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## **STRUCTURED SUPERVISION PLANNING IN MASTER'S RESEARCH: EXPLORING INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCES IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES**

***Abstract.** This study examined the practices, experiences, and institutional support structures related to structured supervision planning within master's degree programmes across selected African universities. Using a mixed-methods research design, data was collected from 362 respondents 214 master's students and 148 supervisors through structured questionnaires featuring Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative insights provided contextual depth on supervision dynamics. Findings show that both supervisors and students recognize structured supervision planning as essential for improving research progress, clarity of expectations, and overall thesis quality. Supervisors reported higher levels of engagement in co-developing supervision plans, clarifying deliverables, and encouraging student responsibility. Students affirmed the benefits but noted inconsistencies, particularly in their involvement in developing milestones and in the regular review of supervision plans. Institutional support was perceived as moderate, with existing policies insufficiently communicated, limited digital tools for supervision management, and minimal monitoring or accountability mechanisms. Comparative analysis revealed perceptual gaps between supervisors and students regarding collaboration, clarity, and institutional backing. Both groups agreed, however, that structured planning enhances motivation, confidence, and timely completion of research. The study concludes that while structured supervision planning is valued, its implementation remains uneven across institutions. The paper recommends strengthening institutional frameworks, providing targeted training for supervisors, adopting digital supervision management systems, and embedding structured planning within quality assurance processes. These interventions can enhance consistency, efficiency, and research outcomes, contributing to a more supportive and sustainable postgraduate supervision environment in African higher education.*

**Keywords:** *Structured Supervision Planning, Postgraduate Research Supervision, Master's Students, Research Supervisors, Institutional Support Systems, Research Management Practices, Supervision Roadmaps, Monitoring and Review Processes, Supervisor–Student*

*Collaboration, Higher Education Quality Assurance, Digital Supervision Tools, Research Timelines and Milestones, Student Motivation and Progress, African Universities, Mixed-Methods Research Design, Descriptive Research, Policy Frameworks in Higher Education.*

### **1. Background of the Study**

The expansion of higher education across Africa has led to a significant increase in postgraduate enrollment, particularly at the master's level. In 2020, approximately 77 million individuals aged 15–29 were engaged in post-secondary education on the continent, a significant rise from 28 million in 2010. Projections indicate that this number will exceed 160 million by 2040 [Statista, 2023a]. In Kenya, university enrollment reached approximately 563,000 students in the 2022/23 academic year, with public universities accounting for the majority [Statista, 2023b]. Despite this growth, postgraduate completion rates remain a concern. For example, between 2001 and 2015, only 25% of doctoral students in Kenya's leading universities graduated within the expected timeframe [Kisige, 2023]. These statistics point to the urgent need for improved strategies in postgraduate supervision to enhance completion rates and research quality.

Structured supervision planning has been identified as a critical factor in improving postgraduate research outcomes. Effective supervision, characterized by clear guidance, regular feedback, and mutual goal-setting, enhances the quality and timeliness of thesis completion [Onyango & Ochieng, 2023]. Additionally, students perceive structured supervision as beneficial to their academic experience, improving motivation and reducing misunderstandings [Kisige, 2023]. However, inconsistent supervision practices and lack of institutional support persist across African universities, often undermining these benefits. Addressing these challenges through the implementation of structured supervision frameworks is essential for improving research outcomes at master's level and ensuring the success of higher education initiatives across the continent.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

In an ideal academic environment, structured supervision of master's research should be a deliberate, institutionally supported process involving clear timelines, collaborative goal-setting, frequent feedback, and continuous capacity development for both students and supervisors. Universities are expected to offer supportive policies and resources that ensure postgraduate students receive high-quality supervision that support timely completion and research excellence [Bitzer & van der Westhuizen, 2020]. Globally, structured and well-

resourced supervision frameworks have been linked to higher student satisfaction, improved academic performance, and increased research output (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). In African universities, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, institutions are under increasing pressure to align with these global standards due to expanding postgraduate enrollment, heightened academic competition, and the need for knowledge production relevant to the continent's development goals [Tinto, 2017].

