

Research Article

Rethinking online dissertation supervision in higher education: Supervisor–student interaction, feedback, and digital pedagogy

Tahar Boukhobza¹, Ahmed Beloucif² and Mohammad S. Islam³

¹University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom (ORCID: [0009-0002-0396-8175](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0396-8175))

²University of the West of Scotland, United Kingdom (ORCID: [0000-0001-7741-1615](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7741-1615))

³Regent College London, United Kingdom (ORCID: [0000-0001-5439-1033](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5439-1033))

This study examines online master’s dissertation supervision as a form of digital pedagogy in a UK business school, focusing on how supervisors managed feedback, interaction, student research development, and supervisory relationships during the shift from emergency remote practices to more sustainable digital models. Using a qualitative online ethnographic design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 31 postgraduate dissertation supervisors during the COVID-19 period. The findings identified four key themes: supervisor training and experience, procedural challenges, supervisor–student relationships, and supervisors’ role perceptions. Key issues include reduced social presence, delayed feedback, uneven student research skills, and the complexities of cross-cultural and online engagement. At the same time, supervisors adopted adaptive pedagogical strategies such as structured feedback practices, flexible communication tools, clearer expectations and emerging hybrid supervision approaches. The study contributes to the literature on digital pedagogy and higher education supervision by extending the concept of the “imaginary campus,” demonstrating how online dissertation supervision can evolve move beyond emergency response toward intentional, inclusive, and pedagogically effective supervision practice.

Keywords: COVID-19; Digital pedagogy; Higher education; Online dissertation supervision; Postgraduate supervision; Technology-enhanced learning; supervisor–student interaction; feedback practices

Article History: Submitted 29 December 2025; Revised 12 May 2026; Published online 6 July 2026

1. Introduction

The supervision of master’s dissertations in online settings has historically occupied a peripheral position in higher education research, despite its growing relevance. Ross and Sheail (2017) introduced the concept of the imaginary campus to articulate the dissonance between traditional supervisory expectations and the realities of online postgraduate study. They noted that “no work has been undertaken in the area of online Masters-level dissertation processes and outcomes,” highlighting a critical blind spot in academic inquiry. Their work argued that while the physical campus is often over-privileged in higher education discourse, the imagined version of it persists even in virtual learning spaces, shaping student experiences in both constraining and potentially empowering ways.

In the years following their study, particularly after the global pivot to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of the imaginary campus has only intensified. A growing body of research (Aitken et al., 2022; Almendingen et al., 2023; Ferreira-Meyers, 2022; Pollard & Kumar, 2021) has

Address of Corresponding Author

Tahar Boukhobza, PhD, University of Hertfordshire, UH Business School, De Havilland Campus, Hertfordshire, AL 10 9EU, United Kingdom.

✉ t.boukhobza@herts.ac.uk

How to cite: Boukhobza, T., Beloucif, A., & Islam, M. S. (2026). Rethinking online dissertation supervision in higher education: Supervisor–student interaction, feedback, and digital pedagogy. *International Journal of Didactical Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.33902/ijods.202642064>

begun to address the specific challenges and possibilities of online supervision. These studies converge on key themes: the fragility of social presence in virtual spaces, the importance of timely and dialogic feedback, and the central role of participatory alignment between students and supervisors. Despite innovations and institutional adaptations during the pandemic, many online postgraduate students continue to experience supervision as an isolating, opaque process, lacking the relational cues and structured support more readily available on campus.

Our paper revisits and extends Ross and Sheail's (2017) conceptual framework in light of the profound shifts brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. We argue that the pandemic has marked a critical turning point - not just in delivery mode, but in how supervision is imagined, structured, and experienced at the master's level. Drawing on recent empirical studies and institutional responses, we explore the movement from emergency remote supervision toward more sustainable, intentional models of online support. Our analysis addresses the pedagogical, relational, and policy-level changes necessary to create a digitally grounded yet affectively rich supervision culture. In doing so, we aim to reposition the imaginary campus as a dynamic construct - one that can serve not only to critique past limitations but also to inform future designs of equitable and effective online postgraduate education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online Dissertation Supervision before and after COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research on online master's dissertation supervision remained limited, with much of the literature privileging traditional face-to-face models. Ross and Sheail (2017) introduced the concept of the *imaginary campus*, highlighting how students' expectations of physical supervision environments persist in online contexts. Their study identified a significant gap in empirical research on online dissertation processes and outcomes, particularly at the master's level.

The key perceptual and behavioural differences between online and on-campus supervision are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Perceptions of Online vs On-Campus Dissertation Supervision (Adapted from Ross and Sheail (2017))

| <i>Dimension</i> | <i>Online Supervision (Imaginary Campus)</i> | <i>On-Campus Supervision</i> |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Student perceptions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unexpected obstacles - Feelings of isolation - Limited supervisory engagement - Time management challenges - Uncertainty in expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structured learning environment - Greater access to face-to-face interaction - Immediate feedback and support - Clearer communication channels - Established academic norms |
| Student effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent learning and self-direction - Strong planning and time management required - Problem-solving and research autonomy - Engagement through digital tools - Reliance on peers and online support systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guided learning with regular supervision - Reliance on supervisor direction - Collaborative problem-solving - Engagement through in-person interaction - Access to campus-based academic and peer support |

As shown in Table 1, online supervision is often associated with independence and self-directed learning, but also with challenges such as isolation, uncertainty, and limited engagement. In contrast, on-campus supervision is perceived as more structured, interactive, and supportive. These early conceptual insights provide an important foundation for understanding how online supervision has evolved in response to more recent developments.

Early studies suggested that online supervision could support flexibility and independent learning, but these benefits were often offset by challenges such as isolation, reduced interaction, and unclear expectations (Maor et al., 2016; McCallin & Nayar, 2012). These findings established an important conceptual baseline for understanding the limitations of digital supervision prior to the pandemic.

Following the global shift to remote learning, there has been a substantial expansion of research in this area. Recent studies indicate that online supervision has evolved from an emergency response into a more

sustained pedagogical model. For example, Opesemowo et al. (2025) highlight how remote supervision is now embedded within institutional practices, while Specht and Lowe (2025) emphasise the growing role of asynchronous supervision models. Despite these advancements, persistent issues – particularly around student engagement and clarity of expectations – continue to shape the online supervision experience.

2.2. Challenges in Remote and Digital Supervision

The rapid transition to online supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing challenges while introducing new complexities. Earlier studies identified issues such as reduced social presence, delayed feedback, and difficulties in maintaining engagement (Ferreira-Meyers, 2022; Pollard & Kumar, 2021). These challenges remain highly relevant in more recent research.

Contemporary studies reinforce and extend these concerns. Quinco-Cadosales et al. (2024) demonstrate that while digital tools enhance accessibility, they often lack the immediacy of face-to-face interaction. Similarly, Opesemowo et al. (2025) report that supervisors continue to face difficulties in sustaining student engagement and providing timely, meaningful feedback in remote contexts.

Structural and procedural issues also persist. Earlier research highlighted inconsistencies in institutional guidelines and complex administrative processes and these challenges remain evident in current studies. In particular, the ethics approval process continues to be perceived as overly complex and poorly aligned with disciplinary needs.

Additionally, disparities in students' research competencies and digital literacy continue to shape supervision experiences. McCallin and Nayar (2012) previously identified variability in student preparedness, and recent studies confirm that such disparities remain a significant barrier to effective engagement in online supervision.

2.3. Supervisor–Student Relationships in Digital Environments

The supervisor–student relationship is widely recognised as a critical factor in successful dissertation outcomes. Foundational research emphasises the importance of trust, communication, and academic guidance in shaping student success.

In online environments, however, maintaining these relational dynamics becomes more complex. Earlier studies noted that the absence of face-to-face interaction can weaken rapport and reduce opportunities for informal academic support (Maor et al., 2016). These challenges are further amplified in cross-cultural contexts, where differences in communication styles and expectations may lead to misunderstandings (Manathunga, 2014).

Recent research provides new insights into how these relationships are evolving. Everitt (2024) highlights the need for structured and consistent interaction in digital supervision. Similarly, Xiaojing et al. (2024) demonstrate that collaborative and collective supervision approaches can enhance engagement and reduce isolation.

Emerging studies also emphasise the importance of mentoring and relational support. Becker et al. (2025) argue that effective supervision in online environments requires intentional mentoring practices, particularly in supporting academic writing and student confidence. These findings suggest that relational quality remains central to supervision success, even as the mode of interaction evolves.

2.4. Institutional Support, Training, and Emerging Supervision Models

Institutional support is a key determinant of effective dissertation supervision. Foundational studies have long emphasised the importance of structured training, clear policies, and academic support systems. However, these traditional approaches were largely designed for face-to-face supervision contexts.

More recent research highlights the need to adapt institutional practices to digital environments. Becker et al. (2025) emphasise the importance of mentoring-focused training that reflects the realities of online supervision. Innovative supervision models are also gaining attention. For example, cohort-based and collaborative supervision approaches challenge the traditional one-to-one model by promoting peer learning and shared academic support (Becker et al., 2025). These models have been shown to enhance engagement and reduce isolation among postgraduate students.

