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‘They do not treat us fairly’: Assessing Graduate Students' Experiences with University Faculty during Doctoral Supervision

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the perspective of research students towards their supervisors' practices to address the issues in research in universities. The study was qualitative in nature and carried out by doing narrative analysis. Students of doctoral level at the Institute of one of the universities were assigned the task to communicate with at least five supervisees studying in different universities of the Punjab and ask them to share their experiences and view point regarding adverse behavior of their supervisors. Open ended questions were asked from the supervisees. The scholars were also asked to jot down the narrative data received from the supervisees. The data was analyzed by using narrative data analysis technique to extract meaningful picture of the overall context. It was found that supervisors of the research students were not good in their practices which ultimately led towards mal-practices, resulted disappointment among the researchers, and unnecessary delay in completion of their research study. The study recommends that supervisors should be provided proper scheduling skills to get accomplished the research work of their supervisees. The HEC and University administration should conduct training sessions in this regard to address research students' issues for timely completion of their research study.

Keywords: doctoral students, treatment, supervisors, research work

Introduction

Novice researchers at PhD level need to work with their supervisors for timely completion of their research work in true letter and spirit. They are required to complete quality research work under the supervision of their allocated supervisors by the respective university in order to obtain PhD degree. The research supervisors treat or behave with the supervisees differently in diversified situations. Sometimes, behavior of the supervisor motivates and pushes the researchers in positive direction to explore well and at times, the behavior leaves a negative impression upon the supervisees that results depression and de-motivation among the researchers. Proactive behavior of the supervisors can well contribute and motivate workers (A. M. Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). Incivility of the supervisors leads to less commitment and dis-satisfaction (Reio Jr, 2011). In fact, incivility of supervisors and coworkers does really matter in productivity and achievement of the goals (Reio Jr & Sanders-Reio, 2011).

It has been observed through whispers and sharing experiences of researchers that they had faced very adverse and ruthless behavior of the supervisors. Behavioral interventions whether in-role or extra role from supervisors may strongly influence upon the co-workers (Werner, 1994) . There are many interesting stories about the supervisors which can be heard from gossips of the researchers. The data regarding disliking of supervisors are also available in the form of complaints in different universities, which reveal mysterious stories about un-professional behavior of the supervisors. This study supposed to find out types of bad behaviors of supervisors towards researchers, symptoms, causes and solutions to convert the behavior of supervisors in positive direction for the sake of the researchers.

Behavioral impact on Learning

Wubbels et al. (2016) mentioned that while the traits that students bring to the classroom have a significant impact on their learning, the attributes of the learning environment also have a direct and indirect impact on students' academic success. Regardless of the behavior of any student, Blank and Shavit (2016) concluded that a disruptive classroom environment can impede learning and reduce student

accomplishment overall. Thus, in contrast to the general school disciplinary environment—which is absent from most studies—a particular emphasis on classroom disruptions becomes crucial to comprehending the relationship between school climate and students' positive or bad academic outcomes. (Urhahne, 2015). Teachers' behavior mediate the relationship between performance judgments and students' motivations and emotions. A rethinking and amended behavior of teachers towards students may counter the undesirable tendencies. Peterson et al. (2016) stated that students are mostly benefited academically when their teachers' implicit biases favoured the ethnic group to which the students belong. Harbour et al. (2015) wrote that when teachers use effective teaching practices, they maximize the probability about active engagement of students in teaching learning process. A learning-friendly atmosphere is necessary for effective simulation, which also offers activities that promote symbolic coding operations and the acquisition of new abilities; Debriefing increases self-efficacy and encourages behavior self-regulation. (Burke & Mancuso, 2012).

Teacher self-efficacy has a positive influence on the students' motivation and achievement (Burke & Mancuso, 2012; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012). (Houchens et al. 2017) revealed that, when used faithfully, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) can lower the number of disciplinary office referrals and out-of-school suspensions for pupils. (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) Growing empirical data supports the beneficial effects of social emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. Policies, educators, and the general public can support the integration of evidence-based SEL programming into regular educational practice, thereby promoting the healthy development of children.