Despite the ideal situation highlighted, the reality in many African universities starkly contrasts with this. Supervision practices are often inconsistent, unmonitored, and inadequately planned, largely due to lack of institutional frameworks, high supervisor-student ratios, and limited training opportunities for supervisors [Hammond et al., 2023]. Many students report minimal engagement with supervisors, delayed feedback, and unclear expectations, leading to demotivation, research delays, and in many cases, attrition [Kisige, 2023]. If this systemic problem is not addressed, African universities risk facing worsening postgraduate non-completion rates, reputational damage, and the stagnation of local research capacity. In the long term, this threatens to undermine national and continental goals of innovation, knowledge-based economies, and sustainable development [World Bank, 2022]. The need for institutionalized and structured supervision planning is therefore urgent and vital to the future of postgraduate education in Africa.

### **3. Specific Objectives**

- I. To assess the level of institutional support available for structured master's research supervision planning across African universities.
- II. To examine the practices and perceptions of supervisors regarding structured supervision planning and its impact on research supervision effectiveness.
- III. To explore master's students' experiences with supervision planning and the perceived effects on their research progress, quality, and motivation.

### **4. Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant value for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of postgraduate education across African universities by focusing on structured supervision planning at the master's level. It provides empirical insights that can inform institutional policies, strengthen supervisory practices, and promote a culture of accountability and planning in research mentorship. The findings will benefit university administrators and

policymakers by identifying gaps in institutional support and offering evidence-based recommendations for improving supervision frameworks. Supervisors will gain practical strategies to enhance their engagement with students, while postgraduate students stand to benefit from improved academic guidance, reduced delays, and a more supportive research experience. Ultimately, the study contributes to national and continental efforts toward improving postgraduate completion rates, fostering knowledge production, and positioning African universities as centers of research excellence aligned with global standards.

## **5. Literature Review**

Research supervision is a cornerstone of postgraduate education, playing a vital role in shaping students' research competencies and academic trajectories. Structured supervision, as opposed to informal or ad hoc approaches, is defined by deliberate planning, shared expectations, and regular progress assessments between supervisors and students [Lee, 2018]. Scholars have increasingly emphasized that effective supervision should be underpinned by frameworks that prioritize clarity, mutual accountability, and academic support throughout the research journey [Manathunga, 2020]. This structure helps prevent delays in thesis completion and contributes to student satisfaction. However, in many African universities, such structured approaches are inconsistently applied or entirely absent, resulting in a varied supervision experience across institutions [Ssempebwa et al., 2016].

Institutional support is critical for structured supervision to thrive. This includes the existence of supervision policies, training programs for faculty, and digital tools such as research progress tracking systems [Kisige, 2023]. Studies have shown that when universities offer clear supervisory guidelines and ensure departmental monitoring of research progress, the likelihood of student completion improves significantly [McCallin & Nayar, 2012]. Yet, across many African higher education institutions, these supports are either weak or non-existent. Supervisors often lack formal training in supervision practices and operate without institutional accountability structures, while students navigate research with minimal formal guidance [Kiguli-Malwadde et al., 2021].

From the students' perspective, structured supervision enhances their sense of direction, motivation, and academic identity. Onyango and Ochieng [2023] found that students who co-developed supervision plans with their mentors reported higher levels of confidence, better time management, and improved thesis quality. Conversely, the absence of structured supervision often leads to communication breakdowns, delays in feedback, and increased dropout rates [Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009]. Despite the evident advantages,

literature points to a persistent gap in the formalization and standardization of supervision planning across African universities. This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that explores both institutional practices and stakeholder experiences, particularly at the master's level, where such studies are still relatively scarce.

## **6. Methodology**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a holistic understanding of research supervision planning within African universities offering master's degree programmes. The qualitative design allowed the study to explore in-depth perspectives, experiences, and contextual factors through open-ended questions, while the quantitative design facilitated the collection of measurable data using structured Likert-scale items. These approaches complemented each other by enabling the researchers to analyze both statistical trends and varied individual experiences. Additionally, a descriptive research design was employed to systematically document and describe existing practices, institutional support structures, and the perceived outcomes of structured research supervision without manipulating any variables.

