Perspectives of University of Zambia Trainee Teachers on Research Proposal Supervision

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences and challenges student teachers were facing during research proposal writing supervision and the need for change in the existing theories and models of research supervision. The idea was to explore common themes emerging from lived experiences of University of Zambia student teachers' perception of lectures' research proposal writing supervision. Research proposal writing is one of the main components for students taking Special Education in the School of Education but developing a research proposal is often an arduous task for a research student. The participants in the study were drawn from student teachers on the teacher education programme at the University of Zambia. The results from the study showed that student teachers had different perceptions about research proposal supervision. These included lack of guidance from supervisors, unavailability of supervisors, unfriendly supervisors, lack of consistency in the supervisors' comments, delayed feedback for submitted work, and lack of research materials. The study recommended that more time should be allocated to proposal writing.

Key words: Research proposal, methods, teaching, professional, supervision.

Introduction

This report has six parts. The first summarises the purpose and objectives of the study. The second presents a review of prior research on undergraduate research programmes and challenges students face in writing the research proposal. The third part discusses the methodology used in the study. In the fourth part we present the results which we discuss in the next part. In the final part we present a conclusion based on the discussion and make appropriate suggestions regarding student perspectives of research proposal writing in the School of Education.

The motivation for this paper arose out of the supervisory experiences of the authors who were all actively involved in undergraduate supervision of research proposal writing. Undergraduate students in the School of Education at the University of Zambia are required to conduct research

as part of the requirements for the award of the bachelor's degree. This setup is similar to that obtaining at other universities such as the Zimbabwe Open University where a research project is a prerequisite for the completion of a degree programme in all the faculties in the university. Developing research students as capable researchers is the focus of research supervision (Down, Martin and Bricknell, 2005). It is through research proposal writing that students become exposed to research. This research process commences with the drafting of a research proposal written under the supervision of a supervisor. During the research process, each student is assigned a supervisor, who is expected to provide professional guidance and support to the student for the duration of the research process. This proposal writing takes place concurrently with theory lectures on the entire research process which provides the theoretical background to students.

While different schools and departments may have their own specific proposal and research report formats, in the School of Education the proposal consists of the introduction which is made up of background to the study, statement of the problem/specific problem to be solved, objectives/research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study and operational definition of terms. The proposal also consists of reviewing the relevant literature, and the methodology which is made up of research design, target population, sampling procedure, sample, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations; and the expected timeline and proposed budget for the study. Students are allowed the leeway to identify and develop a research topic of their choice within the field of Special Education. These topics nonetheless have to be approved by the supervisors who work with the students throughout the duration of the proposal writing stage. By doing the project, students draw on experience and knowledge gained from earlier foundational courses and demonstrate their ability to pull it all together while creating or discovering something new. Research proposal writing gives students a practical glimpse of what research work is all about.

The importance of a proposal in the research process is emphasized by Paul and Psych cited in Manchishi et al. (2012: 127) who noted that:

> *one's research is as good as one's proposal and that an ill-prepared proposal dooms the research project while one that has been well designed promises success and good impression to the makers.*

In order to write such a good proposal as envisaged above requires good preparation of the student in the theory of the research process. This is the purpose of the research course whose importance is highlighted by Manchishi et al. (2015: 136) who have stated:

> *There should be a very strong research course at undergraduate in all the programmes so that the Educational Research Methodology and Proposal Writing at master's level should not be completely strange to students. In other words, since most students enrolling for masters lack background in research, the school should design research courses to provide a strong research background which would be a foundation for Educational Research Methodology and Proposal Writing.*

Research supervision should stimulate the acquisition of knowledge. Successful supervision must be measured not only by the completion rate of research students within a set timeline but also by the success level of the entire research process. This raises the necessity for training institutions to

evaluate their programmes and have client feedback if they are to effectively and efficiently offer relevant training.

This is important particularly considering that there has been a marked increase in the number of students enrolled in research courses and a resultant increase in the number of supervisors who can work effectively with the increased number of students. Without doubt, the ability to conduct one's own research and be able to interpret the research findings of others requires an understanding of the entire research process. Knowledge of the research process helps a supervisor to examine his/her professional practices and to reflect on them. This has become particularly more important now than ever before because policy and practice decisions in education world over are becoming increasingly research-driven. This increases the stakes in ensuring that students see the research course not just as a means to an end but as an end in itself.

