Re-framing postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice: supervisors' perspectives from one university in Lesotho[1]

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, little emphasis has been placed on defining postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice. This lack of a clear conceptualisation is cited as a source of confusion and frustration among practitioners. Lately, there has been a growing acknowledgement that postgraduate supervision should continually be examined in teaching and learning terms. In an endeavour to reconceptualise and reframe postgraduate supervision, a qualitative approach was adopted. anchored within the constructivist paradigm as its overarching theoretical framework. Perceptions of 10 supervisors from one university in Lesotho were analysed. Specific attention was paid to the supervisors' definitions and practices to assess the extent to which they reflected their understanding of postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning practice. The findings revealed that while the selected supervisors perceived postgraduate supervision as a teaching practice, they continued to be frustrated and overwhelmed by the institutionalised vagueness that permeates this practice.

Keywords: research, postgraduate supervision, constructivism, reflective practice, teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Traditionally, definitions ascribed to postgraduate supervision of master's and doctoral students depicted the supervisor as a study leader, a foreperson, an overseer and a coach. Postgraduate supervision has also been defined as an engagement of a supervisor in assisting postgraduate students in identifying a line of inquiry, delineating the scope of the project within the line of inquiry, and providing guidance to lead to the successful completion of the project and the dissemination of results (Lategan, 2014). In addition, postgraduate supervision has been construed as the development of new scholars in a specific profession (Van Rensburg, Meyers & Roets, 2016). Furthermore, this concept has been typified as a relationship between an expert in a specific discipline and a student or a group of students, whom he or she guides towards completion of research work that meets specific academic and disciplinary requirements (Wood & Louw, 2018). From these definitions, it can be noted that reference to postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning activity is rather hidden.

Lately, many countries are confronted with a rapidly changing higher education context that is characterised by increased demands for the accelerated completion of postgraduate students (Kimani, 2014; Masuku, 2021; Noel, Wambua & Ssentamu, 2021). This demand threatens the quality control of postgraduate research in the sense that the focus on supervision is often about assisting students to complete their studies in the minimum time. Limited attention is paid to embracing postgraduate supervision as an opportunity to nurture deep learning in the emerging professionals (Wood & Louw, 2018). Universities in Lesotho are no exception to this state of affairs. As postulated by Motshoane and Mckenna (2021), many do not see postgraduate supervision in a teaching and learning light. Hence it can be noted that when research supervision is separated from the broader teaching and learning project, it has an adverse impact on the supervisory practice, and is likely to constrain intellectual development (Ngulube, 2021). Thus, a hidden teaching and learning characteristic of postgraduate supervision continually creates a wide rift between research and teaching.

According to Wilkinson (2011), the lack of a clear conceptualisation of postgraduate supervision may be one of the reasons why at most institutions there is often a vacuum when it comes to recognition of postgraduate research supervision as a teaching tool. This therefore necessitates the continual examination of the discourse on postgraduate supervision in teaching and learning terms (Nkoane, 2014). This view is backed by Maistry (2017), as well as Motshoane and McKenna (2021), who observe that a growing scholarship of postgraduate supervision calls for its reconceptualisation, shifting from the traditional apprenticeship model towards a constructivist teaching and learning model. The traditional apprenticeship model depicted a supervisee as a passive recipient of knowledge who lacked independent agency, whereas the constructivist model portrays the supervisory practice as a collaborative and an intellectually stimulating experience for the supervisees (Ali, Ullah & Sanauddin, 2019; Masuku 2021; Ngulube, 2021).

Postgraduate research supervision involves learning how to become a researcher, as well as learning about aspects of teaching and learning that transfer into practices; hence the need to redefine it as a teaching and learning site (Boughey, Van den Heuvel & Wels, 2017; Ngulube, 2021; Noel et al., 2021). We have observed, however, that in the Faculty of Education at one university in Lesotho where this research was conducted, the supervisory practice is not clearly defined in teaching and learning terms. Furthermore, the workload policy does not clearly quantify supervision in terms of credit hours that recognise the amount of teaching that goes into this practice. In the absence of clear postgraduate supervision and workload policies (Masuku, 2021), the frequency of supervisory meetings and activities remains the discretion of a supervisor. This leaves supervisory responsibility to a vague interpretation, which may be taken casually, thereby compromising quality. Furthermore, postgraduate supervision may end up in unforeseen overloading and frustration of the supervisors. Therefore, this study emanated from the recognition that there is a need to understand postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning site, since this has implications for practice (Ngulube, 2021).

