



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges Affecting Timely Completion of Evening Postgraduate Programs in Tanzania: Insights from Students' and Supervisors' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the dual perspectives of students and supervisors on factors affecting timely completion of evening postgraduate programmes in Tanzanian higher education. Using a phenomenological approach, the study specifically explores the unique challenges encountered by both evening postgraduate students and their supervisors during the dissertation writing process. The research was guided by Tinto's Student Integration Model and employed purposive sampling to select participants including six evening postgraduate students who had been pursuing their masters for five years and their respective six supervisors. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis, with thematic analysis used for interpretation. The findings reveal contrasting perspectives between students and supervisors. While students highlighted work-study balance difficulties, financial constraints, and skill mismatches as primary challenges, supervisors emphasized student commitment issues and delays in accommodating feedback. This perspective gap contributes to delayed completion rates. The study recommends enhanced communication protocols between students and supervisors, structured time management frameworks, and institutional support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of evening programme students. This research contributes to understanding the dyadic nature of supervision challenges in part-time postgraduate education in Tanzania. ©authors

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Introduction

Postgraduate education represents a critical component in developing high-level human capital necessary for national development. In recent years, Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) globally have experienced significant growth in postgraduate enrolment (Osei et al., 2017; IseOlorunkanmi et al., 2021; Mwidege & Matimbwa, 2023). This expansion has been particularly notable in evening programmes, which cater to working professionals seeking to advance their qualifications while maintaining employment. However, timely completion of students enrolled in these programmes has emerged as a significant challenge, with delayed completion rates reported across various countries including Italy (40%), Ghana (40%), and Kenya (Aina & Pastore, 2020; Arthur & Fenyi, 2023; Jepchirchir & Ogula, 2022).

In Tanzania, stakeholders have raised particular concerns about delayed completion among postgraduate students enrolled in evening programmes (Komba & Chiwamba, 2017; Hokororo, 2021; Salehe et al., 2023; Kaponga et al. 2024). These challenges have significant implications for students, supervisors, and institutions alike. For students, delayed completion can result in financial strain, career stagnation, and psychological stress. For supervisors, it creates workload imbalances and affects research productivity. For institutions, it impacts graduation rates, resource allocation, and international rankings (Amani et al., 2022; Lekhetho, 2022).

While several studies have examined postgraduate completion in Tanzania generally (Komba, 2016; Ndenje-Sichalwe & Elia, 2021; Amani et al., 2022; Salehe et al., 2023; Kahangwa, 2024), there remains a critical gap in understanding the specific dynamics between students and supervisors in evening programmes. Most existing research either focuses solely on student perspectives or examines institutional factors, without adequately addressing the dyadic nature of the supervision relationship in the unique context of evening programmes. Recent studies by Amani et al. (2022) and Kaponga et al. (2024) have touched on supervision issues but have not comprehensively compared the perspectives of both students and supervisors.

This study aims to address this research gap by specifically examining the challenges faced by both evening postgraduate students and their supervisors during the dissertation writing process. By analysing these dual perspectives, the research seeks to identify areas of congruence and divergence on how these stakeholders perceive barriers to timely completion. Specifically, the study was guided by two key research question which was; What challenges do evening postgraduate students and their supervisors face during the dissertation writing process? and how do their perspectives align or differ regarding these challenges and their implications for timely completion?

The findings from this study will contribute to developing more effective strategies for supporting evening programme students and improving completion rates in Tanzanian higher education institutions. By understanding both sides of the supervision relationship, targeted interventions can be designed that address the specific needs and constraints of this unique student population.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Vincent Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing the timely completion of evening postgraduate programmes students in Tanzania. Tinto's model asserts that students' decisions to persist or withdraw from their studies are significantly shaped by their integration into both the academic and social systems of their educational institution (McCallen & Johnson, 2020; Haverila, Haverila & McLaughlin, 2020).