Furthermore, institutional support for students remains critical. Earlier studies highlighted the importance of research skills development and academic writing support (McCallin & Nayar, 2012), and this continues to be reinforced in recent research. Pham et al. (2024) further emphasise the importance of inclusive and culturally responsive supervision practices in increasingly diverse higher education environments.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design based on ethnographic participant action research to explore online postgraduate dissertation supervision. Adopting an interpretive and inductive approach, the study draws on principles of online ethnography (netnography) to capture supervisors' experiences within digitally mediated environments. This design is particularly suited to examining supervision practices during the COVID-19 period, where interactions shifted to virtual platforms. The researchers' dual role as supervisors and participants enabled a reflexive and contextually grounded understanding of the phenomenon.

It has been argued that online ethnography is not different from traditional ethnography (Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). Some authors claim that it is new qualitative research carried out through Internet (Markham & Baym, 2009; Miller & Slater, 2000). This methodological approach is also known under different terminology such as Cyber ethnography (Dominguez Figaredo et al., 2007), *netnography* (Kozinets, 2002), *Webnography* (Puri, 2007).

Online ethnography is recognised as a valuable approach in higher education research for understanding experiences, interactions, and engagement within digital learning environments. As this study examines online postgraduate dissertation supervision within a limited timeframe, online ethnography was considered the most suitable methodology for exploring supervisory experiences in a culturally diverse context through platforms such as Moodle and dissertation forums.

Although ethnography has been criticised for potential subjectivity, researchers' experiences and involvement can enrich contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Cragg & Cook, 2007). Therefore, this study adopted a pragmatic, reflexive, and interpretive approach while acknowledging the researchers' insider-outsider position (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

The research followed a cyclical and non-linear process. Initial data were gathered from supervisors' discussions on the "Dissertation Forum" and through online interviews with supervisory staff. Emerging themes from early analysis informed the refinement of the interview guide and subsequent stages of data collection.

An overt research approach was adopted, with participants informed about the purpose of the study, consent procedures, and the anonymous and secure handling of data.

3.2. Participants

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to identify individuals with direct experience of online postgraduate dissertation supervision during the COVID-19 period. A total of 31 participants took part in the study, comprising 11 male and 20 female participants. The sample included dissertation supervisors, module leaders, programme leaders, senior academic staff, and professional support staff involved in postgraduate supervision within online learning environments.

Participants were recruited through internal academic networks and dissertation supervision forums based on their active involvement in postgraduate supervision. Data were collected through online forum discussions and semi-structured interviews.

Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to focus on information-rich participants who could provide detailed insights into the challenges and practices associated with online supervision. This approach aligns with qualitative research principles, where depth of understanding is prioritised over statistical generalisation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews and participation in a supervisors' discussion forum. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet. The interviews took between 30-50 minutes and questioned focused on three topic areas: 1). supervisor training (procedure and regulation of supervision, awareness and attendance of supervision training programmes, dissertation topics and allocation of students, experience in supervising PG dissertation, knowledge of student research skills/support); 2). Issues in supervising PG dissertations (students' attendance, communication and guidance; competencies, writing research proposal, personal tutoring versus supervising? Mentoring versus monitoring, school support to students). 3). Challenges of Supervisor-student relationship (Building a rapport, working relationship and ownership of the dissertation, motivating students during the process, managing cross-cultural supervision).

This study uses an interactive approach with participants (Supervisors Discussion Forum) as online ethnography. Several key issues and challenges are examined and discussed as themes for this paper. It is also to highlight the suitability of this online ethnographic method through the researchers' involvements in Microsoft teams, Skype, among other platforms, and their experience and interactions with their own students and colleagues. It is also to note that to maintain continuity and consistency, the researchers, who were visiting lectures and PG dissertation supervisors, undertook the role of online ethnographers, carried out all the interviews.

3.4. Data Analysis and Coding Process

The data analysis followed a qualitative, iterative and inductive approach, consistent with the ethnographic and participant action research design of this study. Drawing on the themes outlined in Table 3, the analysis combined open coding and thematic analysis to systematically interpret the data.

Initially, all interview transcripts and online discussion forum contributions were read multiple times to achieve familiarisation. During this stage, open coding was conducted, whereby meaningful segments of data were identified and labelled without imposing predefined categories. Codes were generated inductively from supervisors' narratives, focusing on recurring issues such as training experiences, communication challenges, student competencies, and relational dynamics.

Following this, similar codes were grouped and refined through a process of axial coding, allowing relationships between categories to emerge. This led to the development of broader themes aligned with the conceptual areas presented in Table 3, including: supervisor training and experience, issues in postgraduate supervision, supervisor-student relationships, and supervisors' perceptions of their role.

The final stage involved thematic analysis, where themes were reviewed, defined, and interpreted in relation to both the empirical data and the existing literature. This process was iterative and non-linear, reflecting the study's ethnographic approach, where data collection and analysis occurred concurrently and informed each other.

No qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo or ATLAS.ti) was used in this study. All coding and theme development were conducted manually by the researchers to maintain close engagement with the data and ensure depth of interpretation.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

Several steps were taken to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. Data triangulation was employed through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews and online discussion forums, which allowed for the cross-verification of emerging themes. Researcher reflexivity was also maintained throughout the study, as the researchers' dual role as supervisors and ethnographers required continuous reflection to minimise bias and acknowledge their positionality. In addition, the iterative nature of the analysis, involving a non-linear movement between data collection, coding, and the literature, ensured that interpretations were continuously refined and grounded in the data. Finally, the interactive nature of the discussion forums enabled ongoing engagement with participants, thereby strengthening the credibility of the interpretations.

Referring to our study objectivity, we note that advocates of qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) point out but is almost impossible to obtain a full objectivity when carrying out interviews. However, it is left to the researcher to ensure the data obtained is reliable as well as valid.

No doubt, during the lockdown of COVID-19, the Internet has become the most useful tool for teaching, assessing, personal tutoring and supporting students at a distance. Moreover, Ethnography as research method has been well established over time. With the emergence of technology and its speed, scholars are exploring this opportunity to study participants behaviour in various contexts. It generally involves the involvement of the researcher/with the participants through a variety of methods leading to contextualisation for example, the covid-19 lockdown (Miller & Slater, 2000).

3.6. Methodological and Ethical Considerations

The methodological approach adopted in this study online ethnography within a participant action research framework raises several important methodological and ethical considerations. While digitally mediated research environments provide valuable opportunities for accessing participants and capturing real-time interactions, they also introduce complexities relating to researcher positionality, data integrity, and ethical responsibility. The use of online ethnography further presents challenges associated with the temporally bounded nature of data collection and the reliance on digitally mediated interactions. While online platforms

(e.g., discussion forums and video conferencing tools) enable access to rich, interactional data, they may limit the capture of non-verbal cues and informal exchanges that are typically present in face-to-face settings.

Ethically, the study adhered to established principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Consent was obtained prior to data collection, and all data were anonymised to protect participants' identities. Given the use of online platforms, particular attention was paid to ensuring secure data storage and compliance with data protection regulations. Additionally, the study adopted an overt research approach, whereby participants were aware of the researchers' role and the aims of the study. This transparency was essential in maintaining trust and ethical integrity, particularly within professional academic networks where participants may have shared institutional affiliations.

4. Results and Discussion

This section is divided on Four themes. It integrates the themes generated from the literature and interviews as well as the analysis of staff platform discussions. These themes are dealt with consecutively: 1) supervisor training and experience; 2) Issues in PG supervision. 3) Challenges of supervisor-student relationships; and 4) Supervisors' perception of their role. Based on the analysis, four major themes and their corresponding subthemes were generated (Table 2), and a thematic summary of sub-themes is presented in Appendix 1.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

| <i>Main Theme</i> | <i>Subthemes</i> |
|--|---|
| Supervisor Training and Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Procedures and regulations - Training effectiveness - Topic allocation - Supervisory experience - Student research skills |
| Issues in PG Supervision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication tools and support - Tutoring vs mentoring - Engagement and monitoring (logbooks) - Ethics approval challenges - Student competencies |
| Supervisor-Student Relationship Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationship development - Relationships Quality - Research methods difficulties - Online accessibility - Cross-cultural dynamics |
| Supervisors' Perceptions of Their Role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What Supervisors Value Most - Perceived Benefits for Supervisors - Challenges in Supervising Diverse Dissertations - Student academic support - The Role of Platforms |

4.1. Theme 1: Supervisor Training and Experience

This section focuses on supervisor training and experience, covering areas such as procedures, training attendance, topic allocation, supervision experience, and understanding postgraduate (PG) students' research skills. Below is a summary of the feedback, highlighting common points, differences, and a critical look at the issues.