Research on undergraduate research in education is extremely limited. Kanyanga et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine factors that affected completion of postgraduate research programmes at the University of Zambia. Although involving postgraduate students as opposed to undergraduate students, Kanyanga's study, both in its methodology and its findings, directly informs our own study and any policy implications we or others may draw from it. Further, Banja (2013) conducted a study on the perceptions of doctoral students regarding the nature, structure and administration of PhD programmes in the School of Education. However, there are no known studies that have been conducted in Zambia targeting the views of undergraduate students on research supervision. Elsewhere, Todd et al. (2006) and Rowley and Slack (2004) have likewise pointed to the lack of material on undergraduate supervision. Similarly, Johnson (2011) has reported that to date education research, in the area of dissertations, has been concerned with diversity of issues relating to postgraduate research supervision. Since undergraduate dissertations have become compulsory in education programmes, it is timely to investigate the role, experience and impact of this element of undergraduate education (Johnson (2011).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate in-depth perceptions of University of Zambia trainee teachers on research proposal writing.

Significance of the study

This research fills a gap in our knowledge. This study might add to our current knowledge about the student and staff experience of undergraduate research proposal writing. The findings of this research might also assist in analysing the student-supervisor relationship and help improve the supervision process by informing staff of students' views. The findings can help inform the practice of those acting as supervisors, thereby improving upon the quality of their supervision and research teaching. It is hoped that the research on students' perceptions of the research challenges they face would contribute to policy formulation and evaluation of the current supervisory practices in the Department of Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education in particular and the School of Education in general.

Limitations of the study

The study was conducted with one class only in the School of Education, therefore care has to be taken not to generalise from a study of undergraduates in one course only to the entire University. In addition, the study collected the views of students only and the supervisors voice is missing from the discussion.

Statement of the Problem

As potential consumers of research findings, the training that teachers receive in research is of crucial importance. To our knowledge, there has not been any study to document the experiences of undergraduate students during their training in research. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to investigate research students' perceptions of research supervision. This study therefore, is aimed at examining the experiences and views of student teachers of the training received in research theory and practical proposal writing supervision in Special Education. The following were the objectives of the study:

1. To assess the perceptions of undergraduate students on the supervision of the Special Education research course.
2. To establish the nature of challenges student teachers were facing in the Special Education research course.
3. To examine the role of the supervisor in research proposal writing.
4. To collect data on the challenges that undergraduate students faced in writing their research proposals.

Literature Review

This section of the article reviewed some of the current secondary research literature on undergraduate research, with a focus on student's evaluation of the supervising abilities of supervisors and also the nature and extent of the interaction between students and their academic supervisors.

Role of the Supervisor

The role of the supervisor is a key concern in the literature. Rowley and Slack (2004) acknowledge that the supervision process is demanding but that supervisors play an important role in this process in terms of supporting students. The supervisor's role includes giving advice, and academic guidance to students (Todd et al 2006).

Numerous studies (such as Latona and Browne, 2001; Piccinin, 2000; Seagram, Gould and Pyke,1998; Dinham and Scott, 1999) cited in Kanyanga et al.(2011) have identified factors affecting research degree completion. Smith (1995) cited in Kanyanga et al. (2011) stressed the importance of the nature of supervisor-student relationships and pointed out that the relationship becomes key as the student works through the research stage of his/her studies.

Challenges students face in writing Research Proposals

Different scholars (Kikula and Quorro, 2007; Kombo and Tromp, 2011; Kasonde-Ngandu, 2013) have established that students faced a lot of challenges in developing their research proposals. These challenges ranged from lack of clarity of the research problem, failure to analytically review literature and providing a clear path on how the study is to be conducted, among others.

There are different categories of challenges that impacts on the way students carry out their research projects. This paper discusses the tutor-related and student-related challenges. Research scholars like Nyawaranda (2005), Shumba (2004) and Chabaya, Chiome and Chabaya (2009) and Pearce (2005) cited in Mapolisa and Mafa (2006) highlight some of the challenges caused by supervisors. These included too few meetings with students, lack of interest in students, lack of interest in the students' research topic, too little practical help given to students, delayed feedback on submitted work, absence from work, lack of research experience, lack of relevant research skills and knowledge such as in the area of statistics as observed by Thomas and Nelson (2001) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992). The experiences of students at the Zimbabwe Open University revealed that some of these tutors have varying research exposure and experiences. Among other competing challenges, the supervision process at the Department of Education at the ZOU has contributed to lowering the quality of the research product (Monalisa and Mafa, 2004).

