

# Factors Behind Low-Quality Academic Works: The Case Of Supervisors And Supervisees At Mohamed Kheider University Of Biskra, Algeria

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates academic supervision that is pivotal for the development of academic research and the evolution of higher studies. One of the main difficult challenges that teachers encounter is supervising their candidates. This process requires a lot of patience, hard work and perseverance. Similarly, the fact of being supervised students creates a lot of pressure on the part of the supervisees in which they should prove themselves as researchers who deserve a particular academic qualification. Although the academic virtues of supervision imply guiding the supervisees, helping them to locate data that is relevant to their topic and improving the quality of their work, there may exist several problems and sensitivities between the supervisor and supervisee. This study aims at identifying the factors, which contribute to the low-quality of the academic works, such as dissertations and theses. In order to investigate the issue, questionnaires were administered to 83 participants, namely 30 teachers (supervisors), 3 Doctorate candidates and 50 Master 2 students involved in different specialties at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra in Algeria. Through these questionnaires, it was attempted to diagnose some of the factors behind the difficulties encountered in the supervision process and the reasons that lead to problems in the supervisory relationship. The latter revealed that the supervisees' deficiency and supervisors' inefficient supervisory skills are the main inducements for the failure of the supervisory process, which may influence in many cases the quality of the student's graduation work.

**Index Terms:** Academic virtues, Candidates, Graduation, Higher studies, Perseverance, Qualification, Supervisory skills.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The supervisory process is an academic issue that is not given its real value, although it is critical to the success of both teachers and students at the level of higher education and in terms of producing a valuable graduation work. The latter refers to the academic mentoring process that some teachers, as well as students complain about. On one part, many supervisees complain regarding their supervisors. For instance, some students argue that their supervisors do not allot sufficient time for them to answer their queries and correct their work. On the other part, some teachers argue that they encounter difficulties when supervising some students. They presume that when they supervise particular students, the latter expect that it is the role of the supervisor to do at least half of the work, such as collecting data for them, rewriting some parts that should be modified in the work, and even being concerned about the style and the format of writing, which should be the students' responsibility to do so. However, they assume that their role is only guiding and improving the work rather than writing and collecting data for it. It is true that supervising students is not an easy task, especially if a supervisor has many supervisees. Additionally, being supervisees can be very strenuous since they should be knowledgeable about the conducted research by reading intensively, conversant with the issues related to methodology, format, and style of writing and committed to the research requirements, especially the genuineness of their work. Therefore, the main objectives of this paper are detecting the problems that underpin the supervision process, as well as determining the causes that lead to its failure.

## 2 WHAT IS ACADEMIC SUPERVISION?

The term academic supervision refers to supporting and guiding students in the research process to fulfill an academic qualification. It implies a situation where a teacher is following students academically throughout the semester(s) until they finish their graduation work. Ford and Jones (1987) argue that supervision means the carefully planned and regular meetings between a supervisor and supervisee for the sake of discussing the supervised work and critically reflecting upon it.

Academic supervision refers to the process in which a student undertakes a research that is guided by a particular teacher. It also means the process of monitoring a supervisee's graduation work (undergraduate or postgraduate student). Kotirde and Yunos (2014) state that "supervision in a school system implies the process of ensuring that policies, principles, rules, regulations and methods prescribed for purposes of implementing and achieving the objectives for education are effectively carried out" (p. 55). This process includes several tasks that a supervisor should be committed to, such as correcting the supervisee's work, providing useful feedback and comments and assessing the progress of the research. Further, it requires that the supervisees to relate to their supervisors, accept the provided feedback and consider their opinion during all the research stages. Affero *et al.* (2014) claim that supervision is an inter-relational process, which involves particular exterior and interior factors that affect both the supervisor and supervisee. Quality supervision then is based on promoting the development of the supervised students and assuring a high quality of their work. Helping students to develop ideas related to their investigated subject and sequencing them in an appropriate order are an essential feature of supervision [3]. Kotirde and Yunos (2014) presume that "A basic premise of supervision is that a teacher's instructional behaviour affects student learning" (p. 54). Henceforth, this process requires advising the supervisees to accomplish their work and providing help and assistance, so that they make progress in the research and reach certain findings. However, some supervisors seem to be careless about their supervisees' work. Epstein *et al.* (2005) argue that there are some supervisors who are not serious about the supervisory process and due to their bad practice of this process, they contribute to the bad quality of the academic research of the supervisee. The latter is described by Alice Miller as 'Poisonous Pedagogies of Supervision'. Academic supervision requires a consistent checking and detailed proofreading. Janosik *et al.* (2003) "The process is dynamic and demands active participation by staff member and supervisor" (p. 6). Therefore, supervisors ought to manage both materials and time for the student to ease the research

process.

