participant was initiating a marital relationship. Based on her view, the marital relationship placed different demands on her time and her physical ability to undertake her student research, and all of that seem to have altered her so-called 'normal circumstances' as a doctoral research student. This implies that when life-changing shifts, such as marriage, occur in the life of a doctoral

student, they change the situational context in which the student functions and this has a direct bearing on the supervision experience of that doctoral student.

Another participant indicated how personal job demand could impact doctoral students' learning experience, as follows:

*I registered in 2003/2004 second semester... As far back as then... I did my coursework quite alright... Thereafter because of the cumbersomeness of my... work I couldn't do my actual research work. It... was not the issue of my supervisor, I did not have time... that was the situation until 2009 when I got converted to academics in the middle of 2009. In 2010 I came to... pick up the work again to do my research work. So I would say effectively, I started in 2010 even though my reg. number is reading 2004 (Haman, 8a).*

Here, the participant from the population sample revealed how combining his job and study adversely affected his ability to focus on his study, and that resulted in halting his academic programme for more than five years. As an administrative staff running side-by-side with a part-time doctoral research studentship, the participant seems to give more attention to his job than to his PhD. It is likely that the participant is self-sponsored and depends on his salary as the main source of funding, and as such he had to give more priority to his job. Based on the data, the participant was only able to continue with his student research when he became a member of the academic staff. This suggests that there was more demand on his time when he was a non-academic staff member and his employers may not have given him consideration with regards to his study programme. Sometimes, employers do not support their employees in their acquiring additional degrees if such qualifications would not be of direct benefit to the organisation, and is solely for the personal gain of the employee. Notwithstanding, the participant's supervisor may still expect that the participant observes the agreed deadlines. This implies that holding a full-time or a part-time job places additional demands on doctoral students, and that could affect their supervision relationship.

In a somewhat similar manner another participant expressed his experience of personal challenge, thus:

*...between 2011 November to present time we have had series of screening, staff verification and whatever, which has led to some people's salary being stopped... Some had delay in salary payment because of omission, same name, or similar name...so, for that reason it affected me. [...] and at times they [my supervisors] sound warning to me that this programme is dragging for too long and is delaying... ...definitely, you know that as workers we are solely dependent on our salaries, anything that affects our salary will automatically affect every other thing about us. So, I just felt that, since I could no longer pay my school fees, the wisest thing for me to do at that point was to suspend my programme, and that was exactly what I did, until the matter was resolved in 2013 (Moses, 13b).*

For this participant, his experience relates to an unforeseen circumstance, which constitutes a financial crisis. The resulting effect of the financial problem, according to the participant, was that he could no longer pay his university registration fees and, consequently, he had to suspend the doctoral research programme. The participant reveals that his supervisors had felt compelled to issue cautionary messages to him. Although the participant understood his supervisors' warning, the circumstance seems to have been beyond his control, as he could do nothing about it until his employers could sort out his income issue. But, one may wonder why his university supervisors would react to the employer manner with respect to how they undertook this. One reason for that could be that the supervisors themselves were concerned that they would be held accountable to the university for the extended duration. Another reason could be that the participant was not able to communicate the nature of his financial problem convincingly to his supervisors. As such, the supervisors may have reacted based on the initial limited information/knowledge of the personal challenge that the doctoral student encountered. In the quotation below, this participant further revealed how his supervisors later became a huge source of support for him, and probably when they understood the nature of his personal challenge:

*...in fact sometimes...I make calls and...send text messages and I get responses from them... Sometimes they even call me...otherwise I think for what had happened overtime, probably I would have abandoned the program (Moses, 13a).*

From the data, the participant seems to express satisfaction with the open communication line between himself and his supervisors, in which either party in the relationship could, potentially, initiate contact. It is notable, therefore, that the supervisors were not just waiting for the participant to contact them, as they also initiated the contact. According to the participant, his supervisors' concern for his wellbeing was a major motivation in his decision to persist in pursuing the doctoral research programme. This means that when supervisors incorporate issues of affect awareness in the supervision relationship, they are likely to encourage better throughput in addition to making the supervision experience more fruitful and beneficial for them.

A variation is revealed in the excerpt below, which indicates that the supervisors' personal life also filters into the supervision space and impacts the supervision experience of doctoral students:

*At a point she [my supervisor] was indisposed, that also led to delaying my work. ...because she was not sound, she was sick she could not attend to me. [...] there are so many things I wasn't certain about, but while I was waiting and praying for her to recover, I kept doing the much I could on my own (Kenneth, 11a, b).*

Here, the participant revealed that at a certain stage in his student research, his supervisor became ill, and she was unable to carry out her supervisory role. The participant believes that his supervisor's unavailability to make input and give feedback and to provide support resulted in a lack of direction and uncertainty for him. Based on the data, there seems to be no alternative arrangement by the department/faculty to bridge the gap created by the supervisor's absence (due to the unexpected illness), in order that the participant could still progress with his student research. This suggests that the university may not have put in place any system to deal with unforeseen circumstances, in order to be responsive to the need of the doctoral students. The implication of this for doctoral students is that their progress will not only be halted, but they may also lose focus or become de-motivated and discouraged.

Similarly, another participant reported his experience when his supervisor passed away, as follows:

*...I noticed that she had just extinct, so that is the painful aspect of it all, it was very traumatic. [...] well, I know that it has affected my study at least for now pending when the department re-assigns me to some other supervisor, but no two individuals are alike, even the Siamese twin (Abel, 1a).*

The data here show how the sudden demise of the participant's supervisor resulted in a traumatic experience for him as a doctoral student. There also appears to be a level of uncertainty exhibited by the participant, with regards to being re-assigned a new supervisor. Usually, when a supervisee is re-assigned to a new supervisor, the supervisee is less likely to be aware of the research orientation and supervision style/approach of the new supervisor. The supervisee may also be unsure about whether the new supervisor would understand the focus of his/her study or whether s/he would have to reshape his topic and several other issues that may subsequently create uncertainty. This clearly shows the dilemma of a doctoral orphan. The new supervisor may also experience some tension in dealing with the psychological state of mind of the doctoral research student as an orphan and the thesis task that is taken-over half-way through his/her student research programme. This shows that personal life situations of both the doctoral students and the supervisors could impact supervision experience in ways that are not predictable. Although these situations exist, in most cases they are not taken into consideration by the supervisor, as they appear to be not factored into the supervisory policy guidelines.

## **5.4 A Diagrammatic representation of category two: supervision as transacting in the social space**

Table 4 below depicts the participants' ways of experiencing research supervision in category two – supervision as transacting in the social space. Similar to diagram in table 3, the 'what aspect' is presented first, with the different experiences that made up the category on the right-hand-side of the table while, the 'how aspect' which represents the impacts on those experiences on participants' learning and development were presented at the lower part of the table (on the right hand side of the table).

**Table 4. Participants' experience of supervision as transacting in the social space, and the impact on participants' learning and development**

(Adapted from Reddy, 2010, p. 78)

<b>WHAT ASPECT (REFERENTIAL)</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>WAYS OF EXPERIENCING RESEARCH SUPERVISION</b>
	Supervision as transacting in the social space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants' conception of supervision as transacting in the social</li> <li>• Participants' transaction with university assigned-supervisors</li> <li>• Participants' transaction with group/co-supervisors</li> <li>• Transacting in the defence committee/panel space</li> <li>• Transacting with peers and colleagues, and other academics outside the university</li> <li>• Influences of university/departmental context on students' transaction in the social space</li> <li>• Transacting in the personal social space and its influence on supervision relationship</li> </ul>
<b>HOW ASPECT (STRUCTURAL)</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>IMPACTS ON PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</b>
	Supervision as transacting in the social space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of agency</li> <li>• Exposure to well-established professionals and academics provides learning support, gaining more insight and development of confidence</li> <li>• Defence attendance offers learning opportunities for participants to learn how valid arguments are presented</li> <li>• Deeper level of learning, as opposed to superficial learning</li> <li>• Frustration or trauma due to detrimental or undeserving commentaries on participants' proposal/oral defence</li> <li>• Rejection by the panel of valuable research that could contribute to the body of knowledge</li> <li>• Indifferent attitude of supervisors to participants' personal context limits the ability of participants to learn</li> </ul>

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of category two – supervision as transacting in the social space. The finding shows that guidance with regards to thesis development is not limited to that guidance which a single supervisor provides to a doctoral student. On the contrary, in the current research, great learning opportunities were explored through the participants' engagement with group/co-supervisors, supervisory committee, peers/colleagues and other academics outside the universities. The chapter found that the participants' transactions are of two types – organic transacting (where the supervisor connects students to key resources), and forced transacting (where the supervisor neglects supervisees, probably on the assumption that doctoral students have the resources and skills to network with the existing community of scholars on their own). Based on the finding, the participants' ability to transact in the university's social space and the quality of learning that occurred was affected by variables such as: supervision approach adopted by the department/supervisors, supervisors' mode of consultation with the doctoral students, power issues between doctoral students and supervisors, conflict of interest between co-supervisors and academics (supervisory panel). Although the finding showed that institutions/departments do organise programmes/activities to support doctoral students, extenuating institutional circumstances (strike action) and the supervisor's personal extenuating circumstances (supervisor's demise) that may have not been factored into supervision arrangements still impacted student ability to progress in a student research programme. Furthermore, the chapter found that the academic lives of doctoral students are not isolated from other aspects of their lives, and therefore the personal world and the social world of the doctoral students both interfere with their studies. The supervisory relationship and the doctoral students' ability to learn was found to be negatively affected when the supervisors lack concern and are indifferent to the doctoral students' personal life circumstances.

# **Chapter 6**

## **Student yearning for a positive supervision relationship**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) discussed the analysis and findings in category one – supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship; and category two – supervision as transacting in the social space. This is the final data analysis chapter in my student research thesis, and it presents the analysis and findings of category three, which entails student yearning for a positive relationship. The chapter describes the varied ways in which the participants expressed their yearning for a positive supervision relationship. It focuses on the way in which the relationship between the participants and the supervisors developed; the investment that the supervisors and the participants make in the relationship; the participants' conception of the impact of the supervisors' pastoral care and support; and how the supervisors encourage the doctoral students' self-efficacy. Furthermore, the chapter discusses issues of power in seemingly positive supervision relationships and describes gift-giving practices as ways in which students express their yearning for a positive supervision relationship. A diagrammatic representation of the participants' experience of supervision in category three and the outcome space for all three categories of description analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 is presented, followed by the conclusion.

## 6.2 Participants' expression of yearning for a positive relationship

The experience of supervision expressed in this category is one of yearning for a positive supervision relationship, and the participants indicate this yearning in diverse ways. One of the participants expressed her yearning, thus:

*...how I wish I had somebody... I wanted somebody that we can work together. I believe it is team-work, not one man's work... (Naomi, 14a).*

The participant here reveals her deep yearning for a cooperative and collaborative supervision relationship, which is based on her understanding of research supervision and knowledge production as a joint enterprise between the supervisee and the supervisor. But, from the participant's expression of disappointment, it seems her expectation was not met; and her supervisor probably holds a divergent view at that moment. This shows that the participants do have expectations from their supervisors, whether they are clearly transmitted to the research student or not, which may not be realised and that could be de-motivating for the doctoral students.

In line with this, other participants expressed their views, thus:

*...in most cases, what you expect is not what you get... (Cecelia, 3a.).*

*The truth is that things are not done the way they are supposed to be done... we just pray and hope for things to get better (Isaac, 9b).*

The participants here suggest that unrealised expectation from the supervisors is a very common experience since doctoral students only have an 'imagined' ideal relationship which does not necessarily materialise. Probably, issues of expectations between the doctoral students and the supervisors were not discussed and aligned from the on-set of the supervision relationship. Therefore, when the doctoral students' expectations are not met, the data show that the doctoral student will simply look forward to some sort of divine/external intervention in order to alter their situation/plight, i.e., the non-proactive stance of possible negative ruminations on the part of the research student. This suggests that both the supervisors and the institutional system in which the doctoral students find themselves do not empower the doctoral students to be able to assert themselves in the supervision relationship. Furthermore, the participants' yearning for divine intervention, as revealed in the data, is an indication that the doctoral student may have lost

confidence in their ability to exert some level of influence in shaping the supervision space; i.e., a depressed situation for the doctoral student. This shows that the marginalisation of doctoral students could have a negative impact, both on the personal self and the scholarly self that they aim at develop.

A variation in the way in which some of the participants expressed their yearning for a positive supervision experience, was captured in the following quotation:

*Of course, I will prefer to choose my supervisor... I will go for someone I can easily relate with, someone who is friendly and understanding... and also committed in terms of giving me timely feedback... (Haman, 8a).*

The above data reflect the view of eighty percent of the participants in the population sample of the study, with regards to preference for choosing their own supervisors. This is contrary to the departmental/institutional practice that excluded students from the supervisor nomination process, as discussed earlier in Chapter 4. This shows the participants' yearning for inclusion and having a voice, which most institutions may not be aware of if they do not solicit the opinions/views of doctoral students in nominating their supervisors. Also, looking at the supervisor qualities that are revealed in the data – friendliness, understanding and commitment to providing prompt feedback show that the participants focus on the affective domain of care and consideration rather than the supervisor competence. In other words, the doctoral students are looking for humane and conscientious supervisors whom they can rely, on as opposed to disciplinary experts. This shows that the doctoral students expect their emotional needs to be considered in the supervision relationship and the fulfilment of that factor could improve their overall student research experience.

Another variation in the way in which the participants expressed their yearning for a positive supervision relationship, can be seen in the quotation below which captured a supervisee-supervisor conversation, thus:

*One day, he [my supervisor] said to me, 'I don't think you are going to get an A in this work'... I said, Prof, 'how can a father like you talk to his daughter like that?' Please say*

*something positive to me... So, he started laughing and said 'you will get an A'... and I said amen... (Doris, 4a).*

From the presented data, the participant was disappointed that her supervisor did not have positive expectations of her, which is evident in his negative comment concerning the outcome of her study. This is very demeaning and discouraging, as there is no conversation about the supervisor assessing what the needs of the doctoral student are, and then the supervisor applying appropriate supervision strategies, so that the doctoral student might acquire high-level competences. Notwithstanding, the participant seems to be asking her supervisor to show some faith in her student research ability and to trust that she, as a student researcher, will achieve results on the grounds of her assumed ability to make positive comments. This suggests that doctoral students value positive, supportive feedback/encouragement, as they want to know that their supervisors believe in their abilities to be successful and achieve at a high-level of research studentship, instead dispensing negative criticism. Also, looking at the way in which the participant communicated with her supervisor, in addressing the supervisor as a father figure and taking a daughter figure position, in order to be able to convince him of her argument. Clearly, power differential exists between the supervisor and the doctoral student. Therefore, to ensure a positive supervision relationship with the supervisors, doctoral students are likely to devise ways with which to navigate the power issues that are evident in the research data of this thesis.

In line with the above view, some of the participants revealed how they related with their powerful supervisors in their bid to ensure a positive supervision relationship, thus:

*...you have to be going there on and on... At least in the morning you say good morning sir then you go. If there is something for you, then he will tell you what to do... (Naomi, 14a).*

*...they appear not to be cooperating with students. So, sometimes we begin to think, do they want to see our faces every now and then? ... ...students come from their working places to this place, many people have lost their lives as they travel, but is like these supervisors don't care (Isaac, 9a).*

The participants here revealed that they are saddled with the responsibility of pacing up and down within their supervisors' offices to gain their attention, and be instructed in what they need to do.

This reveals a very hierarchical relationship, where the doctoral student waits to be instructed, as opposed to a high-level type of research student taking ownership and showing autonomy. Also, from the data, it seems that the supervisors call for supervision meetings solely for the official record, and then they simply go through the motions and really do not provide substantive engagement. As such, the doctoral students feel that by paying constant courtesy visits to their supervisors, they could indirectly remind those supervisors of their dutiful work, so that they do not forget about the doctoral student completely. This seems to be a sort of unwritten rule for getting the attention of the supervisors. From the data, it appears that part-time doctoral students who shuttle between work and study, and travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres to go to consult with their supervisors, spend their time and money and often risk their lives in the African-travel- setting process are the worst affected by such a disturbing rule. Notably, they are likely to be neglected, and could go without guidance if they are not able to pay constant courtesy visits to their supervisors. When that happens, it would elongate the time to complete the student research programme. As such, the participants perceive their supervisors as having a total disregard for their personal contexts, and no sense of appreciation of the harsh realities of the student's life. The implication of the participants' perceptions of their supervisors as being insensitive, distant and disconnected, is that they may not be able to trust their supervisors and that would affect the relationship that might exist between them. Also, the bid to earn the supervisors' favour could degenerate into potential bribery and corruption practices that are unethical, and that could affect the quality of thesis that the supervisees produce.

### **6.2.1 Participants' conception about developing a positive relationship with supervisors**

The relationship between the supervisors and the doctoral students in this research, happens to be a continuous one which extends from undergraduate and/or masters' study to the doctoral research programme. The biographic information provided by one of the participants, in the excerpts below, captured the view, thus:

*...I had my first degree at [University 'A'] and that was completed in 2005. ...my second degree was in the same university ... ..was completed on the first December, 2008. I started my doctoral study 2010/2011 session... I have completed coursework. Presently, I'm doing my research work...with the same supervisors... (Naomi, 14a).*

The data presented here reflect the educational trajectory of all the participants in this research. It shows that the participants are already conversant with the departmental and institutional contexts in which they undertake their student research programmes. The implication is that they would have a smooth transition to doctoral student research programmes, as captured in the excerpt below:

*...when I was doing my masters she picked interest in my work... ....So when I came back for my PhD, she...was the one who advise me on the area to work on... ....much later when the work took its full swing and almost winding up...she became more interested in... talking about my personal issues. ....we became more or less mother and son at the end of the day... but at the beginning she was really business-like, no personal issues... At first, if I don't have the means to do some things she may not bother ... but later she would ...she will even give me some money... (Gabriel, 7a).*

Having been supervised by the same supervisor during a master's degree, the participant here revealed that it was easy for him to agree with his supervisor and subsequently quickly settle on a research topic for his doctoral research programme. This means that an established positive supervision relationship with the supervisor is likely to endure and continue into future studies. Notwithstanding, the participant also revealed the supervision approach/style that his supervisor adopted at varying stages of his study. As shown in the data, the supervisor seemed to adopt a strictly task-focused approach at the initial stage of the supervision relationship. Probably, the supervisor did not want relationship building to come in the way of the thesis production at that stage. That may explain why the supervisor only became solicitous, caring and was effecting financial assistance/support towards the completion stage of the student research programme. As a result, the participant developed a deep sense of belonging, which he referred to as a 'mother-son'-type of bonding. This suggests that the kind of relationship that could exist between doctoral students and their supervisors is determined by the stage at which the doctoral students are inserted

into their student research. The linear way in which supervision relationship is believed by the participants to progress/develop - from being thesis-focused to being more interpersonally focused, is also an indication that the supervisors are less likely to respond to the personal and emotional needs of the doctoral students, at the initial stage of their programme. The implication is that the doctoral students may feel uncared-for and they could abandon the programme.

A variation in the way in which the relationship developed between the participants and the supervisors, is captured in the excerpt below:

*... I came back again for my PhD... I am now surprised at the relationship. ...he is no more as harsh as he used to be. ...the relationship is so fine now that I am embarrassed whether he is the same man that would tell me all kinds of things in those days. ...he said they give certificate in character and in learning. So he will...shake you to really know your character. ...He was challenged at my attitude...the way I reacted to his harshness was what embarrassed him ...because I wasn't shaking... (Doris, 4a).*

While the participant in an earlier quotation seems to enjoy a positive relationship in the supervision relationship of her doctoral degree, the participant in the above transcript reveals a case of intimidation and harassment and abuse of power during her masters' degree. This participant now shows her amazement regarding the improvement of her supervision relationship with the supervisor. Although the participant seems to attribute this to her strength of character, confidence and resilience, several other factors may have played out. One reason for the improved relationship could be that due to the extended period of the ongoing relationship (from masters' degree to doctoral research studentship), both the participant and her supervisor may have gained a level of understanding about each other's behaviour, style of supervision/learning, expectations, and so on. It is also possible that the participant has become matured in dealing with critiques, as is also indicated by one of the other participants, thus:

*...actually, it was later that we were able to understand his wisdom in interfering so to say in our submissions (James, 10a).*

The participant has revealed here that, initially, he lacked an understanding with respect to receiving feedback from his supervisor; as he simply resented his supervisor. Hence, if his

supervisor was not able to diagnose and address the problem, it may eventually affect their relationship. This clearly shows that the doctoral students' maturity in knowledge contributed to the development of positive supervision relationship.

### **6.2.2 Participants' conception that pastoral care and support from supervisors promote a positive supervision experience**

Although, from the interview data, a positive supervision experience seems to be rare, for most of the participants in this study, there were instances where the participants indicated that they experienced satisfaction in their supervision relationships. In the quotation below, the participant revealed how pastoral care and support from the supervisors enhance positive supervision experience, thus:

*They [my supervisors] call me to encourage me... that 'your work is good...whatever it is, always show your face... one or two words of advice will be given to you that will encourage you...' They have been doing that ...otherwise I think for what had happened overtime, probably I would have abandoned the program... (Moses, 13a).*

The participant here revealed that his supervisors provided pastoral care and support for him through regular communication. In this way, the participant revealed that he was motivated and encouraged to continue with his student research programme, despite personal challenges that impeded his study. This shows that the supervisors took responsibility for the wellbeing of the supervisee. Notably, the supervisors' concerns may also be because they felt accountable for the supervisee's progress. But, the data clearly show how the humane character displayed by the supervisors could promote fruitful and beneficial supervision experience for the doctoral student and, thus, encourage better throughput in the student research programme.

Some of the participants added another dimension to how pastoral care and support by the supervisor could promote positive supervision relationship/experience for doctoral students, thus:

*...she was also studying the work, sometimes in the night after reflection, she would call me in the morning or in the night and say err remember to come and meet me tomorrow because... I have seen a work that has been done in this area and there is one problem that can be tied to this work... So she is been very helpful so to speak... (Gabriel, 7a).*

*...he doesn't have the time...despite that...he does his own part, so that we can move forward... I know that if I request [for literature] and he has them, he will give me. (Endurance, 5a)*

According to these participants, their supervisors showed care and concern for them by investing their time and energy in the development of their theses. This entails assisting doctoral students with resources, reading several drafts produced by the students, and providing prompt feedback to enable the doctoral students to progress with their studies. Clearly, the doctoral students value a supervisor who willingly provides support and responds to their needs, and they seem to consider such a relationship to be positive. But, the level of involvement of the supervisors, as revealed in the data, raises concerns with regards to the issue of ownership of the thesis. This points to the tension between balancing guidance provided by the supervisors and the level of autonomy that the doctoral students are expected to exercise.