In addition, Mottiar and Gorham (nd) have reported students highlighted challenges in identifying a research question and a feeling of uncertainty about how to proceed in carrying out the research. Research scholars such as Bell (2000), Pearce (2005), Sidhu (2001), Anderson, Day and MacLaughlin (2006) and Aspland, Edwards, O'Leary and Ryan (1999) cited in Mapolisa and Mafa (2006) have listed lack of time, lack of money, lack of library resources, lack of commitment and motivation to do the research, lack of adequate theory in the area being researched on, students' failure to meet regularly with their supervisor, and family problems or commitments as some of the challenges in the supervision of research projects that emanate from students.

Methodology

This research was undertaken during the 2012/2013 academic year with third year students who were pursuing the Bachelor of Special Education Degree Programme. This section describes the research methodology used to collect the data on the perspectives of University of Zambia students on research proposal supervision.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. One hundred and twenty students pursuing the BEd. (Special Education) research course completed the questionnaire. Students were asked to evaluate their supervisors in terms of supervisory effectiveness, availability for supervision and quality of supervision, among others. Since the study sought to have in-depth understanding of the perceptions of students of research proposal supervision at the University of Zambia, a case study design of students in EPS 301 research course was used. The intended use of the design was consistent with that of Kombo and Tromp (2006) who pointed out that a case design is used to describe a unit in detail. As a result, in-depth study of students' perspectives about research proposal supervision was conducted.

The population of the study was all the 160 students registered for the EPS 301 Research course. The accessible sample was 120 students that registered for EPS 301 Research course. This number consisted of 61 female and 59 male students. Because it provided equal chance to participants to be chosen for the sample, simple random sampling procedure was used to select the sample.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. This instrument enabled the researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents. Statistical Package for Social

Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

Results and Discussion

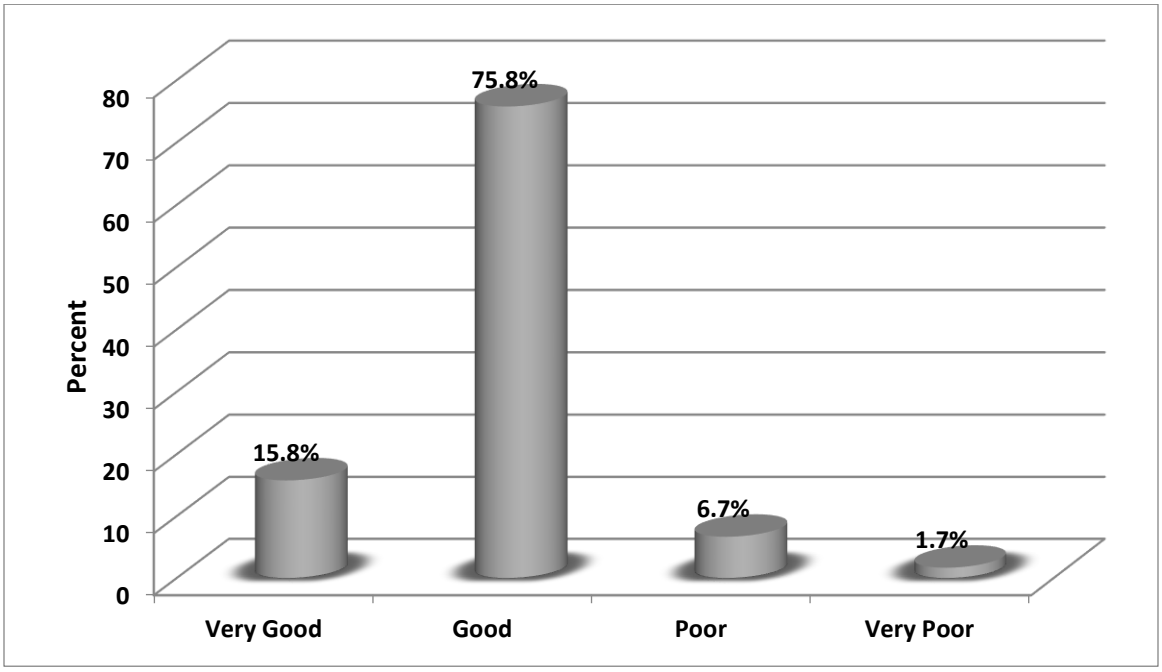
Demographic characteristics of respondents

Of the 120 trainee teachers who participated in the research fifty-nine (49.2%) constituted male respondents and 61 (50.8%) were females. The major portion of the respondents (70.1%) was under 23 years old. About 23.4 percent of selected students were in the range 23-31 years, followed by 5.2% in the range of 32-40 years old, and only 1.3 percent were 41 years old and above. Further, 2 (1.7%) of the respondents were non-school leavers, 42 (35.3%) were school leavers, and 75 (63.0%) were in-service.