### 3 WHAT IS A SUPERVISOR?

A supervisor is a teacher who affords support and assistance to a particular undergraduate or postgraduate student, so that the latter completes his/her academic work, such as a dissertation, in order to get a degree. Henry and Weber (2010) argue that a teacher who chose to supervise a certain student has committed himself to one of the most influential and responsible roles in education. Supervisors are the ones who check the progress of a student's work during an academic year. They are the advisors who guide students during their educational career in order to obtain an academic qualification. Ford and Jones (1987) emphasise that "Supervisors also need some facility to understand the theory which supports interventive methods, so that experience and knowledge can be brought together in an understandable way for the student" (p. 8). Cuenca (2012) argues that being a supervisor is totally different from being a teacher in the way that the former should identify patterns related to the supervision process and provide a reasonable response towards the various confronted situations. Supervisors are the academic counsellors who monitor a student's research and manage time allotted to it. They are the reflective teachers who ensure that the supervisee is punctual and committed to the research requirements. Performing the role of an instructional supervisor is very complex [5]. Supervisors are required to guide the research process on a topic chosen either by the student, the teacher, both of them or a certain administrative staff.

### 4 WHAT IS A SUPERVISEE?

A supervisee is the student, the candidate or the one who conducts a research guided by a supervisor. Oxford Dictionaries (2017) defines the term supervisee as "a person who is supervised", and its origin is dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The supervisee seeks feedback, advice and information with regard to his/her work from the supervisor. A supervisee can be simply defined as the undergraduate or postgraduate researcher who conducts an enquiry on a topic under the guidance and support of a supervisor.

## 5 RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISOR

The supervisor is required to follow certain rules in order to mentor a supervisee. Marzano *et al.* (2011) claims that "the purpose of supervision should be the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement" (p.2). The first duty of a supervisor is improving the quality of the supervisee's work. The supervisory relationship that is maintained between the supervisor and supervisee should be based on respect and mutual understanding. Epstein *et al.* (2005) argue that it is essential that at the first stage of supervision that both parts (the supervisor and supervisee) discuss how the supervision process would be conducted and agree on matters that are critical to maintaining a good supervisory relationship. There are several duties, which the supervisor is supposed to be committed to during the supervision process. Some of these duties are the following:

1. Checking the supervisee's work.
2. Correcting mistakes, affording feedback and writing

comments.

3. Setting a meeting each period of time (usually one or two weeks) and being committed to it.
4. Ensuring that the student is developing his/her work, which means checking the progress of the research.
5. Determining a specific period of time for a certain part of the research to be submitted for review and correction.
6. Discussing the problems that the supervised student encounters and dealing with them skillfully.
7. Raising the supervisee's consciousness towards plagiarism and ensuring that the work does not include it.
8. Scrutinising the research in order to bring the best results.

However, Ford and Jones (1987) emphasise that the supervisor should consider the two following aspects:

1. The educational process, *i.e.* helping the student to identify and make explicit learning already acquired, by asking questions such as: 'What led you to this conclusion?'; 'What knowledge are you using when you make that assumption?'; 'What concepts are you using?'
2. The social work content: the knowledge and skills that are relevant to the problem in hand. (p. 70)

### 5.2 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISEE

Similarly, the supervisee has different duties, which should be respectively followed in order to successfully complete the academic work (*i.e.*, dissertation or thesis) and maintain a good relationship with the supervisor. Robinson (2017) indicates that one of the supervisors' rights is expecting a high level of commitment on the part of their supervisees. These supervised students should positively react and respond to the supervisor's comments, advice and feedback. Thus, these are some of the diverse responsibilities, which should be tolerated by supervisees:

1. Being committed to the meeting set by the supervisor.
2. Considering what has been said or modified by the supervisor and working on it.
3. Applying what has been recommended by the advisor in terms of methodology, layout and/or style.
4. Consulting the supervisor on what is/will be done and referring to him/her before taking any notable step in the research.
5. Respecting time determined by the supervisor to complete a certain part of the work.
6. Taking into account that the research is a shared work between the supervisor and the supervisee, and both of them should discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the research.

