Participatory Action Research as an Approach for Sustainable Post-Graduate Supervision in Higher Education

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Abstract

The generation of knowledge is a defining attribute of universities, yet many South African institutions face challenges in achieving this effectively, particularly in postgraduate supervision. This study explores participatory action research (PAR) as a catalyst for sustainable postgraduate supervision in higher education. Using a qualitative approach and systematic literature review (SLR) of 12 studies, the research identified five key themes: fostering participation and collaborative support, nurturing cordial student–supervisor relationships, promoting democratic and emancipatory supervision, enhancing communication and constructive feedback, and applying a cohort supervision model. The findings suggest that PAR can shift supervision from hierarchical, individualistic models toward interactive, empowering practices that enhance postgraduate success. By addressing power dynamics and emphasizing collaborative engagement, supervision becomes more sustainable. The study recommends adopting a co-supervision model, where responsibilities are shared among supervisors, enabling students to benefit from diverse expertise while reducing the workload on individual supervisors.

Keywords: Emancipation, Post-Graduate, Participatory Action Research, Supervision, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, postgraduate supervision is essential since it shapes graduate students' academic and career paths (Cekiso, Tshotsho, Masha & Saziwa, 2019). Fostering a positive learning environment, encouraging academic success, and enabling the creation of original research that makes a significant contribution to the field all depend on effective supervision (Madikizela-Madiya & Atwebembeire, 2020). The significance of effective supervision has grown in recognition as the higher education landscape changes, with institutions realizing the impact it has on student happiness, retention, and timely completion rates (Kabanda, 2022). Moreover, postgraduate supervision fosters critical reflection, educational creativity, and competence growth for the supervisor, hence augmenting their professional development (Lekhetho, 2022). Because of this, postgraduate supervision is an essential investment in the future generation of academics, professionals, and leaders, calling for a deliberate focus on the creation of efficient supervisory techniques (Mncina, Letsie, Nkhi, Mofana, 2024).

The generation of knowledge remains a vital attribute of a university. Nonetheless, the system's susceptibility to efficiently accomplish this objective remains a considerable challenge. Numerous higher education institutions in South Africa continue to encounter substantial difficulties regarding their ability and proficiency to monitor postgraduate students (Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). The primary issue highlighted by the study is the prevalence of new and

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inexperienced supervisors who lack the requisite conceptual skills to facilitate advanced research endeavors, necessitating high-level thinking, critical analysis, and creativity (Dladla & Ndlovu, 2019). The problem arises from insufficient research proposals or conceptualizations grounded in incomplete and unreliable interpretations of the existing theory and literature pertinent to the phenomena under investigation. This is coupled with inadequate methodological skills and feeble argument construction. The South African higher education sector is characterized by resource inadequacies, inadequate research investment, and limited capability and research skills (Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2020). The Council on Higher Education of South Africa (CHE, 2009) asserts that postgraduate students are essential elements of the national innovation system. In this context, universities are seen as pivotal entities in fostering development through the enhancement of human resource potential. The Department of Science and Technology and the Council for Higher Education (2009) indicate that the nation lacks sufficient enrollment and completion rates for PhDs, adversely affecting the economy, employment levels, and the capacity to generate wealth for the welfare of all (Chugh, 2022). Moreover, even enrolled individuals do not consistently finish their education, exacerbating the strain on the already struggling economic foundation (Wanyama & Eyamu, 2021). The researcher contends in this paper that conventional and linear approaches to postgraduate education have failed to yield the anticipated levels of efficiency and production.

Research indicates that multiple initiatives labeled as cohort supervision were initiated to enhance interactions among students and their peers, as well as between students and supervisors as a collective, due to the recognition that students achieve optimal learning through diverse sources (Govender, 2023), including fellow students and various supervisors. This realization indicated that, due to the evolving requirements of postgraduate students, the era of a single apprentice studying directly from a master has ended (Hendrickse, 2022). A postgraduate student must possess extensive information acquired from several sources to remain informed (Blose, Msiza & Chiororo, 2021). The requirements of postgraduate study in today's intricate and ever-evolving environment necessitate enhanced theoretical knowledge, methodological proficiency, interpretative abilities, political acumen, and technological competence, among other talents (David, 2020). Buirski (2022). asserts that South African institutions face a scarcity of supervisors, inadequate funding, and a deficiency in research skills, leading to challenges in establishing robust postgraduate programs. To determine sustainable postgraduate supervision in higher education, the supervisor-supervisee relationship is considered one of the negotiated boundaries (Karuri, 2023). Nkoane (2014) contends that power dynamics can be transformed and eradicated within dialogical contexts. Power is not bestowed; rather, it is individually and collectively generated within the evolving praxis involving the supervisor and supervisee (Madikizela-Madiya & Atwebembeire, 2020).

