# Challenges Confronting Postgraduate Supervision at the National University of Lesotho: Supervisors' Perspectives

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# Challenges Confronting Postgraduate Supervision at the National University of Lesotho: Supervisors' Perspectives

*Tebello Tlali, Julia Chere-Masopha, Edith Sebatane and Tankie Khalanyane*

**Abstract**

Postgraduate supervision can be a challenging form of teaching, with the challenges further compounded by context or institutional-specific factors. The Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho has faced numerous challenges in offering postgraduate degrees, with a few qualified supervisors for the large number of students who enrol in these programmes. This study explored the nature of the challenges confronting postgraduate supervision in this context. It was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm and employed a qualitative approach. Fifteen supervisors participated, of whom nine (three associate professors and six senior lecturers) were individually interviewed. Six junior lecturers took part in a focus group discussion. Guidelines on postgraduate supervision were also subjected to document review. The findings revealed that while some supervisors had positive experiences, others are frustrated. This is due to a lack of training, and lack of clarity on supervisory procedures, as well as the low academic literacy and lack of commitment exhibited by some students. It is recommended that supervisors should be capacitated through training. Furthermore, supervisory guidelines should be reviewed and benchmarked against best practices in the field.

**Key words:** Postgraduate supervision, constructivism, reflective practice, supervisory guidelines, challenges in supervisory practice

La supervision des étudiants de troisième cycle peut être une forme d'enseignement difficile, les défis étant encore aggravés par des facteurs

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spécifiques au contexte ou à l'institution. La Faculté d'éducation de l'Université Nationale du Lesotho a été confrontée à de nombreux défis pour proposer des diplômes de troisième cycle, avec peu de superviseurs qualifiés pour le grand nombre d'étudiants qui s'inscrivent dans ces programmes. Cette étude a exploré la nature des défis auxquels est confronté l'encadrement des étudiants de troisième cycle dans ce contexte. Elle s'est appuyée sur le paradigme interprétativiste et a utilisé une approche qualitative. Quinze superviseurs ont participé, dont neuf (trois professeurs associés et six maîtres de conférences) ont été interviewés. Six maîtres de conférences ont pris part à un groupe de discussion. Les directives relatives à l'encadrement des étudiants de troisième cycle ont également fait l'objet d'une analyse documentaire. Les résultats ont révélé que si certains superviseurs ont eu des expériences positives, d'autres sont frustrés. Cela est dû à un manque de formation et à un manque de clarté des procédures de supervision, ainsi qu'au faible niveau de connaissances universitaires et au manque d'engagement de certains étudiants. Il est recommandé de former les superviseurs. En outre, les directives de supervision devraient être revues et comparées aux meilleures pratiques dans le domaine.

**Mots clés :** Supervision des étudiants de troisième cycle, constructivisme, pratique réflexive, directives de supervision, défis de la pratique de supervision

## 1. Introduction and Research Problem

Postgraduate supervision is challenging in any context (Stephens, 2014; Boughey, van den Heuvel and Wels, 2017). Research and knowledge production continue to be the hallmark of higher education; however, in some contexts, systems are lacking to uphold this hallmark. Maistry (2017, p. 1) observes that the "neoliberal performativity imperatives that drive the strategic vision and mission of many higher institutions...have begun to shape the higher education project in particular ways". Wood and Louw (2018) concur and assert that the focus of postgraduate supervision is often graduating students in the shortest possible time rather than embracing the task as an opportunity to develop them as emerging professionals.

Due to the rising number of students enrolling in postgraduate studies, most university teaching staff have heavy workloads (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011; Frick, Bitzer and Albertyn, 2014; Kimane, 2014; Naidoo and Mthembu, 2015). They also have to juggle teaching, marking assignments and examinations; their own research, and publications

as well as administrative work as departmental or faculty heads and deans. As a result, some supervisors work under much pressure and frustration, especially those who are inexperienced and lack extensive research knowledge and skills (Van Rensburg, Meyers and Roets, 2016). A further challenge highlighted by previous research is the large percentage of lecturing staff that teach and supervise in line with their own experiences as students and lack deep knowledge of student or adult learning (Wilkinson, 2011; Kimane, 2014). The literature also notes that universities are seeking to improve postgraduate programmes while at the same time trying to meet enrolment demand (Naidoo and Mthembu, 2015).

The Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) offers four postgraduate programmes, namely, the Master of Education, Master of Arts in Education, Master of Science in Education and PhD. The faculty has a teaching staff complement of 37 lecturers, 18 of whom are PhD holders. The NUL Senate has ruled that only PhD holders are eligible to supervise Masters and PhD programmes regardless of whether they are a senior or junior lecturer. It is assumed that a doctorate provides adequate competence in research methodology and supervision skills. However, PhD holders still face considerable challenges in their supervisory practices. Furthermore, senior lecturers without PhDs are prohibited from supervising at this level, regardless of their research experience and output.

In recent years, postgraduate enrolment in the faculty has increased, resulting in relatively high supervisor-supervisee ratios. Most supervisors have a minimum of six postgraduate supervisees, and they also teach in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and carry administrative responsibilities. While six supervisees might be considered an average load, due to the fact that the number of eligible supervisors differs in the faculty's different departments and units, the load is not evenly distributed, and some have ten or more. Hence, the faculty faces the on-going conundrum of not having enough supervisors to match growing demand for its postgraduate programmes.

Against this background, our study explored postgraduate supervisors' experiences and challenges in the Faculty of Education at NUL and aimed to identify strategies that could be employed to mitigate the challenges.

## Theoretical Framework

Constructivism was employed as a theoretical framework. The central assumption of this comprehensive teaching and learning theory is that students learn effectively when they are supported by student-centred approaches which allow them to reflexively 'construct' their own knowledge (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Within the context of postgraduate supervision, constructivism regards students as responsible for their learning, understanding and creation of new knowledge while the supervisor's role is to support, facilitate and act as a co-explorer (Sebele and Jacobs, 2018). Thus, the supervisor serves as a scaffold for learning. However, the supervisor also requires institutional support to gain relevant supervisory skills and competencies.

Previous literature identifies various challenges in postgraduate supervisory practice (Bitzer and Albertyn, 2011; Kimani, 2014; Stephens, 2014; Naidoo and Mthembu, 2015; Rauf, 2016; Van Ransburg et al., 2016; Muraraneza, Mtshali and Bvumbwe, 2020; Vos and Armstrong, 2019). For the purpose of this study, the literature review focused on common challenges, namely, insufficient preparation of postgraduate supervisors, a lack of guidelines on postgraduate supervision, problems within supervisory relationships, challenges emanating from students, and the role of reflective practice, especially in mitigating some of the challenges.

## Insufficient Preparation of Postgraduate Supervisors

Naidoo and Mthembu (2015) note that some research supervisors lack knowledge of how to conduct effective postgraduate research supervision. Such supervisors feel overwhelmed by the task, particularly when under pressure to accelerate graduate throughput (Van Ransburg et al., 2016). This can be attributed to anxiety and a lack of confidence, especially among inexperienced supervisors.

## Lack of Guidelines on Postgraduate Supervision

Kimane (2014) observes that clear supervision policies and guidelines may help students and supervisors by providing clarity on what to expect. Naidoo and Mthembu (2015) concur and add that this challenge exists in a number of different contexts. The lack of clarity on the scope of postgraduate studies is also cited as a problem in some institutions; this is true of the NUL (Van Ransburg et al., 2016).

## Problems within the Supervisory Relationship

The supervisory relationship can work for or against successful supervisory practice. For instance, the supervisor is expected to provide guidance, support, and constructive feedback throughout the research period (Rauf, 2016). Students become discouraged when they find that their supervisor has only scanned or not read their work. They expect extensive written comments, either in the thesis or separately in the form of notes (Jili and Masuku, 2017). Students need to play their part by sticking to submission deadlines and reading extensively. They should also exhibit maturity and submit quality drafts, honour consultation appointments, and communicate their challenges to their supervisors (Rauf, 2016; Jili and Masuku, 2017).

In some instances, problems emerge due to poor communication on what is expected of each party. A memorandum of understanding should be drafted and honoured. A well-grounded supervisory relationship can grow into fruitful future research collaboration between the supervisor and supervisee, while a broken supervisory relationship wastes time and causes frustration, anxiety and sometimes failure to complete the research project (Rauf, 2016; Jili and Masuku, 2017).

## Challenges Emanating from Students

Some challenges in postgraduate supervision emanate from students themselves. Previous research indicates that some students who enroll in postgraduate studies are not equipped with critical thinking skills (Van Ransburg et al., 2016). Others struggle with language proficiency, which is a barrier in grasping the art of academic writing, communication, and conceptual and research methods (Van Ransburg et al., 2016). Plagiarism, inadequate computer literacy and the inability to search for material are cited as further student challenges.