## 6 THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between the supervisor and his/her supervisee should be based on respect. This vital element in the supervision process assures that both parts share the same aim and agree on the principles of the supervisory procedure. Henry and Weber (2010) indicate that there are prominent principles for the supervisory process. One of these principles is to provide objective feedback to enhance the quality of the supervisee's work. In addition to this, collaborative supervision can be very useful in which two or more professionals discuss the investigated topic critically. Communication is also critical to a positive supervisory relationship. Light *et al.* (2009) presume that both supervisors

and supervisees should reinforce the ability of understanding individual differences and accommodate them through accepting the changes in motivation, mood and intellectual methods. They should discuss the negative as well as the positive aspects of the research. A successful supervisor minimises the worries of his/her supervisee and attempts to diagnose the problems encountered during the research process skilfully. Ford and Jones (1987) claim that "The supervisory relationship generates a number of anxieties for students: there is the threat to their independence and autonomy; the anxiety of exposing their ignorance and vulnerability ; the risk of not meeting their supervisor's expectations" (p. 75). For that, it is the role of the supervisor to reduce at least some of these anxieties. The collaborative work maintained between the supervisor and supervisee is the key to successful supervisory process.

## 7 THE STUDY

### 7.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the most critical aspects of higher education is preparing students to achieve a qualification. The latter enables them to further develop their skills and conduct higher studies either at the local level or abroad. In order to achieve a certain qualification, a university student should be supervised by a particular teacher. During the supervision process, there may exist some sensitivities between the supervisor and supervisee. Many of the latter complain about their supervisors in terms of the absence of a good supervisory relationship. It is argued that the supervision process is characterised by default. Some academic works are of a low-quality due to the lack of efficient supervisory skills.

### 7.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims at :

- Examining some of the factors that contribute to the low-quality of the academic works.
- Enhancing the quality of academic supervision through raising the awareness of supervisors and supervisees towards the reasons that lead to the failure of the supervisory relationships.
- Helping stakeholders (teachers and students) to develop certain skills related to the supervisory process and relationship.

### 7.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is based on the following research question :

- ✓ What are the factors that contribute to the low-quality of academic works?

### 7.4 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The present study advocates the following hypothesis:

- ✓ Supervisors' inefficient supervision skills and supervisees' deficiency are the main factors that contribute to the low-quality of academic works.

### 7.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In order to investigate this subject, a qualitative data method was used to obtain data and validate the research hypothesis. Questionnaires were administered to supervisors and Doctorate and Masters supervisees. Both close-ended and open-ended questions were included in the questionnaires. Three main versions of the questionnaires were developed

(Arabic, English and French) since it was addressed to students of different specialties. The questions included in the questionnaires aimed at scrutinising the factors that hinder the supervision process and identifying the different difficulties encountered by the two parts of the supervisory process (supervisors and supervisees).

### 7.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The study included 83 participants. In the latter, 30 teachers (supervisors), 3 Doctorate candidates (postgraduate) and 50 Master 2 students (undergraduate) were involved in order to identify the factors that lead to the difficulties encountered during the supervision process. The teachers were 14 (46.66%) males and 16 females (53.33%), while students were 15 (28.30%) males and 38 (71.69%) females from different faculties at Mohamed Kheider University in Biskra. These participants were selected from different specialties as the following:

- ◆ 5 teachers of Arabic, 2 teachers of physics, 3 teachers of French, 7 teachers of Law, 5 teachers of Mathematics, 5 teachers of Social Sciences and 3 teachers of Chemistry.
- ◆ 5 students study Arabic, 25 students study English, 6 students study French, 7 students study Law, 2 students study Mathematics, 3 students study Social Sciences and 5 students study Chemistry.

Data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using statistical and textual analyses. For students, 28.30 % of the participants (n=15) agreed that their supervisor contacts them and enables them to contact him/her whenever they need, while 71.69% of the participants (n=38) stated that they disagree about the former statement. This means that the majority of the participants have difficulties in terms of contacting their supervisees whenever they are in a need to discuss issues related to their research. It is true that teachers who are at the same time supervisors have various duties, but one of the main duties is being committed to the supervision process requirements. Directing the supervisee and monitoring the research process is one of the preeminent responsibilities of the supervisor. For the research process, 94.33% (n=50) of the supervisees claimed that they strongly disagree that their supervisors direct them in every step of their academic work; however, 5.66% of them (n=3) argued that they have a neutral stand, which means they neither agreed nor disagreed about it. Out of the total rate, 98.11% (n=52) expressed a strong disagreement about the statement "Your supervisor checks your work regularly", while only 5.66% (n=1) agreed about it. Regarding the statement "your supervisor provides you with materials or references relevant to your topic", 9.43% (n=5) strongly agreed, 15.09% (n=8) agreed and 75.47% (n=40) disagreed about it. Out of the total number, 62.26% (n=33) presumed that their supervisors do not provide support and encourage them to fulfill the research requirements. However, 83.01% of the supervisees (n=44) stated that their supervisors do not insist on setting a meeting with them to discuss and monitor their work, while 16.98% of the supervisees (n=9) agreed that their supervisors persist on meeting their supervisees. Only 5.66% of the participants strongly agreed that their supervisors improve their academic work in a way that satisfies them, similarly 26.41% (n=14) agreed about the latter. Whereas, 67.92% (n=36) strongly disagreed about it and claimed that they are dissatisfied about the way their work is being corrected by their supervisors. A high percentage

