



*Research Article*

## **Nurse Academics Perceived Responsibilities and Expectations from Nursing Students During Research Supervision**

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### **Abstract**

Globally, research supervision has become a significant part of the job of an academic thereby placing higher demands on nurse lecturers as they are obligated to supervise nursing students research projects. This study explored the perceived responsibilities and expectations of nurse academics regarding nursing students research supervision at Universities in Southeast Nigeria. A validated semi-structured in-depth interview guide, served as qualitative research instrument for data collection. Data generated from one-on-one interview sessions exploring the viewpoints of nineteen research supervisors were subjected to Colaizzi's qualitative content analysis. Three emergent themes were identified from the results of this study: research role perception; students should aim at becoming independent researchers; gratification. Result showed that nurse academics juggle through the roles of teaching, guiding, motivating to discouraging any form of plagiarism and malpractice. They also encourage continuity of research and look forward to seeing a permanent change of behaviour in their supervisees. Nurse academics expect active participation plus genuine interest from their students towards their research project and majority see supervision as a rewarding experience. The findings suggest that a cordial relationship between supervisors and supervisees is essential for a successful research project. Awareness of these elements will enable institutional heads and academic union bodies to develop a better approach to research supervision.

**Keywords:** Nurse Academics, Research Supervision, Research Supervisor, Nursing Student

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Contemporary, research supervision has become very necessary for students to achieve higher degree certification. It has been viewed as a bi-lateral or two-way interaction process between the supervisor and the student. Abiddin et al (2011), noted it to be a complex social encounter which involves two or more parties with both converging and diverging interests whose relationship needs to be sustained and balanced because it plays a significant role in affecting the quality of the supervisory process and will determine the success of any particular project. Other authors have shared same view too (Tangen et al, 2016; Affero et al, 2014; Chiappetta-Swanson et al, 2011; Al-Muallem, 2016; Severinsson, 2015; Krauss et al, 2010). In

higher institutions, the act of carrying out researches has been infused into the curriculum as student nurses must stand before their senior counterparts- 'nurse academics' and 'research project supervisors' to defend their projects, thesis or dissertation as the case may be before graduating. The designated staffs responsible for supervising and facilitating nursing students' research projects are nurse academics, and these sects have other duties which include providing educational and clinical support to the nursing student (Chinweuba et al, 2019). In spite of this, they are still expected to teach their assigned courses, give mandatory quizzes and examination as well as mark and record them, write and publish scholarly articles, create time for family among others. Suffice

it to say that they are still expected to grow academically and professionally as the university education system compel them to work hard to remain relevant in their academic career (Chinweuba, et al 2019).

Nevertheless, research supervisors have been saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring that students' research work come up to standard of the academic discipline (McCallina et al, 2012; Chiappetta-Swanson et al, 2011), and because education is expanding at a rapid rate, higher demands will invariably be placed on research supervision (Severinsson, 2015). Research supervisors' approach in supervision may vary between a 'hands-off' mode to a 'hands-on' mode (McCallina et al, 2012), other authors have insisted that helping students with work planning and meeting different set targets is a major element of the supervisor's role as long as the student achieve his/her scholastic potential (Afferro et al, 2014; Bacwayo et al, 2017). Undoubtedly, more than one student may be assigned to a research supervisor for supervision, and because these students are working on different topics per time, it increases the supervisors' responsibilities as he or she has to ensure a quality work and at the same time follow the University timeline (Muhammad et al, 2020). Ostensibly, it can be presumed that research supervisors have expectations which they anticipate from their supervisees, and these may stem from their personal and collective experiences during prior supervisions. In order to promote research capabilities in students, supervisors expect these students to show some level of independence in carrying out their studies (Nasir et al, 2015) without waiting for their supervisors to tell them step by step of what they ought to do, they need to be responsible for choosing their project topics which may be based on their area of interest or expertise and not wait for their supervisors to dish out topics to them although, this may have been the patterns of some academics. Because when students select a topic for their investigation and are able to study and critically examine the previous findings and literature, then they would be able to demonstrate their degree of mastery of the topic, which reflects their academic and intellectual maturity (Lundgren et al, 2009). Abiddin, et al (2009), reiterated that the student should be responsible for an original contribution to the subject and for developing a mature, critical knowledge of the subject area and its context. Of course this can only be feasible when they take up the responsibility of sourcing out their own research topics (Anderson et al, 2006), apply relevant research techniques and mastering the skill of evaluating and re-evaluating their own work and that of others in the light of current developments (Lessing et al, 2012).