A similar experience was revealed by one of the participants who seems to have an exceptionally satisfactory supervision experience, as follows:

*They give me their time, sometimes they support me when I need finance ...they direct me, they encourage and whatever I'm looking for, if is related to my work they motivate me. I have observed that some people stay more than fifteen years doing PhD and this is my third year and I'm planning to even round up this year by God's grace, so if people are doing it for over fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and even twenty years doing PhD, and you are doing it within three years, you have to say that these people are really working... (Luke, 12a).*

In the transcript, this participant reveals how his supervisor views his role beyond simply being a disciplinary expert, as he has also taken a pastoral role upon himself. The participant further indicates that lack of care and support from supervisors account for students' prolonged stay on

the doctoral programme which, according to him, takes more than fifteen years in some cases. This excessively long duration of doctoral studies raises concerns about the relevance of the study at such a late date of completion. This is so because when students stay for long periods on a programme, whereby, their literature would have become obsolete, and the methodology might have developed better ways of carrying out analysis. As a result, students may have to rework their theses many times in their field of inquiry. This also draws attention to issues of resource utilisation which relates to how universities ensure effective utilisation of personal, institutional as well as national resources.

### **6.2.3 Positive supervision relationship as encouraging supervisees' self-efficacy**

Generally, the doctorate is not only seen as a process of thesis development, as it is also seen as a process of self-development, whereby doctoral students develop their confidence to engage in independent intellectual work. One of the participants revealed an occasion whereby her supervisor encouraged her self-efficacy at the initial stage of her supervision relationship, thus:

*Well, at that stage we worked together, that's the truth... He is full of ideas and I am full of ideas. So, for instance, when we bring a particular topic we put heads together, we discuss it at length, we make arguments over it because, for me to bring up a particular topic I know what I want to get out of that topic, he has his own view. So by the time we marry the two, it is like a kind of a friendly discussion... ...you know we are together in the deal, ...at the end of the day if I did well he also did well..., because is a joint job. So we make sure that before we arrive at...the topic... we just kind of dissect it... (Favour, 6a).*

The data here provide relevant insight as to how self-efficacy was encouraged at the initial stage of settling on the research topic. According to the participant, settling on the research topic was not a one-sided deliberation. On the contrary, it was achieved through extensive discussion and giving and receiving feedback between the supervisor and that participant. This is an indication that while the participant was very assertive, the supervisor was not only open to dialogue and

debate, but also he had a lot of faith in the doctoral student as he respected her ideas, and he could trust her judgement. Therefore, the supervisor encouraged the voice of the doctoral student to be given prominence, at least at that stage. The data show that for this participant the whole PhD process is a joint enterprise in which the supervisor is, in a way, affected by her success or otherwise. As such, according to the transcript, she seems quite satisfied with the synergetic mutually beneficial relationship between her and her supervisor, and as aforementioned, at least at that initial stage. This points to the role of respect and trust in engendering research student self-efficacy in the supervisory relationship.

One of the participants further supports this conception, by noting:

*...she didn't present herself to be so superior or may be a kind of eh... despotic, no. She wasn't tyrannical, she was so friendly...she has that kind of cordiality and democratic system, and she maintains that kind of leadership style with every student (Abel, 1a).*

For this participant from the research population, his supervisor's approach to supervision was not autocratic or dominant in any way. Unlike the aforementioned dominant supervisors who felt less secured by the assertiveness of their students, the supervisor in this case seems to be affectionate and cooperative, and that made it possible for democratic engagement to occur between the supervisor and his doctoral students, as shown in the data. This demonstrates that when supervisors recognise doctoral students, as when speaking on their subject, they are likely to allow them to have a voice in the supervision relationship, and by doing so, they could foster student self-efficacy.

A variation in the way in which the participants experienced the supervisor's encouragement of self-efficacy, can be seen in the quotation that follows:

*He advised me, ... ' why don't you go and read...go to library ...read so that you can be exposed'... so, I did that and... my interest now deepened in another area, so I now got a topic and brought it to him and he approved. He also liked the topic and said I should go*

*and start writing ... he doesn't have the time...despite that...he does his own part so that we can move forward (Endurance, 5a).*

For this participant, her supervisor seems to encourage her to develop self-efficacy by adopting both a challenging strategy and a supporting strategy. Challenge, is in the sense that the supervisor did not do the work for her, but the supervisor did expose her to reading, so that she would be able to identify her area of research interest. Support, is in the sense that the supervisor directed the research student to where she could find help, that is, by simply directing her to the library. In so doing, the doctoral student revealed that she was able to deepen her knowledge in her area of interest and was provided with a researchable topic. This indicates how supervisors could promote identity formation by exposing their supervisees to the literary works that have been carried out by other authorities in their field.

#### **6.2.4 Positive supervision relationship as a joint effort between participants and supervisors**

While most of the participants in the population sample perceive the role of supervisors as being central in achieving a positive supervision relationship, some of the participants indicated that achieving a positive supervision experience is not solely dependent on the supervisors' effort. On the contrary, a positive supervision experience is a result of joint efforts between supervisors and the doctoral students, as indicated in the following excerpt:

*...in some cases...after the close of work ...we would sit down...for about two hours or three hours... she's been there for me to the extent that ... I seize that opportunity to seek for clarification... but the important thing is that...it was because I opened up to be helped. Now, if I didn't create that forum she would have just made it formal ... Sometimes is not even the project [thesis] issue itself... I was also writing papers on those concepts, and I needed to understand...those concepts ... so we were writing papers with her while the project was still going on.... After some time...she asked me to assist some of her masters' students... ...So, I was helping her to supervise them... (Gabriel, 7a).*

The data here show how the participant took the initiative to arrange for additional/informal supervision with his supervisor, and the supervisor also accepted to sacrifice/invest her time in providing the needed support. The data further show that the relationship grew to the point where the supervisor could delegate some of her supervisory roles/responsibilities to the participant (to supervise her masters' students). This means that the supervision relationship can be mutually beneficial both to the supervisor and the doctoral student. It also indicates how supervisors could mentor doctoral student to take on academic roles. But, most importantly, the data show that the doctoral student's commitment and assertiveness was key in enabling him to maximise his learning opportunities in the supervisory relationship. These include the development of capabilities through writing, co-authoring, and broader career development. This means that cooperation and understanding between the supervisors (mentors) and the supervisees (mentees) play roles in promoting a positive supervision relationship.

Two other participants shared similar views with regards to the efforts made by the supervisors and the doctoral students to ensure positive supervision relationship, thus:

*...He noticed that I am hard working... but... I didn't know that I can turn them into papers... So, he guided me, he showed me some of the work he was doing...and from there I was able to write... I published two journals... (Doris, 4b).*

*...I think I told you that I normally meet with them at the office, at home, on the main road and other places... So, they gave me encouragement. ... ..and they are actually impressed by what I have been able to achieve within a short space of time... (Luke, 12a).*

The participants here felt nurtured when their supervisors valued their efforts and were also committed to assisting them with their writing work and their publications. One of the participants revealed how her supervisor encouraged her to publish by discussing his own writing and, probably, exposing her to the works of other academics. This means that supervisors could foster the personal growth of the doctoral students, as well as promoting the forging of the professional identity of the doctoral students by applying the appropriate strategies. Also, the data seem to

indicate that the doctoral students' personal capital (dedication, diligence, commitment to their studies, etc.) will come into play, in terms of getting easy access to the supervisors and guidance from those supervisors. It is not unusual for the supervisors to focus more attention on students who are hardworking, as that could enable them to complete their student research on time. Hence, it means that the level of support that the doctoral students receive from their supervisors could also be determined by the doctoral students' own commitment to their studies, and that would invariably impact on the supervisory relationship.

A variation in the way in which the participant revealed how joint effort between supervisors and doctoral students enhances positive supervision relationship, can also be seen in the quotation below:

*...I decided I was not going to abandon the work... ...I have been communicating with them [my supervisors] since my predicament started, and each time I call they keep on encouraging me and praying for me... ... which has really helped... ...So, I didn't abandon it (Moses, 13a).*

In this case, the participant shows self-determination to continue with his study despite his personal challenge. But, this self-determination was also supported through sustained communication with his supervisors and by supervisor pastoral care and supervisor support. Thus, empathy on the part of the supervisor may have fostered the resilience exhibited by the doctoral student and, consequently, the courage to persist on the programme. Notably, the level of understanding shared between the supervisor and the doctoral student, as expressed in the data, is likely to result in a positive supervisory relationship.

### **6.3 Issues of power inherent in positive supervisory relationships**

Issues of power in the supervision relationship have come through in the supervision experiences revealed by the participants from the population sample of this thesis. This section further uncovers some forms of power that exist in the supervision relationships which the participants consider

positive/satisfactory. In the quotations below, the metaphors which the participants use to describe their supervision relationship are suggestive of this conception:

*...she became more interested in... talking about my personal issues. ...So, we became more or less mother and son at the end of the day... (Gabriel, 7a).*

*He tries to make sure that he is not the one delaying me ... I think it is more like a father-daughter thing... (Endurance, 5a).*

*I can say that the relationship is cordial...But we are not equals at all... (Naomi, 14a).*

*Will I say father or friend? ...they take me as part of them... (Luke, 12a).*

From the data presented here, the participants view their supervision relationship as positive when their supervisors become supportive and show concern about their personal and academic needs. Apart from one of the participants, who seems to indicate that his relationship with his supervisors was built more on a comradeship of equals compared to the rest of the population sample, who had used bonding descriptions such as: father-son, father-daughter, mother-son and other metaphors, to describe their relationship, and these latter descriptions suggest that there will always be co-related issues of power. But, the data here show that sometimes issues of power turn out to be a positive factor. However, if the relationship between the doctoral students and the supervisors becomes too maternal, it may also present problems of attachment, autonomy, independence, and also ownership.

Another participant succinctly captured power issues that are inherent in a seemingly positive supervision relationship, thus:

*I think the experience was nice because it was double-edged. It was nasty on one part because there were times that... I needed guidance... so that I can go and do the work. ...she will apparently leave room for gap.... But then, later-on when I come back she will say no, this is what you should do. So ... you are in a dilemma, not because the person is not prepared to help you but, that spirit of 'let me be business-like' occupies the supervisor's heart. ... So, it made me to go into wild reading which I think is good ... for my personal growth (Gabriel, 7a).*

The participant here described a scenario in which his supervisor, whom he sees as supportive at times, was providing little or no guidance. While this could be a way in which the supervisor gradually weans the participant away from dependence, the participant conceives of it as a horrendous way in which his supervisor exercises her authority/power over him. This means that the supervisor probably wants to gain recognition for his expert knowledge and position from the participant. To achieve that, the supervisor seems to deliberately withhold critical information from the participant and allows him to struggle along, before providing guidance. The implication, as revealed in the data, is both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that the participant had to immerse himself in his study and in the search for knowledge. The negative implication is that the participant seems to lack direction, and was unable to channel his effort towards reading the relevant material to be able to make quick progress with his student research. This means that his student research progress may have been impeded.

A variation in the way that participants' expressions suggest that power issues exist in a positive supervision relationship, can be seen in the narration of a participant who had challenges with his job (non-salary payment), as in the following transcript:

*...they keep on encouraging me and praying for me. But, at times they sound warning to me that this program is dragging for too long... that... “...in your set, one person has finished... and you are on the waiting. The set after you, that’s the third set, they are progressing... they have even proposed and some of them are now in the field collecting data.” So, please...come up... (Moses, 13a).*

The participant here revealed that when he had financial challenges, his supervisors motivated him through their pastoral care, support, and prayers. The issue of prayer suggests that the supervisors subscribe to the belief of calling on a transcendental force that supposedly controls everything, which is almost a psychological reassurance that all will be well if one simply commits to regular prayer. But, at the same time, the participant revealed that his supervisors sometimes challenged him by issuing cautionary messages to him and compared him with his colleagues, who are making progress in their studies, while he is not making good progress. Given that universities impose timeframes for the doctoral research period, it is possible that the supervisors are concerned about how the inability of the participant to progress would impact on their jobs as academics; hence the

participant was being cautioned. But, the way in which the supervisors compared the participant with his colleagues, could have both positive and negative effects on the participant. It is positive in the sense that he may be challenged to also increase his commitment and dedication to his study. On the contrary, the comparison may have a negative effect on the participant, as he may develop a negative self-perception; which could limit his academic engagement. It may also engender anger to the point where the supervisor-supervisee relationship becomes strained.

## **6.4 Gift-giving as a way for participants to express yearning for a positive supervision relationship**

The participants in the population sample of this research, are of the conviction that the practice of gift-giving to supervisors for favours is a common place practice in the business education programme in their respective Nigerian universities. Although gift-giving seems to be an unacceptable practice in most of the institutions, and thus constitutes a covert practice, there are clear indications in the interview transcript data which suggest that gift-giving from the doctoral student to the supervisor could simply be an expression of the participants' yearning for a positive supervision relationship. The various conceptions held by the participants with regards to gift-giving are discussed in detail in the sections that follow.

### **6.4.1 Gift-giving as a covert practice**

The following participant statement about gift-giving from the doctoral student to the supervisor, supports the conception that it is a covert practice that is not necessarily approved by the university in which it is practiced:

*They can call it gift or whatever, my dear, the truth remains, it is bribe. It is even shameful when it is happening among people that call themselves intellectuals. Let me give an example with my school, sometimes when we have meeting, I use to raise some of these issues there. Then some of our lecturers started saying e-he-n! You mean this kind of thing*

*is happening here? You need to see how they were just pretending. But nobody can claim he doesn't know or at least hear about what lecturers are doing here. They collect money from students and all those things...It is even worst when it comes to the supervision of a thing. I think the problem is that, nobody wants people to point at him or her, that, 'this is the person that made his or her colleagues lose their jobs'; so that, they will not set the person up. ...And that is why I told you that, I like your study. If you can come up with some recommendations on how to deal with some of these things, it will help (Doris, 4b).*

From the data presented here, gift-giving practices in supervision relationships is not only illegal, but also demeaning to the supervisors, who have attained higher levels in academia and then condescend themselves with illicit practices. The participant laments the fact that some academics/supervisors in her institution feign ignorance of this practice, despite its high prevalence. She, however, reveals that the supervisors that feign ignorance do so for fear of intimidation, labelling and/or set-up by some of the supervisors (probably the majority) who may have themselves been benefiting from the illicit practices, and as such they support the practice of gift-giving. This means that although gift-giving seems to be commonly practiced in the supervision space in the business education programme (i.e., where the data for this study were gathered), it is still a hidden practice and academics dare not talk about it publicly. Thus, the participant expressed concern as to how this hidden practice could be exposed. This means that gift-giving to the supervisor (i.e., bribery) has negative implications for supervision practices.

#### **6.4.2 Gift-giving as a culture-driven practice**

One of the conceptions that the participants held in the interviews with regards to a gift-giving practice in supervision, as stated above, is captured in the excerpt below:

*You know that giving is part of our culture, and normally, when you travel and come back, people, especially those who are close to you expect things from you. And as an individual, you see it as something you need to do, to make people happy you know. We normally feel that, at least one should buy something, even if it is bread.... So, students can also feel the same way, they could buy some things, just to say 'sir, I got this for you' (Oshua, 15b).*

From the data, it transpires that gift-giving by doctoral students to supervisors seems to be presented as a culture-driven practice, whereby, doctoral students make an attempt at not meeting with their supervisors while being empty-handed, whenever they return from their journeys; i.e., doctoral students feel obliged to present gifts to their supervisors. Notably, therefore, this may be a normal practice in the Nigerian society, as indicated by the participant. But, with regards to supervision, the participant's view about gift-giving by doctoral students to supervisors raises some suspicion as to whether there are truly no hidden motives behind the gifts that doctoral students offer to the supervisors. Arguably, it is unlikely that doctoral students would be explicit about why they present gifts to their supervisors. Doctoral students could present gifts as a way of pulling their supervisors into a relationship and, thus, doctoral students expect a reciprocal investment, in other ways. Hence, it is likely that the participant here downplayed how doctoral students and/or supervisors could abuse the act/art of gift-giving in the doctoral student-supervisor relationship. The next conception about gift-giving sheds light on the viewpoint presented here.

### **6.4.3 Gift-giving as a student methodology for manipulating the education system**

The above conception is captured in the utterance of one of the participants, thus:

*Sincerely speaking I don't do that. ...umm, looking at it as a cultural thing, well, I think is much more than that. Yeah, because, when you look at those students who do things like that, they are mostly people who are not ready to work but want the certificate; in fact, you hardly can see them around. And whenever they come to see their supervisors, they load their cars with different kinds of items...for the supervisor. ... Because they are not interested in learning anything, they prefer to be running after supervisors, doing one thing or the other for them, instead of facing their work. But, I think is working for them, yes because, the supervisors could just decide and say this person has been here for a while let's release him. ...yeah, they graduate him; and you know, they know how to manoeuvre their way (Benjy, 2b).*

Contrary to the earlier view, in his interview transcript, this particular participant frankly and vividly reveals the covert undertone and the reciprocal undercurrent in the practice of gift-giving by students to their supervisors. Although the participant, first and foremost, dissociated himself from the practice, he argues that viewing gift-giving to the supervisor merely as a culture-driven practice, could just be a way of finding an excuse to forgive and also to perpetuate the culture. To support his claim, the participant describes a specific kind of student who is ultimately more concerned with the acquisition of the certificate. It is thus notable that he is of the conviction that undergoing the rigour of the research process, the doctoral student could also bestow gifts on the supervisor sufficiently enough to win the supervisor's favour. The supervisor in turn, could find illicit ways of manipulating the academic system and pushing the doctoral student through that system. Notably, however, there seems to be a level of misconception as to who engages in the actual intellectual part in the doctoral research work; and whether the supervisor has some powers to do that on behalf of the doctoral student. However, the analysis brings to the fore how the idea of gifts, corruption and throughput are linked and, thus, unmask gift-giving by doctoral students to the supervisors. This view is further revealed in the next section.

#### **6.4.4 Gift-giving as supervisor extortionism and student exclusion**

The sentiments expressed above have been echoed by one of the participants who revealed that gift-giving could be a way of extorting from students and also excluding other students. This conception is supported by the following excerpt:

*...in terms of gratification no, they [the supervisors] will tell you. ...But, sometimes you help yourself... we call it "shining your eye" ...your colleagues will say, please if this man...will not attend to you...why not 'shine your eye'. But that does not mean that they are corrupt ...but then, when you give they will accept. ...Some people tend to believe that because they are not doing it that is why they are being unnecessarily punished (Isaac, 9a).*

From the presented data of the interview transcript, it transpires that the participant revealed a scenario whereby supervisors who initially declared a lack of interest in receiving gratification from students, turn around and act in a manner that is contrary to their initial declaration.

According to the participant, such an attitude by the supervisors makes the students believe that they need to offer something to the supervisors in order for the students to enjoy a quality academic service. As such, gift-giving practices, as revealed by the participants, have become so entrenched that the pidgin English term in Nigeria of “SHINE YOUR EYES”, interpreted as “BE WISE”, implies the offering by students of material bribes to the supervisors, and this has now become a cliché among the doctoral students in the universities. Thus, fee-paying doctoral students find themselves in a compromised position to pay again for the service of their supervisors; and as a result, they suffer manipulation and extortion. Although the participant tends to portray the supervisors as not being corrupt, the practice of student gift-giving to the supervisors has obvious implications for the doctoral students, the supervisors, and also the universities themselves. The implication for the doctoral students who are unable/unwilling to offer bribes (i.e., they are unable to shine their eyes or be wise) to their supervisors is that they are likely to be neglected or treated in an inhumane manner by the supervisors. While some doctoral students (those who offer gifts) are embraced and included, others may be distanced or excluded. This shows that the gift-giving practice in academic supervision could serve as a tool for inclusion/exclusion. Arguably, such a practice renders the doctoral research programme as a costly venture, and as such potentially discourages prospective students from choosing to study in such any Nigerian university. Again, the supervisors who accept bribes from the students do not only encourage unethical practices but they also allow their sense of judgement to be influenced, and as a result they compromise standards and undermine the purpose of the doctorate/PhD. A variation in conception about gift-giving practice is revealed in the next section.

#### **6.4.5 Gift-giving as an act of appreciation**

The excerpt below captures the participants’ conception about gift-giving to the supervisors as an act of appreciation as follows:

*In my own case, what I did was that... as soon as I finished, I went and bought some gifts for her, do I need to mention the gifts here? [Laughter] ... some people don’t consider that, but I knew, it wasn’t right for me to begin to give her gifts while I was still doing the work,*

*because it will send a wrong signal. ...Some of our supervisors here, don't even care about their students; but on her own, she was willing to help, to will make sure that she equip you with all that it takes to do the work. ...So, for me, the gift was just my own little way of saying 'thank you'. ...I don't see anything wrong in that (Abel, 2b).*

Here, the participant describes a justifiable and acceptable gift-giving practice as one which is undertaken strictly after the doctoral student has completed his/her student research programme. Otherwise, the participant is of the view that gift-giving by the students to the supervisors would only create a negative impression or would probably be regarded as outright bribery. In other words, the participant is of the view that the timing for giving gifts is important in revealing the true motive. Hence, gift-giving in this case appears to be undertaken out of the doctoral student's own volition, as an act of appreciation, given the unfriendly environment whereby other supervisors show little or no concern for their students. This suggests that gift-giving to the supervisors may not have arisen in the first place had the supervisors been supportive. But, it seems that is not the case, doctoral students who receive adequate attention from their supervisors feel almost indebted to those supervisors and as such they reciprocate (show appreciation) by giving gifts. This clearly shows that gift-giving to the supervisors could be the students' way of developing a friendship and a positive relationship with the supervisors. This probably explains why doctoral students who feel neglected also devise unethical ways of getting the attention of their supervisors, through gift-giving, as described earlier.

