

Issues and Expectations Experienced by PhD Students

Authors : Vilma Zydziunaite, Monika Kelpsiene

Abstract : Research problem: PhD students represent a crucial group within the academic workforce. They importantly contribute to their departments' and universities' research efforts by, among others, carrying out data collection, running experiments, helping with or leading publication writing, presenting at conferences, and sometimes applying for research funding. PhD students and supervisors can face a number of issues: supervisor can be overbearing, which can lead to personal conflicts or mismatched expectations regarding PhD students; PhD students often work while experiencing feelings of loneliness; PhD students may be required to teach, tutor, and mark as part of her/his training, which can prevent them from doing their research; PhD student may experience non-effective feedback and mentorship practices while supervisor has a responsibility to provide guidance, feedback, and support to PhD student. PhD students experience issues when they do not agree with supervisors regarding the dissertation parameters, methodologies, interpretation of findings, and conclusions. Such a situation creates tension between the PhD student and her/his supervisor because the preparation of the dissertation becomes aggravated. While the reasons for a PhD student's decision to discontinue their doctoral studies are multifaceted – from personal and family issues to departmental and disciplinary cul-tures, issues with supervisors contribute to a PhD student's decision to discontinue their PhD. This is hardly surprising since, to a PhD student, their supervisor is commonly the central and most powerful person who controls many aspects of the PhD trajectory: the PhD student's integration into the academic community and discipline, the topic and process of their dissertation research, their career path following the doctorate, and sometimes the PhD students' funding. The research aim of this study was to reveal and describe PhD students' experiences of issues and expectations in their postgraduate studies while collaborating with their supervisors. Methodology: The sample consisted of 16 PhD students from Lithuanian Universities representing social, agricultural, technological, natural sciences, humanities, and arts. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews; for data analysis, the latent qualitative content analysis was applied. Findings highlighted issues and expectations experienced by PhD students while they prepare their dissertations and interact with their supervisors. Expectations of PhD students regarding supervision: support, availability, expertise in the field surrounding the PhD, good communication, constructive feedback, helping with direction and structure, being approachable and establishing good rapport, having experience in supervision, and being interested in PhD student's career for the future. Issues that meet PhD students while collaborating with supervisors: non-effective performance of supervisor's role, poor feedback, lack of supervisor's commitment and interest in PhD student's project, lacking experience in supervision, having limited knowledge and expertise in the field surrounding the PhD, being selfish and disrespectful. Conclusions: Meaningful, respectful, co-creation-based working relationship between a PhD student and supervisor is essential. It's important to raise concerns early on and not let them drag out. A healthy relationship between PhD student and a supervisor should allow issues to be addressed without fear of criticism.

Keywords : academic collaboration, academic interactions, PhD student, supervisor, university, postgraduate studies

Conference Title : ICHE 2025 : International Conference on Higher Education

Conference Location : Bangkok, Thailand

Conference Dates : March 03-04, 2025