

Navigating a Supervision Model in TESOL Research Training: Narrative Insights from Asian International PhD Students

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Abstract: Supervision is central to the doctoral research training experience, and the effectiveness of supervision has been prioritised for the empowerment of intellectuals and professionals in response to the ever-burgeoning development of the globalised world. Exploring supervision experiences to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the harmony and smoothness of supervision contributes to adequate supervision. There is substantial empirical evidence concerning supervisors' experience of supervision. Nevertheless, international doctoral students' supervision experiences have not been adequately investigated, and little is known about the supervision experience of Asian PhD students undertaking TESOL training. Specifically focusing on a broad spectrum of challenges faced by such a cohort, this study provides a deeper understanding and insight into the complex process of supervision that leads to successful research training globally. The *Critical Incident Technique* (CIT) was adopted for investigating and analysing narratives on research training experiences in native English-speaking countries. Key findings were presented, followed by critical and detailed analysis and comments. Implications for the adequate supervision of prospective international PhD students were also discussed, laying the foundation for developing a humanistic model for the supervision of Asian international PhD students. With its contributions, the study will significantly interest language educators, researchers, doctoral students of TESOL education, and international and comparative education.

Keywords: doctoral supervision, supervisory relationship, TESOL, PhD, Asian international students

1. Introduction

In response to the ever-burgeoning development of the globalised world, in higher education, priority is given to enhancing the quality of doctoral training programs and supervision (Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Nerad, 2012). Effective supervision is closely correlated with students' positive postgraduate experience and successful research training outcomes (Doyle et al., 2017; McGagh et al., 2016; Platow, 2012; Wisker, 2005); therefore, enhancing the quality of supervision has become a critical issue in

higher education. It has become essential to understand doctoral students' needs, preferences, and challenges at different stages of PhD research (Orellana et al., 2016). This understanding helps create adequate supervision, and the misalignment in expectations and preferences between the supervisor and students results in PhD students' dissatisfaction (Le et al., 2021; Holbrook et al., 2014). Since supervisors' appropriate approaches to supervising PhD students contribute to their students' satisfaction (Park, 2005; Chen & Le, 2021), a plethora of literature calls for developing supervision models that fit specific PhD students from international backgrounds, particularly in a specialized profession of teaching as well as an academic field for research, TESOL, the acronym for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Nowadays it is not only a global economic enterprise which involves millions of people all over the world, but also a common career and interest for many non-native speakers of English.

The roles of supervisors, supervisors' perception of their roles, and supervision styles have been addressed in available studies. There is also substantial empirical evidence highlighting the role of supervisors in the successful and timely contribution of doctoral training programs (e.g. McCallin & Nayar, 2012; Tomasz & Denicolo, 2013; Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017). Although PhD originally denoted 'teaching' (Cahusac de Caux, 2019), supervision is not merely academic teaching (Connell, 1985) or limited to academic roles. Supervision differs from other forms of teaching in higher education in that supervision requires a blend of skills in handling pedagogy and personal relationships (Grant, 2003). This multi-dimensional process involves human and non-human factors (Delany, 2009) and a wide range of supervisor roles: administrative/management, educational and supportive. Both supervisors and supervisees (PhD students) encounter tremendous challenges at different stages of the training process (Woolderink et al., 2015), where their identities are negotiated, and personal transformations are experienced. While extensive literature mainly concerns supervisors' supervision experience (e.g. Stracke, 2010; Overall et al., 2011; Wang, 2013; Carter et al., 2020; Bogelund, 2015), international doctoral students' experiences of supervision have not been adequately investigated. Asia has witnessed the highest speed in economic development and technological advancement in the last few decades, and the significantly important position of English and TESOL has been integrated into the curricula of Asian countries. Concerning the shortage of literature in the field of PhD training in TESOL, little is known about the supervision experience of a cohort of Asian PhD students. This current study was conducted to provide a deeper understanding and insights into the complex supervision process and propose a supervision model in response to the needs of international doctoral students, mainly Asian PhD students.

2. Literature

2.1 Supervision: A Complicated, Dynamic Process

Being a PhD supervisor is increasingly challenging and complicated (Bogelund, 2015; Woolderink et al., 2015; Ismail et al., 2013) because supervising a PhD student primarily involves the productive relationship between supervisor, student, and thesis (Grant, 2003). Moxham et al. (2013) highlighted three constructs in a PhD journey: (1) the institutional position of the supervisor as an experienced successful researcher, an established authority in some area of her/his discipline, a source of feedback, encouragement, and networks, an evaluator of the student's work or an examiner; (2) the student positioned as not knowing, insecure, inexperienced, needy, and consumed by the project; and (3) the thesis as the privileged form of institutional formal, discipline, and original knowledge. In other words, supervision is not only merely concerned with the thesis, but more importantly, it involves human factors. Instead of academic issues, doctoral students' problems often occupy half of the supervision time (Phillips & Pugh, 2005). The supervision process is characterised by various transformational processes between these three 'active, changing, and changeable agencies' (Lusted, 1986, p.3); therefore, improving the quality of supervision requires both the product (the thesis) and the process (transformations of the PhD student) to be taken into account.