According to this model, students enter higher education with a variety of personal, family, and academic characteristics that interact with their institutional experiences throughout their academic journey. For evening postgraduate students, these characteristics often include professional commitments, family responsibilities, and diverse academic backgrounds, distinguishing them from traditional full-time students.

Tinto's model is particularly relevant for examining the experiences of evening postgraduate students due to its emphasis on academic integration, which includes key interactions with faculty, especially supervisors. For evening students, who typically have limited campus presence, the quality of these supervisory relationships becomes crucial. Additionally, the model highlights how external commitments such as work and family can significantly hinder a student's ability to integrate academically, a central challenge for those enrolled in evening programmes who must balance multiple roles.

Although Tinto's original model was primarily developed for undergraduate contexts, researchers have successfully adapted it for postgraduate education (Amani et al., 2022). In this study, we extend the model by specifically focusing on the supervisor-student relationship as a vital aspect of academic integration for postgraduate students. We also consider how the unique demands of evening programmes present distinct integration challenges that differ from those faced in traditional postgraduate education.

By applying this theoretical framework, we can systematically analyse how the challenges encountered by both students and supervisors impact academic integration and, consequently, timely completion rates. This approach enables us to explore both individual factors, such as student commitment and time management, and institutional structures, including supervision allocation and support mechanisms, that influence completion outcomes within evening postgraduate programmes. Figure 1 subsequently depicts the Tinto's model of students' integration.

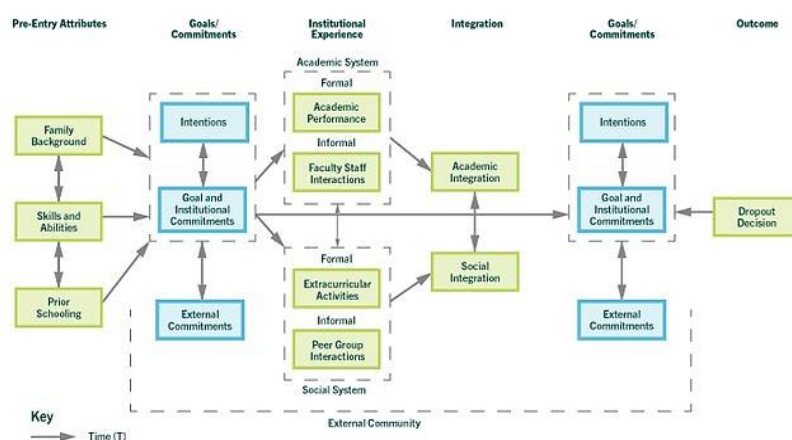


Figure 1. Tinto's Model

*Source: Adapted from Tinto

Empirical Studies on Challenges Faced by Postgraduate Students and Supervisors

Postgraduate completion rates remain a significant concern globally, with various studies documenting the multifaceted challenges affecting timely completion (Delnoij et al., 2020). Research specifically examining evening postgraduate programmes highlights several recurring challenges. For students, balancing professional and academic responsibilities emerges as a dominant theme. Bravo et al. (2023) found that evening students often assume a "triple role" as parents, workers, and students, creating complex time management challenges. Similarly, Sanga and Shirima (2024) observed that Tanzanian adult learners in evening programmes struggle to align full-time employment with academic demands, frequently resulting in delayed completion or programme withdrawal.

Financial constraints represent another significant barrier. Studies in Zimbabwe indicate that self-sponsored postgraduate students often face difficulties with tuition payments, leading to

registration delays and programme discontinuation (Mutanana & Pedzisai, 2020). Research in Ghana has similarly identified funding limitations as a major obstacle during dissertation writing (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2015). Additionally, academic preparation and skill alignment significantly affect completion rates. Challenges related to research methodology competence, academic writing skills, and discrepancies between previous qualifications and current programme requirements have been documented (Abdul-Salaam, 2024; Komba, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, Ali & Zayid (2022) highlighted language proficiency as a critical factor influencing completion rates.