Supervisory Role and Academic Research

Academic research requires strong determination and commitment to induce or deduce meaningful results, and supervisory role is a key factor in this regard. (Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi, & Shah, 2017) express that academic psychological capital positively mediates the relationship between supervisor support and PhD students' engagements. Meng and Zhao (2018) wrote that academic supervisor leadership, according to the

author, can be defined as the process by which supervisors of graduate students construct, safeguard, and develop their students' creativity by considering, motivating, and developing behaviors. It can also have a positive impact on postgraduate creativity through professional knowledge, intrinsic motivation, and creative thinking. These are interactional mediating variables. Professional knowledge is the foundation of creative thinking, and creative thinking is supported by intrinsic motivation. The supervisory team plays an extremely important role in conduct of a successful quality research. It oversees the entire research project and provides feedback as well as emotional support where necessary, through the research phase. Feedback is a fundamental component of learning (Griffiths, Blakey, & Vardy, 2015). Supervisor support plays a substantial role in increasing employee job satisfaction. Supervisory role is closely interrelated with supervisees work satisfaction (Qureshi & bin Ab Hamid, 2017). The "zone of proximal development," or the space between a novice's autonomous abilities and his or her capacities, is where more experienced members of a community of practice mentor novices' activities to help them join. Under the direction of experts, novices become more knowledgeable peers (Thiry & Laursen, 2011)

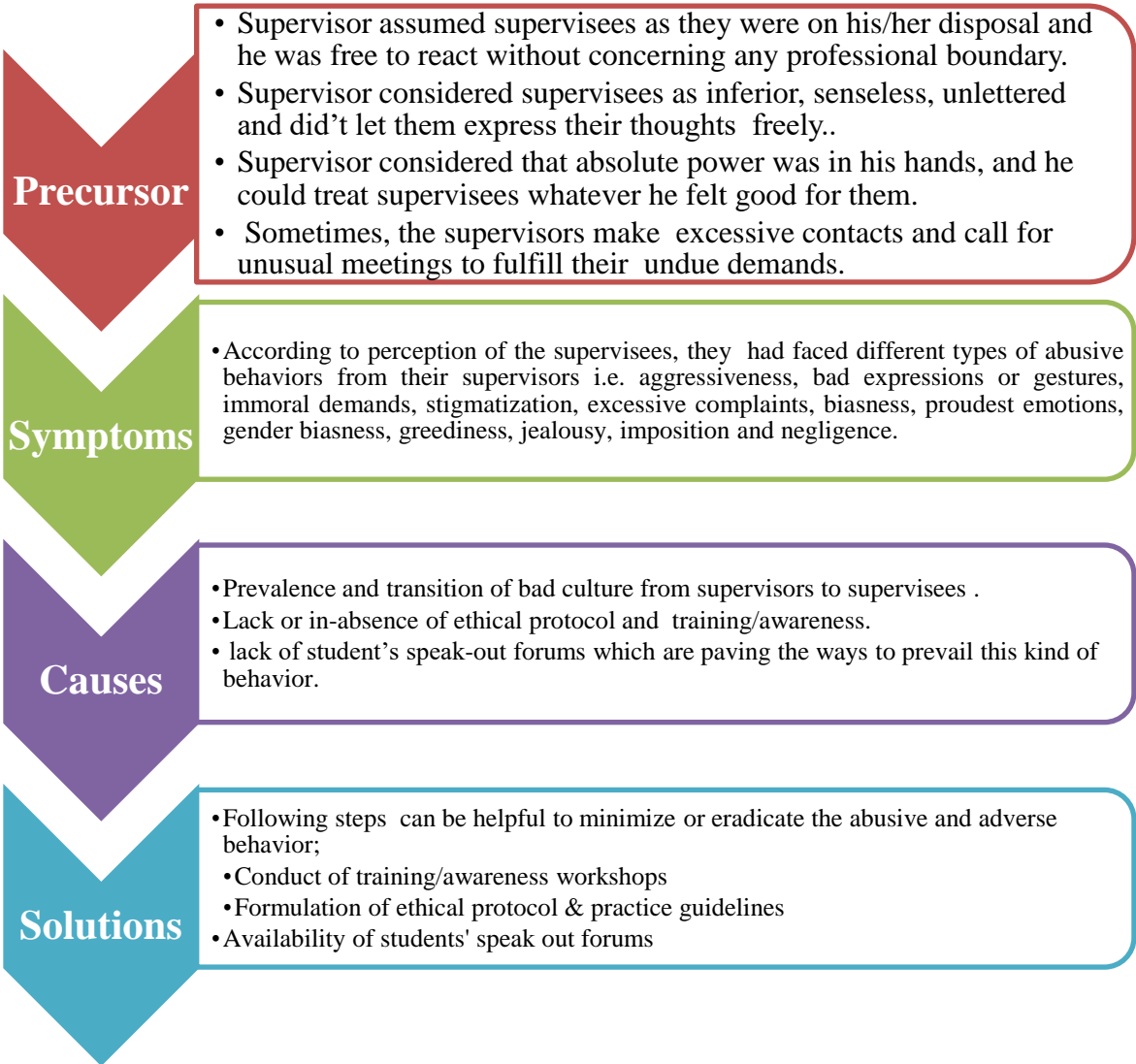
Supervision is not a solitary pursuit. The supervisory role not only requires collaboration with the students of course, but also with other colleagues (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011). Being a scholar in the field is not the only essential component of successful postgraduate supervision; developing a strong professional rapport with the student is also crucial. This frequently entails serving as an example of sound research techniques. It also requires encouragement and motivation of all students regardless of the supervisor's personal opinion about their work. If we want to go even farther with this work, we might need to develop new research supervisor pedagogy. However, there remained a great need to supervise and manage the research student to some degree as well as make sure that the supervisors and, to a lesser extent, the student, complied with the rules set forth by the university. Therefore, in addition to giving students a certain level of comfort about competence and regulations, supervisors should also gain knowledge through reflective and reflexive activities. (Grant et al., 2014).

Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature and carried out by doing narrative analysis. The method known as narrative analysis views stories as both narrative events and their representations. Using this method, the researcher examines the structure and substance of narrative data to see how these components benefit the storyteller and the story. (Mihas, 2019). The study of a person's life experiences as they were recounted to the researchers or discovered in records and archive material is known as narrative research. One of the key components of certain narrative research is having the subject recollect one or more life-changing experiences, or "epiphanies." In narrative research, the investigator provides a detailed account of the environment or situation in which the revelation transpired. (Frankelet al., 2011).

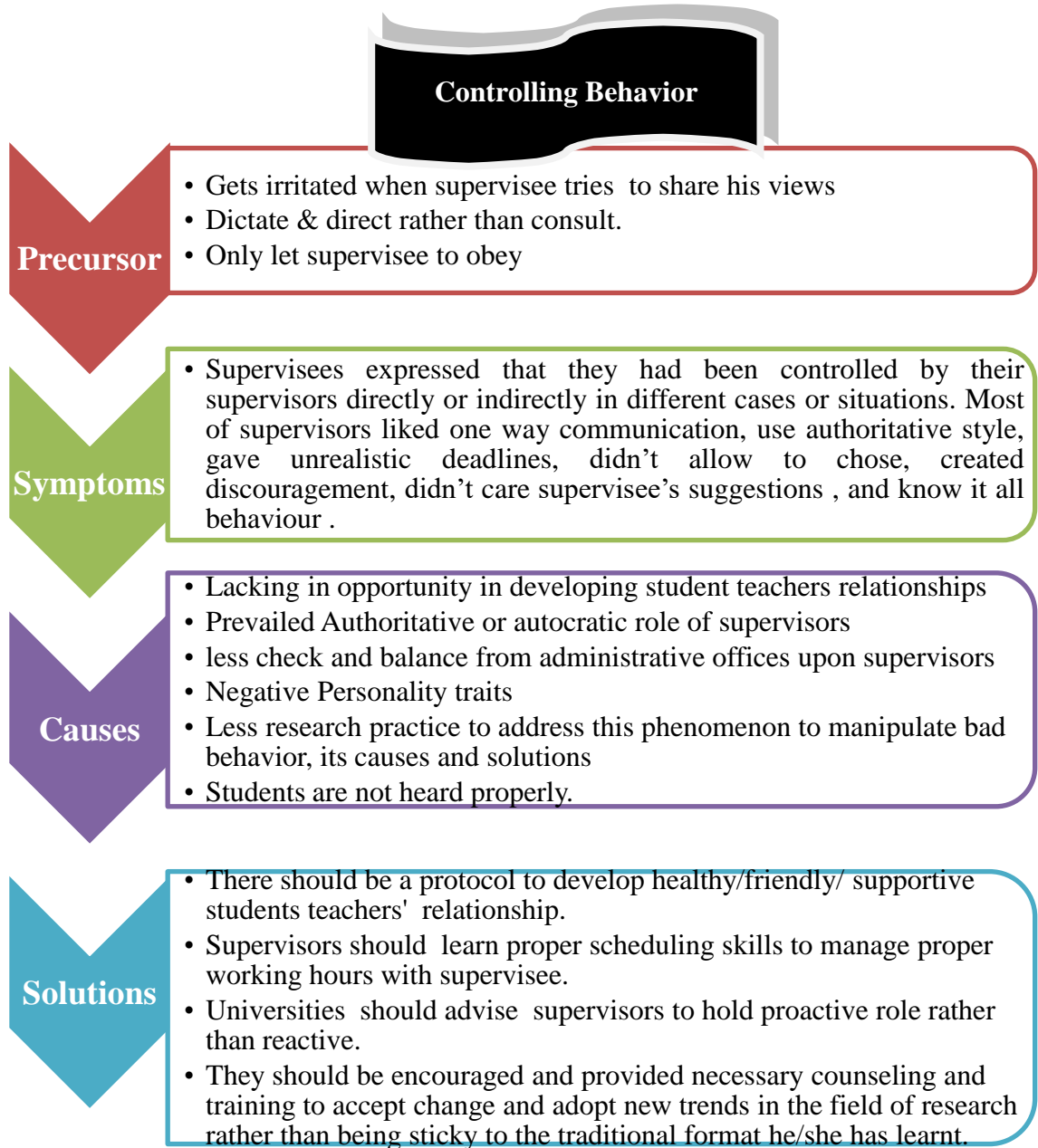
In present study, the researcher selected 06 universities of the Punjab for data collection, where PhD programmes were running in different disciplines. Subsequently, the researcher assigned the work of data collection to two (02) students of doctoral level at the Institute of Education from one of the universities in Punjab, Pakistan. They were asked to communicate with at least five supervisees from each university and ask them to share their experiences and view point regarding bad and unprofessional behavior of the supervisors. They were further asked to note down the narrative data received from the supervisees. They approached supervisees studying in 06 sampled universities, as per their own choice and convenience. It was a kind of open ended interview of supervisees. The sample of study consisted of 30 participants (five from each university), belonged to sampled universities having diversified cultural background. During data collection, ethical considerations of research were also followed in true letter and spirit. The students submitted their doctoral level assignments including sharing their own experiences. The qualitative data obtained from the respondents was analyzed by using narrative data analysis technique to derive a meaningful picture of the overall context.