Successful supervisory relationships are contingent upon effective interpersonal dynamics that acknowledge the significance of individual or one student to two supervisors interactions (Odularu & Akande, 2024). From the student perspective, commendable qualities of supervisors include reliability, involvement, encouragement, expertise in the research domain, active listening skills, and a willingness to both dispute and educate (Wood & Louw, 2018). Pather (2022) observes that pupils predominantly seek assistance and mentoring. In a PAR sustainable postgraduate supervision, empowerment serves as the fundamental rationale for autonomy. The supervisor does not regard the student as an item or a tool for achieving objectives. Both the

supervisor and supervisee play a crucial role in the creation of new knowledge forms (Mhlahlo, 2020). Considering dialogical settings as a negotiated agreement that empowers both sides, the researcher recognizes that empowerment is not bestowed by the powerful. There are a number of reasons why sustainable student supervision is marginalized. First, insufficient supervision skills training among supervisors impedes their ability to provide effective advice, which in turn results in subpar support for postgraduate students (Gumbo, 2019). Second, the problem is made worse by insufficient institutional resources and support systems, which foster an atmosphere that encourages supervision neglect (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024). Furthermore, the emphasis on research output and the pressure to publish frequently eclipse the importance of supervision, leading supervisors to place their research agendas ahead of the requirements of their students (Blose, Msiza & Chiororo, 2021). Moreover, Okeke-Uzodike (2021) notes that insufficient finance and a burdensome workload also play a role in the marginalization of sustainable student supervision. Furthermore, irregular and subpar supervision quality is permitted by insufficient regulations and guidelines controlling supervision activities (Madikizela-Madiya & Atwebembeire, 2020). All of these elements work against the sustainability and quality of student

Post-graduate supervision is essential for developing advanced research capability, knowledge generation, and innovation in South African higher education (Cekiso et al, 2019). Producing top-notch academics capable of tackling the nation's socioeconomic problems depends on effective supervision (Akala & Akala, 2022). According to Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua (2024), the main goals of post-graduate supervision are to assist students in conducting original research, to help them acquire skills related to research methodology, and to help them develop critical thinking and independence. But research on the subject indicates that there are gaps in supervision methods, especially when it comes to supervisors' lack of training and the lack of assistance for students from varied backgrounds (Dzubinski & Sanchez, 2022). To close this gap, participatory action research (PAR) is crucial because it allows for a context-specific, reflective, and cooperative investigation of supervision techniques (Kandel & Kandel, 2023). By using PAR, researchers can discover context-specific problems and build customized solutions to improve student outcomes and supervision quality in collaboration with supervisors and students (Andriopoulou & Prowse, 2020). Consequently, the research question of this investigation is as follows:

- How does participatory action research as an approach impact the sustainable post-graduate supervision in Higher Education?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This qualitative investigation was designed to evaluate current evidence about the research question: • How does participatory action research as an approach impact the sustainable post-graduate supervision in Higher Education? To effectively address this question, a systematic review methodology (Moher et al., 2009) was used to identify potential literature within Australia and internationally. This approach was used to identify if contributing effects were constant throughout the literature, as well as providing an opportunity to identify potential gaps within the

current literature. The PRISMA approach was utilised due to its highly effective evidence-based minimum set of items for reporting in systematic reviews, ensuring a transparent account of why the review was undertaken, the process that was followed, and the results that were found (Moher et al., 2009). We followed the following PRISMA protocol: identification (keywords, search criteria, database, and records extracted), screening (inclusion and exclusion), eligibility (quality assessment), and inclusion (final data included).

Study group for the research

The distribution of publications by year (2019–2024)" illustrates the temporal spread of the 12 studies included in the review. Based on the chart (Figure 1) showing the distribution of the 12 studies included between 2019 and 2024, the study group of this research consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles that directly explored Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an approach to postgraduate supervision in higher education contexts. These studies originated from five countries—South Africa (8 studies), the USA, Nepal, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho (1 study each)—indicating both geographical diversity and a strong regional concentration in South Africa. For instance, 2022 stands out as the most productive year, with 4 studies published. This peak may indicate a growing interest in Participatory Action Research (PAR) and sustainable postgraduate supervision during that period, potentially influenced by the post-COVID-19 academic shift toward collaborative and reflexive research approaches. The years 2019, 2021, and 2024 each contributed 2 studies, showing steady but moderate engagement with the topic in those years. This suggests sustained, albeit limited, scholarly attention over time. However, 2023 had only 1 publication, the lowest across the six years. This dip could reflect delays in publication cycles or reduced research activity related to PAR and supervision during that specific year. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the included studies by country and year, spanning from 2019 to 2024.
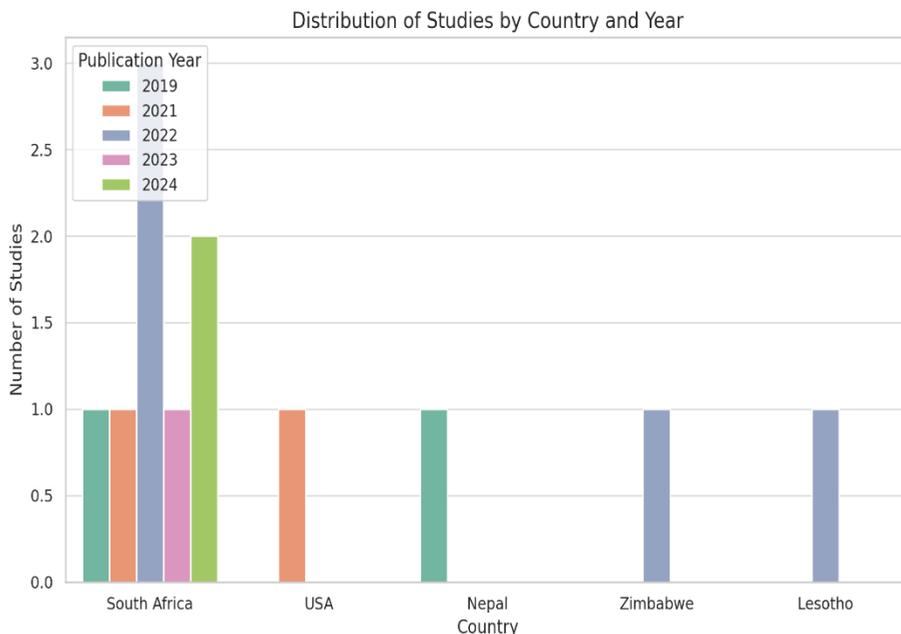
Figure 1: Distribution of studies by country and year

