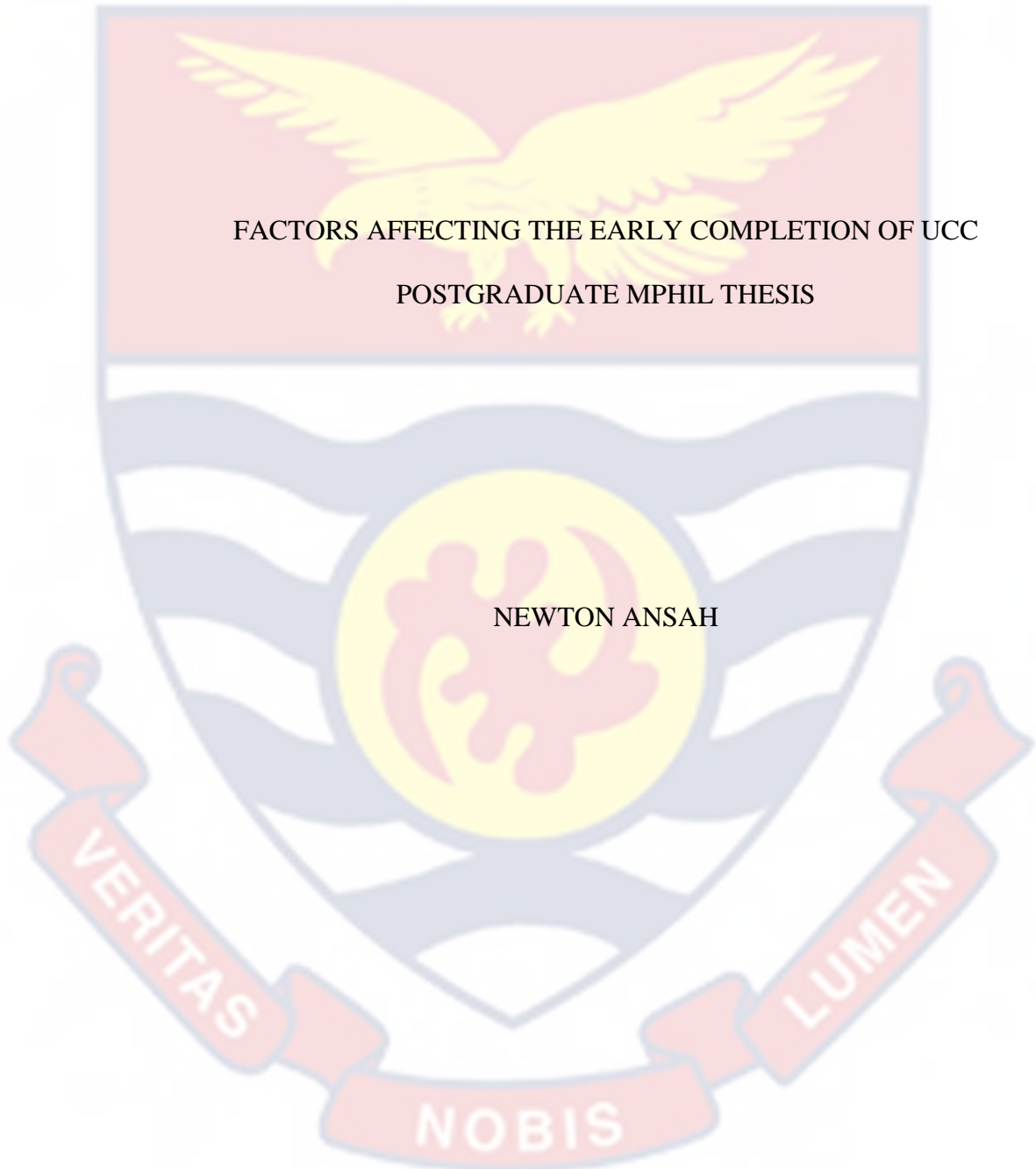
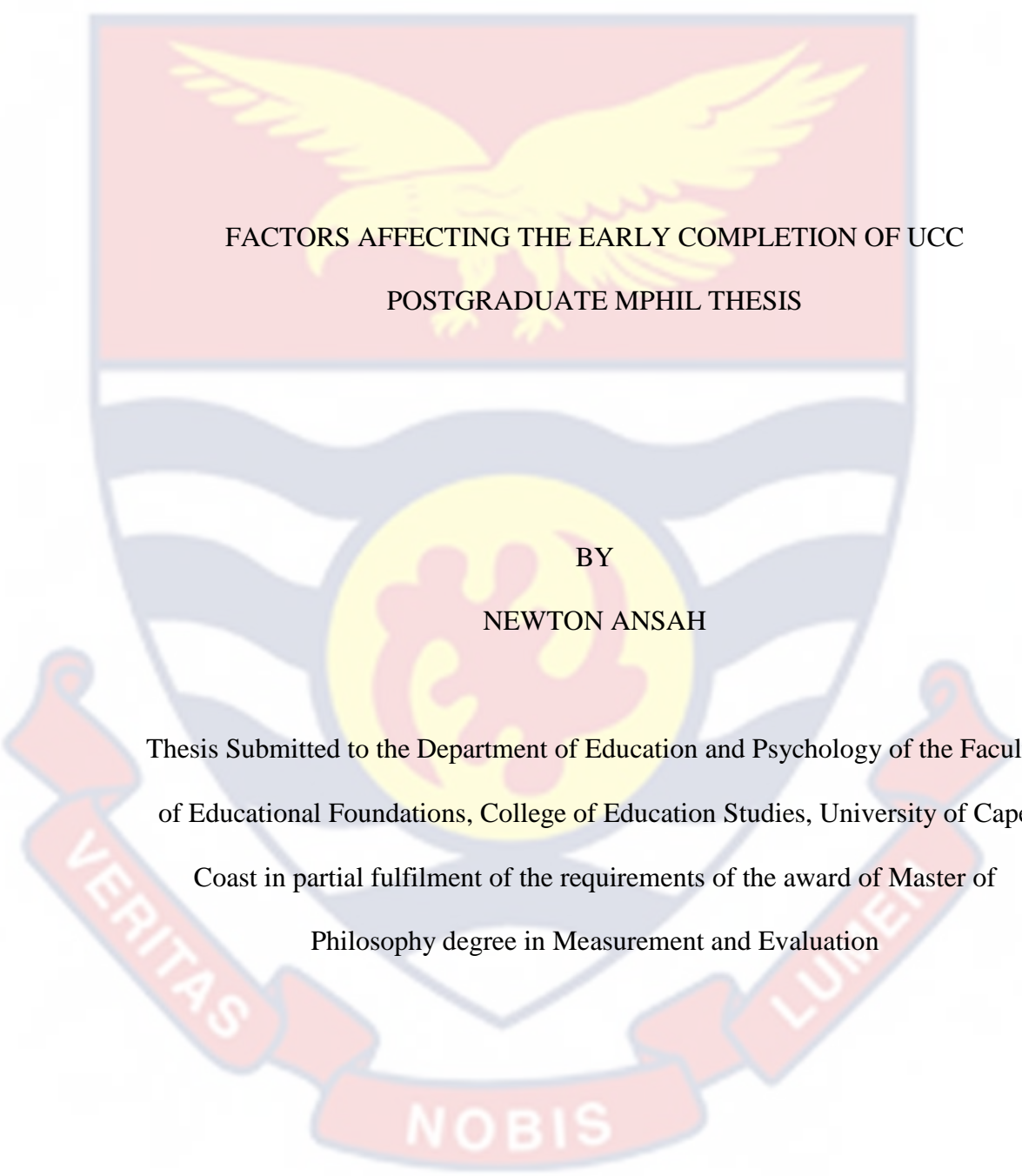


UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



2025

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FACTORS AFFECTING THE EARLY COMPLETION OF UCC
POSTGRADUATE MPhil THESIS

BY
NEWTON ANSAH

Thesis Submitted to the Department of Education and Psychology of the Faculty
of Educational Foundations, College of Education Studies, University of Cape
Coast in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Master of
Philosophy degree in Measurement and Evaluation

MAY 2025

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

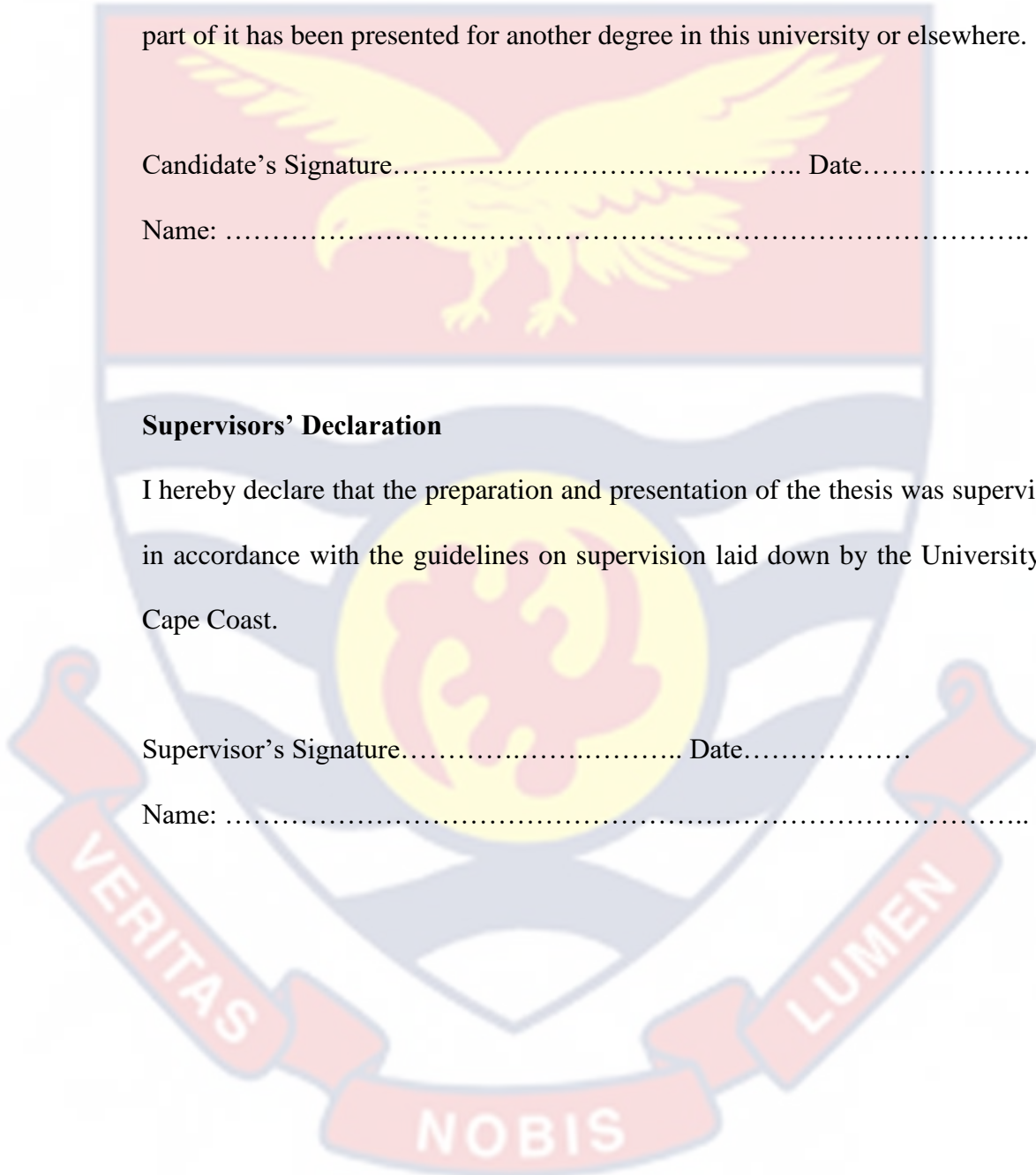
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Supervisors' Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Supervisor's Signature..... Date.....

Name:



ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors that impacted the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast, specifically focusing on student-related, supervisor-related, and institution-related factors. A descriptive survey with a mixed-method approach was adopted on a sample size of 53. The study used questionnaires and an interview guide for the collection of data. The questionnaire's validity was confirmed through expert review, and reliability was ensured via a pilot test, yielding high Cronbach's alpha values: student-related factors (.948), supervisor-related factors (.932), and institutional-related factors (.899), with an overall reliability of .793. Qualitative reliability was also ensured using Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using means and standard deviations, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The study established that lack of research skills, delays in supervisor feedback, and administrative bureaucracy affect the early completion of MPhil theses. It is recommended that students prioritise commitment and engagement in their research. Also, academic institutions should ensure an improvement in supervisor support, and streamlining administrative processes. The study concluded that research skill deficits, delays in supervisor feedback, and administrative bureaucracy significantly hindered the timely completion of MPhil theses at the University of Cape Coast.

KEY WORDS

Academic writing

Completion rates

Graduate studies

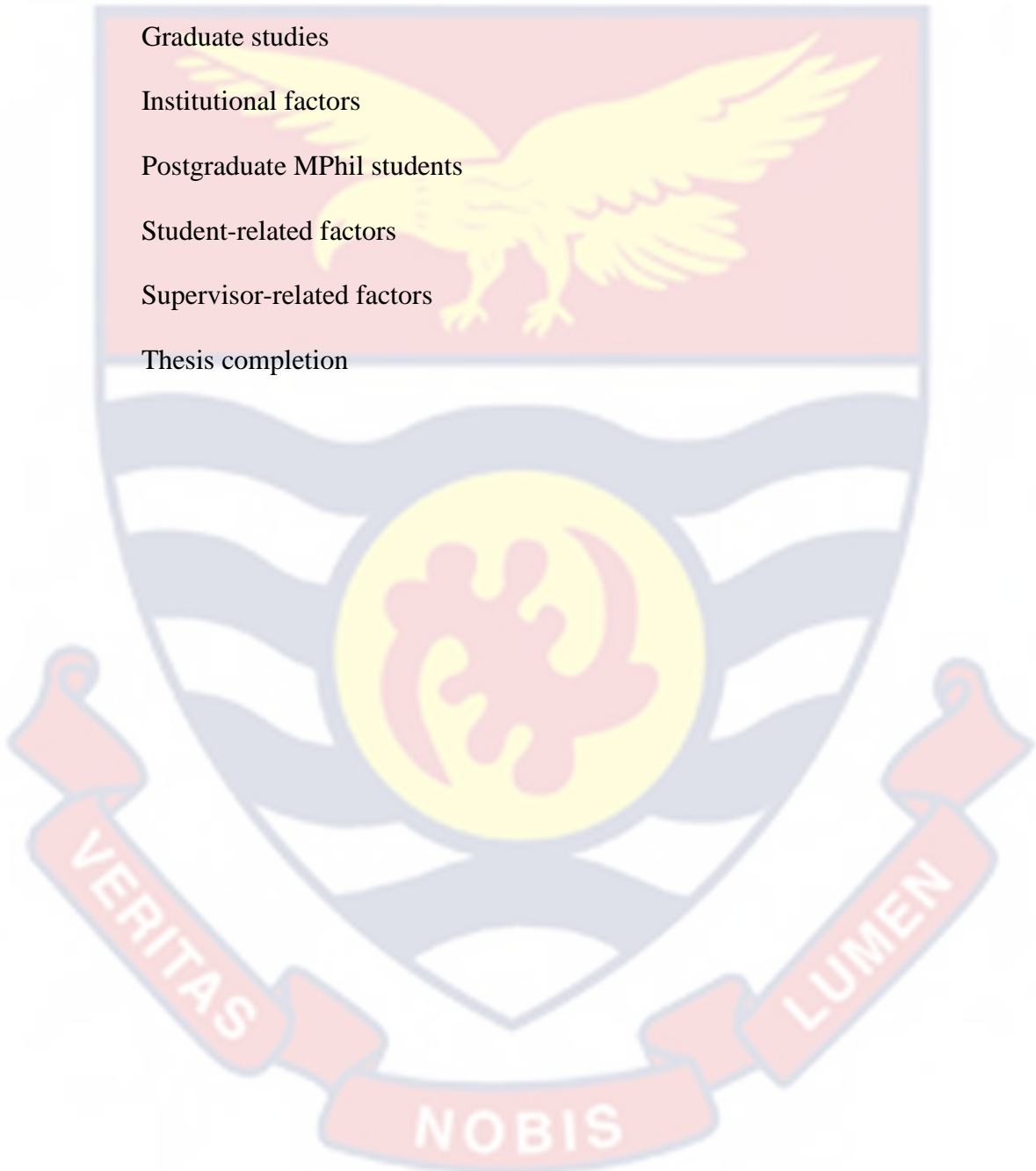
Institutional factors

Postgraduate MPhil students

Student-related factors

Supervisor-related factors

Thesis completion



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My colleague, Ebenezer Takyi-Wadieh, helped shape the study. I also appreciate the participants, including students and senior faculty members who completed questionnaires for this research.

DEDICATION

To my father Mr. Walter Ansah, his wife Mrs Elizabeth Esinam Ansah,
and to my uncle Dr. Edward Wilson Ansah.



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of higher education institutions is to prepare students for vital occupations in government, industry, and public and private organisations. Additionally, because universities as higher education institutions develop new knowledge through research and can transfer and spread it, they are considered critical institutions of civil society. One major requirement for postgraduate completion is the completion of research work, commonly known as a thesis or dissertation depending on the programme involved. Postgraduate students seem to be challenged with this requirement, leading to delayed completion times. Some students are unable to complete within the two-year minimum completion time. It is, therefore, necessary to determine the factors that led to this situation.

Background to the Study

Timely thesis completion is a key indicator of academic progression and institutional efficiency in higher education, directly impacting both student success and the overall functioning of universities. Swanzy, Langa, and Ansah (2018) highlight the importance of addressing challenges that hinder student success in African universities, emphasising the broader role of these institutions as public assets contributing significantly to national economic growth and societal development. Historically, as noted by Mbawuni and Nimako (2015), higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa was predominantly characterised by publicly funded, government-operated universities until the late 20th century.

Factors such as the quality of academic services, institutional support, and student satisfaction, identified by Kara, Tanui, and Kalai (2016), play a crucial role in postgraduate students' success. These services directly influence early thesis completion, as students' engagement and satisfaction with their academic environment are essential for timely submission and graduation.

Nations that have expanded their higher education systems by investing more in research and development (R&D) activities possess a greater potential for accelerated growth within the globalised knowledge-driven economy (Varghese, 2013). R&D activities encompass both the generation of new knowledge and the integration of existing technology, which results in reduced production costs and enhanced product quality according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016). Olaoye, Ayinde, Ajewole, and Adebisi (2021) emphasise the critical role of R&D in forecasting economic advancement in Africa, asserting that investment in R&D and effective governance are essential for driving meaningful innovation and enduring economic growth. Consequently, African nations must enhance and fortify their research and development capabilities while ensuring efficient governance to achieve sustainable economic growth. This underscores the importance of academic writing within universities as a fundamental skill that contributes to the broader goals of higher education and national development.

Educators consistently strive to assist students in improving their writing skills, with a specific focus on academic writing. Academic writing is a formal style of expression employed in universities and scholarly work, requiring

adherence to grammatical and mechanical rules, precise vocabulary usage, and the development of analytical and critical thinking skills (Hanifi, 2020). Writing tasks, including essays, dissertations, and theses, are challenging for many students but are essential for academic success and the completion of postgraduate programmes. Despite the challenges, proficiency in academic writing is crucial for postgraduate students to meet the rigorous standards of higher education (Jeyaraj, 2018).

Jeyaraj (2018) highlights the complexities of postgraduate research writing, pointing out difficulties such as time management, developing writing skills, and accessing necessary resources. These challenges often hinder timely thesis completion. Similarly, Heide et al. (2019) reported that 28.7% of postgraduate students in Germany failed to complete their master's thesis, resulting in their inability to graduate. Factors influencing successful thesis completion include topic selection, consistent focus on the research subject, timely feedback from advisors, and adequate allocation of institutional resources. Nevill and Chen (2017) underscore the significance of financial assistance, noting that postgraduate students often struggle to balance employment, family responsibilities, and educational commitments.

Research in some African countries, including studies by Marnewick and Pretorius (2016) in South Africa and Ssenyonga and Nakiganda (2020) in Uganda, reveals similar challenges. While most postgraduate students complete coursework within the first year, they often encounter difficulties with the research component, leading to delays or non-completion. Systemic issues such as

poor time management, limited resources, and inadequate supervision are major contributing factors. Marnewick and Pretorius (2016) found that the average duration for completing master's studies in South Africa extended to 3.3 years, significantly exceeding the intended minimum of two years. Additionally, the average dropout rate for master's students stood at 46% for the 2008 cohort, highlighting systemic inefficiencies.

Institutional factors significantly contribute to delays in postgraduate completion. Boughey and McKenna (2021) identify barriers such as excessively high academic standards, alienating institutional cultures, and inadequate student support mechanisms. Mphekgwana, Mabila, Tirivangasi, and Makgopa (2020) found a negative correlation between dropout rates and factors such as gender, financial assistance, and campus residency, with students fitting these profiles less likely to abandon their studies. Insufficient funding is also noted as a critical impediment to student progress.

Globally, similar dynamics are observed. Kamonsarn and Person (2018) highlight the roles of gender, socio-economic status, and employment in study completion in Bangkok, with younger students and those employed within academic institutions completing their studies more swiftly. These findings underscore the global nature of the factors affecting postgraduate education.

Ghana's higher education system has undergone significant expansion, with the number of tertiary students doubling between 2009 and 2015 (Kamran, Liang, & Trines, 2019). However, the system faces challenges in meeting the growing demand for education while maintaining high standards. Abugre (2018)

identifies institutional policy shortcomings and inadequate infrastructure as pivotal obstacles to academic progress. Factors such as overcrowded facilities, excessive teaching loads, and limited research resources impede timely thesis completion. Essuman (2020) highlights personal factors such as family-related distractions and institutional aspects like resource availability as significant barriers to completing MPhil programmes at the University of Cape Coast (UCC).

Statement of the Problem

Studies on gender disparities in academia highlight important factors that could also affect MPhil students during their research and thesis writing. For instance, Bolen (2023) found that male students in certain academic colleges, particularly those in male-dominated STEM fields, reported lower satisfaction with their interactions with faculty and academic advisors. This dissatisfaction could negatively impact their academic persistence and overall experience, especially in thesis and research writing. The study suggests that differences in student satisfaction based on sex and academic college could contribute to challenges faced during the thesis writing process.

Moreover, Santos, Horta, and Amâncio (2021) highlighted that women's research agendas were generally less risky and more collaborative compared to their male counterparts, indicating a possible influence of gender on the approach to research and academic output. This may suggest that female MPhil students could face additional pressures related to expectations around research style or topics that are less aligned with the riskier, individualistic nature often associated with advanced thesis work.

Furthermore, Nielsen (2016) challenges the notion of meritocracy in academic performance, revealing that women were less likely to engage in international collaborations and more likely to publish single-authored articles, which may suggest that female MPhil students could face difficulties in networking and collaboration, potentially impacting their ability to complete their thesis in the same way their male peers might. These studies collectively point to gender differences in academic experiences, which could affect the challenges MPhil students face during their thesis writing, from satisfaction with academic support to the collaborative opportunities available for research.

Also, accommodation can significantly affect a student's ability to complete their thesis on time due to its impact on academic performance, behavior, and engagement. Kowalski (2022) found that students living in on-campus housing tend to perform better academically, as they are more engaged in both academic and social activities. This increased engagement could lead to better time management and academic support, which is crucial for thesis writing. Similarly, Djaba (2022) highlighted that students who lived on campus during their first and second academic years had higher GPAs and higher retention rates, suggesting that the structured and supportive environment of on-campus housing may foster an academic focus, helping students stay on track with their research and writing. On the other hand, López Turley and Wodtke (2010) demonstrated that while the overall effect of on-campus living on academic performance may not be universally significant, certain groups, such as Black students, benefited from higher GPAs when living on campus. This indicates that the residential

environment can provide varying levels of support and resources that can influence the time management and academic success of students, including their ability to complete a thesis.

Carlson (2023) further emphasized the positive correlation between on-campus living and student involvement, suggesting that students living on campus are more likely to be engaged in academic and extracurricular activities, which could contribute to better time management and a sense of responsibility necessary for completing demanding tasks such as thesis writing. Collectively, these studies suggest that the support, structure, and engagement opportunities offered by on-campus housing can positively influence a student's academic focus, ultimately aiding in the timely completion of their thesis.

Given these challenges, it is imperative to examine the personal, environmental, and programme-specific factors influencing thesis completion rates. These include individual capabilities, institutional support, and programme characteristics. Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving postgraduate education outcomes in Ghana.

Empirical evidence reveals that a substantial number of postgraduate students globally, and in Africa specifically, exceed the stipulated two-year timeframe for completing their theses (Nevill & Chen, 2017; Jeyaraj, 2018; Heide et al., 2019; Marnewick & Pretorius, 2016; Ssenyonga & Nakiganda, 2020). In Ghana, similar trends are observed, with many postgraduate students struggling to finish their studies within the expected timeframe (Abugre, 2018; Botha, 2018; Essuman, 2020; Nyagome & Milledzi, 2020).

Existing research highlights factors contributing to delayed completion, including financial constraints, family responsibilities, and institutional challenges such as inadequate supervision and limited resources. However, there is a lack of comprehensive data on the contemporary factors affecting the timely graduation rates of postgraduate master's students in Ghana. While some studies, such as Essuman (2020), provide valuable insights, they are limited by qualitative approaches and small sample sizes.