This chapter has analysed the findings in category three, pertaining to the student yearning for a positive supervision relationship. The chapter established that the participants expressed their yearning in many ways. Sometimes, the participants revealed their yearning for a positive supervision relationship through the expression of disappointment because of unmet expectations, exclusion and negative criticisms from the supervisors. Also, the findings showed that some of the participants expressed satisfaction with the supportive roles played by the supervisors which entailed pastoral care and support, encouraging self-efficacy of students, as well as the joint effort between the supervisors and the doctoral students in ensuring that positive relationships remain intact. Again, the findings revealed issues of power inherent in the supervision relationship which the participants considered to be positive as it exposed the many ways in which some of the

participants employed the practice of gift-giving to navigate relationships with their powerful supervisors.

## 6.5 A diagrammatic representation of category three – student yearning for a positive supervision relationship

As with tables 3 and 4 in chapters 4 and 5 respectively, table 5 below represents category three – student yearning for a positive supervision relationship diagrammatically. The table depicts the ‘what aspect’ - participants’ ways of experiencing research supervision in category three, and the ‘how aspects’ – the impact of those experiences on participants’ learning and development as beginner researchers.

**Table 5. Student yearning for a positive supervision relationship and the impacts on participant' learning and development**

(Adapted from Reddy, 2010, p. 78)

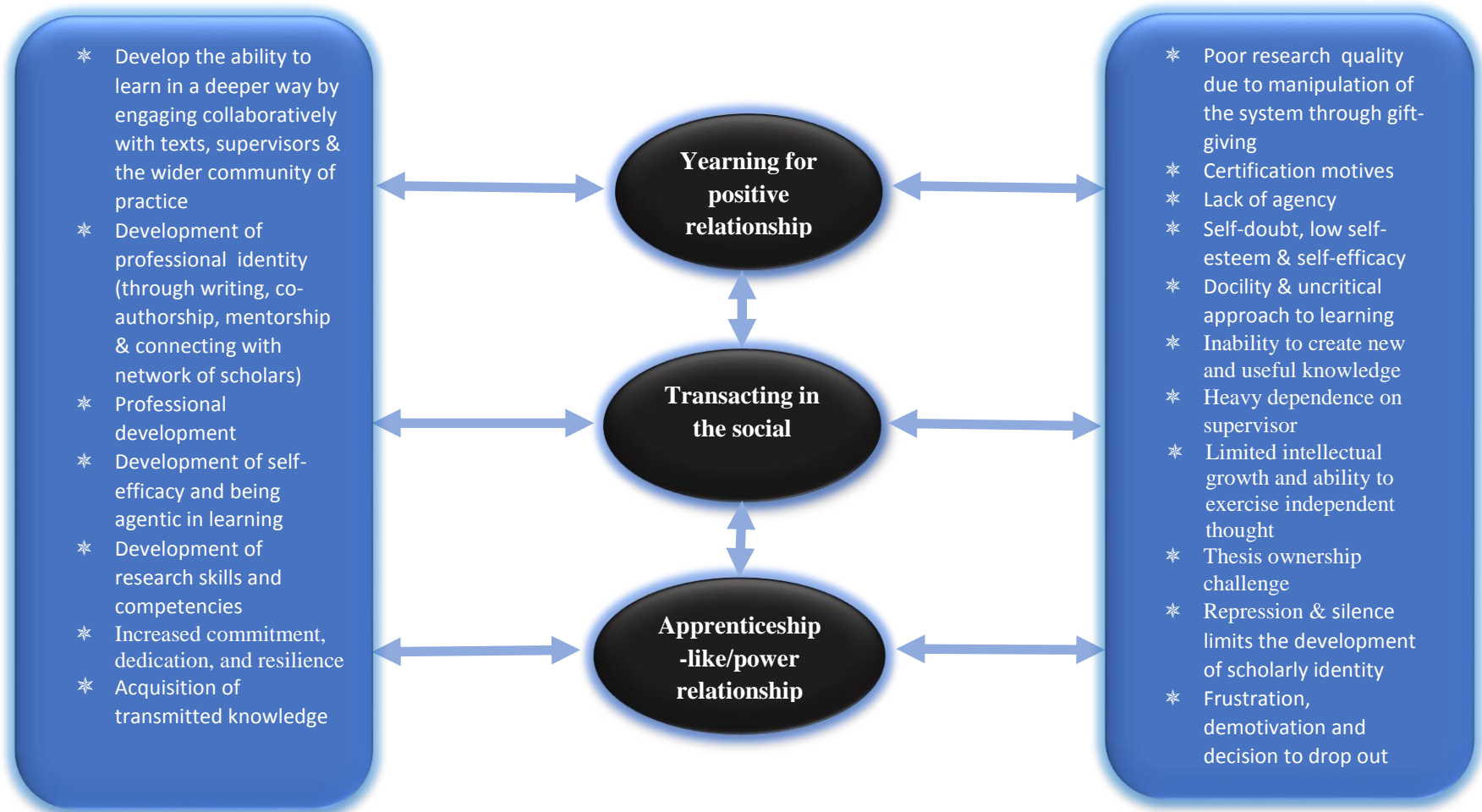
	CATEGORY	WAYS OF EXPERIENCING RESEARCH SUPERVISION
<b>WHAT ASPECT (REFERENTIAL)</b>	Student yearning for a positive supervision relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant's expression of yearning for a positive supervision relationship</li> <li>• Participants' conception about developing/building positive relationship with supervisors</li> <li>• Participants' conception that pastoral care and support from supervisors enhance positive supervision experience</li> <li>• Positive supervision relationship as encouraging participants' self-efficacy</li> <li>• Positive supervision relationship as a joint effort between participants and supervisors</li> <li>• Issues of power inherent in positive supervision relationships</li> <li>• Gift-giving as a way that participants express yearning for a positive supervision relationship</li> </ul>

<b>HOW ASPECT (STRUCTURAL)</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>IMPACTS ON PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT</b>
	Participants yearning for a positive supervision relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humane character displayed by the supervisors encourages participants' assertiveness and development of own ideas</li> <li>• Respect and trust engenders self-efficacy in the doctoral students</li> <li>• Development of capabilities through writing, co-authoring, and broader career development</li> <li>• Empathy on the part of the supervisor fosters resilience and better throughput</li> <li>• Mentorship enables participants to take on academic roles</li> <li>• Exposure to literary works promotes the forging of professional identity</li> <li>• Disdain and disrespect from supervisors affects doctoral students' self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy</li> <li>• Limits opportunity to build academically nourishing and empowering relationship with supervisors that scaffolds learning.</li> <li>• Participants' inability to develop necessary qualities critical to the personal and scholarly self being developed</li> <li>• Long stay on the doctoral programme demotivates doctoral students</li> <li>• Inclusion/exclusion through gift-giving practices renders the doctoral research programme as a costly venture</li> <li>• Limited knowledge creation capability</li> <li>• Low quality of thesis</li> </ul>

## **6.6 Phenomenographic outcome space derived from all three categories of description**

The outcome space shown in figure 4 below is a graphic representation that summarises the three categories of description analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this study and it captures the variation in the participants' experience of supervision. Each category of description represents a way in which the participants collectively experienced research supervision in the business education programme as interpreted by me (the doctoral student researcher in charge of this student research). In the diagram, the three categories of description representing participants' limited number of ways of experiencing research supervision, are presented at the middle and then the impact of those ways of experiencing on the participants' learning (both positive and negative) are presented on the left-hand and right-hand sides of the diagram. The two arrows from each of the three categories of description pointing toward the right-hand side (negative impacts) and the left-hand side (positive impacts) indicate that, participants' experience of supervision in each of the categories resulted in both positive and negative impacts on their learning. Also, the two headed arrows connecting the three categories of description show that although participants' ways of experiencing supervision has been grouped into three distinct categories, participants' experience in the three categories are inter-linked. Category one, supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship was a fundamental experience for all of the participants in this PhD research thesis, as it was given effect by the institutional/university context. Power issues were evident at the initial stage of the research process, where the participants had to learn to select research topics that would fit into the supervisors' field of interest (the masters' domain). Eighty percent of the participants expressed frustration with this process due to misalignment in expectations, the supervisors' socialisation and participants' inexperience in conducting research in relation to the doctoral students' area of interest. This category also revealed extreme cases of power dynamics in the supervision space, which resulted in personal abuse and repressive silence from supervisor to doctoral student. Learning in this category seemed to be transmissive in nature, as the participants were mostly directed and instructed, and offered feedback in the form of corrections that needed to be made. However, this apprenticeship-like mode of supervision enabled the participants to be committed to their studies, and to acquire some knowledge, skills and competencies from their supervisors (masters). In the second category of description - transacting

in the social space wherein most of the participants consider transacting in the social space to be supplementary/complementary to the supervisors' efforts. This transaction was either encouraged by the supervisors and/or the department (organic transacting), or forced because of the supervisors' unavailability, inaccessibility, neglect and lack of care and concern for the doctoral students. Generally, the participants are of the viewpoint that transacting in the social space afforded them the necessary support in terms of sourcing literature for their studies, access to a wider pool of knowledge and connecting with the network of existing community of scholars for their professional development. On the other hand, power issues in the university social space, and other extenuating circumstances (including personal challenges), limited the participants' ability to transact in the social space. Lastly, category three entailed student yearning for a positive supervision relationship. All the participants in this study expressed some sort of yearning for a positive supervision relationship. Those who experienced support and care from their supervisors indicated a high-level of satisfaction with their learning experiences. Others who felt neglected and excluded by their supervisors resorted to manipulating the system and pulling the supervisors into some form of relationship. The general conception held by the participants in this category was that accomplishing the thesis task and maximising the learning experience in the doctoral supervision process hinges so much on a positive interpersonal relationship between doctoral students and supervisors. Figure 4 below shows the outcome space:



**Figure 4. Outcome space** (Derived from the three categories of description - findings of this study)

# **Chapter 7**

## **Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings presented earlier in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of my PhD thesis. These findings revealed variation in the participants' experiences of supervision in the business education programme, as captured in the three main categories of description. The main aim of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss key findings in the context of the literature that was reviewed earlier in Chapter 2 of this thesis. By so doing, answers to the three critical questions that guided this PhD research, as indicated below, will be provided. These questions are as follows:

- (a) What are the research supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria?
- (b) How did the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students impact on their learning in the doctoral programme?
- (c) Why do doctoral business education students experience research supervision in the way they do?

As outlined earlier, the three major categories of description that emerged from the analysis of the chapters of this study, as findings, are category one - supervision apprenticeship/power relationship; category two - supervision as transacting in the social space; and category three - student yearning for a positive supervision relationship. These three categories of description comprised of several conceptions/views/understanding about research supervision in the business education programme in four universities in Nigeria, as revealed by the participants and as interpreted by me, the PhD student researcher. The discussion chapter pulls together the key findings drawn from all the three categories of description in the context of the existing literature to provide a consolidated view of how the current findings resonate with, contradict or expand existing knowledge on the experience of research supervision.

## **7.2 Supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship**

One of the ways in which the participants in this study experienced research supervision, as the finding has revealed, was that it was experienced as a highly hierarchical/asymmetrical/power-laden relationship. This experience, for the most part, created in the participants a sense of self that is almost powerless in relation to the supervisors and at the same time it was rewarding for some of the participants. The finding aligns with previous research that identified traditional-academic discourse of supervision - whereby the supervisor wields so much power as a disciplinary expert and the student obediently submits to the training of the supervisor (guru) to be able to acquire disciplinary knowledge (Grant, 2005b). ‘Metaphors’ of apprenticeship, discipleship, oedipal family relationship and paternalism were commonly used to foreground such power imbalance in supervision relationships (Lee & Green 2009; Mackinnon, 2004; Yeatman, 1995). This PhD thesis adds to this by revealing another powerful metaphor that was employed by one of the participants who portrayed the doctoral student as a suckling-goat, and the supervisor as a god (section 4.3). In this relationship, the participant revealed that doctoral students must humble themselves, honour and probably worship supervisors (gods) to be able to receive guidance with regards to their studies. This finding resonates with Idoniboye-Obu’s (2015 p. 256) view that “compared to lecturers in other parts of the world, the Nigerian lecturer is more or less omnipotent in relation to the student”. The strong power issues revealed in the finding suggests a high possibility for the doctoral student (suckling-goat) to feel powerless in relating to a super-powerful supervisor (god), that s/he may simply take information/ideas/instructions from the supervisor as commands that needed to be acted upon uncritically. The system of learning that creates such docility in students has been associated with the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970; 2005) where students become mere receptors of information provided by their teachers (supervisors). This approach to learning has been highly criticised for its inadequacy in evoking critical consciousness and stimulating intellectual growth in students (Micheletti, 2010). In the supervision context, such could create problems of ownership of the thesis/ideas/arguments (Ghadirian et al., 2014) as students may be denied the opportunity to make autonomous decisions and exercise independent thoughts in writing their thesis. As such, the goal of pursuing the PhD could be reduced to mere

completion of thesis and obtaining the degree without acquiring high-level critical thinking skills that the doctoral study is meant to inculcate.

This bears out the Waghid (2006, p. 428) concern about some doctoral students he related with in his institution, who are being driven by certification motives rather than by engaging in critical inquiry and academic debates which are fundamental in fostering ‘authentic learning’ or debates as explained by the author. This kind of learning, he believes, can be enhanced through a supervision relationship that is empowering and liberating for students (Lee, 2012). Although the kind of learning that happens in supervision is also affected by factors associated with the doctoral students - their experiences, beliefs, personal characteristics, for example, lack of confidence (Khene, 2014; Wilson-Strydom, 2011). My PhD thesis also confirmed that the participants’ level of preparedness, awareness of the demands of doctoral study, competency and experience in conducting research affected the way in which doctoral students engaged in the supervision relationship. For instance, the participants with a low level of preparedness and who lacked adequate awareness of the demands of doctoral research tended to depend more on the supervisors (section 4.3.2.1). However, empirical evidence shows that the supervisors can empower and enable students to negotiate liminalities (i.e., the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rites) in their learning journey and to encourage high-level engagement and exchanges between the supervisors and the doctoral students (Fataar, 2005; Khene, 2014; Lee, 2011; Waghid, 2006). These authors/writers tend to believe that supervision is not only concerned with providing intellectual guidance to students but is also concerned with the “*complex negotiation of the psychological and affective dimension of the student’s personality make up*” (Fataar, 2005, p. 40). For instance, Waghid (2006) in his study found that by being humane he was able to liberate his study subjects who were initially limited by their past apartheid experience and wrong notion about supervision as being patriarchal in nature (where students do not question supervisors’ authority) and encouraged them to develop confidence and assert themselves in the supervision relationship. This suggests that the supervision approach that supervisors adopt is critical in diagnosing barriers to doctoral students’ learning and empowering doctoral students.

With regards to the supervision approach, one of the findings in this thesis showed that the supervisors' socialisation is critical to their style/approaches to supervision. Participants revealed that despite the government's emphasis on fast completions, their supervisors find it difficult to implement the government's new policies on supervision which are contrary to their own socialisation (section 4.3.2.3). This finding supports earlier research findings and discussions that the supervision style/approaches that supervisors adopt is likely to be influenced by their 'past experience of supervision as students' (Bitzer, 2010, p. 24; Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000; Lee, 2008; Okeke, 2010). Notably, the current finding raised concerns as to why supervisors have remained conservative in their approach to supervision despite changes in government's policy. One reason for this could be based on the assertion by Okeke (2010) that Nigeria is not quick to align its educational policies and practices to international good standards. The changes in the higher education landscape have made most advanced countries to prioritise re-training and re-socialisation of supervisors to keep pace with changes and development in higher education supervision context (Manathunga, 2007). In Nigeria, the case seems different, as research evidence shows that "most institutions of higher learning in Nigeria lack staff development programmes for training and re-training of staff" (Asiyai, 2013, p. 167). It is unlikely that the supervisors who have not been exposed to modern pedagogical practices (including the supervision process) would adopt modern approaches to supervision. Such supervisors are likely to continue to supervise students in a conservative apprenticeship-like/power manner they themselves have been socialized into. The next section discusses the several normative practices which are commonplace in the supervision context of this study.

### **7.2.1 Institutional entrenched practices in admission and supervisor nomination**

Usually, research supervision happens in the complex context of institutional systems, structures, procedures, infrastructural support, equipment and resources (Delany, 2008, p. 3; Green, 2005; Kelly, 2009). This study's finding with regards to institutional entrenched practices sheds light on how the procedures for admission and supervisor nomination could exclude doctoral students and

place them at a disadvantaged position from the point of entry into the university and why that could constitute a challenge for supervision. The account of the participants showed that their institutions practice a system whereby admissions into doctoral business education programme are tied up with the nomination of the supervisor. While the institutions allow supervisors to participate in the supervisor-supervisee pairing process, they completely deny doctoral students participation in this process. This finding chimes with Okeke,'s (2010) observation that there is acute neglect of students' involvement at the initial stage of admissions and supervisor-supervisee selection in higher education institutions in Nigeria. A similar practice where the department allocates supervisors to students has also been reported in Britain (Philips & Pugh, 2000). Contrary to this practice, several other studies argue for the students' personal involvement in selecting their supervisors (McAlpine & Turner, 2012), as supervisor selection is considered to be an important aspect of the supervision arrangement (Edwards, Aspland, O'Leary, Ryan, Southey & Timms, 1995, p. 6). An earlier study suggests that students who are involved in the selection of their supervisors tend to be more satisfied and progress well in their studies (Ives & Rowley, 2005). This partly explains the Philips & Pugh (2000, p. 11) view of students' personal choice of supervisors as "the most critical step" in their supervision journey.

The fact that most of the participants in this thesis revealed that they would prefer to be included in the supervisor-supervisee selection process if given the chance, suggests that they want their interest to be taken into consideration and their voices heard. On the contrary, the institutions seem to place doctoral students at the mercy of entrenched practices that they are not likely to contest should they be uncomfortable with the supervisors they have been assigned to. Little wonder that despite the unsatisfactory supervision relationship revealed in this study, no participant opted for a change of supervisor which is an option that postgraduate students in other contexts can resort to (Golde, 2000). The implication of such closed system in terms of admission and supervisor nomination that silenced doctoral students is that the institutions may have structurally set the scene for power play in supervision. This seemed to be the case as most of the participants revealed that their supervision encounters were characterised by one form of domination/intimidation or the other. One of the participants indicated this by saying '...*he will always make you know that you are just a student...*' (Section 4.3.1.1). Probably, those supervisors that oppressed doctoral students were

aware of their institutional power and position in relation to the marginal position of the doctoral students. An earlier study by Grant (2008) finds that supervisors, to establish their voices as masters in the supervision space and thus gain recognition from students, are likely to silence students. This thesis adds to the limited body of work that describes the processes involved in supervisor nomination for doctoral students (Ives & Rowley, 2005). This thesis also provides some insights into an important question asked by a commentator in an earlier study by Grant & Manathunga (2011, p. 353) that: “To what extent does context and structure enter into supervision?” Other implications of the institutional normative practices will be discussed further in subsequent sections in this chapter.

### **7.2.2 Nepotistic behaviour compromises the integrity of the research endeavour**

The department constitutes an immediate environment for doctoral students and as such the culture atmosphere and practices in the department contribute to the experience that the doctoral students receive. The findings in this PhD student research show that favouritism by administrative staff with regards to scheduling defence dates, and student funding of meals for the examination panel members were some of the issues that doctoral students grapple with in their university department. The participants’ accounts showed that favouritism occurs when some administrative staff at the department suppressed the right of students to favour their preferred candidates in terms of fixing defence dates. Thus, doctoral students who are under pressure to quickly secure a date and move on with their student research are encouraged to offer bribes to administrative staff. This finding not only exposed the departments’ poor scheduling system and administrative weakness, but also showed how this practice created another form of social exclusion as administrative staff that derive benefits from favouring some students may deliberately frustrate students that do not offer bribes and thus delay their progress. Arguably, if the system was being run effectively, such unethical practice (bribery) may not have arisen in the first place and all the students would receive adequate attention.

An earlier study in investigating the challenges for better thesis supervision found that student engagement in the act of lobbying, to influence departmental heads to assign lenient supervisors to them, resulted in inequality in the supervisor-supervisee pairing in the department (Ghadirian et al., 2014). Another study identified administrative issues with regards to how delays in the allocation of supervisors constitutes setback to student progress (Heeralal, 2015). The novel finding in this PhD thesis differs, in that this thesis has revealed an act of unethical practice as perpetrated by the administrative staff in four Nigerian universities, in collaboration with the students in the departments, and which previous studies have not fully described.

With regards to the student funding of meals for the examination panel members during defence presentations, the participants' accounts showed that the department placed the responsibility of catering for meals for the panel members on presenting students. The fact that the departments pair students to share the costs of the meals was a clear indication that the departments are aware of the financial implications. This finding confirms the Okeke (2010) personal experience and observation that students catering for meals for panel members during their research work defence is an entrenched practice in Nigerian higher education institutions, which show a lack of consideration for fee-paying students. The department may not have considered that such a practice could create an avenue for doctoral students who are financially buoyant to provide better meals for the panel members, than those students who do not have the financial ability to provide fine meals. Notably, therefore, the attention of the students may be shifted away from undertaking thorough student research work, to appeasing panel members with expensive meals to influence their judgements. Given that any attempt to manipulate the panel would undermine the standard of theses produced in the department/university (Okeke, 2010). Student funding of meals during thesis defence represents a potential threat to the quality of feedback that students receive during defence and the entire goal of the defence exercise is not only affected, but is also ruined.

Also, considering how favouritism by administrative staff and student funding of meals could exclude and delay student progress may add to our understanding of concerns raised in earlier studies, that postgraduate students in the Nigerian context could stay excessively long periods as

PhD students, and in some cases up to twenty (20) years (Agu & Kayode, 2014; Ekpoh, 2016; Duze, 2010). One of the participants that reported being delayed for four (4) months to share the cost of catering for meals for the panel members with other students, was a typical example of an unnecessary delay that resulted from such departmental practices. This seems obvious since doctoral students do not usually work at the same pace as some other students who are more dedicated and committed. Unnecessary delays could also keep doctoral students away from their families and friends for so long that their social lives could be affected. Consequently, students may become so isolated and they may also lose motivation for their studies. Such delays have costs implications at the national, institutional and personal levels (Whitman, Halbesleben & Holmes, 2014). The finding brought to the fore the detrimental structure that may have been operating unchecked within the higher education system in Nigeria, which the institutions are probably unaware of, or otherwise.