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study sought to analyse the supervisors' perceptions and practices in respect of the extent to which they reflect postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning practice. Based on this aim, the study was guided by two objectives, namely:

- to explore the perceptions of postgraduate research supervisors on supervision as a form of teaching

- to establish how supervisors' practices reflect their understanding of postgraduate research supervision in teaching and learning terms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is framed within the constructivist paradigm as the overarching theoretical perspective. The central principle of this theoretical perspective is that students play an active role in constructing their own perceptions and meaning about their experiences and practices (Bada, 2015). This theory debunks the assumption that knowledge is an autonomous phenomenon that exists without the knower. Rather, it recognises that knowledge construction is a product of reflection about, and synthesis of, the prevalent circumstance and practices. As such, constructivism grants the students ownership of what they learn (Bada, 2015; Jaiwal, 2019).

Within the context of postgraduate research supervision, constructivism perceives a student as a responsible partner in the creation of new knowledge, while the supervisor's role is to support, facilitate and become the co-explorer of this new knowledge (Sebele & Jacobs, 2018). One of the fundamental characteristics of constructivism is the process of scaffolding, whereby a teacher supports a student to achieve the intended learning outcomes (Bada, 2015). The supervisor has to create an environment that nurtures the attainment of meaningful learning for the supervisee, by deliberately exposing them to the activities that support the learning process. Against this background, constructivism is construed as a suitable theoretical framework for underpinning most educational practices because of its wide-ranging impact on teaching and learning (Bada, 2015). Although the discourse of teaching and learning is often associated with classroom practices, the contention in this study is that such a discourse is also relevant for postgraduate research supervision. Thus, it is argued that as part of higher education, postgraduate research supervision also requires student-centred approaches and more collaborative learning environments (Ali et al., 2019; Masuku, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature for this study has been reviewed in two areas, namely postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice, and the role of reflective practice in postgraduate research supervision.

Postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice

In line with the constructivist approach, teaching and learning involve the active collaboration of both a teacher and a student, producing knowledge together (Zeegers & Barron, 2012; Masuku, 2021). Just like any teaching and learning situation, the supervisory practice can be described in terms of the following key components: the supervisor signifies the educator; the supervisee is synonymous with the student; the research project denotes the subject matter; and the supervision guidelines and institutional procedures set a critical context that can nurture or thwart effective teaching and learning.

Postgraduate supervision involves developing a scholarly identity, based on an awareness of, and sensitivity to, the ontological dimension of doing research, alertness to the student's conceptual capacities, learning styles and modes of intellectual processing (Motshoane & Mckenna, 2021). A major feature of postgraduate supervision is the creation of an interactive learning space where the seasoned supervisors and postgraduate students are engaged in an ongoing mutual and dynamic learning process (Nkoane, 2014; Ngulube, 2021). Accordingly, in the higher education space, postgraduate supervision is a collective activity that embodies knowledge sharing.

As Wilkinson (2011) rightly observes, postgraduate supervision is an extremely complex and challenging teaching-learning process, which is often misunderstood and underrated. Motshoane and Mckenna (2021) concur that this involves a distinctive kind of teaching which is both problematic and challenging. As a site for teaching and learning, postgraduate supervision has to be guided by key principles, which include general teaching skills, a deep knowledge of a specific discipline, and deep reflectivity (Masuku,

2021). Another key element of supervisory practice is communication and, more specifically, feedback on submitted research work. Strategies for giving constructive feedback include pitching the criticism at the student's level of understanding and keeping it specific; grounding feedback in evidence from the written work; linking to strategies for improvement; and using appropriate language in a collaborative rather than a lecturing style (Van Rensburg et al., 2016; Masuku, 2021). In essence, effective supervisors need to be grounded the in key tenets espoused by excellent teaching.