This study seeks to address these gaps by employing a mixed-method approach with a larger sample size to investigate the challenges encountered by current graduate students and those who have experienced delays. By engaging both groups, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing thesis completion rates at UCC, offering insights that can inform policies and interventions to improve academic success and graduate completion rates.

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to explore the factors contributing to the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. The primary objective was to gain insight into the following aspects:

1. Student-related factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing.
2. Supervisor-related factors that posed a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing.

3. Institutional-related factors that served as challenges to MPhil students during their thesis writing and completion.
4. Sex differences in student-related factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing
5. Examine how student-related challenges encountered during research and thesis writing differ based on MPhil students' accommodation status (on-campus vs. off-campus).
6. Differences in student-related factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing in relation to employment status.

Research Questions

Per the study's objectives, the following research questions guided the conduct of the research:

1. What student-related factors play a role in prolonging the completion of MPhil research and thesis writing?
2. What supervisor-related factors contribute to delays in MPhil students' research and thesis writing?
3. What institutional-related factors contribute to the extended duration of MPhil students' programme completion?

Research Hypotheses

1. H₀: There is no statistically significant difference between male and female MPhil students in terms of student-related factors influencing thesis completion.

H₁: There is a statistically significant difference between male and female MPhil students in terms of student-related factors influencing thesis completion.

2. H₀: there is no statistically significant difference in student-related factors influencing thesis completion between MPhil students residing on-campus and those off-campus.

H₁: There is a statistically significant difference in student-related factors influencing thesis completion between MPhil students residing on-campus and those off-campus.

3. H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in student-related factors influencing thesis completion between employed and unemployed MPhil students.

H₁: There is a statistically significant difference in student-related factors influencing thesis completion between employed and unemployed MPhil students.

Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study are expected to shed light on the contemporary factors that influence postgraduate completion rates. By identifying these factors, governmental bodies, faculty leaders, supervisors, and the school of graduate studies can implement relevant strategies to enhance the graduation rates of postgraduate students. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the findings will serve as a valuable resource for UCC's administration in increasing awareness and

improving graduation rates not only within the University of Cape Coast but potentially across other Ghanaian universities at the postgraduate level.

This research is also intended to provide insights that could benefit graduate students currently enrolled in postgraduate research studies, aiding them in addressing study-related variables that impact the completion of their theses. In addition, the results could provide crucial information for funding organisations, enabling them to make well-informed decisions regarding the financial support of graduate students. Moreover, the perspectives and reflections shared by postgraduate students will contribute to enhancing their understanding of research supervision techniques.

The study's results are anticipated to have a positive impact on various stakeholders, ranging from educational institutions and government bodies to graduate students themselves, providing valuable insights to foster improved postgraduate completion rates and academic success.

Delimitations

Geographically, the research centred on the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The scope of the study was delimited to MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast, with a specific emphasis on those enrolled in the Faculty of Educational Foundations. The research included students who had surpassed the designated duration for the Master of Philosophy programme, spanning a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 7 years. The study is also delimited to descriptive and inferential statistical tools for quantitative analysis, thematic

analysis for qualitative data, and purposive and stratified random sampling. It also engaged only supervisors who supervised the postgraduate MPhil theses.

Limitations

The findings may be specific to the University of Cape Coast and the Faculty of Education, making it challenging to generalise the results to other universities or disciplines. Different institutions and faculties may have unique challenges. The study's sample size may be limited, which could impact the representativeness of the findings.

Definition of Terms

Institutional factors: Conditions within the University of Cape Coast institution that influence the educational experience, such as policies, resources, and support services.

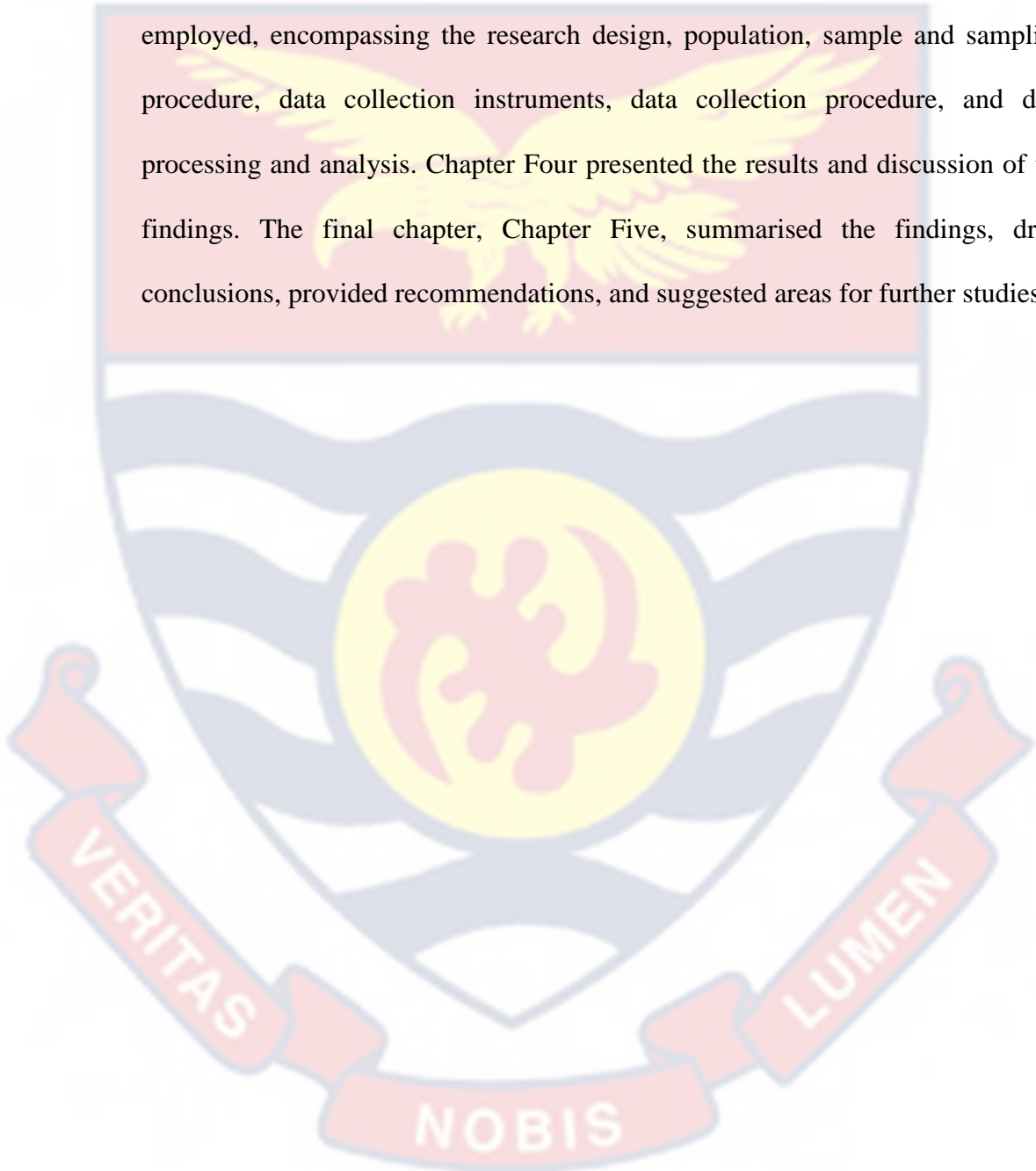
Student-related factors: Characteristics and behaviours of individual post-graduate students, like motivation and study habits, that affect their academic performance and success.

Supervisor-related challenges: Difficulties or obstacles in the relationship between a post-graduate student and their research supervisor, which can impact research thesis.

Organisation of the Study

The study was organised into five chapters. The first chapter, serving as the introduction, covered the background of the study, statement of the problem, the study's purpose, research questions and hypotheses, significance of the study, delimitations, limitations, definition of terms, and concluded with the organisation

of the study. This was followed by chapter two, which reviewed an extensive body of related literature, including the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and empirical review. Chapter three addressed the research methods employed, encompassing the research design, population, sample and sampling procedure, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, and data processing and analysis. Chapter Four presented the results and discussion of the findings. The final chapter, Chapter Five, summarised the findings, drew conclusions, provided recommendations, and suggested areas for further studies.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the factors influencing the graduation rates of MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. The research comprised three key segments: a theoretical analysis of prominent retention theories, including Vincent Tinto's model, Jiranek's Dissertation research completion triangle, and Kolb, Boyatzi, and Mainemelis' Experiential learning theory; a conceptual review focusing on postgraduate studies, completion, and student retention mechanisms; and an empirical review presenting findings from the review of previous studies.

Theoretical Review

Vincent Tinto's model of student retention (1975, 1993, 2010)

Professor Vincent Tinto occupies a prominent position as a prolific and influential theorist in the realm of student affairs, particularly concerning the subjects of student retention and persistence. His work has given rise to the prevailing sociological theory on these matters. One of Tinto's pivotal contributions is his 1975 research article titled "Dropout from Higher Education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research," which has acted as a catalyst for extensive research on student retention and achievement globally. In this article, Tinto introduced a model that revolves around student attrition (commonly referred to as "dropout"), shedding light on the dynamics of student retention an`

d success in the context of higher education. Tinto's framework suggests that a student's integration into both the academic and social aspects of university life, as well as their commitment to their studies and the institution's goals, significantly impact their likelihood of persevering in their educational pursuits (Tinto, 1975; McCubbin, 2003). His objective was to clarify how the university environment shapes students' journeys within the institution, which he accomplished by devising a "longitudinal model of institutional departure" grounded in an input-process-output framework (Tinto, 1993, p. 114).

Vincent Tinto is a prominent figure in the field of student retention theory. His work, first introduced in 1975 and later revised in 1989 and 1993, has had a significant and enduring impact. Initially, his focus was on addressing student retention challenges in four-year colleges, but over the past four decades, Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" (1993) has gained widespread acceptance within the education community. This model highlights three primary factors contributing to student attrition: academic difficulties, the struggle to align educational and career aspirations, and a lack of effective integration, both academically and socially, within the institution. The key determinant of whether a student stays enrolled, or leaves is their ability to establish a strong sense of belonging and integration within the university community. Several factors have been identified as critical influencers of retention and are closely linked to sustained student commitment. These elements encompass the students' initial obligations, camaraderie from peers, enthusiastic participation in the university's academic community, and the caliber and regularity of faculty-student exchanges

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1993). It is important to note that these factors' impact can vary among educational institutions. Therefore, higher education institutions are encouraged to assess the unique characteristics of their student body carefully. The most effective and valuable retention strategies evolve and are grounded in coordinated efforts involving continuous research, assessment, and policy development.

In 1975, Vincent Tinto developed an interactive model to provide insights into the process of students leaving an educational institution. At the core of this model are two pivotal factors: commitment to academic goals and commitment to the institution itself. These elements, in turn, are shaped by two critical aspects: academic integration and social integration. Academic integration relates to how a student perceives their progress and intellectual growth, while social integration pertains to the quality of a student's interactions with peers and faculty (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Tinto proposed that as integration increases, both academically and socially, a student's dedication to their educational objectives and their active involvement within the institution also increase. In contrast, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) expanded on this concept, suggesting that negative interactions and experiences can diminish integration, ultimately leading to a student's departure. Tinto's theory about students leaving can be summarised as follows: students are more likely to remain in an institution when they have clear personal goals and perceive the institution as a valuable means of achieving these goals. Tinto's retention theory encompasses a process that unfolds over time, involving a student's academic potential and the social dynamics within the

institution. This results in a directional model rooted in the ongoing shifts (Kerby, 2015).

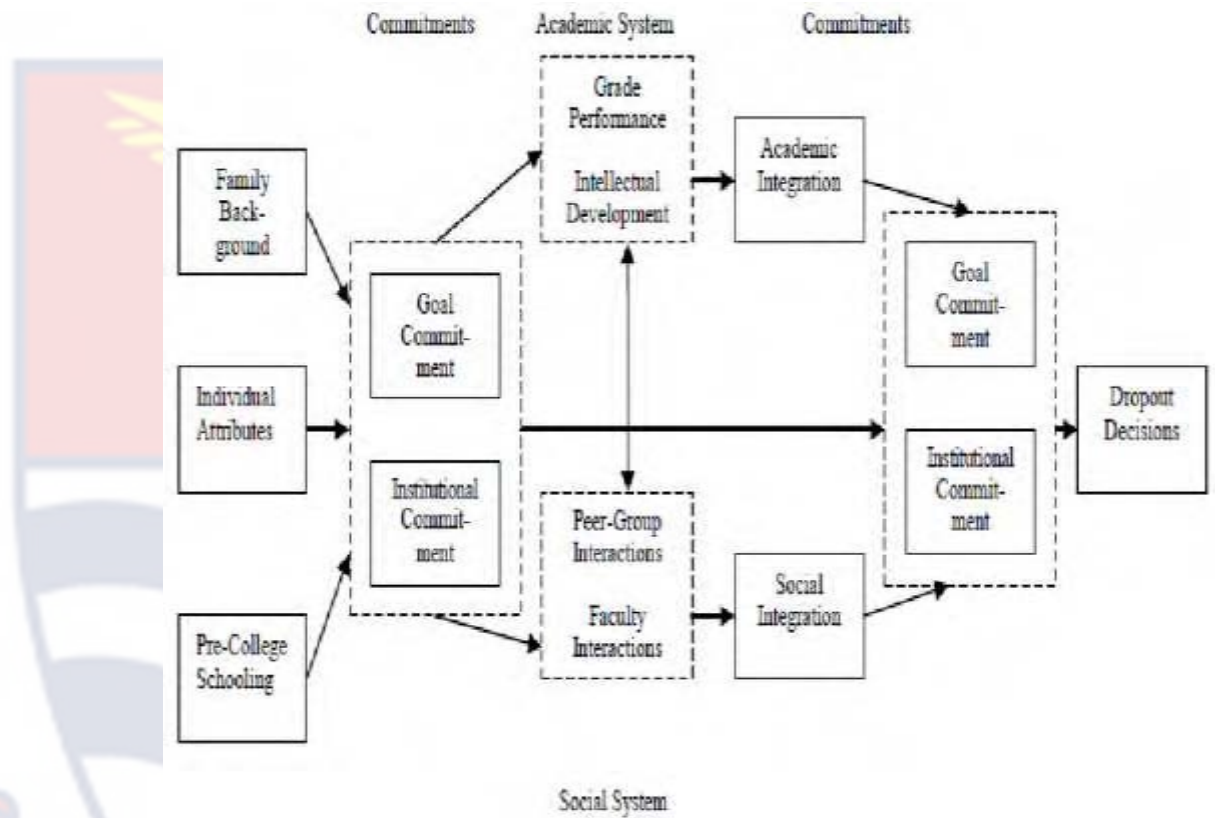


Figure 1: Tinto's Students Integration Model (1975)

As per Tinto's 1975 theory, when students commence their university journey, they carry with them a foundational set of characteristics. These encompass elements such as family background, which includes factors like social status, parental education, and expectations. Furthermore, individual attributes like gender, race, age, and academic aptitude, in conjunction with their previous educational history, including high school performance and coursework, also play a pivotal role. In combination, these attributes shape a student's initial dedication, both towards their educational aspirations and the particular university they are enrolling in. Goal commitments signify the extent of a student's devotion

and motivation to attain a university degree in a broader context. In contrast, institutional commitments indicate the level of a student's determination to graduate from a specific university. These commitments are not stagnant; they undergo transformation as students spend time at the university and are influenced by their integration into the academic and social systems of the institution. Consequently, these dual forms of integration result in the development of new levels of commitment, both towards their academic objectives and the institution itself.

Furthermore, the initial commitments a student makes to their academic and institutional goals have a significant role in shaping their subsequent commitments. Tinto emphasises that, in the end, it is the interaction between a student's dedication to completing their college education and their allegiance to the institution that determines whether they continue their studies or choose to leave college (Tinto, 1975, p.96). To illustrate the intricate process of student integration, Tinto (1993) draws on the concept of rites of passage as described by Van Gennep, which consists of three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. Van Gennep's theory, as presented in "The Rites of Passage" (1960), explores how individuals navigate societal changes over time while maintaining stability amid these transitions. Tinto (1988) clarifies that the reason for referencing Van Gennep's work is to provide a framework for understanding the gradual journey of student persistence in college and, by extension, the evolving process of students leaving college over time. Tinto suggests that

students are more likely to leave the university when their progression through these stages remains incomplete.

The start of a college journey is called the "separation" stage. During this time, students begin to distance themselves from their old communities, such as friends from high school, family, and the place they used to live. These old communities often have different values, rules, and ways of doing things compared to the university. So, students may need to make some changes and maybe even stop following the old rules to fit in better at the university. If students are going to a college near where they live and do not stay on campus, they might not have to make as many changes, but they could still find it hard to fit in with the new college community both academically and socially (Tinto, 1988, 1993).

The second phase of the student experience is called "transition," and it happens either during or after the separation stage. During this time, students are no longer as connected to their old communities, but they haven't fully adjusted to the university environment yet. It is a time when many students might choose to leave the university voluntarily due to the challenges that arise during this transition period. However, a student's determination to achieve their educational goals and their loyalty to the institution hold significant sway in this stage. If a student is resolutely committed to their educational objectives and strongly connected to the university, they can effectively navigate the challenges posed by the transition phase (Tinto, 1988).

The final phase of the university experience, known as "incorporation," represents a crucial stage in students' academic journey. However, it can only take place after they have successfully navigated the earlier stages of separation and transition, which typically occur in the early stages of their university life. During the incorporation phase, the primary objective is for students to become fully integrated into the university community. Unlike the traditional societies where incorporation is often marked by formal rituals and ceremonies, modern university settings may lack such structured processes.

To facilitate this integration, universities play a pivotal role in providing students with a variety of formal and informal mechanisms to connect with the university community. These mechanisms encompass activities such as residence hall associations, student clubs, extracurricular opportunities, and faculty lectures. By engaging in these activities and taking part in the university's broader social and academic life, students are better equipped to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to the institution.

Several critical factors contribute to students' decision to remain in university and successfully complete their academic journeys. These factors include their initial expectations and goals, the support and guidance they receive from faculty and staff, the constructive feedback they obtain on their progress, and their level of involvement in academic and social activities. By nurturing positive expectations, providing robust support systems, offering effective feedback, and encouraging active student involvement, universities can enhance the likelihood of student retention and academic success. This, in turn, ensures

that students not only persist through their university experience but also thrive in their educational pursuits.

Student expectations play a pivotal role in their actions and behaviours within their academic environment. These expectations are moulded by their anticipation of the environment they are entering and their perceptions of themselves because of their experiences in that environment. While some students might have a clear sense of what to expect from higher education, others might not. The institution itself, through various means such as statements and actions by its members, administrators, faculty, and staff, directly and indirectly shapes student expectations. Moreover, the influence of student peer groups and external significant figures beyond the campus also contributes to these expectations. The institution's set standards for the quality and level of effort required for successful performance also influence student retention. Notably, having high expectations is crucial for student success, while low expectations lead to failure. Research into motivation and academic performance has highlighted the significant impact of expectations on student learning and achievement (Schilling & Schilling, 1999). Students internalize these expectations and are influenced by the extent to which these expectations validate their presence and participation on campus.

Support is an equally significant factor alongside expectations. While having high expectations is important, it is equally crucial to provide the necessary support for students to attain those expectations. Lacking sufficient backing, whether it is in terms of academics, social aspects, or sometimes even financial support, numerous students encounter difficulties in meeting the

university's expectations and excelling in their college journey (Filkins & Doyle, 2002; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). For a significant portion of these students, access to academic assistance comes in the form of fundamental skills courses, commonly referred to as developmental or remedial education programmes. Additionally, they may utilise resources such as tutoring, study groups, and academic support initiatives like supplemental instruction and summer bridge programmes. These types of academic support play a pivotal role in enabling these students to succeed in the college environment (Ryan & Glenn, 2003; Upcraft et al., 2004; Peterfreund, Rath, Xenos, & Bayliss, 2008).

The retention of students in educational institutions is not solely determined by their academic performance; it is a complex process influenced by a range of internal and external social factors that interact within the campus environment. Beyond just grades and coursework, students' ability to persist in their education is shaped by their social experiences. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among students, especially the younger ones, who reside on campus. They find themselves navigating a series of social adaptations, encompassing both their pre-existing social ties, such as family and friends, and the establishment of entirely new social connections with fellow members of the campus community. These social adjustments are crucial milestones in the college experience (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Skahill, 2002; Somera & Ellis, 1996). The formation of these fresh social networks offers several benefits to students. They provide stability in an

otherwise unfamiliar environment, predictability in social interactions, and foster positive emotions. These connections can serve as a support system, offering companionship and assistance during the challenges of academic life.

On the flip side, when students lack the necessary social support, it can lead to feelings of marginalization or even isolation. These emotions can result in difficulties adapting to the new environment and, ultimately, may lead to students withdrawing from their academic pursuits. This is especially true for underrepresented students who find themselves in the minority on campus, as they may face additional challenges related to cultural or social differences (Cabrera et al., 1999).

Financial assistance plays a significant role in influencing student retention and persistence, particularly among individuals from low-income backgrounds (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Heller, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The impact of financial support on retention can be viewed in two ways: direct and indirect. In the latter context, it pertains to how varying levels of aid, including loans and grants, affect the choice of college and the types of involvement during enrolment (Heller, 1996). Specifically, for students with limited financial resources, receiving less financial aid is associated with enrolling in 2-year institutions, which in turn correlates with lower retention rates and eventual degree completion (Bettinger, 2004). Similarly, reduced financial support often leads to students attending part-time or working while in college, both of which, all else being equal, diminish the likelihood of persistence and graduation.

Assessment and feedback systems play a crucial role in fostering student retention. Environments that offer thorough assessment and regular feedback on student progress enhance the chances of student success. These settings enable faculty, staff, and students to receive continuous feedback about their performance, facilitating necessary adjustments to support student achievement. Feedback is particularly valuable when it introduces a slight cognitive dissonance between a student's perception of their performance and the insights provided by the feedback. This dissonance is thought to trigger more profound changes in behaviour (Carroll, 1988). When faculty members consistently gather feedback from students and share their evaluations, students tend to exhibit enhancements across various dimensions, including cognitive and developmental aspects (Guskin, 1994; Boud, 2001).

Engagement in academic or social activities does not occur in isolation but within particular social and cultural contexts. This involvement includes faculty, staff, and students, all of whom attribute significance to these interactions based on their values. The impact of engagement on student outcomes is not solely reliant on the level of participation but rather on how these interactions cultivate significant social and academic connections, fostering a profound "sense of belonging" (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003; Harris, 2006).

While this holds true for all students, it is particularly crucial for retaining underrepresented and low-income students in settings where the majority is more affluent (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Ostrove & Long, 2007). Thus, student retention is influenced not solely by the presence of involvement but by how students

perceive and interpret their involvement. However, it is important to clarify that the absence of any involvement can lead to academic and social isolation, which can lead to withdrawal.

Jiraneck Dissertation research completion triangle (2010)

Closely connected to Tinto's Integration Models and adapted variations is the Dissertation Completion Triangle devised by Jiraneck. This model concentrates on a fundamental aspect of postgraduate studies, specifically research, and is founded upon extensive research conducted to ascertain completion times. These studies were conducted in both Australia and the UK by researchers such as Spear (1999), Wright and Cochrane (2000), Wright (2003), Kearns, Gardiner and Marshall (2008), and Jiraneck (2010). The findings from these investigations revealed a range of factors that impact the time taken for research-based Master's and Doctoral students to complete their studies or attain candidacy. These factors encompass the academic discipline being pursued, the mode of attendance (either part-time or full-time), the availability of scholarships, and the technical obstacles faced during the research journey. Jiraneck (2010) categorises all the identified factors from these studies into three overarching groups, which are deemed essential for the successful execution of a research project. Several factors significantly influence a student's research journey. Firstly, the student's unique qualities and personal circumstances come into play, encompassing their academic capabilities, financial situation, language proficiency, interpersonal skills, and the balance between their persistence and potentially counterproductive behaviours (Kearns, Gardiner, & Marshall, 2008). Secondly, the nature and

quality of supervision play a crucial role. This includes factors like the frequency of meetings, the support received from peers and fellow researchers, and the guidance provided by mentors. Lastly, the availability of resources and facilities for the research project is paramount. This encompasses access to culture collections, analytical equipment, and the necessary expertise, among other things. All these elements together shape the student's research experience and ultimately impact their success in their academic pursuits.