### **7.2.3 Positive and negative effects of power issues in the supervisee / supervision relationship**

Although issues of power in the supervision relationship are mostly portrayed in a negative light, the finding in this study revealed that power could also result in positive impacts on doctoral students. Similar findings regarding the potential for power relationship in the supervision space to be both rewarding and disturbing have been noted (Grant, 2008; Schulze, 2012). In her study, that considers supervision as a master-slave relationship, Grant (2008, p. 23-24) seems to suggest that the rewarding aspect of the hierarchical supervision relationship may ironically be derived from the “painful moments of masterfulness on the part of [the] supervisor” that gets the student to accomplish the thesis. This study provides further insight into how “painful moments of masterfulness” of the supervisors turned out to be rewarding for some of the participants. An instance of that was revealed by one of the participants in my PhD research, who indicated that working with a strict and harsh supervisor enabled her to become dedicated and committed to getting her thesis task accomplished (section 4.3.1.1). In other words, the participant feels that if her supervisor were to be tolerant/humane, that is, lenient and easy-going, she probably may relax

and not be committed to meeting the set deadlines. This suggests that the participant overlooked the issues of affect and focused on the ‘thesis’ which is a view that is in accordance with Firth and Martens (2008), in highlighting that, since the ‘thesis’ is the basis for supervision relationship, it is essential for the supervisors to adopt a task-focused approach to supervision and get the thesis task accomplished, rather than give in to personal emotions, tricked, genuine, or otherwise.

This view, however, contradicts the Hockey (1994) assertion that supervision comprises of two core elements, namely, the intellectual aspect and the emotional aspect. Most feminist writers also support the incorporation of both the rational and the emotional aspects for effective supervision relationships (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000; Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000; Manathunga, 2005b). These authors seem to provide a broader view of supervision as one that attends to the development of both the thesis and the supervisees’ persona.

The ‘thesis-focus’ stance taken by the participants may be better appreciated in the light of commonly reported experiences of neglect by the supervisor, inaccessibility to the supervisors and the supervisors’ lack of care and concern for students which the participants may have become accustomed to. These challenges, however, turned out to be beneficial to some of the participants in terms of enabling them to develop agency for their learning as one of the participant revealed as follows: *“I don’t depend on them any more... What is important for me is to develop myself and that is what I am doing”* (section 4.3.2.5). The negative experiences also forced other participants to transact in the social space and thus reduced their level of dependence on their supervisors (section 5.2) as will be elaborated on later in this thesis. This shows that some of the doctoral students employ coping strategies whereby their personal capital (determination, resilience, doggedness) comes to play in the supervision relationship. Since doctoral students are not a homogenous group as they may respond to similar experiences differently, a ‘forged in fire’ (Williams & Lee, 1999) or strong power-laden supervision relationship may not always result in a positive experience for all of the doctoral students.

However, despite the growing evidence that the conventional power-laden supervision relationship is unappealing to modern thinking, the ‘hierarchical model of supervision’ is still commonplace in some contexts (Bartlett & Mercer (2000, p. 197) such as with Nigeria. Arguably, this may be due to institutionalised structures of domination in such contexts as Green (2005, p. 154) asserts that “the practice of supervision...is always structurally asymmetrical” (p. 154). In this thesis, power issues seem to be complicated by entrenched practices that have remained unchallenged in the institutions. Thus, this a novel addition to previous research via power played out in unique ways, which have not been previously recognised in the literature.

The finding that the participants experienced frustration with the research topic selection and the process of topic approval by the supervisors/committee provides us with a clear indication of the way that power works in the study context. One of the major problems that the participants revealed as indicated by one of the participants was that the doctoral students needed to select research topics and work in the domain of their supervisors (masters) - *...a PG student told me that the man is interested in evaluation... That, if I’m choosing topics in other areas he may not tell me, but he will not approve them for me* (section 4.3.2.2). Arguably, failure on the part of the doctoral student to do a thorough investigation of their supervisors’ field of expertise seems to have contributed to her frustration. The lack of information from the supervisor to explicitly communicate such expectation to the student shows that there is a hidden power undertone. Hence, instead of appraising the student regarding his expectations, the supervisor left the participant to discover the expectations for herself without considering her struggles and how long it would take her to stumble on them, if at all. Notably, “these (unspoken) expectations are often a cause of much frustration and concern for students from the beginning of the research process — usually starting with the choice of topic and later on direction of the study as a whole” (Kiguwa & Langa, 2009, p. 52). At the end, instead of the supervisor accepting to work with the doctoral student in her area of research interest, the doctoral student had to abandon/alter her interest to suit the supervisor’s. In keeping with the argument that institutional normative practices that place students in a disadvantaged position impacts negatively on their agency and learning (Hart, 2009, p. 412); doctoral students may feel so marginalised and unable to assert themselves in the supervision relationship. This has implications for students as one of the participants revealed that sometimes

students become frustrated and quietly drop out of the programme. This confirms the Lovitts (2000, p. 49) assertion that while some authors have continued to blame the reasons for doctoral attrition on students, the institutions/departments that silence students also contribute significantly to student dropout. Similarly, Golde (2005) posits that departmental culture and practices not only shape students' experiences but also discourage/aggravate the issues of doctoral attrition. Thus, that author draws attention to the need to focus on disciplinary and departmental context.

Another implication is that it can result in a mismatch in the research interest or misaligned expectations, whereby supervisors adopt a hands-off approach to supervision and neglect students (McGinty et al., 2010, p. 519), contrary to student expectations. A typical example of misaligned expectation was revealed by one of the participants in this student research, who indicated that whereas she expected proper guidance from her supervisor, the supervisor adopted a thesis-focused approach which required that she produce a complete chapter of her thesis at once. This finding is an illumination of how supervisors that align with the orientation that doctoral students are always/already autonomous researchers (Manathunga, 2007) could relate with doctoral students. Such supervisors may not consider that doctoral students who can produce a complete chapter at once may not benefit from learning opportunities that accrue in the processes of engaging with supervisors in discussions, questioning, argumentation, and the giving and receiving of feedback. Thus, doctoral students may miss part of the processes that are necessary for their development as researchers. This has negative implications on the quality of the researcher/scholar as well as the thesis that is produced (Khene, 2014). That probably informed the Kiguwa & Langa (2009, p. 51) opinion that the supervisee should be involved in negotiating the choice of supervision style/approach.

#### **7.2.4 Repressive silence in supervision**

One of the findings of this PhD research, with regard to power relations, was the issue of repressive silence in supervision. This manifested itself from the initial stage of the data collection for this thesis, where most of the participants were initially reluctant or even too scared to divulge information about their supervision relationship. They revealed that doing so could expose them

to the danger of victimisation by their supervisors, and to avoid that they tended to pretend or tried to maintain false relationships with their supervisors (section 4.3.2.5). Similarly, the Golde (2000) study records the fear exhibited by students who, despite dropping out of their student research programme, felt uncomfortable about exposing the reasons for their decision to leave the department. These dropouts are of the conviction that their supervisors still possess the power to victimise them in their future careers. It is, thus, notable that students can be so repressed to the point that they remain silenced after exiting their programmes. Grant (2008), in her study entitled “*Agonistic Struggle - Master–slave dialogues in humanities supervision*”, employed a Gurevitch (2001) special reading of Hegel’s master and slave allegory to explain how students are repressed into silence in the supervision relationship. Grant, notes that the master-slave relationship involves a struggle for recognition which happens in dialogical moments where the speech of speakers fighting against the other, and at the end a winner emerges as the master and ‘gains the right to speak’ while the loser (the slave) becomes silenced (2008, p. 13). Grant argues that a similar struggle happens in supervision where the supervisor due to his institutional position has the right to speak and the student recognises the master (supervisor) by silence. Explicating how the master-slave relationship played out in the supervision relationship to silence students, Grant provides a practical example of what she termed ‘ordinary’ and ‘exceptional ways’ and asserted that:

...in ordinary ways - for instance, the supervisor does not think much about the supervision, the student or the work between meetings – and in other more exceptional ways, such as the supervisor who makes it plain that s/he is not interested in (will not listen to) anything to do with the student’s personal life. In supervision meetings, lack of preparation by the supervisor, interruptions at the office door, trivial feedback, receiving phone calls, may all be ways in which the supervisor signals the student’s speech to stop (Grant, 2008, p. 14).

In line with the Gurevitch (2001, p. 93) argument, the classification of repression occurs in hierarchical relationships where he distinguished between ordinary repression and a more troubling abusive repression – which “becomes outright terror – a manifestation of evil.” Most of the examples provided by Grant may not fit into abusive repression as the second category - ordinary repression. The findings in my thesis research add to this by bringing to light both the ordinary repression and the horrendous kind of repression which is abusive repression that happens in the supervision context in Nigeria. The participants of the population sample in this student research revealed instances where supervisors suddenly renege on appointments and miss

supervision meetings without apologies (which may be regarded as ordinary repression). Also, some of the participants indicated that consultations with supervisors, at times, depend on the mood, disposition and personal interests of the supervisors. This means that supervisors handle supervision as a matter of convenience rather than as a matter of commitment and responsibility, and as such, they do not seem to prioritize or regularise supervision as part of their job. This has implications for the doctoral students as they may be regarded as a nuisance and a burden in the system and because they may suffer ill-treatment, disrespect and neglect contrary to their expectations. As victims of negative power play in the supervision relationship, doctoral students are likely to lose self-confidence and self-esteem (Woolderink, Putnik, van der Boom & Klabbers, 2015).

A more disturbing kind of abusive repression was also revealed by the participants in this study. One such kind of abusive repression was expressed by one participant who revealed that her supervisor sometimes used derogatory animal remarks to hurt the feeling of students – “*she said he called her goat*” (section 4.3.2.5.). This shows disregard for the personhood of students and is a blatant abuse of power that may best be described in the words of Frow (1988, p. 319) as “‘mad’, ‘traumatic’, an ‘ordeal’ of ‘cruelty’...”. A related concept to abusive supervision revealed in the literature is supervisory bullying (Morris, 2011). Bullying, as explained by the author, involves the use of force/power to coerce others into fear, intimidation and then silence (Morris, 2011). This finding contradicts the assertion by Meng, Tan & Li (2017) that academics are less likely to engage in abusive behaviour in supervision due to their higher level of educational attainment. Horrendous repression perpetrated by supervisors is likely to traumatise and frustrate students to the extent that they may drop out of the programme, as one of the participants in this student research indicated that one of her colleagues may have quietly dropped out of the programme. This has implications in terms of loss of important human resources (Whitman, Halbesleben, & Holmes, 2014).

The finding further showed that despite the participants ‘knowing’ that they were caught in an unhealthy relationship, they had no choice but to tolerate the unethical behaviour which is somewhat disturbing as it seems to remain a constant threat throughout the duration of the

programme. This may be so because, as argued by Meng et al., (2017, p. 614), the institutions where they conducted their study in China have not set-out any “grievance procedure for students” to deal with issues of abusive supervision relationship. It seems that the participants are aware of the detrimental effect of attempting to challenge the system as one participant noted - *“You don’t need to pick up offence...You need to stomach it, if you really want to get through”* (section 4.3.2.5.). McKay et al., (2008) suggest that institutional structures, culture and practices can support academic bullying. So, students would rather endure the humiliation and be suppressed. This concurs with the finding by Morris (2011), in her study that focused on supervisory bullying on the internet blog sites, which shows that victims of abuse are usually silenced and do not have the courage to speak out due to fear of reprisals. This also bears out the Gurevitch (2001) argument that ‘abusive repression silences and banishes the voices of its victims from the land of the spoken although repression is never fully accomplished’. Similarly, Wisker & Robinson (2012) note that in severe cases of abusive power relations, students are usually marginalised and silenced.

This is an issue of concern, as doctoral students may internalise the oppression and affirm negative stereotypes of powerlessness which could affect their mental and emotional well-being and thus make them lose confidence in themselves (Martinko et al., 2013; Woolderink et al., 2015). In some instances, self-doubt and lack of confidence can lead to “self-exclusion and alienation” (Khene, 2014, p. 74). The stress that an abusive supervision relationship mounts on students is believed to reduce their level of creativity (Meng et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, abusive supervision relationships would make it difficult for supervisors to build a nourishing and empowering relationship with supervisees and scaffold their learning (Hobman et al., 2009). This implies that doctoral students would be denied the chance to develop trust and mutually satisfying learning experiences. Essentially, this finding within this thesis adds to the limited body of literature on abusive supervision relationship between supervisors and research students by foregrounding the worst cases of abusive repression experienced by some Nigerian doctoral students in a way, in which no study has effected before, and particularly with respect to the Nigerian university context. Evidence in the literature shows that earlier studies on abusive supervisory relationship have focused mostly on the workplace/businesses rather than on doctoral supervisory relationships (Decoster et al., 2014; Xu, Huang, Lam & Miao, 2012). The finding also provides insight into the

destructive impact that such supervisory relationships could have on doctoral student emotional well-being, sense of self, learning and identity development.

### **7.3 Transacting in the social space**

Another finding in this study was that the participants experienced research supervision as transacting in the social space. Most of the participants in my student research revealed that their experience of supervision was not restricted to the experience between a university-assigned supervisor and a doctoral student, as it extends beyond that, into other academic relationships and learning opportunities in the university social space. This understanding about research supervision revealed by the participants in my student research concurs with the widely expressed view that “the supervision process is not only accomplished between the ‘established’ dyad student-supervisor” rather, various social agents are involved in the supervisory process (Baptista’s, 2011, p. 3579; Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; Dysthe et al., 2006; McFarlane, 2010). The finding by this PhD research sits well with the body of work in the literature on the “multiplicity” dimension of research supervision involving doctoral students’ relationship with several stakeholders/players in the university social space (van Biljon & de Villiers, 2013, p. 1443; Lee & McKenzie, 2011, p. 69). By illuminating the understanding of Nigerian doctoral students’ experiences of transacting in the university social space, the findings of my PhD research, add to the limited number of qualitative studies that explore the student perspective. Some authors attribute this deficit to exigencies in eliciting “sustained feedback from doctoral students regarding their experiences of working with an individual supervisor, or even a supervisory panel, for ethical and practical reasons” (Lee & McKenzie, 2011, p. 69).

Based on the findings in my PhD research, the participants seem to co-inhabit two social worlds (the social world of the university, and the social world of the personal/family) consisting of several variables that mediated their relationship with supervisors and shaped their learning experience in diverse ways (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). The participants view the role of the student to be central in terms of assessing their own needs and capabilities in relation to the guidance provided by their supervisors and determining the level of additional support they

require in the social (section 5.2). This reveals the assumption that students have the resources and skills to network with the existing community of scholars independently. In fact, not all students develop the capacity to transact in the social space on their own as some students require their supervisors to scaffold their learning (Tian, Watson Todd & Darasawangm, 2012). Although, some of the participants expressed strong personal motivation for transacting in the social space (for example, to build a strong knowledge base, have a deepened understanding of their fields of enquiry, and produce quality research output); that does not mean that they did not encounter difficulties that require supervisors' support; it suggests, however, that such participants were more agentic in their learning.

Furthermore, the findings in my thesis showed that the participants in the population sample from the four Nigerian universities engaged in two kinds of transacting in the university social space - organic transacting and forced transactions. Organic transacting seems to happen when the university/department or supervisors provide opportunities for doctoral students to connect with each other, network with existing scholars and access academic and social support. The participants experienced that through workshops/seminars that the school of postgraduate studies organises IT/computer training for all postgraduate students. Although that may only cater for generic skills, which for doctoral students may be at various levels of their studies, the participants view such support as beneficial. Another example of organic transacting as revealed by the participants in this research relates to supervisors providing motivation and encouragement for doctoral students to join professional bodies and become part of a wider community of practice (section 5.2). This is important, as doctoral students could become aware of the kind of knowledge that is valued in their field of study and how they can contribute to it. It could also help doctoral students to deal with self-doubt, develop confidence (Martinko et al. 2013; Woolderink et al., 2015) and possibly be motivated to make a home in the academia. Appreciation of the ways in which belonging to disciplinary communities of practice and professional bodies may enhance construction of students' identities is reflected in studies arguing for student disciplinary enculturation (Delamont et al., 1997; Leonard et al., 2006; Parry, Atkinson & Delamont, 1994).

Also, the findings in this thesis showed that organic transacting sometimes happens when supervisors that lack a particular expertise are willing to refer doctoral students to other sources of

support. For instance, the participants in this thesis, as aforementioned, revealed that their supervisors usually refer them to statisticians for the statistical aspect of their thesis - “... *she [my supervisor] directed me to a very good statistician... that aspect of statistics is not her area and you know they all have different areas of expertise*” (section 5.2). This confirms the results of an earlier study by Lessing and Schulze (2002, p. 148), whereby supervisors that lack adequate statistical competence, or are unwilling to learn, or are unwilling to spend time teaching statistics to students, are likely to refer students to experts. It also suggests that the supervisors who are willing to connect students to other academic supports, rather than claim to be the source of all knowledge, are secure within themselves and could encourage quality work and enhance doctoral student progress. This impact has been reported in an earlier study (Leonard et al., 2006, p. 32) that students that are able to connect with “other academics” within and outside their discipline are more encouraged to continue with their programmes.

With regards to forced transacting, the finding showed that it revolved around power issues orchestrated either by the institutional practice and/or supervisors’ abuse of power. For instance, the participants indicated that their department made attendance at defence compulsory for all postgraduate students. Although most of the participants found that to be beneficial, the forced nature of such transacting seems evident (section 5.2.3). Another form of forced transacting that is noticeable in this PhD research relates to the supervisor role (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004), which the participants believe to be neglected. Issues of inaccessibility to supervisors, lack of care and concern from supervisors, intimidation and neglect by supervisors were mostly cited as the reasons for the participants to look elsewhere for support. One participant statement read thus: “...*Support? Where? Nothing like support, I just have to sort it out myself.....there is nothing like support or directing you to where you can find these materials. ...you have to rise up and look for... where to find help*” (section 5.2). Again, the supervisors’ negative attitudes towards doctoral students, as revealed by the participants, appear to have served a positive purpose by pointing the doctoral students to the wider social space and discouraging heavy reliance on the supervisors.

Notably, the concern is that where there is an absence of basic guidance from supervisors, there may not be any guarantee that the advice sought from others would be appropriate. That could

pose a risk to doctoral students who are faced with the high demand of making original contribution to their field of study. Considering that students do encounter conceptual difficulties - “the point(s) at which students...become ‘stuck’, unable to make intellectual progress” (Johnson, 2014, p. 69; Killey, 2009; Harlow & Peter, 2014; Meyer & Land, 2005) they may require assistance from their supervisors. The absence of guidance from the supervisors would mean that they may be unable to navigate the thresholds, let alone experience the transformative learning that comes with it. Also, minimal interaction/contact could limit epistemic engagement between supervisees and supervisors which is a key element of the supervisory process (McGinty et al., 2010, p. 517). In other words, the processes of learning that students need to go through may be neglected.

### **7.3.1 Participant transaction with group/co-supervisor enhances/inhibits learning**

Although group/co-supervision was only experienced by the participants in one out of the four institutions where the data for this thesis were generated, their experiences provide insight into the practice of group/co-supervision in the context of this PhD research. One important finding in this regard was how consultations and supervision meetings were held. The participants in this category revealed that supervision meetings were held with individual supervisors, as opposed to having all three supervisors in attendance. To this effect, the participants noted that: “*I don’t see the three of them at the same time, I only see one supervisor at a time... Because, there was no such arrangement*” (section 5.2.2). This shows that, whereas the department uses the group/co-supervision model, the practice is still very much informed by the traditional solo model of supervision. As revealed earlier (section 7.2), it is possible that the supervisors have not experienced group/co-supervision themselves and they are probably unaware of how it is to be implemented. This finding is identical to that of Qureshi & Vazir (2016) who, in their personal reflective study, indicate that they themselves lacked any personal experience and training in group/co-supervision. Notwithstanding this fact, their ability to draw knowledge from the body of literature enabled them to adopt and to implement a group/co-supervision model in their institution. A lack of experience and training on the part of supervisors may perhaps account for the persistent use of the apprenticeship model of supervision in developing countries (Bitzer &

Albertyn, 2011, p. 876), despite existing evidence that the traditional solo approach to supervision is inadequate, in terms of meeting the current demand of a doctoral programme (Boud & Lee, 2005; Sampson & Comer, 2010).

Consequent upon holding separate supervision meetings, the participants revealed that they received conflicting feedback from the supervisors, which has also been established by previous studies (Paul, Olson & Gul, 2014; Rugg & Petre, 2004; Watts, 2010). In most cases, institutions provide supervision guidelines or some sort of contract that spells out the terms of student researcher engagement. But, in this thesis research of mine, the participants revealed that supervision guidelines are usually not adhered to (section 4.3.2.3) and supervision meetings are sometimes held based on the individual supervisor's mood and disposition (section 4.3.2.4). Also, there seems to be a clear absence of contract between group/team of supervisors, as revealed by one of the participants – *“...If there is anything that they are not able to agree on...it is now the responsibility of the major supervisor to take a decision”* (Section 5.2.2). Watts (2010) explains that the success of team-supervision is highly dependent on the individual supervisors that make-up the team and their ability to put students' interest first and be humble to learn from each other is important in fostering “intellectual generosity” (p. 336). This is consistent with the Sambrook et al. (2008, p. 81) explanation, that there is no “best type of relationship” as the supervision relationship is ultimately determined by the “individuals involved”.

Again, based on the findings in this PhD research, the participants noted that hidden competition exists among group/co-supervisors, and co-supervisors sometimes appeared to be interested in finding out whose ideas/feedback students align their work with. Probably, the competition arose because the most “intellectual guidance” did not always come from the main supervisor (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 18). Thus, the participants had to find ways of managing the relationship. One of the participants' approach is illustrative of what students do - *“I don't want a situation where one will feel slighted by way of saying you have gone to see him before coming to me...Honestly, sometimes I feel bad but, to save situation and not allow myself to become the carpet for the elephants...I tell a lie”* (section 5.2.2). The participant resorts to ‘dishonest’ behaviour to maintain ‘peace’ and to avoid ill-treatment from his supervisors, echoes the Paul et al. (2014, p. 5) sentiments that a lack of cohesion between co-supervisors could result in students “playing one

supervisor off against the other in order to avoid following advice that they might not wish to take”. But, their study provides no empirical evidence to support their claim. The present research thesis explicates how students ‘play off’ supervisors by keeping secret or hiding the feedback they receive from co-supervisors, as revealing feedback from one supervisor could threaten free communication with another supervisor (Watts, 2010).