The selection of studies was guided by clear inclusion criteria, which required that each article (1) explicitly applied or engaged with PAR as a methodological or theoretical framework, (2) focused on postgraduate or doctoral supervision, and (3) addressed sustainability, collaboration, reflexivity, or empowerment within supervisory relationships. Only qualitative studies were included, specifically those using participatory approaches (n = 8) or case studies (n = 4). Studies were also limited to those published in English and between 2019 and 2024, ensuring both linguistic accessibility and relevance to recent academic developments. This selective and methodical process ensured that the included articles were not only thematically aligned but also methodologically robust, forming a solid basis for the thematic content analysis.

Data collection

The researcher conducted an electronic search through the university library system to identify peer-reviewed journal articles relevant to the application of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in postgraduate supervision. A systematic search of the current literature was completed between February 2019 and April 2024. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the researcher searched databases including Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resource Information Centre), and EBSCOhost. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed literature, written in English and published in the past 5 years (2019-2024). Additionally, search alerts were set for the search word combinations to ensure any literature published after the search date was included in the literature review, and additional articles were identified via reference lists of literature located within the search. The search strategy incorporated a combination of Boolean operators and keywords tailored to the topic. The final search string was: (("Participatory Action Research" OR "PAR" OR "Action Research" OR "Participatory Methods")) AND (("postgraduate supervision" OR "doctoral supervision" OR "graduate research supervision")) AND (("sustainable practices" OR "collaborative learning" OR "supervisory relationships" OR "co-research")) AND (("higher education" OR "university" OR "doctoral education")).

Identification

In the identification phase, a comprehensive search was conducted to locate scholarly literature relevant to Participatory Action Research (PAR) and postgraduate supervision in higher education. A total of 47 records were retrieved from a combination of sources, including academic databases, institutional repositories, and grey literature. These records encompassed empirical studies, theoretical discussions, and methodological contributions across various global contexts. The initial search was designed to be broad to capture diverse interpretations and applications of PAR, especially in the context of postgraduate education and supervision. At this stage, 3 duplicate entries were detected and removed using reference management software, leaving 44 unique records for further screening.
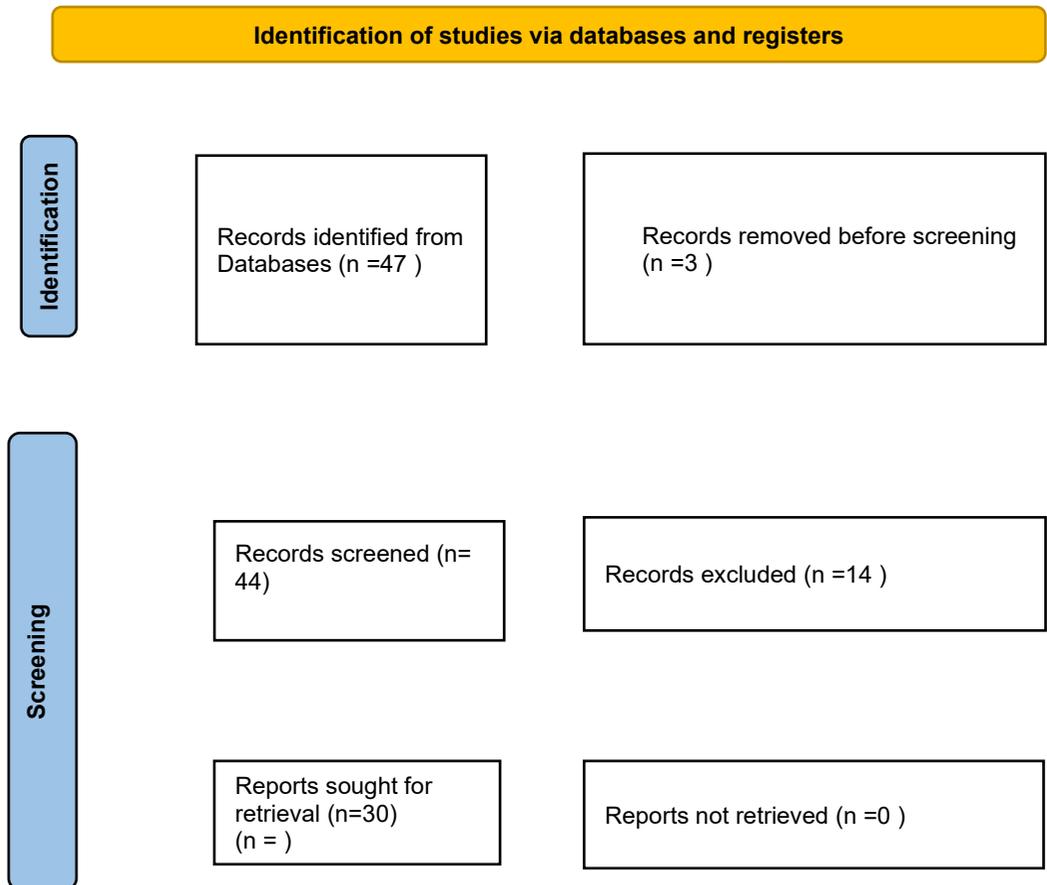
Screening

The screening stage focused on evaluating the titles and abstracts of the remaining 44 articles to determine their relevance to the research topic. This phase served as a critical filter to eliminate studies that did not address either PAR methodology or the domain of postgraduate supervision.