From the supervisors' perspective, several recurrent challenges have been identified, including managing student engagement and commitment, addressing varied levels of academic preparedness, and navigating communication barriers (Wilson & Pool, 2024; Noel et al., 2021). Supervisors often report difficulties with students who disappear for extended periods, fail to incorporate feedback, or submit substandard work (Amani et al., 2022). Furthermore, the quality of the supervisor-student relationship constitutes a critical factor; mismatches in research interests, communication styles, or expectations can significantly impede progress (Ssentamu-Namubiru & Sajjaji-Bakibinga, 2020; Claudius & Vincent, 2017). Research by McKinley et al. (2012) emphasizes that effective supervision requires a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities.

While these challenges have been documented separately, there is paucity of studies which have explicitly compared student and supervisor perspectives within the same institutional context, particularly in evening programmes in Tanzania. This comparative approach is essential for developing comprehensive solutions that address the concerns of both groups. Our study addresses this gap by examining how these perspectives align or diverge, providing insights that can inform more effective supervision practices and institutional support mechanisms.

based on the literature reviewed, it is apparent that although existing literature highlights numerous challenges faced by postgraduate students and supervisors, a notable gap remains in comparative analyses of their perspectives, particularly in the context of evening programmes in Tanzania. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted interventions that enhance both student completion rates and supervisory effectiveness.

Method

The subsequent section presents the study methodology.

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of both students and supervisors in evening postgraduate programmes. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables researchers to investigate how individuals perceive and make meaning of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was particularly appropriate for examining the complex, subjective nature of supervision relationships and the challenges encountered by both parties.

A comparative phenomenological design allowed the researchers to analyse similarities and differences in how students and supervisors interpreted their experiences, revealing potential disconnects in understanding that might contribute to delayed completion. Unlike case studies or ethnographic approaches, phenomenology focuses specifically on the essence of experiences rather than broader cultural patterns or organizational factors.

Research Site and Participant Selection

The study was conducted at one purposively selected Tanzanian university that met three key criteria: (1) offering multiple evening master's degree programmes, (2) having at least ten years of experience providing evening postgraduate education, and (3) representing typical institutional structures found in Tanzanian higher education. These criteria ensured that findings would have reasonable transferability to similar contexts.

Following Yin's (2009) recommendations on purposeful case selection, the researchers employed two sampling techniques. First, purposive sampling was used to identify evening postgraduate students who had been pursuing their degrees for five years (beyond the expected three-year timeframe). This specific criterion ensured participants had extensive experience with the challenges affecting timely completion. Second, we employed criterion sampling to select the respective supervisors of these students, creating matched pairs that allowed for direct comparison of perspectives on the same supervision relationship.

The final sample comprised 12 core participants; six (6) evening postgraduate students and their respective six (6) supervisors. This sample size aligns with recommendations for phenomenological studies, which typically involve 3-10 participants to enable in-depth analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study also included two (2) administrative participants (one Principal and one Head of Department) to provide contextual insights on institutional policies and practices making up a total of 14 study participants.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered using two complementary methods:

Semi-Structured Interviews: The researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all participants, employing parallel but role-specific interview protocols for students and supervisors. This approach facilitated the exploration of similar themes while considering the distinct perspectives of each group. The interview protocols included questions about challenges faced during the dissertation process, communication practices, time management strategies, and perceived barriers to completion. Most interviews were held face-to-face in participants' offices, lasting between 45 to 60 minutes, while two were conducted via telephone due to scheduling challenges. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and supplemented with field notes.

Document Analysis: We reviewed important institutional and national documents to gain insight into the formal frameworks governing postgraduate supervision. These included the Tanzania Commission for Universities Standards and Guidelines for Postgraduate Studies (2019, 2023), available at www.tcu.go.tz, as well as institutional Regulations and Guidelines for Postgraduate Studies (2022). The document analysis provided crucial context for understanding the formal expectations placed on both students and supervisors.