With regards to feedback from the supervisors, most of the participants’ expressions suggest that they view feedback as correction. A, typical example in this regard would be: “*You cannot say because he is your second or third supervisor, you will not consider his corrections*” (section 5.2.2). This raises questions about the role that the supervisor should play in the development of the thesis and of the doctoral student. It is thus unclear whether the supervisor is to offer corrections or ask questions and guide doctoral students to allow them take ownership of their studies and to develop independent thought. The literature on research supervision differentiates between constructive and instructive feedback given to students. Constructive feedback is one aspect that challenges students to think. It is open-ended and “probing, asking them to explain, extend, justify, give concrete examples, why the study was significant, what would it contribute, why the particular methodological tools were chosen and what ethical consent procedures were used.” (Carless, Salter, Yang & Lam, 2011; Qureshi & Vazir, 2016, p. 102). Usually, such a type of feedback is provided in a learning environment, where there is mutual respect and student and supervisors engage critically and dialogically, according to Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt (2011). This enables doctoral students to engage in deep reflection, to develop critical thinking ability, and to take ownership of their research project (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Notably, with the apprenticeship-like/power relation found in this PhD research, where supervisors seem to be very directive and instructive, the participants are less likely to actively engage in the process of giving and receiving of feedback. Wang & Li (2011) explicate this view, thus:

In the apprenticeship model of supervision... the student may adopt a position of passivity and let the supervisor direct the relationship. In this model “feedback is accepted in an uncritical way, with students importing suggestions into the text and placing more confidence in the words of the ‘master’ than in their own ability to formulate acceptable texts (p. 102).

The implication of this model of feedback, as acknowledged in the literature, is that it limits students' ability to exercise independent thought in the knowledge creation process and thus affects their ownership of their student research (Ghadirian et al., 2014). Also, the finding in this PhD thesis, that in-fighting among the co-supervisors seems to be the order of the day and the supervisors are more concerned that doctoral students align their work with other supervisors, is indicative of the possibility that some supervisors would rather give corrections instead of providing constructive feedbacks, to enable doctoral students to learn. This contradicts the guiding orientation to supervision identified by Murphy et al. (2007, p. 219) whereby the supervisor uses "inquiry techniques through which candidates can become expert".

This study confirms the findings and explanations in existing studies (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011; Paul et al., 2014; Rugg & Petre, 2004; Watts, 2010) that conflict and disagreement among team/group/ co-supervisors can create a non-conducive learning environment for students. One of the participants that expressed their deep feeling of dissatisfaction, noted that "...*sometimes there use to be this unhealthy disagreements...*" (section 5.2.2). This shows that doctoral students consider disagreement and misunderstanding among supervisors as unhealthy, counter-productive and unprofitable, as far as student research studies are concerned. This points to the level of collegiality and professionalism at play among the academics. In this instance, it appears as if the supervisors' personality, power and ego take precedence over the need to create new knowledge and thinking with respect to whatever the field requires.

Notably, if disagreement among co-supervisors is handled in a way that is productive, supervisees could learn about argumentation and justification of different viewpoints. One of the participants indicated that, conflicting feedback from his supervisors gave him the opportunity to develop. This may be because the participant had the opportunity to observe/watch his supervisors engage with one another, in constructing and defending arguments and this could have been a powerful learning space for the research student. This finding is in accordance with an assertion by Watts (2010) that disagreement between supervisors can be beneficial to students, in terms of stimulating the ability of the student to think critically and thus possibly contributing to the ongoing debate in his/her field of student research. This can happen if the relationship among group/co-supervisors is "a

productive partnership rather than a stressful struggle of ideology and/or personality” (Van Rensburg, Danaher, Malan, Erwee & Anteliz, 2012, p. 43).

In spite of the challenges in group/co-supervision, all of the participants in this PhD research who were supervised by the group/co-supervisors, indicated their preference for this model of supervision. This finding is consistent with an earlier account that students prefer to be supervised by more than one supervisor, despite the challenges that are inherent in this model of supervision (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011). The advantages of group/co-supervision which, according to the participants in this PhD research, include having a broad range of perspectives on their research work, a richer pool of knowledge, and widened epistemological access (section 5.2.2), which seems to outweigh the disadvantages (Paul et al., 2014, p. 3).

### **7.3.2 Student transaction with a supervisory panel affects student learning**

The supervisory panel/committee in the university departments serve as quality control mechanisms that vet, critique the work of students, and provide feedback to presenting research students (during student research proposal defence and internal defence). The participants revealed that sometimes the panel is also involved in the process of selecting research topics for the students, although no defence is required at this stage. But, the challenge that is commonly encountered, as revealed by all the participants in this study is the cancellation/rejection of research topics by the supervisory panel. This may be a failing on the part of the doctoral students to undertake an exhaustive review of the literature in order to determine whether the ‘so-called gap’ (presented as a research topic) does exist. Also, if there is so much emphasis on defending the student research proposal early, doctoral students may not know what the real gap is to sufficiently and convincingly argue for the significance of their proposed topic/study (Jansen, 2011). But, considering the Lessing and Schulze (2002, p. 140) argument that, although doctoral students are responsible for selecting their research topics, they still require assistance from their supervisors to be able to make such a selection. This suggests that the supervisory process is essentially to prepare doctoral students and to induct them into their respective roles as researchers.

With regards to the actual defence which happened at various stages of the research process - proposal, internal and external defence, the participants revealed that, apart from the presenting student, the department allows all of the postgraduate students to be in attendance as observers, except for the final viva voce examination. The participants see this practice to be beneficial, as it provided them with a powerful learning opportunity to observe/listen to their colleagues' defence of their own research work and to learn from the critique/feedback/corrections given to them on how valid arguments are presented. Thus, one of the participants revealed that she became better prepared for her own defence (section 5.2.3). This points to the way in which the defence attendance could enhance research student learning, student development of confidence and student personal growth.

However, the participants also revealed that the experience of defence could sometimes be devastating, particularly for presenting students, as the examination panel members could turn the defence venue into an arena of conflict and rivalry (Okeke, 2010). This resembles what Watts, (2010, p. 338) refers to as supervisors taking a "competitive turn" in team supervision. But, much more than taking such a "competitive turn", the participants in this study revealed that conflict/disagreement among examination panel members could be so tense that, some academics question the integrity of fellow supervisors at the student research defence venue. Sometimes some academics make allegations that some supervisors are more concerned with output (counting the number of students they graduate), instead of focusing on student research knowledge generation as a process (refer to section 5.2.3). The concern, however, is that the perceived problem created by the supervisor is not addressed to the supervisor, by any higher authority, for example, but is debated/contested/fought through the unsuspecting student, whose student research work may be rejected by the examination panel in order to aggravate his/her supervisors. As one of the participants revealed: *"...the area we experience problem is where you come out for oral defence or proposal...if there are extreme issues between the lecturers...they try to transfer these things to students"* (section 5.2.3). This suggests that the panel presentation process may be an antagonistic space, or even more of a vicious space, as opposed to being a supportive and developmental space. The finding contradicts the Denicolo (2001, p. 44) position that "vivas should be held in conditions that allow students to perform to the best of their ability".

The finding, however, confirms the Watts (2010, p. 337) assertion that one of the challenges in a team supervision arrangement is that “supervisors may use the student in order to score points off each other as part of their own power struggles”. Additionally, the finding in this PhD research thesis does, extend our understanding that while defence is a necessary part of the rigour that it is expected to be, it can degenerate into an unhealthy contest between the doctoral students research supervisors and the examination panel members, at the expense of the doctoral student at critical moments in the doctoral research environment (i.e., during defence presentations). As such, presenting students could receive detrimental or undeserved commentary on their proposal or oral defence that could frustrate and traumatise them. This finding corroborates with previous research findings in the literature, that associate an overwhelming emotional distress, a decrease in the sense of self, and a low motivation to continue with the student research following a negative experience with the viva voce examination (Hartley & Fox, 2002; Leonard, 2006; Tinkler & Jackson, 2002; Wallace & Marsh, 2001). However, these authors focused only on the final viva voce, and this PhD research of mine, brings to the fore the student experiences of research defence at critical stages of their student research practice, for example, with the student research proposal. This finding may be considered as part of the “special elements of RHD experience that can trigger, or exacerbate, a range of psychological or emotional problems” for students and consequently affect their ability to complete their programmes (Norton, 2011, p. 5). The implication is that, valuable doctoral researchers and doctoral research outputs that could contribute to the body of knowledge may be lost/missed (Solem, Hopwood & Schlemper, 2011).

Overall, the findings of this PhD research illuminate our understanding of issues of “conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests and power imbalances” (Morley, 1999, p. 4; Gillies & Lucey, 2007) that impacted the participants’ transaction in the university social space, and such issues “are rarely openly acknowledged and discussed” (Gillies & Lucey, 2007, p. 2), as is the case in a recent study by Ghadirian et al. (2014, p. 4) that recommends the use of a ‘supervisory committee’, as a way to deal with the challenge in doctoral supervision. But, the question is, why do students experience research defence/viva voce in this way? Could it be due to a “lack of clarity about the purposes of the viva” as established in previous studies (Denicolo, 2001; Wallace & Marsh, 2001)? More research may be required in this regard.

### **7.3.3 Transacting in the personal social space: impacts of extenuating personal circumstances on the supervision relationship**

Most of the participants in this PhD research revealed that issues in their personal lives relating to family, job and finance interfered with their studies and the relationship with the supervisors. This concurs with the Weidman, Twale & Stein (2001) assertion that family, friends and employment exert influence on students despite being an external factor in the university setting. These personal issues, as found in the population sample survey of this PhD research, were sometimes not envisaged at the onset of the supervision relationship. An example of extenuating personal circumstance with regards to family life was revealed by one of the participants who expressed a deep feeling of obligation to urgently secure the safety of her brother's family from a crisis/unrest situation in the state. Because of the participant's commitment to ameliorate the family problem, her attention seemed to have shifted away from her study, and that affected her supervisor's perception of her as a research student. Instead of providing support in the challenging period, as suggested in the Wright & Cochrane (2000, p. 193) study, the supervisor simply compared the participant with other students and concluded that she was not making progress. Although the supervisor may be unaware of her plight, his conclusion suggests that he probably did not care to enquire. This implies that supervisors could be insensitive to the personal circumstances of doctoral students and that may result in developing wrong perceptions about them. This finding confirms the Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt (2011, p. 11) argument that "family responsibilities will...impact on the nature of the relationship" that students have with their supervisors. Task-oriented supervisors may fail to recognise the doctoral student as a "whole person" (Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 11), whose educational, social and psychological wellbeing is to be considered (Green, 2005). Findings in earlier studies in the literature suggest that not all academics live a balanced life-style - some prefer their academic work over family (Golde, 2005; Golde & Dore, 2001). As such, they are less likely to recognise that doctoral students have family lives to take care of.

Another personal circumstance, revealed by the same participant in this PhD research was the issue of entering into the marriage relationship - "[b]y August that year, a man came and said he wants to marry me. [Laughter] ...so we went to different places...and there were lots of distractions" (section 5.3).

It seems obvious that the participant allowed personal matters to take precedence over her academic life. But, her experience draws our attention to how marriage placed different demands on the participant's time and physical ability to study. This shows that life-changing shifts like marriage can occur in the life of a doctoral research student and that could change the context in which the doctoral research student works, and they have a direct bearing on the supervision experience of the doctoral research student. Also, based on the finding, there seems to be no evidence that the man (husband) was a suitable partner in the participant's life. As it was, the participant had to alter her so-called 'normal circumstances'. This raises questions as to what it means to be a female doctoral research student assuming a marriage relationship. In the patriarchal society as we have in most African countries, marginalisation of women seems normal. In line with this view, an earlier study focusing on the impact of work context on postgraduate students' learning experience, suggests that women in postgraduate studies encounter more challenges in terms of accessing family funding (Leonard et al., 2006). Hence, there may not be any consideration on the part of the husband.

Another personal challenge, revealed by the participants in this PhD thesis, relates to the issues of work pressure. One of the participants, who tried to combine his administrative job with part-time doctoral research, revealed that the demand of his job resulted in his inability to continue as a doctoral student and he had to suspend his study for about five years. This finding is consistent with previous findings that students' 'personal problems', 'work-related problems' can make them to suspend their programmes (Ives & Rowley, 2005, p. 537). For another participant, an unforeseen personal circumstance was experienced in the form of financial crisis due to a stoppage of income (salary) at his work place. Hence, the participant was unable to pay his university fees and, consequently, suspended his doctoral student research programme. During that period, the participant revealed that his supervisors were supportive, but at some point they began to issue cautionary messages to the participant. This may be because the participant was not able to communicate the nature of his context convincingly to his supervisors. Thus, the supervisors may have reacted based on the initial limited information/knowledge of the personal challenge that the participant had encountered. It is also possible that the supervisors themselves were concerned that they would be held accountable to the university for the extended duration of a PhD research thesis. Notwithstanding, the participant later revealed that there was an open communication line between

them in which either party could initiate contact. The participant considered that to be a motivating factor in his decision to persist with the doctoral research programme. This means that when supervisors incorporate issues of affect in the supervision relationship, they are likely to encourage better throughput and that could make the supervision experience to be more fruitful and beneficial. This finding is in accordance with a finding by Watts (2008), whose study on part-time doctoral students states that empathy is required when supervising part-time students who juggle between study, work and family. Although there are debates about the level of supervisors' involvement in students' personal lives, Fataar (2013), in outlining a pedagogy of supervision, proposes 'active relational engagement' which includes understanding the personal dynamics in the student's life. Similarly, Watts (2008, p. 370) advocates a "tailor-made" supervision approach that responds to the individual needs and circumstances of students. But, this was not the case for most of the participants in this PhD thesis research, as their personal circumstances were not taken into consideration.

Sometimes, the extenuating circumstances emanated from the supervisors. One of the participants revealed that his supervisor was at some point ill and unavailable to perform her supervisory roles. The participant revealed that his progress was halted as there was no alternative arrangement by the department/faculty to quickly bridge the gap created by the supervisors' absence. This suggests that the university may not have put in place any systems to deal with unforeseen circumstances in order to be responsive to the needs of doctoral students. Another participant had a traumatic experience caused by the demise of a supervisor which, according to him, resulted in a lack of direction and also uncertainty - which has been found to be the dilemma of a doctoral orphan (Wisker & Robinson, 2012). This PhD thesis, adds to this by illuminating on an understanding about the implications for both students and supervisors. Usually, when a supervisee is re-assigned to a new supervisor, the supervisee is less likely to be aware of the research orientation and supervision style/approach of the new supervisor. The supervisee may also be unsure as to whether the new supervisor would understand the focus of his study or whether s/he would have to reshape his topic and several other issues that create uncertainty. The new supervisor may also experience some tension in dealing with the psychological state of mind of the doctoral orphan and the thesis task that was taken over halfway through his study. The need for "emotional intelligence" (Sambrook et al., 2008, p. 81) on the part of the supervisor has been highlighted. The finding shows

that personal life situations of both doctoral students and supervisors could impact on the supervision experience, in non-predictable ways. Although these situations exist, in most cases they are not taken into consideration by the supervisor, as they appear to be non-factored into the supervisory policy guidelines of the institutions, or probably non-implemented. Issues regarding implementation was found to be a major challenge in the Nigerian context by Ogbuno (2013).

## **7.4 Student yearning for a positive supervision relationship**

This PhD research thesis finds that the participants have a deep yearning for a positive supervision relationship, as is captured in the words of one of the participants, thus – *“how I wish I had somebody... I wanted somebody that we can work together”* (section 6.2). Some of the participant yearning indicates that the doctoral students seek humane and conscientious supervisors, upon whom they can rely, in order to take care of the affective domain of care and consideration, as opposed to being experts in (harsh) discipline. But, in most cases, the participant expectations were only pertaining to an ‘imagined’ ideal relationship that does not always materialise (Schulze & Lessing, 2003), as those expectations seem to diverge from the expectations of the supervisors. The situation was exacerbated by a lack of clarification of the expectations from the onset of the supervision relationships (Van der Boom, Klabbers, Putnik, & Woolderink, 2013), as revealed by the participants. Thus, some of the participants only look forward to some sort of divine/external intervention, to alter the situation, given the fact that the institutional system/practices do not also empower the doctoral students to assert themselves in a relationship with powerful supervisors, as discussed earlier (refer to section 4.3.1.1).

Other participants revealed how they had to devise ways of navigating the power issues that are evident in the doctoral student research context. A typical example was shown in the way that one of the participants responded to her supervisor, who had given a demeaning and discouraging commentary with regards to the likely outcome of her thesis – *“I said, Prof, ‘how can a father like you talk to his daughter like that?’ Please say something positive to me...”* (Section 6.2). The participant’s response showed that she values positive, supportive feedback/encouragement as opposed to negative criticism. The way that the participant simply addressed the supervisor as a

father and quickly took a daughter position, which was almost like taking a stance of being a subjugated natural victim type on the part of the student, to be able to convince the supervisor, demonstrates that the participant acknowledged that the power differential exists between supervisors and supervisees. Other participants showed similar realisation as they revealed that they had to learn the ‘unwritten rule’ for getting the attention of the supervisors which entails paying constant courtesy visits to the supervisors, whereby doctoral students were saddled with the responsibility of perambulating their supervisors’ offices to get their attention and be told what to do. It seems like the supervisors call for supervision meetings for the record to simply go through the motions and not to provide substantive engagement. What seems more disturbing is that the hierarchical relationship meant that doctoral students had to wait to be instructed, as opposed to these high-level doctoral research students taking ownership of themselves and their work and showing their personal and academic autonomy.

Part-time doctoral students who share their time between work and student research appear to be the most affected by the ‘unwritten rule’ of paying constant visits to the supervisors. One of the part-time participants, in the population sample of this PhD research, lamented how the supervisors showed their total disregard to the harsh realities of the rigours of part-time doctoral student life and its related personal context (section 6.2). This finding contradicts the Green (2005) suggestion that all aspects of students’ lives – their educational, social and personal wellbeing should be taken into consideration in supervision. The finding confirms the Okeke (2010, p. 117) assertion that the supervision relationship that is ‘characterized as a pedagogy of indifference’ as identified in the traditional discourse of Grant (2005b, p. 36) on supervision, may be ‘very popular’ in the Nigerian context. Thus, the finding brings to light a predicament faced by doctoral students, particularly the part-time doctoral students in the context of the four Nigerian universities from which the population sample for this PhD research was drawn for which, previous studies in the literature have failed to illuminate. Earlier studies on the Nigerian context mostly focused on the challenges relating to inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor teaching and learning facilities and funding (also found in this PhD thesis), but which have paid less attention to the challenges arising from the power dynamics in the supervisory relationships (Ekpoh, 2016; Duze, 2010; Ogbogu, 2011; Okebukola, 2006). The negative implication of such power issues is that doctoral students may

resort to unethical practices in their bid to gain the supervisors' attention to subsequently attend to the research student needs.

#### **7.4.1 Gift-giving as a means for students to express their yearning for a positive supervision relationship**

This PhD thesis finds that the giving of gifts by the doctoral students to the supervisors is commonplace in the Nigerian supervision context, pertains to four Nigerian universities, from where the data for this PhD thesis were generated. Although the participants showed some variation in their conception on gift-giving to the supervisors, the general motive seems to be to develop a positive relationship with the supervisors. One of the conceptions that the participants revealed about gift-giving to the supervisors was that it could be a culture-driven practice. This corroborates the assertion of Idoniboye-Obu (2015, p. 17) that “gift-giving is commonplace in traditional African society. It is normal for people in the Nigerian society to offer gifts to family, friends, and so on to strengthen the “sense of worthiness and fulfilment” (Akanle, 2013, p. 92).

However, a recent study that examines the culture of gift-giving in the context of the laws against bribery in Nigeria raises the concern that it is difficult to differentiate between ordinary gift-giving and bribery (Bello, 2014). The author suggests the complete eradication of gift-giving practice in public offices as a way to maintain sanity in public organisations. This raises suspicion about gift-giving in the supervision space because doctoral students are less likely to be explicit about why they present gifts to their supervisors. Doctoral students could present gifts as a way of pulling their supervisor into a relationship and expecting a reciprocal investment in some other ways. Although one participant revealed that gift-giving can be an act of appreciation done out of the student's own volition to appreciate the supervisors who supported them. It seems obvious that given the unfriendly supervision environment revealed by the participants, where most of the supervisors show little or no concern for their students, doctoral students who receive adequate attention from their supervisors may feel almost indebted to those supervisors and as such would

want to reciprocate (show appreciation) by giving gifts (section 6.4.5). In other words, gift-giving to supervisors may not have arisen in the first place had the supervisors been supportive.

Therefore, viewing the practice of gift-giving by doctoral students to supervisors as a culture-driven practice for most of the participants seems simplistic, as it downplays how students and/or supervisors could abuse gift-giving in the supervision relationship. The participants revealed that students do offer material gifts to supervisors with intentions to have such reciprocated (Bello, 2014) to manipulate the system (section 6.4.3). One of the participants revealed that some of the students believe that they could bestow gifts on the supervisors in a sufficient manner to win supervisor favours and the supervisor in turn could find illicit ways to manipulate the education system and get the students their certification. The finding concurs with the Okeke (2010, p. 117) argument that “some students and individuals have the dangerous impression that what counts is no longer effort plus ability, but cash plus the willingness to disburse it.” Cases of manipulations are usually reported to occur in more formal undergraduate setting in Nigeria (where students bribe lecturers for marks) which results in the production of half-baked graduates (Aina, 2014). The practice of gift-giving in supervision revealed in this study whereby the supervisors could manipulate the system to get undeserving students through raises concern as to who engages in intellectual work and whether the supervisor has some powers to do that on behalf of the student. There might be a need for further studies to investigate these issues.