2.2 Supervisory Relationship: A Critical Issue to be Addressed

Supervisory relationship management is one of the significant issues in doctoral supervision that affects students' training experiences (Le et al., 2021; Lundgren & Osika, 2021; Bekessy & Wintle, 2006; Hockey, 1996; Dinham & Scott, 1999; Abiddin et al., 2011; Moxham et al., 2013). Poor relationships with the supervisor entail unsuccessful postgraduate experience (Bekessy & Wintle, 2006). Although much of the literature on doctoral supervision has documented the undeniably crucial role of the supervisory relationship in the successful supervision process, how to manage the supervisory relationship still needs to be adequately explored. Orellana et al. (2016) identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the harmony and effectiveness of the supervisor-student relationship, including the personal characteristics of the supervisor and students, the supervisor's roles, and supervision styles. It is essential to understand the roles of the supervisor involved in this complicated training process because it lays the first cornerstone for more understanding of how to handle communication and interaction between the supervisor and students.

Understanding the complicated nature of the relationship between supervisor and student is necessary for managing supervisory relationships. It has been argued that the supervisory relationship stems from power differences. Some advocate that the relationship between supervisor and students is hierarchical, and supervisors have more power than students (e.g. Gregory, 1995; Grant, 2003; Woolderink et al., 2015). The supervisor is assumed to be the agent of supervision, playing a dominant role in all supervisory matters. Others view this type of relationship as a pedagogical power relation where both supervisor and students are equally capable of exerting influence on each other (Stracke, 2010). More empirical evidence indicates that such a relationship is a power relation, but not in the meaning of the supervisor dominating the relationship; rather, students are equally empowered to change supervision practices (Cree, 2012).

2.3 Supervision Models

The most popular supervision models, which have been summarised by McCallin and Nayar (2012), include the traditional model (master-apprentice), the group supervision, the mixed model/the blended learning model, and the professional doctorate. Each of these models has its features and brings numerous benefits to different cohorts of research trainees. The traditional model offers minimal input from supervisors, so it suits self-directed students. The master-apprentice model focuses on the product of the research training or the successful completion of PhD degree. The group supervision model operates in the form of workshops organised by supervisors to offer academic and non-academic support to groups of students simultaneously. The students who attend the learning and research workshops can improve their writing skills, problem-solving skills, library skills, and research methods. Utilising the environment in supervising students, the blended model helps strengthen the supervisor-student relationship. For early researchers who are employed or seeking professional development in their workplace, the doctorate model suits them best because it not only enables the development of trainees' research capacities in the workplace context but also enlarges their research networks.

The traditional model, the master-apprentice approach, remains popular in many research contexts, but the model has significant drawbacks. Identifying some weaknesses of this model, Harrison and Grant (2015) then proposed some alternative models of supervision, among which the collaborative cohort or team supervision model contradicts the master-apprentice one. The proposed models focus on excellent supervisor-student relationships, so they prioritise the proper adoption of communication styles and management of relationships and interactions. Collaboration experienced during PhD research journey stimulates students and contributes to their positive PhD experience (Stracke, 2010). Khen (2014) also advocated collaborative and interactive approaches to supervision and argued that these practices could be implemented to facilitate the supervisory relationship and supervision process. Growing empirical data has supported the view that undertaking PhD studies in collaborative atmospheres sustains students' motivation and results in their success in the research training process. However, this approach, characterised by active learning, initiative or innovation, and autonomy, is appropriate for active, committed, and autonomous research students.

Particular types of supervision approaches or models that are culturally relevant to a specific cohort of students have been recently developed; the shared feature of these contemporary models is their Western origin, which adopts the Western view of the world. Supervisors, mainly English native supervisors, can be challenged to provide flexible and adequate supervision to international PhD students from various socio-cultural and educational backgrounds. Working and living in their native countries, these supervisors may not realise unpredictable non-academic challenges and personal issues faced by international students who migrate from different political and socio-cultural systems. They may be familiar with long-established Western models of supervision and, therefore, might fail to accommodate Asian PhD students doing PhD in TESOL in developed Western countries. Given that there is no "one-size-fits-all" model of supervision that adequately meets all the needs of doctoral students, this research aims to develop a supervision model to fulfil the needs of a specific cohort of students, namely, Asian PhD students in TESOL.

3. The Study

This current study aims to address the following questions:

1. How do Asian international students perceive their supervisors' roles in their research training journey?
2. How can an effective supervision model be established to facilitate the TESOL research training journey in Western English-speaking countries?

Guided by the above research questions, this study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach, which focuses on the voices of the participants (Babbie, 2011) and helps gather individualised, context-rich data about situations (Cohen et al., 2000). The CIT was proved adequate for studies exploring aspects of a process, including events, incidents, factors, and the experience of a specific situation or event (Butterfield et al., 2005). Instead of other available qualitative methods, the CIT was used in this current exploratory research to provide in-depth, rich accounts of experiences of doing PhD research in native English-speaking countries.

3.1 Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy

In the current study, purposive sampling methods were employed for participant selection. The sampling needed to ensure efficiency: data in the form of their first-hand knowledge and experience, good quality information, and cost-effectiveness (Babbie, 2011). The participants were graduates from training PhD programs in Education (TESOL) in native English-speaking countries, including but not limited to countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Participants were sourced from researchers' academic and alumni networks because these contacts allowed the researchers to receive a pool of rich and in-depth information about participants' PhD training experience. Among 20 PhD graduates who met the criteria of selection were contacted, 12 respondents agreed to take part in the research.

