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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN
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**Supervising Master's Thesis in English-Medium Programs in Public Universities in
Azerbaijan: Roles, Responsibilities, and Models**

Latifa Vahidzada

Contact e-mail: lvahidzada14718@ada.edu.az

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ADA UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS OF

Latifa Vahidzada

APPROVED:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Vafa Yunusova

A blue ink signature of Dr. Vafa Yunusova.

Committee Member: Dr. Samira Hajiyeva

Committee Member: Dr. Namig Abuzarov

A blue ink signature of Dr. Namig Abuzarov.

Dean of School of Education: Dr. Ulviyya Mikailova

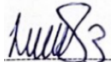
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Abstract

**Supervising Master's Thesis in English-Medium Programs in Public Universities in
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Latifa Vahidzada

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS 2023

The study aimed to explore master's degree student's and master's thesis supervisors' perceptions of the supervision process, supervisors' roles, and their responsibilities in English-medium programs in Azerbaijani public higher education institutions (HEIs). Although supervision was a well-explored process in Western and Asian countries, this topic had never been investigated in Azerbaijan. Therefore, state policies and resolutions on higher education have been reviewed to get initial data regarding the phenomenon. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from the eighteen participants. For this purpose, nine master's degree students and nine supervisors of those students in three public HEIs were interviewed.

According to the findings of the study, most participants stated that the master's degree students chose their thesis titles and thesis supervisor at the beginning of the second term. Furthermore, the findings showed that nearly the majority of master's thesis supervisors did not require a plan for the thesis from their students. Instead, supervisors provided students with a plan based on the university guidelines regarding master's thesis dissertations.

The most common supervisory roles listed by supervisors were a guide, a supporter, a friend, a teacher, and an academic advisor. Likewise, graduate students expressed a role of a supporter, a guide, a helper, and a motivator which they considered more relevant to their supervisors. When it comes to the findings regarding supervisors' responsibilities, they were regarded as ensuring a good quality thesis, suggesting literature, reminding students of deadlines,

meeting students' needs, being available for meetings, and providing academic and emotional support.

Based on the findings, neither supervisors nor students were aware of the supervision models in literature which were anticipated before the data collection process; however, the supervisors utilized particular strategies that had been shaped during the practice. Most supervisors stated that they supported and guided students when they needed help as an indication of the Apprenticeship model. Nevertheless, they occasionally assisted students with academic writing and organizational skills meaning the Teaching model of supervision was utilized in some cases in Azerbaijani public HEIs.

Keywords: *supervision, supervisors' roles, supervisors' responsibilities, supervision models*

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Chapter I. Introduction

Background Information

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Azerbaijani higher education system has changed dramatically. Azerbaijani government had to eliminate the Soviet ideology in the higher education system and establish a new educational system to meet the needs of the country and respond to the global trends of the developed countries (Suleymanov, 2020). A need emerged to make a transition from the Soviet educational system to the international and modern standards in education (Samadova, 2016). Therefore, public policy mainly focused on maintaining a balance between governmental regulations, social demands, and university autonomy (Suleymanov, 2020). However, a decline in the economy and scarcity of resources in the education field hindered the complete implementation of the educational reforms (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2016). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, Azerbaijan became the most dynamically developing country in the post-Soviet area regarding education (Samadova, 2016). A new division was determined between bachelor's and master's degrees (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2016). In 1993, a two-tier higher education system was adopted in Azerbaijan comprising bachelor's and master's degrees; thereby, the master's degree education was introduced in 1997 with the first graduation of the bachelor's students (Suleymanov, 2020). With the adoption of the Bologna system in 2005, the three-tier educational system integrated the doctoral level of education alongside bachelor's and master's degrees (Samadova, 2016). Although the first university was founded in 1919 in Azerbaijan, the number of HEIs increased significantly during the first 5 years of the independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Isakhanli & Pashayeva, 2016). According to the data provided by the State Statistical Committee [SSC, 2021-2022], currently, there are 40 public and 11 private universities in Azerbaijan which provide bachelor's and master's programs. Totally, 187987 and 24186 students are educated at public and private HEIs respectively [SSC, 2021-2022]. SSC [2021-2022] reported that 6185 master's degree students had received their master's diploma in public higher

education institutions (HEIs) which was almost 16 times higher than the number of graduates in non-state HEIs constituting 392 students in the 2021-2022 academic year (see Figure 1). This study focused on public HEIs where 87% of total master's degree students studied (SSC, 2021-2022). In the 2021-2022 academic years, 2052 students in public universities and 476 students in private universities did not receive a diploma [SSC, 2020-2022]. In other words, 72.2% of master's degree students graduated from the HEIs meaning 27.8% could not graduate in the 2020-2021 academic year (see Figure 1).

