

## DIDACTICS



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# Supervisees' Perceptions of the Supervision Process: Case study of Master 2 Students of English Language Department at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, Algeria

**Abstract.** Supervision is defined as intensive, interpersonally focused one-to-one relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. This study addresses supervision at the level of Master as a process that is influenced by many factors, namely supervisees' perceptions. It aims at exploring learners' perceptions of the supervision process. The study uses the descriptive survey design to explore the perceptions of supervisees towards supervision process. The sample is made of 50 master students in the section of English Language at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, 25 of them are specialized in Didactics and 25 are specialized in Linguistics. The number of males and females respondents is also equal, 25 for each. A questionnaire is constructed to collect data; it is composed of 30 statements which are divided into three sections. The findings reveal that the supervisees perceive of supervision as a process on which the supervisor is responsible at all levels, they expect him to prescribe what do to, to be knowledgeable and to take full authority.

**Keywords:** supervisees, perceptions, supervision process, supervisors.

## 1. Introduction

Dissertations are generally considered capstone experiences that provide students with an opportunity to answer a research question within a disciplinary framework under supervision. For Ashwin (2017), Dissertations are not a pivotal factor in many de-

grees, but they also bridge between theoretical course work done in the classroom and independent research undertaken in real contexts. Despite the wealth of research into the supervision of PhD students namely is the works of McCallin (2012) and Halse (2011), on the same line of thought, Ginn (2014) confirms that Master supervision has been under-researched. There is relatively sparse literature to draw on to help with exploring Master's students' perceptions about supervision. Ginn (2014) emphasizes the importance of paying more attention to Master supervision.

Supervisees, in any supervisory experience, rely on a set of ideas they construed on what supervision is and how it should be carried out. However, the literature, as well as academic practice, appears severely lacking as to what learners perceptions in the supervision process are. Lee (2011) argues that there is presently a need to explore the perspective of supervisees' perceptions toward the research supervision process.

The research endeavor is meant to explore supervisees' perceptions about the supervision process. To reach the aim of the study, the following research question will be investigated: What are Master students' perceptions toward research supervision? To answer the research question, it has been hypothesised that supervisees' perceive supervision process as a supervisor-centred approach.

This study is undertaken with the intention to provide data that assist to improve the level of Master 2 students as novice researchers and encourage sound and well-informed scholarship thereby improving knowledge base provision from universities. This study has contributed to the enrichment of existing literature on supervision and also provided information for further research in this area. Findings from the study will enable supervisors realize the perceptions of learners towards supervision so that appropriate guidance can be given to them in the lesson delivery. Also, the findings will help erase the erroneous impression that learners have about supervision process. Finally, it would also be beneficial to the Algerian education policy makers as it would help address problems related students perception of supervision process and the implementation of educational policy and programmes with regard to Master supervision.

Sambrook (2008) states that supervisors need to communicate their conceptions to their supervisees. But it is also the supervisee's task to construct a repertoire of what s/he believes supervision as contends Benmore (2016). Master students in Algerian universities, departments of English being a case in point, struggle to complete their research works. This may be due to certain perceptions they hold which in turn inform their practices in a supervision experience and affect the process as a whole. Though learners' perceptions and teachers' conceptions toward supervision are equally important, the former appears severely lacking research which is attested by Wellington (2010). Therefore, it can be asserted that the perceptions and the way they are acted out in practice are essential factors in carrying out research.

## **2. Literature Review**

As argued earlier, academic literature has only limited applicability to supervising Master supervisees during their thesis. Thomas (1995) observes the lack of research on learners' perceptions in supervision.