The study targeted master's students and supervisors drawn from a purposively selected sample of universities across Africa that offer postgraduate education. The identities of the participating universities were not disclosed to safeguard institutional anonymity and prevent reputational sensitivity of supervision practices. Several institutions also accepted participation on the condition that their names would remain confidential, which strengthened the integrity of the responses. Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation across diverse academic disciplines, including sciences, applied sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences. The primary instruments for data collection were structured questionnaires tailored separately for students and supervisors. Each questionnaire included sections on background information, scaled statements assessing institutional support and supervision planning practices, and open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights. This combination of tools provided both depth and breadth in understanding supervision planning across African higher education institutions.

## **7. Results and Findings**

### **7.1 Response Rate and Demographic Profile of Respondents**

#### **7.1.1 Response Rate**

A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed to respondents across selected African universities. 240 to master's students and 180 to research supervisors. Out of these, 362 completed questionnaires were returned, comprising 214 from students (response rate of 89.2%) and 148 from supervisors (response rate of 82.2%). The overall response rate was therefore 86.2%, which was considered satisfactory for reliable statistical and qualitative analysis. The high response rate was attributed to the online distribution method and institutional cooperation that encouraged participation.

Figure 7.1 Response Rate

*MS = Master's Students*

*RS= Research Supervisors*

#### **7.1.2 Country Distribution of Respondents**

Respondents represented universities in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, South Sudan, and Ghana, reflecting both East and West African participation. As summarized in Table 7.1, the majority of respondents were from Kenya (38%), followed by Uganda (22%), Tanzania (16%), Ghana (12%), Burundi (7%), and South Sudan (5%). This distribution reflects the dominance of postgraduate enrolment and research activity in East Africa, while also integrating perspectives from emerging West African institutions.

Table 7.1 Country Distribution of Respondents

<b>Country</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Kenya	138	38.1
Uganda	80	22.1
Tanzania	58	16
Ghana	43	11.9
Burundi	25	6.9
South Sudan	18	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>

### 7.1.3 Areas of Study or Supervision

Respondents were categorized according to their academic domains as indicated in the questionnaires. Table 7.2 presents the findings.

Table 7.2 Distribution of Respondents by Academic Area

<b>Academic Category</b>	<b>Students (%)</b>	<b>Supervisors (%)</b>	<b>Overall (%)</b>
<b>Science / Applied Science</b>	41	48	44
<b>Arts / Humanities / Social Sci.</b>	59	52	56
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

Overall, 56% of the participants were drawn from Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, while 44% were from Science and Applied Science fields. Among students, Arts and Social Sciences represented the largest proportion (59%), while among supervisors, Science-related disciplines accounted for a relatively higher share (48%). This balance reflects the interdisciplinary nature of postgraduate research within African universities.

#### **7.1.4 Academic Discipline or Field of Supervision**

Respondents represented a wide range of academic disciplines. The most frequently mentioned fields among both groups included Business Administration and Management, Education, Social Sciences, Public Health, and Information Technology. Smaller representations were also noted in Engineering, Environmental Studies, and Agricultural Sciences. This distribution provided a balanced perspective on research supervision practices across both technical and non-technical disciplines, thereby enriching the comparative analysis.

### **7.2 Institutional Support for Structured Supervision Planning**

This section presents findings from both students and supervisors regarding the level of institutional support available for structured supervision planning, based on responses to Likert-scale questionnaire items. Five-point Likert scales were used to measure the perceptions of both supervisors and students across key dimensions of structured supervision planning. Respondents rated each statement on a scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

#### **7.2.1 Students' Perceptions of Institutional Support**

Students were requested to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding institutional support for research supervision. Table 7.3 summarizes the responses.