3.2 Data Collection

The critical incident technique was used to collect data. According to Flanagan (1954), data collection can be done in different ways: interviewing, questionnaires, and narrative form. This research intends to provide as much space as possible for participants to narrate their own stories. Guided questions were provided to facilitate participants' narration. They were instructed to write narratives, focusing on factors that helped and hindered the participants' supervision experience. The participants' demographic information, namely, gender, age, teaching experience, length of PhD candidature, country of origin, and country of destination, were also obtained.

Before the data were collected, information sheets and consent forms were distributed for the informants' approval. Participants were informed of the research, their access to the collected data, and the right to withdraw at any time and refuse to answer any questions they would not feel comfortable with. All the collected data is confidential and securely stored. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to ensure that every individual who participated in the study would not be affected by the research. All the categories/themes decided by the researchers will be sent to the participants for their confirmation. This member check enables the research to be ethically validated and increases the credibility of qualitative research

3.3 Data Analysis

After the raw data were collected, they were arranged with the application of Nvivo software to create the initially emerged themes. Then a list of initial themes was identified, reviewed, compared, and contrasted with the pre-determined themes. As themes are decided by relevance to the research question and significance to the participants (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tee et al., 2019), the researchers selected the ones that are accurate presentations and depictions of participants' perceptions and experiences of the participants. After the researchers approved these themes, subordinate and superordinate themes that embody subordinate themes were developed and sent to some experts and participants for cross-checks. Rich and compelling text extracts relating to the research question and literature were chosen. The data analysis was done on a case-by-case basis and involved making meaning of data from low-level interpretation to a highly detailed, interpretative, and theoretical level (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To ensure the trustworthiness of research findings, as soon as the study came up with findings, they were returned to participants for verification. The findings were discussed and compared with the previous literature. Twelve text extracts were selected as illustrations that capture the participants' perceptions and experiences. All identifiable personal names of people, institutions, or places were deleted, and the participants' names were changed to protect their identities.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Participants

Table 1 provides demographic information of the participants, with identifiable personal names replaced with pseudonyms. The names were organised in alphabetical order. As can be seen from the table, Australia was the most popular destination for Asian PhD students, with six out of 12 respondents undertaking their studies there. Most graduates had more than five years of TESOL teaching experience.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

Participant	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age Group	Years of Experience in TESOL	PhD Candidature (years)	Home Country	Host Country
1	Ben	Male	41-50	>10	5	Vietnam	USA
2	Delma	Female	41-50	>10	4	Philippines	New Zealand
3	Hoa	Female	31-40	>10	5	Vietnam	Australia
4	Hung	Male	22-30	5-10	4	Vietnam	Australia
5	Kenneth	Male	31-40	5-10	4,5	Philippines	UK
6	Kim	Female	41-50	>10	5	Korea	UK
7	Lynn	Female	31-40	5-10	4	Indonesia	New Zealand
8	Pema	Female	31-40	5-10	4,5	Bhutan	Australia
9	Siti	Female	31-40	5-10	4	Malaysia	Australia
10	Su	Female	31-40	<5	4	China	Australia
11	Tan	Male	31-40	5-10	5	Malaysia	Australia
12	Tina	Female	22-30	< 5	4	China	UK

4.2 Supervisors' Role in Students' Academic Journey

It has been accepted among most of the participants that their supervisors provided them with immense academic support at different stages of their PhD. For Hoa, her supervisor's feedback, guidance, and instructions encouraged her to achieve an excellent outcome: the thesis was assessed as "passed without change". She attributed her success to her supervisor's continuous support in all academic matters, from brainstorming ideas for the research proposal to writing the thesis.

My satisfactory outcome derived mainly from my principal supervisor's continual support. He always gave me detailed and clear instructions, advised me on research-related matters, and monitored my research progress. I particularly appreciate his help with reading and reshuffling my thesis. He also gave feedback on my last draft to make it more engaging and coherent. After finishing my thesis, I adopted his style of writing, which I found compelling: using short, simple sentences instead of my previously lengthy, complex sentences. (Hoa)

Hoa's supervisor plays a significant part in her academic achievement, contributing to her successful research training experience. Hung, Hoa's officemate, also attributed his academic validation to his supervisors:

I was lucky to be invited to co-author a journal article by my supervisors in my second year of candidature. It was then published in a Q2 journal six months after being submitted. This collaboration was an enriching experience for any international PhD student like me. I learned a lot through their support during the publication process, and I gained much experience on how to construct an article, how to respond to reviewers' comments, and which steps are involved in getting an article published. (Hung)

Hoa and Hung were provided with adequate supervision, including feedback, guidance and instructions during their PhD studies. Their positive experiences were reported to be impacted either by the successful completion of the thesis and the publication or, more importantly, the involvement and satisfactory performance of their supervisors' supervisory activities. Such Vietnamese students were happy with their supervisors and used compliments to talk about their supervision experience. They consider the meetings with supervisors an indispensable chance to address all the research-related matters, clear all the blocks of ideas, and provide feedback and guidance for drafts. Hoa further emphasised the significance of her supervisors' role: *"They played a critical role in my successful academic journey. Their pedagogical guidance, instructions and constructive feedback gave me a sense of relief and encouraged me to push beyond my limits"* (Hoa). To these Vietnamese students, their supervisors were a primary source of academic support.