### **2.1. The Concept of Supervision**

There is no consensus about the definition of the concept supervision, many scholars define it in different ways; Rensburg (2016) defines it as a way of stimulating, guiding, improving, refreshing, encouraging and overseeing performance of supervisees. Carroll (2007) defines the supervision process as a continuous self-assessment, which implies that supervisees review their works and reflect on the content for the sake of betterment. According to Loganbill & Hardy (1983), supervision is a formal process based on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, where the supervisor's role is to help the supervisee acquire appropriate research skills. Lee (2009) explained supervision as oversight of work and discipline. Lessing (2014) in his turn argues that supervision process is a means through which the supervisees accumulate and construe new knowledge grounded in the wider field of practice. Al-Muallem (2016) sees supervision as a multidimensional and complex process which employs supervisor and supervisee to learn and develop together while moving towards the same objective.

In this study, supervision is defined as intensive, interpersonally focused one-to-one relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee in which the supervisor is to stimulate, guide, improve, refresh, encourage and oversee the performance of supervisees while undertaking research in Master level.

Supervision is the process of conceptualising research, developing a collaborative approach by communicating the roles of the supervisor and roles of the supervisee to gain work alliance.

### **2.2. The Concept of Perceptions**

There is no unanimously agreed upon definition of the term perceptions, many researchers define it in various ways. Harvey and Smith (2005) argue that perception is a process that enables to assess and/or build and construe impressions towards a variety of things that exist in the human senses. Nelson and Quick (1997) explain perception as a process used to analyze information provided by others. Rao and Narayan (2017) also provided an explanation, for them, perception is a process that starts with selection followed by organization than interpretation of sensory stimulations and intake into meaningful information. According to the Unumeri in Nurohman (2018) perception is in accordance with the opinions and views of someone. Solso (2008) believes that perception is an advanced cognitive level in the interpretation of sensory information or referred to the interpretation of things that people sense.

Perceptions have been receiving a great deal of attention from educational researchers too. Rakhmat (2007) argues that perception in the learning process is a system to understand received information through senses, interpret them to produce a unique vision about what they are and then internalize it. Hidayah (2015) confirms the fact that the process interpretation is not the same on every individual. Devito (2011) defines perception as a mental activity performed by the learner, which applies to supervised learners, on his/her educational context and it largely informs learners' decision-making as it acts as the means whereby the student processes information on an object of knowledge and the significance he/she builds around it. Rockeah (2002) contends that perceptions are any simple disposition, conscious or unconscious, directly communicated or inferred from what a person, in our context supervisee, says or does. Certain perceptions supervisees hold inform their practices in a supervision experience and affect the process as a whole. Therefore, Eley and Murray (2009) assert that the perceptions of supervisees about supervision, their roles in this process as well as their supervisors' roles in supervision process are essential factors in the supervision process.

In our study, perceptions are defined as the way individuals deduce and interpret information to construe impressions towards a variety of things that exist in the human senses.

As perceptions are at the level of abstraction, they are measured through the self-report, the participants of this study, through the questionnaire, are asked to report directly on their own perceptions.

### **2.3. Supervision in the Algerian University**

In Algeria, the supervisor must regularly monitor the Master students' dissertation by devoting a significant part of his time to the effective supervision and guidance of the student in the progress of the Master dissertation. He must ensure that the student shows initiative and gains autonomy throughout the preparation of the dissertation. Teachers who fulfil the requirements of supervision suggest a list of topics from which Master students select one specific topic to work on. The university allocates the second semester of second year of Master for scientific research however most of supervisors and their supervisees prefer to start supervision process early in the beginning of the year. The process start by selecting a topic, reviewing the literature related to it, reflecting the issue under research on the Algerian context and then doing fieldwork. While undertaking these steps, the supervisees have certain perceptions and about how supervision is done, the roles they need to perform and expectations about the roles of their supervisors.

### **2.4. Previous studies**

Guidelines for supervisors originating from managerial thoughts on successful performance are discussed in many studies including Abiddin et al (2009), Chiappetta et al (2011) and Ladany et al (2013). However; empirical studies involving large groups of Master students and their perceptions are lacking.