Another participant, who considered gift-giving as an illegal practice, revealed that it is demeaning for the supervisors, who have attained higher levels in the academia profession, to stoop so low by accepting gifts from doctoral students. The participant lamented how some academics/supervisors in her institution feign ignorance of this practice despite its high prevalence. She, however, attributed such denial to the fear of intimidation, labelling and/or set-up that supervisors who expose the practice may face from their colleagues (probably the majority), who may have been benefiting from the illicit practice and in a way support it but dare not talk about it publicly. Probably, this may have also contributed to the in-fighting and acrimony displayed by some of the panel members during the defence presentations (Section 5.2.3). The concern, however, is that this practice of gift-giving to supervisors seems to remain hidden, and even in the literature on the Nigerian context. Idoniboye-Obu (2015) rightly notes that corruption in Nigerian higher education

has been grossly overlooked. This could be because some of the supervisors are also part of the drivers of the corrupt practice as the finding revealed that they sometimes use it as a tool to extort and exclude students (section 6.4.4). One of the participants revealed that such supervisors may initially declare lack of interest in receiving gratification from students, but they turn and act contrary to their initial declaration by receiving gifts from students. According to one of the participants, such an attitude by the supervisors made doctoral students to now believe that they need to offer something to the supervisors to receive quality service. As such, gift-giving practices have become so entrenched that the aforementioned term “SHINE YOUR EYES”, which implies offering of material bribes to supervisors, has now become a cliché among students in the institutions, as previously noted in this thesis. The use of coded language among doctoral students was found in a recent study that focused on the hidden curriculum in PhD supervision in an intercultural context by Kidman, Manathunga & Cornfort (2017). The authors find that doctoral students devised a “highly coded form” of speaking, despite the lowly status ascribed to them by the supervisors in the foreign country where they conduct their studies (p. 1208).

This finding confirms the Idonoboye-Obu (2015) argument that “students engage in corrupt behaviour because of corrupt behaviour on the part of a lecturer” (p. 241). Some of the author’s study subjects reported that supervisors sometimes pressurise, intimidate and oppress students to succumb and engage in corrupt practices (p. 243). The phrase ‘shine your eyes’ revealed in this study is also consistent with a related term - “sorting” commonly used in literature in the Nigerian context which implies bribery whereby students offer “money or other material inducement to their lecturers after an examination to influence their grades” (Akpanuko, 2012: 94; Aina, 2014; Idoniboye-Obu, 2015, p. 118). But, none of these studies that reported corrupt practices (e.g., bribery) in Nigerian higher education institutions (Godwin et al., 2011) focus on the systemic corruption (Idoniboye-Obu, 2015) that seems to be well-seated in the supervision space that this PhD thesis illuminates.

The gift-giving practice has several implications for students, as it places fee-paying students in a compromising position to pay again for the service of their supervisors and as a result they are being manipulated and extorted, as noted earlier in this thesis. Again, the supervisors who accept bribes from research students not only encourage unethical practices but they also allow their sense

of judgement to be influenced, and as a result they compromise standards and undermine the purpose of the doctorate. Also, it draws attention to how the gift-giving practice in the supervision context could serve as a tool for inclusion/exclusion. A social exclusion perspective reveals the subtle ways in which people become included and/or excluded through an ‘othering process’ (Commins, 2004). Gift-giving appears to work to ‘other’ the less powerful groups, that is, doctoral students who do not ‘shine their eyes’ to the supervisors (bribe supervisors) as they may suffer neglect and abandonment (Williams & Lee, 1999), while doctoral students who offer gifts are embraced and included. By implication, the practice of gift-giving in the supervision context could either enhance conditions for learning for gift-givers or serves as a stumbling block to learning to non-gift-givers. Although, it could also have negative implications for gift-givers in that it could shift their focus from intellectual engagement that the supervision relationship should afford them to mere acquisition of a certificate (Waghid, 2006). Thus, the effectiveness of the monitoring and quality assurance role of the National University Commission (NUC) and the federal ministry of Education (FME) as the rise in corruption in the Nigerian higher education has been partly attributed to failure on their part to develop mechanisms that ensure quality (Aina, 2014; Idoniboye-Obu, 2015).

The implications are that for the university corruption or bribery (gift-giving by doctoral students to supervisors) could inhibit the university’s supervision space, that is supposed to be a space for developing academics that can intellectually “challenge and transform societal practice” (Sayed, 2002, p. 8), since the larger society, in turn, influences the university. For, example, in Idoniboye-Obu’s (2015, p. 255) study, corruption culture in the society was found to account for 38.3% of corruption issues in universities. Similarly, Akpanuko (2012, p. 92) argues that “the university system is a mirror image of the decay in the wider Nigerian society”. Notably, the issues of corruption both in the society and in higher educational institutions are not limited to the Nigerian context, as corruption issues have been reported in other contexts (Orkodashvili, 2009; Yang, 2007). For a developing country like Nigeria, that is striving to compete favourably in the World-based knowledge economy, overlooking corruption in the supervision space will impact negatively on the integrity of its graduates (Okebukola, 2015b).

#### **7.4.2 Pastoral care and support enhance student satisfaction and student sense of self-efficacy**

Another finding in this PhD research, shows that the relationship between the supervisees and the supervisors could be collaborative and mutually satisfying. Participants who revealed that they experienced positive relationship at some points in the supervision process, showed that a positive relationship is not automatic, as it develops over time. The continuity in their relationship from masters to doctoral studies seemed to contribute to that development as both doctoral students and supervisors appeared to have gained a level of understanding about each other's behaviour, style of supervision/learning and expectations, as noted earlier in this thesis. This finding confirms the Ives & Rowley (2005) assertion that continuity in a supervision relationship enhances student satisfaction. Also, some of the participants appear to have become more mature in dealing with critiques - *I came back again for my PhD... I am now surprised at the relationship. ...he is no more as hash as he used to be. ...the relationship is so fine now* (section 6.2.1).

The finding confirms that the kind of relationship that exists between doctoral student and supervisor may sometimes be determined by the stage at which the doctoral student is in his/her study (Chiappetta- Swanson & Watt, 2011; Wisker & Robinson, 2012). For example, one of the participants that indicated being satisfied with some aspects of his supervision experience revealed that his supervisor who initially adopted a strict task-focused approach later became solicitous, caring and provided financial assistance towards the completion stage of his study. That enabled the participant to develop a deep sense of belonging which he referred to as a 'mother-son' bond (section 6.2.1). This finding confirms Chiappetta-Swanson & Watt's, (2011, p. 17) explanation that the "*pastoral* approach may be utilized towards the end of the candidacy as the student becomes comfortable with the research and the writing up." But, the fact that the relationship only progressed/developed in a linear manner - from being thesis-focused to one that is more interpersonal meant that the supervisor would not likely respond to personal and emotional needs of the doctoral at the initial stage of his study. Notably, it can be argued that the supervisor's initial task-focused approach may be because the supervisor did not want the building of the relationship to come in the way of the thesis production (Lee, 2008). There seems to be no negotiation of expectations at the different stages of the research process. That may be due to power issues that

have been found to be major factors that negates the building of the friendship relationship in supervision (Ives & Rowley, 2005). This finding points to the idea that Khene's, (2014) insights as to what constitute a humane pedagogy has little or no currency in certain sectors of Nigerian higher education.

However, the participants revealed that supervisors sometimes encouraged that their sense of self-efficacy. For instance, one of the participants revealed how her supervisor was not only inclined to open-up to dialogue and debate, but also had a lot of faith in her as a research student, respected her ideas, and trusted her judgement, at least at the initial stage of her study (section 6.2.3). This points to the role of respect and trust in engendering student self-efficacy in supervisory relationship (Franke & Arvidsson 2011, p. 8). The finding also echoes the Gravett (2005, p. 40-41) explanation about dialogical discussion which “essentially refers to a respectful relationship”, whereby, the “adult educator does not assume the role of unilateral authority thereby silencing the voices of the learners”. The supervision approach revealed here aligns with the Lee (2010) emancipatory approach to supervision, where the supervisor fosters student personal growth and student development by providing a conducive atmosphere for the students to freely participate in intellectual discussions and give their opinions/ideas. Unlike the dominant supervisors who feel less secure by the assertiveness of their students, the supervisor in this case seemed to recognise the doctoral student as a speaking subject with rights, and that made it possible for a democratic engagement to occur between them. Another participant revealed a variation in the approach that her supervisor adopted to encourage her self-efficacy - a challenge and support strategy - *He advised me, ... ‘ why don’t you go and read...go to library ...read so that you can be exposed’ ... so, I did that and... my interest now deepened* (section 6.2.3). The supervisor challenged the participant in the sense that he did not do the work for her. On the contrary, he exposed her to reading so that she was able to identify her area of research interest. In terms of support, the participant revealed that her supervisor directed her to the library where she could find help. In other words, the supervisor seems to promote her identity formation by exposing the participant to the works that have been carried out by other authorities in their field.

Regular communication was another way through which participants revealed they were supported. One of the participants indicated that through regular communication, whereby either of the parties could initiate the communication, he was encouraged to continue with his programme despite personal challenges that initially impeded his study. This confirms previous research finding that the “quality of interaction, sense of care from supervisor to students were all important...” (Golde, 2000). Although, it is also possible that the supervisors referred to in this study showed concern and took responsibility for the participant’s well-being because they felt accountable for the participant’s progress. But, what seems important is that the humane character they displayed promoted fruitful and beneficial supervision experience for the participant (Ives & Rowley, 2005) which could also encourage better throughput for the university.

In general, the pastoral care and support that the participants revealed encompasses affection, academic support whereby the supervisors invested their time and energy in providing guidance for the development of the doctoral students’ theses by providing technical assistance with literature resources, reading several drafts produced by the supervisees and providing prompt feedback to enable the supervisees make progress with their studies. It also involved the development of the doctoral students’ capabilities in writing, co-authoring and broader career development. This means that supervisors could foster personal growth of doctoral students as well as enhance the forging of professional identity of doctoral students by applying appropriate strategies (Lee, 2012). However, it seems that the level of support that the doctoral participants receive from their supervisors was also determined by the participants’ own dedication, diligence and commitment to their studies. In other words, the participants’ personal capital (self-determination, resilience, etc.) comes into play in the supervision relationship. In most of the cases, student self-determination was also reinforced through sustained communication with supervisors, empathy on the part of the supervisor, supervisor pastoral care and supervisor support, and this fostered the resilience in the doctoral students (section 6.2.4). This shows that there was a joint effort between the supervisors and the doctoral students.

The only participant that claimed to experience a positive supervision relationship all through the supervision process, pointed to an issue of critical concern in the Nigerian context, namely, the lack of care and support from the supervisors to the research students. This, according to the

participant, usually accounts for the students' prolonged stay on the doctoral programme, which can span for more than fifteen years in some cases, as noted earlier. This finding is consistent with previous studies that posit that doctoral studies in Nigeria can be prolonged for twenty (20) years (Agu & Kayode, 2014; Ekpoh, 2016; Duze, 2010). Additionally, this study draws attention to the implication of an excessively long duration for doctoral research in terms of the relevance of the theses produced, thereafter. Arguably, when students have stayed long on a programme, by the time they complete their thesis, the literature may well have become obsolete, methodology may have moved along, and better ways to carry out analysis may have been discovered. As a result, students may have to rework their thesis several times to maintain the standard with current happenings in their field of inquiry. This also draws attention to issues of resource utilization which relates to how universities ensure effective utilization of personal, institutional as well as national resources.

Furthermore, the study found that issues of power are still inherent in the supervision relationships that the participants considered as being positive. For instance, one of the participants that indicated that he was lucky to have a positive supervision experience revealed that sometimes his supervisor deliberately withheld critical information from him and allow him to struggle before providing guidance. This concurs with the Knowles (2007) assertion that even a pastoral style of supervision contains regulatory and disciplinary aspects. Notably, the struggle for recognition, as identified by Grant (2008), played out in this PhD thesis, whereby, the supervisor would probably want to gain recognition for his expert knowledge and, thus, deliberately withhold critical information from the doctoral student.

## **7.5 Understanding research participant experiences of supervision through the ecological model**

Supervision in the Nigerian context has its unique peculiarities that have not been adequately engaged with in the literature on supervision. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (comprising of micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-environments) provides a useful lens for understanding the layered environments within which doctoral students' experience of research supervision was

constructed. Based on the finding that the participants experienced research supervision as the apprenticeship-like/power relationship (category one), different proximal processes – the face-to-face supervision relationships, interactions and activities (Tobbell & Donnell, 2013) played out in the participants' immediate environment (micro-environment) that impacted their learning and development. These factors/variables as revealed in the finding related to the participants themselves (their competence and experience in conducting research) as well as the supervisors (supervisors' socialisation, and attitude towards students). Issues of mismatch in expectations between the supervisors and the doctoral students, the participants' struggles in understanding their masters' (supervisors') domain in research topic selection and power relations were found to impact both negatively and positively on the doctoral students' experience of supervision. Other micro-variables found within the departmental context relate to the departmental practice, whereby doctoral students had to fund meals at defence presentations and the issue of favouritism in scheduling defence dates perpetrated by some administrative staffs in the department. This finding echoes a Lovitts (2008) explanation that the student learning experience in the supervision space is not only affected by their personal characteristics, but also by several variables in the micro-environment. The finding also shows that other variables in the institutional exo-environment (that is, the next environment after the departmental environment as shown in figure 1) includes entrenched practices in admissions and supervisor nomination in the department/university which exclude students from the selection process, shortage of supervisors, and inadequate resources and infrastructure in the department/university. Although these factors are not within the immediate micro-environment of the participants, they contribute to the way that supervisors and doctoral students are positioned in the supervisor-supervisee relationship and how the participants construct themselves as less powerful in relation to the supervisors. As a result, the participants remained passive recipients of instruction and directives from the supervisors instead of playing an active role in shaping both their environment and their learning experiences as suggested in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Shupp & Arminio, 2012). While three of the participants consider such a power relationship to be beneficial, in terms of enabling them to be more committed and dedicated to the theses task, the rest of the participants indicated negative impacts of repression and silence such as frustration, demotivation, prolonged stay, and the decision to leave the doctoral research programme.

With regards to the finding that the participants experienced research supervision as transacting in the social space, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model enables us to understand the proximal process of interactions and relationships (in the micro-environment) that the participants had with different social agents. The findings showed participants' transaction as doctoral students is prevalent within the university department, that is, transaction with university assigned-supervisors and group/co-supervisors, transacting in the defence committee/panel space and with peers and colleagues. In cases where the transaction was organic and supported by the supervisors and the department, the participants revealed that their learning was enhanced (by connecting to the wider community of scholars through conference attendance, and so on). However, as was the case with the finding in category one, strong power issues characterised the departmental social space and that affected the participants' transaction as it disempowered most of them (particularly, in cases where doctoral students bear the brunt of conflicts among co-supervisors and supervisory panel). Another micro-environmental variable that immensely influenced the dynamics in the supervision relationships was their transaction in the personal social space (job and family). This was experienced in terms of extenuating personal circumstances (on the part of the participants, and the supervisors; and sometimes institutional factors) which doctoral students have little or no control over the situations. Notably, these factors seemed not to have been factored into the supervisory relationship. Another distal environmental factor (exo-environment or the wider university environment) revealed in the finding include the participant transaction with peers, colleagues and other academics outside the university. Participants revealed how such transactions provided emotional and academic support (for instance, they received assistance with sourcing literature for their studies). The finding also showed that the doctoral students in this category did not only rely on their supervisors for direction as they were more agentic (relational agency) in asking for help from others when they needed it (Hadingham, 2011). This confirms an earlier argument that the developing individual (the doctoral student) has an active role to play in shaping his/her experience through interactions and relationships within the nested multi-directional systems/environments (Christensen, 2010).

With regards to student yearning for a positive supervision relationship (category three), some of the findings indicated that developing/building a positive relationship with the supervisors was

enhanced by the participants' continuity in the supervisory relationship from the Master's degree to the doctoral research level. Also, the participants who received pastoral care and support from supervisors and whose self-efficacy was encouraged experienced high-level of satisfaction. This indicates that proximal processes in the micro-environment (a basic unit where development occurs) could be liberating and empowering for doctoral students (Lee, 2012). However, where issues of power relation were strong, the finding showed that some of the participants tend to devise ways of negotiating the power issues. Based on the finding, gift-giving – a practice believed to be common in the Nigerian society (macro-environment) was used by participants as a way of pulling the supervisors into a relationship. This shows how societal practice filters into the supervision to impact on the supervisory relationships. The impact of the practice of gift-giving to supervisors as revealed in the study was the social inclusion and exclusion of the doctoral students (Commins, 2004). In other words, gift-giving may be seen as a subtle form of 'othering' in which some doctoral students become included and others excluded (usually, those who may not afford to offer gifts to supervisors). In some cases, simultaneous inclusion and exclusion do occur whereby an included person enjoys both "luxury and servitude"; and the excluded gains autonomy with hardships" (Jackson, 1999, p. 130).

Overall, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model enables us to understand the complex nature of doctoral students' supervision experiences which are mostly affected by proximal processes in the micro-environment. However, several other factors in the exo and macro – environments filter into the supervision space to impact on the supervisory relationship, doctoral students' satisfaction and learning experiences. It also showed that the doctoral student has the capability to play an active role in shaping the environment as well as his/her experience of learning in the PhD programme, either positively or negatively.

## **7.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the supervision experiences of Nigerian doctoral business education students in relation to the literature on research supervision and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. The discussion focused on the three key categories of description presented as the key findings of the study – the participants' experience of research supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship; the participants' experience of research supervision as transacting the social space; and student yearning for a positive supervision relationship. Of special note is the issue of power dynamics in the supervision space which for the most part constructed doctoral students and supervisors as different kinds of subjects - masters and apprentices/servants. The issue of power play in the supervisory relationship was also found to be given effect to by the departmental/institutional structure, systems and practices. In addition, the chapter analysed/discussed the impact of the many ways of experiencing research supervision on participant learning and participant development in the doctoral programme.

# **Chapter 8**

## **Insights, Implications and Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This concluding chapter presents the summary of main findings, and attempts to offer insights and implications of my PhD student research thesis. This thesis was necessitated by the acute contextual gap in literature on research supervision, with particular reference to Nigerian doctoral students from four Nigerian universities. The aim of this doctoral student research was to explore the research supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria. In pursuance of that, this doctoral student research sought to address the following critical questions:

- (a) What are the different ways that doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision?
- (b) How do the supervision experiences of doctoral business education students in Nigeria impact on their learning and development in the doctoral program?
- (c) Why do doctoral business education students in Nigeria experience research supervision the way they do?

The chapter starts by providing an overview of the entire study. The chapter then outlines the major findings and proposes a framework for understanding the relationship between doctoral students' experience of research supervision and learning. Lastly, the chapter provides implications and limitations of this PhD thesis; and based on that, makes suggestions for future research.

### **8.2 Overview of the study**

In Chapter 1, I presented the introduction, rationale for the study, the research problem, objectives of the study as well as the critical questions that guided the study. I then provided the contexts (international, national and institutional) in which my study was situated; my personal motivation

for embarking on the study, and my role in conducting the research. Lastly, I presented the research design and method; and how the entire study was organised to provide understanding to the reader. Chapter 2 focussed on the extant literature on research supervision which revealed the following key issues: One, research supervision has been generally acknowledged as an important process central to the development of high level researchers/scholars; yet, it has remained highly privatised in many contexts; and as such a less-theorised phenomenon. Two, the challenge of poor quality researchers and research outputs, high rates of attrition and late completions of doctoral programmes have been consistently linked to the quality of research supervision processes, practices and experiences that doctoral students receive. However, the perspectives of students – who are the most affected by supervision actions and practices have been under-investigated. Three, the growing body of work in the literature on research supervision has mostly emanated from the Western world; but, not so much has been investigated in the developing African contexts. The implication of this was that more studies are required to explore research supervision from the perspectives of students from developing African contexts.

In Chapter 3, a detailed explication of the research design and methodology was presented. The key tenets of phenomenographic research approach adopted for this study were outlined; as well as ethical issues; validity and reliability (trustworthiness) of the study.

In the data presentation of Chapters 4-6, I identified key data selections from the interview transcripts to support the different ways that the participants experience research supervision, which is in line with phenomenographic data analysis process. The three main categories of description arrived-at as the qualitatively different ways that the participants in this study experienced research supervision were presented as findings of the study. These are: participants' experience of research supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship; participants' experience of research supervision as transacting in the social space; and student yearning for a positive supervision relationship.

The discussion of the key findings in relation to existing literature was the focus of Chapter 7. Here distinct links to existing findings were presented in terms of how the current findings resonate with, contradict or expand existing knowledge about the experience supervision.

## **8.3 Delineating the findings**

In this section I synthesise the key findings of my thesis, with a view to proffering tentative answers to the research questions.

### **8.3.1 Research participant experiences of supervision as apprenticeship-like/power relationship and its impact on student learning and student development**

The experience of research supervision as an apprenticeship-like/power relationship is one of the important findings to emerge from my thesis. Participants described such relationship as one that is mostly characterised by supervisor indifference to the interpersonal aspects of students' lives. Although some participants pointed to the benefit of power-laden relationship – in terms of enabling them to become more committed to the thesis task and in taking agency for their learning; the majority of the participants revealed that they were marginalised, intimidated, humiliated, and dehumanised in so many ways. This is evident in the way that participants constructed themselves as less powerful and submissive subjects in relation to supervisors. The impact of that way of experiencing research supervision on participants' learning as revealed in the finding included the inability of the participants to assert themselves in the supervision relationship and have independent opinions.

#### **8.3.1.1 *Participant experiences of apprenticeship-like/power relationship***

The findings are that participants consider supervision as a relationship laden with power, in which supervisors positioned themselves not only as the primary source of intellectual guidance with regards to accomplishing the thesis task, but also as masters or even gods (omnipotent) in relation to doctoral students. Participants' felt that, this mode of supervising adopted by their supervisors

may have been influenced by their supervisors' socialisation (as many of them have been socialised in the traditional power-laden mode of supervision). While participants believe that their level of preparedness and competence in conducting research contributed to the supervisory relationship and their ability to learn, they mostly cited power issues as the major challenge they encountered in the research process. The finding showed how power was used negatively in the supervisor-supervisee encounters (supervision meetings) whereby some supervisors intimidate students to establish their voices as masters and thus, silence doctoral students. Similar experiences were revealed by participants with regards to scheduling consultations with supervisors whereby they indicated that consultations are left to the whims and caprices of supervisors who for the most part are unapproachable, unavailable, and inaccessible to students. However, some participants acknowledged that supervisors are overloaded with teaching and administrative workloads that they have limited time for supervision. Thus, the findings suggest that supervision may not have been appropriately factored into the work schedule of the supervisors; and as such, doctoral students appeared to constitute a nuisance in the system. Also, in relation to the analysis that there was no negotiation of expectations, mutual agreement or contract signed between supervisors and supervisees from the on-set of the relationship, the finding showed that participants experienced mismatch/misalignment in expectations with regards roles and responsibilities and approach to supervision – for instance, the analysis showed that, some supervisors adopted a thesis-focused approach to supervision when doctoral students expected a process-focused approach.