Data Quality Assurance

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, several measures were implemented: methodological triangulation involved using both interviews and document analysis for cross-verification of findings; member checking entailed sharing interview transcripts and initial interpretations with participants to confirm their accuracy and validity; peer debriefing included having two colleagues with expertise in higher education research to review the coding schemes and interpretations to enhance analytical rigor; and language considerations ensured that interviews were conducted in Kiswahili, allowing participants to express themselves freely, with careful translation during analysis to maintain nuanced meanings.

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, starting with familiarization, where the researchers immersed themselves in the data through multiple readings of transcripts and field notes. They then generated approximately 80 initial codes across the dataset during the initial coding phase. Related codes were clustered to identify potential themes, with a focus on comparing student and supervisor perspectives. In the theme review step, the researchers assessed the themes for internal coherence and distinctiveness, refining the structure through iteration. Each theme was clearly defined and named to capture its essence and connection to the research questions. Finally, we produced a report by selecting compelling excerpts and linking the analysis back to the research questions and theoretical framework. Throughout this process, we maintained

a comparative focus, examining how different stakeholders interpreted the same supervisory relationship, which revealed valuable insights into their differing perspectives on the identified challenges.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed rigorous ethical guidelines. The researchers obtained institutional approval prior to starting data collection and ensured that all participants provided informed consent. To maintain confidentiality, the use of position titles and pseudonyms instead of participants' names in the reports was observed. All data were stored securely, and participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Findings

The findings are organized around five major themes that emerged from the analysis. These themes capture the key challenges faced by both evening postgraduate students and their supervisors, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence in their perspectives.

Work-Study Balance Challenges

-Students' Perspectives

Work-study balance emerged as the primary challenge for evening postgraduate students. All three participants highlighted the difficulty of managing professional responsibilities alongside academic demands. One student articulated:

As an evening student, it was difficult for me to accomplish studies due to the fact that I had no study leave. I was compelled to fulfil my employer's obligations during the day and then use the remaining evening hours for studies. Sometimes, I had to work late, which caused me to miss appointments with my research supervisor.

Additionally, government workplace relocations from to Dodoma further strained their time management. One participant noted that transfer-related disruptions significantly hindered their dissertation progress. As one of the interviewed supervisors said:

My student was proceeding well with dissertation writing. However, due to transfer to the capital city, Dodoma he retarded and began to miss appointments and quite often brought the work late without addressing the comments adequately.

As argued in Tinto's Model, integration into academic and social systems is pertinent in balancing of studies and students' social life (McCallen & Johnson, 2020; Haverila, Haverila & McLaughlin, 2020).

-Supervisors' Perspectives

Supervisors recognized that many students faced time constraints but framed the challenge as one of prioritization. One supervisor remarked:

My student was not academically weak; he was formerly above average, but due to a lack of seriousness, he delayed completing his studies. I came for consultations, but the student often wouldn't show up, despite several notifications.

This perspective gap reveals a disconnect in which students view structural work-study conflicts, while supervisors interpret them as issues of commitment. This misalignment adversely contributes to friction in the supervisory relationship.

These findings resonate with Bravo et al. (2023), who noted that evening students often juggle "triple roles" as students, parents, and workers. Similarly, Amani et al. (2022) highlighted that limited study leaves forces students to work and attend sessions late, negatively impacting academic performance. Sige & Shirima (2021) reported similar challenges among Tanzanian postgraduate students, while Arthur et al. (2023) found that full-time work limits students' time and leads to delays in graduation.

These results align with Tinto's model, which emphasizes the impact of external commitments on academic integration. For evening students, work responsibilities significantly compete with academic commitments. However, the differing perspectives suggest that supervisors

may underestimate the structural nature of these constraints, attributing them instead to individual commitment factors. Improved communication and ensuring academic and social integration is pertinent in enhancing supervisory effectiveness and achieving students' goals as recommended by Tinto's integration model.