I inquired about the reasons for the students' failures to graduate from the authorized people in SSC and Ministry of Education; however, they did not specify why 27.8% of master's degree students had not received their diplomas in the 2020-2021 academic year. I assumed that one of the reasons why students did not graduate may have originated from the supervisors' lack of support to the master's students in developing a thesis. According to Brain et al. (2011), a survey with 108 graduate students revealed that reasons for successful graduation were self-esteem (91.4%), knowledgeable academic advisor (91.1%), professors' interest in students' academic success (91.4%), failing to develop a thesis (90.2%), family support (90%), personal motivation (88.6%), access to an online library (87.1%), and affordable tuition (70%). Another research showed that supervisors played a major role in the successful completion of a thesis as well as in contributing to the student's academic development (Mhunpiew, 2013).

Table 1

Comparison of the acceptance to and graduation from the HEIs in Azerbaijan in [2020-2022] academic years

	Number of students who were accepted to HEI [2020-2021]		Number of students who received diploma [2021-2022]	
	bachelor	master	bachelor	master
State HEIs	39417	8237	33495	6185
Non-state HEIs	5586	868	3337	392

Note. The figure shows the number of students who were accepted to the state and non-state HEIs at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year and the number of graduates at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year [SSC, 2020-2022]. Adapted from the tables on the website of the State Statistical Committee [SSC, 2020-2022], January 2023, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/education/?lang=en>

Problem Statement and the Significance of the Study

Master's degree programs provide students with an opportunity to gain knowledge about conducting research and developing a thesis. Supervisors play a significant role in accomplishing a master's thesis by guiding students during the thesis development process (Filippou *et al.*, 2021). As students doing master's degrees generally have little or no experience in thesis writing, this process challenges them, and appointed supervisors well-equipped with pedagogy and experience support them in that respect (Mhunpiew, 2013). According to the Azerbaijani legislation, the final phase of master's degree education is the development and defense of a master's thesis in Azerbaijani HEIs for which only the students who gain applicable grades from all the courses are considered eligible (Decree of the Minister of Education, 1998). The requirements of the decree on a master's thesis are as follows (Decree of the Minister of Education, 1998, Pub. L. No. 202):

- A master's thesis is scientific or experimental research of a master's student which is carried out individually with the guidance of a supervisor;
- The title and plan of the master's thesis have to be connected with the scientific work of the department that the supervisor belongs to and has to be affirmed by the supervisor and the scientific council of that department within the first 3 months of the first term;
- Master's students have to report the preparation of the master's thesis to the supervisor and the department regularly;

- The master's thesis has to be written in the instructional language of the master's degree program.

Several studies have been conducted to approach the supervision process from various aspects in Post-Soviet, Western, and Asian countries. However, no research has been carried out regarding supervising master-level students in Azerbaijani higher education. The sole source of data is the Azerbaijani legislation on education. Governmental documents state that supervisors have to assign tasks for master's students, guide students in preparing an individual working plan, provide resources related to the thesis topic, and arrange regular meetings to discuss the individual work plan and provide scientific-methodological recommendations (Decree of the Minister of Education, 1998, Pub. L. No. 202). No scientific data has been provided to demonstrate how the actual supervision process is being conducted and practiced at HEIs of the Azerbaijan Republic. Given that Winchester et al. (2017) state preliminary data is a small-scale data collection method that might be gathered to demonstrate the potential impact or significance of the study. To justify the importance of the study, I held three interviews with three master's degree students who had graduated from the public HEIs located in Baku for collecting preliminary data. Two interviewed participants completed their master's degree at the same public university, but the other student graduated from a different public HEI. While responding to the question about the frequency of their meeting with their supervisors in the first year of their master's studies, two students stated that they had not had any meetings with their supervisors during the first term of their second year. The other student mentioned that she had had only one meeting with her supervisor during the fall term. As stated by the Decree of the Minister of Education (1998), the title and plan of the master's thesis have to be affirmed by the supervisor and the scientific council of the department during the first three months of the first term (Pub. L. No. 202). Preliminary data revealed that all the interviewed students selected the title for their thesis agreeing with their supervisors at the beginning of the first term which was corresponding with the above-mentioned regulation. However, the students did not make a plan