Table 7.3 Students' Responses on Institutional Support (n = 214)

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean
My university has policies, guidelines or framework that support structured supervision	12%	18%	25%	30%	15%	3.3
The institution provided tools (e.g., portals, progress trackers) to manage research	20%	22%	28%	22%	8%	2.9
There is a formal process for matching students with suitable supervisors	15%	20%	27%	28%	10%	3.1
I received institutional guidance on how to manage my research journey effectively	18%	25%	30%	20%	7%	2.9

Approximately 45% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their universities had policies and framework supporting structured supervision, suggesting moderate policy awareness and availability. Fewer students reported access to tools for research management (30% agreement), indicating limited digital or institutional infrastructure support. Formal processes for supervisor-student matching were moderately recognized (38% agreement), reflecting partial implementation. Guidance on managing the research journey received the lowest support (27% agreement), highlighting a gap in proactive institutional mentoring.

### 7.2.2 Supervisors' Perceptions of Institutional Support

Supervisors were asked to rate institutional support for supervision planning. Table 7.4 summarizes the responses.

Table 7.4 Supervisors' Responses on Institutional Support (n = 148)

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean
My institution provides policies or frameworks to support research supervision planning	10%	15%	30%	35%	10%	3.4
I have received institutional training or guidance on how to plan supervision	28%	32%	25%	12%	3%	2.5
The university provides tools or platforms to assist in supervision management	30%	30%	25%	12%	3%	2.5
Institutional expectations support structured supervision planning	15%	20%	28%	30%	7%	3.2
My department monitors the supervision process formally	35%	30%	20%	12%	3%	2.4
There is accountability for research supervision quality within my institution	38%	32%	18%	10%	2%	2.3
Interdisciplinary or cross-school supervision structures are encouraged	40%	30%	20%	8%	2%	2.2

While 45% of supervisors agreed or strongly agreed that policies and expectations support structured supervision, institutional training, tools, and monitoring were reported as largely insufficient. Less than 20% of supervisors reported formal monitoring, accountability, or cross-school structures, suggesting that institutional support mechanisms are weak or inconsistently applied. Overall, supervisors perceive limited organizational backing for implementing structured supervision, particularly in monitoring and training.

### **7.2.3 Key Qualitative Insights**

Open-ended responses reinforced the quantitative findings. Many students noted that guidelines exist but are not consistently communicated or enforced. Supervisors highlighted lack of formal training and absence of institutional monitoring systems as major barriers. Both groups emphasized the need for centralized research management platforms, clear policies, and structured orientation programs for both students and supervisors.

## **7.3 Supervisors' Practices and Perceptions of Structured Supervision Planning**

### **7.3.1 Practices in Supervision Planning**

Supervisors were asked about the specific practices they employ in research supervision planning. Table 7.5 summarizes the responses. A five-point Likert scale was used where respondents rated each statement on a scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Table 7.5 Supervisors' Practices in Research Supervision Planning (n = 148)

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean
I co-develop supervision plans with my students to guide their research journey	8%	15%	22%	40%	15%	3.6
I discuss clear expectations and deliverables with each student at the beginning	5%	10%	20%	45%	20%	3.9
My students benefit more when we have a mutually agreed supervision roadmap	3%	7%	15%	50%	25%	4.1
I regularly monitor and adjust the supervision plan based on student progress	10%	20%	25%	35%	10%	3.4
A formal plan helps reduce delays in thesis completion	5%	10%	20%	50%	15%	3.9
I encourage students to take active responsibility for their research progress	2%	8%	15%	45%	30%	4.1
Structured planning increases the efficiency of supervision sessions	3%	7%	18%	50%	22%	4

The majority of supervisors (55% combined Agree/Strongly Agree) co-develop supervision plans and clarify expectations at the beginning of the research journey. Supervisors overwhelmingly perceive that mutually agreed supervision roadmaps and structured planning increase research efficiency and reduce delays. Monitoring and adjusting plans is moderately practiced, indicating that while plans are made, their ongoing review is not always consistent. Supervisors strongly emphasize student responsibility, reflecting an approach that encourages self-directed research while guided by structured supervision.