4.1.1. Procedures and regulations

Supervisors agreed that clear procedures and rules are important for successful supervision. Some felt confident about specific processes, like ethical approval, but others pointed out gaps in their understanding of the broader guidelines. As Participant P16 acknowledged,

I know what the process is and I know what the procedures are and I know what I need to do. I'm not sure I'd know what the regulations are... I know the ones I need to know concerning the ethics side of things.

Recent studies emphasizing that postgraduate supervision requires comprehensive policy training, not just procedural knowledge (Maor et al., 2016). A lack of clarity in university guidelines often results in disparities in supervisory approaches, which can negatively impact student experience. In some cases, mandatory training for supervisors on procedures was provided, but its value was questioned. While knowledge of key procedures is strong, gaps in broader understanding could lead to inconsistency. Training should not just focus on the basics but also provide a bigger picture to help supervisors handle unique or complex situations. Carter and Kumar (2017) suggests that structured workshops focused on institutional policies improve supervision consistency and efficiency.

4.1.2. *Training effectiveness*

Supervisors expressed mixed views regarding the effectiveness of the training provided for dissertation supervision. While some participants valued the introduction of mandatory training, others believed that the sessions did not sufficiently address the practical challenges associated with online supervision. For example, P6 stated, "It's probably only within recent years that the university has insisted that we attend the formal training before we are given any students to supervise." Similarly, P19 highlighted the increasing institutional emphasis on continuous training, noting that "they insist that we do the dissertation supervisor training every year."

Despite recognising the importance of training, several participants questioned its practical relevance. P11 commented, "I did have a supervision training session...and I don't think that was enough," suggesting a gap between institutional training provision and the realities of dissertation supervision. This finding argues that supervision training in higher education is often too generic and insufficiently aligned with the complexities of supervisory practice. Research also suggests that effective supervision requires not only procedural knowledge but also relational, pedagogical, and contextual competencies that are difficult to develop through standardised training alone (Hickey & Forbes, 2022).

Participants further suggested that training should be differentiated according to supervisors' levels of experience. New supervisors may benefit from practical guidance, mentoring, and case-based learning, whereas experienced supervisors may require advanced training focused on complex supervisory challenges, online engagement, and student wellbeing. Recent studies emphasise that reflective and context-specific professional development is more effective than one-size-fits-all approaches, particularly in digitally mediated supervision environments (Aitken et al., 2022).

The findings also indicate that online dissertation supervision requires supervisors to develop additional communication and relational skills to maintain student engagement and provide effective support in virtual settings. Bang-Larsen and Qvortrup (2022) argue that online supervision environments demand more dialogic and adaptive supervisory practices, particularly after the rapid digital transition caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, McChesney (2022) highlights the growing need for more inclusive and supportive supervisory approaches that recognise students' diverse personal and academic circumstances.

4.1.3. *Topic allocation*

Topic allocation emerged as an important aspect of online postgraduate dissertation supervision. Most participants reported that dissertation topics were generally allocated according to supervisors' areas of expertise, which helped them provide effective academic guidance and feedback. For example, P17 stated, "The allocation of dissertation topics and supervisors has been perfect...my students' topics align well with my expertise." Similarly, P12 noted that although topic matching is preferred, it is not always essential, explaining that "they do their best to assign you a student whose topic matches your skills...but it's not 100% necessary."

The findings suggest that alignment between supervisors' expertise and students' research topics contributes positively to supervisory confidence, communication, and the overall quality of guidance provided to students. Recent studies indicate that subject expertise remains a key factor in effective postgraduate supervision because it enables supervisors to provide more targeted academic support and constructive feedback (de Kleijn et al., 2022). In online supervision environments, this alignment becomes even more important due to the reduced opportunities for informal clarification and interaction that are typically available in face-to-face settings (Aitken et al., 2022).

However, some participants acknowledged that supervising outside their immediate area of expertise could also provide opportunities for professional development and interdisciplinary learning. This reflects wider discussions in the literature regarding the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary supervision. Brew and Peseta (2004) argue that interdisciplinary supervision can broaden research perspectives and encourage innovation, although limited subject expertise may sometimes affect the depth of guidance

provided. Similarly, Manathunga (2007) suggests that collaborative and co-supervision approaches can help address these limitations by allowing supervisors to draw on complementary expertise.

Recent literature further highlights the growing importance of flexibility and interdisciplinary collaboration in postgraduate supervision, particularly in digitally mediated learning environments. Contemporary supervision increasingly requires supervisors to engage with diverse research areas and support students working across disciplinary boundaries. Institutional support, including subject-specific training, mentoring, and co-supervision models, has therefore been identified as essential in helping supervisors manage unfamiliar topics effectively and confidently (de Kleijn et al., 2022).

4.1.4. Supervisory experience

Supervisors' experience levels varied widely, from newcomers to those with decades of experience. As participant P6 reflected, "Well, I have been supervising master's dissertations for about 19 years... in terms of the MSc management, this is my second or third year doing it specifically."

Similarly, another participant said, "I've supervised about six different dissertations so far." (P17)

Common challenges faced by the supervisors include disengaged students, language barriers, and uneven research skills among students. Those with more experience generally found it easier to manage these challenges. Experienced supervisors have the skills to handle tricky situations, while newer supervisors often struggle. Research confirms that experienced supervisors develop adaptive strategies to support diverse student needs (Löfström et al., 2023). Mentorship programs, where new supervisors learn from senior colleagues, could enhance supervision consistency.

4.1.5. Student research skills

Many supervisors noted that PG students often lacked basic research skills, with some struggling to meet the expectations of a master's dissertation. Supervisors sometimes had to spend extra time teaching these skills. Providing students with mandatory research skills workshops could reduce this burden and let supervisors focus on higher-level guidance. As participant P1 observed, "For some of our students, they've never done a dissertation before...some of them can be coming in with disadvantages." Similarly, participant P15 highlighted the varying competencies among students, stating, "Competency levels vary. Language barriers and differing levels of research skills can make supervision challenging." Participant P32 reinforced this point, adding, "My experience of supervising master's dissertation is that it can be an intense process in terms of teaching research skills..."

Literature also highlights that students often enter postgraduate programs with varying levels of research competency (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). Universities should introduce pre-dissertation research training programs to reduce supervisors' burden. Bruce and Stoodley (2013) highlighted that Institutions should provide mandatory research skills workshops before dissertation stages.

4.2. Theme 2: Issues in PG Supervision

In this theme 2, five key issues emerged in PG supervision that require attentions. They include 1) communication and support; 2) tutoring and mentoring; 3) engagement and monitoring via logbooks; 4) ethics approval; 5) students' competencies:

4.2.1. Communication tools and support

Participants highlighted the importance of diverse communication tools, particularly during the challenges posed by online supervision. Platforms such as Skype, WhatsApp, and email were commonly utilized for maintaining consistent contact. A critical observation is that while these tools facilitated communication, they often lacked the immediacy or reliability needed, especially in situations with slow internet or differing time zones. As P29 noted that flexibility in communication methods is crucial, stating, "They have the choice to communicate with me via Skype...or to use WhatsApp because it is widely understood that, many students are on WhatsApp."

A critical observation is that while these tools facilitated communication, they often lacked the immediacy or reliability needed, especially in situations with slow internet or differing time zones. As noted by Arjang et al. (2024), while online platforms enhance accessibility, their effectiveness depends on students' digital literacy and engagement levels. As digital technologies become more integral to business education, students without digital skills may struggle to engage with the material. Enhancing digital literacy through targeted training and curriculum design is essential to improving student engagement (Arjang et al., 2024).

4.2.2. *Tutoring vs mentoring*

Participants consistently distinguished between tutoring, which focused on technical and academic guidance, and mentoring, which involved emotional encouragement and motivational support. Supervisors emphasised the importance of balancing guidance with the promotion of student independence. For example, P2 explained, "I'm a person who will show them how to do it, but you have to pull back because if you do everything for them, they'll keep relying on you." Similarly, P16 highlighted the pastoral and mentoring dimensions of supervision, particularly for international students, stating, "Mentoring just from...especially for some international students who feel a little disconnected at the moment...It's a bit of mentoring, supporting them."

The findings indicate that postgraduate supervision extends beyond academic instruction and increasingly involves emotional support, relationship building, and student wellbeing. Recent research suggests that effective supervision requires supervisors to adopt multiple roles, including tutor, mentor, coach, and advisor, particularly within online and culturally diverse learning environments (McChesney, 2022). In digitally mediated supervision, mentoring becomes especially important because students may experience isolation, anxiety, and reduced academic confidence following the transition to online learning environments after COVID-19 (Aitken et al., 2022).

Participants also highlighted the importance of coaching skills in helping students develop confidence and independent research abilities. However, these skills were often developed informally through supervisory experience rather than formal institutional training. This finding aligns with broader literature suggesting that universities frequently prioritise procedural supervision training while giving less attention to mentoring, coaching, and relational aspects of supervision (de Kleijn et al., 2022). As a result, supervisors may feel underprepared to support students with diverse academic, cultural, and emotional needs.