for the study during the first term as it had not been required by their supervisors. Considering the results of the preliminary data, a question emerged about how the supervision process was happening in public universities and whether the supervisors were aware of their responsibilities and roles as a supervisor declared in the legislation. Hence, I decided to explore supervisors' and master's degree students' understandings of the supervisors' roles and responsibilities. Counting the fact that all master's students in Azerbaijani public universities were required to develop a thesis of their interest and conduct research, there was an enduring need to explore this topic (Aliyev, 2016). Exploring supervisors' and students' perspectives might have contributed to enhancing their understanding of the supervisors' roles and responsibilities to enable students to complete the master's thesis successfully.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore master's thesis supervisors' and master's degree students' perceptions about their roles, responsibilities, and models of supervising in Azerbaijani public universities where a high number of master's degree students are educated [SSC, 2021-2022]. Moreover, I collected the preliminary data from the students in public HEIs and revealed a discrepancy regarding the master's thesis supervision. The research especially focused on English-medium programs as the number of master's degree programs delivered in the English language had increased in recent years in Azerbaijan (Suleymanov, 2020). More detailed information about the sampling strategies has been provided in the third chapter - Methodology.

Research Questions

The followings are the research question and sub-questions:

1. What supervising models are utilized during the master's thesis supervision process in English-medium master's degree programs of public higher education institutions in Azerbaijan?
 - a. What are supervisors' perceptions of the supervision process, their roles, and responsibilities?
 - b. What are master's thesis students' perceptions of the supervision process, supervisors' roles, and responsibilities?

Definition of Key Terms

In this section, I will define the important terms utilized in my study.

Supervision - A university professor's regular academic guidance and help for master's degree students who are developing master's thesis (Decree of the Minister of Education, 1998, Pub. L. No. 202)

Master's Thesis - A piece of writing which is considered scientific-scholarly research written under the supervision of an academic supervisor/advisor (Bailey & Scarrow, 2010).