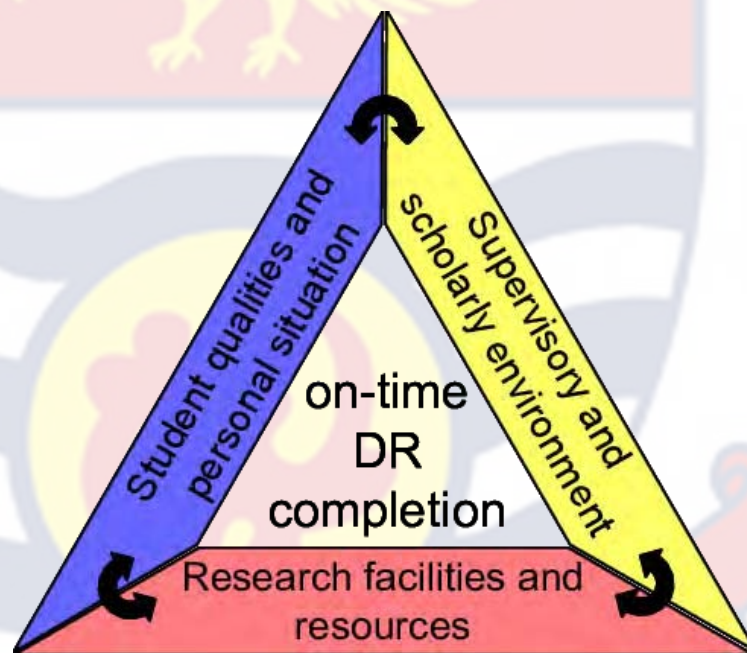


Figure 2: Jiranek Dissertation Research Completion Triangle

The Jiranek Dissertation Research Completion Triangle emphasises that the presence of all its components is crucial to prevent project failure. The significance of specific factors in determining attrition or completion differs based on each student's unique context, further complicated by the interconnectedness of the three categories of factors (Wright, 2003). Nonetheless, it is imperative to identify the contributing factors that play a pivotal role in supporting the timely

completion of dissertation research. The impact of these factors on an individual's ability to complete their research is contingent on the student's personal circumstances and the intricate interplay among these elements (Wright, 2003).

The principal determinants of progress can be categorised into two main groups: personal or student-related factors and institutional factors. However, some models underscore the paramount importance of supervisory arrangements in the progress equation for research postgraduate students. These models elucidate that students' level of academic or social integration, their satisfaction, and their decisions regarding whether to continue or discontinue their studies are influenced by personal factors, such as prior qualifications, individual attributes, family background, financial status, goals, intentions, and expectations about the institution, as well as institutional factors, encompassing teaching and learning support facilities, the institutional environment, and supervision arrangements. Furthermore, it is worth noting the significant interconnectedness among these various factors and their collective impact on the degree to which students become integrated into the academic environment, subsequently shaping their choice to persevere or withdraw.

Kolbs Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

David A. Kolb holds a significant position in the field of education due to his invaluable contribution in providing a strong theoretical foundation, a characteristic that is sometimes lacking in the works of many other authors in the field (Holman, Pavlica, & Thorpe, 1997). Kolb, in his work from 1984 (p. 38), postulates that "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the

transformation of experience." This statement forms the core idea behind his Experiential Learning theory.

Kolb's Experiential Learning theory offers a structured and sequential approach to curriculum design, offering valuable insights into how to enhance student learning within individual learning sessions or across entire courses. This theory introduces a cyclical learning model that encompasses four distinct stages, which are often referred to as sensing/feeling, watching/reflecting, thinking, and doing (Fielding, 1994). These stages are essential components of the experiential learning process.

One of the critical aspects of this theory is the recognition of the connection between these stages and different learning styles. Individuals exhibit various preferred learning styles, and understanding these styles represents the initial step in making students aware of alternative learning approaches. By acknowledging and addressing these diverse learning styles, educators can promote greater adaptability among students, enabling them to navigate the varying demands of different learning scenarios effectively (Gibbs, 1988).

Teachers should also be aware of their own learning preferences to develop effective teaching strategies. When the teaching style does not align well with the student's learning style, it can hinder the learning process (Fielding, 1994). Although the learning cycle can start at any point, it is recommended to follow the stages sequentially. The learning cycle generates feedback, forming the foundation for new actions and evaluating their outcomes. Students should go through the cycle multiple times, envisioning it as a spiral of repeated iterations.

Kolb conceptualises action research as a continuous "spiral of action and research," encompassing four essential phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992b, p. 11). Race (1993) has introduced an alternative interpretation of Kolb's model, expressed in more informal language. He labels the stages as: desiring, doing, receiving feedback, and processing. One of the authors employed this adapted model to investigate the learning process among diverse groups of geography students and staff (Healey, 1998).

The 'experiential learning theory' underscores the significance of hands-on activities like fieldwork and lab sessions, but it does not prioritise these forms of learning exclusively. The key is to methodically guide the learner through each stage of the cycle, establishing meaningful connections between them. The model provides a direct critique of highly theoretical programmes or courses that disregard students' previous experiences or knowledge. It also takes issue with experiential activities lacking proper preparation for the experience and/or inadequate opportunities for reflection on the experience and its relevance to broader reading or the more theoretical aspects of the course (Jenkins, 1997).

Kolb's two continua are typically represented using a framework with an east-west axis known as the Processing Continuum, which illustrates how we approach a task. The north-south axis is termed the Perception Continuum, which describes our emotional response and how we think and feel about the task. Kolb's theory suggests that we cannot simultaneously engage both variables on a single axis, like thinking and feeling. Instead, our learning style is determined by the combination of these two choices. To better comprehend Kolb's learning

styles, it is often helpful to visualise them as a two-by-two matrix, where each learning style emerges from a blend of two preferred approaches or orientations.

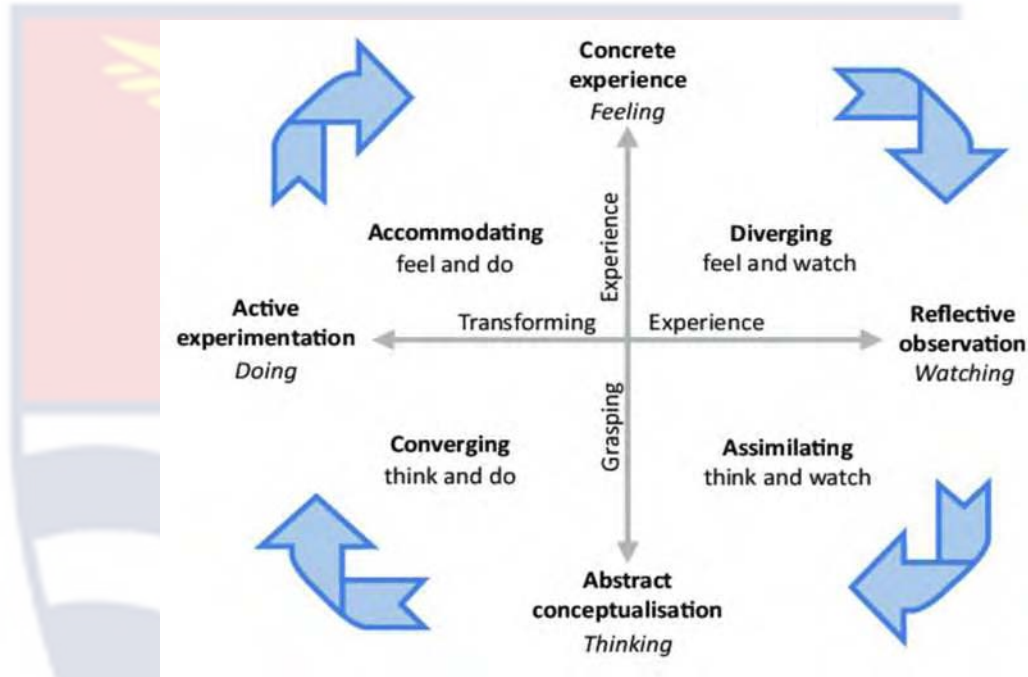


Figure 3: Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning

Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning encompasses four primary stages that illustrate the transformation of experience through reflection into concepts, guiding subsequent active investigation and the selection of new encounters. The stages are as follows:

1. **Concrete experience (CE):** In this stage, individuals engage in activities outside the classroom setting that are novel to them. This could involve encountering new situations or reinterpreting existing experiences considering newly acquired concepts.
2. **Reflective observation (RO):** Following the concrete experience, learners contemplate the significance of the activity or how to navigate within this

newfound encounter. This phase involves reflecting on the new experience in the context of their existing knowledge, with a focus on identifying any disparities between experience and understanding.

3. **Abstract conceptualisation (AC):** During this stage, learners formulate theories to comprehend the concrete experience. Reflection gives rise to fresh ideas or adaptations of existing abstract concepts, representing the learning derived from the experience.
4. **Active experimentation (AE):** This step entails putting theories to the test. The newly developed or modified concepts lead to experimentation, where individuals apply their ideas to real-world situations to observe the resulting outcomes.

These four stages constitute a continuous cycle, with learners progressing from one stage to the next, continuously building upon their experiences and knowledge.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is grounded in two fundamental axes, which are the 'abstract-concrete' axis (AC-CE) and the 'active-reflective' axis (AE-RO). These axes represent the primary modes through which individuals engage in the learning process. The 'abstract-concrete' axis pertains to how individuals perceive and absorb new information or experiences. It encapsulates a spectrum of approaches, ranging from engaging the senses and emotions to understand information in a 'concrete' manner, to thinking 'abstractly' by employing logic and reason to comprehend the same information.

On the other hand, the 'active-reflective' axis addresses how individuals process or adapt the information they have comprehended. This axis illustrates how learners transform and make sense of their experiences, encompassing the 'active' engagement with the material and the subsequent 'reflective' processing of that material. These dimensions, as described by Smith and Kolb in 1986, provide a framework for understanding how individuals engage with the learning process, from initially perceiving information to subsequently making sense of it.

Kolb (1984) proposed that students demonstrate preferences for specific aspects within the stages of experiential learning, leading to the development of learning styles that operate across two facets of the process. He posited that students tend to lean towards ways of learning, with their preferred style representing an inclination rather than a rigid rule. While individuals may adapt their learning styles depending on the situation, they typically exhibit preferences for specific learning behaviours. Kolb identified four distinct learning styles, each linked to a unique problem-solving approach. Divergers, for instance, approach situations from various angles, placing a strong emphasis on idea generation and brainstorming. On the other hand, Assimilators tend to employ inductive reasoning and excel at developing theoretical models. Convergents prefer hypothetical-deductive reasoning as their primary method of problem-solving. Lastly, Accommodators are inclined to execute plans and experiments, adapting swiftly to immediate circumstances. These four learning styles offer insights into how individuals approach and tackle learning tasks, showcasing the diversity of cognitive strategies employed in the process.

The selection of a specific learning style is influenced by an individual's competencies, surroundings, and learning history (Nulty & Barrett, 1996). According to Kolb, learners achieve better outcomes when the learning content aligns with their preferred style.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) can be linked to the challenges encountered by students in the context of thesis writing by exploring the various stages of the experiential learning cycle. During the concrete experience stage, students might grapple with difficulties arising from limited practical exposure to research and scholarly writing. These challenges could stem from insufficient training or inadequate guidance from supervisors. In the reflective observation stage, students may encounter obstacles when critically analysing research findings, relating them to existing literature, and crafting meaningful conclusions. The abstract conceptualisation stage may present hurdles in developing and applying theoretical concepts, integrating research outcomes, and constructing a cohesive argument within the thesis. Lastly, the active experimentation stage could present challenges in implementing research plans, conducting data analysis, and managing time efficiently. Overall, Kolb's theory underscores the significance of offering students opportunities for experiential learning, reflective practice, and the cultivation of conceptual understanding to address the obstacles they face during the thesis writing process.

Conceptual Review

Postgraduate Studies

The global higher education sector is facing increasing pressure to produce skilled and innovative individuals capable of driving national development efforts. Postgraduate education holds significant value within national economies, as postgraduate degree holders are expected to generate and disseminate knowledge, contributing to the advancement of intellectual boundaries. A postgraduate degree, typically granted by universities, signifies the highest level of academic accomplishment in a specific discipline. Among the available postgraduate options, degrees like the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) are acknowledged for their significant emphasis on research. The choice to pursue postgraduate studies, be it MPhil or Ph.D., stems from a variety of motivations. Ho, Kember, and Hong (2012) observe that these motivations encompass educational enrichment, career progression, future career success, professional development, and personal interest in skill refinement.

Postgraduate studies encompass a process of growth in which students are tasked with evolving into scholars, facilitated by the institution's thoughtful guidance and support. Postgraduate students, often individuals with prior academic experience, embark on an academic career trajectory after completing their bachelor's degree or higher education. These students, pursuing both masters and Doctoral qualifications, aim to enhance their employability and advance in their professional paths. Universities globally are inclined to increase their postgraduate enrolment numbers, as this contributes to their financial resources

(McCulloch & Thomas, 2012). Postgraduate student demographics encompass a wide range of variables, including age, cultural background, experience, and enrolment status (part-time or full-time, on-campus or remote), often without the aid of scholarships or funding. Research students face pressure to meet candidacy deadlines, publish research, balance familial and work commitments, and acquire a diverse skill set that can bolster their competitiveness in the job market.

According to Kaur and Sindnu (2009), there is a growing trend in research within society, largely attributed to the significant role played by postgraduate degree holders in driving national economic development. The duration for fulfilling MPhil and Ph.D. degrees can vary among universities, typically spanning two years for MPhil and three years for Ph.D., although these timelines may differ depending on the institution. These programmes offer the flexibility of pursuing them on either a full-time or part-time basis. At the postgraduate levels 7 and 8, the curriculum necessitates students to develop research skills, which are assessed through the submission of a thesis, an examination, or a combination of both. These specialised degrees include the Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). Additionally, graduate students often need to enrol in courses appropriate to their research field, which may encompass subjects such as advanced research methods and computational analysis.

Attaining an MPhil or Ph.D. primarily entails submitting a comprehensive and innovative research document within the chosen field, typically presented in the form of a thesis. This thesis undergoes a rigorous evaluation and validation process by external examiners, often through an oral defense examination. It is

worth noting that Ameen and Warraich (2014) pointed out that the University of Karachi introduced a Ph.D. programme with a thesis requirement in 1967, whereas the University of the Punjab Lahore pioneered regular coursework-based MPhil and Ph.D. programmes with thesis requirements in 2005. The submission of a well-structured thesis or dissertation is a pivotal requirement for attaining postgraduate MPhil and Ph.D. degrees through the pursuit of original research. Furthermore, holders of such degrees are expected to excel and assume influential roles within both public and private sector institutions. Pearson (2005) underscored the challenging nature of the thesis completion process, highlighting that writing the thesis poses a significant difficulty for students aiming to obtain their postgraduate degrees. Mutula (2009) outlines four key purposes of postgraduate research:

1. Testing Assumptions/Observations: Postgraduate research involves questioning assumptions and rigorously examining observations. This process ensures the credibility and reliability of research, fostering trust within the academic community.

2. Providing Theoretical Frameworks: Postgraduate research contributes by creating theoretical frameworks that help readers understand complex information. These frameworks, often derived from extensive literature reviews and data analysis, facilitate deeper comprehension, and influence subsequent studies.

3. Creating New Knowledge: Postgraduate research is a creative endeavour that generates new knowledge. Researchers contribute to human

understanding by making new discoveries, developing innovative theories, and providing ground-breaking insights.

4. Sharing and Implementing Findings: Research findings should be disseminated widely and applied in practical contexts. Effective communication and implementation bridge the gap between theory and practice, making research a catalyst for positive change.

Postgraduate students encounter various challenges. Komba (2016) highlights several shortcomings among postgraduate students when selecting a thesis topic, including issues related to area and topic choice, as well as the benefits and implications of the chosen thesis. Collins (2012) notes that thesis writing is a technical endeavour that demands critical thinking, which pertains to students facing numerous challenges while composing a thesis for their postgraduate degree programme. Many graduate students are mature or distant learners, and their needs differ from those of residential and undergraduate students (Humphrey & McCarthy, 1999). Part-time students find it challenging to balance their academic and professional responsibilities, often experiencing inadequate support, and understanding from their supervisors, inflexible programme structures, and a sense of isolation (Lessing & Lessing, 2004). Anxiety is a common experience among graduate students due to uncertainties about expectations and assessment procedures (Lovitts, 2005; Malfroy, 2005).

Postgraduate students face a range of obstacles, including family commitments, work obligations, and financial constraints. These challenges can influence their academic achievements, particularly since a significant number of

these students are managing both employment and marital responsibilities. Many postgraduate students rely on self-funding or scholarships, underscoring the importance of completing their studies promptly and within the prescribed timeframe. Numerous studies consistently reveal that a notable proportion of graduate students encounter difficulties in meeting the established deadlines for degree completion (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011). Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, with a primary concern often revolving around the quality of information and support services offered by educational institutions. These students' unique needs often come into conflict as their academic journeys are characterised by a high degree of self-reliance. Additionally, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may possess specific requirements due to the challenges presented by a technology-driven environment and the need for autonomous research (Lessing & Schulze, 2002). These considerations are pivotal when devising targeted resources for information and support tailored to graduate students.

Concept of Completion

University students consolidate their research endeavours, guided by their research supervisors, into a comprehensive document known as a thesis or dissertation. This compilation stands as a testament to their original scholarly contributions. Employing their utmost critical thinking abilities, these scholars strive to complete their work, demonstrating their proficiency in documenting their research (Smith & Krathwohl, 2005). This intricate process nurtures logical thought processes and enhances problem-solving capabilities among research

scholars, empowering them to autonomously undertake research endeavours by identifying and formulating research questions pertinent to their chosen area of study. The thesis serves as a reflection of students' distinctive attributes, encompassing their knowledge, competencies, and personal values (Matin & Khan, 2017).

Postgraduate research is often characterised as an intricate phase of training that guides students towards becoming independent researchers and integrating them into the academic community (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014). This period of training typically occurs under the watchful guidance of experienced academics (Mutula, 2009) and involves a thorough, methodical, and dedicated exploration of various aspects of education. The primary aim is to discover, refine, and interpret facts, applications, and theories (Bently & Kyvik, 2013; Ifedili & Ominnu, 2012). The knowledge gained through research endeavours contributes to the enhancement of educational outcomes and the refinement of skills, ultimately leading to improved livelihoods and national progress. As proposed by Mendoza (2007), research students undergo a dual process of integration, encompassing academic assimilation as well as personal and professional growth.

Upon the completion of coursework and the successful fulfilment of comprehensive or qualifying examinations, university students embark on their research journey. This phase of their academic pursuit entails selecting an area of personal interest, in consultation with their research supervisor, as well as designing and conducting a study that considers an accessible population (Komba,

2016). The process of composing a thesis carries substantial importance in academic research, especially for postgraduate students working towards MPhil and Ph.D. degrees, as it represents a crucial milestone on their path to achieving these advanced academic qualifications. Additionally, it contributes to the expansion of knowledge within a specific field of study.

The timely accomplishment of postgraduate degrees is of paramount importance across all disciplines, facilitating constructive participation in the broader national economy. However, numerous postgraduate students encounter delays in obtaining their MPhil and Ph.D. degrees, primarily due to the obstacles associated with thesis writing. Throughout this phase, research students grapple with a diverse range of obstacles that extend beyond the selection of a supervisor and research topic. Challenges encompass the dynamics of supervisor-student relationships and the availability of institutional support. Issues also arise in selecting an appropriate research design and effectively gathering and presenting data in the form of a comprehensive report (Lessing & Schulz, 2003). The final stages of the research process, including the composition of the report, present a plethora of difficulties for students (Huang, 2010). These challenges may be tied to personal concerns and experiences while translating knowledge into practice, demonstrating commitment to their work, managing socioeconomic circumstances, honing communication skills, and effectively managing stress during this critical period (Bocar, 2009)

Despite observing a rise in the enrolment of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast between the academic years 2006/2007 and 2014/2015,

Nyagome and Milledzi (2020) noted a discrepancy between the enrolment figures and the graduation rate. Their study uncovered that a substantial portion of Ph.D. students, approximately 76%, who were admitted during this period failed to complete their programmes. These findings echo the assertion made by Pyhalto et al. (2012) that while Ph.D. students tend to be a carefully chosen group, not all of them successfully graduate from or finish their programmes. Wendler et al. (2012) support these observations by indicating that attrition from doctoral programmes remains notably elevated in North American educational institutions, with around 50% of students withdrawing from their studies over the past half-century.

The outcome further aligns with Hasrati's (2015) report, which indicated that attrition rates among doctoral students fluctuate between 30% and 50%, contingent on the discipline or the specific country. The successful culmination of a postgraduate dissertation is influenced by a multitude of factors. These encompass both student-related aspects (such as personal challenges and academic proficiency) and institutional factors. The personal realm of a postgraduate student exerts a substantial influence on their capacity to accomplish a research dissertation successfully. Aspects encompassing personal relationships, familial obligations, financial circumstances, occupational commitments, and health status wield significant effects on this front. Additionally, a waning interest in the chosen research topic and shifts in career aspirations also bear notable consequences (Wright, 2003). Other factors tied to the student that impact the completion of research dissertations encompass the depth of their knowledge,

previous experiences, dedication, socioeconomic conditions, communication prowess, stress coping abilities, and aptitude for time management (Bocar, 2009). It is highlighted by Matin and Khan (2017) that failing to adhere to the research schedule can lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and despondency during the research phase.

As per Shafie et al. (2010), thesis writing is considered an art within the realm of postgraduate education, often serving as a pivotal assessment before degree completion. An evident challenge, recurrent in the literature, is the sense of isolation experienced by postgraduate students during the thesis writing phase (Manathunga, 2005; Wisker, Robinson & Shacham, 2007). This phase is inherently solitary, with students collaborating closely with one or two supervisors. Wright (2003) highlights that many postgraduate students perceive their thesis writing journey as isolating and, at times, even emotionally taxing. A significant hurdle identified by Hofman and Berg (2000) is the scarcity of financial resources, posing a major obstacle to research endeavours. Personal adversities, including health and financial concerns, also contribute to challenges in the thesis writing process for postgraduate students (Lightfoot & Doerner, 2008). Notably, Tardy (2010) uncovered that a lack of self-confidence stands out as a prominent difficulty in thesis composition. Confidence, as illuminated by Can and Walker (2011), plays a crucial role, with student self-assurance positively influenced by constructive feedback from mentors. Earlier investigation underlines that, while postgraduate students in social sciences tend to complete their coursework on schedule, they often encounter delays during the thesis

writing phase due to a myriad of challenges. Moreover, the attrition rate within the realm of social sciences surpasses that of other disciplines (Armstrong, Allison & Hayes, 2004; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

Students engaged in graduate studies within universities are facing mounting pressures to fulfil their academic commitments within specified timeframes. Similarly, faculty members are also under comparable pressure to attract and retain high-quality candidates who can successfully conclude their studies within set timelines. This endeavour is crucial not only for securing funding and research opportunities but also for elevating the institution's research reputation and standing. In tandem, universities are striving to maximise their resources across both teaching and research domains. This shift is driven by intensifying competition for funding and the link between financial support and key performance indicators, as well as accountability benchmarks. The issue of incomplete higher degree programmes and extended completion timelines has drawn significant scholarly attention, particularly in countries like Canada, the UK, USA, and Australia. In numerous instances, research has centred on attrition data, revealing that attrition rates in some American doctoral programmes surpass the 50% mark (Martin, Maclachlan, & Karmel, 2001).

However, estimates from various universities have shown that the percentage of students who leave their doctoral programmes within the first few years is typically below 40%. On the flip side, some research studies have suggested that more than a third of these students drop out during their first year (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Looking at the higher end of the scale, cohort-based

studies have hinted that attrition rates for doctoral candidates in the USA could go as high as 85% (D'Andrea, 2002). On a more positive note, Colebatch (2002) proposed that completion rates for research degrees in Australia have improved significantly since the 1980s, reaching levels between 80% and 90% by the mid-1990s. In Canada, a recent study found that the completion rates were notably influenced by the discipline area, ranging from 45% in arts and humanities to 70% in life sciences, with science disciplines generally staying in the high 60% range (Elgar, 2003).

The effectiveness of research supervision plays a crucial role in the completion of research projects. The quality of supervision holds the key to the ultimate outcome of the research endeavour and can determine the success or failure of the student (Cullen, Pearson, Saha, & Spear, 1994). In essence, the calibre of supervision has a direct impact on learners' ability to meet their objectives and contributes to both the academic standing of the supervisor and the scholarly reputation of the university. Supervisors have a pivotal responsibility in providing guidance, counsel, and input across various aspects of the research project, encompassing topic selection, pertinent literature, methodology, data analysis, coherence, and precision of work, writing style, presentation, and overall project advancement. This meticulous oversight aims to ensure the research's scientific rigour (Haksever & Manisali, 2000; Lessing & Schulze, 2002; Blunt & Conolly, 2006). Janssen (2005) emphasised the critical importance of a supportive and accessible supervisor. However, a recurring challenge often encountered by

graduate research students is the perceived lack of engagement and assistance from their supervisors.

Insufficient supervision, as highlighted in various studies, has been linked to supervisors who are inexperienced, uncommitted, or unavailable (Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, 1994). Research consistently emphasises that the quality of supervision plays a crucial role in determining whether research students succeed or not (Buttery & Richter, 2005; Abiddin et al., 2011; Tahir, Ghani, Atek, & Manaf, 2012). Postgraduate research efforts undertaken to meet qualification requirements come with their unique set of challenges. A study focused on LIS (Library and Information Science) schools in East, Central, and Southern Africa, and their supervisor-supervisee dynamics among postgraduate students, uncovered the following insights (Mutula, 2009).

These delays hindered the progress of postgraduate research projects, potentially leading to frustration and hampered adjustments. The study emphasises the need for improved communication and clear expectations between supervisors and students to mitigate these delays and enhance the quality of postgraduate research experiences in the region.

The lack of well-defined supervision guidelines can lead to ambiguity in roles, expectations, and communication channels between supervisors and students. This finding underscores the importance of establishing comprehensive and transparent supervision guidelines to enhance the postgraduate research experience, foster effective collaboration, and ultimately contribute to successful outcomes in the specified academic context.