The role of reflective practice

Frick, Bitzer & Albertyn (2014) point out that research supervision undeniably involves a greater degree of explicit teaching than supervisors and higher education institutions usually acknowledge. As such, supervisors need to engage in extensive reflection on current practices and approaches so that they may deepen this form of teaching and learning (Frick et al., 2014). This view is underscored by Koukpaki and Adams (2020), who highlight that reflective practice is well-embedded in teaching and learning contexts.

The notion of reflective practice in postgraduate supervision is used specifically to improve practice (Masuku, 2021). Accordingly, reflective practice allows practitioners to think about their craft and to assess how they fare against the best practices in the field. Engaging in reflective practice necessitates dialogue and residual learning through which a practitioner continues to reflect in a conversation with the self and with others (Koukpaki & Adams, 2020). Reflective practice increases confidence and willingness to the practitioners to become lifelong learners (Wood & Louw; 2018; Petrucka, 2019; Masuku, 2021). As such, the need for an ongoing reflective practice of supervisors cannot be over-emphasised.

METHODOLOGY

This study is guided by the constructivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach was adopted. A descriptive research design was followed to explore the supervisors' perceptions and practices regarding postgraduate supervision. The supervisors' perceptions were analysed for the extent to which they demonstrated their understanding of the nature of postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning site. This approach is underscored by Merriam (2014), who holds that descriptive designs seek to understand the meaning or definitions that the participants have constructed. By virtue of being invited to take part in this research project, the participants were compelled to think reflectively and redefine postgraduate supervision accordingly (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

The study utilised an open-ended qualitative questionnaire, followed by semi-structured interviews to collect data. The intention was to ensure crystallization of the data collection methods and enhance the credibility of the findings. An open-ended questionnaire allowed the collection of rich detailed data (Cohen et al., 2011) about postgraduate supervision teaching and learning activities. The follow-up, semi-structured interviews were also advantageous, as they allowed probing and enhanced the depth of responses. Data were analysed thematically, and inductive codes were utilised (Merriam, 2014).

PARTICIPANTS' SELECTION

The participants were purposively selected (Merriam, 2014). The intention was to engage supervisors who were considered knowledgeable about the tenets of effective teaching and learning. Such tenets include the characteristics of good educators, student characteristics, subject matter, teaching strategies, assessment and constructive feedback, learning outcomes, and effective learning. The participants also ought to have a minimum experience of five years in supervising postgraduate research. Ultimately, 10 supervisors from the Faculty of Education at one university in Lesotho were selected based on this criterion. By virtue of their professional training, which is entailed in teacher education, supervisors in the Faculty of Education were considered to be experts in teaching and learning matters. Hence it was anticipated that

they would have the ability to translate the tenets of effective teaching and learning into their supervisory practices.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study so that the dignity of the participants could not be compromised. The participants' identities were disguised by allocating each a pseudo-code. As such, the participants were labelled Supervisor-one (S-1) to Supervisor-ten (S-10), respectively (Cohen et al., 2011). Attention was also paid to trustworthiness issues by documenting the research decisions and processes of data collection and analysis to enable an audit trail of our reasoning and conclusions (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). All audio records and transcriptions were safely locked away with the intention to destroy them after five years. Data transcripts were shared with the participants in order for them to verify the raw data and to correct factual errors. This was meant to ensure respondents' validation or member checking as described by Birt et al. (2016). Furthermore, we were mindful to control our own bias that could result from our own involvement in postgraduate research supervision. Hence, we strived to be as objective as possible in the decisions and conclusions made (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Sufficient direct quotes were included from the data with a view to accentuating the participants' voices, and enhance authenticity of the findings.

THE FINDINGS

As indicated, data were analysed thematically and inductive codes were utilised (Merriam, 2014). Due to the overlapping themes, this section integrates the findings from both the qualitative questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. The findings were categorised into the following five themes: (1) the supervisors' role; (2) acknowledging postgraduate supervision as a form of teaching; (3) strategies for effective supervision; (4) the basis for adopting a particular supervision strategy; and (5) indicators for effective supervision.