Data Presentation



Discussion

- The data reveal that supervisors use abusive behavior while interacting with their supervisees. There are various precursors i.e. immoral way of interaction, assuming the supervisees as inferior, senseless, unlettered etc. Most of the supervisors show sense of proud and think that supervisees are on their disposal till the completion of research study. The supervisors having such kind of behaviors have symptoms like aggressiveness, bad expressions or gestures, stigmatization, biasness, gender biasness, greediness and jealousy. They often make immoral demands and neglect the actual state of affairs through which the supervisees are passing to manage their study. They don't give liberty to researchers to express their thoughts. Their attitude towards the students is sometimes as insulting one. In fact, the supervisors had also gone through the very same treatment, when they were themselves research scholars. Hence, it may be a kind of transition of bad behavioral culture from supervisee to supervisor. It was also found that supervisors of research students were not good in their practices which ultimately generate mal-practices. Finally, these issues lead towards unnecessary delay in completion of research degree or students give up their study in disappointment. Similar study indicates that supervisors are also a cause in delayed submission of research work at post graduate level (Sarwar, Shah, & Akram, 2018). However, Supervisees suggested some of solutions to control such kind of behavior. They argued that through counseling, conducting training workshops and application of behavior modifications protocol, the existing situation can be improved regarding provision of a conducive environment for supervisees, enabling them to accomplish their research within stipulated time.



Respondents described that supervisors attempted to control them during their research course. They preferred to dictate the researchers and offered them only one option of compliance to their instructions. Respondents expressed that the supervisors often gave them unrealistic deadlines, without considering their capacity and domestic circumstance. Further, they didn't like suggestions from supervisees. In opinion of the respondents, this might happen due to prevailing autocratic style and lack of availability

of chances to promote students' teachers' positive relationships. Pro-active approach of supervisors could also contribute to resolve these issues.

Apathetic Behavior

Precursor

- Want to get rid of responsibility
- Laissez Fair
- Don't attend calls or accept the meeting proposal from supervisee

Symptoms

- Some supervisors contain the following symptoms of apathetic behavior:
 - Super agreeable
 - Indecisiveness
 - hands-off or super busy or pretend to be busy
 - Avoiding presence of supervisee

Causes

- Deviation from professional approach and moral ethics .
- non-seriousness towards professional requirements
- less remuneration

Solutions

- There should be a protocol to develop healthy/friendly/ supportive students teacher's relationships.
- Supervisors should learn proper scheduling skills to manage proper working hours with supervisees.
- Universities should advise the supervisors to hold proactive role rather than reactive.
- They should be encouraged and provided necessary counseling and training to accept change and adopt new trends in the field of research rather than being sticky to the traditional format he/she has learnt

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research concludes that supervisors don't follow and care the professional norms and ethical principles set for quality research. They deviate from the core requirements of the research and don't facilitate their supervisees, which is a significant cause of unproductive and average quality research. Resultantly, Owing to their non-serious approach and unprofessional behavior, unnecessary delay occurs in timely completion of the research degree.

This study also concludes that bad behavioral practices of research supervisors are one of the major problems due to which students give up their research study in disappointment.

On the basis of findings and conclusions derived from the present study, the following recommendations are hereby made to address the problematic issues of the supervisees related to their supervisors.

- Supervisors should learn proper scheduling skills to manage proper working hours with supervisees, enabling the researchers to accomplish their research study as per timelines set in regulations of the universities. Their role should be proactive rather than reactive.
- They should be encouraged and provided necessary counseling and training to enhance their professional skills, enabling them to accept change and adopt modern trends in the field of research rather than being sticky to the traditional format they had undergone in their own research study.
- There should be a protocol for supervisors in each university to develop healthy, friendly and supportive students' teachers' relationship.
- They should be provided necessary counseling and relevant trainings by the respective university as well as HEC to equip them with necessary skills and modern trends of research

- More study should be made by the researchers to dig out other problematic issues, with solutions, to address research students' concerns.

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