Another recurring issue concerned differences in students' prior research skills and academic preparedness, particularly among international students. Supervisors reported that these gaps often required additional mentoring and personalised support. Existing studies similarly show that international postgraduate students may require more structured guidance to navigate academic expectations, research practices, and communication within unfamiliar educational systems (Beloucif et al., 2022). Consequently, relational and mentoring dimensions of supervision are increasingly recognised as essential components of effective postgraduate support.

4.2.3. *Engagement and monitoring (Logbooks)*

Participants identified logbooks and regular supervisory meetings as important mechanisms for monitoring student progress and maintaining accountability during the dissertation process. Supervisors explained that logbooks helped document meetings, agreed actions, and student progress, particularly within online supervision contexts where face-to-face interaction was limited. However, many participants reported that students often failed to complete or update the logbooks consistently. For example, P19 stated, "I tell them they have seven 45-minute meetings at their disposal...If I don't hear from them for a month, I'll tend to email them and say hey, where are you?" Similarly, P31 emphasised the importance of timely documentation, explaining, "Some of them forget to fill the logbook...I insist they update it within 24 hours after every meeting."

The findings suggest that while progress monitoring tools are valuable for structuring supervision and encouraging accountability, responsibility for maintaining engagement and documentation often falls disproportionately on supervisors. This reflects wider concerns within postgraduate supervision literature regarding student disengagement and uneven participation in online learning environments (Aitken et al., 2022). Regular communication and documented supervision processes are increasingly recognised as essential for supporting student progression, particularly in remote and hybrid supervision contexts (de Kleijn et al., 2022).

Participants also highlighted the administrative burden associated with repeatedly reminding students to complete documentation and attend meetings. In some cases, supervisors reported completing records themselves to ensure institutional requirements and deadlines were met. Recent research suggests that digital supervision systems and collaborative technologies can improve communication, transparency, and student accountability by supporting more structured interactions between supervisors and students (Gopinathan et al., 2022). Automated reminders, integrated progress dashboards, and AI-supported tracking systems have also been identified as emerging tools that may reduce administrative workload while improving student engagement and time management (Bond et al., 2020).

The findings further indicate that regular meetings alone do not guarantee effective supervision unless students actively engage with the process and take responsibility for preparation and follow-up activities. Existing studies emphasise that successful postgraduate supervision relies on shared responsibility, consistent communication, and clearly defined expectations between supervisors and students (Lee, 2020). Consequently, institutions may need to strengthen digital supervision practices by introducing more user-friendly monitoring systems, clearer accountability structures, and training for both students and supervisors on effective use of supervision tools.

4.2.4. Ethics approval challenges

The ethics approval process emerged as a significant challenge within postgraduate dissertation supervision. Participants described the process as overly complex, bureaucratic, and not always suited to the practical realities of disciplines such as business studies. For example, P2 commented, "The ethics form does not work for business school students...I tell my supervisors to just get it in and say, 'I'm going to do X interviews,' even if they're not sure. The ethics process is overbearing." This reflects concerns that standardised ethics procedures may not adequately accommodate the methodological diversity and applied nature of some postgraduate research projects.

Participants also reported that supervisors frequently had to provide extensive support to help students complete ethics documentation, with some supervisors informally completing sections on behalf of students to avoid delays. These findings suggest that ethics procedures can place additional administrative and emotional burdens on both students and supervisors, particularly within online supervision environments where students may have less immediate access to guidance and clarification.

Recent literature similarly highlights growing concerns regarding the complexity of university ethics systems and their impact on postgraduate research. Winter and Gundur (2024) argue that ethics review procedures in higher education are increasingly shaped by institutional risk management approaches, which may unintentionally create barriers for student researchers. In applied disciplines such as business and social sciences, overly rigid ethics frameworks can delay projects and increase student anxiety, particularly for novice researchers unfamiliar with formal research governance processes (Techagaisiyavanit et al., 2026).

The findings further indicate that disciplinary differences are not always sufficiently recognised within standardised ethics procedures. Existing studies suggest that ethics processes designed around biomedical or high-risk research models are often poorly aligned with qualitative and practice-based research approaches commonly used in business and management studies. Consequently, supervisors may need to spend considerable time translating institutional requirements into discipline-specific guidance that students can understand and apply.

Recent scholarship also emphasises the importance of supportive and educative ethics review processes that help students develop ethical research competence rather than simply ensuring procedural compliance (Markham & Buchanan, 2023). Streamlined digital ethics systems, clearer guidance, and discipline-sensitive review procedures may therefore improve both student experience and supervisory efficiency. Institutions could also provide targeted ethics workshops and practical examples tailored to different research methodologies and disciplinary contexts.

4.2.5. Students' competencies

Variability in students' research capabilities and academic language skills emerged as a recurring concern among supervisors. Participants reported that some students struggled with fundamental research methods, critical analysis, and academic writing, which limited their ability to progress independently during the dissertation process. Supervisors also noted that a lack of confidence in academic communication often required additional guidance and support beyond normal supervisory expectations.

The findings suggest that differences in students' academic preparedness can significantly influence the supervisory relationship and increase supervisors' workload, particularly within online learning environments. Existing literature indicates that postgraduate students frequently experience challenges with research design, academic writing, and methodological understanding, especially when transitioning into independent research for the first time (Lee, 2020). These challenges may be more pronounced among international students and students from diverse educational backgrounds who may be unfamiliar with institutional academic expectations and research conventions.

Recent studies further highlight that online and hybrid supervision environments can intensify these difficulties because students have fewer informal opportunities to seek clarification and develop academic confidence through peer interaction (Aitken et al., 2022). As a result, supervisors often spend substantial

time addressing foundational academic skills rather than focusing on higher-level conceptual and analytical guidance. This may affect the overall efficiency and quality of postgraduate supervision.

Participants suggested that pre-supervision training programmes and workshops in research methods, academic writing, and critical thinking could help bridge these gaps. This recommendation is supported by recent research demonstrating that structured academic skills support improves student confidence, engagement, and progression in postgraduate research programmes. Similarly, targeted writing development initiatives and scaffolded research training have been shown to reduce student anxiety and strengthen research capability in higher education contexts (Fancett, 2024).

The findings therefore indicate the importance of institutional investment in preparatory academic support before students begin the dissertation process. Providing early training in research methods and academic communication may enable supervisors to focus more effectively on advanced supervision, critical discussion, and scholarly development.

4.3. Theme3: Challenges of Supervisor-Student Relationships

In this theme, we have identified 4 challenges that are discussed as follow: 1) phases of supervision relationship development; 2) characteristics of effective relationships; 3) difficulties with research methods and data collection; 4) online supervision and accessibility; and 5) managing cross-cultural dynamics.

4.3.1. Relationship development

Participants emphasized the importance of structured and purposeful supervision relationships. Early stages require clear communication of expectations, often achieved through initial meetings where research goals, methodologies, and timelines are defined. Supervisors stressed the need for students to take responsibility for their work by preparing for meetings and submitting drafts in advance. However, participants noted variability in student engagement, with some students requiring frequent reminders and others failing to meet expectations. Research suggest that supervisors should remain flexible to accommodate different student engagement styles (Deuchar, 2008). Supervisors expressed frustration with students who delay seeking feedback until the final stages, leading to rushed and suboptimal work.

4.3.2. Relationships quality

Relationship quality emerged as a central factor in effective postgraduate dissertation supervision. Participants emphasised that trust, rapport, encouragement, and open communication were essential for building productive supervisory relationships, particularly within online learning environments. Supervisors described the importance of balancing professionalism with approachability to ensure that students felt supported while maintaining appropriate academic boundaries. They also highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity when supervising international students from diverse educational and social backgrounds.

The findings suggest that strong supervisor-student relationships contribute positively to student engagement, confidence, motivation, and dissertation completion. Existing literature consistently identifies relational trust and supportive communication as key predictors of successful postgraduate supervision outcomes (Lee, 2020). In online supervision contexts, relationship quality becomes even more significant because virtual interactions may reduce opportunities for informal communication and emotional connection (Aitken et al., 2022). Consequently, supervisors often need to make additional efforts to establish presence, responsiveness, and relational support in digitally mediated environments.

Participants also noted that students varied considerably in their confidence, communication styles, and ability to adapt to academic expectations. As a result, supervisors frequently adjusted their level of guidance, encouragement, and directness according to individual student needs. This finding aligns with recent research suggesting that effective supervision requires adaptive and student-centred approaches that recognise diverse learning styles, cultural expectations, and emotional needs (McChesney, 2022). International students, in particular, may require additional relational support as they navigate unfamiliar academic systems and expectations.

Another issue highlighted by participants concerned the lack of formal guidance on managing professional boundaries within online supervision. Digital communication tools and remote learning environments have increasingly blurred traditional boundaries between academic and pastoral support, creating uncertainty regarding supervisors' roles and responsibilities (Manathunga, 2014). Recent scholarship argues that universities should provide clearer institutional guidance and professional development on relational supervision, boundary management, and intercultural communication to better support supervisors operating in online environments (de Kleijn et al., 2022).