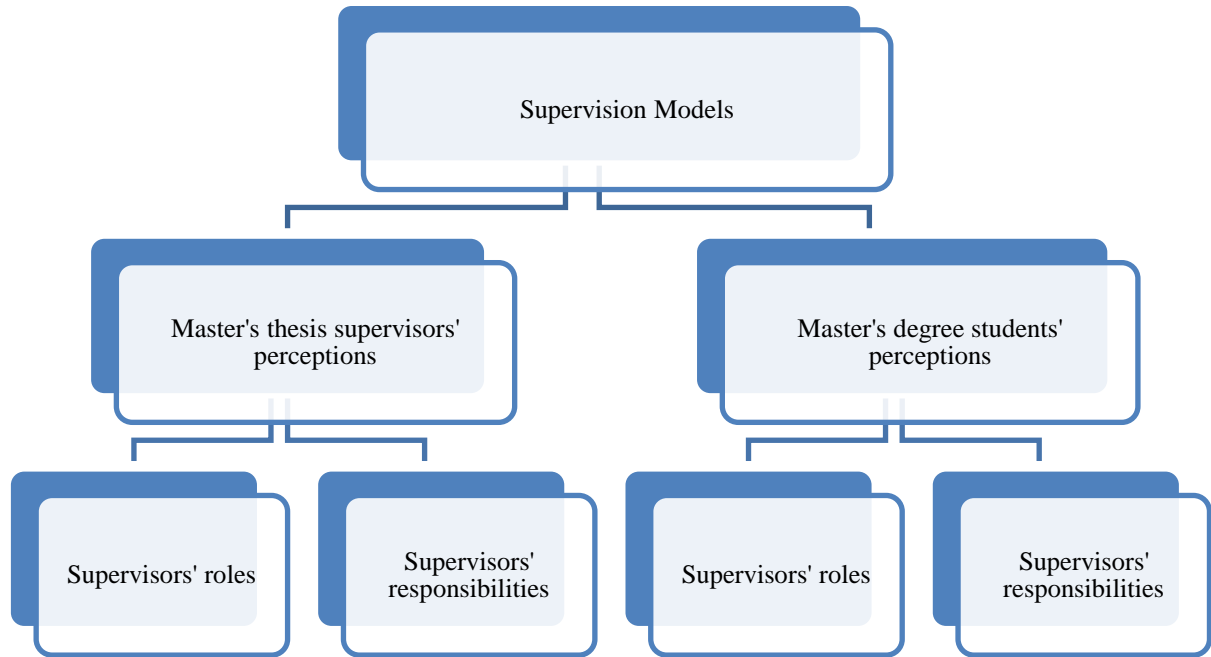
Chapter II. Literature Review

This literature review examines master's thesis supervisors' roles, responsibilities, and supervising models from master's degree students' and supervisors' perspectives in some post-Soviet, Western, and Asian countries. The review has been organized based on the geographical and thematic classification of previous studies in the related field. To provide a thorough analysis of supervision from the past until now, the literature review focuses on the studies within a time frame between 1987-2022 in which studies on supervision have been conducted. It constitutes the following sections: Conceptual framework, English-medium master programs, master's thesis, master's thesis requirements in Azerbaijani higher education, factors contributing to the development of master's thesis, supervising master's thesis in different contexts, supervising models, supervisors' roles, supervisors' responsibilities, and the gap in the literature.

Conceptual Framework

Creating a conceptual map of research helps to determine significant features, decide which relationships are meaningful among them, and what kind of data is required to be collected and analyzed (Robson, 2002). Conceptual maps aim to study a particular phenomenon systematically within a framework to make meaning of data (Bouma & Wilkinson, 2004).

This conceptual framework has been designed to illustrate various components of my study to be explored integrally (see Figure 1). For this purpose, master's thesis supervisors' and master's degree students' perceptions of the supervisors' roles and responsibilities have been investigated to make conclusions about the supervision models utilized in Azerbaijani public universities. In other words, interviewing both supervisors and master's students based on the questions related to some aspects of the supervision process has enabled me to define which supervision models are in practice in Azerbaijani public HEI. This conceptual framework has also provided me with a bigger picture of the phenomenon. Hence, I could define which kind of interview questions needed to be asked of the interviewees for collecting the necessary data.

Figure 2*Conceptual Framework***English-Medium Master Programs**

Higher education is continuously internationalizing (De Wit & Hunter, 2015) and English-medium instruction (EMI), as its major aspect fosters multicultural and multilingual teachers' and students alliance (Konttinen, 2018). Hellekjær (2010) describes EMI as instruction provided in English to students whose native language is not English. Institutions are offering more programs in English in higher education due to the need to cater to international students, attract foreign teachers, and prepare a diverse student body for publishing research in English (Hellekjær, 2010). The language of internationalization is often considered to be English generating the term called "Englishization" of higher education (Dafouz & Smit, 2016).

In the Azerbaijani context, internationalization in higher education is often regarded as one of the ways of increasing the quality of education and advancing in international rankings which have become more popular in recent years (Suleymanov, 2020). The number of degree programs in Azerbaijani higher education has also increased in the recent past (Suleymanov, 2020). This trend originates from the tendency to adjust the current higher education system to international

education principles ensuring the transparency of higher education, international competitiveness, and development of scientific research in Azerbaijan (Resolution 88 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan of May 12, 2010).

Master's Thesis

Completing a master's degree has various requirements depending on the institution and discipline. Master's degree students obtain their diploma upon successful completion of the final capstone project, handbook or manual, written or oral exam, coursework, or thesis at the end of their studies in different countries (Bui, 2013). However, a thesis is required from all students completing a master's degree in some countries including Finland (Ylijoki, 2001). As the final stage of achieving a master's degree, the thesis is regarded as the culmination of tertiary education, a gateway between the study world and scholarship world, a major reason for dropouts and prolonged duration of the master's studies, and students' anxiety (Ylijoki, 2001). A master's thesis is an original work of graduate students that demonstrates their ability to review literature, collect data, analyze the collected data, discuss results, make conclusions, and draw implications based on research findings (Bui, 2013). Developing a master's thesis provides students with an opportunity to practice real research based on which they can continue their further education as doctoral students (Ylijoki, 2001).

Master's Thesis Requirements in Azerbaijani Higher Education

Since independence, a lack of research practices has been observed in Azerbaijani universities which are also confirmed by QS EECA (Quacquarelli Symonds Emerging Europe and Central Asia) rankings (Suleymanov, 2020). To enhance research practices in higher education in Azerbaijan, several state programs have been implemented one of which is a contract between a consortium of Azerbaijani universities and Clarivate companies provided by the Ministry of Economy (Suleymanov, 2020).