Rating the quality of teaching in Research Course EPS 301

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of teaching the research course, EPS 301. The results are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Rating of quality of teaching in EPS 301



The results show that the opinions of respondents were homogenous across all categories of socio-demographic categories. Nineteen (15.8%) of the respondents rated the quality of teaching as very good, 91 (75.8%) as good, 8 (6.7%) as poor and 2 (1.7%) as very poor. This is significant because the students separated the teaching from the shortcomings associated with supervision. Students bemoaned the lack of support from supervisors particularly in respect of the constructive feedback acquired. Clearly, students had more positive views of the quality of teaching compared to the quality of supervision. This point will be discussed in more detail later on.

Rating of supervisor's guidance

Background to the study. Regarding respondents' rating of their satisfaction with the interaction and guidance by the supervisor with specific reference to the background of the study, 18 (15%) rated it as poor, 33 (28%) rated it as fair, 32 (27%) rated it as good, 24 (20%) rated it as very good, while 11 (9%) rated it excellent.

Development of research objectives. In terms of the satisfaction with the interaction and guidance by the supervisor in developing research objectives, 9 (8%) of the respondents rated it as poor, 23 (19%) rated it as fair, 41 (34%) rated it as good, 35 (29%) rated it as very good, while 12 (10%) felt it was excellent.

Literature Review. As far as respondents' rating of their satisfaction with the interaction and guidance by the supervisor in the area of literature review, 21 (18%) viewed it as poor, 27 (23%) rated it as fair, 30 (25%) felt it was good, 29 (24%) rated it as very good, while 11 (9%) reported that it was excellent.

Methodology. In the area of methodology, respondents' rating of their satisfaction with the interaction and guidance by the supervisor was as follows; 20 (17%) rated it as poor, 30 (25%) rated it as fair, 36 (30%) rated it as good, 23 (19%) rated it as very good, while 10 (8%) rated it excellent.

Findings indicate that the overall guidance of their supervisor relative to developing the background of the study, developing study objectives, conducting a meaningful review of the related literature and casting the study in a good methodology, ranged from poor to excellent. As alluded to earlier, more respondents had less favourable opinions of the quality of supervision compared to their perception of the quality of teaching. Only ten (12%) of the respondents rated the quality of teaching as either poor or very poor while under supervision as many as 18(15%) rated supervisors' guidance on background to the study as poor, 9 (8%) rated supervisors' guidance on development of research objectives as poor, 21 (18%) rated supervisors' guidance on literature review as poor and 20 (17%) rated supervisors' guidance on methodology as poor. In short, there is a much higher number and percentage of student responses that are positive about the quality of teaching compared to the quality of research supervision. This can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, under supervision, a student was tied to a single supervisor as opposed to the teaching which had several lecturers involved. The implication of this is that lecturers appeared to attend to classes more consistently than supervisors attended to their students, thereby eliciting more negative views in the eyes of the respondents.

Supervision Barriers for Respondents

Respondents were asked to give challenges they were experiencing in the existing arrangement of research supervision. Table 1 shows the mean score response of barriers and challenges of the respondents.

Table 1: Research Proposal Supervision Barriers for respondents

	Females (N = 61)		**Males** (N = 29)		t-test	
Barrier	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t-value*	sig. 2-tailed
Lack of guidance from supervisor	3.43	0.99	3.39	1.12	6.36	0.000
Unavailability of supervisor	3.87	0.99	3.53	1.01	9.03	0.000
High cost of tying and printing drafts	2.96	0.81	2.89	1.17	10.9	0.000
Much work alongside proposal writing	3.48	1.90	3.20	1.10	7.84	0.000
Supervisor not friendly	3.31	0.93	3.11	1.17	3.17	0.003
No consistency in supervisor's comments	3.25	1.90	2.79	1.01	3.11	0.020
Feedback not received on time	3.09	0.99	2.83	1.11	5.22	0.000
Lack of research materials	3.66	1.15	3.38	1.06	3.19	0.001
Lack of background information	3.01	0.87	2.67	0.99	2.99	0.002
Supervisor's incompetence	2.79	0.99	2.81	1.02	4.11	0.000
Difficult to come up with research topic	2.97	0.83	2.47	1.12	3.01	0.000