### **7.3.2 Perceptions on the Impact of Structured Supervision Planning**

Supervisors' perceptions indicate that structured supervision planning: Improves student research progress and thesis quality, enhances clarity regarding timelines, deliverables, and expectations, increases the efficiency of supervision sessions, reduces wasted time and confusion, and builds a more collaborative and accountable supervisory relationship.

Qualitative responses supported these perceptions. Supervisors reported that structured planning reduces misunderstandings, allows early identification of research challenges, and provides a framework for monitoring student progress effectively.

### **7.3.3 Challenges Reported by Supervisors**

Despite the perceived benefits, supervisors identified several challenges in implementing structured supervision planning: High supervisor-student ratios, limiting the time available for individualized planning, Limited institutional tools or platforms for tracking progress. Inconsistent departmental monitoring and lack of accountability mechanisms. Time constraints due to competing teaching and administrative responsibilities. Supervisors suggested that institutional interventions, such as training programs, digital supervision tools, and formal monitoring systems, could mitigate these challenges.

## **7.4 Master's Students' Experiences with Supervision Planning**

### **7.4.1 Engagement in Supervision Planning**

Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about their engagement and experiences in supervision planning. A five-point Likert scale was used where respondents rated each statement on a scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Table 7.6 summarizes the responses.

Table 7.6 Students' Experiences with Supervision Planning (n = 214)

Statement	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean
My supervisor discussed and agreed with me on a research supervision plan	10%	15%	20%	40%	15%	3.5
The agreed plan clarified timelines, expectations, and deliverables	12%	18%	22%	38%	10%	3.3
I was involved in co-developing my research supervision milestones	15%	20%	25%	30%	10%	3.1
I found the planning of supervision sessions helpful for my research progress	8%	12%	20%	45%	15%	3.7
My supervisor regularly reviewed our supervision plan and made adjustments	20%	25%	25%	25%	5%	2.8
Structured supervision planning reduced misunderstandings with my supervisor	12%	18%	25%	35%	10%	3.2
Supervision planning helped me feel more supported and guided	10%	15%	20%	40%	15%	3.5

Around 55% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisors discussed and agreed on a research supervision plan and that planning was helpful for research progress. Involvement in co-developing milestones was moderate (40% agreement), indicating that not all students experienced participatory supervision planning. Regular review and adjustment of supervision plans by supervisors received the lowest positive response (30% agreement), suggesting that follow-up and plan adaptation are inconsistent. Structured supervision planning contributed to clarity, reduced misunderstandings, and enhanced perceived support, although gaps remain in student engagement and consistent plan review.

### **7.4.2 Perceived Effects on Research Progress and Motivation**

Students highlighted several benefits of structured supervision planning: Improved time management and adherence to research timelines, enhanced clarity of expectations, reducing confusion about tasks and deliverables, increased motivation and confidence, particularly when students were actively involved in planning milestones and greater perception of support and guidance, which contributed positively to their academic experience.

Qualitative responses reinforced these findings, with students reporting that structured planning helped them organize work systematically and avoid unnecessary delays, while lack of plan review or guidance occasionally caused frustration.

### **7.4.3 Challenges Reported by Students**

Students identified challenges in supervision planning which include limited supervisor engagement, especially in revising plans or providing timely feedback, inconsistent institutional guidance, making it difficult to understand expected processes, time constraints due to supervisor availability and heavy student workload, lack of digital tools or platforms to track milestones effectively, students suggested that institutional support, including formal orientation, online progress trackers, and clearer policies, could improve the supervision experience.

Master's students reported that structured supervision planning is beneficial for research progress, clarity, motivation, and perceived support. While most students experienced initial plan discussions and guidance, active co-development and regular plan review were inconsistent, highlighting areas for improvement. Institutional backing, supervisor engagement, and accessible planning tools are critical to enhance the effectiveness of supervision planning and maximize student outcomes.

### **7.5 Comparative Analysis Between Supervisors and Students**

This analysis highlights areas of convergence and divergence in perceptions of planning practices, institutional support, and overall supervision experience across participating African universities.