Literature on supervision of PhD students (postgraduate) appears readily available in Zuber-Skerritt (1999) and Jackson (2004) works. Research conducted with supervisors of master dissertation students indicates that supervisors believe that the role of the supervisor contributes to good supervision. Robert (2018) adds that supervisors help supervisees by providing directed and clear advice, supporting and instilling confidence in students and fostering student independence and growth. However, in studies examining supervisees' perspectives (e.g., Todd et al., 2006; Wiggins et al., 2016), the paucity of their perceptions at this level has been noted. These studies in particular neglect the importance of students' perceptions; they do not tackle them though they have a direct impact on their practice in supervision process.

The mentioned studies explored in way research students' perceptions and experiences related to the nature of supervisory support received from their supervisors during their research work. However, Lee (2011) states there are presently a need to explore the perspective of supervisees' perceptions toward the research supervision process. Rau (2004) contends that different perceptions of supervisees are also significant predictors in the supervision process.

### **3. Methodology**

The issues in this section include study design, the population, sample as well as the sampling procedure, the research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures.

#### **3.1. Study Design**

The attempt to explore supervisees' perceptions and their practices in the supervision process urges the researcher to adopt a descriptive-exploratory approach.

#### **3.2. Population and Sampling**

This study is carried out at the Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret, with master 2 students at the English department. For the sake of the generalizability of the study outcomes, the researcher selected 50 Master students. The sample is composed of 25 students (10 males and 15 females) who are specialized in Didactics, and 25 students (15 males and 10 females) who are specialized in Linguistics. This type of sampling, according to the researcher, is more convenient to the type of issue under investigation.

#### **3.3. Instruments**

A questionnaire was the instrument used for the collection of data to get specific responses from respondents. It was piloted with four students, one male and one female from Didactics speciality and one male and one female from Linguistics speciality.

The piloting was important because its purpose was to establish the instrument's face validity and reliability, and to improve questions, format and scales. The questionnaire is composed of four main questions: the first and second are to specify their gender and speciality respectively; the third is a table to fill in whereas the fourth is to provide a personal definition to the term supervision. The table contains 36 yes/nos statements, and they require justifications for the no option. The items are adapted from the questionnaire provided by Palmoro (2004). These statements make three main sections; the first contains 10 items that deal with supervision process aiming at extracting supervisees' perceptions about what is supervision and what are the steps of supervision process, the second is composed of 14 items that are related to supervisors' roles in supervision process. The items of this section aim at exploring the informants' perceptions about the exact roles their supervisors need to perform. The third is made of 12 statements that are about supervisees' roles in supervision process, these statements address respondents' perceptions of their roles in the supervisory experience as they make the second part of his process.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The obtained data are presented, analyzed and interpreted in a consistent manner. The analysis process aimed to present data in an intelligible and interpretable form so as to pinpoint trends and relations in agreement with the research aims. In turn, these trends and relations would enable the researcher to shed light on the core issue, viz., supervisees' perceptions towards supervision process.

- 1- The questionnaire opens up with a question about the gender of respondents.
- 2- A question about their speciality, either Didactics or Linguistics, follows.

The results are presented in the following table:

Table 3.4.1 Gender and Specialty of the Participants

Level	Gender	Didactics	Linguistics	Total
	Males	10	15	25
	Females	15	10	25
	Total	25	25	50

These two questions are asked in order to put the respondents' remaining answers into a greater context, and verify whether the gender and/or the specialty would affect the perceptions of the informants or prove any variation in the results. The sample is made of 50 students from two different Master Majors..

- 3- A set of statements in the form of a table makes up, the third question

## Section I: Supervision Process

Table 3.4.2 Supervisees' Perceptions of Section I Statements

Statements	Yes		No	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1-Supervision has a collaborative approach	06	04	19	21
2-Supervision is a two ways process	05	05	20	20
3-Supervision is an exchange of ideas	07	08	18	17
4-Supervision sessions take place regularly	04	04	21	21
5-Supervision sessions are focused	04	05	21	20
6-Supervision sessions are regularly cut short	19	21	06	04
7-Supervision is tailored to level of competence	05	04	20	21
8-The quality of supervision fits my needs	06	06	19	19
9-Supervision must reflect learners' level	00	00	25	25
10-Supervision is supervisor centred	20	22	05	03

The table 3.4.2 shows, on one hand, that there is no significant variation between males' and females' responses regardless their position of agreement. Whether they agree or disagree, the highest number of difference between male and female respondents does not exceed 02 as in items 01, 06 and 10 which make a difference of 8%. For items 02, 04, 08 and 09 there is no difference between males and females responses. In statements 03, 05 and 07 there is a difference marked by one respondent which makes 4%. Therefore, the differences between males' and females' responses in answering items of Section I which deals with the nature of the supervision process will not be taken into consideration as they are slight.