As a result, 14 records were excluded because they did not sufficiently relate to the participatory action research paradigm or focused on unrelated aspects of higher education, such as undergraduate teaching or purely administrative supervision practices. This left 30 studies that appeared to potentially meet the inclusion criteria and were subjected to full-text assessment.

Eligibility

In the eligibility stage, the full texts of the 30 remaining articles were closely examined against pre-determined inclusion criteria. These criteria required that studies explicitly utilize or critically engage with Participatory Action Research, reflect on postgraduate supervision (whether in theoretical, practical, or reflective terms), and address sustainability, reflexivity, or collaborative knowledge production. During this phase, 6 articles were excluded. These exclusions were based on either a lack of methodological engagement with PAR or insufficient emphasis on postgraduate supervision. Some studies, while relevant to PAR, focused on general educational reform or teacher development outside the postgraduate context. After this rigorous evaluation, 12 articles remained fully eligible for inclusion in the final synthesis. The selection process is shown in Figure 2, adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

Identification of studies via databases and registers	
Identification	Records identified from Databases (n =47)	Records removed before screening (n =3)
Screening	Records screened (n= 44)	Records excluded (n =14)
	Reports sought for retrieval (n=30) (n =)	Reports not retrieved (n =0)

Included

Reports assessed for eligibility (n= 30) (n =)	Reports excluded: • Review papers (n=1) • Non-English papers (n=1) • Duplicate records (n=2) • Not focused on PGS (n=1) • Published before 2018 (n=1)

Studies included in review (n =12)

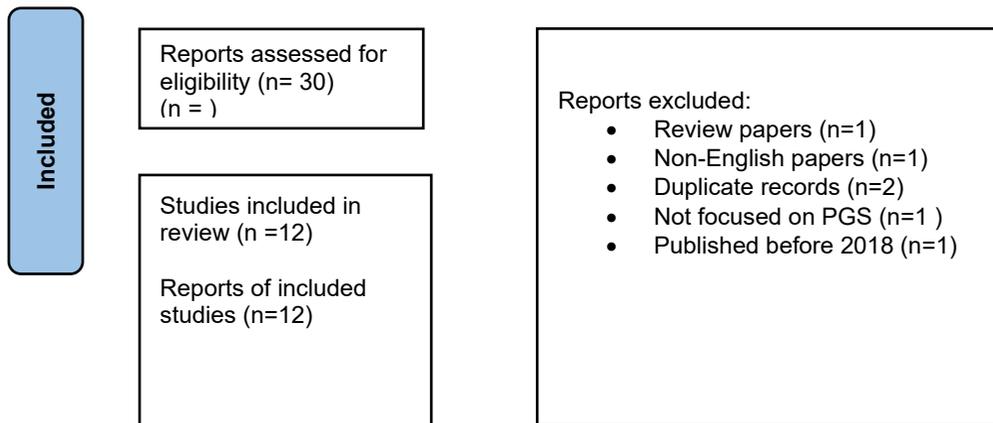Reports of included studies (n=12)

Figure 2, PRISMA Flow Diagram

Inclusion

The inclusion stage resulted in the selection of 12 final articles that met all the inclusion criteria. These studies were integrated into the qualitative synthesis and collectively provided rich, multi-layered insights into how Participatory Action Research contributes to sustainable postgraduate supervision. The selected articles included empirical case studies, auto-ethnographic narratives, collaborative research reflections, and theoretical models rooted in Ubuntu, decoloniality, and democratic supervision. The studies span various regions, including South Africa, Nepal, Sweden, and the United States, allowing for cross-cultural comparisons of PAR in supervisory contexts. Together, these works formed the evidentiary foundation for identifying key themes, methodological approaches, and transformative practices within participatory postgraduate supervision frameworks.

Data analysis

The systematic literature review employed for this study used thematic content analysis to analyze various appropriate literature sources, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic procedural steps. Following the initial identification of articles, records were subjected to title and abstract screening. This process aimed to determine whether each article met the predefined inclusion criteria. Screening was conducted systematically by reading each title and abstract for mentions of PAR, participatory methodologies, and postgraduate supervision. To ensure consistency and accuracy during article selection, the screening process followed a double-blind strategy in which titles and abstracts were reviewed independently by two researchers. Discrepancies in inclusion decisions were discussed and resolved through consensus, which strengthened inter-rater reliability. The researchers used a structured checklist based on the inclusion criteria to guide their decisions. Despite efforts to ensure rigour, some limitations and potential biases were recognised. Firstly, the review only included English-language articles, which may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages, especially given the global relevance of PAR. Secondly, there was a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of

abstract language — for instance, some studies described their approaches as "collaborative" or "engaged" without explicitly stating they used PAR, requiring judgment calls from reviewers. Subsequently, selected studies underwent a thorough quality assessment to evaluate their methodological rigor and validity (Green & Thorogood, 2018). Quality appraisal criteria were adapted from established guidelines, using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses [PRISMA] checklist and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme [CASP] tool for qualitative studies (Pillay, 2024). Each included study was critically appraised based on criteria relevant to its study design, research methods, data analysis, and reporting quality. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and themes related to participatory action research as an approach for sustainable post-graduate supervision in higher education. The generated themes were developed through an iterative process of coding, categorization, and theme refinement, leading to the comprehensive findings regarding the impact PAR has on the sustainable post-graduate supervision in higher education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher charted each article by entering its details into a table (see Table 1). These included: (1) author/s, (2) year of publication, (3) title, and (4) findings. An overview of the studies included in this scoping review is presented in the next section.