Issues of power were also found to complicate the doctoral student experience of the research topic selection process, as almost all participants expressed frustration with the amount of time wasted to arrive at a topic selection. While some participants attributed this to failure on their part, the majority of participant felt that it was due to limited/no guidance provided by supervisors. The analysis revealed that in some cases, participants have to align their research interest to those of supervisors to get research topics approved; although, such expectations are still not communicated or clarified by the supervisor. Other participants claimed that although supervisors allowed for student input in decision making on research topic selection, they tended to be very directive in proposing research topics. The finding further showed that participants experienced extreme cases of power relation whereby the supervisory relationship became very abusive that supervisors use derogatory commentaries to hurt the feelings of students (as revealed in the case where a

participant claimed that a supervisor called a supervisee 'goat'). Although some participants revealed that they were able to respond to such abuse positively by taking initiative for their learning and depending less on supervisors; the finding showed that abusive relationship repressed most participants into silence. This was noticed during the stage of recruitment of research participants for this PhD thesis research, where most students were initially unwilling to speak about their supervision experiences due to fear of being identified. Also, the finding showed that abusive supervision led to the drop out decision for some students. This enables us to understand that whereas there has been shifts in conceptualisation of research supervision that have greatly influenced the practice of supervision (particularly the current humanising supervision pedagogy that is well received in the western contexts); new supervision pedagogical practices is for the most part non-existence in the Nigerian supervision context focused on in this study. The patriarchal hierarchical practice of supervision still prevails contrary to the idea of students' active participation in the knowledge production process which the ecological model emphasis as being central to learning and development.

#### ***8.3.1.1.1 Institutional and departmental context***

In addition to the finding that supervisory relationship is power-laden, the analysis revealed that the positioning of supervisors and students within the institutional/departmental context is not only structurally hierarchical, the institutional practices and procedures also influenced power play in supervisory relationships. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model enables us to identify various issues that the doctoral student interact with (both animate and inanimate) that exert influence on the supervision relationship. One of such is the institutional practice of simultaneous release of admissions and nomination of supervisors, whereby potential doctoral students are excluded from the recruitment and supervisor nomination process; whereas, the system privilege supervisors to be part of the selection process. As such, participants revealed that they end up being paired with supervisors they would not have wanted to work with should they be given the opportunity to make a choice. Another practice by the departments is one which placed financial burden on presenting students to fund meals for supervisory panels during defence. This practice according to the participants required that presenting students are grouped together to be able to share the cost of funding meals; and as such, resulted in unnecessary delays for some students who are more

committed and hardworking than others. This suggests a lack of consideration on the part of the department for doctoral students who, in most cases, are self-sponsored and are given limited timeframe to study. Apart from that, the analysis showed that, the practice opens the door for students to want to impress panel members with expensive meals; thus, creating another form of exclusion for students who cannot afford to do so.

Based on the findings, another practice in the department which may have been hidden to the university authority is the favouritism in scheduling defence date perpetrated by administrative staffs. Participants revealed this practice as a form of ‘othering’ whereby undeserving students who have connections with administrative staff are favoured at the expense of others; thus, other students are excluded and delayed unnecessarily. In addition to that, participants revealed that inadequate infrastructure and research resources (journals, books, internet and electricity) in the institution/department limited their ability to have physical access to relevant literature, to be able to keep abreast of current happenings in their fields of inquiry, and write up some required chapters of their thesis (such as the literature review chapter, for example). Participants felt that despite these challenges, some supervisors showed no care and concern regarding their plight; and that affected the supervisory relationship (especially, in a situation where the supervisor required the student to produce a complete chapter before consultation).

### ***8.3.1.2 Impact of the apprenticeship-like/power relationship on student learning and student development***

The analysis shows that the influences that power dynamics had on student learning included the inability of the research participants/students to freely engage in critical dialogue with powerful supervisors in with regards to their theses work. For the most part, participants revealed that they received information, feedback, instructions and directives from supervisors and simply obeyed. The analysis pointed to how this docile way of learning where students become receptors of information or knowledge transferred from supervisors could limit doctoral student critical thinking ability, and as such, hamper student ability to develop their own thoughts and ideas. This may also constitute a challenge to the ownership of the thesis and subsequent publications from the thesis. The finding also shows that with the power issues in supervisory relationship whereby

supervisors are indifferent to the concerns of doctoral students, participants who encounter liminalities in their learning (a situation where they get stuck and unable to progress with the thesis writing process), may stay excessively on the programme. Whereas, the experience of liminality can be a transformational, especially where intellectual guidance are provided to doctoral students to enable them to learn and cross the liminal stages; participants revealed that issues relating to unclear and ambiguous feedback provided by supervisor, coupled with supervisor unavailability or inaccessibility to supervisors to quickly get clarification limited their ability to resolve issues in their studies. The finding further revealed that some doctoral students are also be unable to understand constructive feedback provided by supervisors (probably because of inexperience). This may also suggest that the supervisor was unable to diagnose the cause of the student's problem and offer support appropriately. Consequently, doctoral students could become demotivated to learn and unable to complete their programmes according to the required timeframe.

### **8.3.2 Supervision as transacting in the social space**

The second major finding in my thesis is that all of the participants realised that they require additional support to complement supervisors' effort with regards to the thesis work. This suggests an increased and expanded level of awareness compared to the earlier finding where participants' focus was majorly on the supervisor. Based on the findings, participants co-inhabit two important social worlds that impacted their ability to transact in the social – the social world of the university and personal social world; but, the university was the locus for their supervisory transactions. The analysis showed that participants' motivation for transacting in the university social space was either *organic* (due to personal/professional aspirations, encouragement by supervisors, and/or based on established support structure of the university), or *forced* (this included university/department mandated attendance of workshop/seminar and defence presentations and/or issues of neglect and abandonment by supervisors). Irrespective of whether participant transacting was organic or forced, the findings showed that participants' relationship with different social agents (e.g., co-supervisors, and defence supervisory panel) in the university social space was often characterised by power dynamics.

The three participants who had co-supervisor relationships, talked about how such relationship was beneficial to them in terms of providing a wider pool of knowledge and epistemological access. However, they indicated that the supervisory relationship could sometimes be marred by subtle forms of power between the co-supervisors. This was evident in the claim by participants that supervisors sometimes provide conflicting feedback, and then, each of them prefer that the student align his/her work with their own ideas/feedback. To manage such an unhealthy relationship, participants sometimes resorted to playing the supervisors against each other by hiding the feedback received from other supervisors. It seems obvious that instead of the supervisors to engage with each other in a collegial manner thereby allow the student to benefit from debates and argumentations when supervisors differ, the finding suggests that supervisors' personality or ideology take precedence over knowledge creation. One of the issues that may have contributed to conflicting feedback, received by students in co-supervision relationship as revealed by research participants, is that supervision meetings are held separately instead of having all three supervisor in attendance. By this practice, doctoral students in co-supervision relationship may have more complex power issues to deal with than those in the single supervisor mode of supervision. A similar experience of transacting in the defence presentation space was revealed by most participants, whereby the panel members provided constructive feedback on work presented, which allowed both the defending student and other postgraduate students in attendance to learn how to produce quality work. But, the finding revealed that, sometimes the defence space could be turned into a stage for power tussle and rivalry between panel members (supervisors); such that, defending students could become the victims and bear the brunt of conflict among panel members (e.g., by receiving harsh commentaries). In extreme cases, participants revealed that some doctoral student works are rejected/failed by the panel just to get at the supervisor; resulting in devastation and trauma for the student.

With regards to participants' experience of transacting in the personal social space, participants mostly cited family, finance and job challenges as issues that interfered with their studies and affected their ability to cope. Family challenges included finance, family commitments, and entering into marriage relationship, as revealed by one female doctoral student. In terms of job, participants (mostly the part-time students) revealed that they experienced challenges with combining work and study due to work pressure, distance between university and place of study,

as well as the financial implications. Whereas, some of these challenges may be anticipated, participants also revealed that most of the challenges they encountered were extenuating circumstances beyond their control (e.g., stoppage of salary, supervisor's illness and strike actions in the university). Some participants indicated that these challenges affected their ability to focus on their studies; and two of the participants had to suspend their studies for some time; consequently, their relationship with their supervisors was impacted. As the finding revealed, some supervisors seemed to be unaware or are insensitive to the personal circumstances of student. This was evident in the way that some supervisors issued warnings, and made insensitive comparisons about the progress of their supervisees as alleged by some participants. Participant who had supportive supervisors revealed that they were encouraged to persist on the programme despite their personal challenges. The finding suggests that, although students do have personal aspect of their lives with personal challenges that affect their studies and the supervisory process, these are usually not taken into consideration in supervision. It seems important to note one key character that appeared to have enabled most participants to cope in the power-laden supervision context which is resilience.

#### ***8.3.2.1 Impacts of participant experiences of transacting in the social space on student learning and student development in PhD student research***

Research participants' transaction in the social (particularly, the forced type of transacting resulting from neglect and inaccessibility to supervisors) was found to have enabled some participants to develop relational agency. This means that they could take initiative in determining when they needed help/support and they also showed the ability to ask for help from people who could assist them (e.g., colleagues and other academics within and outside their universities). University mandatory attendance at defence presentations was also found to be beneficial to participants in terms of enabling them to learn from feedback/critiques given to students and how arguments are presented, in order to improve themselves and the quality of their work. Also, based on the finding, the university system of support – seminars and workshops organised for postgraduate students (organic transacting) enabled participants to learn important research skills (although this may be generic); and to also socialise, thereby deal with the issue of isolation commonly reported in social sciences and humanities. Again, participants revealed that becoming

members of professional bodies through the encouragement of their supervisors enabled them to have connect to a wider community of practice thereby enabling them to have epistemological access, to learn and engage with authorities in their field of study. That way, they could deal in self-doubt, lack of confidence, and lack of developing of their identity as scholars.

However, power dynamics in the university social space was found to affect the participants negatively in terms student learning and student emotional wellbeing. The finding showed that an unhealthy relationship between co-supervisors and supervisory panel members not only limited epistemic engagement between supervisors, it also hindered learning opportunities that would have enhance participants' development. The analysis suggests that whereas supervisors could differ in opinion/view in terms of feedback given on students' work; their ability to be collegial and engage in productive partnership is important to the way students learn. This relates to how students could learn from supervisors' debates, argumentations and then align their views for the benefit of students.

### **8.3.3 Research participant yearning for a positive student supervision relationship**

The third major finding in this thesis is that all participants expressed a yearning for a positive supervisory relationship, though in different ways. Some participants expressed their yearning by revealing their expectations, frustrations and helplessness on how their expectations are not met. Their helplessness was evident in the way that some participants simply resorted to looking forward to some kind of divine interventions to alter the situation. This suggests that there may not be safe grievance procedures set in place for students; and if there are, students may not have been empowered to use such an approach, as earlier findings have indicated that students are often intimidated and repressed into silence.

As a result, the finding showed that some students had to devise ways to navigate power issues. Some participants claimed that paying constant visit to supervisors is way one way to get their attention. However, the analysis showed that, such 'unwritten rule' did not favour part-time

doctoral students who share their time between work and study. Another way by which students navigate relationship with powerful supervisors as revealed in the finding was through gift-giving to supervisors. Although participants shared divergent views with regards to the practice of gift-giving in the supervision space, which include the conception that gift-giving is just a cultural practice common in the African/Nigerian society. But, most participants believe that such ideology only masked the hidden reciprocal intentions for offering the gifts. They believe that gift-giving is a device by students to pull supervisors into relationship in order to receive reciprocal benefits (probably to get the supervisors' attention). Another view about gift-giving expressed by participant is that gift-giving can be a way of appreciating supervisors for providing guidance and support to students. This view may have been informed by supervision context characterised by supervisors' unconcern and indifferent attitude towards the needs of students and inattention to students. As such, students are likely to feel indebted to supportive supervisors, and may want to reciprocate by offering them gifts. The finding further showed that students used gift-giving to bribe supervisors and to manipulate the system; and the supervisors also extort students by placing them in a compromising position to offer gifts to supervisors. Participants revealed that although some supervisors declared lack of interest in any form of gratification, their actions contradicted their declaration as they accept gifts from students. This shows that, supervisors are also drivers of the practice of gift-giving in the supervision space. The analysis revealed that gift-giving to supervisors has now become so common that students have devised coded ways of speaking to each other like 'SHINE YOUR EYES' (as defined earlier in this thesis). Thus, this hidden, but common, practice of gift-giving to supervisor has become a tool for inclusion/exclusion of students.

Despite the power issues revealed in the supervision context, the findings of this thesis show that some participants actually experienced what they considered to be positive supervision relationship at least at some points in their supervision encounters. Such participants expressed satisfaction with having an open/regular line of communication between them and their supervisors whereby either of them can initiate conversation. They also revealed that they enjoyed pastoral care and support from their supervisors (in terms of affection and empathy), academic support (investment of time for consultations and provision of regular feedback and so on), and their sense of self-efficacy was encouraged by the cooperative and collaborative engagement they

had with their supervisors with regards to the thesis task. For instance, one participant suggested that her initial experience of research topic selection was quite satisfying as her supervisor allowed debates, argumentations and discussion in settling on her research topic; which showed that the supervisor had faith in her and respected her views. But, apart from one participant who claimed to have had satisfactory supervision experience all through the research process, the experiences revealed here were rather exceptional. For the most part, research participants indicated that their supervision experienced was affected by the negative use of power by supervisors.

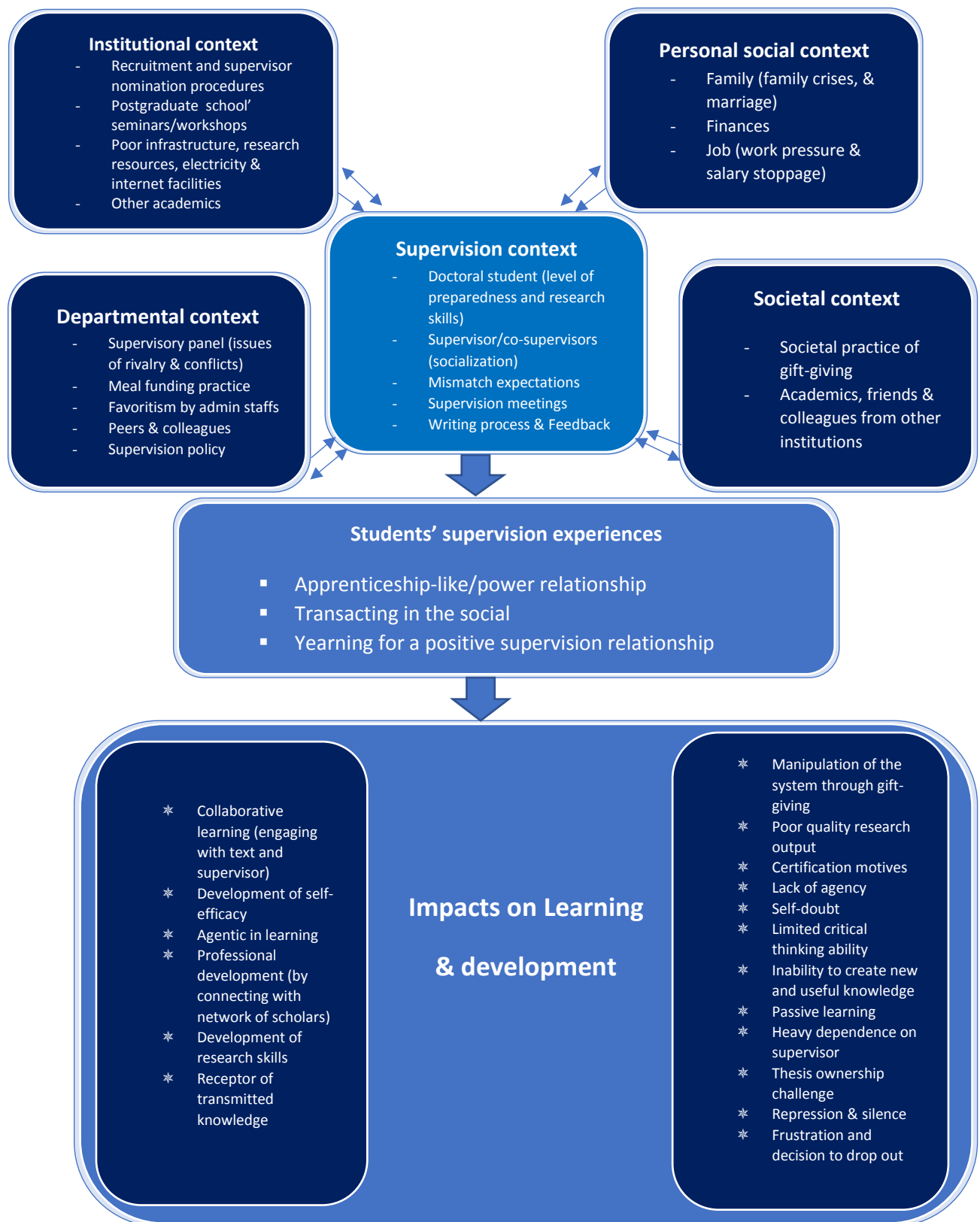
#### ***8.3.3.1 Impacts of the ways that participants expressed student yearning for positive supervision relationship on student learning and student development***

The analysis that participants expressed their yearning for a positive supervision relationship (during interviews for this study) by revealing their frustration about unmet expectations which they seemed not to be able to communicate to the authorities involved suggests that, they lack the boldness to voice out their experiences. Probably, the participants may have internalised the marginalised position they seemed to have been placed by the university as well as the intimidation, abuse and repression from supervisors (as earlier revealed), such that, they see themselves as having no power to shape the way that supervision happens. In other words, the highly power-laden context (non-conducive learning environment) they found themselves may have affected their self-confidence and also inhibited their ability to be self-expressive; and that is detrimental to the scholarly self they are trying to develop. Also, based on the finding that some students had to resort to unethical practices of gift-giving to supervisors (bribery) in a bid to get the required attention and have positive relationship with supervisors, participants revealed that students' attention get shifted from undergoing the necessary research rigour central to knowledge creation to finding ways to manipulate the system and simply get through the programme. Such a major drive for certification, as revealed in the analysis in this thesis, undermines both the quality of work they are expected to finally produce and the type of scholars they become (socially, professionally and mentally maligned, for example). In addition, the analysis shows that students who do not offer gifts to supervisor are sometimes excluded - not given the needed attention; which suggests that students may be denied intellectual guidance that will enable them to develop

research skills and competencies critical to their professional career as researchers. But, for the research participants that had satisfactory supervision experience whereby supervisor were humane, and provided needed care and support, the findings revealed that became more secured and assertive, and they were able to have fruitful learning engagements with their supervisors. This is seems important to their journey of becoming independent scholars.

#### **8.4 Towards a framework for understanding the relationship between doctoral research supervision experience and doctoral student learning in the context of a developing country**

The responses abstracted from participants' expressions of experiences of research supervision, enabled the development of this framework. The framework offers a conceptual representation of the tentative answers to the questions regarding what the experiences are that doctoral students received from research supervision, and the impacts on their learning. It illuminates understanding of students' experiences as being affected and shaped by complex variables in the immediate and distant environment. The supervision context located at the centre and surrounded by other contexts focuses attention on the space where development of the doctoral students occurs, and the factors at play in that context. The double-headed arrow connecting the supervision context to other contexts – departmental, institutional, personal and societal contexts indicates that influences from different contexts are sometimes multi-direction (for instance, the supervisor being part of the recruitment process of new doctoral students). While the one-headed arrow connotes one-directional influences on the supervision space. For instance, the stoppage of a research participant's salary exerted influence on his ability to fund his study, which he was unable to influence. Together, these variables resulted in three main ways of experiencing research supervision for the participants in this study as indicated in the box below the different environmental contexts. Immediately after that is another box indicating how the three ways of experiencing research supervision impacted on the research participants' student learning and student development; with each way of experiencing eliciting either positive/satisfactory student learning or unfavourable student learning, or both.



**Figure 5. Framework for understanding participants' supervision experiences**

## 8.5 Implications of this PhD research

The findings in this PhD student research suggest that, generally, the understandings about doctoral research supervision experiences, as reflected in supervision discourses, mostly emanating from Western contexts and related researches internationally, have not sufficiently captured the unique and peculiar ways that supervision is experienced in the developing African contexts such as Nigeria. The findings arising from this study on the ways that doctoral students experienced research supervision provided important contextual insights, and implications for different stakeholders in higher education and supervision enterprise; and these form the focus in this section.

Doctoral research supervision in the business education programme, as well as other doctoral programmes in Nigeria and most developing countries still rely heavily on the traditional one-to-one supervisory relationship characterised with power issues, despite increasing evidences that it is no more appealing to modern thinking (Bartlett & Mercer, 2000). Power dynamics in supervisor-supervisee relationships have conventionally been portrayed by the paternalistic metaphor of master-apprentice or master-slave relationship (Grant, 2005; Lee & Green 2009). My study findings suggests possible addition to this: god versus suckling-goat metaphor (used by a participant to describe the supervisor as a deity or a divine being in relation to the dehumanised student, as aforementioned). This portrayal enables us to understand the intensity of power issues in the business education supervision space, and possibly explains why participants were not able to assert themselves in the supervision relationship; but, were obedient and always trying to appease (or were probably worshipping) supervisors. The ecological systems theory used in this study enables us to understand that issues in the supervision space could be as a result of influences from a constellation of bidirectional factors at the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels. This suggests that existing patriarchal culture of the Nigerian context (the macro environment) as revealed in the literature, may have allowed for a solidified intense power structure at the institutional and departmental contexts, as well as the supervision space. Such strong power dynamics revealed in the findings appeared to have produced passivity/docility in the doctoral students contrary to the goal of doctoral education (focused on developing critical and autonomous thinkers). This provides some insights as to why some of the participants simply received feedback

from supervisors as corrections to be effected, rather than engaging dialogically in a give and take process of feedback. The constructivists' theory of teaching and learning on which Bronfenbrenner's model was based enables us to see that learning and development is better enhanced by active participation and engagement of students in the supervision learning process. Doctoral student engagement in the feedback process is an important learning opportunity that empowers students to freely express their ideas/views/opinions, and question or even disagree with supervisors' viewpoints; thus, develop independent thought. The fact that one of my research findings showed that doctoral students that formed informal peer groups were able to create emotionally supportive environment that allowed them to be self-expressive about their studies is indicative of the need to disrupt the existing power system. Adopting the cohort model of supervision (composed of students at the same stage of their research studies) may be a one of the steps to providing a non-threatening space for doctoral students to interact and engage with each other to develop confidence.