Regarding the academic role of supervisors, not every PhD student undergoes a positive experience like Hung and Hoa. For example, Tina's overall negative academic supervision experience was a painful story to recall:

My principal supervisor held a high position in the Faculty, so she always seemed busy. For nearly four years, I was lonely in my PhD journey due to the lack of her supervision. Sometimes, it took me two or three months to finish a chapter, and I sent her three weeks before the scheduled meeting. However, she only had 15 minutes before our appointment to look at it. I would often present the 30-page chapter, repeating and summarising the chapter before she commented. Her questions and comments indicated that she did not read at all or had only a quick scan of my chapter. They were so general and shallow and could 'fit' all the supervisees. She did not perform her role as a supervisor. I was suffering from her neglect. I sometimes joked with my close fellows that she adopted a 'pedagogy of indifference' in supervising me. (Tina)

Tina's use of 'pedagogy of indifference' might fuel different arguments concerning adequate supervision. This term is adopted by those supporting pedagogic practices of postgraduate supervision

marked by neglect, abandonment, and indifference. According to Johnson et al., this pedagogy can produce the “independent, autonomous scholar” (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 136) since a PhD student is “capable of independent scholarship from the beginning of their candidature” (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 141). However, the idea of autonomy and the independent scholar in 'pedagogy of indifference' is a purposeful pedagogical activity, which is different from a more distant supervision style on the part of Tina's supervisor. PhD supervisors must act in increasingly complex and demanding academic roles and balance freedom and neglect (Eley & Murray, 2009). Tina suffered from her supervisor's neglect, which did not come from a pedagogy of indifference but instead from her supervisor's inadequate supervision. Tina's negative experience influenced her academic success.

It has been gleaned from such an extract that Tina's negative experience is associated with the supervisor's role. For Tina, her principal supervisor's performance in her academic role as a supervisor needed to be sufficient and efficient. She expected her supervisor to exercise her authority in this academic relationship. This expectation might be similar among international students from Asian cultures who conduct their PhD studies in the host countries. A supervisor must provide the students with direct instruction, advice, and guidance on academic matters such as experimental procedures and the preparation of written thesis material to conform to the norms and expectations of the academic field. Defined as "the gatekeeper of the discipline" (Manathunga, 2007), a supervisor is expected to be an expert in a specific field; they should possess extensive knowledge and understanding of the topic area. They should also be capable of providing constructive feedback on the thesis standard by reading drafts. However, it is reasonable for the supervisor to require their students to be autonomous and proactive. Alienation to the new supervision system often results in international PhD students' assumption or expectation that a supervisor covers a wide range of roles and tasks in PhD training. Pema is not an exception when making the following claims:

Being a PhD supervisor in the UK seems more straightforward than in my home country. My supervisors did not involve me much in my thesis. I had to find the topic that interested me, develop the research questions and design, and write the chapters. As they are native English speakers, I thought I would benefit from their language proficiency to make 'native-like' pieces of writing, yet, they recommended that I use professional editing services. (Pema)

The above quotation implies that Pema brought her expectations about what a supervisor and a PhD student should perform during supervision. Regarding the supervisor's role in the writing-up stage, Pema wished her supervisor to be a proofreader. This assumption might be different from her supervisor's perspective. Instead of performing the responsibilities of a professional editor, supervisors should facilitate their students' formulation of ideas and provide feedback on the thesis drafts. They should help students identify their writing strengths and weaknesses to improve their academic writing capacities and enhance their critical thinking to debate and embrace criticism (Wang & Li, 2011; Lee & Murray, 2015).

Supervisors in Western universities tend to assist the PhD students in addressing academic issues, leaving non-academic or personal matters for other relevant professional units, such as International Students' Office or Counselling Services, to handle and support (Chen & Le, 2021). The mismatch in defining the roles and obligations of supervisors and students often derives from cultural reasons. This discrepancy has been identified as a source of learning problems and academic and culture shocks faced by Asian students (Kutieleh et al., 2003). To disseminate the negative impact of this issue, supervisors need to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the two parties involved in supervision.

They said my thesis is like my 'child', so I had to understand it best and take care of it. They also emphasised from the beginning that PhD students have to be autonomous, proactive, and independent and that their roles are only academic partners, guides, instructors, and inspirers. (Kenneth)

The above extract illustrates that Kenneth was aware of his roles and his supervisors' roles thanks to the communication and clarifications made by his supervisors in the early stage.