On the other hand, regardless their gender, 80% of the respondents disagrees with the idea that supervision is a collaborative, two ways approach and 70% think that supervision is not an exchange of ideas.

The data above show also that 84% of the informants disagree with the idea that they should take supervision session regularly and 82% disapprove the fact that supervision sessions need to be focused. On the same line of thought, 80% consent with cutting short supervision sessions.

With regard to the alignment between supervision and learners' needs and competences, more than 80% of the respondents which makes the great majority disagree. This belief is reflected first in their unanimous disagreement with the idea that supervision should reflect their level, instead they think that it reflects the supervisor's level and later in their agreement with the statement stating that supervision is supervisor centered.

## Section II: Supervisors' roles in supervision

Table 3.4.3 Supervisees' Perceptions of Section II Statements

Statements	Yes		No	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1- The supervisor respects my views and ideas	21	22	04	03
2-The supervisor and I are equal partners in supervision	03	04	22	21
3-The supervisor is open-minded in supervision	12	11	13	14
4-The supervisor draws up agenda for supervision	13	14	12	11
5-The supervisor is interested in the supervision process	25	25	00	00
6-The supervisor is approachable and available whenever I need.	25	25	00	00
7-The supervisor pays close attention to supervision process	25	25	00	00
8-The supervisor considers my feelings and anxieties	00	00	25	25
9-Supervisors are knowledgeable and experienced	25	25	00	00
10-Supervisors provide practical support	25	25	00	00
11-Supervisors train supervisees in research skills	25	25	00	00
12-Supervisors provide references	25	25	00	00
13-Supervisors correct research document mistakes	25	25	00	00
14-Supervisors invest more in supervision	25	25	00	00

The table above reveals that in section II, as in section I, there is no significant variation between males' and females' responses regardless their position of agreement. The number is similar is items 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 as there is unanimity in agreeing or disagreeing whereas items 01, 02, 03 and 04 there is a difference marked by one respondent which makes 4%. Therefore, the differences between male informants' and females informants' responses in answering items of Section II which tackles the roles of supervisors as seen by supervisees in a supervisory experience will not be taken into consideration as they are slight.

The respondents unanimously share the same perceptions about the supervisor; they assert that he needs to be interested in the supervision process, approachable, available, knowledgeable and experienced besides paying attention to the process and investing in it, correcting mistakes, providing references, training supervisees' in research skills and providing practical support needed.

On the contrary, all the respondents (100%) disagree with the idea of considering their anxieties and feelings by the supervisors. The participants of the study strongly believe that their feelings and anxieties must be excluded during the supervision process.

From the table, 86% of the sample belief that the supervisor should respect their views and opinions; however, 56% of the informants also belief that the supervisor should not be open-minded. These two distinct perceptions show that the respondents lack autonomous and critical thinking, they expect the supervisor to respect their views an opinions, but they do not share any ideas related **to** their research work because they expect the supervisor to be closed-minded when it comes to their Master dissertation.



Learners' submissive quality is reflected also in item 01 as 82% of them disagree with the idea stating that supervisors and supervisees are partners in supervision process.

