The Expectations And Experiences Of Research Supervisors Concerning The Intellectual Capacity Of Their Supervisees

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Abstract

The current study aimed to investigate research supervisors' expectation and experiences of their supervisee's intellectual capacity. Under qualitative paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted. An interview protocol with separate version for both supervisors and supervisees was developed. It was primarily focused on supervisor's expectations and experiences of their supervisees. 10 Dyads of PhD Research supervisor and supervisee were purposively selected from the research repository of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Their research projects in social sciences and submission after June 2019 was ensured in order to get insights of recent experiences of the PhD process and supervision which could be easy to recall. Their details were requested to registrar and controller examination of respective universities. Out of 10 dyads, eight agreed to participate. Total 16 interviews were conducted with 8 supervisors– supervisee dyads. Two separate frameworks were developed for data analysis, one was based on responses of supervisor and supervisee to a set of questions. This led to second framework based on patterns and themes emerging from first framework. Research supervisors were found to be interested in transformational learning and innovative research. There was a transition in expectations of supervisors for their supervisee from being independent researchers to interdependent ones. It was found that there was a gap between supervisors' expectation and actual experiences. On the other hand, supervisee's perception of research supervision was

structured and dependent on the supervisor. Further research showed that supervisors' experiences were not matched with their expectations.

Key Words: Qualitative Research, Semi-Structured Interviews, Higher Education, Independent Researchers, Dyad analysis, Intellectual capacity

Introduction

At the post graduate level, the intellectual capacity of research scholars or supervisees pertains to their ability to think about a problem, learn from past and present research, develop a structured plan, and execute it with discipline. A huge part of building Intellectual capacity of a post graduate research scholar or supervisee lies in his/her belief that he/she can do it. Potential and successful research scholars are always open to and looking for opportunities to learn, reflect on their practices and improve themselves. A research supervisee, especially at post graduate level, is generally expected to have professional, personal and academic writing skills. These skills include skills pertaining to how they conceptualize and identity the research problem, connect and design methodology for sampling, data collection and analysis, and synthesize the findings for appropriate recommendations. The skills should be supported by a host of personal skills including creativity, clarity of logical thought, confidence, and flexibility, in addition to time management skills.

Research supervisees are independent researchers who should have the ability of critical thinking and solving complex problems, in order to successfully plan future research. Research is a strenuous activity that needs research to display business acumen in achieving objectives, handling, and overcoming challenges and executing the research plan in a timely manner. These abilities are cultivated over time and usually take years to develop or acquire. Researchers such as Ghafarin and Kiani (2010), have highlighted the need for strategic thinking in research; this enables researchers to assess and develop insights about the effectiveness and applicability of research variables for success in research. The various modes of strategic thinking include techniques such as convergent and divergent thinking, logical thinking, and practical/pragmatic thinking. These strategic thinking skills are also necessary within the academic context and instruction for better delivery and planning of educational materials and achieving learning outcomes. Such thinking skills enable a researcher to create, unify, integrate, and utilize a correct set of frameworks and resources to achieve better results.

Supervisee learning ability/capacity is a predictor of their intellectual capacity; according to Carroll & Gilbert(2005)the learning acquired and exhibited by the supervisee is at the heart of supervision. Critical reflection is the medium of learning in supervision (Carroll, 2009). The learning which occurs in research supervision is indicated by how the supervisee works or what they accomplish, which is often facilitated by the supervisor and is a form of reflective practice. The learning within the supervisory period is related to theoretical knowledge and researcher mindset, skill building and implementation, developing professional outlook and carrying out the research work with ethical awareness, self-awareness, and sensitivity towards others. The

supervisors may act as facilitators by providing opportunities for teaching and instruction, constructive and critical feedback, providing professional insights, and sharing their subjective research experience.

PhD is a unique opportunity to gain research experience under the support of an experienced researcher working closely with supervisee to provide guidance and feedback. Supervisee planning ability /capacity is an important predictor of their intellectual capacity. From the research proposal to the viva and defense of the PhD, there are several components and milestones that comprise this journey. The research proposal is one of the most important early stages of a PhD and lays out the plan for research. The level of planning skills exhibited is an indication of the future success, learning and capability of information processing. These are distinct from other academic and research skills and are one of the key predictors of intellectual capacity.

Weber and Cobaugh (2008) concluded that integration of the principles of project management into research planning can lead to more efficient study execution and higher-quality results. The ability that supervisees display in planning strategies involve both conducting and monitoring the proposed activities, as well as updating and revising the research plan according to emerging conditions and situations. The research plan includes proposal development, proposal approval, instrument development and data collection, write up and final defense. The research limitations, delimitations, and the timeline for each research activity, need to be well established. After proposal approval by the department, its execution begins. The project execution phase includes the closure and evaluation of the project, as well as reporting and disseminating the processes and findings of the research. Both supervisor and supervisee are responsible for activities to begin on time and are in accordance with the standards of performance. Coordination between supervisor and supervisee and different activities is most important for execution.