4.3 Supervisors' Role in Students' Emotional Journey

4.3.1 A Source of Emotional Well-being

Cree's (2012) study stressed the importance of supervisory support and guidance for completing the research training process. In their research, Vehvilainen and Lofstrom (2016) indicated that international PhD students need more than academic support. In other words, they expressed an interest in being cared for in a warm and harmonious relationship. Whether or not supervisors should become a source of emotional support is debatable (e.g. Christie & Garrote, 2013). It has been maintained that supervisors provide insufficient emotional support to PhD students (Christie & Garrote, 2013). The current study revealed that emotional support is integral to a supervisor's duties; students' emotional well-being enables the participants to clear the block of academic progress. All the students preferred to be supervised by dedicated, caring and sympathetic supervisors who supported their students emotionally. They all valued the presence of their supervisors in challenging times such as isolation, homesickness, culture shocks, hospitalisation, and various cultural adaptations. These findings are consistent with the literature on the roles of supervisors (e.g. McCallin & Nayar, 2012; Orellana et al., 2016; Woolderink et al., 2015; Rugg & Petre, 2004; De Gruchy & Holness, 2007). One of the students, Su, acknowledged her supervisor's assistance with handling emotional challenges in her adaption stage:

I am so grateful for all the encouragement and support from my supervisors. Without my co-supervisor's continual care and support for the first year, I would have been depressed to lead a lonely and isolated life. She took me to some second-hand shops where I could enjoy buying cookware and books. She also introduced me to the local communities where I could find church services and, later, my current partner. (Su)

For Su, the support she received from her supervisors was beneficial for her in the later stages of her academic journey, which "... empowered my self-confidence and determination to continue with my studies during challenging times." (Su)

PhD students' positive experience of supervision is correlated with their successful completion of the PhD training. Ben, a male student, found his supervisor's supervision effective and satisfactory because Ben's supervisors adopted a 'pedagogy of care.'

I had a wonderful and successful PhD training research experience. My supervisors treated me like their son from the first to the last day in Australia. Not only the academic support, but the care and emotional support they dedicated to me gave me the feeling of being at home in that host country. I highly appreciated all the encouragement and support because it sustained my confidence and lessened my feelings of alienation when I was learning to settle in. One day I shared my health issue with my co-supervisor. She also showed her sympathy and encouraged me to keep going. She was the person who took me to the Office of Graduate Research and helped me capture the best and most relieving moment of my life: submitting the hard copies of the thesis. I treasure those memories forever. (Ben)

Ben's positive experience of supervision was credited to his supervisors' proper management of the supervisory relationship. His case delineates the idea supervision is an intellectual and socio-emotional relationship. Ben's preference for dedicated, friendly, and caring supervisors features other Asian international PhD students in this research study. They wish their supervisors would treat them like 'academic fathers and mothers who often care for their children. The findings also reinforce Cree's (2012) idea that supervision should involve care. As can be seen from the participants, TESOL PhD students do not struggle with academic issues such as English language proficiency because they are experienced proficient English teachers in their home countries. The biggest challenge is the emotional issues that sojourners face in the initial stages of adaptation when supervisors' support and care enable them to survive academically and psychologically. Most participants preferred the informal supervision style when finding that this approach worked for them. For instance, Tan asserted that:

My early completion of the PhD is primarily credited to my supervisors' continuous support. They are devoted and caring. I will employ his style of supervision to supervise my future research students. Supervision should involve tremendous care and support; supervisors should always be handy, sympathetic, and committed. (Tan)

Delma had positive supervision experiences because her four-year PhD training was an academic journey of harmony, supervisory support, and guidance:

The PhD training process is stressful, and we PhD students do not need more struggles. I was fortunate to be supervised by caring, approachable, and friendly supervisors. They were both open to my ideas and very receptive. I found it comfortable to express my points of view, attitudes, and emotions in front of them. My five-year journey was only sometimes smooth, but with my supervisors always there for support and help, I enjoyed it and achieved a lot. (Delma)

It has been documented that supervisors' academic capability and expertise were the most critical factors for students' successful doctoral experience (Shen et al., 2017). Motivating PhD candidates, investing time, and providing emotional guidance and support were essential tasks of adequate supervision (Woolderink et al., 2015). The findings suggest that successful training experiences depend not merely on academic factors but combined academic and non-academic support. A favourable supervisor was portrayed by the participants of this study as an instructor who is knowledgeable, committed, and exceptionally supportive and knows how to balance student autonomy and their intervention (Vehvilainen & Lofstrom, 2016). Adequate and smooth supervision requires a supervisor to perform three functions: administrative/management, educational, and supportive (Kadushin, 1992).

This study confirms the previous finding that critical feedback may bring emotional challenges to students (e.g. Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Some students claimed that they were emotionally stressed because of their supervisors' comments and feedback:

I was stressed when receiving feedback from my supervisors on the drafts. The theoretical framework I spent three months writing was weak and shallow—too many paragraphs needed to be revised or rewritten. I doubted if I could finish my study successfully. Feeling overwhelmed, I even burst into tears. (Siti)

Different feelings, such as disappointment, self-doubt, and anxiety, came to me when hearing the feedback from my supervisors on the first draft of the proposal. Their comments were critical and straightforward. I thought I was dumb and not competent to undertake this training. (Kim)

As emotional well-being is critical for research productivity (Muniroh, 2019), international research trainees should receive as much pastoral and emotional support as possible to fit into the host institution and host country. Supervisors should not be outsiders during the process of PhD students seeking emotional support. Supervisors need to be a channel to connect students with the host university and society.