### Section III: Supervisees' roles in supervision

Table 3.4.4 Supervisees' Perceptions of Section III Statements

Statements	Yes		No	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1-I have an active role in all the supervisory sessions	11	12	14	13
2-I discuss my supervisor's ideas	08	09	17	16
3-I regularly prepare questions to ask the supervisor	07	08	18	17
4-I prepare myself for discussion before the supervision sessions	08	07	17	18
5-I ask for clarification and justification from the supervisor	03	03	22	22
6-I pay close attention to the supervisory process	09	09	16	16
7-I reflect on my practice in supervision	07	07	18	18
8-I communicate my feelings and anxieties to the supervisor	05	05	20	20
9-I consider my supervisor's advice as prescriptive	25	25	00	00
10-I follow my supervisor's outline word by word	25	25	00	00
11-I seek references from my supervisor	25	25	00	00
12-I skip supervision sessions	17	16	08	09

As in sections I and II, there is no remarkable difference between males' and females' responses regardless their position of agreement. The number is similar in items 05, 06, 07 and 08. Furthermore, there is a unanimous agreement in statements 09, 10 and 11. Items 01, 02, 03, 04 and 12 manifest differences among male and female respondents' responses by one respondent which makes 4%. As a result, the differences between male informants' and females informants' responses in answering items of Section III which is about the roles of supervisees as seen by them in a supervisory experience will not be taken into account as they are not significant.

All the respondents 100% agree upon the idea that the supervisor's advice is prescriptive and needs to be strictly followed, and 88% do not see it a necessity to discuss their supervisor's ideas or ask for justification or clarification. All Participants also attest that the supervisor is references provider, they do not spare any effort to search for references; rather they expect the teacher to search for them and select what to use on their behalf.

From the same perspective, 70% of the students' involved in the study do not prepare for discussions nor for asking questions. It may be due to the fact that 66% of them find it acceptable to skip supervision sessions as it is also proved in items 04 and 06 from section I and item 04 from section II. It may be related also to supervisees' lack of motivation and interest.

As in section II, 80% disagree with the idea of considering their anxieties and feelings by the supervisors. The participants of the study strongly believe that their feelings and anxieties must be excluded during the supervision process. About 70% of the respondents think that they do not need to be interested in the process not to reflect upon their practice.

### Specialism of participants

Table 3.4.5 Supervisees' Perceptions of the Questionnaire Statements According to the Specialty of Participants

Statements	Number of Didactics students who said yes	Number of Linguistics students who said no
Section I Supervision process		
1-Supervision has a collaborative approach	06	04
2-Supervision is a two ways process	04	06
3-Supervision is an exchange of ideas	07	08
4-Supervision sessions take place regularly	04	04
5-Supervision sessions are focused	05	04
6-Supervision sessions are regularly cut short	22	18
7-Supervision is tailored to level of competence	06	03
8-The quality of supervision fits my needs	08	05
9-Supervision must reflect learners' level	00	00
10-Supervision is supervisor centred	22	20
Section II Supervisors' roles in supervision process		
1- The supervisor respects my views and ideas	23	19
2-The supervisor and I are equal partners in supervision	04	03
3-The supervisor is open-minded in supervision	12	11
4-The supervisor draws up agenda for supervision	15	12
5-The supervisor is interested in the supervision process	25	25
6-The supervisor is approachable and available whenever I need.	25	25
7-The supervisor pays close attention to supervision process	25	25
8-The supervisor considers my feelings and anxieties	00	00
9-Supervisors are knowledgeable and experienced	2525	2525
10-Supervisors provide practical support	25	25
11-Supervisors train supervisees in research skills	25	25
12-Supervisors provide references	25	25
13-Supervisors correct research document mistakes	25	25
14-Supervisors invest more in supervision	25	25
Section III Supervisees' roles in supervision process		
1- I have an active role in all the supervisory sessions	13	10
2-I discuss my supervisor's ideas	10	7
3-I regularly prepare questions to ask the supervisor	09	06
4-I prepare myself for discussion before the supervision sessions	08	07
5-I ask for clarification or justification from my supervisor	03	03
6-I pay close attention to the supervisory process	10	08
7-I reflect on my practice in supervision	08	06
8-I communicate my feelings and anxieties to the supervisor	06	04
9-I consider my supervisor's advice as prescriptive	25	25
10-I follow my supervisor's outline word by word	25	25
11-I seek references from my supervisor	25	25
12-I skip supervision sessions	18	15

From the table above, we notice that, as for gender, the number of participants differs slightly between the two specialties with a general tendency of Didactics students being numerous with no more than 3 responses. Therefore, the specialty of the participants does not affect their perceptions of supervision process.