It is worthy of note that literature is quite silent when it comes to the responsibilities and expectations nurse academics perceive and demand from their student nurses during research supervision, instead there have been quite a collection of articles that dwelt on students' expectations from their lecturers as regards research supervision (Orakci, 2020; OzcakirSumen et al, 2014; Cakmak et al, 2016; Lundgren et al, 2009; Dogan et al, 2015; Severinsson, 2015). These have painted a picture that depicts students as the only ones at the receiving end especially as recommendations have focused on lecturers adjusting their supervisory styles to enable the student cope easily and to avoid the high attrition rates when it comes to projects, thesis or dissertation write-ups (Ali et al, 2016; Al-Muallem et al, 2016; Abiddin et al, 2011). It takes two to tango is an old cliché which

is seemingly true. For a successful and smooth supervision process, both parties (supervisor and supervisee) need to be aware of the other's expectations and try to abridge them. Their expectations can be minimized if they can discuss and agree on a solution at the early stage of supervision (Nasir et al, 2015) since supervisors will likely move from one role to another along the course of supervision (Harwood et al, 2016). Therefore, this study hopes to elaborate on the nurse academicians' perceived responsibilities and the expectations they demand or anticipate from their supervisees during the course of research supervision.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Study area and design:** The study was conducted at Universities in Southeast Nigeria. It adopted a qualitative research design, utilizing the descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the perceived responsibilities and expectations of nurse academics during research supervision.

**Sampling technique and instrument:** Purposive sampling procedure was employed to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling is intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon (Robinson, 2014). The participants were selected non-randomly according to a variety of academic ranks, work experiences and specialty degrees and interviewed until data saturation was achieved. A semi-structured in-depth interview format guided the study. The interview guide was divided into sections, questions and follow-up questions/probes. The instrument was subjected to the scrutiny and expert opinions of two professors of nursing who are experienced qualitative researchers. A pilot study was also conducted among two tutors from a nearby School of Nursing (University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Enugu State), using the interview guide to explore their perceived responsibilities and expectations in detail. This is to ensure that test research protocols and data collection instruments were accurate. It would also aid to identify potential problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocol prior to implementation to improve the quality and efficiency of the main study (In, 2017).

**Sample size/data Collection:** Nineteen semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilized. The in-depth interviews were conducted among nurse academics currently lecturing in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing at the University of Nigeria (UNN), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Imo State University (IMSU) and Abia State University (ABSU). These nurse academics must have previously supervised students' research work in the last 2 years and are currently supervising nursing students' research work. This provided the opportunity to gain insightful information on the current trends pertaining research supervision.

**Data analysis:** Data gathered through tape records were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's method of qualitative content analysis.

**Ethical considerations:** The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku Ozalla, granted the approval for this study and an Ethical Clearance Certificate with reference number; UNTH/CSA/329/VOL.5 was issued. All the study participants consented to the study after being briefed on the purpose of the research. Ethical principles of voluntariness, confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence were adhered to as stipulated by the Helsinki 1964 declaration and its later amendments.

**RESULTS**

This qualitative data recruited 19 participants with different age variations, 2(10.5%) were within age range of 20-30years, 5(26.3%) were between 31-40years, 2(10.5%) were within 41-

50years, 7(36.9%) were between 51-60years while 3(15.8%) were 61years and above. Majority 14(73.7%) were female, while 5(26.3%) were male. In reference to marital status of participants, the majority 16(84.2%) were married, 2(10.5%) were single, while one (5.3%) was widowed. Frequency data on years of working experience revealed majority 11(57.9%) had between 1-10years of working experience, 4(21.0%) had 11-20 years of working experience, 3(15.8%) had 21-30 years of working experience, while only one participant had 31 and above years of working experience. Data extraction, induction and in-depth analysis of the transcripts revealed three themes and seven subthemes. Descriptions and illustrations of the themes and subthemes are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Themes and Subthemes

SN	Theme	Sub-theme
1	Research Role Perception	Familiarize with the student
		Ensure acquisition of research writing skills
		Identify research errors
		Uphold Nursing Professionalism
2	Students should aim at becoming independent researchers	Student should own their works
		Supervisors spur supervisees.
3	Gratification	Experience sense of fulfilment

**Research Role Perception**

Nurse academics who participated in this study expressed their subjective viewpoints of the role they as lecturers ought to play during research supervision. This theme emerged with four sub-themes namely: familiarize with the student, ensure acquisition of research writing skills, identify research errors and uphold nursing professionalism. These sub-themes illuminate the supervisors’ perceived role not only for producing a good research project but also for ensuring sustainability in research for future generation.