It should also be noted that it is possible for students to balance work and evening studies. Postgraduate students should learn effective time management while fulfilling multiple responsibilities, as many successful students have managed to do so. Research indicates that success in this balancing act requires support from employers and family, along with institutional training to navigate these challenges (Rockman et al., 2022). In Tanzania and elsewhere, adult learners must develop coping strategies to effectively manage their studies alongside work and personal responsibilities (Sige & Shirima, 2021).

These strategies may include setting realistic goals, utilizing time management tools, and seeking assistance from academic advisors. Effective time management strategies, such as prioritizing tasks and setting clear goals, are essential for success. Students should also seek mentorship and resources from their institutions to enhance their academic experience. Creating a supportive network with peers can facilitate motivation and accountability. By recognizing and addressing the challenges of balancing work and study, postgraduate students can improve their academic performance and completion of their studies will be on time. Ultimately, fostering a culture of understanding among supervisors regarding the realities of student's life can lead to more productive educational outcomes.

Financial Constraints

-Students' Perspectives

Financial challenges emerged as a significant barrier to timely completion from the student perspective. All student participants were self-sponsored, creating substantial pressure to balance income generation with academic progress. One student explained:

I am struggling to find money for paying university dues and take care of my family while attending studies. It deprives me with concentration time on my study leading to often facing difficulties to meet the schedule and demands of my supervisor.

Another student highlighted how financial constraints affected their ability to maintain consistent registration:

I am self-employed, so I have to work extra hard to get tuition fees. Sometimes, I fail to register on time due to financial constraints I encounter as a self-sponsored evening postgraduate student.

These financial pressure directly impacted students' ability to prioritize academic work, attend supervision meetings, and maintain consistent progress. The findings of this study underscore the assumptions of Tinto's Model of students' integration which presupposes that family background of a students has a stake in the academic progress. Thus, students with families and yet not sponsored tend to struggle with external commitments and impair their schedule of accomplishing their studies. It also reinforces the assumption of the Model that Financial availabilities are crucial in sustaining persistence of students and the reverse of it perpetuates drop out.

-Supervisors' Perspectives

Interestingly, financial constraints received minimal mention in supervisor interviews. When discussing barriers to student progress, supervisors focused primarily on academic and commitment factors, often overlooking the financial challenges students face. This omission suggests that supervisors may have limited awareness of the financial pressures affecting their students, or they may view these constraints as external to the academic supervision relationship. While Tinto's model acknowledges financial factors as influencing persistence, our findings suggest that in the Tanzanian context, financial constraints play an even more central role than the model might predict. This viewpoint is supported by Arthur et al. (2023),

who found that financial constraints posed significant challenges for postgraduate students in Ghana, affecting travel, data storage, and research costs. Similarly, Amani et al. (2022) noted that a lack of sponsorship led to delays in postgraduate completion. Mutanana & Pedzisai (2020) in Zimbabwe also identified financial limitations as a primary factor contributing to delayed completion. The absence of financial considerations in supervisor perspectives represents a significant gap in understanding that likely affects how supervisors interpret student behaviour and commitment. Rauf (2016) in Sri Lanka found that many postgraduate students delayed completion during the thesis writing stage, recommending that organizations provide research grants or soft loans to help students overcome these financial challenges. Furthermore, Sverdlik et al. (2018) emphasized that access to diverse financial support options, such as loans, scholarships, and assistantships, significantly impacts postgraduate students' well-being and timely completion. Hence, recognizing and addressing financial constraints is crucial for enhancing the academic experience of postgraduate students. Improved awareness among supervisors could lead to better support mechanisms, ultimately facilitating student success and well-being throughout their doctoral journeys.

Academic Preparation and Skill Alignment

-Students' Perspectives

Students expressed significant challenges related to the alignment of their academic backgrounds with the requirements of their current programmes. One student highlighted this disconnect:

The lack of direct relationship between my previous degree and the current master's programme was a great challenge for me. I started with Civil Engineering at the undergraduate level, but now I'm pursuing a Master's in Business Studies.