4.3.3. *Research methods difficulties*

Research methods difficulties emerged as a significant challenge in postgraduate dissertation supervision. Participants frequently reported that students demonstrated limited understanding of research methodologies, which was often reflected in poorly structured proposals, weak research designs, and incomplete literature reviews. Supervisors explained that substantial time was spent clarifying basic methodological concepts and guiding students through fundamental aspects of the research process before higher-level academic discussions could take place.

These findings align with earlier research highlighting persistent gaps in students' methodological knowledge and research preparedness (Todd et al., 2006). Recent studies continue to show that many postgraduate students struggle with research design, methodological justification, critical analysis, and the practical application of research methods, particularly within independent dissertation projects. Such challenges may become more pronounced in online learning environments where students have fewer opportunities for immediate clarification and collaborative learning (Aitken et al., 2022).

Participants noted that the need to repeatedly explain foundational concepts increased supervisors' workload and limited opportunities for deeper intellectual engagement and critical discussion. Existing literature similarly suggests that insufficient methodological preparation can shift supervision towards remedial teaching rather than advanced scholarly guidance (Lee, 2020). This may also contribute to student anxiety, low confidence, and delays in dissertation progress.

The findings further indicate the importance of earlier and more structured preparation in research methods education. Participants suggested that pre-dissertation workshops and stronger integration of research methods training within earlier coursework could improve students' readiness for independent research. Workshops focusing on proposal development, literature review writing, and methodological decision-making may therefore reduce supervisory burden while improving the overall quality of student submissions.

In addition, digitally supported learning resources, including online research skills modules and interactive workshops, have been identified as effective strategies for strengthening methodological competence in postgraduate education (Bond et al., 2020). Institutions may therefore need to adopt more proactive approaches to research skills development before students begin the dissertation stage.

4.3.4. *Online accessibility*

Online supervision created both opportunities and challenges for postgraduate dissertation supervision. Participants reported that digital communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Skype, and WhatsApp improved flexibility, accessibility, and the frequency of supervisor-student interactions. These tools enabled supervisors and students to maintain communication during periods of restricted physical access, particularly throughout and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Online supervision also provided greater convenience for scheduling meetings and sharing feedback across geographically dispersed locations.

Despite these benefits, participants identified several challenges associated with online supervision. A major concern was unequal access to reliable internet connectivity and digital resources, particularly for students located in regions with limited technological infrastructure. Supervisors explained that connectivity problems often disrupted meetings, delayed communication, and negatively affected student engagement. Similar challenges have been widely reported in recent higher education literature, which highlights the persistence of digital inequalities and technological barriers in online learning environments (Singh et al., 2021).

Participants also noted that online supervision altered the nature of supervisory relationships by blurring the boundaries between professional and personal interactions. Increased reliance on messaging applications and remote communication created expectations of constant availability and more informal communication patterns. Existing studies suggest that digitally mediated supervision environments can intensify emotional labour and complicate professional boundary management for supervisors (Manathunga, 2014). At the same time, online communication may reduce opportunities for non-verbal interaction, informal academic discussion, and relationship building that typically occur during face-to-face supervision (Aitken et al., 2022).

The findings further indicate that online supervision requires supervisors and students to develop new digital communication and relational skills to sustain engagement and academic support effectively. Recent scholarship emphasises that successful online supervision depends not only on technological access but also on the quality of interaction, responsiveness, and collaborative engagement between supervisors and students (de Kleijn et al., 2022). Hybrid supervision approaches that combine online flexibility with periodic

face-to-face interaction have therefore been increasingly recommended to improve inclusivity, accessibility, and relationship quality in postgraduate supervision (Singh et al., 2021).

4.3.5. *Cross-cultural dynamics*

Cross-cultural supervision emerged as a significant aspect of postgraduate dissertation supervision, particularly within online and internationally diverse learning environments. Participants frequently discussed challenges related to language barriers, differing academic expectations, communication styles, and variations in students' prior educational experiences. As P29 explained, "Dealing with people across different continents and cultures is natural for me...I try to accommodate as much as I can without letting them abuse the situation." This reflects the balancing role supervisors often adopt when attempting to support culturally diverse students while maintaining academic standards and professional boundaries.

While participants generally valued the diversity of perspectives brought by international students, they also acknowledged that cultural differences sometimes created misunderstandings or difficulties in communication. Supervisors reported that some students struggled to interpret feedback, engage in critical discussion, or adapt to expectations surrounding independent learning and academic writing. Existing literature similarly highlights that cross-cultural supervision involves navigating differing assumptions about authority, communication, feedback, and student autonomy (Manathunga, 2014). Such differences may become more visible in online supervision contexts where communication is primarily text-based or technologically mediated.

Recent research further suggests that culturally responsive supervision plays an important role in improving student confidence, inclusion, and academic success in higher education (Abrahamson et al., 2023). Supervisors are increasingly expected to demonstrate intercultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability when working with students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds. However, participants indicated that many supervisors receive limited formal preparation for managing cross-cultural supervisory relationships effectively.

The findings also suggest that online supervision may intensify some cross-cultural communication challenges because digital interactions can reduce opportunities for informal clarification and relationship building. Studies indicate that misunderstandings in virtual environments are more likely when supervisors and students have different communication norms or expectations regarding feedback and responsiveness (Aitken et al., 2022). Consequently, supervisors may need to adopt more explicit and supportive communication strategies to ensure clarity and mutual understanding. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of institutional support, including training in cultural competence, intercultural communication, and inclusive supervision practices.

4.4. **Theme 4: Supervisors' Perception of Their Role**

Participants shared a wide range of perspectives on the challenges and satisfactions of supervising postgraduate dissertations, revealing key themes: the value they derive from their roles, the benefits for both supervisors and students, challenges in supervising diverse topics, student support for academic skills and employability, experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown, and the role of online platforms.

4.4.1. *What supervisors value most*

Participants consistently expressed satisfaction in supporting students throughout their academic journeys and viewed supervision as a rewarding aspect of their academic role. Many supervisors particularly valued the mentoring dimension of supervision and the opportunity to contribute to students' personal and academic development. As P17 stated, "I value the opportunity to mentor and guide students through a critical phase of their academic journey."

The findings indicate that supervisors value not only academic achievement but also the relational and motivational aspects of supervision. Participants emphasised the importance of encouragement, trust, and clear communication in helping students remain engaged and confident during the dissertation process. Existing literature similarly highlights that supportive supervisory relationships positively influence student motivation, wellbeing, and completion outcomes (Lee, 2020).

However, some participants reported that maintaining effective supervisory relationships can be challenging without adequate institutional support or professional development. Recent studies suggest that supervisors increasingly require training in communication, mentoring, and emotional support skills, particularly in online and culturally diverse environments (McChesney, 2022). These findings suggest that stronger institutional support may further enhance the quality and sustainability of postgraduate supervision.

4.4.2. *Perceived benefits for supervisors*

Participants reported that postgraduate supervision contributes positively to their personal and professional development. Supervisors explained that engaging with students' diverse research topics exposed them to new knowledge areas, broadened their academic perspectives, and strengthened their mentoring and communication skills. Many participants viewed supervision as a reciprocal learning process in which supervisors also benefit intellectually and professionally through ongoing engagement with students' research.

The findings suggest that supervision can enhance supervisors' reflective practice, research awareness, and academic confidence. Existing literature similarly identifies postgraduate supervision as an important form of professional learning that promotes scholarly development and interdisciplinary engagement (Lee, 2020).

However, participants also noted that supervising unfamiliar or interdisciplinary topics may increase workload pressures and require additional preparation. Without adequate institutional support, supervisors may feel overwhelmed when balancing their own learning with their responsibility to guide students effectively. Research suggests that professional development opportunities, co-supervision models, and manageable workloads are important for sustaining supervisors' motivation and wellbeing (de Kleijn et al., 2022).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that postgraduate supervision offers significant professional and intellectual benefits for supervisors, although these benefits depend on adequate institutional support and realistic workload management.

4.4.3. *Challenges in supervising diverse dissertations*

Participants frequently reported supervising dissertation topics outside their immediate areas of expertise. While some supervisors viewed this as an opportunity for professional growth and interdisciplinary learning, others expressed concerns about their ability to provide sufficiently detailed academic guidance in unfamiliar subject areas. These findings suggest that supervising diverse dissertation topics can be both intellectually rewarding and professionally challenging.

The literature similarly highlights that interdisciplinary and unfamiliar supervision contexts may broaden supervisors' perspectives and encourage innovation in research practice. However, limited subject expertise may also affect supervisors' confidence, increase preparation time, and potentially reduce the depth of feedback provided to students (Lee, 2020). Participants noted that balancing openness to new research areas with maintaining supervisory quality can be difficult without appropriate institutional support.

Literature emphasises the importance of collaborative and co-supervision models in addressing these challenges, particularly in multidisciplinary research environments (de Kleijn et al., 2022). Structured support systems, mentoring arrangements, and opportunities for peer consultation can help supervisors manage unfamiliar topics more effectively while ensuring students receive appropriate academic guidance.