Table 1. Articles included in the review (in alphabetical order)

No	Author(s)	Year	Title	Findings
1	Adedokun, T., & Oyetunde-Joshua, F.	2024	Navigating the academic odyssey: Exploring the role of supervisors in supporting postgraduate students. Journal of Culture and Values in Education	The findings identify strengths in supervisory support and areas needing enhancement. The findings indicate that many students desire more hands-on help with methodology and writing, and career mentoring emerges as an area where postgraduate support falls short of expectations. The study recommends that supervisor training be provided for supervisors and intending ones, and such training should be focused on writing guidance, networking,

				advising, and motivation. By implementing such programs, universities can empower supervisors to optimally assist students, thereby enhancing experiences and outcomes.
2	Akala, B.U & Akala, B.M	2022	How can doctoral supervision be improved? Views from doctoral students in two faculties of education at South African universities.	The study findings reveal that if academic leadership at the faculty level is actively involved in this process at the strategy formulation level, the experiences of students can change for the better. This can be done through the introduction and establishment of seminars, small and large group engagements, and the widening of social capital. Widening of social capital will ensure that both PhD supervisors and PhD students share productive supervision experiences while buttressing multi-directional relationships between supervisors, students, and their peers aimed at improving completion rates and the doctoral journey.
3	Blose, S., Msiza, V., & Chiororo, F.	2021	Developing a supervisor identity through experiential learning: Narratives of three novice academics working in a South African University.	Upon examining our narratives, we identified four sources of learning that were significant in developing our

				supervisor identity: our current or previous supervisors, senior colleagues, meaningful corridor talks, and the practice of reflexivity. We recommend that institutions of higher learning pay added attention to the development of novice supervisors. Although structured programmes are significant, other learning avenues need to be explored to assist novice supervisors in developing a supervisor identity.
4	Cekiso, M., B. Tshotsho, R. Masha, & T. Saziwa.	2019	Supervision experiences of postgraduate research students at one South African higher education institution.	The study findings revealed that communication breakdown, poor feedback, non-availability of some supervisors, and lack of ethical consideration were some of the major factors that contributed to negative supervisory experiences of the students who participated in the study. Based on the findings, the study recommended a number of intervention strategies that could be put in place for both students and supervisors to improve the supervision experience. Among these are the adoption of a collaborative cohort

				model, supervisor training, and communication guidelines.
5	Dzubinski, L. M., & Sanchez, J. N.	2022	Newly Minted: How Recent Doctoral Graduates Perceive Their Relationship with Their Supervisor.	Findings showed that women value a supervisor who supports their professional development, develops a personal relationship with them, and helps them navigate the institution. We found that men value a supervisor who develops mutuality with them, encourages their internal grit, and facilitates self-direction. Finally, findings demonstrated that international students value a supervisor who is a subject matter expert, who goes above and beyond in their supervision of the student, and who demonstrates cultural competence. All participants valued a supervisor who socializes them into the academy through appropriate support, but the desired support varied slightly for women, men, and international students. We conclude with implications for supervisors and recommendations for

				future research.
6	Gumbo, M.T.	2019	Online or offline supervision? Postgraduate supervisors state their position at the University of South Africa.	The findings showed that the supervisors are knowledgeable in terms of the tools or applications such as MS Word, my Unisa, and the Discussion Forum. Furthermore, the findings indicated that there is a need for the training of other supervisors with respect to the use of certain online applications and/or tools. The most important finding is that supervisors value the human aspect such that, though supervisors are positive about the role of technology in supervision, the human aspect should enjoy precedence in their supervision of students.
7	Kabanda, G.	2022	Quantum shift in Postgraduate Research Supervision.	The study established that good research supervision entails maintaining best practice elements, enhancing the skills and knowledge of the supervisee, assisting with the growth of the reflective practice, and providing the supervisee with international scholarly exposure with a strong coherence of arguments. It was noticed that virtual supervision works more

				effectively when students are aware of the potential and limitations of the virtual environment and when supervisors prepare students to actively engage in the partnership process. The new Higher Education Policy Education 5.0 requires knowledge and innovation research and training to create a context in which research students will be expected to complete their degrees more quickly and graduate with a wider range of research capabilities, which make them more entrepreneurial and responsive to industry needs.
8	Kandel, R.K., & Kandel, G.K.	2023	Collaboration, Discussion, and Feedback for Improving Students'(Report) Writing and Presentation: A Participatory Action Research	The findings showed that the intervention significantly improved the students' AW and presentation skills. The findings also showed that students refined their writing skills by gaining insight from the model presentation, discussions, and feedback. They significantly improved their writing and presentation skills through collaborative tasks performed regularly during the study. The study

				suggests that model presentation, group discussion, peer and teacher feedback, and self-reflection can be effective in enhancing students' AW and presentation.
9	Lekhetho, M.	2022	Postgraduate students' perceptions of support services rendered by a distance learning institution.	From a thematic analysis of the themes that recurred, the findings revealed that despite the challenges, most students appreciated the support provided, particularly by supervisors who guided them efficiently and gave them feedback promptly. To improve graduation rates, it is recommended that supervisors be trained in effective supervision and support of students from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds.
10	Madikizela-Madiya, N. & Atwebembeire. J.M.	2020	Colleague postgraduate supervision and the production of space in higher education: A duo-ethnographic analysis	The reflection suggests that social values of trust, compassion, and care in CPS can outrun the spatial constraints for the benefit of the supervisees in the relationship. However, the colleagues in the CPS can also experience some subtle power dynamics and tensions if the process is not well communicated.