Statement of the Problem

Research work and study at post graduate level demands working with intellect, creating new knowledge (Phillips & Pugh 2010), and driving innovations and growth for nations (Smith 2010). Johnson (2000) opined that doctoral research process requires supervisees to have a certain level of intellectual capacity. Intellectual capacity of supervisee is, his/her ability to think, learn, plan, and execute with discipline like a processor or operating system. Bui (2014) found that expectations develop over time for both supervisors and students, as both divide their expectations into different stages along the doctoral study. because the students develop their understanding and independent research skills over time. It sounds obvious to understand the supervisor's expectation of their supervisee because it can impact not only supervisee performance but also the way they expect of supervisors in their supervisory roles. It would lead to good and healthy quality rapport between supervisor and supervisee which is important for quality academic research. In this context the present study was planned to probe research supervisors' expectations and experiences of their supervisees' intellectual capacity.

Research Questions

The research study focuses on the following research questions which were derived from the main objective of investigating research supervisors' expectation and experiences of their supervisees 'intellectual capacity.

- What do research supervisors expect from supervisee thinking ability/capacity?
- What do research supervisors expect from supervisee learning ability/capacity?
- What do research supervisors expect from supervisee planning ability /capacity?
- What do research supervisors expect from supervisees ability/capacity to systematically execute the research plan?
- What were the research supervisor's experiences of PhD supervision specifically related to supervisee's intellectual capacity?

Methodology

Under qualitative paradigm, semi-structured interviews which were based on individual expectations and lived experiences were conducted.Research methodology used by Maykut and Morehouse(1994) and later Bui (2014) was followed. Research study was focused on the expectation and lived experiences of PhD supervisors employed in HEC recognized public and private universities of Pakistan. This approach was consistent with Wright (2007) and later on Franke and Arvidsson (2011) who also conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate research supervisory relationships for deeper quest of emergent topics and themes.10 Dyads ofPhD Research supervisor and supervisee were purposively selected from social sciences within the Pakistan research repository(http://prr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/handle/123456789/9).There were total 18002 research studies since 2009; the 10 Dyads had submitted their research projects after June 2019.Their details were requested from the registrar and controller examinations of their respective universities. For two reasons this sampling technique was used first to get retrospective comments ofresearch supervisor and supervisee on expectations related to supervisee's intellectual capacity and research supervision respectively and their experiences of expectation fulfilment or expectation mismatch; secondly, it allowed a dyadic analysis. Out of the 10 dyads only8 agreed to participate in the study, resulting in the conduction of 16 interviews. There were 5 male and 3 female supervisors, and six males and two female doctoral students. The supervisors' experience ranged from 8 to 27 years within Pakistani universities. They have been supervising between six to 28 doctoral students each, and their ages vary from 27 to 48 years.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data need to be treated carefully to ensure that participants' lived experience are not influenced by the researchers' biases as Wright (2007) said that all interpretations must be grounded in the participants' understanding. Two separate frameworks were developed for data analysis, one was based on responses of supervisor and supervisee to a set of questions. This led

to second framework based on patterns and themes emerging from first framework. Supervisor-students dyads responses were matched to assess similarity and difference of expectations within specific relationships to build an integrated data framework. Two boards were used to display the transcripts. On one board, data of first framework (separate) and on the other board, data of second framework (integrated) was displayed. Eight dyads, individuals and emergent themes were coded with different color. As on first board which was for separated data, the theme of 'supervisee thinking ability/capacity' was coloured in green for supervisors and in yellow for supervisee. On the second board which was for integrated data, different colors were used for coding each dyad further to distinguish supervisors' data from supervisees, it was underlined. For convenience of theme identification, notes were taken. As Wright (2007) narrates that This help researchers to avoid from getting lost in the huge text of eachtran script and leads the more focused analysis of underlying meaning of the narratives rather than on the specific content of particular one.

Results

The data analysis revealed four main dimensions that the interviewees expressed during the interview process, according to the main research questions. They are presented in the following section:

Supervisee Thinking Ability/Capacity

Supervisor M -3 said "I prefer to supervise those students who had been in my class during their coursework. I feel comfortable with whom, who know my mind set. I expect that one who is doing PhD should think in innovative way, his or her approach should be systematic -------- but I had felt that few my supervisees were inclined towards replication. They said we can do same research in our context -------I motivated them that PhD research is not only contribution to existing one, it requires innovation too".