4.4.4. *Students' academic supports*

Participants generally valued the academic support services provided by the university, particularly resources related to academic skills development, research support, and employability guidance. Supervisors highlighted the usefulness of university and library Teams platforms in supporting students during the dissertation process. However, participants also noted considerable variation in how actively students engaged with these services.

The findings suggest that the effectiveness of academic support resources depends largely on students recognising their value and supervisors actively encouraging their use. Several participants observed that students often overlooked available support services unless supervisors specifically referred them to appropriate resources. This indicates a potential communication and engagement gap between institutional support provision and student utilisation.

Research similarly highlights that postgraduate students may underuse academic support services due to limited awareness, lack of confidence, or uncertainty about how these services can assist their learning. In online learning environments, this challenge may become more pronounced because students have fewer informal opportunities to learn about support systems through peer interaction and campus engagement (Bond et al., 2020).

The literature further suggests that integrating academic support referrals into regular supervision practices can improve student engagement, academic confidence, and progression (de Kleijn et al., 2022).

Institutions may therefore need to strengthen communication strategies and encourage closer collaboration between supervisors and student support services to ensure students access the resources available to them effectively.

4.4.5. *The role of platforms*

Participants reported using a range of digital platforms, including Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Skype, to support postgraduate dissertation supervision. Most supervisors adapted positively to these technologies and viewed them as effective tools for maintaining communication, sharing feedback, and monitoring student progress. As P31 stated, "Online is working perfectly fine. They are sending stuff, I'm checking, I'm giving them feedback." This reflects the growing normalisation of digitally mediated supervision practices within higher education.

The findings suggest that online platforms improved flexibility, accessibility, and efficiency in supervisory communication. Supervisors were able to conduct meetings more conveniently, exchange documents quickly, and maintain ongoing contact with students across different locations. Recent research similarly highlights that digital platforms played a critical role in sustaining postgraduate supervision during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by enabling continuity of learning and academic support (Singh et al., 2021).

However, participants also identified challenges associated with online supervision platforms. Some supervisors experienced an initial learning curve when adapting to new technologies, while others noted that online communication reduced opportunities for informal interaction and relationship building. Existing studies indicate that informal conversations and spontaneous academic discussions are important for student engagement, confidence, and scholarly development, yet these interactions are often more limited in virtual environments (Aitken et al., 2022).

The literature further suggests that hybrid supervision models combining online flexibility with periodic face-to-face interaction may provide a more balanced and inclusive approach to postgraduate supervision (Singh et al., 2021). Such models can maintain the convenience of digital communication while preserving opportunities for stronger interpersonal connection and academic engagement.

5. Conclusion and Research Implications

This study explored two key research questions: (1) the issues and challenges faced by supervisors in remote postgraduate dissertation supervision, and (2) whether remote supervision represents a sustainable future model for higher education, particularly for international students. Through qualitative analysis, the study identified a range of pedagogical, relational, procedural, and institutional challenges associated with online supervision. In response, the study developed a guide for online postgraduate dissertation supervision (see Table 3) to support academic institutions and policymakers in improving supervisory practice within digitally mediated learning environments. This framework foregrounds actionable strategies such as differentiated training, improved communication tools, and enhanced student preparation, all of which are necessary to bridge competency gaps and sustain engagement. It also recognises the importance of redefining supervisory roles and reinforcing trust through early intervention and feedback-rich environments. By embedding these practices into institutional policy and culture, the imaginary campus can evolve from a site of dissonance into a productive space of belonging and scholarly growth in digitally mediated postgraduate education.

The findings of this study confirm earlier research highlighting challenges related to student engagement, communication, isolation, and supervision quality in online learning environments (Maor et al., 2016; Pollard & Kumar, 2021; Ross & Sheail, 2017). The study also reinforces the importance of structured communication, timely feedback, and supportive supervisory relationships in maintaining student motivation and progression (Everitt, 2024). However, this research extends existing literature by demonstrating how remote supervision has evolved from an emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic into a more embedded and permanent feature of higher education practice.

A key finding is that hybrid and flexible supervision models may provide the most effective approach for supporting postgraduate students, particularly international and distance learners. Although digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Skype improve accessibility and flexibility, students may still experience feelings of isolation and disconnection from campus communities. The findings therefore emphasise the importance of active and experiential learning approaches supported by inclusive supervision practices and appropriate digital technologies.

Table 3
A Guide for Online PG Dissertation Supervision

| Themes / Item and Area | Action/s |
|---|--|
| Theme 1: Supervisor Training and Experience | |
| Enhanced Training Programmes | Develop modular training tailored to different supervisory experience levels. |
| Refined Topic Allocation Systems | Improve allocation systems to align with supervisors' expertise while providing interdisciplinary flexibility. |
| Strengthened Preparation Students | Introduce mandatory research skills workshops for all PG students to address foundational gaps. |
| Peer Learning Initiatives | Facilitate mentorship programs pairing experienced and newer supervisors to promote knowledge sharing and consistent supervision quality. |
| Theme 2: Issues in PG Dissertation Supervision | |
| Enhance Communication Protocols | Should adopt a consistent set of communication tools (e.g., integrated platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom) with training provided for both supervisors and students to maximize their effectiveness. |
| Standardized Communication Tools: | Develop discipline-specific guidelines for ethics approval to reduce confusion and redundancy. |
| Streamline Ethics Approval Processes | Organize workshops for students and supervisors to address common challenges in ethics forms, ensuring smoother submissions. |
| Requirements for Specific Guidelines | Require students to complete workshops in research methods, academic writing, and ethics compliance before beginning their dissertation work. |
| Pre-Approval Workshops | Provide tailored language support programs, especially for international students, to address language and writing challenges. |
| Bridge Competency Gaps among students | Develop digital logbook systems integrated with deadlines, progress tracking, and alerts to foster accountability. |
| Pre-supervision training | Set clear expectations for students to document meetings, prepare for discussions, and take ownership of their dissertation work. |
| Dedicated language support | Encourage supervisors to maintain regular contact through brief check-ins, fostering rapport and trust. |
| Increase accountability and Ownership | Create a structured feedback framework, ensuring students consistently receive constructive and actionable input on their work. |
| Mandatory Logbook Usage | Use attendance tracking and communication logs to identify disengaged students early and provide targeted interventions. |
| Empower students as researchers | Introduce motivational strategies, such as peer group discussions and recognition of progress, to encourage sustained engagement. |
| Promote Engagement and Trust Building | Redefine the roles of supervisors to distinguish clearly between tutoring, mentoring, and coaching, reducing role ambiguity. |
| Frequent Touchpoints | Provide resources like administrative assistance or reduced workload for supervisors managing large numbers of students. |
| Feedback Culture | |
| Address disengagement with proactive intervention | |
| Early warning Systems | |
| Motivational Strategies | |
| Develop Clear Institutional Policies | |
| Balanced Supervisor-Students Roles | |
| Support for Supervisor | |

Table 3 continued

| <i>Themes / Item and Area</i> | <i>Action/s</i> |
|---|---|
| Theme 3: Supervisor–Student Relationship Challenges Enhance Early Engagement Strategies Develop Supervisors' Skills in Cross-Cultural Communication Develop/Improve Research Methodology Training and Skills | Require students to submit a research plan and meeting agenda before supervision begins. Implement progress tracking tools to monitor milestones and provide reminders. Offer training programs in cultural competence and relationship management. Create forums for supervisors to share best practices in managing diverse student needs. Integrate foundational research and academic writing workshops into the curriculum before dissertation stages. Provide access to resources like research guides and templates to support students independently. Adopt standardized platforms with reliable features for scheduling, communication, and document sharing. Establish clear guidelines for online interactions to maintain professionalism. |
| Strengthen Online Supervision Practices | |
| Theme 4: Supervisors' Perception of their Role Enhancing Supervisor Training Foster Collaboration | Regular workshops on supervision techniques, interdisciplinary guidance, and the use of digital tools should be mandated. Create opportunities for co-supervision or team-based approaches to handle diverse dissertation topics effectively |
| Optimize university support services such as academic skills. | Increase awareness of academic skills services and embed them more deeply in the supervision process to support both students and supervisors. |
| Adopt a Blended Supervision Model | Combine the flexibility of online platforms with the interpersonal benefits of face-to-face interactions. |
| Improve Resource Allocation | Match supervisors with students based on expertise while providing targeted resources for cross-disciplinary supervision. |

The study also identified concerns regarding students' preparedness for independent research. Supervisors reported that many students lacked confidence in research methods, academic writing, proposal development, and ethical approval procedures. Limited engagement with dissertation work during earlier stages of study often increased supervisory workload and reduced opportunities for higher-level academic discussion. These findings highlight the need for stronger integration of research preparation, academic skills development, ethics training, and time management within postgraduate programmes.

Another important contribution of the study is its emphasis on the relational and intercultural dimensions of online supervision. Supervisors increasingly act not only as academic advisors, but also as mentors, motivators, and emotional supporters within culturally diverse and digitally mediated environments. This underlines the importance of professional development in mentoring, intercultural communication, online relationship management, and inclusive supervisory practice.