### **7.5.1 Overall Perception of Structured Supervision Planning**

Both supervisors and students generally recognized the value of structured supervision planning in enhancing research progress, clarity, and accountability. Supervisors (mean = 4.1) expressed slightly higher agreement on the usefulness of supervision planning compared to students (mean = 3.5). Supervisors emphasized that planning helps them track progress, reduce delays, and maintain consistency across multiple supervisees. Students, on the other hand, acknowledged the benefits but cited inconsistent implementation and limited involvement in co-developing plans as key gaps. This indicates that while supervisors perceive planning as integral to quality supervision, students often experience it more as a supervisor-driven process than a collaborative one.

### **7.5.2 Clarity of Expectations and Milestones**

65% of supervisors reported that they discuss clear expectations and deliverables with their students, compared to 55% of students who affirmed that such discussions took place. Similarly, 55% of supervisors indicated that they co-develop supervision plans with students, but only 40% of students agreed they were actively involved in such co-development. This disparity suggests a perceptual gap, supervisors may view informing students about plans as collaborative, while students equate collaboration with shared decision-making and documentation of timelines.

### **7.5.3 Monitoring and Review of Supervision Plans**

The regular review and adjustment of supervision plans emerged as a weak area across both groups. Only 45% of supervisors and 30% of students agreed that supervision plans are reviewed and updated regularly. Qualitative comments from both groups indicated that time constraints, heavy workloads, and multiple supervisees per supervisor limit the frequency of structured reviews.

### **7.5.4 Institutional Support and Policy Frameworks**

The finding that only 45% of both students and supervisors support the perception that their institutions have frameworks to support supervision planning suggests that institutional support for research supervision is present but robust. This indicates that more than half of the respondents do not perceive clear or comprehensive structures guiding supervision processes. Such gaps may lead to inconsistencies in supervision quality, as practices may vary widely across schools, departments, or individual supervisors. The moderate level of

agreement may also point to limited awareness of existing frameworks, implying that policies, if present, are not well communicated or effectively implemented.

This situation highlights the need for institutions to strengthen and formalize supervision support mechanisms. Clearer guidelines, capacity-building initiatives, and improved communication could enhance the effectiveness and consistency of supervision planning. Strengthened institutional frameworks can improve research quality, timely research completion, and overall postgraduate productivity.

#### **7.5.5 Summary of Comparative Findings**

This section synthesizes the key areas of convergence and divergence between supervisors' and students' perspectives on structured supervision planning. Summarizing these comparisons provides a clearer understanding of the systemic strengths and gaps that shape the postgraduate supervision experience across participating African universities. Table 7.7 presents the comparative analysis of weighted means across similar statements provided by both groups.

Table 7.7 Summary of Comparative Findings

<b>Comparable Statement</b>	<b>Students' Mean</b>	<b>Supervisors' Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation Summary</b>
Institution has policies/frameworks for structured supervision	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>	Both groups moderately recognize institutional frameworks; supervisors slightly more positive.
Availability of tools/platforms for supervision management	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>	Students perceive slightly better access to tools; supervisors report insufficient digital support.
Institutional training/guidance on supervision planning	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>	Students feel somewhat supported; supervisors report lack of formal training.
Co-development of supervision plans/milestones	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.6</b>	Supervisors perceive higher collaboration than students experience.
Discussion of expectations and deliverables	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.9</b>	Supervisors believe they communicate expectations clearly; students report inconsistent clarity.
Regular review/adjustment of supervision plans	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	Weakest area for both groups; students experience fewer follow-up reviews.