Poor supervision - i.e., no schedule for meetings, no records of discussions, etc. A significant issue highlighted was poor supervision, characterised by the absence of structured meeting schedules and a lack of records documenting discussions. This deficiency in supervision structure can lead to confusion in communication, unclear expectations, and hindered progress. The study underscores the necessity of establishing effective supervisory practices, including regular meetings and comprehensive documentation, to ensure a productive and supportive environment for postgraduate researchers in the specified academic context.

Supervisors were always too busy to meet students. Another challenge identified was the consistent unavailability of supervisors for student meetings due to their busy schedules. This obstacle disrupts communication, hampers guidance, and potentially leads to delays in research progress. The study highlights the importance of addressing this issue by establishing mechanisms to ensure regular and accessible interaction between supervisors and students. This approach is crucial in fostering a conducive research environment and facilitating successful postgraduate research experiences within the mentioned academic context.

Inadequate preparation for postgraduate study. The insufficient preparation provided for postgraduate studies was also highlighted as a challenge. The study revealed that students often lacked the necessary skills and resources to effectively engage in advanced research. This inadequacy in preparation could impede the research process, leading to frustration and suboptimal outcomes. The

study emphasises the importance of addressing this challenge by enhancing preparatory programmes for postgraduate students, providing them with the tools and skills needed to navigate their research endeavours successfully within the specified academic context.

Additional challenges identified in the study encompassed issues such as the subpar quality of admitted students, the tardiness of students in submitting their work, and the struggle to balance work commitments with academic studies. According to Ekstein and Wallenstein (1972), supervisors should be equipped to address the challenges faced by students by being receptive to their emotions and offering them support and acknowledgment. This is essential because students confront an array of difficulties, including emotional, socio-economic, and psychological concerns that encompass personal, societal, and occupational responsibilities. These challenges span inadequate funding, limited research infrastructure, social isolation, insecurity, and a lack of self-assurance (Phillips & Pugh, 2000). Recognising the diversity among students, supervisors should possess an understanding of their psychosocial backgrounds and prevailing issues. They should also demonstrate adaptability in tailoring their supervisory approaches to accommodate everyone's circumstances, traits, and needs (Hockey, 1996; Hung & Smith, 2008; Haksever & Manisali, 2000). This recognition arises from the acknowledgment that students vary in terms of intellectual capabilities, personalities, motivation levels, and attitudes.

The delays in postgraduate research progress can result from various factors, including the interactions between supervisees and supervisors, as well as

the role of university management (Abiddin, Ismail, & Ismail, 2011). The institution itself carries a significant responsibility in ensuring the availability and accessibility of essential resources to promote a sustainable research culture.

Creating an environment that provides postgraduate researchers with a conducive and comfortable workspace is crucial (Ali, Watson, & Dhingra, 2016). Numerous studies underline the importance of fostering positive supervisor-student relationships to support the success of students in their research pursuits (Mapesela & Wilkinson, 2005; Abiddin et al., 2011).

According to McAlpine and Weis (2000), these relationships often become personalised and tailored to the individual, with students even developing close friendships with their supervisors. Conversely, Malfroy (2005) discovered that students frequently encounter frustration due to strained relationships with their supervisors. Spear (2000) underscores the role of effective communication in fostering good relationships, stating that it hinges on "communication, communication, and communication." The significance of transparent and candid communication during supervision is also evident in other studies (Haksever & Manisali, 2000; Phillips & Pugh, 2000).

Snyder (1999) identified three categories of coping strategies: assessment-focused, challenge-focused, and emotion-focused. Typically, postgraduate students utilise all three strategies to navigate the difficulties and obstacles they encounter during the thesis writing phase. While students find value in all three approaches to mitigate challenges, problem-focused coping tactics appear to be the most effective in addressing such obstacles. According to Wright (2003), the

coping strategies adopted by postgraduate students, encompassing "inner strength, confidence, and self-determination," play a pivotal role in their success during the thesis writing phase. In a study conducted by Mafa and Mapolisa (2011), it was revealed that a substantial number of students struggled to formulate a thesis proposal, often due to their inability to effectively manage the challenges they confronted.

Lessing and Lessing (2004) identified several overarching factors that impact graduate completion rates, encompassing elements such as user-friendly administrative procedures, grasp of academic and scientific criteria, effective workload assessment across various research components, maintaining communication with supervisors, surmounting feelings of isolation, adept conflict resolution, and the capability to articulate and defend viewpoints relevant to the study. Humphrey and McCarthy (1999) emphasised the crucial role played by providing adequate facilities, financial support, fostering departmental and university-wide interaction, logistical arrangements, and demographic considerations in ensuring the success of graduate students. A consistent theme emerges across studies, wherein a collection of factors spanning diverse environments influences graduate retention and completion for all students (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011). This consistency is a result of shared experiences that students encounter while integrating into their chosen community of practice. Their academic journey often involves accumulating debt, competition for funding, managing demanding programme prerequisites, dealing with isolation, and juggling personal and work-related commitments, leading to concerns about

their overall quality of life and anxieties about future career prospects upon graduation.

Students Retention

The exploration of student retention commenced with Vincent Tinto's pioneering work in 1975, focused on investigating the characteristics of student drop-out. Since then, research in this area has evolved from studying dropout traits to formulating comprehensive models of retention and attrition that centre on the dynamic interaction between students and institutions. The terms "retention" and "persistence" are frequently utilised interchangeably, with attempts to establish clear distinctions between them proving challenging. Some have proposed that "retention" represents an institutional-level gauge of success, while "persistence" pertains to an individual or student-level measure of achievement (Hagedorn, 2005). However, this distinction has not gained widespread acceptance.

The concern over student retention rates has been a significant focus for higher education institutions worldwide since the inception of formal education systems. In a broad sense, not every student completes their academic programmes. Although various reasons contribute to students not graduating, certain individuals opt to voluntarily withdraw from their studies. This phenomenon can impact tertiary institutions in various ways, influencing their academic reputation and financial strategies.

Two ends of the spectrum exist concerning student retention. The first involves *normal progress*, seen in students who *stay* or are *retained*. They

consistently enrol each semester, pursue full-time studies, and complete their degree in approximately four years. On the other hand, a *dropout* or *leaver* refers to a student who enters college but abandons their studies before graduating, with no intention of returning to that or any other educational institution.

Between these contrasting scenarios lie *transferred* students. These individuals initiate their studies at one institution and then switch to another. While from the student's viewpoint, transferring represents a natural progression, the original institution might consider it a dropout situation.

While identifying students who stay on track is straightforward, those who leave can potentially return at any moment. Referred to as "*stop-outs*," these students often temporarily discontinue their studies due to financial constraints or family emergencies, only to resume a year later. Some students may embark on their educational journey, pause to work, or fulfil family responsibilities, and then resume learning after a substantial period, spanning years or even decades. The label of "*dropout*" can morph into that of a "*stop-out*" over time, highlighting the fluid nature of their educational journey. This underscores the intricate and diverse pathways students can take within the realm of education. Other students become *slowdowns*, going from full-time attendance to taking just a few courses. Retention principles according to Voight and Hundrieser (2008) are:

The goal of a retention effort is improved educational experiences for students, rather than retention per se. This involves improving teaching quality, curriculum relevance, support networks, and resources to foster student motivation, success, and connection. By focusing on enriching educational

experiences, institutions can naturally lead to improved retention while also promoting comprehensive student success.

Improving the quality of student life and learning is a continuing and important priority for all institutions of higher education. Improving student life quality and enhancing the learning experience are enduring and vital priorities for higher education institutions globally. This involves providing modern facilities, diverse extracurricular activities, robust support services, and innovative teaching methods to foster holistic student growth. The focus on these aspects ensures that students not only receive a strong education but also thrive emotionally, socially, and intellectually, preparing them effectively for the evolving demands of the future.

Implementing a process to enhance the quality of student life and learning, which directly contributes to improving retention rates, should be approached systematically. This approach not only focuses on enhancing the overall institutional quality and effectiveness but also promotes student success. Increases in retention rates are closely tied to the current state of efforts aimed at improving the quality of educational programmes and services. Typically, institutions that undertake a systematic and comprehensive approach to retention can expect to see gradual improvements, including a "lift" in cohort graduation rates ranging from 10 to 20 percent and enhancements in annual retention rates of about 2 to 5 percent over time. It is important to recognise that improving retention is a complex task; retention and attrition are influenced by multiple factors and cannot be resolved through quick-fix strategies.

Enhancing retention in education is a complex task due to the multifaceted nature of retention and attrition factors. Quick-fix solutions are inadequate as these phenomena are influenced by diverse academic, social, economic, and personal variables. A successful approach involves a comprehensive strategy that encompasses improved teaching, personalised support, financial aid, mental health resources, and inclusive environments. Acknowledging the complexity and adopting holistic strategies is key to fostering student success and persistence.

Nevill and Chen (2007) identified financial assistance as the primary factor influencing the successful completion of doctoral degrees among students. They established that a significant number of postgraduate students in the United States struggle to effectively manage the demands of work, family, and educational commitments simultaneously. Tinto (2010) suggested that in order to improve the retention of postgraduate students, all higher education institutions should offer readily accessible academic, personal, and social support services. The interactions that students have with academic, personal, and support service staff on campus can have a profound influence on their sense of belonging to the institution and their capacity to navigate the campus environment, meet academic expectations, and eventually graduate. Institutions that establish elevated expectations and actively involve students in their learning process create an environment conducive to student success (Demetroiu & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Empirical Review

Students Related Factors that Serve as a Challenge to MPhil Students during their Research and Thesis Writing

In 2016, Rauf conducted a study with the aim of identifying the factors hindering the successful completion of postgraduate degrees and proposing strategies to reduce non-completion rates. The study began with a comprehensive review of existing literature to identify factors previously recognised as obstacles to completing a thesis. Following this, two types of analyses, exploratory and descriptive, were employed.

The study's sample comprised 20 postgraduate students who were already experiencing delays in completing their theses, and this group generated a total of 120 items. For the exploratory phase, the study employed convenient sampling, selecting subjects based on immediate availability. In the descriptive analysis, it was noted that students' academic quality had a significant impact on their ability to complete their theses. Additionally, personal circumstances and financial resources emerged as crucial factors of notable significance in the process.

In 2017, Matin and Khan conducted a study aimed at identifying challenges and issues faced during research and thesis writing in the context of Bangladesh and providing potential solutions. This research adopted a cross-sectional descriptive approach and spanned across 20 different medical colleges and institutes within Bangladesh. The study involved a total of 133 postgraduate students and 46 supervisors who participated. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The researchers employed two pretested semi-

structured questionnaires, one for students and one for supervisors, to collect data. Subsequently, the collected data were analysed using SPSS version 19.

The study identified several general problems encountered during the research and thesis writing process. These included a lack of students' knowledge, limited experience, and insufficient commitment to thesis work, time constraints, excessive workload, inadequate funding, and irregular meetings with supervisors. The research aimed to shed light on these issues and offer potential strategies to address them within the unique context of Bangladesh.

In 2018, Afzal and Jami conducted a study aimed at exploring the prevalence of academic procrastination among students in public universities and understanding its underlying reasons. Their research included a sample of 200 university students, consisting of 155 women and 45 men, enrolled in the social and natural sciences departments. To evaluate academic procrastination and its contributing factors, they utilised the Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students, initially developed by Solomon and Rothblum in 1984. Employing backward linear regression analysis, the researchers sought to identify significant predictors or reasons for academic procrastination.

The analysis revealed several notable predictors (reasons) for academic procrastination, with risk-taking, task averseness, and decision-making emerging as prominent factors. Task averseness stood out as the most influential predictor, with a medium-level regression coefficient. Additionally, the study found that academic procrastination was prevalent across all three academic levels (MSc, MPhil, and Ph.D.). When comparing students from social sciences and natural

sciences departments, significant differences were observed in the prevalence of certain reasons for academic procrastination. Among social sciences students, reasons such as task averseness, time management issues, and laziness, resistance to control, decision-making difficulties, and lack of assertion were more frequently cited. In summary, the study highlighted that task averseness, fear of failure, dependency, decision-making challenges, and risk-taking tendencies were commonly identified as reasons contributing to academic procrastination among university students.

In 2018, Sarwar, Shah, and Akram conducted a study with the objective of identifying the factors contributing to delays in completing research work at the postgraduate level. Their research involved a sample of 40 supervisees and 16 supervisors, all affiliated with four public sector universities located in central Punjab, Pakistan. To gain deeper insights into the reasons behind research work delays, the researchers utilised a semi-structured interview schedule. This approach enabled them to collect perceptions and perspectives from the participants regarding the factors responsible for hindering the timely completion of their research work. The factors identified were subsequently categorised into three primary aspects: those related to the supervisees, those related to the supervisors, and those linked to the institutions where the research work was conducted.

The data collected were subjected to thematic analysis, a qualitative research technique that identifies recurring themes or patterns within the information provided by the participants. Among the factors associated with

supervision, several themes emerged. These included a lack of motivation, the impact of job-related assignments and duties, domestic responsibilities after marriage, inadequate language skills, and financial limitations. These themes shed light on the multifaceted challenges that postgraduate students face when trying to complete their research work. In essence, the study delved into the complexities surrounding the delayed completion of research work, particularly highlighting factors that span across the supervisee's personal circumstances, the supervisory relationship, and the institutional environment.

Wanasinghe's study in 2020 had several objectives: firstly, to identify the academic challenges that students encounter while conducting research for their master's degree; secondly, to recognise personal factors that students face, which hinder the completion of their research; and finally, to provide suggestions for overcoming these challenges. To achieve these aims, the study employed a survey methodology.

Data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to students enrolled in the Master of Education Degree programme. The sample consisted of 176 students who were in their second year of the programme. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised to analyse the data collected from the survey questionnaires. The study revealed that students faced various academic challenges when conducting their research for the master's degree. In addition, personal factors also played a role in affecting the completion of their research. These personal issues included workplace commitments, family commitments, health problems, lack of family support, difficulties with time management, and

the need to commute long distances to the university. Overall, Wanasinghe's study shed light on the academic and personal obstacles that students encounter while conducting research for their master's degree and provided insights into potential strategies for addressing these challenges.

In the study conducted by Shahsavar and Kourepaz in 2020, the researchers aimed to identify the challenges faced by postgraduate students when writing the literature review section of their theses. To achieve this objective, the researchers employed an exploratory sequential mixed method design. In the quantitative phase of the study, the researchers evaluated 40 completed master theses using descriptive analysis. This assessment was based on Akindele's guideline, which presumably provides a framework for evaluating the literature review section of these theses. In the qualitative phase, the study involved 10 postgraduate students who voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to gather more in-depth insights into the challenges these students encountered when writing the literature review section of their theses.

For analysing the interview data, the researchers utilised Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis methodology, which involves identifying and examining recurring themes within the collected data. The findings of the study indicated that many students, even those considered proficient, struggled with tasks such as synthesising information, critiquing existing literature, and explaining the relevance of the literature in their writing. Instead, their focus tended to be on summarising the findings and interpretations of other researchers. Moreover, the study highlighted additional challenges such as a lack of sufficient

knowledge and time to adequately complete the literature review section. In summary, Shahsavar and Kourepaz's study revealed that postgraduate students often faced difficulties in effectively synthesising, critiquing, and explaining the literature in the context of their thesis writing. These insights provide valuable information for improving the way literature review sections are approached and supported in postgraduate education.

The study conducted by Ul Haq and Shahzad in 2021 aimed to explore the motivations driving students' interest in postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science (LIS), as well as the challenges they encountered while planning and writing their theses. The study employed a quantitative research approach with a survey design to gather information.

A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool, which was adapted for the purpose of this study. The study focused on the population of MPhil and Ph.D. students enrolled in library schools within the Punjab province. Out of the 72 students in the MPhil Programme and 26 in the Ph.D. programme, 71 (72%) responded to the questionnaires that were distributed via email.

For data analysis, the researchers utilised various statistical measures such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of the study highlighted some significant challenges faced by postgraduate students in the field. These included managing a demanding job schedule, fulfilling family responsibilities, overcoming language barriers, and addressing a lack of critical thinking skills. In summary, Ul Haq and Shahzad's study employed

quantitative methods to investigate the motivations behind students' interest in postgraduate LIS studies and the challenges they encountered while working on their theses. This research sheds light on the various factors affecting postgraduate students in this field and provides insights that can be valuable for addressing their needs and enhancing their academic experiences.

Shahzad and Naeem's study in 2021 aimed to investigate the strategies employed by Postgraduate MPhil and Ph.D. students in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) to address the challenges they encountered while writing their dissertations. The study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a survey research design to fulfil its objective.

The study focused on a population of 98 research scholars, with 72 enrolled in the MPhil programme and 26 in the Ph.D. programme within the field of LIS. This population was the subject of investigation for the study's objective. The findings of the research indicated that researchers experienced difficulties related to challenges stemming from their target population. Specifically, problems arose when attempting to approach the chosen population for the purpose of data collection. Respondents showed reluctance to engage with questionnaires or instruments used for data collection, and the target population itself denied access for data collection purposes.

To summarise, Shahzad and Naeem's study employed a quantitative research approach to delve into the strategies employed by MPhil and Ph.D. students in the LIS field to address challenges in their dissertation writing process. The research shed light on the specific challenges related to accessing the target

population for data collection, providing insights into the difficulties faced by researchers in this context.

Supervisor-Related Factors that Posed as a Challenge to MPhil Students during their Research and Thesis Writing

Garwe and Mugari's study in 2015 aimed to investigate the perceptions of MBA students regarding the quality of research supervision within Zimbabwean universities. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs to accomplish its objectives. To gather information, the researchers employed a combination of documentary evidence and questionnaires. These tools were administered to two groups: 100 current MBA students and 100 students who had completed their MBA in 2014. The sampling approach used for this study was purposive sampling, where participants were deliberately chosen to represent specific characteristics or experiences.

The results of the study indicated that a significant challenge highlighted by the students was the lack of adequate time for supervisors to engage with the students they were responsible for guiding. A major concern was that supervisors often struggled to meet the expectations of their students. This issue stemmed from several factors, including the high number of students assigned to each supervisor, the busy schedules of the supervisors, and their various professional and personal commitments, which hindered their availability and accessibility to students.

In summary, Garwe and Mugari's study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the perceptions of MBA students in

Zimbabwean universities regarding the quality of research supervision. The findings underscored the challenges arising from supervisors' limited time availability and their inability to fulfil students' expectations due to factors such as workload and personal commitments.

Sarwar, Shah, and Akram (2018) carried out a study aimed at identifying the factors contributing to delays in completing research work at the postgraduate level. The study focused on a sample consisting of 40 supervisees and 16 supervisors, all from four public sector universities in central Punjab, Pakistan. To gather insights into the reasons for the delay in completing research work, the researchers employed a semi-structured interview schedule. This schedule was utilised to collect the perceptions of both the supervisees and supervisors regarding the factors responsible for the delays in research work completion. These factors were classified into three categories: supervisee-related factors, supervisor-related factors, and institution-related factors.

For analysis, the researchers employed the thematic analysis technique. This method involves identifying recurring themes or patterns within the collected data. The results of the study indicated that supervisor-related factors were significant contributors to the delays in research work completion. These factors included the busy schedules of supervisors, a lack of experience in supervision, insufficient knowledge in the relevant field, a less positive attitude towards high-quality research work, and an inability to effectively use modern communication tools.

Sarwar, Shah, and Akram's study focused on understanding the factors leading to delays in research work completion at the postgraduate level. Their research highlighted the various aspects that play a role in these delays, particularly supervisor-related factors, which encompassed issues such as time constraints, expertise, and attitudes towards research quality.

Siddiqui, Zulfiqar, and Khalid (2020) conducted a study to identify the challenges MPhil students face during their research work completion in both public and private universities in Lahore. The researchers explored these difficulties from the students' perspectives and examined how these experiences differed based on the students' gender and the type of university they attended. To gather data, the researchers employed a survey method. They selected a convenient sample of 300 MPhil students, including both male and female students, from both public and private universities. Data collection was carried out through a questionnaire that consisted of a 4-point Rating Scale containing 25 items.

Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the percentage of students' perspectives, and Inferential Statistics (specifically, Mann-Whitney U tests) were used to analyse the differences based on students' gender and university type. The study's findings indicated that one of the major challenges MPhil students faced was the difficulty in approaching their supervisors. This was attributed to the supervisors' heavy academic and administrative responsibilities, which prevented them from giving students the necessary time and attention.

Additionally, students reported that supervisors often gave preference to other guests over students, disregarding students' scheduled appointments.

Siddiqui et al. (2020) explored the difficulties MPhil students encounter during their research work, focusing on their perspectives in both public and private universities. The research brought to light challenges related to students' interactions with their supervisors, particularly the lack of accessible and dedicated supervision time due to the supervisors' other commitments.

The study conducted by Wanasinghe (2020) aimed to achieve various goals: firstly, to recognise the academic difficulties students encounter while conducting research for their master's degrees; secondly, to identify personal factors that impede their research progress; and thirdly, to propose remedies for these challenges. The research employed a survey approach to attain these objectives, collecting data via questionnaires distributed to students enrolled in the Master of Education Degree programme. The sample consisted of 176 students who were in the programme's second year. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the survey data, revealing that 36% of students faced issues associated with their interaction with supervisors, including delays in receiving feedback from their research mentors.

Ul-Haq and Shahzad (2021) conducted a study that delved into students' motivations for pursuing postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science (LIS) and the challenges they encountered while planning and writing their theses. The research employed a quantitative approach, specifically a survey design, for its execution. Data collection was facilitated through a questionnaire, customised

for the purpose of data collection. The study focused on M. Phil and Ph. D. students enrolled in library schools within the Punjab province. Among the participants, there were 72 students in the MPhil programme and 26 registered in the Ph.D. programme. Questionnaires were distributed to all students via email, and the respondents' participation resulted in 71 (72%) completed questionnaires. The analysis of data was conducted using various statistical measures, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, facilitated by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed significant insights, with 66% of participants cumulatively agreeing that supervisors had limited time to assist in thesis writing, while 27% disagreed. Additionally, 53% of respondents cumulatively agreed that their supervisor or seminar body delayed modifying their topic, with 36% disagreeing. In terms of the impact of bitter politics among supervisors during proposal and seminar stages, 57% of respondents disagreed, while 37% cumulatively agreed.

Institutional Related Factors that Served as a Challenge to MPhil Students during their Thesis Writing and Completion

In 2012, Mapolisa and Mafa conducted a study to examine the obstacles faced by undergraduate students when conducting research at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in the Harare and Bulawayo regions. The research utilised a combination of descriptive surveys, focus group discussions, and document analysis methods. Random sampling was employed for the descriptive surveys, while purposive sampling was used for the focus group discussions in ZOU's Harare and Bulawayo Regions. Document analysis involved a review of

undergraduate research projects stored in the university's regional libraries. The questionnaire was completed by 45 Bachelor of Education (Educational Management) students, and the research data were thematically analysed and interpreted. The study identified institution-related challenges, including the absence of internet facilities, insufficient research-related courses, inadequate library resources, limited computer literacy, and a lack of workshops. These challenges adversely affected the research capabilities of the examined students.

Ekpoh (2016) conducted research at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, focusing on the difficulties faced by postgraduate students during their research and thesis writing processes. The study employed a survey research design and included a sample of 200 postgraduate students, encompassing both Master's and Doctoral candidates who had completed their theses during the 2011/2012 academic session. Four research questions guided the study, and data were collected using a questionnaire named the "Postgraduate Studies Questionnaire" (PGSQ), developed and validated by the researchers. The study's findings revealed that postgraduate students at the University of Calabar encountered various challenges in their research and thesis writing, primarily stemming from both student-related and institutional-related factors. Among the institutional-related issues were the absence of internet facilities, departmental delays, deviations from academic calendars, an inadequate research environment, subpar social services, and insufficient study resources.

Matin and Khan (2017) conducted a study to investigate the factors and challenges associated with conducting research and writing theses in the context

of Bangladesh. The research involved a cross-sectional descriptive approach across 20 different medical colleges and institutes in Bangladesh. The study encompassed 133 postgraduate students and 46 supervisors as participants, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection included the use of two pretested semi-structured questionnaires, one for students and the other for supervisors. SPSS version 19 was employed for data analysis. The study revealed that institutional challenges encompassed issues such as inadequate guidance and resources, the absence of a research cell, proper thesis writing formats, and insufficient cooperation from the institute itself.

In 2018, Sarwar, Shah, and Akram conducted a study aimed at identifying the factors contributing to delays in completing research work at the postgraduate level. The study's sample consisted of 40 supervisees and 16 supervisors, selected from four public sector universities in central Punjab, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather insights from participants regarding the factors leading to research work completion delays. These factors were categorised into three main aspects: supervisee-related factors, supervisor-related factors, and institution-related factors. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. The study found that institution-related challenges included procedural delays, administrative misalignment, irrelevant rules and regulations, a lack of research infrastructure, and poor research culture within the university setting.

Siddiqui et al. (2020) conducted a study to uncover the perspectives of MPhil students regarding the challenges they face during research work completion in public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The study also

examined how these experiences varied by gender and university type. Data were collected through a survey approach, involving a sample of 300 MPhil students from both genders and various university types. A questionnaire with a 4-point rating scale and 25 items was used for data collection. Quantitative analysis techniques, including Mann-Whitney U tests, were applied to assess differences based on gender and university type. The findings indicated that neither the respective Head of Department (HoD) nor the director were readily accessible to students, and students lacked access to paid e-libraries. However, the libraries themselves were well-equipped.