Supervisor F -2 told "I expect from my supervisees a highest level of cognitive and logical skills. A PhD student try to generate knowledge it requires thinking new feasible ideas for proposing solutions to problems around him------on certain occasion I felt that he(supervisee) had innovative ideas without logical background "

Supervisor M -5 said "I expect from my supervisee to develop a level of thinking abilities for becoming independent researcher. In start she(supervisee) was totally dependent on me but later on she knew what I was expecting"

Supervisor F -1 said "PhD candidates come to me for topics. Really I feel bad for their childish thinking approach. I expect them having specific topics from their area of interest and I expect them to have commitment with their identified research problem   I remembered that one of my supervisee changed his 4 topics and was still not satisfied   at the end when I asked him to change supervisor then he started to do work but still was confused."

Supervisor M -4 said "I expect that they should have a drive for their potential contributions of the topics. My role is just to advise them which line or direction should be followed and which should not be. As for the knowledge, I expect them to be experts------in this regard I had bad experiences with my supervisees".

Supervisee F -1 said "I expected that my supervisor would recommend me books, articles, websites, other dissertation. It made me focused on my research study. Although it was my job but recommendations and the conversations with him were really supportive and I did need them to bring me back on my course or sometimes to push me on another aspect of thinking"

Supervisee M – 3 said "I needed a publication for submission of my dissertation to notify-… I requested help from my supervisor – I didn't know how to prepare a manuscript for a research journal and how to publish it ---------there was the word limit and specific format--. I had a lot of words to write, my supervisor edited it and her comments were really helpful in that first paper"

Supervisee Learning Ability/Capacity

Supervisees were asked that What have you learned from your PhD Journey? What approaches and practices you are doing differently now that you were not doing before your PhD?

On the other side supervisors were asked about their expectations and experiences related to their supervisee's learning ability. They were asked that What do they did to facilitate learning process of their supervisees? How they see their supervisees asWhat approaches and practices they are doing differently now that they were not doing before their PhD?

Supervisor F -3 recalled"I have been assigned to supervise the research project of a student and support him.He has started his PhD after a break of 12 years, yes he was almost near to my years. He has strong aspiration and was ambitious but lack of learning skills. After few meetings with him, I found that it could be problematic for me. I discussed with my close fellows they opined that he wants to do and with guidance, coaching and support he will gradually build up his resilience for his lack of learning skills and gradually get back to his project like fresh graduate. During his proposal development phase, I called him daily for an hour and provided him different tasks associated with his learning skills. you can't believe he did extraordinary after that".

Supervisor M -5said "I expect PhD candidate, a transformational learner … At different stages of his/her research study he submits draft of different chapters of dissertation to his supervisor for consultation and guidance------- I sometimes changed the whole draft and asked her to critically reflect not only on her submitted draft but the way she develops that draft".

Both personal and academic learning are associated with Transformational learning which is considered as deepest form of learning (Carroll, 2010).

Supervisee M -2 said that "I expected that my supervisor will provide me written structured feedback on my draft. Whenever I received checked draft or had a meeting with him, I

developed new mental maps and worked on new meaning-making frameworks. I learned from those frameworks and rewrote my draft with new comprehensions".

During PhD research supervisor and supervisee both have to face many challenges individually and together for transformational learning.

Supervisor M -1said "From PhD candidate I expect good language skills both in terms of writing and presentation along with critical thinking skills and these can be learned by practice I observed lack of language expertise in my supervisee".

Supervisee F-2 said" Supervisor should realize that at the end PhD candidate is a student. I remembered that due to language problem how much time wasted. Writing and speaking improves with practice but the most important is in which environment you are going to practice".

Supervisor M -1 said "When students come to office first time and when they come to say Goodbye there is a lot of changes can be observed due to learning during their PhD".

Supervisee F -1said "PhD degree is not an accomplishment for me but I learned a lot during this period. I feel more knowledgeable and competent than before----------By practicing, rethinking, redoing, I changed me and my project for betterment".

Supervisor M -4 said "Being a research supervisor, I think, supervisee should trust on my feedback, may be it would be difficult to hear, but being open to feedback, learning from it and using it to grow is part of their capacity building".

Supervisee Planning Ability/Capacity

Most problems PhD students experience due to their Poor planning

Supervisor M -5 said "As PhD attributed with self-directed learning, I expect self-management from supervisees. PhD is a golden opportunity for them to develop an effective and highly efficient process for doing research I remembered one of my supervisee who was proactive in self-regulation but lack of logical thinking".

Supervisor M -3 said"Being a supervisor, I can just guide and facilitate them about planning their research. They should have the ability to estimate how long each activity or milestone will take like how many months he will spent for data collection and how? --------I saw poor planning delayed her project as she could not manage PhD program related departmental formalities and data collection".