As demonstrated in table 1, unavailability of the supervisor (M = 3.87, SD = 0.99) was the highest among all the given reasons, especially among female graduates which indicates that females viewed unavailability of supervisors the most research proposal writing barrier, followed by lack of research materials (M = 3.66, SD = 1.15), too much work alongside proposal writing (M = 3.48, SD = 1.09), lack of guidance from supervisor (M = 3.43, SD = 0.99), supervisor not friendly (M = 3.31, SD = 0.93), lack of consistency in supervisor's comments (M = 3.25, SD = 1.90), feedback from supervisor is not received in good time (M = 3.09; SD = 0.99), lack of background information to the research course (M = 3.01; SD = 0.87), difficult to come up with research topics (M = 2.97; SD = 0.83) cost of typing and printing drafts (M = 2.96; SD = 0.81) and supervisor's incompetence in some research components (M = 2.79, SD = 0.99). Similarly, the male respondents also gave unavailability of the supervisor the highest mean score of 3.53 (SD = 1.01) of the research proposal writing barrier items advanced in the study. This indicates that males viewed unavailability of supervisor the most research proposal writing barrier also, followed by lack of guidance from supervisor (M = 3.39, SD = 1.12), lack of research materials (M = 3.38, SD = 1.06), too much work alongside proposal writing (M = 3.20, SD = 1.10), supervisor not friendly (M = 3.11, SD = 1.17), cost of typing and printing drafts (M = 2.89, SD = 1.17), feedback from supervisor is not received in good time

(M = 2.83; SD = 1.11), supervisor's incompetence in some research components (M = 2.81; SD = 1.02), lack of consistency in supervisor's comments (M = 2.79; SD = 1.01), lack of background information to the research course (M = 2.67; SD = 0.99) and difficult to come up with research topics (M = 2.47, SD = 1.12).

The results also show that female and male groups viewed unavailability of supervisors, lack of guidance from supervisors, lack of research materials and too much work alongside proposal writing as the most research proposal writing barriers. However, it is interesting to note that among the research proposal writing barriers, the males had a slightly higher mean (M = 2.81) than the females (M = 2.79) only on supervisor's incompetence in some research components. For the rest of the barrier items, the means for females were higher than that of the males. A sample *t-test* was performed to compare the mean differences of each item between males and females for research supervision barriers.

The results further show that the mean score of each of the barrier items from female respondents was higher than that of the male respondents. All the mean differences for barrier items between the female and male respondents were statistically significant at the level of $p<0.001$. Supervisors not being friendly to students was significant at $p<0.003$, while lack of consistency in supervisor's comments was significant at $p<0.020$).

The supervision challenges reported by the research students in this study were consistent with those identified by Thomas and Nelson (2001) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992). Further, if there is a poor relationship between the supervisor and the student, the student was more likely to negatively assess their supervisor. This demonstrates that students perceived significant drawbacks due to ineffective supervision, particularly the unavailability of supervisors which as the data shows, was the most significant barrier indicated by the respondents, both male and female. Additionally, the unavailability of supervisors affected all aspects of supervision. For instance, too much interference from a supervisor in a students' work (personality) can act as a challenge for a student wishing to express themselves and own the work they consider theirs. It is important that the student is allowed to design their project, undertake the research and write it up without too much interference from the supervisor (Armstrong (2012). This view by Armstrong cannot go without comment. Not every student can be allowed to design their projects on their own. Some students might need help because they possess low learner capacity to design good research projects. Such students, if allowed to work on their own, might produce projects which fail to meet the acceptable standards. There are important questions raised about power relations in student research supervision (Kalogiannakis, 2002). In understanding this, it is important that we consider the kind of power relations that exist in the classroom and during supervision. Relations between students and supervisors are affected by such factors as age, gender and socio-economic background. Therefore, we must acknowledge not only the different perspectives of teachers and students, but their institutionally unequal positioning as students and supervisors (Saikkonen, 2002).