| 11 | Mncina, T. C., Letsie, H., Nkhi, S. E., Mofana, M. | 2024 | Effective communication in postgraduate supervision: Shaping experiences and overcoming challenges. | The findings reveal several factors that hinder effective communication in postgraduate supervision, including cultural dominance, lack of mutual respect, insufficient training, and a lack of professionalism, among others. Based on these findings, the study recommends that experienced supervisors be assigned to students and that there be a focus on two-way communication and training to develop the necessary skills for a respectful supervisor-student relationship. |
| 12 | Okeke-Uzodike, O. E. | 2021 | Postgraduate supervision in a South African transforming academic environment: A reflexivity approach. | The findings show that postgraduate supervision is characterised by various factors that determine the degree of skills transfer and development. The study provides insights into aspects of supervision that, if not well managed, may compromise the objective of skill development. It contributes to the ongoing discourse in supervision pedagogy and recommends careful consideration of the dynamic changes that may impact the |

				level of educational transformation and skills development in the knowledge economy.

The following section presents a summary of the key themes that emerged from the literature based on the findings. These themes are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Themes emerging from the literature findings

Themes	Theme description	No. of articles
Theme 1	PAR enables participation and collaborative support in the research process	6
Theme 2	Establishing cordial relationships between students and supervisors	7
Theme 3	PAR fosters emancipatory and democratic supervision process	5
Theme 4	PAR promotes communication and constructive feedback	8
Theme 5	PAR complements the cohort supervision model	3

Theme 1: PAR enables participation and collaborative support in the research process

The results indicated that through PAR, students and supervisors collaborate to redefine their social relationships by reinterpreting the activities that form them (Lekhetho, 2022). It is a collaborative scientific endeavor. PAR offers a cooperative methodology for knowledge management and mobilization (Mncina et al., 2024). In PAR, researchers and stakeholders engage collaboratively throughout the research process, starting with the collective identification of research priorities (Kabanda, 2022) and extending through design, data collection, analysis, dissemination, and application of findings. The richness of collective, community constructivism and collaborative learning at the postgraduate level allows for easy access to individuals' various understandings of constructions and discourses as needed. Postgraduate students acquire knowledge from a combination of self-study, rookie researchers, 'experts', supervisors, and participants (Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). PAR is a cooperative initiative aimed at resolving challenges within particular systems. This is a collaborative, cyclical, reflective research design aimed at problem-solving, enhancing work practices, and comprehending the impact of the research or intervention within the research process (Cekiso et al., 2023). It expressly advocates for understanding the effects of change and adjusting activities accordingly (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022). Co-supervision is a collaborative endeavor with two instructors jointly overseeing a single pupil. Literature findings indicate that post-graduate supervision is a multifaceted process necessitating supervisors to offer more than merely academic assistance to students (Ward & Walter, 2021). The successful completion of a student's education necessitates a robust

relationship with their supervisors (Wood, 2020). Supervision workshops are essential for augmenting students' knowledge and equipping them for the research process (Ward & Walter, 2021). Workshops, whether conducted internally or in partnership with external experts, are essential (Fabri & Jobér, 2024). The findings highlight the transformative power of PAR in postgraduate research supervision. By embracing a collaborative and inclusive approach, PAR dissolves traditional boundaries between students, supervisors, and stakeholders, fostering a dynamic learning environment. This cooperative methodology not only redefines the student-supervisor relationship but also empowers students to take an active role in shaping their research journey. Through collective problem-solving, shared knowledge construction, and reflective practice, PAR enables students to develop a deeper understanding of their research topics and acquire essential skills for navigating complex real-world challenges. Ultimately, PAR supervision models promote a culture of mutual support, constructive feedback, and continuous improvement, leading to more effective research outcomes, enhanced student experience, and better preparation for the demands of academic and professional environments.