Supervisor F -1 said "According to me, proper planning is important. Research proposal can be a predictor of their planning ability. Planning does not only mean time management, it means how aspect along with what and when too".

Supervisee F -3 said "Yes--- planning ability is very important for PhD student. I remembered that I used a pocket diary in which I entered y start dates, important milestones and end dates. Even after how many days I had to see my supervisor was in it".

Supervisee M -3 said "For me Planning ability of supervisee is doorstep of PhD success... poor or less or even wrong planning are much better than no planning at all------------------I expect from my supervisee everything in black and white".

Supervisee Systematic Plan Execution Ability/Capacity

To develop a plan is not enough for PhD students, they have the ability to execute it too. Supervisors generally expect from their supervisees to have ability of becoming independent researchers and experts in their chosen fields.

Supervisor M -3 said "I want my supervisees not only develop their own proposal but the way of implementing it I felt lack of this ability"

Supervisor M -4 said "In term of implementation, I expect them to be doyens and self-regulator"

Supervisor F -3 said "I think that supervisor role is of guidance at proposal development stage and facilitation at implementation phase. Supervisee should have the ability to execute research plan"

Supervisee M -3 said "From my point of view supervisor is responsible for directing the activities required for completing the research on time".
Supervisee F-3 said "I expected from my supervisor that she would clearly define and communicate there search tasks and set targets for me to complete my research"
Supervisor M -5 said "I see research timeline is a tool for supervisee to track and refine his study. He should be capable of ensuring all activities associated with the research are completed in accordance with the timeline set by me and sometimes departments give them a specific time for completion."

Supervisor M -2 said "--------He (supervisee) must be able to develop research instrument and do pilot testing teste as per standard procedure"

Sometimes research project does not move forward as it was planned. Certain issues and problems arises as course of research that need to be resolved for successful implementation of research plan.

Supervisor M -4said" ------ Problem management skill is crucial for supervisees as he or she has to face many things during research. For supervisor, it is a problem that her supervisee lacks this skill. How they can move forward?"

Supervisor F -2 said "When I completed my first chapter after approval of proposal, I felt confident and started working on next milestone of my timeline. my every little completion develops execution muscle"

Supervisor M -3 said "I expect and suggest supervisee to act on things and use strategies that have value".

Supervisee F-1 said "I knew data could be collected through personal visits of schools, requesting friends to collect data from their near places, request supervisor to use her network, through google forms etc. but in spite of using all of these strategies it was time consuming"

Supervisor M -2 said "----- students knows how can be acted on research plan, they said …I will do in this way and that way but actually I felt they had lack of ability to take right way. they had too many research related strategies and solution but no action. I expected best, meaningful and of high value approach from them.

Conclusion & Discussion

This study probed the research supervisors' expectations and experiences of their supervisees' intellectual capacity and has tinted an inclusive and diverse picture of expectations and experiences that had not been specifically investigated earlier. There were four aspects of supervisee's intellectual capacity: Thinking, learning, planning and execution. Research supervisors were found to have high expectations of their supervisees' intellectual capacity and were not satisfied due to experiences with their supervisees. Their general expectations from supervisee were not confined to a single aspect of intellectual capacity but encompassed all the 4 aspects. They expected that their supervisees would be logical and critical thinker, transformational learner, self-regulatory and would have ability to plan and execute research systematically. It was concluded that mostly their expectations and experiences were mismatched.

On the other side supervisee were found to have less rigid expectations. They expected proper guidance and facilitation without time barrier from their supervisors. Mostly their expectations and experiences are matched.

The research study reflects the different aspects of expectations in line with intellectual capacity. These different aspects can be supervisor-centred versus supervisee-centred. In line with Stubb et al. (2012), students often report overlaps in different aspects. The dyadic analysis facilitates an understanding of the comparative views of both supervisees and their supervisors.

Supervisor' expectations of intellectual capacity of supervisees were aligned with previous studies (Johnson et al. 2000, Phillips & Pugh 2010), but there was found a gap between expectation and experiences of them. They expected supervisee to be transformational learner and critical thinker. Supervisors' intellectual expectations of their supervisee progressed from being independent to interdependent researcher. In early stage of doctoral study, supervisors

expected their supervisees to be independent. They expected them to be able to work interdependently with them as co-authors and/or colleagues during last stages of doctorate. Hong T.M. Bui (2014) concluded that for supervisors, supervisee's intellectual capacities were important not only for their thesis completion but also for becoming prospective academics. This study provides practical implications for both supervisors and supervisees. Results leads towards transformation learning at doctoral level along with critical thinking, and self-regulation. Supervisee expect their supervisors to supervise and guide their research. These study urge supervisors to understand their supervisees.

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