According to the Resolution 15 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan (February 13, 1997), all master's students must develop a thesis or dissertation that they will

defend as a final stage of master's degree studies. Master's dissertations must meet one of the following requirements (Resolution 15 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan of February 13, 1997, chapter 3):

- focusing on solving a particular problem that is of high importance in the field
- scientific interpretation of technical, economic, and technological problems of high practicality.

Factors Contributing to the Development of Master's Thesis

Scholars emphasize several reasons affecting the process of developing a master's thesis. A study conducted in the Netherlands found that the student-supervisor relationship has an impact on the successful completion of a master's thesis (de Kleijn et al., 2013). Another study revealed that the selection of the topic, the supervisor's timely feedback, support from the administration, and financial resources were the main factors influencing master's thesis development in medical education (Heide et al., 2019). In mathematics and statistics, students perceived the attractiveness of the topic, motivation, and the selection of supervisor as the most significant factors which may have supported the progress of their master's thesis in different cases (Koskenoja, 2019). Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) concluded that master's degree students found supervisors' insufficient knowledge, lack of support by supervisors, change of supervisors, and supervisors' workload as main challenges during their thesis development. The reviewed literature supported the supervisors' impact on the development of the master's thesis to some extent.

Supervising Master's Thesis in Different Countries

Master's thesis supervision in China is considered a process in which a more experienced and skillful person encourages, guides, teaches, and befriends a less experienced or skilled person to promote their research skills (Bahtilla & Oben, 2022). In the Estonian context, supervisors are regarded as feedback providers who help students to improve by commenting on

stages of their research work (Alas & Liiv, 2018). In Kazakhstan, a supervisor is a person who observes the process of individual study and timely completion of the research work (Zhamanov, 2020). Correspondingly, supervisors are considered the second most responsible people after the students who have a significant role during the thesis development process in Turkiye (Unver, 2005). In contrast, supervisors turn into the first responsible person in thesis development in the Russian Federation who instill his/her ideas, add new data to students' work, and correct the text which makes the research almost the supervisors' work (Selivanova, 2020). In Azerbaijan, thesis supervisors act as academic advisors (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Theories on Supervising Models

Supervising is a constant and ongoing process that necessitates tailoring supervision to meet individual students' needs and the demands of the institution (Halse, 2011). The study conducted by Dysthe (2002) has identified three models of research supervision: teaching, apprenticeship, and partnership with the ascending level of the students' autonomy and descending level of the supervisors' guidance. He clarified that different supervision models can be applied by supervisors based on their experiences as well as institutional, personal, and disciplinary factors (Dysthe, 2002). Another classification of supervision models was suggested by Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) entailing three broad models: traditional one-to-one supervision, team supervision with several supervisors but one student, and group supervision with one supervisor and several students. In a study analyzing data on postgraduate research outputs in South Africa between 2010-2016, the traditional individualistic model is more prevalent in higher education compared to team and group supervision (Guerin, 2015). Similarly, the individualistic approach is widely used in the United Kingdom while Australia has shifted to team supervision (Backhouse 2010; Buttery et al., 2005; Chiang 2003; Robertson, 2017). Considering Dysthe's supervision models, research conducted in the five Finnish universities shows that the teaching model of supervision is mostly utilized based on the supervisors' perspectives (Filippou *et al.*, 2021).

Supervisors' Roles

According to Macfadyen (2019), interviews held with master's thesis supervisors revealed that some of them are unsure or unaware of their supervisory roles even if they are accomplishing their duties. Yet some researchers have investigated and defined master's thesis supervisors' roles in higher education as follows: a director, a facilitator, an advisor, a teacher, a guide, a critic, a freedom giver, a supporter, a friend, a manager, and an examiner which should be revisited and modified by supervisors according to the situation (Brown & Atkins, 1988). McGinty et al. (2010) have asserted that master students in Australia seek supervisors who play the role of guide, mentor, teacher, and motivator. Another researcher states that supervisors' roles are not limited to helping students to complete their research as an advisor, but also comprise contributing to students' personal development (Mhunpiew, 2013). In the Brazilian context, qualitative interviews and questionnaires held with students and supervisors revealed supervisors' role as *literacy brokers* which means that supervisors contribute to the development of thesis students' writing skills although supervisors did not define themselves as "literacy brokers" (Martinez & Graf, 2016). Wright, Murray, and Geale (2007) reported that supervisors prioritized one of the roles in their practices such as researcher trainer, supportive guide, quality assurer, and mentor.