Theme 1: The supervisors' role

The participants were requested to define postgraduate research supervision. The objective was to assess the extent to which they viewed the supervisory practice as a teaching and learning activity. Their views revealed the versatile role played by a supervisor. They described a supervisor as a guide, a source of support, a resource person, a critical reader, and most importantly as a teacher. Upon further analysis of this theme, the following sub-themes emerged:

Sub-theme 1: Guidance

The participants pointed out that they perceive postgraduate supervision to involve guidance and ensuring that the students uphold certain standards stipulated in the field. This is what one participant had to say:

> Postgraduate supervision involves guiding postgraduate students through questions and relevant tasks. It also involves planning, execution of the plan and write up. (S-1)

From the foregoing quote, the participant acknowledges that their role in postgraduate supervision as to guide the students in planning and writing up their research, as well as probing the students with relevant tasks and questions to enhance clarity on research issues. Another participant concurred,

> It entails guiding and ensuring that they do their research work with high standards as stipulated in the field. (S-6)

From the above responses, it can be noted that the participants viewed the supervisor's role at master's and doctoral levels as mainly to provide guidance to ensure that certain standards of research work are attained.

Sub-theme 2: Support

The participants also depicted a supervisor as a source of support for the supervisee. One participant stated,

> As a supervisor you find yourself having to provide psycho-social and emotional support for the supervisees. (S-3)

From what the participant said, it can be noted that the supervisor's role is not simply to provide academic support to the students. Rather, the role extends to caring for their psychosocial welfare as well. This was confirmed by another participant, who said,

> I regularly check on my students to see how they are doing socially, mentally and emotionally. I even share coping mechanisms which worked for me when I was a student. (S-6)

The above response illuminates the supervisory role as nurturing the supervisees' psychosocial wellbeing as well. This finding illustrates that supervisors have to be compassionate in supporting and scaffolding students learning.

Sub-theme 3: Providing resources

Resourcefulness is another characteristic associated with postgraduate research supervision. Here is what one participant divulged,

> When I come across a paper that is relevant to what they are doing, I give it to them. I also suggest materials for reading where necessary. (S-2)

The above response is an example of how resourceful and selfless a supervisor ought to be when it comes to sharing materials that might benefit the supervisee. In support of this position another supervisor added,

> I also share external examiners' comments with my students so that they know what to expect. This helps them to improve their reading and writing style. At times, I share with them my own work and other related material (S-9).

From the foregoing responses, it emerges that a supervisor not only provides expertise and academic support, but they also have to go out of their way to provide material resources too. The above sub-themes reveal that the participants have comprehensive perceptions of how versatile the supervisory role ought to be (Petrucka, 2019).

Theme 2: Acknowledging postgraduate supervision as a form of teaching

The findings also revealed that postgraduate supervision is fundamentally and unavoidably a form of teaching. Further analysis of this theme yielded two sub-themes, namely customised teaching and the teaching load.

Sub-theme 1: Customised teaching

The participants depicted postgraduate supervision as a customised form of teaching as seen in the following response:

> Postgraduate supervision is teaching that is individualised and customised to each individual students and it is based more on the constructivism or authentic learning. (S-1)

In the foregoing quote, postgraduate supervision is portrayed as a form of teaching that is usually custom-made to the students' needs. Furthermore, the participants explicitly align postgraduate supervision with constructivist or authentic learning (Bada, 2015; Ali et al., 2019). This serves as an acknowledgement that postgraduate supervision is indeed a form of teaching. Another participant reiterated,

> Postgraduate supervision is a form of teaching because in most cases a supervisor has to teach supervisees how to approach certain things and what it is that is expected of them in each chapter. Hence it is unavoidably teaching and re-teaching fundamentals of research. (S-10)

The above quote confirms that this supervisor is aware of the teaching responsibility that comes with postgraduate research supervision. The participants were unanimous that whether or not the students went through research methods course(s), the supervisor unavoidably continues to teach and re-teach the art of conducting research.