4.3.2 Disharmonious Relationships with Supervisors as a Source of Emotional Challenges

Many PhD graduates in our study reported that most of their emotional challenges are related to disharmony in their relationships with supervisors. Lynn, a Taiwanese PhD student, felt very reluctant to communicate with her principal supervisor because “*she was so demanding, strict and cared only about things related to the PhD thesis.*” Lynn hoped to develop a harmonious relationship with her principal supervisor but found the gap between them bigger due to a critical incident before the confirmation. Her change of research questions and research design resulted in the reconsideration of supervision roles as well as the division of supervision proportion. Her principal supervisor became the co-supervisor, and this caused more tensions in their relationships. Throughout her journey, she experienced unsmooth supervision and a lack of support from this supervisor. Lynn felt “*stressed, lonely, and uneasy*” when facing the ‘crisis’ in her relationship with her supervisor: “*Almost all the*

discussions happened via emails. Some face-to-face meetings were short and addressed merely academic concerns. Even though we tried to fulfil our roles accordingly, I could feel tension, conflict, and disharmony in our relationship." (Lynn)

For Asian students, supervision is more than an academic journey but an emotional association (Van Laren et al., 2014). Coming from Confucian cultural backgrounds, many students in this study desired to maintain collective peace in supervisory relationships. They appraised the sense of harmony in working and interacting with supervisors. As handling supervisor-student relationships appropriately conduces to the general emotional well-being of Asian PhD students, establishing nurturing and protective partnerships has become vital.

4.4 Supervisors' Role in Students' Transformation

The findings showed that effective supervision impacts the successful completion of the degree (the product) and transforms the students (the process). Tan confessed that the research training process promoted his intercultural competence. He developed intercultural understanding, awareness, and sensitivity:

In my situation, doing a PhD is an intercultural learning process; I became more culturally competent. I said so because I became more understanding and sensitive to the cultural differences between my supervisors and me; I was in the 'third place' culture in interacting and communicating with them. (Tan)

Intercultural competence is the outcome of the intercultural learning process. It is an increasingly vital aspect of the relationship between supervisor and student (Zheng et al., 2019). The above extract of the narrative highlighted the importance of considering supervision intercultural learning process, which enables the different learnings to happen and the relationships involved to be built, developed and maintained. This study indicated cultural dimension as one of the biggest challenges concerning the supervisor's role. Supervising international students is demanding and challenging because working with students of international backgrounds requires supervisors to be flexible and skilful in employing supervision styles. When the supervisor and the student 'meet on the bridge' (Singh, 2009, p. 187) and are aware of their roles and obligations, supervisors can succeed in such a mutual engagement and interaction. For instance, Tan said, "*My relationships were harmonious because we were clear and aware of tasks and roles of each party*" (Tan). This finding endorses the view that a supervisory relationship is a pedagogical power where both the supervisor and the student can change the relationship dynamic (Chen & Lee, 2021).

Other research trainees also substantiated their knowledge, skills, and psychology changes. All the participants attributed their transformations to their supervisors, who play the role of 'agent for change' (Giroux, 1988). The following narrative upholds the idea that supervision can shape the supervisee's identity as a socio-cultural process (Hopwood, 2010).

After the PhD training, I knew what a good supervisor should be like. I will become a supervisor like him: supportive, caring, patient, approachable, and knowledgeable. I will provide additional support to my future students because, for sure, we will be in the same boat; we will undergo similar struggles. (Delma)

4.5 Concluding Remarks

The findings from this research also highlight the importance of the supervisor's support in both academic and non-academic aspects. This study supports the previous studies in defining three functions of effective supervision: administrative/management, educational, and supportive (Kadushin, 1992). According to Cree (2012), supervision should also involve a kind of care. This study emphasises care regarding supervision style. It is a fact that international PhD students are likely to encounter more complex problems in their everyday lives, so they tend to wish for supervisors to take an interest in them as a whole person (Vehvilainen & Lofstrom, 2016). Existing literature insists that supervision should be

best conceptualised at the individual, group, and community levels (Vehvilainen & Lofstrom, 2016). This study also suggests that supervisors and institutions should look for ways to better integrate their students into communities and promote intercultural interaction between international students and local communities, and other multicultural networks.

Analyses of the data provide some implications to promote effective supervision. Firstly, supervising international students is distinguished from supervising local students in such a way that PhD students need academic and non-academic support from their supervisors to make transformations. It is necessary to shift from the product-oriented view towards the process-oriented view that considers supervision a human development process. PhD students need support at different stages of their training, so supervisors can become sources of support or channels to get their students to access those support sources. The findings imply that PhD supervision should be more concerned with care, continuing guidance, and support. Loving, caring, and pastoral supervision enable students to grow academically and overcome emotional challenges. In this regard, meaningful social relationships should be created and nurtured based on mutual trust between international PhD students and supervisors in Western universities.

Supervisors play a significant part in their students' academic achievement and research training experience. Inadequate supervision can cause negative experiences and influence. Students in this study prefer dedicated friendly, and caring supervisors. In other words, they are happy with a model of supervision that involves care. Supervisors' support and care enable these Asian students to survive and thrive both academically and psychologically. Based on the findings, a favourable supervisor was portrayed as an instructor who can possess intercultural competence that helps them to handle intercultural communication and interaction with students from diverse cultures. A supervisor should adopt a 'pedagogy of care' style in supervising students. Being approachable is necessary because supervisors are initial contact people whom students can rely on and seek support and guidance from. As Asian students value harmony in their supervisory interaction and communication, understanding and skills in handling and building relationships with students should be included in a model of supervision.