These findings also show that the aspect of preparing doctoral students for high level intellectual work is almost neglected in the supervision encounter and in doctoral student experiences. Most research participants do not have the sophisticated understanding of the PhD as being about becoming thinkers, scholars and creating new knowledge. In addition, the finding revealed that some doctoral students come into the doctoral programme with limited research skills, competencies and experience which impact their ability to operate at required intellectual capacity. The understanding from these findings suggest that research supervision in the study's context is informed by the pedagogy of indifference whereby the very functional role of the supervisors to students (in terms of research skills training) are sometimes neglected. The study suggests a re-orientation for doctoral students and supervisors so as to view doctoral work as knowledge creation process. Future research should focus more how to prepare doctoral students to see themselves as scholars, writers and thinkers in the field that they have chosen; for the purpose of creating and producing new knowledge. With regards to the supervisors, more work relating to staff development (new and existing staff) on how they should see themselves as supervisors, coach, mentors and as people who lead new-comers into academia is required. There may also be need for further studies to explore ways to identify doctoral student learning needs from the on-set and how to provide appropriate provide support for students. Also, with the finding that supervisors'

own socialisation (mostly in the traditional power-laden mode of supervision) affected the way they supervise students, the issue of re-socialisation of supervisors to adapt to new and modern approaches to supervision demands urgent attention.

The finding that institutional procedures for the recruitment of new doctoral students and allocation of doctoral students to supervisors is a fraught process which may have unwittingly given effect to power play in the supervisory relationship point to the need for universities to review their admission and supervision policies to counter the challenges and give voice to students. This inclusive policy could enhance doctoral student assertiveness in the supervision space. Evidences of favouritism by in defence scheduling by administrative staff (hidden practices); and some ‘unwritten rules’ of paying constant courtesy visit to supervisors, suggests weakness and failure in the departmental system. Again, the finding that departmental practice of students funding meals for panel members at defence, which revealed several implications that includes placing financial burden on students thereby excluding and unnecessarily delaying those who cannot afford it; focusing the attention of students on pleasing panel members instead of doing quality work; and influencing the sense of judgement of panel members; thus, undermines the purpose of the defence exercise. These issues, together with conflict between co-supervisors and rivalry among panel members, may explain why participants consider the research process of research topic selection process, proposal development procedure and defence exercise to be time wasting, cumbersome, frustrating, and traumatizing. Whereas, proposal development and defence procedures could be handled as process and public defence practices.

Evidence that power issues in supervision relationship elicited different responses from the participants (positive and negative) suggested that power may be used positively to focus doctoral students on accomplishing the thesis work. However, the findings showed that the ways that power works in supervision relationship in this context elicit more negative than positive impacts on student. The most negative response being the students resorting to negotiate power issues through unethical practice of gift-giving to supervisors (bribery). Within the neo-liberal discourses of supervision that foregrounds the commodification of education, students are constructed as consumers having so much power to choose; and supervisors as provider of services have less power (Grant, 2005). The finding regarding gift-giving to supervisors showed that although the

students (gift-givers) possess some kind of power that make the supervisors give them attention, such power seems different compared to those of consumers (legitimate), as it is only an appeasement to supervisors (unethical). This is against the high moral standard expected from institutions of higher learning, particularly at the doctoral level (which is the zenith of learning). There is, therefore, a need to disrupt it. The authorities responsible should create awareness about the negative implications not only for the students (in terms of poor quality of work they produce and the quality of researcher they become), but also for the institutions (in terms of poor reputation and limiting their ability to attract good candidates) and the nation at large (in terms of lowering the quality of intellectual human capital developed by the nation to compete in the global knowledge economy). Such sensitisation could be achieved by organising regular orientation and seminars to inculcate professional attitudes in students and supervisors.

Above all, it would be imperative to provide a non-threatening reporting system or feedback mechanism where the university authority communicates directly with postgraduate students. This practice could assist in making every party to the supervision relationship accountable. Most importantly, it would assist in identifying issues that could negatively affect research outputs that institutions produce; so as to address them immediately. This would go a long way in improving students' supervision and learning experiences in the PhD research programme; and at the same time reposition higher education institutions in the struggle for human capital development for the nation.

In line with the ecological systems theory and the constructivist theory of teaching and learning that emphasise how learning happens through interactions and active participation of developing individuals, the findings of my PhD thesis provide a reason for the adoption of a cooperative and collaborative mode of supervising wherein participants indicated better satisfaction. Participants described satisfactory supervision experience that enhanced their learning positively as that which encouraged two way line of communication, guidance and support from supervisors, as well as care and consideration for their personal needs. In other words, it incorporates the intellectual (critical and dialogical engagements with supervisors and texts) as well as the affective (pastoral care and support) aspect of the relationship. This seems important as student lives are composed of different aspects (academics, personal and social), and students sometimes have personal

circumstances that constrained their studies. Further studies may focus on the extent to which student personal challenges should be considered in supervision and how they should be negotiated.

The use of phenomenographic approach in this study enables us to map out different views regarding research supervision experience expressed by the group of participants interviewed for this study (including contradictory views expressed by individual participants). Since the focus in phenomenographic study is not to uncover the essence of a phenomenon, that is, what is common in people's experiences (first-order) as a phenomenological study would do; the study sought for variation in participants expression of experiences to provide a rich and wholesome understanding of the group's experience of the supervision phenomenon (second-order).

Even though I successfully use the phenomenographic approach in mapping out the variation in my participants' conception of research supervision, the use of phenomenography as a research approach in a context like Nigerian (where power issues in supervision relationships are so strong that participants become apprehensive of being identified) is not without challenges. The main challenge for me was the ease of access to the participants' lived experience. This was complicated by my participants' lack of familiarity with the use of audio-recorder to capture their voices (even though that has been the main instrument for data gathering in phenomenography). This is understandable as most doctoral students from the Nigerian context come from a positivists' background where quantitative methodologies (like surveys) constitute the common approaches for data gathering. As a result, of this barrier to accessing deep and rich data, a follow-up interview was necessitated. The awareness of these contextual issues could be of immense importance to other researchers who may want to replicate this study in similar contexts. I suggest that such researchers could first identify their participants and then establish a good relationship with the participants prior to actual data gathering (or phenomenographic interview). Otherwise, they could consider the use of supplementary approach to data collection (triangulation).

## **8.6 Limitations of this PhD student research**

For the proper interpretation of the findings of this PhD student research thesis, some limitations of the research should be taken into account. Firstly, a limited number of participants (fifteen participants) were used in this research. However, since the concern in this research was to not generalise but rather to have an in-depth understanding of the supervision experiences of the participants in the population sample, the participants were drawn from the different stages of their doctoral studies, and the data reflected the supervision experiences of all the different stages of the doctoral process. Secondly, this thesis did not explore the perspectives of supervisors which would have enabled pairing of doctoral student accounts with supervisor accounts, in order to study the differences in the ways that supervisors and doctoral students view and interpret supervision experiences. But, that was not the concern in this research, as the thesis sought to give voice to doctoral students whose voices are usually unheard in supervision relationships, particularly in the Nigerian context. Also, doctoral students learning, as described in this thesis, only reflects the learning of a particular group of doctoral students who are studying in a particular programme (business education programme) in a specific context, related to four Nigerian universities. Other ways of learning may emerge with different groups of students in different contexts.

## **8.7 Concluding remarks**

My PhD thesis was conducted on the higher education context and has a focus on doctoral student experiences of research supervision in a business education programme. The study drew its participants from four universities in Nigeria, and adopted relevant methodology to explore students' experience of research supervision. The findings from the PhD student research show that the supervisor-supervisee relationship is not only informed by the traditional power-laden mode of supervision, the institutional structure, procedures and practices (some of which are hidden practices and unwritten rules) may have unwittingly given effect to power relations in supervision. The findings showed variation in the ways that participants responded to, coped with and/or negotiated the power dynamics in the supervision space. For many doctoral students impact of power-laden supervision experiences on students may be arranged in a continuum ranging from

being resilient and more committed their studies; passive, intimidated and silenced; manipulative and offering bribes to supervisors (gift-giving); to frustrated, repressed and traumatised students one of whom decided to abandon the programme. In other words, the dynamics of power in supervision could either enhance conditions for learning or serves as a stumbling block to learning. However, based on the findings, power issues elicited more negative than positive impacts on doctoral students. Notwithstanding, the finding that some doctoral students had satisfactory supervision experience indicated that, they were those that at some points had active and fruitful engagements with supervisors in a collaborative and supportive way. The constructivists' perspective on which Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was based enables us to understand that active participation, collaboration and engagement between the teacher (the supervisor) and the student engenders not only satisfactory experience but authentic learning. As such, this thesis suggests that, for supervision and doctoral student learning experiences to be fruitful and beneficial, there is a need for the disruption of the conventional methodology that supervision practices have been adopting.

The challenge however, is, how would the disruption come about; who will be responsible; and at what cost? The ecological systems model that underpinned this study provides us with some clue. It clearly showed that different stakeholders (from macro to micro levels) involved in doctoral education exerts some kinds of influences (sometimes indirectly) on the supervision space. Considering the finding that the societal culture of gift-exchanges (including corrupt practices of bribery) at the macro level is also perpetrated in supervision relationships. The government for instance, could provide strong policy that supports accountability and deters unethical practices at all levels (further studies may be required in this regard). This is critical to the higher education enterprise which is now pivotal to nations' competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. The institutions and departments that provide the immediate environment for supervision may exert their influence by ensuring the implementation of sound supervision policies and also demand accountability from all staffs and academics. The supervisors (as facilitators, mentors, and couches) could enhance knowledge creation by a change of approaches to supervision. Similarly, the doctoral students directly influence by supervision practices may have to embrace morally sound work ethics and choose to face intimidation and ridicule than to be silenced.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**



School of Education, Edgewood Campus  
Private Bag X03 Ashwood 3605, Pinetown,  
KZN, South Africa Cell: +278040124906  
Email: mercydozie@yahoo.co.uk

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2013

The Head of Department  
Vocational Technical Education Department,  
Faculty of Education  
University of Uyo

### **Request for Consent to Undertake Research at University of Uyo**

I am currently undertaking a study towards a PhD degree in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa with Professor S.M. Maistry as my supervisor, (Tel. +27 312603457 and e-mail: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za).

The research topic is:

### **Doctoral Research Supervision Experiences of Business Education Students in Nigeria**

The objectives are as follows:

- i. To understand the experiences of Business Education doctoral students in their research supervision.
- ii. To understand how their experiences impact on their learning.

- iii. To deduce suitable explanations for these experiences.
- iv. To theorize a model that will enhance a more effective supervision process in Nigerian context.

This study will contribute to knowledge by way of providing an informed understanding of research supervision experiences of business education doctoral students and by theorizing a model that will enhance a more effective supervision process in Nigerian context.

As one of the few institutions that offer PhD programme to Business Education students in Nigeria, I believe University of Uyo is a valuable site to conduct this study.

I wish to request for permission to interview at least ten doctoral candidates of Business Education from your institution; specifically, those at the following stages: proposal preparation stage, data analysis stage, writing up stage and those who dropped out from the programme.

I will be grateful if my request is granted and I will be willing to donate a copy of my thesis to your institution for reference purposes.

Yours sincerely,



Mercy Okoli

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FROM ABU UNIVERSITY



School of Education, Edgewood  
Campus Private Bag X03 Ashwood  
3605, Pinetown, KZN, South Africa  
Cell: +278040124906  
Email: mercydozie@yahoo.co.uk

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> June, 2013

The Head of Department  
Vocational and Technical Education,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

*The dept hopes to  
give her maximum cooperation  
to carry her research work*

Request for Consent to Undertake Research at Ahmadu Bello University  
Zaria

I am currently undertaking a study towards a PhD degree in the School of Education,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa with Professor S.M. Maistry as my  
supervisor, (Tel. +27 312603457 and e-mail: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za).

DEPT. OF VOC. & TECH. EDUCATION  
HEAD OF DEPT.  
24/6/13  
MAISTRY S.M.  
ZARIA

The research topic is:

Research Supervision Experiences of Business Education Doctoral Students in  
Nigeria

The objectives are as follows:

- To understand the experiences of Business Education doctoral students in their research supervision.
- To understand how their experiences relate to the supervision process.
- To deduce suitable explanations for these experiences.
- To theorize a model that will enhance a more effective supervision process in Nigerian context.

This study will contribute to knowledge by way of providing an informed understanding of research supervision experiences of business education doctoral students and by theorizing a model that will enhance a more effective supervision process in Nigerian context.

## APPENDIX C: LETTER OF CONSENT FROM UNIVERSITY OF UYO



**UNIVERSITY OF UYO**  
**DEPARTMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**  
**P.M.B.1017, UYO, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

Vice-Chancellor: Prof. (Mrs.) Comfort M. Ikpo, B.Sc. (Ed), M.Ed. (Gen), Ph.D. (Kwale)

Registrar: Esak U. Umuahak (Mrs) B.A. (Calabar), M.S. (Ibadan), MVM

Acting Head of Department: Dr. Enoidem B. Usoro, B.Sc. SSIST, M.Ed. (Nig), Ph.D. (Uyo)

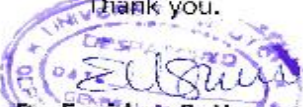
11<sup>th</sup> July, 2013

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I write at the instance of **Mercy Okoli**, a **Ph.D.** student in the School of Education, University of Kwazulu – Natal, South Africa, who is undertaking a research study on "Doctoral Research Supervision Experience of Business Education Students in Nigeria".

Mercy Okoli is requesting for permission to interview the doctoral candidates of Business Education from the University of Uyo. She has been given the permission to do so and a maximum cooperation is expected from our Ph.D. students in Business Education.

Thank you.

  
**Dr. Enoidem B. Usoro**  
Ag. Head of Department

## APPENDIX D: LETTER OF CONSENT FROM UNIZIK UNIVERSITY

# NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY

P.M.B. 5025, AWKA

DEPARTMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Telegrams: UNIZIK, AWKA  
NAU/FOE/VOCED/16/VOL.2/112

Spec. Ref: \_\_\_\_\_

Gen. Ref: \_\_\_\_\_



E-mail: voced\_nau@yahoo.com

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

08/07/13

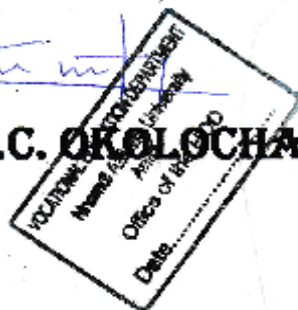
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

### AUTHORITY TO INTERVIEW OUR STUDENTS

You are hereby authorized to interview our students as part of your study to enable you provide an informed understanding of research supervision experiences of Business Education doctoral students in Nigeria.

Kind regards.

  
**DR.C.C. OKOLOCHA**  
**HOD**



## APPENDIX E: LETTER OF CONSENT FROM UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

### UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

NSUKKA CAMPUS

#### DEPARTMENT OF VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

TELEGRAMS: 'NIGERSITY, NSUKKA'  
042-771911, N771920 EXT. 39



AGRICULTURE  
BUSINESS  
COMPUTER EDUCATION  
HOME ECONOMICS  
INDUSTRIAL-TECHNICAL

Your Ref. ....

Our Ref. ....

DATE: 05 July, 2013

Prof. S.M. Maistry  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus  
University of Kwazulu-Natal  
Private Bag X03 Ashwood 3605  
Pietermaritzburg, KZN,  
SOUTH AFRICA

#### Request For Consent to Undertake Research at University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Your Ph.D student, Mercy Okoli, has requested us to allow her collect data from the Business Education Ph.D students of our Department for her thesis. She has the permission to do so.

This visit I hope will give her the opportunity to know what we do here and how we do them so that she can compare with the experiences in her college.

Best regards.

  
Prof. C.A. Obi  
Head of Department

## APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



30 July 2013

Mrs Mercy Okoli 212562336  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0489/013D  
Project title: Doctoral Research Supervision Experiences of Business Education Students in Nigeria

Dear Mrs Okoli

### Full Approval – Expedited

This letter serves to notify you that your application in connection with the above has now been granted full approval.

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its Implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.  
PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor U Bob (Chair) & Dr S Singh (Deputy Chair)

/px






cc Supervisor: SM Maistry  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr MN Davids  
cc Post Graduate Administrator: Ms B Bhengu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Professor Urmilla Bob (Chair) and Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X5400, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 4609 Email: ximbao@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS



## APPENDIX G: LETTER OF CONSENT TO DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Mercy Okoli  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus  
Univ. of KwaZulu Natal  
Cell: +278040124906  
Email: mercydozie@yahoo.co.uk  
Date:

To-----

### Request for Consent

I am currently undertaking a study towards a PhD degree in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Professor S.M. Maistry is my supervisor, with phone number: +27 312603457 and e-mail address: maistrys@ukzn.ac.za. The topic of my research is: **Doctoral Research Supervision Experiences of Business Education Students in Nigeria**. The objectives of my study are as follows:

- i. To explore the variation in the ways doctoral business education students experience research supervision;
- ii. To determine how doctoral business education students relate their research supervision experiences to the supervisory process and the reason for such relationship; and
- iii. To develop a model for supervision from the categories that emerged from the data.

This study will contribute to knowledge by way of providing an informed understanding of doctoral research supervision experiences of business education students and by theorizing a model for supervision that will more accurately reflect the Nigerian context.

### Location of the Study

This study is intended to take place within Nigeria.

As a doctoral candidate, your experience and knowledge will be of great importance to this study. I am therefore seeking your consent to participate in this study, which will involve being interviewed on your perspectives of the topic in relation to the objectives of the study above.

Our meeting will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you. All information gathered in the course of this study will be treated with utmost confidentiality. You are at liberty to withdraw from participating at any point you desire. Be assured that you will not incur any financial implication throughout the process.

Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Mercy Okoli

**Consent to participate in the study**

I, ----- (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

.....

Signature of participant

.....

Date

## APPENDIX H: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

**Doctoral Research Supervision Experiences of Business Education Students in Nigeria** by  
Mercy Okoli from PhD Thesis 2018b

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## **APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **DOCTORAL RESEARCH SUPERVISION EXPERIENCES OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS IN NIGERIA**

#### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

##### **SECTION A: Biographical Details**

Gender:

Institution:

Can you tell me where you completed your first and second degrees?

Can you tell me where you completed your Bachelor's and Master's degrees?

In what year did you graduate from Bachelor's degree & Master's degree?

When did you start your PhD study?

What year of your study are you in now?

Are you in full-time or part-time study?

##### **SECTION B: Initial Stages of Study**

1. How many supervisors do you have?
2. Who chose your supervisor(s) – yourself or the department/faculty?
3. Would you have preferred to choose your supervisor(s) yourself? Explain.
4. Where are supervision meetings held? How often?
5. Did your supervisor adhere strictly to any university official guideline during your meetings? Explain.
6. Describe the kind of supervision records that are kept by you and your supervisor?
7. Do you understand the expectations of PhD study? Please explain.
8. Do you think PhD study and Masters' study are the same? Explain.
9. How did your supervisor offer clarity in this regard?
10. Can you describe any previous research experience you had?

In the next set of questions I want to explore your PhD experience from the point you decided to undertake this study until the stage of proposal development.

1. What were the major issues discussed at your first supervision meeting?
2. Can you tell me how you arrived at the topic of your study?
3. What challenges did you encounter in this regard if any?
4. In what ways did your supervisor support you in settling on a topic?
5. Can you explain the nature of your supervisor's involvement in setting the objectives of your study?
6. What kind of feedback did you get from your supervisor at this point?
7. Were there any personal issues that you had to deal with in your PhD study (financial, relocation, accommodation and/or family)?
8. How did your supervisor attempt to understand your personal issues?
9. Knowledge of the available literature in any given field is crucial to PhD study. How did you source literature for your study?
10. What sort of support did you get from your supervisor in terms of literature search?
11. How did your supervisor connect you with library resources in relation to your study?
12. How did you come to understand the expectations of a literature review at PhD level?
13. Please explain how your supervisor offered clarity in this regard?
14. Can you explain how your supervisor helped you with structuring your literature review?
15. Theoretical/conceptual framework forms the basis on which every study must be based. How did you come about theoretical/conceptual framework for your study?
16. What challenges (if any) did you encounter in getting the theoretical/conceptual framework for your study?
17. Please explain the sort of guidance you received from your supervisor on theoretical/conceptual framework?
18. What kind of feedback did you get at this stage? Explain.
19. How did you get to know about the methodology you used for your study?
20. Please explain the kind of support you got from your supervisor in relation to your choice of methodology?
21. Can you tell me how you developed instrument for your study?
22. What was your supervisor's involvement in constructing the instrument? Explain.
23. How did your supervisor guide you with regards to ethical issues about your study?

### **SECTION C: Proposal Development/Defence Stage**

1. How did your supervisor help you in developing your proposal? Explain.
2. Please explain how your supervisor prepared you for proposal defence?
3. Did you find the experience emotionally and/or intellectually challenging? Explain whether your supervisor helped you with this?

4. What feedback did you get from your proposal defence?
5. How did your supervisor react/respond to the feedback from the proposal defence?
6. How did the feedback impact on the progress of your study? Explain.

#### **SECTION D: Final Stages of Study**

1. What were the steps taken by your supervisor to ensure that you gather relevant data for your study?
2. Please explain how your supervisor helped you in your data analysis?
3. Do you think your supervisor is a specialist in data analysis? Explain how it affected your data analysis.
4. Describe the kind of support you got from your supervisor in writing up the chapters of your study?
5. In your opinion, does your supervisor possess the required knowledge in your chosen area? Explain how your supervisor presents himself/herself in the field?
6. Please explain how the nature of communication between you and your supervisor enabled/hindered the progress of your study?
7. Ideally, the doctoral candidate should continue to undertake research and publication after the awarding of the degree. How (if at all) has your supervisor developed your research skills for this purpose?
8. The issue of power between the supervisor and the doctoral candidate is one that is frequently mentioned in the literature on supervision. How did power relation between you and your supervisor enabled/hindered the progress of your study?
9. How will you describe the quality of the supervision you received?
10. Briefly describe your 'ideal' PhD supervisor.
11. In summary, briefly describe your supervision experience.