**Familiarize with the Student**

Study participants affirmed that research students were usually assigned to them by the department. After which they (research supervisors) will convene the assigned students for supervision, identify their area of research interest as well as assess their research capacity and guide them in formulating a researchable topic. Research supervision starts when students are centrally assigned to supervisors and the latter tries to know their supervisees as stated by participant 1: *“Well usually we start by identifying assigned students”* Similarly, participant 19 affirmed: *“students are usually assigned to us”*. This was generally followed by a meeting between supervisors and supervisees as stated by participant 2:

*As soon as project students are assigned, or first of all, when the students are assigned to me, I usually call for a meeting to tell them what I expect from them.*

*In fact, sometimes I have to call them as a group, you know, sometimes when they assign students, they assign maybe a group of 10 or 15. So, sometimes we come first and sit down as a group to discuss research work generally (participant 4).*

Participant 18 centred on developing a working relationship with the supervisee as stated:

*I like to initiate that communication because some of them may want it fast or quick but I want it done right. So I try to bring*

*them closer to me. I initiate a cordial working relationship and we work together, generally I have a good relationship with them.*

During familiarization meeting, submission of three research topics is the next agenda and there might be need for additional topics if the three presented are not accepted. Therefore, the study participants play the role of internal assessors as stated by participant 2:

*So the first thing they (students) are expected to do is to submit a minimum of 3 research topics, from there we the supervisors are expected to choose from the list. However, if at the end of the day I am not satisfied with any of the topics, I will still ask them to bring more, really at this stage we assess to know if the topics are researchable.*

However, for some study participants, identifying area of interest was a prerequisite for the type of topic and research approach:

*The first part should be to identify my student’s area of Interest. Because it will help us, it will guide us to get a good topic. So, if he or she has an interest in a particular field, we start with the field, maybe the person is interested in, maybe maternal and child health, Paediatrics or something like that. That’s the first part, then from there we would then start forming a researchable topic (participant 4).*

*So assessing the capacity or ability of the student will help me determine the needs of this supervisee so as to ensure we come up with something good, then of course include a few questions and assessing how much knowledge the person has on his/or her area of interest (participant 1).*

Generally, it was obvious that while some study participants ask their student to come-up with three or more topics during their familiarization meetings, others focus on student’s area of

interest to develop their research topics. However, the two approaches maybe utilized as stated by participant 13:

*Our first meeting is usually very important because there are students who are totally blank and not sure of what to do. So an assessment of such student will let me know how he/she could be helped, it is either they bring-in three topics or I help the student to develop a researchable topic in agreement.*

### **Ensure Acquisition of Research Writing Skills**

This sub-theme reveals the unique role of supervisor in enhancing acquisition of research skills. Although research is taught as a course in school, supervisors still play indispensable role of enhancing actualization through teaching and playing the role of a guide, as narrated by participant 17:

*Although, research is a taught course but, when it comes to writing a research project, the supervisor has a unique duty to bring this home. Therefore, she guides the students to develop a good proposal that will start with the introduction, all through literature review and designing of the project. Therefore, I will say supervisors acts as a guide to some students.*

Other participants defined what guiding a student entails as narrated:

*My role as a supervisor is to guide the person who is on a research project. Guidance neither means reasoning or writing for the person, but for the person to be able to see some aspects and analyze it critically. It is also to enable the person to see what I consider unclear, for the person to look at it again and make it more clearly for another person who will look at it. It is to find the areas where the person is not doing well, correct them, and applaud the good spots (participant 11).*

*Guiding, because it is expected that the student must have been exposed to research writing and so I don't impose on the student, I allow the student to flow then I guide the student. Guiding means you have to know how to direct the student towards what he or she is supposed to do in carrying out his or her research (participant 13).*

*It is expected that you as a lecturer you have more knowledge of the research and student knowledge cannot be compared to your knowledge and so you tend to guide the student on the right way to carry out his or her research (participant 3).*

Similarly, others affirmed the role of a guide as recounted:

*As a supervisor, my role is to guide the students to write the project and you know most of them are still coming up. They still do not really have the requisite knowledge they need to write a topic, whatever topic of interest they have, so as a supervisor, I have to help them identify a good topic and also follow them through the process of writing and make sure that they are adhering to the institutional rules and also make sure that they're doing the ideal thing. Also I clarify them if they have any area of confusion and just basically guide them through (participant 6).*

*I believe my role as a lecturer is to guide these students. When you guide them well, they will be able to come out with a project that is readable and meaningful. My role is to guide them properly, let them understand what research is and be able to write well and make a meaningful research (participant 5)*

Another participant added that in the process of guiding the student, they make them realise that they are the authors of their own work as narrated:

*Yes, you know it is a dynamic situation, you need to be focused on guiding the student. I make the student realize that he or she is the author, I only facilitate because many students think I am supposed to be doing the job for them personally I resist it but I don't abandon them, I keep guiding them until they get it right (participant 8).*

Some of the participants affirm that their role also entail teaching as stated:

*It is also my role as a supervisor to teach my research student, how to write, starting with the background, how do you write the background of study? I have to explain to the student (participant 4)*

*I think that is, the most important thing to me that by the time the student is done with the project, there must be something new the student has learnt over all from that. So I ensure that I take it upon myself to teach what they do not know all over again (participant 1)*

Further, some study participants stressed on the need to impart knowledge, while others identified their role as motivators for discouraged students as stated:

*I believe even as a supervisor it is my duty to ensure that the student also has some knowledge imparted and that's the one basic thing (participant 11).*

*Some of them have certain reasons why they are slow with their work because from my experience, some students complain of financial constraints, and that slows down their work. Some of them have some family related issues especially those who are married, schooling and working at the same time, they are not as fast as those who are not so that is what I found out. I try as much as possible to encourage them so that they don't just relax. Sometimes when you ask them to make a correction, they just collect it and for some time you don't hear from them again, so I see it as my responsibility to kind of nudge them, motivate them so that they can also continue and speed up with their research works (participant 7).*

### **Identify Research Errors**

Participants disclosed that it was their responsibility to ensure that students produce a research work devoid of plagiarism, manipulations or falsified information as well as confirming research ownership. This subtheme illuminated participant's role in detecting any form of plagiarism and ensuring authorship of student research as stated:

*I don't know of any particular thing I will say is my most important role, but the overall of everything is that, to ensure that the student does a good project work, devoid of plagiarism, and not a manipulated product (participant 1)*

*Okay, my responsibility is to ensure that the student do the right thing in research and avoid manipulations (participant 9)*

*Then if there are errors I should be able to detect it as a supervisor. I should also be able to detect plagiarism and evidences of malpractice and make sure that the student doesn't carry on with that (participant 16)*

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*You know sometimes students copy peoples work, and they cannot defend such work, and it is our place to ensure that the work is theirs and they can defend it, we have the role to detect any error and direct them to the right part (participant 19)*

Study participant 6 affirm that supervisors have the role to ensure that student do what is right as stated:

*I like things being done the way they should and I know that research has a lot involved and also considering our profession being a health care profession that deal with lives.... So this research when they are disseminated people will look at it and they can apply the findings in their area of practice, and if those findings are falsified, it can affect the patient's care. So we need... I want to make sure that they do the right thing and whatever findings we are getting is what they are and not falsified.*

Additionally, study participant 6 also affirmed the need to look out for erroneous instrument as narrated:

*So your instrument and your methods are very important to me, even if you're writing rubbish in your literature, those ones, one can still go back and update them but their instrument is paramount. So even if I am busy, when it gets to that point, I take out my time and go through and even try to make my inputs...*

#### **Uphold Nursing Professionalism**

Participants expressed the need for promoting continuity of research, professionalism, sustainability, adding to existing body of knowledge and research skills for today and future generation. This subtheme illuminated an additional role which looks beyond the present objective of completing their research project, but surpassing to uphold nursing professionalism as stated:

*My most important responsibility is firstly to ensure that these students as they are carrying out their research project, that they are doing it with the mind of adding to existing knowledge because these days, students see project as a fulfilment of all righteousness but as their project supervisor I first of all try to create an awareness, to enlighten them that this is a research you are doing so you must see it as a way of adding to existing body of knowledge that can help to improve the profession (participant 7).*

*Because this is an academic world, and we are in the world of research so the student has to leave the faculty with the ability to carry it out, this is the way we have to sustain and ensure continuity of research among nurses and in nursing profession, we have the mantle to impact knowledge and research skills for today and future generations (participant 16.)*

#### **Student Should Aim at Becoming Independent Researchers**

This theme aimed to elicit nurse academics research supervisor's expectations from their supervisees and measures to motivate students to attain expected roles. This theme emerged with two sub-themes namely: 'student should own their works and supervisors spur supervisees'.

#### **Students Should Own their Works**

Participants expressed that during research supervision, they looked forward to students' active participation in the research process, integrating suggestions, showing genuine interest and

time consciousness, which will be evident in their availability and commitment. This theme illuminated participant's expectations as narrated:

*I expect them to make a positive effort to do something better than the previous one. If I give a correction, I expect the student to first understand what I mean by the correction because some of them when I write something even when it appears ambiguous to them, they do not come to find out, they just go and do the wrong thing and that will mean me embarrassing them. But I expect the student to first get the actual correction that is been given, understand the correction and then make positive effort to effect that correction as expected, then come up with something better than the previous ones submitted (participant 1).*

*Emm, I expect active participation, understanding the topic, showing interest and working. Being conscious of time, following up the corrections given and taking out time to understand what the supervisor means by the corrections and doing it (participant 18).*

Participant 13 identified student's cooperation as stated:

*Cooperation. The student should cooperate with the supervisor. Cooperation in the sense that if you tell the student what to do, the student should do it and on time, that is the ideal and what it is supposed to be to achieve good success.*

Similarly, participant 8 identified willingness to learn as stated:

*They must have an open mind to learn, be willing to take advice from the supervisor. Also be committed to the work in both time and content. They must be available so that the work can be done. I usually tell them to feel free that no issue is too flimsy to be discussed because what you may consider flimsy may be a big burden for the supervisee.*

Some participants' expectations involved claiming ownership of the work as stated:

*I expect them to own their work and be committed to the work, to be enthusiastic about it and then be original" (participant 19).*

*First of all, I tell my students that this is your work, even if you want to publish it, I will be a co-author so they must do most of the work as I am only a guide. Although I can help with literatures and other materials if need be. But the student must be willing to do more because it is for the award of their respective degrees which will be in their name (participant 14).*

*I want them to write their work on their own. They don't need to start copying and with the years I have spent as a lecturer, if you write your work on your own I will know. If you copy I will know. I will tell you 'well copied work from here to here'. If you didn't work with your project supervisor, I will also know, I will tell you from here to here you worked with him and he left you, the student will agree and say it's true sir (participant 3).*

Study participant 2 enumerated her expectations through every step of research process as detailed:

*My students are the ones to bring their topics, it is my responsibility to approve and make corrections. They are the ones to go online, look for materials to write their work. They are the ones to get their ethical approval. They are the ones to*

go to the field. They are the ones to do most of the work, I am just a guide to them.

For participant 18 their expectation is for learning to take place, which implies a permanent change in behavior toward research as detailed:

*The role is for them to be researchers themselves, yes, in education, there is this thing they say... to have a change in behaviour after every program or course... So that you have passed through a research process or project is for you to become a researcher.*

Additionally, participant 11 affirmed that students should be willing to play mentee role and publish their work as detailed:

*I expect them to play a mentee role; to be willing to learn, to be forth coming when they need assistance, be able to seek out solutions etc. I expect them to publish their work after their project to justify the effort put into the work.*

### **Supervisors Spur Supervisees**

This sub-theme aimed to identify measures to support students who do not meet desired expectations. They range from peer to peer mentoring, giving encouragement & counselling, carrying out proper investigation to identify the problems of weak students, mini lecturing interactions and giving opportunity for improvement.

Participant 3 affirmed that it is good to assess the student and identify problem, determine measures to use and help students as narrated:

*Okay. Like I said, it depends on..., the very first thing I do is to find out why. For example, there's a student I have not seen for a long while. So, when I found her, I tried to investigate, she said, 'her sister is in the hospital, she is admitted, they're looking for blood and all what'. You know it is a different case where you have a student who is in the hostel and who will just tell me that, 'ma, I'm still looking for materials to write my work' and that does not ever end. So, it is first of all exploring to find out why the person is not meeting up.*

Correspondingly, participant 13 added that students can never be the same as stated:

*Well not all fingers are equal you should expect that. Everybody will not... in fact they will not be what I expect them to be. So my expectations are different, everybody is not the same. So I will expect the lazy ones, the unserious and serious ones. I try to accommodate the weak ones.*

Another participant affirms the need to support weak students as narrated:

*I don't have to shout on weak students, because they become more confused and run away from me but if I understand that there are some weak students who may not know what they are doing and I take my time to supervise them, then the student will come to me. Do you know that students can pray for a particular supervisor? Why, because the supervisor interacts and communicates with them amicably. So I accommodate them and give them opportunity to improve (participant 5).*

In the same way, participant 1 insist on assessment before determining means of support as stated:

*Hmm, well, I won't throw the person out or rather throw him away, what I need to do is... I already know that it's an extra labour for me, so what I will do is to create more time, convenient time preferably a period that I won't have*

*distraction, sit the person down find out what the person problem is and how best the person can do the work. Em, if I discover that the student seems not to understand the topic very well I will suggest changing the topic to get something better for him or her. So I won't reject the person.*

A participant affirmed that no matter how bad a student may be as long as he or she pull through with research project, some form of learning has taken place as stated:

*Believe me I..., it depends, I am not..., if they fall short of my expectations, I'm not just happy but one thing is I will try to make sure that even if you're not leaving with so much information or so much skills, but let there be little change, the way you were when you came and the way you are leaving should not be the same. There's no way you can pass through me without getting one or two thing out of it. So it depends on the magnitude (participant 6).*

Some study participants identified peer mentoring and teaching as a means of support as narrated:

*Most of the time, I push them. But if I notice that, they are not moving at my pace and I have limited time considering that they have to graduate and all that. Then, I have to..., sometimes I assign colleague, their colleagues to them, I can tell them 'go and see how this person did her Chapter 4, go through it, do your own and then bring back to me'. So, something like that (participant 4).*