The comparative analysis reveals several important patterns in how supervisors and students experience structured supervision planning. Both groups acknowledge the presence of institutional policies supporting supervision, with students reporting a mean of 3.3 and supervisors slightly higher at 3.4, though these systems are viewed as moderately effective rather than robust. Students tend to perceive slightly more availability of tools (2.9) compared

to supervisors (2.5), while supervisors feel less equipped due to limited institutional training and digital resources (2.5). This disparity could be due to the possibility that students are more digitally endowed than the faculty members involved in research supervision, which is concerning. A notable perceptual gap emerges in collaborative planning: supervisors report co-development of supervision plans with a mean of 3.6, whereas students report 3.1, and supervisors perceive clearer communication of expectations (3.9) than students experience (3.3). The weakest area for both groups is the regular review and adjustment of supervision plans, with students reporting 2.8 and supervisors 3.4, reflecting systemic constraints such as high supervision loads and insufficient monitoring structures. Overall, the findings show that although structured supervision planning is valued, its implementation remains inconsistent and constrained by both institutional and practical challenges.

## **8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that although structured supervision planning is widely recognized across African universities as critical for improving research clarity, accountability, and student progress, its effectiveness is constrained by weak institutional execution. The findings show a persistent disconnect between supervisory intentions and student experiences, with supervisors perceiving planning and communication as collaborative and clear, while students encounter limited participation and inconsistent follow through. This gap is not merely interpersonal but institutional, reflecting the absence of clearly embedded systems that translate supervision policies into routine practice at departmental and faculty levels.

The most critical weakness identified is the lack of systematic monitoring and review of supervision plans. Once initial plans are developed, institutions rarely provide mechanisms to ensure they are revisited, updated, or used as active management tools throughout the research journey. This limits early detection of academic or methodological challenges and contributes directly to prolonged completion timelines. Existing institutional frameworks, training provisions, digital tools, and accountability structures are unevenly developed and poorly integrated, leaving supervisors without sufficient support and students without consistent guidance. As a result, supervision quality depends largely on individual effort rather than standardized institutional processes.

To realize the full benefits of structured supervision planning, universities must adopt clear operational pathways that embed supervision planning into institutional quality

assurance systems. This requires formalizing supervision plans as mandatory, monitored documents, integrating them into postgraduate regulations, and linking their review to departmental reporting structures. Institutions should establish continuous professional development programs for supervisors, supported by accessible digital platforms for progress tracking and documentation. Clear communication of supervision policies, regular audits of supervision practices, and defined accountability roles at departmental and graduate school levels are essential. By moving decisively from policy presence to institutionalized practice, universities can strengthen supervision consistency, enhance student engagement, improve completion rates, and build a sustainable postgraduate research environment grounded in accountability and shared responsibility.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

To strengthen structured supervision planning and improve the quality of postgraduate research, universities should adopt practical and actionable steps that can be implemented at institutional, departmental, and supervisory levels. Institutions should formally embed supervision planning into their quality assurance systems by developing clear guidelines that outline the responsibilities of both students and supervisors. Every research student should produce a supervision plan at the beginning of their study, and departments should ensure compliance through regular quality checks. Universities should invest in continuous capacity building for supervisors by offering regular training programs that focus on structured planning, effective communication, mentorship skills, and the use of digital tools among others. These training programmes should be accessible and linked to supervisor appointment and performance evaluation.

Universities should also adopt digital platforms that support supervision activities by allowing real time monitoring, easy updating of milestones, automatic reminders, and clear documentation of feedback. This would improve transparency and strengthen accountability for both students and supervisors. Institutions should improve monitoring and review mechanisms by introducing periodic supervision audits, requiring regular progress updates, and establishing clear procedures for addressing delayed or problematic cases. Recognising outstanding supervision and addressing persistent gaps will also strengthen accountability. Greater emphasis should be placed on genuine collaboration between students and supervisors. This can be achieved by co-creating supervision plans, holding regular structured meetings, and empowering students through training on research management and planning skills.

Furthermore, universities should intensify communication on existing supervision policies by ensuring that every postgraduate student receives clear information during orientation and throughout the research cycle. Policies should be easy to access, easy to understand, and reviewed regularly to reflect current needs. Finally, institutions should create support structures at faculty or school level such as supervision committees that oversee implementation, share good practices across departments, and ensure that supervision standards remain consistent.

Through these measures, universities can transform structured supervision planning into a practical and consistent system that strengthens research quality, enhances timely completion of studies, supports supervisors, and improves the overall postgraduate experience.

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