equal to 90.56% of the participants (n=48) strongly disagreed about the statement “your supervisor does not take too much time to correct a particular part of the research, while 1.88% (n=1) of the supervisees agreed about it and 7.54% (n=4) had neutral standpoint. A low percentage equal to 15.09% of the supervisees (n=8) strongly agreed that their supervisors manage time and materials during the research process, in addition to 1.88% (n=10) agreed about it as well. Nonetheless, 56.60% of the supervisees (n=30) strongly disagreed that their supervisors ease the research process by managing time and materials, similarly 9.43% of the participants (n=5) disagreed about it. The majority of the participants 84.90% (n=45) stated that their supervisors do not care about either them as supervisees or their research, while only 9.43% (n=5) agreed that their supervisors do care about them and their research. Whereas 5.66% (n=3) expressed a neutral position towards the latter. When it comes to availability of the supervisor whenever their supervisees need them, 92.45% (n=49) strongly disagreed that their supervisors are always within reach, while 3.77% (n=2) of them disagreed about it as well. Only 3.77% (n=2) agreed that their supervisors are available whenever they need them. The participants were asked about the problems that they encounter regarding their supervisors, some of them (n=18) presumed that their supervisors temporize and elude when their supervisees are in a need of them, especially when it comes to questions or confusing points that they want to discuss with them. One of these participants claimed that they feel disappointed and confused about particular points in their research and want to discuss them with their supervisors; however, they did not have the chance to do so due to the fact that the supervisor ‘escapes’ from his/her responsibility as an advisor. An ideal supervisor for 75.47% of the participants (n=40) is the one who is serious about the research process, guiding the supervisees and reading with them to improve the quality of the research. Only 1.88% (n=1) of the supervisees argued that an ideal supervisor does not escape from his/her responsibility as a supervisor or provide reasons, which may not be of the supervisees’ concern. Another participant 1.88% (n=1) claimed that supervisors seem that they do not know what is really meant by a supervisor. They just do not care about their supervisees. “They believe in what I can call do it by yourself because it is your own business of qualification”. For teachers, 30% (n=6) agreed that their supervisees are perseverant, while 80% (n=24) of the participants expressed a disagreement about the latter. Time allotted to complete a certain part of the research, which is precised by the supervisor, is not respected by all supervisees since 33.33% (n=10) of the supervisors agreed about it. However, 36.33% (n=11) claimed that their supervisees are committed to the time specified by the supervisor to complete a part of their research, while 30% (n=9) also agreed about it. The majority of the supervisors 56.66% (n=17) indicated that their supervisees do not develop a critical understanding of their research, whereas 13.33% (n=4) of these supervisors claimed that their supervisees do so. Nevertheless, 30% (n=9) of the teachers had a neutral standpoint about it. Most supervisors 60% (n=18) argued that their supervisees do not discuss the major points of their research with them and seek advice, while only 23.33% (n=7) of these participants strongly agreed that their supervisees discuss the major points included in their research and ask for feedback and advice. A considerable rate of the participants 83.33% (n=25) agreed that their

supervisees follow their instructions and carefully consider their comments and feedback, while 16.66% (n=5) disagreed about it. Consulting the supervisor is a very important duty of the supervisee, but 56.66% (n=17) of the supervisors argued that their supervisees consult them before moving to further stages in the research, while 33.33% (n=10) expressed a disagreement about the latter. Only 10% (n=3) had a neutral disposition for supervisor’s consulting. Many supervisors 63.33% (n=19) stated that their supervisees are always present in every supervisory meeting, in addition to 20% of them (n=6) expressed a strong agreement about it, while 16.66% (n=5) disagreed about the statement. A high percentage equal to 86.66% (n=26) of the supervisors strongly agreed that their supervisees encounter difficulties in research methodology and 13.33% of them (n=4) also agreed about it. The majority of the supervisors indicated with a strong agreement that their supervisees commit a lot of mistakes in terms of grammar, punctuation and spelling, in addition to 16.66% (n=5) who also agreed about it. Only 3.33% (n=1) of the supervisors claimed that his supervisee has a good style of writing, while the majority of them 76.66% (n=23) strongly disagreed and 20% (n=6) disagreed about it. Many supervisors 76.66% (n=23) presumed that their supervisors are not acquainted with the research requirements. However, 13.33% (n=4) of these supervisors had a neutral standpoint and only 10% (n=3) agreed that their supervisees are conversant with the research requirements.