*If it means bending backwards to carry them along... I keep encouraging them to come forward, to change their negative attitude to learn and to even share with their colleagues, because students' language is different from their tutors. Their contemporaries' may talk to them in the language that may sink better than what I the supervisor is saying. Maybe if he or she can look at the work of others that will also help (participant 8). Then like I said, there are some students who are not as academically fit like the others. Okay, then I know that for these ones the supervision becomes a kind of mini lecturing interaction. I need to at least bring the person up to speed, to an extent, and then know when to refer them to their colleagues and stuff like that (participant 9).*

Another participant stated continuous encouragement as stated: *It's just to keep encouraging them, most often they want to give up, so I keep calling them, telling them that the time is running out, you need this to graduate, don't give up (participant 2).*

### **Gratification**

This theme emerges with one sub-theme namely: 'experience sense of fulfilment'. It illuminates the sense of fulfilment experienced in the course of research supervision.

### **Experience Sense of Fulfilment**

Participants expressed their sense of satisfaction, fulfilment and pride during supervision. This subtheme reveal extents of participants' satisfaction in their expected tasks as stated by participant 13:

*There is no one that is not happy for a job well done, especially when a weak student turn-out strong. The student appreciates you, maybe at first they hated you for being so strict, at the end they see what you were trying to do. I feel so good and happy.*

Participant 1 further expounded:

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*My dear oh I give myself a pat on the back. Imagine a task that will make me sometimes to forget eating, deny me sleep then make me forgo some activities I may wish to attend is enough sacrifice. So I think I'm doing enough, more than enough. I am doing more than what I'm supposed to do. I am doing more than my salary is paying me or earning me.*

Participant 2 added:

*Yes, I feel satisfied, I feel I am doing... (pauses to think) although there are some areas that I know I need to improve but because of time constraints, sometimes I don't meet up with those roles but so far so good, I feel happy about my supervision role.*

Some participants derive a sense of fulfilment as expanded:

*When I interact with my supervisees and they tell me ma, I really learnt a lot, now I understand, it really gives me this sense of fulfilment, so I want to see a dedicated and committed student. Also a student that is learning the act of writing, the act of undertaking research. My aim is not just for you to carry that project in its entirety but for you to at the end, when you even leave the four walls of the University, and you find yourself in a sphere where you are going to take up research, you will know what to do (participant 6).*

Other study participants generally affirm a sense of gratification as indicated:

*"Yes, I feel I am doing well because most of my students at the end of the day are better than when I first encountered them" (participant 16). Another declared: "I feel happy; I am usually proud of them" (participant 12). Similarly, participant 7 added; "I feel very fulfilled, happy and I also feel like my supervision is paying off".*

### **DISCUSSION**

The perceived responsibilities of nurse academics and their expectations from students during research supervision at Universities in South-East Nigeria were analysed in this qualitative descriptive study. Participants in this study confirmed that they play different roles in the student research work to ensure the student's project, thesis or dissertation is successful, which is in agreement with Mhunpiew (2013). Other authors have given an encompassing list of fundamental roles and responsibilities a supervisor should imbibe (Harwood et al, 2016; Chiapetta-Swanson et al, 2011). However, this does not mean that the students should remain complacent and do no work, but rather the joint effort of both parties is needed to ensure timely finishing. The study findings revealed that research supervision starts when students have been centrally assigned to supervisors by a slated committee, the head of department or the faculty/ departmental chairpersons depending on different institutional policies. This contradicts Severinsson (2015) study which disclosed that most students selected their supervisors by contacting the director of research, they can also visit the university website and contact various academics that they pick an interest in. However, it aligns with Chukwuere (2020) study who added that even if the University management assigns supervisors to students, the student still has the choice of accepting to work with the supervisor or make their own choice. Participants in this study stated that when students have been assigned to them, they make it a point of duty to identify and familiarize themselves with their supervisees. Most participants set up meetings with their students, these meetings