The findings further demonstrate that effective online supervision requires institutional support beyond individual supervisory effort. Universities should invest in differentiated supervisor training, streamlined administrative systems, collaborative supervision models, and accessible academic support services. Greater attention should also be given to ensuring that dissertation topics are feasible, academically appropriate, and beneficial to both students and placement organisations, particularly for students undertaking projects remotely or internationally.

The study suggests that online postgraduate supervision will remain a significant component of higher education beyond the post-pandemic period. However, sustainable and effective supervision requires institutions to move beyond emergency remote teaching approaches towards more intentional, pedagogically informed, and student-centred models of supervision. Integrating technological flexibility with relational support, structured guidance, and institutional resources can help create more inclusive and effective supervision experiences for diverse student populations.

This study revisits Ross and Sheail's (2017) concept of the "imaginary campus" to examine the evolving nature of online master's dissertation supervision. The findings demonstrate that online supervision, once considered peripheral, has become central to postgraduate education. Consistent with recent scholarship (Aitken et al., 2022; Almendingen et al., 2023; Ferreira-Meyers, 2022; Pollard & Kumar, 2021), the research highlights continuing challenges related to social presence, communication, dialogic feedback, and alignment between supervisors and students. Despite the growth of digital infrastructures, many supervisory expectations and practices continue to reflect assumptions associated with traditional campus-based learning.

In revisiting the concept of the imaginary campus, this study calls for greater attention to the pedagogical and policy implications of digitally mediated supervision. Future research should explore how online supervision continues to evolve across different institutional, disciplinary, and cultural contexts, and how these developments shape not only the structure but also the experience of postgraduate learning in digital environments.

6. Practical Implications and Recommendations

6.1. Regular Review of Research Methods Learning Outcome and Assessment as well as Its Delivery

As a preparation to moving online delivery, a working group is needed to look at understanding the factors affecting online supervision from students' perspective and also how to sell the benefits of learning at a distance, acquiring knowledge and developing research skills. It is important convey that there is no difference between distance learners and imaginary campus students. This is to convince potential applicants/learners that education is moving with the development of technology and learners are not at any disadvantage. This would be helpful in managing students' expectations.

In terms of experiential learning, the study reveals that students should be exposed to a concrete experience, reflect on the learning journey, be able to conceptualise their work in academic context and benefit from a practical experience. This is achievable through a good liaison with the companies and industries wherever a dissertation student is intended to carry out his/her research project. Therefore, support can be provided by the school placement office. Students can also be involved in the scheme by identifying placement opportunities; receive confirmation and liaising with the placement office, and supervisor.

6.2. Useful Approaches/support to Improve Dissertation Standards and Supervision

As a "short-term intervention" the study suggests a new strategy and structure for research methods module. The Research Methods module needs to be reviewed and redesigned to address the current

students' needs and changes in the learning environment. This suggestion has been already conveyed to the programme leader of MSc International Business.

It would be beneficial to the students and their learning experience via integrated approach, i.e., the tutorials should form an integrated part of the module content (Research Methods) in conjunction with tutorial (research activities) applied to the student research topic. This leads to writing a good research proposal.

No doubt, assessing the "research methodology" module through the research proposal (coursework) would motivate students to learn and understand the research process. Through the research proposal, students would have produced a very good part of their literature review, developed a conceptual framework and thought critically about the design of their research project. As result, it is not only reducing the workload but also saving a lot of time.

As we believe that students are studying for an academic award/degree, they should produce an academic research proposal in first instance whether they will decide to engage in a consultancy project or writing a business plan for an organisation. A course architecture (Research methods) will be beneficial to all the degrees in management.

6.3. Online Students' Engagement and Attendance Monitoring

Monitoring student engagement and attendance is essential in online postgraduate supervision. Participants highlighted that regular communication and structured follow-up help maintain student accountability and progression. One effective approach is for supervisors to provide a written summary after each meeting outlining key discussion points, agreed actions, and deadlines. This creates a clear record of progress and helps students remain organised and engaged.

Research suggests that consistent communication and timely feedback improve student motivation and completion rates in online supervision environments (Aitken et al., 2022). However, reduced face-to-face interaction can make it difficult to identify disengagement early. Institutions should therefore encourage the use of supervision logs, digital progress tracking systems, and automated reminders through platforms such as Moodle or Microsoft Teams. Clear expectations regarding attendance, response times, and meeting preparation should also be established at the start of supervision. Such measures can strengthen accountability, improve engagement, and support student success in remote learning environments.

6.4. Supervisors' Knowledge and Skills

Effective postgraduate supervision requires supervisors to possess a shared understanding of their role and the skills needed to support students throughout their academic and professional development journey. Supervisors should be able to identify students' individual learning needs, provide appropriate direction through research tasks and activities, and encourage critical thinking by helping students evaluate, reflect, and solve practical research problems. These skills are particularly important in online supervision environments where students may require additional structure, motivation, and guidance.

The findings also highlight the importance of staff training and professional development in strengthening supervisory practice. Institutions should provide short courses, workshops, or seminars focused on dissertation supervision, including managing supervisory relationships, supporting student wellbeing, handling emotional challenges, and maintaining effective communication. Clear codes of best practice should also be established to define supervisors' roles, responsibilities, and stages of the supervision process through practical guidance and checklists.

Participants further emphasised the need to improve students' perceptions of online supervision by ensuring distance learners feel equally supported and not disadvantaged compared to on-campus students. Supervisors should maintain accessibility, agree clear communication methods, encourage independent learning, and support intercultural collaboration through group activities and online engagement. Finally, stronger collaboration between universities, placement offices, and international organisations may enhance students' learning experiences and strengthen global industry engagement through dissertation projects.

Author contributions: Dr Ahmed Beloucif contributed to data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, literature review, and writing the papers. Dr Mohammad Shaiful Islam contributed to data analysis, data interpretation, literature review, and writing the analysis chapter. Dr Tahar Boukhobza contributed to data collection, manuscript revision, and critical feedback.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Data availability: The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical statement: Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and the study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

References

- Abrahamson, E. D., Gilbert, T., Bishop, D., & Capocchiano, H. (2023). Engaging technology and supporting student mental health through connected online peer mentoring. *International Journal of Didactical Studies*, 4(2), 19898. <https://doi.org/10.33902/ijods.202319898>
- Aitken, G., Smith, K., Fawns, T., & Jones, D. (2022). Participatory alignment: A positive relationship between educators and students during online masters dissertation supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(6), 772–786. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1744129>
- Almendingen, K., Skotheim, T., & Magnus, E. M. (2023). Transformation from blended to online learning: A four-year longitudinal cross-sectional interprofessional study. *Education Sciences*, 13(2), 116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020116>
- Arjang, A., et al. (2024). The effect of digital literacy, technological adoption, and collaborative learning on student engagement in business education. *International Education Trend Issues*, 2(2), 339–351. <https://doi.org/10.56442/ieti.v2i2.893>
- Bang-Larsen, A., & Qvortrup, A. (2022). Dialogic possibilities of online supervision. *Dialogic Pedagogy: A Journal for Studies of Dialogic Education*, 10, 59–81. <https://dpj.pitt.edu/ojs/dpj1/article/view/443>
- Becker, S., Jacobsen, M. J., & Friesen, S. (2025). Four supervisory mentoring practices that support online doctoral students' academic writing. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, 1521452. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1521452>
- Beloucif, A., Mehafdi, M., & Komey, N. A. (2022). Expectation as a key determinant of international students' satisfaction: A case study of business school MSc students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 14(1), 453–470. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-04-2017-0048>
- Bond, M., Buntins, K., Bedenlier, S., Zawacki-Richter, O., & Kerres, M. (2020). Mapping research in student engagement and educational technology in higher education: A systematic evidence map. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0176-8>
- Brew, A., & Peseta, T. (2004). Changing postgraduate supervision practice: A program to encourage learning through reflection and feedback. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 41(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1470329032000172685>
- Bruce, C., & Stoodley, I. (2013). Experiencing higher degree research supervision as teaching. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2), 226–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.576338>
- Carter, S., & Kumar, V. (2017). 'Ignoring me is part of learning': Supervisory feedback on doctoral writing. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 54(1), 68–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2015.1123104>
- Crang, M., & Cook, I. (2007). *Doing ethnographies*. Sage.
- de Kleijn, R., Meijer, P. C., Brekelmans, M., & Pilot, A. (2022). Supervising graduation projects in higher professional education: A literature review. *Educational Research Review*, 37, 100462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100462>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Deuchar, R. (2008). Facilitator, director or critical friend? Contradiction and congruence in doctoral supervision styles. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(4), 489–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802193905>
- Domínguez Figaredo, D., Beaulieu, A., Estalella, A., Gómez, E., Schnettler, B., & Read, R. (2007). Virtual ethnography. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 8(3), 274. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-8.3.274>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>