The findings that students claimed that there was mismatch between what they studied previously at undergraduate and the postgraduate degree programmes they were enrolled, reflects the tenets by the Tinto's integration model which recognize prior schooling and one's knowledge, skills and abilities as important factors in attaining the schooling goals. This further demonstrates how the institution is committed to its set selection criteria. Students' are also the ones who apply for a degrees suggesting their lack of considerations in applying for relevant postgraduate degree or deficiency on guidance to make right choices. The mismatch between previous and current degrees of study complicates the transition and created substantial obstacles in meeting programme expectations and developing the necessary research skills for dissertation completion. This practice also demonstrates a lack of relevance on catchment of enrolled students and is worth revisiting.

-Supervisors' Perspectives

Supervisors echoed these concerns, frequently citing inadequate research skills and methodological understanding as barriers to student progress. They observed that many students struggled with fundamental aspects of research design, data analysis, and academic writing. One supervisor remarked:

Some students submit work that is premature, substandard, and fails to fully address the feedback provided. From my perspective as supervisor, these skill deficiencies significantly extended the supervision process and necessitated considerable remedial guidance.

The lack of essential research skills significantly prolongs study durations, often resulting in late completions or even student dropouts. Research by Aman et al. (2022) highlights that personal factors such as educational background, commitment, and English proficiency critically impact postgraduate students' completion rates and progress in coursework. Similarly, Thelma et al. (2025) found in Lusaka, Zambia, that students proficient in technical skills such as data analysis and digital literacy demonstrate greater confidence and

motivation in their research endeavours. In contrast, those lacking these skills often experience frustration and disengagement, which hinders their academic success. Gohar and Qouta (2021) further emphasize that poor research skills are significant obstacles to enhancing the quality of academic supervision in Egypt. Additionally, Rauf (2016) noted that in Sri Lanka that student qualities, including hard work, motivation, and writing skills, heavily influence delays in thesis completion. Collectively, these studies underscore the urgent need for targeted skill development to improve completion rates in postgraduate programs.

This challenge aligns with Tinto's concept of academic integration, which emphasizes the importance of matching student preparedness with institutional academic expectations. The skill mismatches identified by both students and supervisors reflect deficiencies in pre-entry preparation that hinder effective academic integration. Interestingly, while both groups acknowledged this challenge, they emphasized different aspects: students focused on disciplinary transitions, while supervisors highlighted the need for research methodology skills. This indicates a critical need for targeted preparation programs that address both academic background alignment and essential research competencies.

Feedback Engagement and Implementation

-Students' Perspectives

Students generally expressed satisfaction with the feedback received from their supervisors; however, they faced significant challenges in implementing recommendations due to time constraints. They identified structural barriers, such as work commitments and limited access to supervisors, that hindered prompt implementation. One student articulated this struggle: Sometimes, I had difficulties in understanding exactly what my supervisor wanted me to do with the comments. By the time I figured it out, a number of weeks had passed leading to delayed completion rates.

This situation highlights a critical gap in the feedback process, where delays in comprehension can significantly impact the overall timeline for dissertation completion.

-Supervisors' Perspectives

Supervisors also acknowledged that feedback implementation is a major challenge but attributed it primarily to issues of student commitment and responsiveness. One of the interviewed Principal noted:

Usually, students are supposed to go to the field for data collection three months after being allocated supervisors. However, some do not meet this deadline while for others who manage to go for fieldwork, do not manage to submit their dissertations by March 31st. For instance, in the 2019/2020 academic year, only 20% of postgraduate students managed to submit by that deadline.

Supervisors expressed frustration with students who would disappear for extended periods without any communication or submit revisions that failed to adequately address prior feedback. This inefficiency in the supervision process unnecessarily extended timelines and detracted from the overall academic experience.