Most postgraduate students study part-time because they are employed full-time. Some struggle to juggle their work and studies, causing frustration on the part of both the student and the supervisor (Mutula, 2011). The literature also notes that some students find it hard to remain motivated (Kimani, 2014; Lategan, 2014). All of these issues could result in unpleasant postgraduate supervision experiences (Muraraneza et al., 2020).

## The Role of Reflective Practice in Postgraduate Supervision

Reflective practice is situated within the constructivist tradition (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Ditchburn (2015, p. 94) defines it as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge". It is therefore regarded as the foundation to develop the highest level of professional teaching competence (Dervent, 2015). Reflective practice, which is used in postgraduate supervision (Botha, 2010) enables practitioners to think about their craft and assess how they fare against best practices in the field. It calls for dialogue, a form of residual learning by means of which a practitioner continues to reflect in a conversation with the self and with others in the field (Wood and Louw, 2018).

The supervisory experience also depends on context. The institutional research culture, support structures, the calibre of the supervised student and the discourse within which research is situated must all be factored in (Boughey et al., 2017) to mitigate the challenges of postgraduate supervision. Given that reflective practice should underpin quality postgraduate supervision as much as it underpins other forms of teaching, ongoing reflexivity is required (Maor and Currie, 2017; Wood and Louw, 2018).

## 2.    Research Design and Methodology

This study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm, and a qualitative approach was adopted. The primary goal of qualitative research is to uncover and interpret meaning (Merriam, 2014). A descriptive research design was followed to explore the meaning which supervisors ascribe to their experiences and challenges regarding postgraduate supervision. Merriam (2014) and Nieuwenhuis (2015) observe that such a design seeks to understand the meaning or definitions that participants have constructed. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), the process whereby meaning is attributed to a phenomenon often compels participants to reflectively interrogate and redefine their perceptions of the phenomenon at hand. In essence, the participants were compelled to reflect on what postgraduate supervision means, the challenges it entails, and how these can be mitigated in their particular context.

In order to enhance the findings' credibility, data were generated by means of a multi-method strategy, with semi-structured interviews followed by a focus group interview and document analysis (Greeff,

2011; Fouche and Delport, 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2015). Fifteen supervisors participated in the study. Thus, while it touched on some student issues, these were addressed from the supervisors' perspective. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine supervisors (three associate professors and six senior lecturers). It was envisaged that senior supervisors would provide rich data due to their level of experience and exposure to supervisory practice and related academic activities (Cohen et al., 2011). A follow-up focus group interview was conducted with six junior lecturers to compare and identify differences in the experiences and insights of senior and junior supervisors. The interview guides covered information regarding the number of supervisees (those still in the system and those graduated), training issues, student issues and mitigation strategies to ensure student success.

Document analysis was conducted on some institutional postgraduate guidelines to determine their coverage and comprehensiveness. Such analysis, which is a systematic procedure to describe the content of any written material that contains information on the phenomenon of interest (Fouche and Delport, 2011), is common in qualitative research.

**Participants' Selection and Ethical Considerations**

The participants were purposively selected because we sought to engage active supervisors who were assigned students at the time (Maree and Pietersen, 2007; Merriam, 2014). The aim was to ensure that the group represented both beginner and experienced supervisors. Ultimately, 15 supervisors with varying levels of experience participated in the study. They consisted of three associate professors, six senior lecturers and six junior lecturers. All had a minimum of three years' experience in supervising postgraduate research. They were all selected from the Faculty of Education and held PhDs. The table below presents the participants' details.

**Table 1:** Participants' details

| Supervisor code | Year PhD awarded | Rank | Supervisory experience (years) | Current number of supervisees | Graduated Supervisees |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SSI-1 | 2008 | Associate Professor | 13 | 13 | 9 |
| SSI-2 | 2010 | Associate Professor | 11 | 12 | 7 |
| SSI-3 | 2010 | Associate Professor | 11 | 12 | 8 |
| SSI-4 | 2012 | Senior Lecturer | 9 | 10 | 5 |
| SSI-5 | 2012 | Senior Lecturer | 9 | 9 | 5 |
| SSI-6 | 2014 | Senior Lecturer | 7 | 8 | 4 |
| SSI-7 | 2014 | Senior Lecturer | 7 | 7 | 5 |
| SSI-8 | 2015 | Senior lecturer | 6 | 7 | 3 |
| SSI-9 | 2015 | Senior Lecturer | 6 | 7 | 4 |
| FGI-10 | 2016 | Junior Lecturer | 5 | 7 | 3 |
| FGI-11 | 2017 | Junior Lecturer | 4 | 6 | 1 |
| FGI-12 | 2017 | Junior Lecturer | 4 | 6 | 1 |
| FGI-13 | 2018 | Junior Lecturer | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| FGI-14 | 2018 | Junior Lecturer | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| FGI-15 | 2018 | Junior Lecturer | 3 | 5 | 0 |