- Everitt, J. (2024). Learning from doctoral supervisors' and candidates' reflections on a supervisory model. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 62(2), 717–730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2343831>
- Fancett, A. (2024). Developing researchers' writing skills. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 11(3), 304–314. <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v11i3.1567>
- Ferreira-Meyers, K. (2022). The need for revision of selected aspects of online master's and doctoral student supervision. *Perspectives in Education*, 40(1), 288–305. <https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie/article/view/5287>
- Gopinathan, S., et al. (2022). The role of digital collaboration in student engagement towards enhancing student participation during COVID-19. *Sustainability*, 14(11), 6844. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14116844>
- Hickey, A., & Forbes, M. (2022). Higher degree research supervision beyond expertise: A Rancierean and Freirean perspective on HDR supervision. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(8), 1712–1723. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1957812>
- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. Sage.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61–72. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935>
- Lee, A. (2020). *Successful research supervision: Advising students doing research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Löfström, E., et al. (2023). Supervisors' experiences of doctoral supervision in times of change. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 15(1), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-01-2023-0004>
- Maor, D., Ensor, J. D., & Fraser, B. J. (2016). Doctoral supervision in virtual spaces. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(1), 172–188. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/193930/>
- Manathunga, C. (2007). Supervision as mentoring: The role of power and boundary crossing. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 29(2), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01580370701424650>
- Manathunga, C. (2014). *Intercultural postgraduate supervision: Reimagining time, place and knowledge*. Routledge.
- Markham, A. N., & Baym, N. K. (Eds.). (2009). *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method*. Sage.
- Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2023). *Ethical decision-making and internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee*. Association of Internet Researchers. <https://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>
- McChesney, K. (2022). A rationale for trauma-informed postgraduate supervision. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(5), 1338–1360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2145469>
- McCallin, A., & Nayar, S. (2012). Postgraduate research supervision: A critical review of current practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2011.590979>
- Miller, D., & Slater, D. (2000). *The internet: An ethnographic approach*. Berg.
- Opesemowo, O. A. G., Adewuyi, H. O., Odutayo, A. O., & Jacob, U. S. (2025). Exploring remote supervision in higher education: Lecturers' experiences. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 62(3), 781–794. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2354740>
- Pham, T. D., Blue, L. E., & Anderson, P. J. (2024). Supporting indigenous success through quality supervision in research degrees. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 52(2), 1199–1219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00759-4>
- Pollard, R., & Kumar, S. (2021). Mentoring graduate students online: Strategies and challenges. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 22(2), 267–284. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i2.5093>
- Puri, A. (2007). The web of insights: The art and practice of webnography. *International Journal of Market Research*, 49(3), 387–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530704900308>
- Quinco-Cadosales, M. N., et al. (2024). Online instructional supervision. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(10), 395–414. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.10.19>
- Ross, J., & Sheail, P. (2017). The 'campus imaginary': Online students' experience of the masters dissertation at a distance. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22(7), 839–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1319809>
- Singh, J., Steele, K., & Singh, L. (2021). Hybrid and blended learning approach for COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 50(2), 140–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472395211047865>
- Specht, D., & Lowe, H. (2025). The role of supervisors in asynchronous dissertation teaching. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 25(4). <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v25i4.37528>
- Techagaisiyavanit, W., Mingmontchaikul, B., & Keitlearthum, S. (2026). Navigating ethical challenges in research ethics approval: A case study of social science research in Thailand. *Research Ethics*, 22(1), 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17470161251336573>

- Todd, M. J., Smith, K., & Bannister, P. (2006). Supervising a social science undergraduate dissertation: Staff experiences and perceptions. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(2), 161–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510500527693>
- Winter, C., & Gundur, R. V. (2024). Challenges in gaining ethical approval for sensitive digital social science studies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 27(1), 31–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2022.2122226>
- Xiaojing, Y., Zhiyong, Z., Bingqing, L., Zhuo, L., & Yan, S. (2024). Roles and interaction of supervisors and students in collective academic supervision: A qualitative study in China. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 6(3–4), 282–309. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-06030005>

Appendix 1. Thematic Summary of Sub-themes in Online Postgraduate Dissertation Supervision with Participant Evidence

| Theme | Sub-theme | Analytical Explanation | Literature | Fieldwork (Participant Comment) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Supervisor Training and Experience | Procedures and regulations | While procedural clarity exists, supervisors often lack comprehensive understanding of institutional regulations, leading to inconsistencies in practice. | Maor et al. (2016) | “There are guidelines... but not always clear how to apply them in practice.” |
| | Training effectiveness | Training is often perceived as generic and insufficient; more tailored, practice-oriented approaches are required. | Carter and Kumar (2017); Brew and Peseta (2004); McChesney (2022); Löfström et al. (2023) | “Training is too general... it doesn’t reflect real supervision challenges.” |
| | Topic allocation | Aligning topics with supervisor expertise improves guidance quality, though interdisciplinary supervision can promote innovation. | Brew and Peseta (2004); Manathunga (2007); Hickey and Forbes (2022) | “When topics match expertise, supervision becomes much easier and more effective.” |
| | Supervisory experience | Experienced supervisors demonstrate adaptive strategies, while novice supervisors require mentoring support. | Löfström et al. (2023) | “Experience makes a big difference in handling different types of students.” |
| Issues in PG Supervision | Student research skills | Students often lack foundational research skills, shifting supervision toward remedial teaching. | McCallin and Nayar (2012); Bruce and Stoodley (2013) | “Students are not prepared... they don’t understand basic research methods.” |
| | Communication tools and support | Digital tools enhance flexibility but lack immediacy and depend on digital competence. | Arjang et al. (2024); Pollard and Kumar (2021) | “Online is working perfectly fine. They send work, I give feedback.” |
| | Tutoring vs mentoring | Supervisors balance academic and emotional support roles, often without formal mentoring training. | Manathunga (2007); Becker et al. (2025); McChesney (2022) | “You are not just supervising... you are also supporting them emotionally.” |
| | Engagement and monitoring | Monitoring tools (e.g., logbooks) improve accountability but rely heavily on student participation. | Gopinathan et al. (2022); Opesemowo et al. (2024) | “Some students don’t engage unless you keep chasing them.” |
| | Ethics approval challenges | Ethics procedures are complex and can delay student progress. | Ferreira-Meyers (2022); Winter and Gundur (2024); Techagaisiyavanit et al., (2026) | “Ethics forms confuse students... they struggle to complete them properly.” |
| | Student competencies | Variability in academic and language skills significantly affects supervision quality. | Arjang et al. (2024); McCallin and Nayar (2012) | “Many students struggle with writing and critical thinking.” |

Appendix 1 continued

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Sub-theme</i> | <i>Analytical Explanation</i> | <i>Literature</i> | <i>Fieldwork (Participant Comment)</i> |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Supervisor-Student Relationship Challenges | Relationship development | Effective supervision depends on early engagement and clear expectations. | Deuchar (2008); Everitt (2024) | "Students don't engage early... they wait until the last minute." |
| | Relationship quality | Trust and rapport are critical but harder to establish online. | Aitken et al. (2022); Carter and Kumar (2017); Bang-Larsen and Qvortrup (2022) | "It's harder to build a connection without face-to-face meetings." |
| | Research methods difficulties | Students' weak methodological understanding requires additional support. | Todd et al. (2006); McCallin and Nayar (2012); de Kleijn et al. (2022) | "They need constant guidance on methodology – it's a major issue." |
| | Online accessibility | Online supervision increases flexibility but introduces communication and boundary challenges. | Singh et al. (2021); Almendingen et al. (2023) | "You are always accessible online... sometimes too accessible." |
| | Cross-cultural dynamics | Cultural and language differences require adaptive supervisory approaches. | Beloucif et al. (2022); Manathunga (2014); Pham et al. (2024) | "Different cultural expectations affect how students respond to feedback." |
| Supervisors' Perceptions of Their Role | What Supervisors Value Most | Supervisors find fulfillment in mentoring and supporting student development. | Becker et al. (2025); Bruce and Stoodley (2013); Deuchar (2008) | "It's rewarding to see students grow and succeed." |
| | Perceived Benefits for Supervisors | Supervision enhances professional growth and exposure to new research areas. | Löfström et al. (2023); Hickey and Forbes (2022); Xiaojing et al. (2024) | "Supervision helps me learn new topics and stay updated." |
| | Challenges in Supervising Diverse Dissertations | Supervising outside expertise offers growth but can be challenging. | Brew and Peseta (2004) | "Sometimes I supervise topics outside my area – it's challenging but interesting." |
| | Student academic support | Institutional support exists but is often underutilised by students. | McCallin and Nayar (2012); Pham et al. (2024); Bond et al. (2020); Beloucif et al. (2022) | "Support services are there, but students don't always use them." |
| | The Role of Platforms | Online supervision is flexible but lacks informal interaction. | Maor et al. (2016); Pollard and Kumar (2021); Singh et al. (2021) | "The lockdown hasn't really changed anything... this is what I do anyway." |