Theme 2: Establishing cordial relationships between students and supervisors

Regarding student-supervisor relations, the research findings indicate that students are more likely to achieve significant progress and receive sufficient supervision when overseen by experienced supervisors and senior academics (Blose et al., 2021). It is incumbent upon supervisors to foster effective learning environments that enable students to leverage their theoretical and practical experiences to advance their academic development (Sunar, Bastola, Maharjan, & Dhungana, 2023). Adedokun and Oyetunde-Joshua (2024) assert that supervisors and supervisees must maintain a friendly connection in their interactions. Supervisors are supposed to demonstrate tolerance towards their students' behavior and personal conduct (Ward & Walter, 2021), thereby building a constructive relationship and guaranteeing effective communication between themselves and the students (Dzubinski & Sanchez, 2022). Moreover, supervisors are anticipated to offer exposure, protection, sponsorship, guidance, visibility, and coaching to their students (Gumbo, 2019). The findings emphasize mutual respect as an essential factor in addressing challenges that may impact research progress (Kandel & Kandel, 2023). Dladla and Ndlovu (2019) corroborate this finding by highlighting the significance of communication in the supervisor-student relationship, which fosters engagement and mutual understanding. Mahara (2024) concurs that mutual respect, power equilibrium, and communication dynamics must be comprehended between the student and supervisor. The findings revealed that supervisors exhibit a deficiency in empathy, demonstrate disinterest in their students' work (Tsotetsi & Omodan, 2021), provide inadequate support, and offer substandard or unresponsive feedback, thereby perpetuating detrimental supervisor-student relationships (Mahara, 2024). The researchers contend that these injustices perpetrated by supervisors undermine the establishment of sustained postgraduate supervision. A robust relationship must be founded on human qualities, encompassing friendliness, openness, adaptability, and accessibility (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022). The findings underscore the significance of constructive feedback in supervision, which can aid in attaining the study's purpose. The findings underscore the vital importance of nurturing positive and supportive relationships between students and supervisors in postgraduate research settings. A productive dynamic, built on mutual respect, empathy, and open communication, is essential for students to thrive academically and personally. Effective supervisors foster a conducive learning

environment by offering guidance, support, and constructive feedback, while also being approachable, adaptable, and interested in their students' work. Conversely, neglecting these fundamental aspects can lead to detrimental relationships, hindering research progress and overall student well-being. By recognizing the significance of human qualities like friendliness, tolerance, and adaptability, supervisors can create a safe space for students to explore, learn, and grow. Ultimately, cultivating robust student-supervisor relationships is crucial for unlocking students' full potential, promoting academic success, and fostering a positive and enduring research experience.

Theme 3: PAR fosters emancipatory and democratic supervision process

The findings demonstrated that PAR contests conventional research procedures by shifting the perception of participants from mere subjects to active co-researchers in the research process (Akala & Akala, 2022). A dedication to democracy in the research process entails improving understanding of social realities in collaboration with individuals who experience these realities (Mncina et al., 2024) by establishing communicative environments for collective critical reflection on shared issues to promote social transformation (Lekhetho, 2022). It promotes collaboration to improve a shared social practice, making it more coherent, egalitarian, logical, informed, satisfying, and sustainable" (Kandel & Kandel, 2023). Participatory Action Research (PAR) seeks to dismantle inequitable power structures in research and society by adhering to the fundamental concepts of "equitable participation" and "social transformation" (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024), thereby advancing an emancipatory agenda (Fabri & Jobér, 2024). This emancipatory objective sought through the democratic collaboration of scholars with those confronting injustices positions PAR within a critical framework (Shrestha & Dangal, 2024). PAR emphasizes the importance of critical dialogue and reflection among community members confronting injustice to enhance critical consciousness and promote social change (Sosnowski et al., 2022). The researcher promotes a more empathetic and logical emancipatory supervision approach that recognizes the identities and contributions of individuals without marginalization (Ward & Walter, 2021). The essay promotes an inclusive emancipatory framework for postgraduate supervision that integrates the viewpoints of postgraduate students, novice researchers, and participants in the knowledge production process (Wood, 2020). The aim is to develop a significant group of researchers or a collective of perspectives that will uphold a critical response practice relevant to their experiences and context (Mahara, 2024). This supervisory method provides opportunities, promotes collaboration and inclusivity, and establishes a climate favorable to a pedagogy of hope and compassion (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022). Positionality in supervision cannot be reduced to a simplistic binary classification. Kandel and Kandel (2023) challenge the assumptions surrounding the independent student and capable supervisor, whereas Akala & Akala (2022) critique the traditional depiction of the supervisor as knowledgeable, accomplished, and authoritative, in contrast to the student as uninformed, insecure, inexperienced, dependent, and overwhelmed. The findings reveal that PAR transforms the traditional supervision landscape by embracing a democratic and emancipatory approach. By elevating participants from passive subjects to active co-researchers, PAR dismantles entrenched power dynamics, fostering a collaborative environment where knowledge is co-constructed and mutual learning thrives. This inclusive framework challenges conventional supervisor-student roles, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and experiences. Through critical dialogue, reflection, and equitable participation, PAR empowers individuals to confront injustices,

cultivate critical consciousness, and drive social change. Ultimately, this approach redefines supervision as a liberating and compassionate process, where scholars, students, and community members unite to produce knowledge that is contextually relevant, socially transformative, and personally empowering. By embracing PAR's principles, supervision becomes a catalyst for social justice, inclusivity, and human growth.