As illustrated in Table 1 above, pseudo-codes were allocated to participants in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The codes reflect the applicable data source as well as the participant number. For example, SSI-1 represents semi-structured interview – supervisor number 1, while FGI-10 represents focus group interview – supervisor number 10. We emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary, and the participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage (Cohen et al., 2011). We also shared the data transcripts with the participants in order for them to check for accuracy and resonance with their views. This promoted respondent validation (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell and Walter, 2016). Furthermore, we use direct quotations from the data to enhance the authenticity of the findings.

**3.   Findings**

A number of issues emerged and were analysed using inductive codes derived from the data (Fouche and Delport, 2011; Merriam, 2014). Due to the overlapping themes, this section integrates the findings from the

semi-structured and focus group interviews, and document analysis. The findings are categorised into the following four themes: (1) training issues; (2) lack of clarity on supervisory guidelines; (3) student issues; and (4) mitigation strategies.

### Training Issues

Academics should receive relevant training and support in order for them to be effective postgraduate supervisors. However, it seems that at NUL, such training and support are not provided. The participants reflected on training and support as follows:

> My navigation of supervision got better after I completed my PhD because I drew from the way I was supervised. I also had confidence because I had already published a number of peer-reviewed articles (SSI-3).
>
> I learned the hard way. I supervised a student that was outside my area, and I struggled methodologically; that was a horrible experience (SSI-8).
>
> One was thrown in the deep end. I received no training from the department/faculty. I decided to register for an online supervision course offered by the Commonwealth of Learning. By the time I finished the course I felt more confident with supervising postgraduate (SSI-9).
>
> The institution does not offer any training. Most of the time, I depend on reading manuals from other universities (FGI-10).
>
> I have never had any type of training. ...It is really frustrating because as you supervise students you keep asking yourself whether you are leading students in the right direction. There seems to be this feeling that the higher your qualifications, ... the higher your ability to supervise. Unfortunately, this is not always the case (FGI-15).

Some novice and junior supervisors such as FGI-15 expressed their frustration with the assumption that holding a PhD is an adequate prerequisite for mastering the supervisory responsibility. SS-8 struggled with methodological issues. However, some experienced supervisors (SSI-3) seemed more positive and felt that holding a PhD as well as experience in publishing research output improved practice. These findings suggest that some novice or junior supervisors are more frustrated at the lack of training for supervisors than their senior counterparts. Furthermore, some senior supervisors such as SSI-9 took the initiative to identify and complete supervisor training offered by external institutions. It can thus

be concluded that training and support are the key to boost supervisors' confidence.

### Lack of Clarity on Supervisory Guidelines

The importance of supervisory guidelines cannot be over-emphasised. They help to map programme activities to enable those involved (supervisors and supervisees) to navigate the supervisory journey with relative ease. In responding to the question on whether guidelines exist for supervision activities and whether they are clear and comprehensive, the participants indicated as follows:

> There are some postgraduate regulations in one old institutional calendar. These need to be more elaborate and updated (SSI-3).
>
> There is no time frame which shows that by such a time, a student should have covered so much. There is no timetable that states that by this time the students should have done that so that they can present on that and get help around that before they can be allowed to move further (FGI-11).
>
> There is no marking rubric to guide the supervisor as to what things to look at or pay attention to as the candidates present. I have seen that some universities provide [an] assessment rubric for the presentations so that a student can be guided accordingly. I am sorry to say it but supervision is done haphazardly here (FGI-12).
>
> I am highly reliant on how I was supervised, especially because there are no clear indicators and monitoring structures here (FGI-14).

These responses show that there are no clear guidelines or mechanisms to monitor the supervision process at NUL. For example, there is no clear time-frame that outlines how frequently the supervisor should meet with a student, and no indication of how supervision should be conducted or how the student should be assessed. Hence, supervisors tend to rely on their intuition and experience, or mimic the methods used when they were supervised as students.