Previous studies underscore the importance of supervisors' feedback in enhancing the quality of postgraduate dissertations and theses completion (Hey-Cunningham et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). Constructive comments are essential for student development (Bearman et al., 2024). Additionally, Bayona (2021) recommended that supervisors adapt their styles to better meet students' needs, emphasizing the importance of their expertise and understanding of institutional regulations.

This theme aligns with Tinto's concept of formal academic integration, which refers to the structured interactions between students and faculty that foster academic development. The differing perspectives on feedback engagement reveal a significant communication and commitment gap in the supervisory relationship. While supervisors interpret delayed implementation as a lack of commitment, students view it as a consequence of structural

constraints. To Tinto's Model, there is a need to harmonize institutional commitment with the external commitments and attain desired academic outcome. This misalignment of commitments and feedback engagement between the supervisor and supervisee indicate a pressing need for clearer communication regarding feedback expectations and implementation timelines.

Chugh et al. (2022) also emphasized the importance of establishing clear feedback processes to improve student engagement and responsiveness. As such, the lessons learned from this analysis point to the necessity of fostering a more effective supervisory relationship through explicit communication and tailored support. Addressing these issues could enhance the overall academic experience and improve completion rates among postgraduate students.

Supervision Relationship and Communication

-Students' Perspectives

Students underscored the importance of supervisor availability and compatibility in their academic journeys. While they expressed general satisfaction with the quality of supervision, they noted that they faced significant challenges in consistently accessing their supervisors, particularly when those supervisors were external to the university. One of the interviewed students articulated this concern:

I wish I had a supervisor within the university to combat the challenge of availability for consultation purposes. I face a problem in meeting my supervisor due to unavailability for scheduled meetings. Quite often, he is not available the University campus for guidance a situation which is detrimental to my progress status in accomplishing the dissertation work.

Furthermore, students expressed a desire for better alignment of research interests and working styles with their supervisors. This mismatch can adversely hinder effective collaboration and impede timely progress in their studies.

-Supervisors' Perspectives

Supervisors highlighted communication as a critical factor in the supervisory relationship, noting frustration with inconsistent student engagement and a lack of notification about delays or absences. One supervisor recounted:

I used to come for consultation several times, but in all these incidents, the student would not show up. I travelled all the way from home for these meetings, despite notifying her beforehand, yet she would still not appear. This demotivates me and contributes to poor progress to the part of the students making her an overstayed student.

Supervisors emphasized that regular, proactive communication is essential for maintaining momentum in the dissertation writing process. Without consistent engagement, they find it challenging to guide students effectively, which can lead to unnecessary delays.

The role of supervisors in supporting dissertation development is crucial, as effective communication is essential for guiding inexperienced students through the complexities of research (Ore, 2021). However, despite the core responsibility of supervisors to guide postgraduate students (Ssentamu & Sajjabi, 2020), studies have shown that poor relationships and harsh supervisory styles can negatively impact student completion rates (Aman et al., 2022). This issue often arises from inadequate communication. For instance, Kaponga et al. (2024) found that students frequently face delays because supervisors provide feedback later than expected. Furthermore, low levels of cooperation between supervisors and students, along with supervisors being unavailable during consultation hours, exacerbate these delays. Supporting this perspective, Salehe et al. (2023) discovered that interactions between students and supervisors have a significant influence on the timely completion of postgraduate studies. Thus, fostering effective communication and positive relationships within the supervisory framework is vital for enhancing student success.

These findings resonate with Tinto's emphasis on faculty-student interactions as a critical component of academic integration. Supervisors need to embrace institutional goals by being committed to the institution and so support students sufficiently. The challenges in establishing consistent communication patterns and aligning expectations significantly impact the effectiveness of supervision. Research by Ssentamu-Namubiru & Sajjabi-Bakibinga (2020) supports this, showing that the quality of the supervisory relationship directly influences completion outcomes.