Staff expertise could be an important factor in student evaluation of their supervisors in particular and the quality of supervision in general. Clearly, therefore, since supervisor's knowledge levels of research and their interpretation of their role differs, the level and quality of supervisor interaction with students cannot be expected to be at the same level. Consequently, as the results

show, not all students will face the same barriers and challenges since their needs and stages of development may be different.

Indeed, considering the increasing numbers of students to be supervised against the number of qualified staff, we realise that some of the challenges students face might be attributed to academic supervisors who are selected for convenience, rather than for their supervisory capabilities that are supported by relevant qualifications. Furthermore, lecturers also differ in their personalities and values, strengths and weaknesses. As earlier indicated these supervisors have different personalities and knowledge basis; and so do the students. In the course of the supervision, supervisors will be exposed to students of various capabilities. As a result while some faculty may be invigorated by the challenges these students can offer, others will be depressed by these students' lack of ability (Centra, 1978). Clearly the student one supervises might have an impact on the experiences of a supervisor. It becomes clear therefore, that supervision performance is a function of a number of factors, as Hackman (1975) cited in Bogen (1978: 51) has argued:

> *What seems clear is that an assessment of faculty performance and its enhancement cannot rely on simple analysis or on single effort. Research on complex organization suggests that improving performance requires consideration of the needs of the individual, the nature of the task to be done, acknowledgement of organizational variables affecting performance, and recognition of the place that environmental conditions, constraints, and incentives have in performance. An understanding of performance requires an analysis of the interactive relationships among these important variables.*

This agrees with the views of Centra (1978, 31) who has noted that:

> *Students' assessments can also assist in making administrative judgments about lecturer effectiveness. Lecturer evaluation is, of course, especially sensitive and difficult. … Since teaching is the major activity of most faculty members, measures of teaching quality as well as measures of quantity such as teaching load must certainly be considered in judging the performance of individual teachers or of a department as a whole.*

Relevance of research skills obtained from the research course

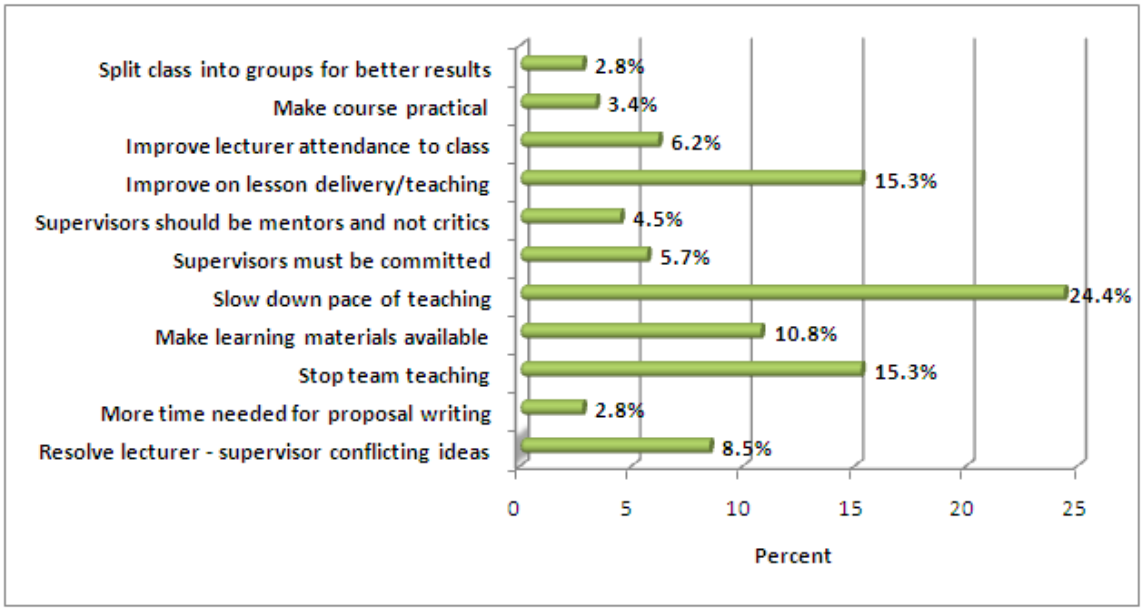
Regarding respondents' rating of the relevance of the research skills that had been obtained in the research course, out of the 120 respondents, 61 (50.8%) said it was very relevant, 46 (38.3%) said it was relevant, 12(10.0%) said it was quite relevant with only 1 (0.8%) respondent indicating that it was not relevant.