5. A 'Whole' Approach to Supervising Students: I-CARE Model

The findings of this study support the argument that the quality of supervision and the role of supervisors are critical to the success of doctoral research training. Supervision is not limited to the academic training of a PhD degree but expands to a mentoring process of personal development. A humanistic model for supervision I-CARE model has been proposed to enhance the effectiveness of supervision, with a focus on improving the relationship and interaction between the supervisor and students. As the name might revoke its meaning, the I-CARE model fits students of Asian cultural backgrounds who prefer supervision with care, support, and guidance (Cree, 2012). The model necessarily includes five core dimensions, which highlight different qualities, tasks, and roles of supervisors:

The first dimension is *Intercultural competence*. Supervision is a type of intercultural communication and interaction that features a dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing, and continuous process of building, developing, and maintaining relationships (Berlo, 1960). The professional development of supervisors' capacities to handle intercultural communication and interaction is indispensable in the landscape of international education in English-speaking countries. Emphasis should be placed on developing various aspects of intercultural competence: intercultural understanding, awareness, sensitivity, and interactional skills. This dimension also refers to supervisors' involvement in promoting intercultural interaction between international students and university staff, local communities, and other multicultural networks. Intercultural interaction enables international PhD students to gain their academic identity and empowers them to engage in research training and create personal transformations.

The second dimension is *Care*. International students wish their supervisors to treat them as whole people. Their preference for a supervision style- ‘pedagogy of care’- calls for attention and support to be given to their academic and non-academic issues. The supervisor’s care, encouragement, and support will help PhD students overcome emotional challenges in the early adaptation stage in the host society. Loving, caring, and supportive relationships between students and supervisors and between students and local communities are critical to students' research training success. Therefore, supervisors should be active in creating meaningful relationships and willing to assist in developing students' significant relationships in the host country.

The third dimension is *Approachability*. Because of the solitary nature of the PhD journey, students may fall at risk of depression and anxiety. International PhD students are likely to encounter more complex problems in their everyday lives than local students. In some compelling circumstances, they will seek advice, assistance, or guidance from their supervisors. Supervisors should be approachable and available to support and guide their students.

The fourth dimension is *Rapport*. It is defined as a state of harmony and is affected by three contextual factors: participant relations, role rights and obligations, and communicative activity (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). The research training journey is challenging and tense, which explains why harmonious relationships between supervisors are significant. Promoting rapport requires the supervisor's intercultural understanding and skills to handle cultural differences. For example, students from Confucian cultures may cling to their tradition of respect for their supervisors, and this culture-driven belief will impact how they interact and communicate with their supervisors to maintain harmony during the research training.

Lastly, the *Emotional intelligence* dimension highlights the importance of the emotional well-being of international PhD students. Raising the standards and high quality of supervision should involve cultivating the emotional well-being of supervisors and students instead of merely focusing on pedagogical innovations. As emotional intelligence plays a large part in building relationships and doctoral students’ successful completion (Wisker et al., 2003), supervisors should exhibit emotional intelligence and the ability to understand emotions (O’Connor et al., 2019) to nurture and enhance the emotional well-being of their students. The I-CARE model is illustrated in the following figure:

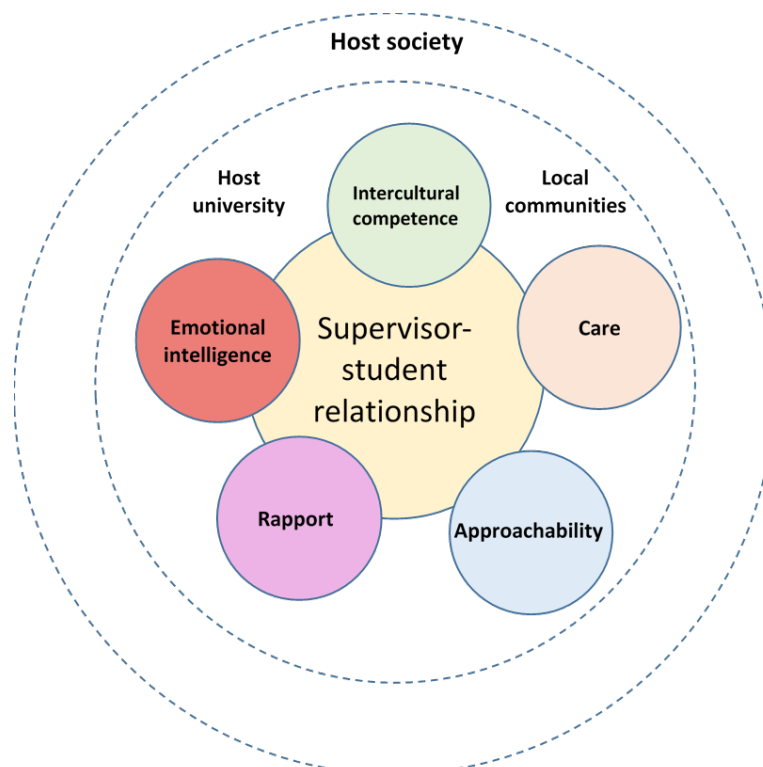


Figure 1. I-CARE model of supervision

The I-CARE supervision model implies supervisors' tasks and roles at different stages of PhD training. A supervisor is expected to fulfil the role of an *Instructor* who provides instructions, academic guidance, and support to PhD students. The supervisor is responsible for providing clear and explicit instructions in academic matters such as thesis, ethics approval, and publications and handling supervisory relationships such as assigned roles and duties for each party. As a *Counsellor* or *Companion*, the supervisor should provide academic/emotional support, advice, and care during students' difficult times. A supervisor also acts as an *Agent of change* who can contribute to students' transformation during and after the research training journey. A supervisor should be considered a *Research partner* because the success of the PhD journey does not rely on either the supervisor or the students. He or she contributes equally to the outcome of the training process and the harmony of the supervisory relationships. In addition, supervisors and students benefit from adequate supervision in terms of pedagogy, competence, and attitudes. Redefining the role of a supervisor as a research partner acknowledges the importance of reconceptualising the power relations between the supervisor and students. In other words, both parties are equally powerful and play vital parts in the training process. Significant, respectful, supportive, and beneficial relationships will result in positive outcomes of the training. Being an *Evaluator* or *Examiner*, a supervisor is expected to provide constructive feedback on students' thesis and research progress throughout stages so that both the strengths and weaknesses will be identified, highlighted, or addressed. Such evaluations and examinations should be made regularly rather than being delayed until the final stage, that is, the thesis submission stage. Focusing on the process rather than the product helps supervisors and students monitor and measure students' research progress.

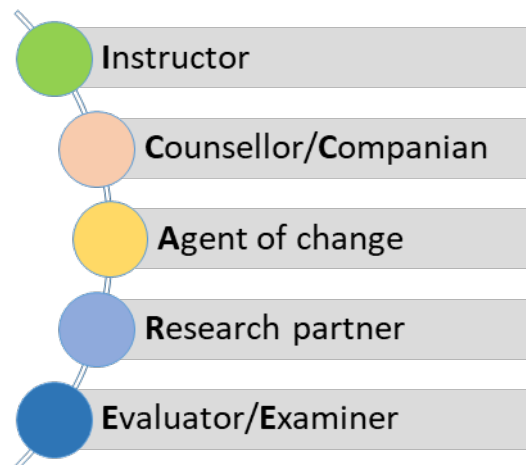


Figure 2. Roles of supervisor

The proposed I-CARE model is created on the process-oriented view, which puts more weight on the student's individual growth than their completion of the degree. The model is a pioneering move to enhance the adequate supervision of prospective international PhD students. It meets the needs of international students who face immense challenges in making pedagogical, socio-cultural, and psychological adaptations to the host society.

6. Conclusion

There is much empirical evidence of supervisors' contribution to the successful and timely completion of doctoral training programs. Previous studies are also at risk of being overgeneralised and not synthesised comprehensively. To overcome such criticism, this study has targeted the PhD process as a whole and dug into a specific cohort of PhD students. Supervision is challenging because it is concerned not only with the production of the thesis but also with the transformation process of students at different levels (Chen & Le, 2021). Often, a supervisor working in the socio-cultural context of his or her own country is metaphorically compared with "a fish living in the water that does not see the water" (Chen & Le, 2021); in other words, the supervisor will only realise their international students'

unpredictable challenges in the unfamiliar environment. This study seeks to improve the quality of supervision by focusing on understanding the complicated nature of this relationship and unfolding the factors that influence this supervisor-supervisee relationship. The findings reported by this research have inspired us to consider PhD research training from a broader perspective, a ‘human development’ approach extending beyond purely academic concerns. Research results call for a pedagogy of care capturing the success trajectory of Asian PhD students doing TESOL, in which students rely on their supervisors for academic success and emotional well-being. It is a fact that whether this cohort of international doctoral graduates remain in their country of study or return to their home countries, they are a talented workforce, and their contributions are beyond the wealth of an organization or a certain nation. TESOL could be transferred into cultural capital and social capital since, in Asian countries, a good command of English means a high social status and a privilege for better employment. This study helps supervisors to have a good understanding of international students from non-English speaking countries, Asian students in particular.

Maintaining good relationships with supervisors influences the research journey. Both academic and non-academic assistance from supervisors contributes to students' positive experiences. As “...resonant relationships are like emotional vitamins, sustaining us through tough times and nourishing us daily” (Goleman, 2007, p. 4), it is vital for PhD students and supervisors to embrace social connections and caring, meaningful relationships. Proper management of the relationship between supervisors and students in supervision has become rewarding. It is necessary to shift the traditional view of supervision, seeing the absolute power of supervisors in the supervisory process, into the process-oriented view that sees supervision as an ecosystem aiming at the student as a whole person.

Although this study emphasises significant relationships and communities as protective factors in enhancing the doctoral students' meaningful study experiences, their active engagement and interaction with supervisors, peers, co-nationals, academic staff and academics, local communities, and religious communities have not been explored to the full. The I-CARE model can be mistreated as a one-size-fits-all model to accommodate research trainees' needs. The proposal of the I-CARE model can be considered a reference framework for prospective PhD students pursuing TESOL studies in English-speaking countries. Future studies can explore how to develop the toolkits and practices based on the model. More extensive investigations should address the model's effectiveness and the factors that facilitate or hinder the model's implementation in supervision practices.

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