FGI-3 indicated that some postgraduate regulations can be found in old NUL 2002/2003-2005/6 institutional calendars. As part of document analysis, we made an effort to locate these documents to determine the regulations' comprehensiveness. The postgraduate regulations are covered in seven pages of a 452-page calendar (NUL, 2002, pp. 350-356). They focus on admission criteria, registration procedures, the duration

of postgraduate programmes, conducting studies, and supervision, under which some supervisor responsibilities are stated (NUL, 2002, PG. 19.00, p. 352). However, there is no reference to student responsibilities.

In addition, there is no mention of a memorandum of understanding to guide the supervisory process between the supervisor and supervisee. This is incongruent with constructivism that holds the student responsible for his or her learning, understanding and creation of new knowledge, while the supervisor's role is to support, facilitate and become a co-explorer (Sebele and Jacobs, 2018). The literature also asserts that students need to play their part by sticking to submission deadlines, reading extensively; showing maturity by submitting quality drafts, honouring consultation appointments and communicating their challenges to their supervisors (Rauf, 2016; Jili and Masuku, 2017).

Other postgraduate regulations (NUL, 2002) cover de-registration, withdrawals, submissions and examinations. The guidelines are somewhat brief and not programme specific. Furthermore, they were last reviewed almost 20 years ago. It is for this reason that new supervisors, who do not have access to old university documents, are unaware of the regulations. The regulations/guidelines thus need to be updated and benchmarked against contemporary best practices.

### Student Issues

The participants also cited student issues which pose challenges to supervisory practice. They were of the view that students' skills, knowledge, commitment and attitude to their studies play a very important role. Student attributes can make supervision easy or difficult. The participants stated:

> *Students have varying skills. The first candidate that I supervised had all the necessary skills. She even had her own laptop. She was able to surf the internet to look for information. Her writing skills were satisfactory. Maybe that is because she was an English language teacher. She had a very good command of the English language and that helped* (SSI-1).
>
> *I once had a very good student. He was one of the best. He showed a lot of professionalism and was highly committed and respectful. He could express himself very eloquently too* (SSI-2).

These supervisors had pleasant supervisory experiences. It should be

noted that they are senior supervisors who are perhaps more confident and relaxed in their outlook. Nonetheless, it is clear that the students they cite were better prepared than many. Other responses revealed the opposite:

> *I had a case where I had this difficult candidate. She could not even adequately address the comments given in track changes. She seemed to just ignore some of them and continued writing* (SSI-6).
>
> *Some of the candidates are not very competent in language. Some have limited computer skills. They even rely on internet cafe assistants to type their dissertations. This is very problematic* (FGI-12).
>
> *Indeed, most students come unprepared. NUL also needs to provide basic support for students. This could be done by updating library resources, providing a computer lab with internet, coaching students on academic writing, making [them] aware of the available student counselling facilities* (SSI-8).

These responses revealed that some students are inadequately prepared for postgraduate studies. Both junior (FGI-12) and senior supervisors (SSI-6 and SSI-8) pointed to a lack of readiness among some students. For instance, they noted that they lacked the basic knowledge and skills required for research, had a poor command of language and lacked skills to source information and use a computer. Thus, such students have limited understanding of what it means to be a postgraduate student.

### Mitigation Strategies

The participants were also asked to suggest strategies to mitigate the challenges they identified. The sub-themes that emerged relate to training, peer support, supervisory guidelines, following best practices, student financial support, promoting independence among students, and a general overhaul of the education system.

#### Training

While some participants felt that they could use formal training on postgraduate supervision, others were of the view that experiential or hands-on training might be more beneficial:

> *It is essential for supervisors to be trained in order to be able to guide, advise and provide academic and other forms of support to their supervisees* (FGI-10).

*I do not believe in formal training. I would rather have… hands-on practice. I have also learned a lot from serving as [an] … external examiner. If all postgraduate supervisors become … external examiners, that exposure could help them to reflect on their own practice and learn* (SSI-2).

On the one hand, inexperienced supervisors (FGI-10) felt that training would make a difference. On the other, senior supervisors such as SSI-2 were of the view that formal training would not be meaningful, and hence recommended experiential or hands-on learning. Despite the different perspectives, the bottom line is that any form of training might be useful.

### Peer Support
Some of the participants suggested that peer support could address challenges in supervisory practice. One said:

*Every now and then I talk to a colleague I am most comfortable with to hear how they have dealt with a similar challenges and try to apply their advice. I also raise some of the challenges at departmental level and get colleagues' strategies* (FGI-11).