Since students were required to frame topics within their area of study (Special Education), it is not surprising that 119 (99 %) of the respondents found the research skills obtained from the research course relevant to them in one way or the other. This is consistent with the views of Bauer & Bennett (2003) as cited in Shaw and Kennepohl (2013).

Respondents' perceptions for improvements in the Teaching of EPS 301

Respondents were asked to suggest ways of improving the teaching in EPS 301 research course. The results in Figure 2 show the participant suggestions to the improvements in the teaching of EPS 301 research course.

Figure 2: Rating of improvements needed in teaching of EPS 301 research course



From the responses, it was clear that students hardly agreed on what was needed to improve the teaching of EPS 301. The single most prominent finding was on the pace of teaching with 30 out of the 120 singling it out for improvement. Regarding the pace of teaching, out of the 120 respondents, 30 suggested that lecturers should slow down the pace of teaching. This is hardly surprising considering that students pursue the research in half the academic year and while pursuing other courses. Time is definitely of the essence. So clearly undertaking a dissertation is time consuming and influences students in both negative and positive ways. It is not surprising therefore that even students who have an overall positive experience of completing the dissertation do experience stress and are aware of the hard work that is necessary in order to complete.

Four (2.8 %) of the participants were for the idea of splitting the class into groups for better teaching/learning results. This group of participants saw the value of group work. It can be an effective method as it can enhance motivation and active learning among students. Though group work requires careful preparation, it is one of the methods which develops critical thinking and communication among learners. These four respondents also supported the idea of having more time for proposal writing. Five (3.4 %) of the respondents suggested that the course should be made more practical. Additionally, 5 (4.5 %) respondents stated that supervisors should be mentors and not critics. Six (5.7 %) of the respondents observed that supervisors should be committed to their work while 7 (6.2 %) suggested that improvements should be made on lecturer attendance to class. With regard to the relationship between lecturers and supervisors, 10 (8.5 %) of the respondents suggested that conflicting ideas between lecturers and supervisors should be resolved. Furthermore, 11 (10.8 %) participants observed that learning/teaching materials should be made available. This agrees with the findings of Peters (n.d.) who advances that in modern times a necessary learning/teaching tool relevant to research supervision is the effective and efficient use of technology. This can be achieved by research supervisors facilitating students' access to resources and guiding students to optimize the use of ICT resources, such as the latest data analysis

software and electronic database, to enhance the reliability and validity of their research. On the other hand, 19 (15.3 %) of the participants suggested that there should be improvements on lesson delivery by lecturers and that team teaching should be done away with. However, team teaching can be of benefit to both the lecturer and the student. Team members can select teaching/learning materials, organise field trips and design tests and final examinations for all students. Thus, a team member benefits from the expertise of other members. Similarly, a student benefits from the different co-ordinated teaching styles of lecturers involved in the team.

Conclusion

This study has provided a good insight into the experiences of students during research supervision. The findings throw considerable light on how undergraduate students' capacities to write research proposals are negatively impacted by supervisor related challenges such as unavailability for supervision at the University of Zambia with a particular focus on the Bachelor of Special Education programme. The study has shown the need for extensive changes in the student-supervisor relationship at the University of Zambia. This is a rich vein of research which can influence the way research courses are offered in all schools and departments. From a supervisor's point of view it is useful to have an understanding of the emotions expressed by students regarding the supervision experience. Being aware of such concerns can influence the way academic research supervisors interact with their students and strive to meet their needs. The solution, it seems, does not lie in policy changes but administrative changes. Nonetheless, the onus lies on supervisors to be competent in understanding and addressing issues presented by the diversity of learning styles and backgrounds. Supervisors are therefore called upon to re-examine their attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that underlie their teaching and supervision and to think critically about their supervisory practices so that both lecturers and supervisors can identify what is working and what needs to be improved.

Recommendations

In line with what has been discussed in this study, we make the following recommendations:

1. More time should be allocated to proposal writing.
2. Supervisors should be readily available to the learners and provide timely and more constructive feedback.
3. Sufficient and adequate learning/teaching materials should be made available.
4. With regard to the pace of teaching, lecturers should slow down the pace of teaching so that learners could effectively capture the taught/learned material.

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