Sub-theme 2: The teaching load

The participants also highlighted the issue of workload involved in postgraduate research supervision. Below are participants' own words,

> Postgraduate supervision is a lot of work. Perhaps supervisors should be exempted from undergraduate teaching, depending on their supervision load. (S-6)

From the above response, the teaching load that comes with postgraduate supervision is emphasised. The participant even expressed how they wished to be exempted from undergraduate teaching so that they can manage the heavy supervision load. Another participant echoed,

> Postgraduate comes with a huge teaching load. The load is actually killing me. Having to read the literature three to four times before the student gets it right is just too much. There are times when I am tempted to change career or retire early. (S-10)

While the literature has indicated that research supervision undeniably involves a greater degree of explicit teaching than supervisors and higher education institutions usually acknowledge (Frick et al., 2014; Masuku, 2021), it turns out that the selected supervisors contrarily acknowledged that postgraduate research supervision is a form of teaching. However, they also alluded to the heavy workload that comes with this form of teaching. Thus, it has emerged that there are participants who are not only overwhelmed by this role, but they consider the heavy supervisory workload as one of their reasons they may want to leave the academia.

Theme 3: Strategies for effective supervision

The participants were also asked to share the strategies they employ to ensure the effectiveness of postgraduate research supervision. This was meant to assess how their strategies align with their understanding of postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning practice. The following sub-themes emerged:

Sub-theme 1: Providing leadership

Some supervisors indicated that they provide leadership to the students' research work as indicated below,

> I identify those who significantly require leadership from the supervisor, and I provide heavy guidance: from shaping focus of their studies, explaining how each stage of research should be conducted and working on their language, demonstrating how they should write and use language. (S-1)

From the above response, a participant alluded to leading the students and giving direction every step of the way, depending on their needs. Another participant gave a different perspective,

> I allow the student to explore and help them to achieve what they intended to find out. Those who demonstrate independence in carrying out their studies require little guidance. I allow them to initiate their own plans and we sit to discuss as to ensure that they are on the right direction. (S-9)

The above quote indicates that when a student shows proactiveness, they should be allowed to explore and take a lead in their study, thereby allowing the supervisor to lead from the back. From these responses, it can be noted that leading students from the back may be a suitable strategy to use specifically with those who exhibit independence. Regardless of whether the supervisor leads from the front or from the back, the bottom line is that they have to provide leadership for their supervisees (Masuku, 2021).

Sub-theme 2: Regular check-ups
The participants also mentioned that regular check-ups with the supervisees were crucial to ensure their success. This is what they said about this issue,

> Keeping contact with supervisees through regular check-up encourages them to hold on when they want to give up. (S-4)

This quotation confirms that keeping a regular contact with the supervisees is a necessity motivating students and ensuring effective supervision. Another participant concurred that,

> Regular communication and meetings keep the students motivated and help to clear any misconceptions. (S-8).

As indicated in the above quote, regular communication has a positive effect in keeping the students focused and motivated. The above findings indicate that the participants were aware of the need to maintain regular check-ups with their students.

Sub-theme 3: Regular constructive feedback
The participants highlighted the importance of giving feedback to their supervisees. Here is what the participants said,

> I engage in thorough reading and thoroughly marking the submitted work, I then provide relevant and constructive feedback that helps to structure that work. (S-2)

The foregoing response highlights the importance of relevant and constructive feedback in shaping the students' work. This is a clear indication of a supervisory practice that is aligned with constructivist tradition (Jaiwal, 2019). Another participant also emphasised the value of constructive feedback as follows,

> I ask my supervisees to submit their work and I provide feedback through track changes and comments. I am giving feedback that is highly provocative through which they discover for themselves what to improve. S-10)

As can be noted from the foregoing responses, assessment and constructive feedback are significant in enhancing effective learning in postgraduate research supervision.