In 2020, Wanasinghe conducted a study with three main objectives: identifying academic challenges experienced by students in conducting research for their master's degrees, uncovering personal issues hindering research completion, and providing recommendations to address these challenges. The study employed a survey methodology and distributed questionnaires to 176 second-year students enrolled in the Master of Education Degree programme. The findings revealed that students faced challenges such as the unavailability of primary data sources, difficulties in accessing research literature, and inadequate library facilities.

Ul Haq and Shahzad (2021) conducted a study to investigate students' interest in pursuing postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science (LIS) and understand the challenges they encountered during thesis planning and writing. The study used a quantitative research approach and a survey design, involving 71 participants, including both MPhil and Ph.D. students from library

schools within Punjab province. Questionnaires were disseminated via email, and the data were analysed using statistical measures. The study highlighted various challenges, including the absence of internet facilities, departmental delays, deviations from academic calendars, insufficient research support, and inadequate social services.

Demographic Factors that Influence Graduation Rates of MPhil Students during their Thesis Writing and Completion

Bolen (2023) conducted a study to examine whether student satisfaction with faculty and academic advisors varied by the sex of the student and the academic college they belonged to at a large public university in the Southeast. Using the Theory of Student Departure, the study aimed to identify how student interactions with faculty and academic advisors could impact persistence to graduation, particularly focusing on the university's efforts to improve male graduation rates. The findings revealed that, although female students did not show significant differences in satisfaction compared to male students, students in the male-dominated College of Engineering reported lower levels of satisfaction with their interactions with faculty and advisors. This dissatisfaction was seen as a contributing factor to the graduation rate gap between men and women, especially in STEM programs. The study suggested that the types of academic colleges students choose and the quality of their interactions with faculty and advisors within those colleges could explain some of the gender differences in graduation rates. The findings highlighted the need for institutional practices that foster better

faculty and advisor relationships, particularly in STEM fields, to improve student persistence and narrow the graduation rate gap between genders.

A study by Santos, Horta, and Amâncio (2021) explores the gender disparities in academia by examining the research agendas of male and female academics. Using multivariate analysis of variance and structural equation modeling, the researchers found that women's research agendas tended to be less risky, and more collaborative compared to those of men. The study also highlighted that institutional characteristic, particularly the autonomy provided by universities, had a more significant influence on female academics, enabling them to engage in more ambitious, multidisciplinary, and risky research. The research further revealed that female academics required more time after completing their PhDs to develop a preference for riskier research agendas, while their male counterparts did not show the same trend.

In this study, Nielsen (2016) explores the persistent gender gap in academic research performance, challenging the individualistic explanations that emphasize personal motivation and merit. Using bibliometric analysis, the research compares the citation and self-citation rates, impact scores, and collaboration patterns of 3,293 male and female researchers at a Danish university. The study found no significant gender differences in citation rates or self-citation practices but highlighted differences in research collaboration and publication venues. Women were less likely to engage in international collaborations and tended to publish more single-authored articles. Additionally, men published in journals with slightly higher impact scores. This study

contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gender inequality in academia by questioning the meritocratic assumptions often applied to performance differences.

Kowalski (2022) conducted a study on the impact of campus housing on student outcomes, using an explanatory research design with a correlational approach. The study aimed to explore how student housing affects academic achievement, as measured by GPA and retention from the first to the second year, student behavior, as indicated by the frequency of conduct violations, and student engagement in both social and academic activities. The research combined both quantitative and qualitative data, including 37,048 records of first- and second-year students from 2014-2019, 4,635 records of conduct violations in residence halls from 2014-2020, and survey responses from 239 students regarding their demographic, financial, and residential factors, along with their engagement in campus life. Additionally, qualitative data from student interviews provided further insights into their academic and social experiences, supplementing the findings from the quantitative analysis. The findings indicated a strong correlation between academic achievement, behavior, and engagement with the residential environment, showing that different types of housing and room configurations significantly influenced GPA and retention from the first to the second year. The study revealed that room configurations, particularly the number of roommates, had a negative effect on student behavior and engagement, as a higher number of roommates was associated with an increased occurrence of student conduct violations and decreased levels of engagement in academic and social activities.

These findings provide valuable insights into the aspects of student housing that play a crucial role in shaping students' success and experiences during their college years.

In this report, Djaba (2022) investigates the impact of living on campus during the first and second academic years on student success outcomes, including GPA, retention, and graduation rates. The study employs a quasi-experimental method to analyze data from first- and second-year students at the University of Connecticut – Storrs Campus. The findings reveal that first-year students who lived on campus during both their first and second years had higher GPAs than those living off-campus. Specifically, students who stayed on campus after their first academic year showed higher retention rates and graduated more quickly. The analysis also indicates that freshmen who lived on campus between 2010 and 2018 earned a 0.31 higher GPA in their first semester, a 0.17 higher GPA in their second semester, and a 0.03 higher cumulative GPA by the end of their second year compared to off-campus students. These results suggest that living on campus during the first and second academic years positively influences student GPA, retention, and graduation outcomes.

In this study, López Turley and Wodtke (2010) examine how living on campus impacts academic performance, specifically focusing on different student groups. Although previous research suggests that on-campus living promotes academic outcomes by enhancing student involvement, it often overlooks differential effects among various student populations. Using data from first-year students in the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), the authors

found that, for most students at most institutions, residence type did not significantly affect academic performance. However, Black students who lived on campus had higher GPAs than their peers living off-campus with family. Similarly, students attending liberal arts institutions who lived on campus had significantly higher GPAs than those who lived off-campus with family.

Carlson (2023) examined the relationship between students' living situations and their involvement on campus. A survey of 169 undergraduate students at the University of Northern Iowa, excluding non-traditional and first-year students, assessed participation in student organizations, leadership roles, and event attendance. Findings indicate that living on campus has a significant positive impact on student involvement, with on-campus students more likely to join multiple organizations, hold leadership positions, and feel engaged. Additionally, students who previously lived on campus remain more involved than those who never did. The study also highlights differences in involvement among off-campus students based on commuting distance. These findings underscore the importance of on-campus housing in fostering student engagement and involvement.

Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook (2013) conducted an exploratory study aimed at understanding gender-specific disparities in challenges faced during the doctoral experience. The research approach involved gathering insights from a counsellor with substantial experience in advising doctoral students. The methodology revolved around collecting observations from this counsellor, who had worked with 92 female and 36 male doctoral students at the University of

Blinded over a two-year period (2008 to 2009), totalling 1436 counselling sessions. The data collected from these sessions were analysed using IBM Corporation's statistical software, SPSS version 19. The researchers found that cultural expectations related to women's passivity, roles in family caregiving, and symbolic subordination to male authority could potentially lead to conflicts between women's social roles and their academic performance. This is because academic success values qualities such as assertiveness, effective communication, and confident handling of power dynamics.

Siddiqui et al. (2020) conducted a study to explore the perspectives of MPhil students regarding the challenges they encountered during research work completion in both public and private universities in Lahore. The study also investigated these experiences in relation to gender and university type. Data were collected through a survey method, with a sample of 300 MPhil students, including both males and females, from both public and private universities. A questionnaire with a 4-point rating scale comprising 25 items was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the percentage of students' perspectives, and inferential statistics, specifically Mann-Whitney U tests, were applied to assess differences based on gender and university type. The findings revealed a significant difference in perspectives between male and female students, with male students scoring higher on average, highlighting notable gender-based differences in the challenges perceived during research work completion.

Chapter Summary

In this study, the literature review focused on examining the factors that influenced the rates of completion for postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. This review encompassed three key components: a theoretical examination, a conceptual analysis, and an empirical assessment.

In the theoretical review, the study delved into various theoretical frameworks to establish a foundational understanding of the factors that influence the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. This analysis involved theories like Vincent Tinto's student retention model (2010), which underscored the significance of blending social and academic integration along with institutional commitment to bolster student persistence and achievement. The research also examined the Jiranek Dissertation research completion triangle (2010), illuminating the interconnectedness of the student, supervisor, and institution in facilitating the successful culmination of research projects. Additionally, the Experiential Learning Theory advanced by Kolb, Boyatzi, and Mainemelis (2014) was explored, underscoring the significance of hands-on involvement and reflective practice in the learning and research journey.

The conceptual review section delved into essential concepts pertinent to the research, elucidating the landscape of postgraduate studies and scrutinizing the distinct attributes and requisites linked to the pursuit of an advanced degree. The notion of completion was also investigated, encompassing the successful attainment of the MPhil programme, and delving into the elements that facilitated

or impeded students' progression to this achievement. Additionally, the discourse encompassed student retention, spotlighting the approaches and measures that educational institutions could adopt to encourage students' continuous engagement and prompt attainment of their academic goals.

The empirical review was formulated in alignment with the study's specific objectives. It entailed an extensive examination of prevailing empirical studies, research articles, and pertinent literature that explored the determinants influencing completion rates among postgraduate students. The intent of this review was to pinpoint voids within the existing literature and to guide the selection of the research methodology and approach employed in the study.

The literature review offered a thorough insight into the theoretical underpinnings, essential concepts, and pre-existing empirical investigations concerning the completion rates of MPhil students pursuing postgraduate degrees. It laid the groundwork for the present study by establishing a theoretical framework, elucidating concepts, and synthesising the existing body of knowledge within the field.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This study sought to explore the factors contributing to the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. This chapter presents the research paradigm, approach, design, study area, population, sampling procedure, data collection instrument, data collection procedures and data processing and analysis, and chapter summary.

Research Paradigm

The study adopted a pragmatic paradigm. Using a blend of methods that, when combined, could shed light on genuine human behaviours, the underlying ideas shaping those behaviours, and the potential consequences of such actions (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) was deemed appropriate for the study. This approach allows for the integration of diverse research methods, facilitating a comprehensive investigation into the complex phenomenon of student success. By emphasising the practical implications of the study, including actionable recommendations, the pragmatic paradigm ensures that the research not only identifies the underlying ideas shaping student behaviours but also provides insights that can inform policy and practice, ultimately benefiting the university and its postgraduate students (Shannon-Baker, 2016).

Research Approach

The study adopted a mixed methods approach. The mixed-methods strategy is a research methodology in which researchers collect and analyse

quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Bowers et al., 2013). This type of research was chosen because it leverages the inherent advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, enabling researchers to delve into various viewpoints and reveal connections that exist within the intricate aspects of our multifaceted research inquiries. Utilizing mixed methods permits researchers to investigate current trends and methodologies in education across a progressively varied array of practical contexts.

Research Design

A research design pertains to the structure and methodological approach employed for investigating, aiming to address research questions through factual evidence and logical reasoning (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In line with the aim of this study, the descriptive survey design was adopted. This design was chosen because it allows for the observation and collection of data as a phenomenon naturally occurs. In a descriptive survey, events or conditions either already exist or have occurred, and the researcher selects relevant variables to analyse their relationships. The primary objective of this design is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics accurately and systematically. Additionally, the descriptive survey design enables the systematic presentation of data, allowing the researcher to arrive at valid and accurate conclusions. A key advantage of this approach is that it provides a wealth of information from a relatively large sample, facilitating generalisations from specific situations. However, a limitation of the descriptive survey design is that it only provides a snapshot of the current situation and does not establish cause-and-effect relationships (Heale &

Twycross, 2018). Despite this limitation, the descriptive survey design was deemed suitable for this study, as it allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the factors affecting the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast.

Study Area

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) is strategically located in Cape Coast, Ghana, with its main campus boasting a captivating geographical setting. To the south, it is flanked by the Gulf of Guinea, offering stunning vistas of the Atlantic Ocean. Its neighbouring districts include the Komenda-Edina-Aguafo-Abrem District to the west, the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District to the east, and the Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira District to the north. Positioned between longitude 1°00' - 1°15' West and Latitude 5°30' North, UCC occupies a total land area of 9826 km². Notably, the School of Graduate Studies at UCC caters to a diverse student body of approximately 7500 graduate students pursuing a wide range of programmes. Among them, 2969 students are engaged in sandwich programmes, 3235 students are enrolled in distance learning, and the remaining 1125 students are following regular study paths. The School of Graduate Studies at UCC is committed to providing an enriching educational environment that equips graduate students with the knowledge, skills, and leadership qualities required for impactful contributions on both national and international fronts.

Population

The population for this investigation includes all postgraduate education students at the University of Cape Coast. The target population constitute the

College of Education students in the third to seventh year of their studies who study various MPhil Programmes at the University of Cape Coast. The accessible population consists of students in the Faculty of Educational Foundations. There were 88 students in their third year for the 2019/2020 academic year as of 2022. It also consists of senior lecturers who supervise MPhil thesis at the Faculty of Education and administrators at the School of Graduate Studies. There are 24 senior lecturers supervising student thesis. Also, administrators who are involved in the management of graduate thesis at the school of graduate studies were part of the accessible population. The Faculty of Education consists of three departments, these are Education and Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, and Basic Education. The Department of Education consists of MPhil Clinical Health, MPhil Measurement and Evaluation, MPhil Educational Psychology, MPhil Special Education and MPhil Sociology of Education. The Department of Guidance and Counselling offers MPhil Guidance and Counselling while the Department of Basic Education offers MPhil Basic Education. The table below presents the number of students in each department.

Table 1: Accessible Population

Department	Programmes	No. of Students
Education and Psychology	MPhil Clinical Health	16
	MPhil Measurement and Evaluation	9
	MPhil Educational Psychology	14
	MPhil Special Education	10

	MPhil Sociology of Education	3
Guidance and Counselling	MPhil Guidance and Counselling	19
Basic Education	MPhil Basic Education	17
Total		88

Source: Faculty of Educational Foundations, UCC (2022)

Sampling Procedure

The significance of gathering data for any research process cannot be overemphasised, as the collected information aids in gaining a deeper grasp of a theoretical structure (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This underscores the necessity of a meticulous and resolute approach when deciding on the data collection method and the sources from which data will be gathered. This is crucial because inadequate data collection cannot be rectified through any form of damage control, resulting in irreversible consequences.

The study's participant pool comprised 53 students, four supervisors, and one administrator from the School of Graduate Studies, culminating in a total of 58 participants. These individuals were chosen through a combination of proportionate sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling methods.

About 88 third-year students faced challenges in completing their studies within the stipulated timeframe. For most research endeavours, it is generally advisable for researchers to target response rates of approximately 60%, as suggested by Fincham (2008). Consequently, the study opted to involve 53 participants (60% of the target sample) from the student body.

To ensure a proportional representation across various academic programmes, the technique of proportionate sampling was employed. This method aided in determining the number of students to be selected from each programme. For participant selection, a snowball sampling approach was utilised. The rationale behind using snowball sampling stemmed from the fact that these students had already finished their coursework and were no longer attending classes. As a result, communication was established through their peers who were actively present on campus during the study period.

In the realm of snowball sampling, researchers commonly initiate the process with a small group of initial contacts, often known as "seeds," who meet the predefined research criteria. These seeds are invited to take part in the research study. Following their participation, these volunteers are then requested to propose additional individuals who also meet the research criteria and might be inclined to participate. This cycle of recommendations persists and proliferates, akin to a snowball gathering momentum as it rolls downhill (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019).

The study also incorporated a group of 4 senior lecturers (acting as supervisors) and one administrator from the School of Graduate Studies. The selection of these participants was carried out in a purposive manner, specifically chosen to offer comprehensive insights into the factors influencing postgraduate completion rates within the student body of the College of Education.

Purposive sampling was employed for these participants due to their distinct abilities and qualities. This approach entails identifying and selecting

individuals or groups with a deep understanding and proficiency in the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Alongside expertise and experience, Bernard (2002) highlights the significance of factors such as their willingness and availability to participate, as well as their capacity to convey their experiences and viewpoints eloquently and thoughtfully.

Table 2 below give a summary of the distribution of students across various programmes within the Faculty of Educational Foundations at UCC and their corresponding sample sizes selected for the study. The breakdown highlights the diverse academic backgrounds and proportional representation of students within each department.

Table 2: Sample Size

Department	Programmes	No. of Students	Sample size
Education and Psychology	Clinical Health	16	10
	Measurement and Evaluation	9	5
	Educational Psychology	14	8
	Special Education	10	6
	Sociology of Education	3	2
Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling	19	11
Basic Education	Basic Education	17	11
Total		88	53

Source: Field Data (2022)

Data Collection Instruments

The study involved the collection of both primary quantitative and qualitative data from both students and supervisors who oversaw students unable to finish their theses within the stipulated timeframe of their studies.

Quantitative Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire was developed based on a review of pertinent literature. Questionnaires offer a structured platform for obtaining both structured and open-ended responses from a wide range of data sources, covering various subjects. As asserted by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), they present advantages in terms of being cost-effective, dependable, valid, and expeditious, making them a preferred research tool.

The questionnaire comprises four distinct sections. Section A pertains to the demographic attributes of the students, encompassing variables like gender, age, marital status, occupation, programme of study, and residential status. Section B of the questionnaire is dedicated to investigating student-related factors that pose challenges to the completion of their research theses. This part encompasses 15 closed-ended questions, framed on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (4). Similarly, Section C focuses on supervisor-related factors that contribute to challenges in research thesis completion. This segment comprises nine closed-ended questions, also using the same four-point Likert scale. Lastly, Section D centres on institutional-related factors that impact the completion of the research thesis. It contains nine

closed-ended questions using the same four-point Likert scale for responses, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (4).

Qualitative Data Collection Instruments

During the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview format was utilised. The semi-structured interview form offers flexibility, enabling the researcher to ask questions that delve deeply into the subject matter and uncover the underlying reasons behind participants' responses. This approach aims to gather comprehensive insights into the factors influencing the timely graduation of postgraduate students, as perceived by supervisors and administrators.

For the semi-structured interviews with supervisors, the interview guide encompassed two sections: A and B. Section A concentrated on attributes like gender, rank, and length of service. Section B delved into 6 specific questions designed to elicit information regarding student-related, supervisor-related, and institutional factors impacting the completion rates of MPhil students.

Likewise, for interviews with administrators from the School of Graduate Studies, the interview guide featured two sections: A and B. Section A focused on gender, rank, and length of service. Section B encompassed 7 questions intended to gather insights into student-related, supervisor-related, and institutional factors influencing the completion rates of MPhil students.

Validity and Reliability

Quantitative data

The validity of the instrument was evaluated by presenting it to experts in the field and the researcher's supervisor. Hence, face and content validity were

ascertained. To ensure the reliability of the data collection tool, a pilot test was undertaken. Piloting serves the purpose of identifying any ambiguities or discrepancies in the questionnaire's interpretation. For the pilot test, MPhil students from the College of Humanities and Legal Studies at the University of Cape Coast were involved. Although not part of the accessible population, they were selected due to the resemblances shared between the two colleges. This approach facilitated refining the instrument before its application in the main study.

Table 3: Reliability (α) of Instruments

Original Instrument	I tems	Reli ability
Student-related challenges	1 5	.948
Supervisor-related challenges	9	.932
Institutional-related challenges	9	.899
Total	3 3	.793

Source: Field Data (2022)

Qualitative data

Reliability is the measure of the degree to which for data collection instrument yields consistent results. Orodho (2009) also defined reliability, as a measure of the degree to which research instruments for data collection yield consistent results. To ensure consistency of the items in the interview guide and observation guide, the items were reviewed with the help of colleagues. The comments and suggestions made were given for expert judgement that was the

supervisors for the study. Also, the prompt and probes used to elicit further information, or clarification was the same for all the respondents. Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the word believability to better describe validity and reliability in qualitative research. The researcher needs to provide evidence of what he has done in the study to assist others to believe what he reports and concludes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is seen when the collected information is not changed to fit the researcher's interests. Trustworthiness has been discussed in the following:

Credibility

Credibility means that the research findings must be closer to reality (Merriam, 2007), because a qualitative study happens in a real-life setting. For this reason, the substantiations which the researcher presents must be convincing. That is why Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that qualitative work must be based on data that speaks to the findings. To establish credibility, the researcher restated and paraphrased the information received from the respondents to ensure that what was heard was in factually correct. Some of the respondents were contacted afterwards to confirm what they meant by what they had said.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the findings can be generalised to other settings, contexts, or populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher must provide readers with enough case information, especially about the context, so that generalisations can be made to similar contexts (Merriam, 2007). In addressing the issue of transferability, the researcher provided a detailed

description of the number of respondents included in the study and where they are located, data collection methods employed as well as the number of respondents in the fieldwork.

Dependability

Dependability relates to what extent the findings of the study might be found again (Merriam, 2007). The data collection and the analysis process should be presented logically, traceably, and well-documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, the researcher must provide a rich description and a detailed explanation of the decisions, methods, and procedures which might have influenced the study (Merriam, 2007). To address dependability, the research design and its implementation were described in detail as well as the data collection procedure.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent that the research can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors further stated that there are certain strategies used to enhance confirmability, like searching for negative cases or conducting a data audit to pinpoint possible bias. To achieve confirmability in this research, the researcher consulted with his supervisor to ensure that he was objective with his analysis of the data.

Data Collection Procedure

To adhere to ethical standards, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Cape Coast. An introduction letter was requested from the University's Department of Education and Psychology.

Clear communication about ethical considerations, confidentiality, and anonymity was conveyed to the participants. The process of data collection involves personally delivering the questionnaires and conducting interviews. All ambiguous items in the questionnaires were clarified for the participants.

The researcher provided a concise explanation of the research's objectives and its significance to the participants. The data collection timeline was estimated to span approximately two to four weeks, during which the researcher gathered data from the participants. The questionnaire was distributed to students while data from supervisors and graduate school representatives were collected through interviews.

Data Processing and Analysis

The survey data were organised and categorised using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. For the quantitative data related to research questions one, two, and three, descriptive statistics such as means, and standard deviations were employed for analysis. Meanwhile, the qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Concerning the research hypotheses, data for hypotheses one, two, and three were subjected to analysis using independent samples t-tests.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The study focused on investigating the factors influencing the completion rates of MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. The previous chapter detailed the research methodology employed in guiding the study. This chapter is dedicated to showcasing the outcomes derived from the analysis of field data. The findings are subsequently juxtaposed with the existing literature for discussion. The study utilised a Case Study design and was guided by three research questions and one hypothesis.

A total of 53 valid questionnaires were administered, reflecting a 100% return rate. Additionally, five interviews were conducted, involving four senior lecturers functioning as supervisors and one administrator from the school of graduate studies. The present chapter unveils the findings and offers an analytical perspective on these findings. The presentation initiated with a display of the demographic characteristics of the participants, succeeded by the presentation of the results pertaining to the research questions and the subsequent hypothesis. The discussion of these findings is the final aspect addressed in this chapter.

Demographics of Respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents is outlined in this section. The demographic details encompass gender, age, place of residence, marital status, occupation, and programme of study.

Gender

The participants in this study were categorised by gender, and their respective responses are displayed in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	35	66.0
Female	18	34.0
Total	53	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 4 provides information regarding the distribution of participants by gender. Among the complete sample size of 53 respondents, the majority, comprising 66.0%, identified themselves as male. Conversely, 34.0% of the participants indicated their gender as female. These findings indicate a discernible overrepresentation of males within the surveyed participants when compared to females.

Place of Residence

Table 5 illustrates how participants are distributed according to their residential locations.

Table 5: Place of Residence

Place of residence	Frequency	Percent
1. Home	30	56.6
2. Hall	2	3.8
3. Hostel	21	39.6
Total	53	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

Most of the respondents, comprising 56.6% (31 individuals), reported residing at their own homes. Only one respondent (3.8%) indicated living in a hall, suggesting a minimal representation in that category. A significant portion of the respondents, 39.6% (21 individuals), reported residing in hostels. These findings provide an overview of the residential patterns among the participants, with a majority residing in their own homes and a notable number in hostels.

Marital Status

Table 6 offers insights regarding the distribution of respondents according to their marital status.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
1. Single	25	47.2
2. Married	28	52.8
Total	53	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

Table 6 above illustrates the marital status distribution of the respondents, detailing the frequencies and percentages of those who identified as single or married. Out of the total 53 respondents, 25 participants, representing 47.2%, were single, while 28 participants, accounting for 52.8%, were married. These results indicate a slight majority of married participants compared to single respondents.

Profession

Table 7 offers an insight into the distribution of respondents categorised by their professions.

Table 7: Profession

Profession	Frequency	Percent
1. Doctor	1	1.9
2. Nurse	1	1.9
3. Student	33	62.3
4. Teacher	18	34.0
Total	53	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

Among the total sample of 53 participants who were surveyed, the majority (62.3%) identified themselves as students. Teachers constituted a substantial segment too, with 34.0% of the respondents specifying their profession as education related. The categories of doctors and nurses had a relatively modest representation, each comprising 1.9% of the total respondents. These results underscore the occupational composition of the surveyed group, with students constituting the largest professional category, followed by teachers, while healthcare professionals had a limited presence.

Programme of respondents

Table 8 illustrates the distribution of respondents according to their respective study programmes, offering insights into their fields of study.

Table 8: Programme of Respondents

	Programme	Frequency	Percent
1.	Basic Education	11	20.8
2.	Educational Psychology	10	18.9
3.	Guidance and Counselling	9	17.0
4.	MPhil Clinical Health	10	18.9
5.	Measurement and Evaluation	5	9.4
6.	Sociology of Education	2	3.8
7.	Special Education	6	11.3
Total		53	100.0

Source: Field Data (2022)

The largest group of participants were enrolled in the Basic Education programme, constituting 20.8% (11 individuals) of the total respondents. The

MPhil Clinical Health programme and the Educational Psychology programme followed closely, both representing 18.9% (10 individuals) of the respondents each. The Guidance and Counselling programme had 9 individuals, accounting for 17.0% of the respondents, while Special Education comprised 11.3% (6 individuals). The Measurement and Evaluation programme included 5 individuals, contributing 9.4% to the total respondents. Conversely, the Sociology of Education programme had the smallest representation, with 3.8% (2 individuals). These findings offer an overview of the distribution of participants across various study programmes, shedding light on the relative distribution of respondents within the total sample size of the study.