### Supervisory Guidelines
The lack of comprehensive postgraduate guidelines was cited as a major problem. Hence, the participants cited the need for relevant guidelines and regulations:

*We need to draw clearer faculty guidelines for postgraduate research supervision. We also need to have some seminars which focus on common challenges experienced by supervisors; as well as find a way to evaluate supervisors so that focused training can be organised for them* (SSI-4).

### Adopting Best Practices
Some experienced supervisors (SSI-1 and SSI-3) observed that adopting best practices could help to mitigate some of the identified problems:

*NUL must adopt/adapt best practices from elsewhere. Most importantly the institution must visibly recognise staff commitment. Among others, the promotion criteria should substantively reward supervision and throughput* (SSI-1).

*Supervisors must be encouraged to regularly reflect on their practice. They should also engage in research and serve as external examiners for*

*other institutions. If all post-graduate supervisors could be involved in the aforementioned activities, these would afford them … exposure that could improve practice* (SSI-3).

These responses identify research output on the part of supervisors, serving as external examiners, engaging in reflective practice and institutional incentives as best practices that could improve postgraduate supervision and mitigate the challenges.

### Promoting Independence among Students
Developing independence and critical thinking among students was another suggestion. This resonates with the tenets of constructivism which advocates for learner support towards independence in their learning. One participant shared:

*I encourage independent and critical thinking [in]… my supervisees. I also conduct in-built research coaching in the process of supervision* (SSI-9).

### A General Overhaul of the Education System
Participants were also of the view that some of the challenges encountered in postgraduate supervision are part of a general systemic problem and should be addressed as such. A senior supervisor (SSI-1) provided an analysis of the systemic issues that lead to some postgraduate supervision challenges:

*Problems demonstrated by the students are … [the end result] of the problems in our education system. In the schools and at undergraduate level students are engaged in learning activities that do not develop their deep thinking, research and writing skills. This is a system problem that … should be addressed holistically by overhauling the education system* (SSI-1).

## 4. Discussion
The supervisors' views suggest that the level of experience and seniority, as well as graduate throughput, tend to boost supervisor confidence. Most stated that they had not received training in supervisory skills. However, this seemed to be of greater concern among junior than senior supervisors. The junior supervisors noted that this made supervision frustrating and overwhelming. This is in line with the literature that asserts that

postgraduate supervision should be regarded as a form of teaching which requires appropriate knowledge and skills, calling for thorough training (Wilkinson, 2011; Maistry, 2017).

The analysis also revealed that some junior supervisors were not aware of the NUL's supervisory procedures and guidelines and were frustrated by their inaccessibility. The literature describes supervisory guidelines as a road map that guides supervisors and supervisees in navigating supervisory practice. They thus set the context within which effective supervision can occur (Manyike, 2017). When the guidelines are almost 20 years old and are inaccessible, they are virtually non-existent. The institutional guidelines and monitoring mechanisms should thus be updated, and made available to all supervisors.

The supervisors also reflected on student issues in relation to postgraduate supervision. While they acknowledged that some students are adequately prepared for postgraduate studies, others lack preparedness. For instance, some struggle with basic language proficiency, computer literacy and research skills. Overall, students lack the academic literacy required to navigate postgraduate studies. The literature states that students should exhibit maturity and play their part in the supervisory relationship (Rauf, 2016; Jili and Masuku, 2017). Some supervisors also alluded to overall systemic issues that affect postgraduate research supervision.

The analysis highlights the need for institutional support mechanisms to scaffold students' and supervisors through the postgraduate research supervision journey. The findings and the literature also note the need for supervisors to engage in reflective practice and handle postgraduate supervision in a manner that encourages independence and critical thinking among students (Wood and Louw, 2018). These strategies are the hallmarks of constructivism.

## 5.    Conclusion

The study explored challenges in postgraduate supervision in the Faculty of Education at the NUL from supervisors' perspectives. The findings highlighted a number of challenges, including a lack of training for supervisors, lack of clarity on the supervisory guidelines, and a lack of readiness and academic literacy among some postgraduate students enrolled in the faculty. The participants proposed mitigation strategies that are supported by the literature (Calma, 2011; Wilkinson; 2011, Maistry, 2017), including training and support for supervisors, and the formulation of comprehensive supervisory guidelines. There is also a need to provide student support and to promote a student-centred culture (Biggs and Tang, 2011) as well as reflective practice (Wood and Louw, 2018) among supervisors.

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