Sub-theme 4: Probing

Probing was cited as one of the mechanisms used by the supervisors to ensure that supervisees attain depth in their research projects. One participant revealed,

> I probe them by having a conversation with them which aims to promote higher order thinking by raising questions, at times by illustrating how to articulate arguments. (S-5)

From the foregoing quote it can be noted that probing the students helps them to think critically and deeply about their work so that they can improve. This view is aligned with the literature that recognises that knowledge construction is a product of reflection and synthesis about the prevalent circumstance and practices. As such, constructivism grants the students ownership of what they learn (Bada, 2015; Jaiwal, 2019; Ali et al., 2019). In support of a similar position, another participant stated,

> I identify gaps, sweeping statements and loose arguments. Then I challenge my students to tighten their assertions and arguments. (S-9)

The above response also indicates how probing students can push them in the right direction, thereby improving their work. From the above sub-themes, effective supervision is associated with the provision of leadership, regular check-ups, constructive feedback and probing of the supervisees in order to assist them in attaining a deeper grasp of the issues at hand. These findings confirm what the literature said about providing leadership (Masuku, 2021) and grounding feedback in evidence from the written work linking to strategies for improvement (Van Rensburg et al., 2016).

Theme 4: The basis for adopting a particular supervision strategy

The participants were also requested to indicate what informed their supervisory strategies. This was meant to establish their understanding of the factors that shape their postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning practice. Further analysis revealed the following sub-themes:

Sub-theme 1: Aligning postgraduate supervision with constructivism

The participants revealed that their supervision practice is influenced by constructivism, which is a teaching and learning theory that underpins knowledge construction. In support of this position, one participant said,

> Postgraduate supervision ought to be more of a constructivist practice if one of its purposes is to create creators of knowledge. (S-3)

Another participant reiterated,

> Postgraduate supervision is a teaching and learning activity that has to be anchored in socio-cultural constructivist theory to ensure its effectiveness. (S-7)

The above findings confirm that effective teaching and learning require to be anchored within the constructivist tradition, as this theory advocates scaffolding and actively engaging students in knowledge production (Bada, 2015).

Sub-theme 2: Professional responsibility

The participants also indicated that they were mainly influenced by their professional responsibility to supervise their postgraduate research students the way they do. This is how the participants explained the matter,

My tacit objective is to produce an independent thinker who fully comprehends the key components of research, and who can master the subject matter in their respective field (S-2).

This quotation is a good example of a supervisory practice that is underpinned by constructivism (Masuku, 2021); thus, producing independent thinking is one of the key tenets of this theory. Another participant added,

I have a responsibility and am committed to promote my students' growth and ensuring quality throughput. S-6

The above response makes reference to students' growth. Such growth is likely to occur when students are supported and they are intellectually stimulated (Ali et al., 2019). These findings reveal that the participants are aware of what effective supervision entails, and they seek to strive to attain such effectiveness.

Theme 5: Indicators for effective supervision

Any effective teaching and learning practice needs to be defined in terms of indicators or learning outcomes. The participants outlined the following indicators, which demonstrate that effective learning has taken place.

Sub-theme 1: Reduced mistakes and increased confidence

The participants illustrated that they can tell by the decline in the number of mistakes made by the students that learning has taken place. The following are the responses from the participants:

I compare previous submissions with the latest one; I am able to see if the student is no longer repeating the same mistakes. (S-5)

The above quote highlights that effective supervision involves assessing the supervisee's growth by comparing their previous drafts with the current and observing that the number of their mistakes has decreased. Another participant concurred,

In due course, some students end up more conversant and confident. At times they become even more knowledgeable than the supervisor. Such students become more daring in their views and are able to back up their positions using academic reasoning. (S-9)

The above response is a typical indicator of effective learning. It is extremely gratifying for any teacher when their student demonstrates confidence and exceeds their expectations in terms of the accrued knowledge in their field of study.

Sub-theme 2: Students' ownership of the work

The participants also cited ownership of the work as another sign that a student has indeed learnt. Here is what one participant said,

When you guide a student, they need to get to a point where they are passionate and excited enough about their work to take the lead. (S-3)

As can be deduced from the above quote, when a student exhibits passion and excitement about their work, they start taking a lead. This is an indication that such a student has intellectually been stimulated (Ali et al., 2019). As expressed by another participant,

It is gratifying when the student begins to own up their research work. (S-8)