could be a one on one meeting or a group meeting where all the supervisees assigned to the supervisor will come together to get accustomed to themselves and discuss research work generally, an attitude that Hadi et al (2017) encourages. It is also on such meetings that research supervisors use the medium to disclose to everyone what their principles or rules would be as well as what expectations they look forward to from the students. This is in conformity with Chikte et al (2016) research where supervisors stated that when meetings are fixed, they expect students to be available for the meetings. The findings revealed that this medium creates room for formal relationships, some of which become very cordial as both parties try to build a working relationship. The essence of a smooth working relationship cannot be over emphasized as evident in studies carried out by Sevirinsson (2015) and Hadi et al (2017), where study participants stressed on the importance of a friendly and healthy supervisory relationship which is necessary for the research process. This view has also been shared by other authors (Ismail et al, 2011; Abiddin, et al, 2009; Krauss et al, 2010). During these familiarization stages, study participants said they usually request for three research topics from their supervisees and there might be need for additional topics if the topics presented are not accepted. However, for some study participants, identifying the student's area of interest was a prerequisite for the type of topic and research approach. For instance, if the student is more interested in paediatrics or maternal and child's health, topics related to these fields will first be explored. Dwelling on students' interest areas act as a guide to obtaining good topics because they would likely give their best to what they are passionate about. Nevertheless, a few participants still utilize both approaches; requesting for their students to come-up with three or more topics during their familiarization meetings and yet focusing on student's area of interest to help develop their research topics.

This study acknowledges that research is a taught course in schools of higher learning, yet it is paramount that supervisors still have a role to play in equipping the students imbibe appropriate research writing skills. This is in agreement with Hadi et al (2017) who stated that supervisors ought to develop students' knowledge and equip them with skills needed to become an independent researcher. Participants in this study concur that when it comes to writing a research project, from the introduction, all through literature review to designing of the project, the supervisor has a unique duty to help bring it home, and they can do this through teaching and playing the role of a guide, just as Abiddin et al (2012) earlier study implied that supervisors are students' guide at every stage of the research process. The literature is also flooded with the 'guiding role' of the supervisor (Hadi et al, 2017; Tahir et al, 2012; Polonski, 2004; Harwood et al, 2016; Chiapetta-Swanson et al, 2011; Grant et al, 2014). Participants agree that guidance neither means reasoning, imposing or writing for the person, but for the individual to gain some insights and gain some clarity, after all, students must have the capacity to work independently (Mafa et al, 2012; Nasir et al, 2015). Besides, it is the duty of the supervisor to correct areas where the student is missing it and applaud the good spots, which is in agreement with Chikte et al (2016) study which stated that students being what they are, are still deficient in carrying out researches, as they still do not have

the requisite knowledge they need to write on a topic. This is where participants in this study agree that they have to come in; act as facilitators to help make meaningful researches.

Research supervisors in this study indicated that they also serve as teachers to the students. Oftentimes, students are confused and do not actually know what should come under a research body (for instance background of the study), they agree that it is their duty as supervisors to explain in details and clear up the confusion because at the end of the day the sole purpose is for the student is to gain new knowledge. This corroborates with Al-Muallem (2016) earlier study which states that 'advocating the student as a proficient researcher is the prime objective of research supervision', therefore supervisors play the educator role (Polonski, 2004). Furthermore, participants have also seen themselves act as motivators to discouraged students, although Polonski (2004) has noted that this is one of the most difficult role for supervisors especially when the student has lost interest in the project. Sometimes, even with all the skills of guiding and teaching, some students are still extremely slow with their work due to some challenges beyond their control. These challenges have ranged between financial constraints, family related issues and for those who are married, schooling and working at the same time; it has been noted that these sects have more often than not been too slow with their research works and the supervisors take up this responsibility to motivate and nudge them so they can come up to speed. However, even though this is in agreement with Mhunpiew (2013) study, which stated that supervisors should provide personal and emotional support, motivation, encouragement, giving advice, and listening to personal issues of the student, nevertheless, Bacwayo et al (2017) study, has warned supervisors not to overly involve themselves in students' personal problems since they are not certified counsellors.

The study findings revealed that one of the challenges facing nearly all the participants is ensuring that the student does a good project work, devoid of plagiarism, and not a manipulated product. This challenge has also been expressed by Mafa et al (2012). It has been noted in this study that students want to take the short cut and not go through the rigors of doing things right. Some students go as far as duplicating or copying some other person's work verbatim without proper acknowledgement. At this rate they cannot defend the work when called upon to do so, therefore supervisors have a role of identifying loopholes and errors (such as erroneous instruments), detecting plagiarism, evidences of malpractice and ensuring authorship of student research. Research supervisors in this study have stated the importance of carrying out researches appropriately and not falsifying results especially for our profession, being a health care cadre that deals with human lives, because these results will be disseminated and its findings can be applied by other organizations or individuals into their area of practice and it can affect patient's care if these results are falsified.

Participants in this study mentioned that it is the duty of supervisors to ensure students carry out their research projects with the utmost intention of adding to the existing body of knowledge in nursing and not merely as a 'fulfilment of all righteousness', or as just a prerequisite for graduation. They

(students) must understand that as long as we are in the academic world, we are in a world of research, so everyone has the onus to sustain and ensure continuity of research among nurses and in the nursing profession, as we all have the mantle to impact knowledge and research skills for today and future generations. This notion was supported by all study participants as one of the most important responsibility for any project supervisor.