Research Question One

What student-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question one sought to identify what student-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. Fifteen items were used to solicit data on this research question. These were on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree and 4 for strongly agree. All 13 items were negatively worded. Therefore, higher scores indicate the item contributes to delay in thesis while lower scores indicate the item is not a factor. Data were analysed using means and standard deviations. A criterion mean of 2.5 from a 4-point Likert scale was set ($(1+2+3+4)/4=2.5$). A mean score above 2.5 indicates agreement and a mean score below 2.5 indicates disagreement. This is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Student-related Factors Contributing to Delays in MPhil Research and Thesis Completion

Statement	M	SD
1. I do not have sufficient research skills	3.22	.93
2. I do not have enough fund for the research	3.09	.45
3. I find it difficult working alone on my dissertation	3.06	.69
4. I am not motivated to complete the research	2.89	.87
5. I have a problem of financial limitation	2.87	0.98
6. My professional obligations do not permit me to spend time on research	2.85	1.05
7. I do not prefer independence in the research work	2.85	1.05
8. I do not have a habit for reading	2.75	1.07
9. I have difficulty in my family	2.75	0.73
10. I have difficulties in data gathering	2.64	0.98
11. My job does not sponsor my study programme	2.62	0.88
12. I do not have access to research grant	2.26	0.74
13. I am not committed for the research	2.21	0.88
14. I do not have good writing ability	2.21	0.77
15. I am not interested in engaging in research	2.11	0.87

Source: Field Data (2022)

The analysis of student-related factors contributing to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing reveals several key insights. Students generally agreed on factors such as insufficient research skills ($M=3.22$, $SD=0.93$), lack of funding ($M=3.09$, $SD=0.45$), difficulties in working alone ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.69$), and lack of motivation ($M=2.89$, $SD=0.87$). These aspects indicate that students recognise the need for improvement in these areas and acknowledge their impact on research progress. However, there were differences of opinion regarding other factors. While students agreed that financial limitations ($M=2.87$, $SD=0.98$), conflicting professional obligations ($M=2.85$, $SD=1.05$), and a preference for less independence in research work ($M=2.85$, $SD=1.05$) reading habits ($M=2.75$, $SD=1.07$), family difficulties ($M=2.75$, $SD=0.73$), data gathering ($M=2.64$, $SD=0.98$), and sponsorship ($M=2.62$, $SD=0.88$) posed challenges, they disagreed on factors such as access to research grants ($M=2.26$, $SD=0.74$),

commitment (M=2.21, SD=0.88), writing ability (M=2.21, SD=0.77), and interest in research (M=2.11, SD=0.87). Understanding these student-related factors can help educators and institutions tailor support and interventions to address the specific needs and concerns of students, facilitating a more effective and timely completion of their MPhil research and thesis writing.

Research Question Two

What supervisor-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question two sought to identify supervisor-related factors that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. Nine items were used to solicit data on this research question. These were on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree and 4 for strongly agree. All 9 items were negatively worded. Therefore, higher scores indicate the item contributes to delay in thesis while lower scores indicate the item is not a factor. Data were analysed using means and standard deviations. A criterion mean of 2.5 from a 4-point Likert scale was set ($(1+2+3+4)/4=2.5$). A mean score above 2.5 indicates agreement and a mean score below 2.5 indicates disagreement. This is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Supervisor-Related Factors Contributing to Delays in MPhil Research and Thesis Completion

Statement	M	SD
1. I do not get prompt feedback from my supervisor	3.28	0.74
2. I do not have a structured supervisory system (such as a written task specification, regular deadlines, regular monitoring, and regular feedback)	3.19	0.76
3. I do not get the opportunity to interact with my supervisor frequently	2.89	0.97
4. My supervisor is mostly not accessible	2.74	0.76
5. My supervisor does not provide me with guidelines about my thesis	2.40	1.01
6. I do not have a good relationship with my supervisor	2.23	1.09
7. My supervisor does not read through my work before making suggestions	2.19	1.11
8. I get inconsistent feedback from my supervisor	2.02	0.91
9. I get conflicting feedback from my supervisor	1.92	0.81

Source: Field Data (2022)

Interpreting the findings based on the mean values of the provided statements concerning supervisor-related factors that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing, the following can be concluded. Firstly, students agreed that they do not receive prompt feedback from their supervisor (M=3.28, SD=0.74). Additionally, students agreed that they do not

have a structured supervisory system ($M=3.19$, $SD=0.76$), indicating that the absence of clear task specifications, regular deadlines, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms is seen as hindering progress.

Furthermore, students agreed that they do not get the opportunity to interact with their supervisor frequently ($M=2.89$, $SD=0.97$) and that their supervisor is mostly not accessible ($M=2.74$, $SD=0.76$). These findings suggest that students perceive a lack of regular interaction and accessibility from their supervisors, which can impact their progress negatively.

However, students disagreed with the statements that their supervisors do not provide them with guidelines about their thesis ($M=2.40$, $SD=1.01$). Moreover, students disagreed that they do not have a good relationship with their supervisor ($M=2.23$, $SD=1.09$). Finally, students disagreed with the statements that their supervisors do not read through their work before making suggestions ($M=2.19$, $SD=1.11$), that they receive inconsistent feedback ($M=2.02$, $SD=0.91$), and that they receive conflicting feedback ($M=1.92$, $SD=0.81$). These findings suggest that students generally perceive their supervisors as reading through their work, providing consistent feedback, and avoiding conflicting feedback, which may not significantly contribute to the delay.

Research Question Three

What institution-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question two aimed to identify factors related to the institution that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. Nine

items were used to solicit data on this research question. These were on a scale of 1-4, with 1 representing strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for agree and 4 for strongly agree. All 9 items were negatively worded. Therefore, higher scores indicate the item contributes to delay in thesis while lower scores indicate the item is not a factor. Data were analysed using means and standard deviations. A criterion mean of 2.5 from a 4-point Likert scale was set ($(1+2+3+4)/4=2.5$). A mean score above 2.5 indicates agreement and a mean score below 2.5 indicates disagreement. This is presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Institution-Related Factors Contributing to Delays in MPhil Research and Thesis Completion

Statement	M	SD
1. More administrative bureaucracy of the process in our study programme	3.19	0.88
2. More administrative complexity of the process in our study programme	2.85	0.91
3. There are departmental politics between faculty members	2.77	1.01
4. Maximum time limit set for the thesis is too short	2.72	1.10
5. There are conflicts of ideas between faculty members	2.62	0.71
6. I do not have access to research data base sources	2.30	1.01
7. I do not have access to guidance from other experts besides my supervisor	2.17	1.30
8. We do not have clear guidelines for thesis (D)	1.98	0.80
9. I do not have access to good libraries (D)	1.72	0.77

Source: Field Data (2022)

The students' responses indicate that they perceive certain institution-related factors as contributing to the delay in completing their MPhil research and thesis writing. They agreed that there is more administrative bureaucracy (M =

3.19, SD = 0.88) and administrative complexity (M = 2.85, SD = 0.91) in their study programme. They also acknowledged the presence of departmental politics (M = 2.77, SD = 1.01), conflicts of ideas between faculty members (M = 2.62, SD = 0.71), and a perceived short maximum time limit for the thesis (M = 2.72, SD = 1.10). These factors suggest that administrative processes, complex dynamics, and time constraints within the institution are viewed as hindrances to timely completion.

However, the students disagreed with the remaining factors. They did not perceive a lack of access to research database sources (M = 2.30, SD = 1.01) or guidance from other experts besides their supervisor (M = 2.17, SD = 1.30) as major contributors to the delay. Furthermore, they disagreed that there are unclear guidelines for the thesis (M = 1.98, SD = 0.80) or a lack of access to good libraries (M = 1.72, SD = 0.77) affecting their progress.

Section C: Hypotheses Testing

In total, three hypotheses were investigated. The most basic of all parametric assumptions, normality, was verified before these hypotheses were examined.

Table 12: Tests of Normality for Hypothesis Testing

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Student factors	.117	53	.070	.964	53	.108

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Source: Field Data (2022)

In this case, both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test yield p-values greater than .05, which means that there is no strong evidence to suggest a significant departure from normality. Therefore, based on these test results, the student factors variable follows a roughly normal distribution.

Three independent sample t-tests were conducted, to prevent Type I error, the p-value of .05 was divided by three, the number of tests to be run ($.05/3 = .017$). Therefore, for a test to be significant, the p value must be less than .017.

Research Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no statistically significant gender differences in student factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing.

H₁: There is a statistically significant gender differences in student factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing.

Research hypothesis one sought to identify the gender differences in the student factors that pose challenges to MPhil (Master of Philosophy) students during their research and thesis writing. The independent variable was gender with two categories; males and females, while the dependent variable was student related factors. Table 13 presents results of the independent samples t-test.

Table 13: Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences in Student-Related Factors

Variable	Male		Female		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Student related factors	44	3.7	32.8	3.3	10.6	.000	3.2

Source: Field Data (2022)

N= 53

Levene's test of homogeneity of variance revealed that the variances for the two groups (Males and Females) are equal ($p = .557$). Results of the t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in student related factors scores for Males ($M=44$, $SD=3.7$) and Females ($M=32.8$, $SD=3.3$), $t(51) = 10.58$, $p = .000$ (two tailed). In this case, the p-value is less than .001, indicating a highly significant difference between male and female participants in terms of "Student related factors." Looking at their means, Males had a higher score on student related factors that prevent them from completing their thesis. Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's d) of 3.2 indicates a very large and substantial difference between the two groups.

Research Hypothesis Two

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in student factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regards to accommodation status (on-campus and off-campus).

H₁: There is a statistically significant differences in student factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regard to accommodation status (on-campus and off-campus).

Research hypothesis two sought to identify differences in factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regard to accommodation status (on-campus and off-campus). The independent variable was accommodation status with two categories; on-campus and off-campus, while the dependent variable was student-related factors. Table 14 presents the results of the independent samples t-test.

Table 14: Independent Samples t-Test for Differences in Student-Related Factors by Accommodation Status

Variable	On campus		Off-campus		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Student related factors	34.4	5.3	44	3.6	7.9	.000	2.1

Source: Field Data (2022) N= 53

The results of the t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in "Student related factors" scores between students living on campus (M = 34.4, SD = 5.3) and those living off-campus (M = 44, SD = 3.6), $t(51) = 7.9$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The obtained p-value of less than .001 indicates a highly significant difference in the "Student related factors" scores between students living on campus and those living off-campus. On average, students living off-campus had higher scores on "Student related factors," suggesting that they face more challenges that hinder the completion of their theses compared to students living on campus. Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's d) of 2.1 indicates a large and substantial difference between the two groups.

Research Hypothesis Three

H₀: There is no statistically significant differences in student-related factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regards to employment status.

H₁: There is a statistically significant differences in student-related factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regards to employment status.

Research hypothesis three sought to identify differences in factors that serve as a challenge to MPhil students during their research and thesis writing with regards to employment status. The independent variable was employment status with two categories; employed and unemployed while the dependent variable was student related factors. Table 15 displays the outcomes of the independent samples t-test.

Table 15: Independent Samples t-Test for Differences in Student-Related Factors by Employment Status

Variable	Employed		Unemployed		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Student related factors	44.4	3.4	33.3	3.5	11.2	.000	3.2

Source: Field Data (2022) N= 53

Levene's test of homogeneity of variance indicated that the variances for the two groups, "Employed" and "Unemployed" accommodation status, were equal ($p = .148$). The results of the t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in "Student related factors" scores between employed students ($M = 44.4$, $SD = 3.4$) and unemployed students ($M = 33.3$, $SD = 3.5$), $t(51) = 11.2$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). The obtained p-value of less than .001 indicates a highly significant difference in the "Student related factors" scores between employed and unemployed students. Looking at the means, employed students had a higher score on "Student related factors," suggesting that they face more challenges that hinder the completion of their theses compared to unemployed students.

Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's d) of 3.2 indicates a very large and substantial difference between the two groups.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Demographic Information

The demographic information of the sample reveals that all four respondents are males. In terms of rank, one respondent holds the position of Associate Professor, while the remaining three are Senior Lecturers with a PhD qualification. One other participant is a senior administrative assistant with a master's degree. The length of service varies among the respondents, with the range spanning from 12 to 22 years. This indicates a diverse range of experience levels within the sample, with the longest-serving respondent having 22 years of service and the shortest-serving respondent having 12 years.

Themes

The researcher began the analysis of the data by first listening to the audiotapes that included the collected information. After that, the researcher proceeded to copy it word for word as the individuals offered their accounts. To become comfortable with the data, the transcribed information was read repeatedly over the course of some time. The formulation of preliminary codes represented the second stage of the data analysis process. This was done by the researcher so that the data could be organised methodically pertinent to the research aims. The researcher came up with the primary themes and sub-themes by basing them on the objectives, and the meaning gleaned from the data. The major and subthemes drawn from the data are outlined in Table 16. The

findings were backed up by the comments made by a few of the participants. By providing each participant with a pseudonym, (participant one, two etc.), the researcher was able to protect their anonymity and maintain their confidentiality.

Table 16: Themes and Subthemes

Research Question	Themes	Sub-themes
One	Perceptions of thesis writing	Skill acquisition Solve real-life problems
	Student related factors	Students' commitment/attitude Inadequate Knowledge Inadequate Time Funding issues
	Supervisor related factor	Poor Supervisee-supervisor relationship Inadequate Time/workload.
	Institutional related factor	Administrative lapses Ethical clearance Thesis assessment Inadequate resources

Measures to address challenges	Progress report Data analysis/thesis writing Education Student-supervisor relationship Institutional Review Board Student supervisor-attitudes Provision of Resources Administrative issues Weighting of supervision
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Source: Field Data (2022)

Research Question One

What student-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question one was designed to examine the factors linked to students that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. To gather relevant data, interviews were conducted with four supervisors and one administrator from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). Two themes emerged from the respondents' data. These were Perceptions of thesis writing and Student related factors that posed as a challenge in thesis writing and completion.

Theme one: Perceptions of Thesis Writing

The first theme of this study focused on examining the perceptions of supervisors and administrators from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS)

regarding thesis writing. It aimed to gain insights into how these key stakeholders perceive thesis writing as an academic endeavour. This theme revealed two sub-themes, these are skill acquisition and solving real life problems. These are discussed in the paragraphs below. Direct statements from interviews are quoted to support these categories. The responses highlight that thesis writing offers a platform for skill acquisition, enabling students to enhance their research abilities, critical thinking skills, and communication capabilities. It serves as an opportunity for students to bring together their coursework knowledge and apply it to real-world research problems, fostering intellectual growth and paving the way for future academic and professional endeavours.

Skill Acquisition

Respondents talked about the requirement aspect, and highlighted the developmental aspects, emphasising the acquisition of research skills, critical thinking abilities, and the application of knowledge gained during coursework. Together, these responses reflect various perceptions of skill acquisition in relation to thesis writing. These perceptions underline the significance of thesis writing as an opportunity for students to acquire practical skills, demonstrate their competence, and contribute to their field of study.

Participant five highlighted that thesis writing is seen as a requirement that students must fulfil to be awarded postgraduate certificates.

According to participant five:

It is a requirement students must fulfil to be awarded postgraduate certificates. By engaging in the process of finalising their thesis,

students demonstrate their comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and their proficiency in conducting independent research within their specialised fields of study.

In this perception, the focus is on the completion of the thesis as a necessary step in the academic journey. It signifies the fulfilment of the programme requirements and serves as a formal evaluation of the student's research and writing abilities.

Respondent One emphasised the significance of skill acquisition in the context of thesis writing. Engaging in the process of thesis writing enables students to acquire valuable research skills that extend beyond the theoretical knowledge gained during their coursework. They could delve into in-depth research, explore relevant literature, and formulate research questions that drive their investigations.

According to respondent one:

Thesis writing offers a unique opportunity for students to acquire and develop a wide range of skills that are crucial for their academic and professional growth.

Through this process, students refine their abilities to critically analyse existing knowledge, evaluate different perspectives, and synthesise information to develop their own arguments and conclusions.

Respondent Two echoed the notion that thesis writing allows candidates to apply what they have learned over the period of coursework. By synthesising the

knowledge and insights gained during their coursework, students demonstrate their ability to bring their learnings to bear in a substantial research project.

According to respondent two:

It allows the candidate to bring to bear what they've learned over the period of coursework, trains students to be critical thinkers and opens the mind of the candidates.

This perception emphasises the integration of theoretical concepts and methodologies into practical research work. Additionally, it highlights the role of thesis writing in fostering critical thinking skills and expanding the candidates' perspectives.

Solve Real Life Problems

These responses collectively highlight the perception that thesis writing enables students to solve real-life problems. It equips them with the skills and knowledge necessary to gather and analyse data, find solutions to societal challenges, and contribute to the betterment of their communities and the nation.

Respondent one stressed that:

The process of conducting research for a thesis equips students with the skills to collect, analyse, and interpret data relevant to real-life issues. Thesis writing, therefore, provides a practical avenue for students to apply their knowledge and skills in solving real-world challenges they may encounter in their future professional endeavours.

According to Respondent three:

Thesis writing plays a crucial role in assisting with the identification and resolution of numerous challenges faced by our nation. It is a valuable avenue through which solutions can be sought for pressing issues. By engaging in research and analysis as part of their thesis work, students could contribute to the discovery and implementation of effective solutions to these problems.

According to respondent four:

Thesis writing helps find solutions to social, academic, and contemporary problems confronting us as a nation and it is through research work (thesis) that the solutions are found.

The respondents' statements highlight the significance of thesis writing in addressing real-life challenges and finding solutions. Through conducting research and analysis as part of their thesis work, students acquire skills and knowledge that can be applied to solve practical problems in their future professional endeavours. Thesis writing plays a crucial role in identifying and resolving pressing issues faced by society, allowing students to actively contribute to the discovery of effective solutions. It provides a platform for students to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, making a positive impact by addressing social, academic, and contemporary problems. Overall, thesis writing equips students with essential skills, fosters critical thinking, and enables them to contribute meaningfully to the resolution of real-world challenges.

Theme Two: Student-Related Factors

Theme two focuses on student-related factors that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. These factors revolve around the students themselves and their characteristics, behaviours, and circumstances that can hinder their progress. Student-related factors, including students' commitment/attitude, inadequate knowledge, and inadequate time, funding limitations, and poor supervisee-supervisor relationships, can significantly contribute to delays in thesis writing and completion.

Students' Commitment/Attitude

Students' commitment and attitude play a vital role in the timely completion of their theses. If students lack dedication or fail to prioritise their research, they may procrastinate, leading to delays. Similarly, a negative attitude towards their work can affect the quality of their output and their responsiveness to feedback, further prolonging the process.

Respondent one specified:

Some of the students are not committed to what they are supposed to do. They do not attach much importance to it.

Respondent two also added that

Attitude of students towards their work. E.g.: their works not being readable as they fail to read over the work before submitting. Their response to feedback takes too long a time before bringing.

According to Respondent four:

Some fail to plan properly or are just lazy. Failing to utilise thesis guide given to them by the School of Graduate Studies. Their response to feedback takes too long a time before bringing. Some students are also not serious with their work as they delay in presenting their work. Students give their thesis as a contract to other people to write for them.

The feedback from the respondents highlights various student-related factors that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. One common factor is a lack of commitment and recognition of the importance of the research and thesis work. Some students do not prioritise their tasks and fail to invest the necessary effort and time, resulting in delays. Another factor is the attitude of students towards their work. Some students submit unreadable works as they do not review their work before submission. Additionally, their response to feedback is delayed, further impeding progress. Lack of proper planning and laziness are also mentioned as factors contributing to delays. Some students fail to utilise the thesis guide provided to them and exhibit a lack of seriousness and delay in presenting their work. Outsourcing the thesis writing to others is another concerning behaviour mentioned. These responses collectively illustrate that students' commitment, attitude towards work, planning skills, and their seriousness in undertaking their research can significantly impact the timely completion of their MPhil research and thesis.

Inadequate Knowledge

Inadequate knowledge refers to a lack of understanding or proficiency in the subject matter or skills necessary for successful completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. Respondent three and Respondent four highlight this factor as a contributor to delays in the process.

According to Respondent three:

Students lack the necessary writing skills and make reading the work a problem for the supervisor.

Respondent four added:

Students lack the necessary writing skills and have too many grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, wrong expressions, copy and paste, etc., which make reading their work a problem for the supervisor. Some also do not know the essence of postgraduate studies.

According to Respondent three, students lack the necessary writing skills, which makes it difficult for the supervisor to read and comprehend their work. This suggests that students may struggle with structuring their ideas, articulating their thoughts effectively, and presenting their research in a clear and coherent manner. As a result, supervisors may face challenges in reviewing and evaluating the work, potentially leading to delays in providing feedback and guidance. Respondent four expands on the issue of inadequate knowledge by mentioning specific problems such as grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, wrong expressions, and excessive reliance on copy-pasting. These issues indicate a lack

of understanding of proper academic writing conventions, research integrity, and originality. Such deficiencies can impede the progress of the thesis as supervisors need to spend additional time addressing these errors and guiding students to improve their writing skills.

Inadequate Time

The term "insufficient time" denotes a circumstance in which students have an insufficient amount of time to commit to their MPhil research and thesis writing. It can arise due to various reasons, such as students having other responsibilities or commitments, including work or personal obligations that compete for their time and attention. Inadequate time can lead to delays in completing the necessary tasks and meeting deadlines, as students may struggle to allocate sufficient time for conducting research, analysing data, writing, revising, and seeking feedback from supervisors.

According to Respondent one:

The students sometimes fail to respect the time given to them by the supervisor.

Respondent two specified:

The difficulty in combining work and thesis writing by some of the students.

In addition, Respondent three specified:

The difficulty in combining work and thesis writing by some of the students hinders them from devoting their time to the work.

Respondent 1, Respondent 2, and Respondent 3 highlight inadequate time as a significant student-related factor contributing to delays in MPhil research and thesis writing. According to Respondent 1, students occasionally fail to respect the time allocated to them by their supervisors. Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 both emphasise the challenges faced by students in balancing their work commitments with thesis writing. This difficulty in combining work and thesis writing hampers students' ability to allocate sufficient time to their research and thesis work, resulting in delays in completion. Thus, inadequate time management and the struggle to balance work responsibilities with thesis writing pose obstacles for students. Failing to prioritise and allocate adequate time to their research and thesis work negatively impacts their progress and contributes to delays.

Funding limitations

According to Respondent 2, inadequate funding is a significant student-related factor that contributes to delays in MPhil research and thesis writing. The financial standing of students is highlighted as a key issue, with most students lacking sufficient funding. This lack of financial resources creates challenges when students need to conduct fieldwork or engage in other activities that require financial support.

According to Respondent two:

Financial standing of the students also poses a challenge. Most students do not have the funding and that makes it difficult for them when they must go to the field.

Insufficient funding can impede students' ability to carry out necessary research activities, such as data collection, travel to research sites, access to resources and materials, or participation in conferences or workshops. Without adequate funding, students may face limitations in their research scope, access to necessary resources, and opportunities for academic and professional development.

Poor Supervisee-supervisor Relationship

Poor supervisee-supervisor relationships refer to a lack of positive and productive interactions between students and their thesis supervisors. These relationships are characterised by inadequate communication, a lack of mutual respect, and a failure to prioritise academic obligations. When the supervisee-supervisor relationship is poor, it can hinder the progress of the thesis writing process and contribute to delays in completion. Respondent 5 highlights poor supervisee-supervisor relationships as a student-related factor that contributes to delays in MPhil research and thesis writing. The lack of a well-fostered student-supervisor relationship negatively impacts the thesis writing process, leading to difficulties and delays.

According to Respondent 5:

Student-Supervisor relationship is not fostered well and hence does not promote a smooth thesis writing process. Supervisors feel they are taken for granted and students not prioritising their academic obligations.

In such situations, supervisors may feel undervalued or taken for granted by students who do not prioritise their academic responsibilities. This can result in

a breakdown of effective communication channels and a lack of timely guidance and feedback. Students may hesitate to seek clarification or guidance from their supervisors, leading to misunderstandings and difficulties in progressing with their research.

Research Question Two

What supervisor-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question two aimed to investigate the factors related to supervisors that contribute to the delay in the completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. To gather relevant data, interviews were conducted with four supervisors and one administrator from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). The involvement of supervisors and the SGS administrator in the research process helped provide valuable insights into the various factors affecting students' progress and completion of their MPhil research and thesis. These interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic from different perspectives and provided a deeper understanding of the challenges and issues faced by students during their MPhil journey.

Theme three: Supervisor-related Factors

Theme three focuses on factors associated with supervisors that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. These supervisor-related factors encompass specific aspects or elements connected to the supervisors themselves that exert an influence on the progress of MPhil research and thesis writing. These factors encompass the behaviour, actions, and

characteristics of the supervisors that can either facilitate or hinder the progress of students' research work and the timely completion of their theses. Supervisor-related factors play a significant role in shaping the student-supervisor relationship and influencing the overall thesis writing process. One factor was common among respondents, and this was inadequate time and workload,

Inadequate Time/Workload

Inadequate time/workload is a supervisor-related factor that can contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. It refers to situations where supervisors have limited availability due to a heavy workload or other professional commitments, which affects their ability to provide timely guidance and feedback to students. Supervisors often have multiple responsibilities, including conducting their own research, teaching, administrative duties, and mentoring students. These responsibilities can create a time constraint, making it challenging for supervisors to allocate sufficient time to each student. As a result, students may experience delays in receiving feedback, discussions, or assistance from their supervisors, which can impede their research progress and thesis writing.