The above responses reveal how gratifying it is for supervisors when their efforts begin to pay off and are demonstrated in their students' competencies and ownership of their work. It needs to be highlighted that ownership of the work is one of the tenets espoused by constructivism (Bada, 2015; Jaiwal, 2019). Observing from the findings, the participants not only shared their understanding of postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice; they also outlined the characteristics that back up their understanding. Thus, they highlighted strategies and mechanisms they employ to ensure effective learning (Masuku, 2021). They further revealed the type of learning outcomes they seek to achieve. Finally, they shared their gratifying moments which signal that deep learning has taken place.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an endeavour to re-frame postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning activity, the study was anchored within the constructivist paradigm, which is regarded as a comprehensive teaching and learning theory for anchoring educational practices (Ali et al., 2019). Empirical findings resonated with this position wherein constructivism was cited as a suitable theoretical perspective within which postgraduate research supervision should also be grounded. Some participants explicitly referred to constructivism in their own responses as follows,

Postgraduate supervision ought to be more of constructivist practices if one of its purposes is to create creators of knowledge. (S-3)

And

Postgraduate supervision is a teaching and learning activity that has to be anchored in socio-cultural constructivist theory to ensure its effectiveness. (S-7)

Constructivism also permeated themes that included students support, giving constructive feedback, developing critical thinkers and independent scholars, as well as the indicators of effective learning, which included students' exhibition of confidence and ownership of their work. Based on these findings, a contention made in this study is that in the process of re-framing postgraduate supervision as a teaching and learning practice, it is crucial to foreground constructivism as an underpinning theoretical perspective.

As indicated by the literature, a teaching and learning practice has distinctive tenets, which include: a meeting site for the educator and student(s); a subject matter; teaching strategies or methods; assessment and feedback; and learning outcomes (Wood & Louw, 2018; Motshoane & Mckenna, 2021). From the findings, it can be noted that postgraduate research supervision meets these criteria and more. Furthermore, the findings revealed teaching strategies and mechanisms which promote effective supervision and students' learning (Masuku, 2021). Against this background, support and relevant professional development for supervisors are recommended. These are crucial in terms of enhancing the quality of postgraduate supervision.

The teaching responsibility involved in postgraduate research supervision cannot be over-emphasised. The findings revealed that a supervisor also has a versatile role, which includes providing emotional support, providing material resources, providing guidance and leadership. As the literature stated, being decisive and interchanging between these roles undeniably requires of supervisors to be well-grounded in reflective practice and that they must continue to be lifelong learners (Petrucka, 2019). Based on this position it can be advocated that supervisors need to deepen their reflectivity and apply flexible leadership skills

depending on the nature of the individual student's needs (Masuku, 2021). This can only be achieved with the relevant professional development.

Assessment and constructive feedback are significant in any teaching and learning practice (Van Rensburg et al., 2016). Based on the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the participants acknowledge the importance of constructive feedback that is coupled with probing the supervisees to push them out of their comfort zones. In addition, any teaching and learning practice has to be outcome oriented (Wood & Louw, 2018). The findings endorse those outcomes such as decreased mistakes vis-a vis increased students' confidence being the principles of constructivism that are indicative that intellectual stimulation and deep learning have occurred (Masuku, 2021; Ngulube, 2021).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study emanated from the realisation of the vagueness in classifying postgraduate supervision as a teaching practice (Ngulube, 2021). Therefore, the aim was to analyse supervisors' perceptions and practices for the extent to which they reflect postgraduate research supervision as a teaching and learning practice. The intention was to contribute to the discourse of teaching and learning, as well as the scholarship of postgraduate research supervision. Thus, the tenets of the effective teaching and learning site were outlined and assessed for how they translate into effective postgraduate research supervision. These included the educator's role, motivation, subject matter, learning outcomes, effective teaching strategies, assessment, constructive feedback, indicators of effective learning. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that the university should cease under-rating postgraduate research supervision and give it due recognition as a teaching and learning activity (Maistry, 2017; Motshoane & McKenna, 2021). Hence, the pertinent policies should be revised and enacted accordingly. Furthermore, proper administration and logistical support should be provided just like with other teaching and learning activities. Moreover, appraisal mechanisms that appropriately credit supervisors must also be put in place.

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