For the last question, only 09 participants out of 50 provided a definition to the process of supervision. Supervisees' definitions share the same perception about supervision process as they see it as an instructional activity that is focused on the supervisor whereas supervisees are assigned to apply his policy and conception passively. This shows that Master supervisees are not well informed of the meaning of supervision.

### 3.5 Discussion

From the analysis of the questions, the participants showed a general tendency towards disagreeing with the statements of the questionnaire. Regardless their gender and their specialty, Master supervisees at Ibn Khaldoun University proved that they think the supervisor is the first central responsible in the supervisory experience, he assumes the major role. Therefore, the hypothesis introduced in this study is confirmed. Supervision for them is a one way process in which the supervisor dictates the supervisees what to do; they do not know nor differentiate between their roles and supervisors' roles. The fact that the students actually have very high expectations with regards to the supervisors' roles needs to be remediated. In this respect, Healey et. al. (2013) wrote a report to identify new and more creative methods of developing a dissertation through the examination of approximately 70 case studies across a range of countries in which they recommended that supervisors and supervisees should be equally involved and be given a choice as to the type of supervision they undertake and the type of outcomes that are assessed to increase transformational learning among students.

Furthermore, Master supervisees believe that supervision sessions are not required as they see supervision prescriptive, they need only few minutes to consult the supervisor in order to tell them what to do and how to proceed, and this can be done after the class or even at university's corridor. These findings clearly assign a significant role on the part of the supervisors to ensure that students adhere to policies, procedures and requirements, complete thesis on time as well as ensure that they are on the right track which can be achieved through regular meetings and regular checks on progress and drafts. Students' total dependence on the supervisor and their submission to him can be related to the pragmatic perception of supervision process as being supervisor-centered and the supervisor as mistake-free sole source of information and the absolute authority is the supervisor-supervisee relationship. These findings fall in agreement with the study of Harrison and Whalley (2008) who carried out a research to examine students' experiences of being involved in an undergraduate supervision and findings indicate that the key areas of focus in are choosing and studying the right topic, ensuring student motivation and enjoyment, and good student-supervisor relationships. The same study identified the main issues of difficulty for most students included un-

derstanding expectations and communicating them to the supervisor, whereas Lessing (2014), students should not be dependent on the supervisors but rather take it upon themselves the initiative by actually working then requesting assistance when needed.

It is undeniable that Master students do not fully grasp the meaning of scientific research. The method of instructing students (undergraduate level and Master level) is also put into question as it has a crucial role in shaping the students' roles and in boosting their autonomy.

#### 4. Recommendations

Based on the results and analysis of the study, a number of recommendations are suggested. First of all, Supervisees should not rely totally on supervisors as they are exploring their Master research topics, they need to understand that supervisors only guide and tutor them. They also need to perceive supervisors as critical partners who complement their roles. On the same line of thought, new perceptions about supervision as a collaborative approach with a tendency to be supervisee-centred need to be developed. Additionally, supervisees should profit from supervision sessions to develop their autonomy, critical thinking and research skills. Furthermore, it is important to organize training sessions for learners on supervisor-supervisee relationship to remove suspicion that characterizes the practice. At a large scale, there should be a national policy on supervision that should be made clear, transparent and understandable to supervisees, supervisors and other stakeholders in higher education.

#### 5. Conclusion

This paper set out to explore the perceptions of Master Supervisees' of English Section at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret towards supervision process. From data analysis and interpretation, it has been concluded also that Master supervisees' in the department of English at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret are supervisor dependent. Supervisees perceive of the supervisors as more responsible and play multifaceted roles in the supervision process than they do, they see supervision as a supervisor-centered process.

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