## 7.7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected and analysed from the questionnaires revealed that the majority of the supervisees 71.69% (n=38) suffer from the lack of constant contact with their supervisors. The dearth of monitoring and direction in every step of the research was expressed by many of these participants (94.33%; n=50). This implies that the whole responsibility during the research is of only the supervisee rather than both parts (*i.e.*, the supervisor and supervisee). Although checking the supervisee’ work and research progress and providing him/her with materials or references relevant to the research are the main responsibilities of the supervisor, the majority of the participants (62.26%) claimed that these supervision principles are not followed by their supervisors. Many participants (83.01%) alluded to the lack of constant meetings between the supervisor and supervisee, which can be due to eluding that is used by the supervisor as a way to transfer the whole responsibility of the academic research to the supervisee. Correction of the academic work implies giving a constructive feedback and critical comments, which can improve the quality of the supervisee’s work; however, what can be inferred from the rates is that the correction provided by the supervisor does not satisfy most participants ( 67.92%) since the supervisor’s correction may focus only on grammar, layout or style. One of the irritating points in the supervision process is taking too much time to correct a particular part of the supervisee’s work. This can hinder the research process in one way and deplete time required to complete it. The majority of the participants (90.56%) suffer from the fact of taking too much time to get their work corrected by their supervisors. The highest rates of the supervisees (84.90% and 92.45%) argued that carelessness and unavailability are shown by their supervisors, which can be due to the supervisor’s personal character or his/her lack of awareness regarding what a good supervisor is characterized by. Therefore, inefficient

supervision aspects are inferred from all these rates, including the lack of contact, direction and management in all the stages of the research, the dearth of checking regularly and providing support and encouragement, unsettling a meeting constantly, not critically correcting the supervisee's work and taking too much time to be handed back to the supervisee, in addition to carelessness an unavailability of the supervisor, most of the time during the supervision process. There are many critical features, which should be maintained by a supervisee during the supervisory process. Some of these features are perseverance and organisation. The rates (80%) indicated that most supervisees are not perseverant. This is may be due to the fact that they are not interested in the subject under investigation, or they are not aware of their responsibilities as supervisees. It was indicated through the highest rate (36.33% as a strong agreement and 30% as an agreement) that most supervisees are committed to the time allotted to complete a certain part of their work, which is identified by their supervisors. This means that in terms of time management and commitment, most supervisors do not encounter problems in having a part of the research (e.g., a chapter) to be handed and corrected in the time specified for it. A researcher is required to critically develop his/her research and attempt to understand it from different angles. Many supervisees do not develop a critical understanding of their research, according to the rates of the supervisors who presumed it (56.66% and 30%), which may be due to their lack of understanding regarding the research methodology and requirements and/or their lack of reading on the investigated subject. Further, discussion is essential to elaborate a research and identify its weaknesses or gaps. However, the rates (60%) indicated that many supervisees do not critically evaluate and discuss their research with their supervisors for the sake of receiving feedback and advice. In addition to that, many supervisees encounter difficulties in research methodology (86.66%) and have problems in grammar, punctuation and spelling (83.33%) and bad style of writing (76.66%). All these rates can be ascribed to the supervisees' deficiency in terms of academic writing principles and research methodology and standards in addition to their unawareness of their roles as researchers.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The supervision process is very complicated and should be given more attention in order to improve the quality of academic works at universities since the latter is very essential to the supervisor's career and supervisee's educational qualification. For a successful supervision, the supervisory relationship should be based on respect, understanding and thoughtfulness, so that both parts achieve considerable results regarding the research process. The supervisor should be aware that the student is a need of academic help and support to fulfill his/her degree, as well as the supervisee should be wary of his/her supervisor's requirements, such as accepting critical feedback, being a good researcher and relating to the supervisor before taking any preeminent step in the research. Henceforth, research is based on cooperation between the supervisor and supervisee. Both parts should work together to achieve a certain aim, which completing an academic piece of writing for graduation.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Supervisors and supervisees should receive a training in the supervisory process to develop certain skills, which may ease the research process and help both parts (*i.e.*, supervisors and supervisees) maintain good supervisory relationships, which can be reflected in the quality of the supervisee's academic work.

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