Participants in this study revealed that when they give feedbacks, they expect students to make positive efforts to do a better work, seek a clear understanding of what they've been asked to do and carry it out accordingly. Participants also stated that they expect active participation and genuine interest in the work. Students are responsible for understanding the topic they have chosen, be time conscious and are responsible for making corrections as feedbacks from supervisors' entails. These findings uphold the viewpoints of Severinsson, (2015), who noted that the level of satisfaction with a supervision process depends on how much responsibility a student assumes, that is an understanding of role expectations. Participants agree that students are expected to go online and look for materials that will support them in writing their work, get their ethical approval, go to the field and virtually do most of the work while the supervisor continues to act as a guide to them. Although in an earlier study carried out by Baydarova et al (2021), research supervisors complained that students expected more guidance than their supervisors are often willing to offer. Other participants in this study identified students' cooperation with their supervisors, which implies that when informed instructions are given, students' should do it and on time. Key points highlighted by participants in this study include an open mind and a willingness to learn, willing to take advice from the supervisor, commitment to the work in both time and content, availability so that the work can be done and freedom to discuss their challenges with the supervisors. Furthermore, participant's expectations in this study also involves claiming ownership of the work, being enthusiastic about it and being original, which supports the position of Bui (2014) study. Since one of the sole purpose of research projects is for the award of students' respective degrees, some of them may wish to publish the findings too and all these will be borne in their names, so there is a need to own the work in its entirety. For some other participants in this study, their expectations are for students to become independent researchers and for learning to take place, which implies a permanent change in behaviour toward research. In addition, the findings revealed that students should be willing to play mentee role, to be willing to learn, to be forth coming when they need assistance and to publish their work after the project so as to justify the effort put into the work. These findings are not far-fetched from Nasir et al (2015) earlier research. Griffiths et al (2015) had earlier advised students to have an honest discussion with their supervisors as regards to their expectations of them which will prevent a mismatch in expectations or else, conflicts will arise.

Findings revealed that proper assessment of the student in order to identify problems and determine measures to be used in helping extremely slow students is paramount. Participants have noted that since it is undeniable that 'all fingers are not equal', it is expected to find the lazy ones, the unserious and serious ones and so they try to accommodate the weak ones and



give them an opportunity to improve by providing constant motivation. This notion has been shared by all participants who insist they won't reject the unenthusiastic students, rather they will accept the fact that such student is an extra labour and so create a convenient time devoid of distractions, and find out how best to help the student. This deviates from Baydarova (2021) study where supervisors were not willing to consciously provide motivation to their students as they suggested that students' need to be proactive in developing their own sources of motivation. Some participants disclosed that they push the student to move at a faster pace, but if this is not still helping, then they will resort to peer mentoring because it is assumed that their contemporaries' may talk to them in the language that may sink better than what the supervisor is trying to portray, a notion that is supported by Lorenzetti et al (2020). For some other participants, they resort to teaching the student as a means of support seeing that some students are not as academically fit like the others, so for these ones the supervision becomes a kind of mini lecturing interaction.

The last theme dwelt on gratification which illuminated the sense of fulfilment experienced in the course of research supervision. Findings revealed that participants have felt happy for a job well done, especially when a weak student turns out strong. The student may not appreciate this effort at first and may actually have disliked the supervisor for being so strict, but at the end when they realize what the supervisor tried to do, they remain grateful. Further, supervisors in this study see supervision as a rewarding experience especially when a proposal is approved and an article is published, this is in congruence with earlier study carried out by Chikte et al (2016). Other participants have expounded their fulfilment; applauding themselves, believing that they were doing more than enough, actually more than what they are being paid for in terms of salaries earned. Almost all participants' express satisfaction over their supervision role, they get a sense of fulfilment when they see dedicated and committed students who after leaving the four walls of the university become independent in research. The same was evident in the study carried out by Mafa et al (2012) where supervisors agreed that supervising students research was enjoyable especially when they see the growth in the student. Although, some participants in this study disclosed that they are aware that there are areas they need to improve on as research supervisors, in addition they acknowledge that they do not have enough experience in supervision, an admission that was also voiced out by research supervisors in an earlier study carried out by Yousefi et al (2015). Despite this confession, these supervisors can't improve on this area immediately because of time constraints yet they remain proud of the efforts they have put in so far.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that nurse academics juggle through different roles during the supervisory process and they also have different expectations they anticipate from the student nurse researcher. Therefore, it is imperative that a cordial relationship between supervisor and supervisee is built as it is essential for a successful research project. Awareness of these elements will enable institutional heads and academic union bodies to develop a better approach to research supervision. Thus, if implemented will culminate in producing competent graduate nurses who will leave their mark on the intellectual history of their discipline by being independent researchers.

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