According to Respondent one:

Making time to supervise and to go through the students' work is sometimes a challenge.

According to Respondent two:

The number of students to supervisor ratio is biased and that makes it difficult for the supervisor to have enough time for each

student. Example: a supervisor having to attend to 15 candidates in a week.

According to Respondent three:

The supervisor is fully engaged in too many activities due to other responsibilities.

According to Respondent four:

The scope of work of some supervisors also makes it difficult for them to promptly vet the work of their students.

According to Respondent 5:

Some supervisors prioritise their personal engagement at the expense of the student's work. Work overload on the supervisors and inadequate supervisors at the various departments

According to respondent one, supervisors struggle to find sufficient time to supervise and review students' work, indicating a scarcity of available time for effective guidance and feedback. Respondent two emphasises the imbalanced ratio between the number of students and supervisors, with supervisors having to handle a large number of candidates. This results in limited time for individual student supervision and hampers the quality and timeliness of support provided. Respondent three reveals that supervisors' engagement in multiple activities beyond student supervision further limits the time they can dedicate to their students' work. This multitasking and divided attention can lead to delays in providing necessary guidance and input. The scope of work of some supervisors, as mentioned by respondent four, adds to the time constraints. Having a wide

range of responsibilities can hinder their ability to promptly review and provide feedback on students' work, prolonging the thesis writing process.

Furthermore, respondent five sheds light on supervisors prioritising their personal engagements over their obligations towards students, indicating a lack of commitment to supporting students' progress. Additionally, work overload and a shortage of supervisors across various departments exacerbate the issue, further limiting the time available for effective supervision. These findings collectively underscore the importance of addressing the issue of inadequate time/workload among supervisors.

Research Question Three

What institutional-related factors contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing?

Research question three aimed to investigate the institutional-related factors that contribute to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. These interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic from different perspectives and provided a deeper understanding of the challenges and issues faced by students during their MPhil journey. Two themes emerged, these were institutional related factors and measures to address challenges.

Theme Four: Institutional-related Factor

Theme four explores the institutional-related factors that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. These factors are associated with the institutional environment and support provided by the academic institution where the research is being conducted. Institutional-related

factors encompass policies, structures, resources, and overall institutional support that can either facilitate or hinder the progress of students' research work and the timely completion of their theses. These factors include administrative lapses, ethical clearance, and inadequate resources.

Administrative Lapses

Administrative lapses refer to errors, inefficiencies, or failures within administrative processes or systems. These lapses can occur in various aspects of administrative functions, such as document processing, record keeping, communication, decision-making, and policy implementation. Administrative lapses can lead to delays, confusion, and errors in the execution of administrative tasks, potentially impacting the progress of MPhil research and thesis writing. The participants' views are presented below.

According to Respondent one:

Departmental failure to organise seminars for students to experience and present their work can demotivate students.

According to Respondent three:

Proposal defence is not organised early enough to afford the students enough time to work on thesis writing.

According to Respondent four:

Failure on the part of departments to assign students to their supervisors early to start having discussions with their supervisors.

According to Respondent five:

Supervisors not being in touch with their HoDs to have supervisors assigned to students early enough. School of Graduate Studies not constantly playing its supervisory role over the various departments/faculties/colleges.

The failure of departments to organise seminars or platforms for students to present their work can demotivate students, as noted by Respondent one. Secondly, the timing of the proposal defence is often not organised early enough, depriving students of sufficient time to work on their thesis writing, as highlighted by Respondent three. Additionally, delays in assigning supervisors to students, as mentioned by Respondent four, can hinder students from seeking guidance and initiating discussions. Lastly, the lack of coordination between supervisors and Heads of Departments, along with insufficient oversight from the School of Graduate Studies, as described by Respondent five, further contribute to delays in the thesis writing process.

Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance refers to the process of obtaining approval from an ethics committee or institutional review board (IRB) for research involving human participants. It is a critical step in conducting research that involves human subjects to ensure the protection of their rights, welfare, and dignity. Ethical clearance involves the thorough review and evaluation of research protocols, methodologies, informed consent procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and any other ethical considerations related to the study.

According to Respondent one:

Time taken for students to obtain ethical clearance sometimes delays.

According to Respondent three:

IRB taking too long a time to give students the go-ahead to work on their thesis has also contributed greatly to the delays.

Obtaining ethical clearance can lead to delays in the research and thesis writing process, as highlighted by respondent one. This step involves submitting research protocols and obtaining approval from an ethics committee or IRB, which can be a time-consuming endeavour. Such delays directly impact the project timeline, causing setbacks in data collection and analysis. Respondent three further emphasises that the lengthy review process by the IRB can impede students' progress in their thesis work. While the IRB plays a vital role in ensuring ethical guidelines are followed, prolonged reviews can significantly hinder students' ability to complete their research and thesis in a timely manner. It is crucial to streamline the ethical clearance process and enhance communication between students, supervisors, and the IRB to address these challenges effectively.

Thesis Assessment

Thesis assessment refers to the evaluation and examination of a student's thesis or dissertation to determine its quality, originality, academic rigour, and contribution to the field of study. Thesis assessment

is critical in ensuring the academic rigour and standards of research in higher education. It provides valuable feedback to students, helping them improve their research skills and contribute to the knowledge in their field.

However, it poses challenges to the timely completion of the thesis.

According to Respondent one:

The outcome of the thesis assessment takes too long a time to come and that can also demotivate other students in the process of conducting their research.

According to Respondent four:

There are delays on the part of external assessors. Other factors like strikes and labour unrest seldom happen but whenever they do, affect students' work gravely.

According to Respondent two:

Supervision not weighted like the courses taught in the class makes it difficult for the supervisors to cope with.

One of the factors mentioned by respondent one that contributes to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing is the time taken for the outcome of the thesis assessment. When the assessment process is prolonged, it can demotivate students and create uncertainty about the progress of their own work. Respondent four adds that delays in the assessment can be caused by external assessors who may have other commitments, leading to longer waiting times for feedback. Unforeseen circumstances such as strikes can also disrupt the assessment process. Additionally, respondent two highlights the challenge of

balancing supervision with other academic responsibilities, which can result in delays in providing timely guidance and feedback. Overall, these supervisor-related factors, including assessment delays, availability of external assessors, and workload management, contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing.

Inadequate Resources

Inadequate resources in the context of MPhil research and thesis writing refer to the limited availability or insufficient provision of essential materials, facilities, and support necessary for conducting high-quality research and completing the thesis successfully. From the supervisors' point of view, inadequate resources can significantly impact their ability to effectively guide and support students in their MPhil research and thesis writing. Supervisors rely on various resources to provide valuable insights, feedback, and assistance throughout the research process.

According to Respondent two:

Supervisors sharing office space with other colleagues makes it difficult to allot ample time for students as they may not want to inconvenience office mates. There are also inadequate resources available to the supervisors. Example: internet connectivity, which makes it difficult for them to stay in offices to access information that may be of relevance to the students.

According to Respondent four:

When the intake of postgraduate students increases and there is not a corresponding increase in the hiring of supervisors, it causes an increase in the workload of the supervisors.

According to Respondent five:

Failure to pay supervisors on time demotivates them. When a student steps down in some cases, supervisors are not paid for the period they spent with such students.

According to respondent two, supervisors face challenges when sharing office space with colleagues, as it may hinder their ability to allocate sufficient time for students and create distractions. Inadequate resources, such as unreliable internet connectivity, can further impede their access to necessary information. Respondent four emphasises that an increased number of postgraduate students without an adequate increase in supervisor hires leads to a heavier workload for existing supervisors, potentially compromising the quality of supervision. Additionally, delayed payment to supervisors, as highlighted by respondent five, can have a demotivating effect and impact their commitment to their supervisory roles. These challenges include limited time availability, inadequate resources, increased workload without staffing adjustments, and payment-related issues. Overall, these factors contribute to the difficulties faced by supervisors in effectively guiding postgraduate students.

Theme Five: Measures to address Challenges

Established Measures

To address the challenges identified by the respondents in the context of postgraduate student supervision, institutions may already have measures in place. These measures aim to mitigate the difficulties faced by supervisors and create a better supervisory environment. Respondents provided measures that have been established to help solve these challenges.

Progress Report

Progress reports are commonly used in various contexts, such as academic settings, business projects, research endeavours, or employee evaluations. They serve as a means of tracking and assessing progress, communicating updates to relevant stakeholders, and ensuring transparency and accountability. Respondents indicated that departments are to hold progress for students.

According to Respondent one:

Every department is to hold at least three seminars for students to present information on where he or she has reached so that whatever challenges they may encounter can be dealt with.

According to Respondent two:

Regular reminders: the school of graduate studies sends regular reminders to the departments, faculties, and schools to ask them to fasten the process of supervision.

According to Respondent three:

Every department is to hold at least three seminars for students to present information on where he or she has reached so that whatever challenges they may encounter can be dealt with.

The respondents emphasise the importance of regular seminars and reminders in supporting the progress of postgraduate students. These practices provide opportunities for students to share their work, seek feedback, and address any challenges they may encounter. Holding seminars within each department allows for open communication and targeted support. Additionally, the school of graduate studies sends reminders to expedite the supervision process and ensure timely guidance. These practices aim to create a productive and supportive academic environment, facilitating the advancement of postgraduate students in their studies.

Education on data analysis/thesis writing

Data analysis education typically covers areas such as statistical analysis, data visualisation, data management, research design, and the use of software or programming languages for data manipulation and analysis. Students are trained to understand different types of data, select appropriate analysis methods, and draw valid conclusions based on the results obtained.

According to Respondent four:

Thesis guide to help guide the students as to how their work should be presented. Organisation of regular data analysis workshops for students.

According to Respondent one:

Workshops that teach students to analyse and manage their data.

Several key suggestions and challenges emerged from the responses regarding the process of MPhil research and thesis writing. One suggestion is to hold seminars where students can present their progress and address any challenges they may encounter. Regular reminders were also suggested to expedite the supervision process. The provision of a thesis guide was recommended to assist students in understanding proper presentation formats, while organising data analysis workshops aimed to enhance their data analysis skills. These suggestions underscore the importance of clear guidance, regular communication, and comprehensive support to ensure a successful MPhil research and thesis writing experience for students.

Student-supervisor relationship

The student-supervisor relationship refers to the dynamic and collaborative interaction between a student and their academic supervisor or mentor in an educational or research setting. It typically occurs in higher education institutions, particularly in graduate programmes or research-focused courses. The student-supervisor relationship is characterised by a close professional bond, where the supervisor guides and supports the student in their academic pursuits, research projects, or dissertation work. This relationship is built on trust, mutual respect, and effective communication between the student and the supervisor.

According to Respondent one:

Workshops on managing one's supervisor and workshops that teach students to analyse and manage their data.

According to Respondent two:

Students and supervisors should go for counselling. This helps the students understand the role they must play in the supervisor/supervisee relationship. Supervisors have also been urged to develop good interpersonal relationships with students to allay their fears. It helps make them approachable to the students.

Efforts are being made to strengthen the student-supervisor relationship through various means, as mentioned by the respondents. Respondent one highlights the availability of workshops that focus on managing one's supervisor and analysing and managing data. These workshops equip students with essential skills and knowledge to effectively navigate their interactions with their supervisor and handle research data competently. On the other hand, Respondent two suggests that counselling plays a vital role in fostering a healthy student-supervisor relationship. By attending counselling sessions, students gain a better understanding of their role in the relationship, while supervisors are encouraged to develop good interpersonal relationships with students, making themselves approachable and alleviating any fears or concerns. Together, these initiatives aim to create a supportive and productive

environment, where students and supervisors can collaborate effectively and achieve academic and research success.

New measures

Institutional Review Board

According to Respondent one, one approach suggested is to expedite the assessment of research protocols by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of this expedited assessment is to enable students to collect their data in a timely manner, which can ultimately help them complete their projects or research work earlier than anticipated.

According to Respondent one:

Getting the IRB to speed up the assessment of the protocol so that the students can for their data to help them finish early.

By advocating for a faster assessment of research protocols, the aim is to reduce the waiting time for students to receive approval from the IRB. This expedites the data collection phase, allowing students to access the necessary data more quickly and potentially finish their work ahead of schedule. By expediting the IRB assessment, students can make progress with their research, gather data in a timelier manner, and have a higher likelihood of completing their projects earlier. This approach recognises the importance of efficient processes in supporting student researchers and enabling them to achieve their academic goals within the allotted timeframes.

Supervisee-Supervisor-Attitudes

Positive attitudes from both students and supervisors are essential in establishing a healthy and productive student-supervisor relationship. This includes supervisors fostering a cordial relationship, being transparent about workload limitations, and students taking responsibility for their work and seeking input from peers. By nurturing these attitudes, students and supervisors can create an environment conducive to effective collaboration, support, and academic growth.

According to Respondent one:

Encourage supervisors to have a cordial relationship with their students (supervisee) and give whatever support they can give them without any hesitations.

According to Respondent three:

Supervisors should be honest enough to give up on some of their workloads.

According to Respondent three:

Students must be responsible and engage their colleagues to proofread their work before sending it in for the supervisor's assessments.

The importance of a positive and supportive relationship between supervisors and students was emphasised, encouraging open communication and mutual support. Supervisors were advised to prioritise and allocate time effectively to guide and assist their students while managing their own workloads.

Students were urged to engage their colleagues for proofreading, taking responsibility for the quality of their work. These perspectives underscore the significance of positive attitudes and actions from both supervisors and students, fostering a productive and successful student-supervisor relationship.

Provision of Resources

The provision of resources refers to the act of supplying or making available the necessary tools, materials, and support systems to individuals or organisations involved in a particular activity or endeavour. In the context of the student-supervisor relationship, the provision of resources refers to the allocation and availability of various resources that facilitate and enhance the learning, research, and mentorship processes.

According to Respondent two:

Provide more conducive office space for supervisors to afford them privacy with their students to prevent distracting other colleagues.

According to Respondent two, it is suggested to provide more conducive office spaces for supervisors. The purpose of these improved office spaces is to offer privacy between supervisors and their students, thereby preventing distractions for other colleagues. This recommendation recognises the importance of creating an environment where supervisors can have focused and uninterrupted interactions with their students. Conducive office spaces provide a suitable setting for private discussions, meetings, and mentorship sessions. By ensuring privacy, supervisors can

address sensitive or confidential matters with their students without causing distractions or disruptions to colleagues in shared workspaces.

Administrative Issues

Administrative issues play a significant role in shaping the student-supervisor relationship and the overall research process. Here are the key points highlighted by the respondents regarding administrative issues:

According to Respondent two:

Reduce the workload of supervisors so they can make enough time for the supervisees.

According to Respondent three:

Proposal defence should be organised somewhere in the second semester of the course work; this gives the students enough time to work on their thesis. Timelines must be set for everything and followed rigidly as done in other jurisdictions.

According to Respondent four:

Departments should assign students to their supervisors early enough so they can start having discussions with their supervisors. There should be regular workshops on all aspects of thesis writing to equip students with the necessary skills needed. Students must be forced to attend such workshops, programs, seminars, etc. Departments should be intentional in the kind of orientation they give the students so that they appreciate the need to be committed to their work.

The responses highlight several key suggestions to enhance the student-supervisor relationship and improve the research process. These include maintaining a positive and supportive environment, being mindful of workload limitations, engaging colleagues for proofreading, reducing supervisor workloads, setting clear timelines and expectations, allocating supervisors early, providing training and workshops, and implementing orientation programs. By implementing these suggestions, institutions can foster effective communication, prioritise student support, establish accountability, and create a conducive environment for successful research collaboration between students and supervisors.

Weighting of Supervision

In the context of university courses, the weighting of supervision typically refers to the allocation of credits or units to the supervision component of a course. It determines the proportionate value that supervision carries in relation to other components, such as lectures, tutorials, assignments, or examinations. Supervision in university courses generally involves one-on-one or small group interactions between students and a supervisor, who provides guidance, support, and feedback on the students' work, research projects, or dissertations. The supervision component allows students to delve deeper into a particular subject area, receive personalised attention, and develop critical thinking and research skills.

According to Respondent two:

Plans are in place to add supervision to the teaching load.

Adding supervision to the teaching load means that instructors would take on additional responsibilities related to providing guidance, mentoring, or overseeing students' progress in their studies or research projects. This could involve activities such as individual or group meetings with students, reviewing their work, offering feedback and support, or monitoring their progress. By incorporating supervision into the teaching load, educational institutions aim to enhance the support and mentorship available to students, ensuring they receive personalised attention and guidance. It acknowledges the value of supervision as an integral part of the educational experience and recognises the need for dedicated time and resources to fulfil these responsibilities. Implementing such plans may involve adjusting the workload allocation for teachers, revising their job descriptions or contractual obligations, or providing additional resources or support to accommodate the supervision component. The specific details and implementation of these plans would depend on the policies and practices of the educational institution or department.

Discussion

Student-related Factors that hinder Thesis Writing and Completion

The qualitative data provided by supervisors and administrators from the school further highlight the student-related factors that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. These insights complement the

quantitative findings and offer a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by students.

According to the supervisors and administrators, several factors hinder students' progress and timely completion. The first factor identified is students' commitment/attitude. This aligns with the quantitative finding of a lack of motivation among students. It suggests that students' dedication to their research and their overall attitude towards their work play a significant role in their ability to complete their MPhil research and thesis in a timely manner. Interventions that address motivation and foster a positive attitude towards research could be beneficial. Another factor identified by supervisors and administrators is inadequate knowledge. This echoes the quantitative finding of insufficient research skills among students. It implies that students may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct research effectively and efficiently.

The qualitative data also mention inadequate time as a factor hindering students' progress. This aligns with the quantitative finding of difficulties in working alone. It suggests that students may struggle with time management and balancing their research work with other obligations. Time management workshops or mentoring on effective planning and organisation could assist students in optimising their research time and progress.

Additionally, funding limitations emerge as a significant factor in both the quantitative and qualitative data. This underscores the financial challenges faced by students in pursuing their research. Finding ways to alleviate financial burdens,

such as exploring scholarship opportunities or offering financial assistance programs, can help alleviate this obstacle.

Lastly, the qualitative data highlights the importance of supervisee-supervisor relationships. Poor relationships between students and their supervisors or mentors can hinder progress and create barriers to timely completion. Fostering strong and supportive relationships, promoting effective communication, and providing mentorship training for supervisors can enhance the supervisee-supervisor dynamic and promote successful research progress.

Thus, qualitative data obtained from supervisors and administrators in the school provides additional insights that complement the quantitative findings regarding the factors that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. The data reveal that students' commitment and attitude towards their research, as well as their inadequate knowledge and research skills, play a significant role in hindering their progress. Time management issues, difficulties in balancing research with other obligations, and financial limitations are also identified as significant challenges. Additionally, the importance of fostering positive supervisee-supervisor relationships is highlighted as a factor that can either support or impede students' timely completion of their studies.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) provides a valuable framework to discuss the student-related factors identified in both the quantitative and qualitative data that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing.

The first factor identified, students' commitment/attitude, aligns with Kolb's concept of "Concrete Experience" and "Active Experimentation" in the learning cycle. According to Kolb, learning is a continuous process that involves reflecting on concrete experiences and acting based on those experiences. In the context of MPhil research, students' commitment and attitude towards their work reflect their engagement in the learning process. Students who demonstrate a positive attitude and a strong commitment to their research are more likely to engage actively in the learning cycle, which can facilitate timely completion. Interventions based on Kolb's theory, such as experiential learning activities, reflection exercises, and opportunities for active experimentation, can help students develop a deeper commitment to their research and foster a positive attitude towards the learning process.

The factor of inadequate knowledge resonates with Kolb's concept of "Abstract Conceptualisation" in the learning cycle. In this phase, learners make sense of their experiences by integrating new information and concepts into their existing knowledge framework. Students lacking sufficient research skills may struggle to conceptualise and apply theoretical concepts to their research effectively. To address this challenge, educational interventions grounded in Kolb's theory can involve providing opportunities for students to engage in reflective observation, conceptual thinking, and knowledge acquisition. Workshops, seminars, and mentoring programs can enhance students' understanding of research methodologies, data analysis techniques, and scholarly writing, thus strengthening their ability to conduct research more efficiently.

The issue of inadequate time aligns with the "Reflective Observation" stage of Kolb's learning cycle. Reflection involves critically examining one's experiences and considering how they can be improved. Students who struggle with time management may benefit from incorporating reflective practices into their research process. By reflecting on their time allocation, identifying inefficiencies, and exploring strategies for optimising their research time, students can develop better time management skills. Kolb's theory emphasises the importance of active reflection as a catalyst for learning and improvement.

The factor of funding limitations can be linked to Kolb's notion of "Concrete Experience" in the learning cycle. Lack of financial resources can present tangible barriers to conducting research, such as limited access to materials, equipment, or research participants. To address this challenge, institutions can provide opportunities for students to engage in concrete experiences by offering financial support through scholarships, grants, or research assistantships. These experiences enable students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world research settings, enhancing their overall learning and facilitating timely completion.

Finally, the significance of supervisee-supervisor relationships highlighted in the qualitative data can be connected to Kolb's concept of "Active Experimentation" in the learning cycle. Collaboration, effective communication, and mentorship are essential elements for facilitating active experimentation. Students who have strong relationships with their supervisors or mentors can benefit from guidance, support, and constructive feedback, which can enhance

their learning experience and research progress. By fostering supportive and collaborative relationships, institutions can create an environment that encourages active experimentation and promotes successful research outcomes.

When examining the results of the earlier research in contrast to the present study, there exist multiple resemblances and intersections in the factors that have been pinpointed as obstacles to students' advancement in successfully finishing their research and thesis.

In Rauf's align study, the significance of student quality, personal situations, and financial resources align with the current study's findings regarding students' commitment and attitude, as well as financial limitations. Both studies emphasise the importance of students' dedication and the impact of personal circumstances on their research progress.

Matin and Khan (2017) identify lack of knowledge, experience, commitment, time constraints, excessive workload, lack of funds, and inadequate supervision meetings as problems in conducting research and thesis writing. These findings parallel the current study's identification of inadequate knowledge and research skills, time management issues, and financial limitations as challenges faced by students.

Afzal and Jami (2018) focus on academic procrastination as a prevalent issue among students. While this aspect is not explicitly mentioned in the current study, the findings regarding students' commitment and attitude towards their research indirectly touch upon the issue of procrastination. Both studies recognise

the need for students to overcome challenges related to motivation and effective decision-making.

Sarwar, Shah, and Akram (2018) highlight factors related to supervision, including lack of motivation, domestic responsibilities, poor language skills, and financial constraints. These align with the current study's emphasis on the importance of positive supervisee-supervisor relationships and the role of financial limitations in hindering students' progress.

Wanasinghe (2020) identifies workplace and family commitments, health problems, insufficient support from family, time management problems, and long travel distances as personal issues affecting research completion. These findings complement the current study's recognition of time management issues and the need to balance research with other obligations.

Shahsavari and Kourepaz (2020) emphasise problems in writing the literature review section, particularly in synthesising, critiquing, and explaining the literature. Although this specific aspect is not explicitly mentioned in the current study, the findings regarding inadequate knowledge and skills in conducting research indirectly touch upon the challenges faced in writing different sections of the thesis.

Ul-Haq and Shahzad (2021) discuss challenges faced by students in Library and Information Science, including a tough job schedule, family responsibilities, language barriers, and lack of critical thinking. While the specific context differs, these challenges overlap with the current study's identification of

time management issues, balancing research with other obligations, and inadequate knowledge and skills.

Supervisor-related Factors that cause challenges in Thesis Writing and Completion.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data shed light on the supervisor-related challenges faced by students in completing their MPhil research and thesis writing.

Quantitative findings indicate that students perceive a lack of prompt feedback and a lack of structure in the supervisory system. The absence of clear task specifications, regular deadlines, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms is seen as hindering their progress. Additionally, students express a lack of frequent interaction with their supervisors and perceive their supervisors as inaccessible.

Qualitative data from supervisors and administrators corroborate these findings by highlighting inadequate time and workload as a significant factor contributing to delays. Supervisors' heavy workloads, professional commitments, and engagement in multiple activities beyond student supervision limit their availability and ability to provide timely guidance and feedback. This aligns with the students' perception of supervisors being inaccessible.

Overall, both the quantitative and qualitative data emphasise the importance of addressing supervisor-related challenges to facilitate timely completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. Enhancing the supervisory system by implementing clearer task specifications, regular monitoring, and feedback mechanisms, as well as ensuring supervisors have sufficient time and

availability for student interaction, can contribute to improving the student-supervisor relationship and supporting students' progress.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data reveals supervisor-related challenges that students face in completing their MPhil research and thesis writing. Quantitative findings indicate students' perception of a lack of prompt feedback, structure in the supervisory system, clear task specifications, regular deadlines, and accessibility of supervisors. The qualitative data from supervisors and administrators support these findings, highlighting inadequate time, heavy workloads, and professional commitments as factors that hinder supervisors' availability and ability to provide timely guidance and feedback.