Notably, for evening students, establishing clear communication protocols may be even more crucial than for traditional students due to their limited presence on campus. This highlights a need for institutions to develop strategies that facilitate better communication and support tailored to the unique circumstances of all students. Overall, as argued by Tinto's Integration Model, students must stick to their schooling goals and foster academic as well as social integrations to complete their studies timely.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges affecting the timely completion of evening postgraduate programs in Tanzania from the dual perspectives of students and their supervisors. The aim was to identify key obstacles and understand how these challenges are perceived by both stakeholders in the supervision relationship. The findings reveal several important insights into the nature of these challenges and highlight significant perspective gaps between students and supervisors.

First, a notable discrepancy exists in how students and supervisors perceive the causes of delayed completion. Students often emphasize structural constraints such as work demands, financial pressures, and mismatches in academic backgrounds. In contrast, supervisors attribute delays more to individual factors, including commitment, time management, and engagement. This misalignment likely contributes to frustration on both sides and impedes effective support.

Second, the unique context of evening programmes introduces challenges that traditional supervision models may not adequately address. The "triple burden" of work, family, and academic responsibilities creates complex time management issues that require specialized support strategies. Current institutional structures, which are primarily designed for traditional students, may fail to accommodate the distinct needs of evening students.

Third, the findings affirm the relevance of Tinto's Student Integration Model in understanding postgraduate completion while suggesting contextual adaptations. The importance of academic integration through effective supervision relationships is strongly supported by our data. However, external commitments particularly work and financial factors may play a more significant role in the experiences of evening students than Tinto's original model suggests.

Finally, the study underscores the critical importance of aligning expectations and communication between students and supervisors. When these expectations diverge, supervision becomes less effective, leading to delayed completion and mutual frustration.

Limitations

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. The sample size was relatively small, focusing on students who have experienced prolonged delays in completing their studies, which may not represent the broader population. However, this approach provided rich, in depth and valuable insights from both students and supervisors regarding their lived experiences. Future research should involve multiple universities to gather a larger and more diverse participant pool.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several strategies are recommended to enhance the completion rates of evening postgraduate students:

-For Institutions of Higher Learning

1. They should develop structured orientation programmes specifically for evening students, addressing time management, research skills, and realistic planning for dissertation completion.
2. They should implement supervisor-student matching processes that consider research interests, working styles, availability patterns, and communication preferences.
3. They should create flexible institutional support mechanisms, including extended library hours, online resources, and virtual consultation options tailored to working professionals' schedules.
4. They should consider financial support options for evening students, such as payment plans, employer partnerships, or targeted scholarships.

- For Supervisors

1. They should increase awareness of the structural constraints faced by evening students, particularly regarding work-study balance and financial pressures.
2. They should establish clear communication protocols at the start of the supervisory relationship, including preferred contact methods, response times, and meeting schedules.
3. They should provide structured feedback with explicit prioritization to help students and manage implementation within their time constraints.
4. They should explore alternative supervision approaches that accommodate the irregular availability patterns of working students.

-For Students

1. They should communicate proactively about constraints and challenges rather than withdrawing during difficult times.
2. They should develop realistic timelines that account for work commitments and financial limitations.
3. They should Seek early support for academic skills, particularly in research methodology and academic writing.
4. They should establish regular communication patterns with supervisors, even when progress is limited.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study highlights several areas for further investigation:

1. Performing a comparative study examining effective supervision models specifically for part-time and evening students.
2. Implementing action research to evaluate targeted support strategies based on the challenges identified in this study.
3. Broadening investigations to include additional stakeholders, such as employers and family members, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem affecting evening student success.

By addressing the unique challenges facing evening postgraduate students from multiple perspectives, institutions can develop more effective support strategies that enhance completion rates while maintaining academic quality. Understanding the differing perspectives of students and supervisors is a crucial first step toward bridging expectation gaps and fostering more effective supervision relationships.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no competing financial interests or known personal relationships that would influence the report presented in this article.

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