Theme 4: PAR promotes communication and constructive feedback

The results indicated that the cornerstone of a robust social presence is discourse, facilitating a critical exchange of ideas and perspectives among the group (Mncina et al., 2024). Dialogue should be open and unrestricted, facilitating both verbal and written criticism and reflection (Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). Lekhetho (2022) elucidates that open discussion can be fostered by promoting learning among and within a community of beginner researchers. Students have the opportunity to express viewpoints, pose inquiries, and acquire knowledge from more informed individuals through seminars and discussions. The objective is to enhance collaborative learning, hence facilitating dialogue among diverse perspectives (Kandel & Kandel, 2023). Within the framework of dialogism, the significance of communication must be underscored, as it is via communication that transparency and reflexivity in producing high-quality postgraduate research outputs are attained (Blose et al., 2021). Akala and Akala (2022) underscore the significance of establishing an "intercultural contact zone" that accommodates cultural variability in cohort supervision procedures. Mahara (2024) elucidates that divergent cultural traditions between students and supervisors may impede the establishment of a social presence inside the cohort supervision group. Supervisees need to distinguish between criticism and academic critique. Scholarly critique facilitates a constructive evaluation of a supervisee's study aimed at fostering academic growth, whereas criticism undermines the work, ultimately disheartening the supervisee (Sosnowski et al, 2022). Consequently, Kabanda (2022) asserted that supervisors should deliver specific comments to supervisees. The research groups improve the quality of supervisees through the supervisor's critique, promoting discussions and cultivating academic collaboration among them (Ward & Walter, 2021). Shrestha and Dangal (2024) assert that involvement in an academic research supervision group and the examination of supervisors' critiques among peers improve the quality of supervisees' research. Sustainable post-graduate supervision promotes the concept of immediate feedback, hence enhancing the progression of the research project (Govender, 2023). Feedback is essential to evaluate if both parties are aligned and comprehending one another. The findings underscore the pivotal role of open communication and constructive feedback in fostering a productive and inclusive supervision environment. By embracing a culture of transparent and respectful dialogue, PAR enables supervisees to engage freely in critical thinking, idea-sharing, and collaborative learning. Effective supervisors facilitate this process by providing timely, specific, and constructive feedback, distinguishing between critique that fosters growth and criticism that undermines confidence. This approach not only enhances research quality and academic growth but also promotes a culture of intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. By doing so, PAR supervision models create a safe space for diverse perspectives to converge, challenges to be addressed, and innovative solutions to emerge, ultimately culminating in successful research outcomes and transformative learning experiences.

Theme 5: PAR complements the cohort supervision model

The results suggested that a cohort method of supervision is advisable for sustained post-graduate oversight, owing to its structured framework and capacity to enhance student involvement in the research process (Akala & Akala, 2022). A cohort supervision strategy denotes a systematic program in which supervisors and students participate in significant academic activities over a defined duration through direct interaction (Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). Cohort supervision aims to facilitate collaboration, support, and advice for students, supervisors, and other specialists during the research process (Kabanda, 2022). Cohort supervision facilitates students' advancement through their studies via a cumulative sequential development process, allowing individuals to concurrently profit from the learning experience (Madikizela-Madiya & Atwebembeire, 2020). The cohort model fosters the establishment of a network of learning interactions (community of practice) that allows students to advance through their studies as an interdependent group (Mahara, 2024). The cohort supervision model is appropriate for residential higher education institutions; nevertheless, its implementation in a rural setting necessitates further scrutiny (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022). Postgraduate students may be unable to participate in regular contact sessions, which are essential for the effective implementation of a cohort supervision strategy (Shrestha & Dangal, 2024). Sessions must be meticulously structured to emphasize research components, work presentation, critique, and feedback from peers and supervisors. Students in this cohort are urged to get comparable results at specific phases of their research (Govender, 2023). This supervisory model offers numerous advantages, such as promoting a collaborative approach, providing students access to the expertise of two supervisors (Mahara, 2024) from distinct disciplines, and distributing the supervisory responsibilities to alleviate the load on a single, already overwhelmed lecturer (Kandel & Kandel, 2023). The findings highlight the synergistic relationship between PAR and the cohort supervision model, revealing a powerful approach to postgraduate supervision. By combining PAR's collaborative and reflective principles with the structured framework of cohort supervision, educators can create a vibrant learning community that fosters academic growth, social learning, and research excellence. This integrated approach encourages postgraduate students to engage actively in the research process, share knowledge, and receive constructive feedback from peers and supervisors. As students' progress through their studies, they benefit from a cumulative learning experience, developing essential skills and expertise within a supportive network of scholars. By embracing this hybrid model, educators can address the unique challenges of postgraduate supervision, promote interdependent learning, and cultivate a culture of collaboration, empathy, and mutual respect, ultimately leading to superior research outcomes and a more fulfilling academic experience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrated how PAR enhances sustainable postgraduate supervision. The research analyzed the issues inherent in the power dynamics between supervisors and students. The study proposed an alternative methodology for postgraduate supervision designed to liberate students from the dominant narrative via interactive postgraduate supervision. The research indicated that comprehending power dynamics in supervision and the necessity of establishing sustainable post-graduate supervision are essential for enhancing throughput rates. The researcher contributes to the discourse by demonstrating how a participatory action research (PAR) framework for postgraduate education fosters a relational and reflective environment essential for critical and dialogical exchanges in the supervision process, thereby equalizing conventional power dynamics and democratizing knowledge production through reflexive dialogue between students

and their supervisors. The study revealed five key themes on how PAR may be used to ensure sustainable student supervision, namely enabling participation and collaborative support, cordial relationships between students and supervisors, an emancipatory, democratic supervision process, communication and constructive feedback, and a cohort supervision model.

This study suggests that to maintain sustainable supervision of post-graduate students, faculty offering post-graduate programs should implement a co-supervision approach. This model promotes a collaborative supervisory approach, allowing the student to leverage the expertise of two supervisors from distinct disciplines while also distributing the supervisory responsibilities to alleviate the load on a single, already overtaxed supervisor. The faculty ought to arrange regular intra-faculty research seminars, enabling supervisees to gain insights from more experienced researchers and benefit from the collective comments of faculty members. The librarians at public universities should adopt a more proactive approach in delivering essential support services to guarantee that the library resources they oversee effectively serve the intended university community, including postgraduate students, rather than remaining dormant and underutilized, especially for research purposes.

DECLARATION

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