The quantitative findings indicating a lack of prompt feedback and structure in the supervisory system align with the "support" element of Jiranek's triangle. Prompt feedback and clear task specifications are crucial for providing the necessary guidance and direction to students. Without such support, students may face difficulties in progressing with their research and meeting deadlines. Implementing structured feedback mechanisms, regular monitoring, and clearly defined tasks can address these challenges and enhance the support provided by supervisors.

The qualitative data emphasising inadequate time and heavy workload of supervisors resonates with the "capacity" component of Jiranek's triangle. Supervisors' limited availability and engagement in multiple activities beyond student supervision hinder their capacity to devote sufficient time to students. This can lead to delays in feedback and interactions, ultimately impeding students'

progress. To address this, institutions can explore strategies such as workload management, providing support staff for supervisors, or allocating dedicated time for supervision to ensure supervisors have the capacity to effectively guide and support students.

The perception of supervisors as inaccessible relates to the "relationship" aspect of Jiranek's triangle. A positive student-supervisor relationship is crucial for effective guidance and support. Inaccessibility can create a barrier to communication and hinder students' ability to seek assistance when needed. Fostering open lines of communication, encouraging regular interactions, and promoting a supportive and accessible supervisor-student relationship can improve the overall experience for students and help them overcome challenges more effectively.

The current study is consistent with previous findings by other researchers. Garwe and Mugari (2015) found that the major challenge reported by MBA students in Zimbabwean universities was the lack of time and engagement from supervisors. This aligns with the current study's quantitative findings regarding students' perception of a lack of prompt feedback and structure in the supervisory system. Both studies highlight the issue of supervisors lacking time to effectively engage with and support their assigned students.

Sarwar, Shah, and Akram (2018) identified factors causing delays in research work completion at the postgraduate level. They found that supervisors' busy schedules, lack of experience in supervision, and limited knowledge in the relevant field were key challenges. These findings align with the current study's

qualitative data, which emphasises supervisors' inadequate time and heavy workloads as factors contributing to their unavailability and inaccessibility to students.

Siddiqui et al. (2020) explored MPhil students' perspectives on the difficulties they faced during research work completion in both public and private universities. Their findings indicated that supervisors were not easily approachable and prioritised guests over scheduled appointments with students. This is consistent with the current study's emphasis on supervisors' unavailability and inaccessibility, further supporting the challenges faced by students in their interactions with supervisors.

Wanasinghe (2020) identified academic issues faced by students during research for a Master's degree. The study revealed that a significant proportion of students had issues related to meeting supervisors and experienced delays in receiving feedback. These findings align with the current study's quantitative findings, which indicate students' perception of a lack of structure in the supervisory system and clear task specifications, leading to delays in receiving timely guidance and feedback from supervisors.

Ul Haq and Shahzad (2021) explored the challenges faced by students pursuing postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science. Their findings showed that many participants agreed that supervisors had less time to assist them in thesis writing. This finding is consistent with the current study's emphasis on students perceiving a lack of accessibility and prompt feedback from supervisors.

Institution-Related Factors Contribute to the Delay in Completing MPhil Research and Thesis Writing

The students' quantitative data reveal that they perceive certain institution-related factors as hindrances to timely completion. Administrative bureaucracy and complexity within their study programmes are seen as barriers, potentially causing delays and confusion. Additionally, the presence of departmental politics and conflicts of ideas among faculty members can create challenges and impede progress. The students also express concern about the maximum time limit for completing their thesis, suggesting that they feel pressured by time constraints. These findings highlight the students' subjective experiences and shed light on the institutional aspects that they perceive as hindering their progress.

On the other hand, the qualitative data from supervisors and administrators provide a deeper understanding of the institutional-related factors affecting MPhil research and thesis writing. The data highlight several specific challenges. Administrative lapses, such as the absence of seminars or platforms for student presentations, delayed proposal defences, and delays in assigning supervisors, are identified as factors that hinder progress and motivation. Ethical clearance processes emerge as another significant factor, with delays in obtaining approval from the IRB impacting data collection and research timelines. Thesis assessment processes are also seen as a potential source of delay, particularly due to external assessors' availability and the prioritisation of supervision compared to classroom teaching. The inadequate availability of resources, including shared office space, unreliable internet connectivity, and increased supervisor workload without

additional hiring, and delayed payment to supervisors, further contribute to delays. These findings provide insights into systemic issues within the institution that affect the students' progress and completion of their MPhil research and thesis.

The findings from both sets of data highlight the complexity of the institutional factors contributing to the delay in completing MPhil research and thesis writing. The students' perspectives shed light on their perceptions and experiences, while the supervisors and administrators offer a broader view of the challenges and issues faced within the institution. Together, these findings emphasise the need for addressing administrative inefficiencies, streamlining processes such as ethical clearance and thesis assessment, and providing adequate resources to create an enabling environment for timely completion of MPhil research and thesis writing.

Vincent Tinto's model of student retention provides a useful framework to discuss the findings related to institution-related factors hindering the timely completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. According to Tinto's model, student retention is influenced by three key elements: academic integration, social integration, and institutional commitment. Applying this model to the findings, we can analyse how these factors may impact students' progress and completion.

First, academic integration refers to students' engagement with the academic aspects of their programme. The quantitative data indicate that administrative bureaucracy and complexity within the study programmes are perceived as barriers by students. This suggests that these institutional factors may

hinder students' ability to navigate the academic requirements effectively, leading to delays. To improve academic integration, institutions could consider streamlining administrative processes, providing clearer guidelines and support to students, and offering resources that facilitate efficient progress.

Second, social integration plays a role in student retention. The qualitative data highlight the importance of supervisee-supervisor relationships and supportive mentorship. Poor relationships between students and their supervisors or mentors can impede progress and hinder timely completion. In line with Tinto's model, fostering strong social connections and providing mentorship training for supervisors can enhance social integration and create a supportive environment that encourages students' progress and completion.

Last, institutional commitment encompasses the institutional support and resources available to students. The qualitative data reveal challenges such as inadequate resources, including shared office space, unreliable internet connectivity, and delayed payment to supervisors. Insufficient resources can create additional barriers and negatively impact students' ability to complete their research in a timely manner. Institutions should prioritise providing necessary resources and support to students and supervisors to enhance institutional commitment and facilitate timely completion.

Multiple studies, including Mapolisa and Mafa (2012), Ekpoh (2016), and Matin and Khan (2017), revealed similarities in the challenges encountered by postgraduate students in conducting research and completing their theses. A common challenge identified was the lack of internet facilities, which hindered

students' research capabilities. Institutional-related issues, such as delays in administrative processes and non-adherence to calendars, were also common challenges faced by students. Furthermore, inadequate research ambiance and poor social services, such as accommodations and study facilities, were consistently identified as hurdles in students' research journey.

Although there were similarities in the challenges faced, the studies also presented some notable differences. Specific institutional factors varied across the studies. For instance, Mapolisa and Mafa (2012) focused on the absence of research-related courses and library resources, while Sarwar, Shah, and Akram (2018) mentioned procedural delays, irrelevant rules, and poor research culture. The current study highlighted administrative bureaucracy, departmental conflicts, and the pressure of time constraints as institutional challenges. Additionally, the current study emphasised the significance of ethical clearance processes and thesis assessment, which were not explicitly mentioned in the previous studies. Another differentiating factor was the availability of resources. While Wanasinghe (2020) discussed challenges related to primary data sources, research literature, and library facilities, the current study highlighted issues such as shared office space, internet connectivity, and supervisor workload.

Thus, there are shared challenges faced by postgraduate students in conducting research and completing their theses, including the lack of internet facilities and institutional-related delays. However, the specific institutional factors and resource challenges vary among the studies. The current study provides additional insights into ethical clearance processes, thesis assessment,

and resource availability as specific challenges faced by students in their research journey.

Gender Differences in Student Factors that Serve as a Challenge to MPhil Students During Their Research and Thesis Writing

The results of the t-test indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in the scores of student-related factors between males and females in terms of factors that prevent them from completing their thesis. The higher mean score for males suggests that they perceive more student-related challenges in completing their thesis compared to females.

Furthermore, the effect size (Cohen's d) of 3.2 indicates a very large and substantial difference between the two groups. Cohen's d is a measure of the standardised difference between the means of two groups, and a value of 3.2 suggests a significant distinction between the males and females in terms of their perception of student-related factors affecting thesis completion. This large effect size implies that the difference between the two groups is not just statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

The observation that males experience more challenges in student factors that hinder the timely completion of thesis writing compared to females can be attributed to various factors. Societal expectations and gender norms may place different pressures on males, leading to increased stress and challenges in academia. The perceived competitiveness within the academic environment could also contribute to higher expectations and obstacles for males. Differences in confidence and self-efficacy levels may play a role, with females potentially

experiencing lower self-confidence and males overestimating their abilities. Field of study disparities, where males may be overrepresented in research-intensive fields, could introduce additional complexities. Moreover, variations in support systems and access to resources may contribute, with females potentially having better access to mentoring and academic support services. However, it is crucial to recognise that these factors are not universally applicable, and individual experiences can vary significantly. Further research is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific reasons why males may face more challenges in this context.

The findings of Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook (2013) and Siddiqui et al. (2020) studies provide insights into the gender-specific differences in the challenges faced by doctoral and MPhil students, respectively, which can be compared to the current findings on student-related factors affecting thesis completion.

Both Carter et al. (2013) and Siddiqui et al. (2020) studies consider the perspectives of students from different genders. Carter et al. highlight the tensions arising from cultural expectations and their impact on women's social relationships and academic performance. They identify that societal expectations regarding women's passivity and subordination to male authority can create challenges in academic environments that value assertiveness and clear communication. On the other hand, Siddiqui et al. explore the difficulties encountered by MPhil students during research work completion, examining

gender differences. They find that male students perceive more challenges compared to female students.

In comparison, the current study focuses on the differences in student-related factors affecting thesis completion between males and females. The findings reveal a statistically significant difference in the perception of student-related challenges, with males reporting higher scores than females. The effect size (Cohen's d) further indicates a large and substantial difference between the two groups, suggesting a significant and practically meaningful distinction in their perceptions.

Overall, while Carter et al. (2013) and Siddiqui et al. (2020) investigate gender-specific challenges in the doctoral and MPhil contexts, respectively, the current study specifically examines the differences in student-related factors affecting thesis completion between males and females. By highlighting these distinctions, the current findings contribute to a better understanding of the specific challenges faced by different genders in completing their theses.

Differences in Student Factors that Serve as a Challenges to MPhil Students During Their Research and Thesis Writing with Regards to Accommodation Status (On-Campus and Off-Campus)

On average, students living off-campus had higher scores on "student-related factors," suggesting that they face more challenges that hinder the completion of their theses compared to students living on campus. Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's d) of 2.1 indicates a substantial difference between the two groups. The finding that students living off-campus had higher scores on

"Student related factors" suggests that they face more challenges that hinder the timely completion of their theses compared to students living on campus. Several factors may contribute to this difference.

First, off-campus students may have additional responsibilities and commitments outside of their academic studies, such as commuting, household chores, or part-time jobs. These additional obligations can limit the time and energy available for thesis work, leading to increased challenges and delays. On the other hand, students living on campus have the advantage of proximity to academic resources, including libraries, research facilities, and faculty offices, which can facilitate easier access to support and guidance. They may also benefit from a more structured and conducive environment for studying, with fewer distractions compared to living off-campus.

Additionally, living on campus may provide opportunities for greater social interaction and collaboration with fellow students, fostering a sense of community and peer support that can positively impact progress and motivation. The substantial effect size (Cohen's d) of 2.1 indicates a significant difference between the two groups, suggesting that the impact of living off-campus on student-related challenges is noteworthy. However, it is important to note that individual experiences can vary, and these findings may not apply universally to all students living on or off-campus.

Differences in Student-Related Factors that serve as a Challenge to MPhil Students during their Research and Thesis Writing with regards to Employment Status

The findings of the t-test in the current study indicate a significant difference in the scores of "Student related factors" between employed and unemployed students. Employed students had higher scores on "Student related factors," suggesting that they face more challenges that hinder the completion of their theses compared to unemployed students.

The higher mean score for employed students implies that they perceive a greater number of student-related challenges in completing their theses. These challenges could be influenced by their employment status and the additional responsibilities and commitments that come with it. Employed students may have to juggle multiple roles and obligations, such as work-related tasks, job responsibilities, and financial pressures. These external demands can limit the time and energy available for thesis writing and research, making it more challenging for employed students to progress and complete their theses in a timely manner.

On the other hand, unemployed students may have more flexibility and dedicated time for their studies. Without the commitments and time constraints associated with employment, they can potentially allocate more focused and uninterrupted time to their research and thesis writing. This greater availability of time and freedom from external pressures may contribute to a relatively smoother thesis completion process for unemployed students.

The effect size (Cohen's d) of 3.2 indicates a very large and substantial difference between the two groups. This suggests that the disparity in the perception of student-related challenges between employed and unemployed students is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. The large effect size further supports the notion that employment status plays a significant role in shaping the challenges faced by students during the thesis completion process.

In summary, the current findings highlight the significant impact of employment status on the perceived student-related factors that hinder thesis completion. Employed students face more challenges in balancing their academic and professional responsibilities, potentially leading to delays and difficulties in completing their theses. Conversely, unemployed students may have a more favourable environment with fewer external constraints, allowing them to devote more time and attention to their research. These findings underscore the importance of considering employment status as a factor influencing the thesis completion experiences of students and suggest the need for targeted support and resources for employed students to navigate the challenges they face.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the factors that impact the completion rates of postgraduate MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. This chapter offers a concise summary of the study's objectives, outlines the derived conclusions, and provides recommendations grounded in these conclusions.

Summary

The study aimed to investigate the factors influencing postgraduate completion rates among MPhil students at the University of Cape Coast. The research was guided by six objectives that were translated into three research questions and three hypotheses. The study drew inspiration from Vincent Tinto's model of student retention (2010), the Jiranek Dissertation research completion triangle (2010), and the Experiential learning theory by Kolb, Boyatzi, and Mainemelis (2014).

To conduct the research, a Descriptive Survey Design was employed to gather information on student-related factors. The participants included students from the Faculty of Educational Foundations who were in their third year during the 2019/2020 academic year (as of 2022). A sample of 53 students was selected for the study. Additionally, four senior lecturers (supervisors) and one administrator involved in MPhil theses processing from the School of Graduate Studies were involved to provide additional perspectives on the research topic. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires adapted from

previously validated instruments to gather quantitative data from students. For the qualitative component, interviews were conducted with supervisors and the administrator from the School of Graduate Studies to gain in-depth insights into the factors influencing student progression. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to summarize student-related factors. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify patterns and themes relevant to the research questions.

Key Findings

The study yielded the following findings.

1. Several factors linked to students that cause delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing have been discovered. These factors include students' commitment and attitude toward their research, inadequate knowledge and research skills, time management challenges, difficulties in balancing research with other obligations, financial limitations, and negative supervisee-supervisor relationships.
2. The main findings regarding supervisor-challenges related to MPhil research and thesis writing indicate that students perceive a lack of prompt feedback, structure, and clear task specifications in the supervisory system. They also express limited interaction and accessibility of supervisors. Additionally, inadequate time and heavy workloads of supervisors were identified as significant factors contributing to delays.
3. The data collected highlight various factors related to the institution that contribute to delays in completing MPhil research and thesis writing.

These factors include administrative bureaucracy and programme complexity, which can lead to confusion and potential delays. Departmental politics and conflicts among faculty members also pose challenges and hinder progress. Concerns about time constraints and the maximum time limit for thesis completion add additional pressure. Additionally, the data reveals specific challenges such as administrative lapses, delayed proposal defense, and delays in assigning supervisors. Ethical clearance processes, thesis assessment procedures, inadequate availability of resources, and increased supervisor workload without additional hiring are identified as additional obstacles. These findings provide valuable insights into the systemic issues within the institution that impact the timely completion of MPhil research and thesis writing.

4. The research also revealed a significant contrast between males and females concerning their perception of factors associated with students that impede thesis completion. Males reported higher scores, indicating that they perceive more challenges in completing their thesis compared to females.
5. The main findings from the analysis indicate that students living off-campus experience more challenges that hinder the completion of their theses compared to students living on campus. On average, students living off-campus had higher scores on "Student related factors," suggesting a greater perception of obstacles in completing their theses.

6. The results of the analysis indicate that there is a significant difference in the scores of "student-related factors" between employed and unemployed students. Employed students had higher scores on these factors, suggesting that they face more challenges in completing their theses compared to unemployed students.

Conclusions

The identified factors related to students, such as commitment, knowledge, and time management, all play pivotal roles in the completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. It is evident that students' attitudes and skills significantly influence their progress.

The findings emphasise that effective supervision is critical for timely completion. Students' perceptions of insufficient feedback, lack of structure, and limited interaction with supervisors underscore the need for clear guidelines and support systems.

The institutional context significantly impacts the completion of MPhil research and thesis writing. Administrative complexities, departmental conflicts, and issues with procedural delays are clear impediments.

Gender Differences: The notable difference in how males and females perceive challenges in completing their theses warrants attention. This finding suggests that tailored support mechanisms may be necessary.

Living Arrangements: Students' living arrangements impact their thesis completion experiences. Those living off-campus face more challenges, indicating a need for targeted support.

Employment Status: The difference in perceptions between employed and unemployed students regarding challenges in thesis completion suggests that the demands of employment can affect academic progress.

Recommendations

Following the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Students should foster a personal commitment to their academic pursuits.
The University of Cape Coast should also provide workshops and support services to enhance students' research skills and time management abilities.
2. The University of Cape Coast should establish clear guidelines for supervisory relationships and provide training for supervisors on effective mentorship. Supervisors should manage their workloads effectively to provide timely feedback and support.
3. The University of Cape Coast should streamline administrative processes and reduce bureaucratic barriers to thesis completion. Encourage open communication and conflict resolution mechanisms to mitigate departmental politics and faculty conflicts. Establish clearer guidelines regarding the maximum time limit for thesis completion.
4. The University of Cape Coast should champion the development and implementation of gender-sensitive support programs to address the specific needs of both male and female students.
5. The University of Cape Coast should lead efforts to improve access to research facilities and resources for students living off-campus.

6. The University of Cape Coast should consider offering flexible scheduling options for employed students and guide balancing work and academic commitments. Career services should be made available to assist employed students in managing employment-related challenges.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are several recommendations for future studies to be conducted differently:

1. Expand the sample size: Although the study included 53 students, a larger sample size could provide more comprehensive insights and enhance the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could consider including a larger and more diverse sample of MPhil students from different faculties or departments within the university.
2. Include multiple faculties or departments: Focusing solely on students in the faculty of educational foundations may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future studies could consider including students from various faculties or departments to capture a broader range of experiences and factors affecting completion rates.
3. Use a longitudinal design: Future studies could employ a longitudinal design, following students over an extended period, to examine the changes in factors affecting completion rates throughout their MPhil programme.

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APPENDICES**APPENDIX A****QUESTIONNAIRE**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

The researcher is a student at the University of Cape Coast researching Factors Affecting Postgraduate MPhil Completion Rates in the University of Cape Coast. I humbly request that you form part of this research by completing the attached questionnaire. Anonymity and non-traceability are highly assured. It is my utmost anticipation that you participate in the study. Thank you.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender

1. Male
2. Female

Age

Indicate your Place of residence

1. Home
2. Hall
3. Hostel
4. Others

Marital status

1. Single
2. Married
3. Divorced

Profession

Programme

SECTION B: STUDENT-RELATED FACTORS

Please rate your responses against the statements.

Strongly disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Agree = 3; Strongly agree = 4

SN	Statements	SD	D	A	SA
1.	I find it difficult working alone on my dissertation				
2.	I am not interested in engaging in research				
3.	I am not committed for the research				
4.	I am not motivated to complete the research				
5.	I do not have sufficient research skills				
6.	I do not have a habit for reading				
7.	I do not prefer independence in the research work				
8.	I do not have good writing ability				
9.	I have difficulties in data gathering				
10.	My professional obligations do not permit to spend time on research				
11.	I have difficulty in my family				
12.	I have a problem of financial limitation				
13.	My job does not sponsor my study programme				
14.	I do not have access to research grant				
15.	I do not have enough fund for the research				

SECTION C: SUPERVISOR-RELATED FACTORS

Please answer by ticking (✓) the corresponding boxes.

1=Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Agree (A) 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

SN	Statements	S D	I	A	S A
16.	I do not have a good relationship with my supervisor				
17.	I do not have a structured supervisory system (such as a written task specification, regular deadlines, regular monitoring, and regular feedback)				
18.	I do not get the opportunity to interact with my supervisor frequently				
19.	My supervisor is mostly not accessible				
20.	My supervisor does not provide me with guidelines about my thesis				
21.	I do not get prompt feedback from my supervisor				

22.	I get inconsistent feedback from my supervisor				
23.	I get conflicting feedback from my supervisor				
24.	My supervisor does not read through my work before making suggestions				

SECTION D: INSTITUTIONAL-RELATED FACTORS

Please answer by ticking (√) the corresponding boxes.

1=Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Agree (A) 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

SN	Statements	SD	D	A	SA
25.	More administrative bureaucracy of the process in our study programme				
26.	More administrative complexity of the process in our study programme				
27.	We do not have clear guidelines for thesis				
28.	There are departmental politics between faculty members				
29.	There are conflicts of ideas between faculty members				
30.	Maximum time limit set for the thesis is too short				
31.	I do not have access to research data base sources				
32.	I do not have access to good libraries				
33.	I do not have access to guidance from other experts besides my supervisor				

INTERVIEW GUIDE**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST****COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES****FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS****DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
ADMINISTRATORS**

The researcher is a student at the University of Cape Coast conducting research on Factors Affecting Postgraduate MPhil Completion Rates in the University of Cape Coast. I humbly request that you form part of this research by completing the attached questionnaire. Anonymity and non-traceability are highly assured. It is my utmost anticipation that you participate in the study. Thank you.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender
 - I. Male []
 - II. Female []
2. Rank (e.g registrar)
3. Length of service

SECTION B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SGS ADMINISTRATORS.

1. What are your perceptions of thesis writing as part of postgraduate studies?
2. What are your experiences and views on MPhil students' thesis writing at UCC?
3. In your opinion, what students' factors could be the impediments?
4. What supervisor factors could be the impediments?
5. What institutional factors could be the impediments?
6. What strategies has your office put in place to improve the timely completion of MPhil students of the University?
7. What other possible ways can the challenges of MPhil thesis writing at the University of Cape Coast be resolved?

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES****FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS****DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS**

The researcher is a student at the University of Cape Coast conducting research on Factors Affecting Postgraduate MPhil Completion Rates in the University of Cape Coast. I humbly request that you form part of this research by completing the attached questionnaire. Anonymity and non-traceability are highly assured. It is my utmost anticipation that you participate in the study. Thank you.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

4. Gender

III. Male []

IV. Female []

5. Rank (e.g professor)

6. Length of service

SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SUPERVISORS.

1. What are your perceptions of thesis writing as part of postgraduate studies?
2. What have been some of the challenges in supervising MPhil theses?
3. In your opinion, what student factors could be the impediments?
4. What supervisor factors could be the impediments?
5. What institutional factors could be the impediments?
6. What measures have been put in place to speed up the completion of MPhil students' thesis writing at UCC?

APPENDIX B**INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

Telephone: 0332091697
Email: dep@ucc.edu.gh



UNIVERSITY POST OFFICE
CAPE COAST, GHANA

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

26th April, 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

THESIS WORK
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
MR. NEWTON ANSAH

We introduce to you Mr. Ansaah, a student from the University of Cape Coast, Department of Education and Psychology. He is pursuing a Master of Philosophy Degree in Measurement and Evaluation and he is currently at the thesis stage.


Mr. Ansaah is researching on the topic: **"FACTORS INFLUENCING POSTGRADUATE MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY COMPLETION RATES: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST."**

He has opted to collect or gather data at your institution/establishment for his Thesis work. We would be most grateful if you could provide him with the opportunity and assistance for the study. Any information provided would be treated strictly as confidential.

We sincerely appreciate your co-operation and assistance in this direction.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,


Gloria Sagoe (Ms.)
Chief Administrative Assistant
For: **Head**

APPENDIX C

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION STUDIES
ETHICAL REVIEW BOARD

UNIVERSITY POST OFFICE
CAPE COAST, GHANA

Our Ref: CES/ERS/UCC/edu/16/22-90
Your Ref:



Date: 16th September, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS CLEARANCE FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Chairman, CES-ERB
Prof. J. A. Omatsho
jomatsho@ucc.edu.gh
0243784739

Vice-Chairman, CES-ERB
Prof. K. Edjah
kedjah@ucc.edu.gh
0244742357

Secretary, CES-ERB
Prof. Linda Dzama Forde
lfordie@ucc.edu.gh
0243781680

The bearer, Newton Ansa, Reg. No. is
M.Phil. / Ph.D. student in the Department of Education
and Psychology in the College of Education Studies
University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana. He / ~~She~~ wishes to
undertake a research study on the topic:

Factors influencing post graduate
MPhil thesis completion rates:
A case study of University of
Cape Coast.

The Ethical Review Board (ERB) of the College of Education Studies
(CES) has assessed his/~~her~~ proposal and confirm that the proposal
satisfies the College's ethical requirements for the conduct of the
study.

In view of the above, the researcher has been cleared and given approval
to commence his/~~her~~ study. The ERB would be grateful if you would
give him/her the necessary assistance to facilitate the conduct of the said
research.

Thank you,
Yours faithfully,

Prof. Linda Dzama Forde
(Secretary, CES-ERB)