Supervisors' Responsibilities

Supervisors' and master's degree students' perceptions have been explored by several researchers revealing some overlaps and incongruity. One of the previous studies reflecting on supervisors' experiences recommends supervisors take responsible actions: considering students' expectations and fulfilling them, developing awareness of being a role model, doing careful planning, keeping students motivated, creating a supportive climate, and looking for ways to help graduate students in their further careers (Phillips & Pugh, 1987).

Current supervisory practices in Thailand include agreeing to have a common goal, making students feel confident, and guiding students in outlining the thesis while students often

expect their supervisors to listen to students' problems, support students to overcome difficulties, and guide students to gain knowledge, providing emotional support, planning time on mutual agreement, reading guidance apart from those which are currently practiced (Mhunpiew, 2013). Fillippou (2020) found out that supervisors perceived their responsibilities as initiating discussions with thesis students to meet their expectations, diagnosing and adjusting their supervision, and encouraging students to initiate meetings in Finnish universities. A comparative study in China and Netherlands identified differences between supervisory responsibilities in Western and Asian contexts stating that the Chinese supervisors focus more on explicit assessment to monitor student progress and prepare students for future careers while the Dutch supervisors tend to utilize implicit regulation, provide emotional support, and improve student well-being (Hu et al., 2016). From the students' perspectives, they expect to have more structured supervision during the thesis supervision in China (Chen et al., 2018). In Azerbaijan, supervisors' responsibilities are helping students create a personal work plan, assigning tasks, recommending resources and literature, and providing consultation on further action points regularly (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Gap in the Literature

Previous studies about supervision in higher education revealed perceived supervisory models, supervisors' roles, and responsibilities in different contexts. However, the alignment between mandatory governmental policies on master's thesis supervision and actual practices has not been elucidated. It is needed to compare and contrast compulsory state policies on educational supervision with the real supervisory process occurring to find out the comprehension and implementation of those policies in universities. Furthermore, scholars investigated the supervision process in terms of master's thesis development. However, the possible impact of supervisors' support on developing future researchers remained underexplored. Hence, exploring supervisors' perceptions about their influence on master's students' development as a researcher after graduation was worth investigating qualitatively.

On the other hand, not enough studies have been conducted in post-Soviet countries on supervision in higher education. In Azerbaijan, there was no research carried out related to educational supervision to enhance the understanding of this practice by supervisors and master students. Therefore, it was important to address this field to draw attention to the supervision process in HEI and to identify current practices and perceptions about supervisors' roles and responsibilities in developing a master's thesis in Azerbaijan.

Chapter III. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore master's degree students' and supervisors' perceptions of the master's degree supervision process, supervisors' roles, responsibilities, and supervision models utilized in English-medium master's programs in Azerbaijani higher education institutions. A qualitative approach was employed for this study as its interest was knowing more about people's interpretations of their practices and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, this study aimed to discover master's students' experiences and perceptions about master's thesis supervision. The underlying philosophy of this research was interpretivism which attempted to understand the situations from the people's point of view who were experiencing them (Sipe & Constable, 1996). This study was exploratory in nature aiming to explore "a new topic" or a topic that was little known about (Swedberg, 2020).

Research Design

Research Site

The selected sites for this study are located in the capital city of Azerbaijan, Baku. three public higher education institutions offering English-medium master's degree programs were visited. The selected two higher education institutions were the oldest universities in Baku which were founded in 1919 and 1920 (The Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2022). One of them is a research-focused institution providing multi-profile education programs while the other one is prominent with its high admission score which is also research-focused offering specialized degree programs in the fields of industry and social life (Isakhanli & Pashayev, 2018). The other university is one of the newest universities in Azerbaijan founded during the last 16 years which is both selective and competitive with its high admission requirements and the highest admission average points scored by the admitted students (Isakhanli & Pashayev, 2018). Supervisory practices in both "old" and "new" universities were explored to compare the nature of their current master's thesis supervision practices.

Participants

The target population of this study was several master's degree students and master's thesis supervisors in Azerbaijani public universities. The participants were nine master's degree students and nine supervisors of those students who were interviewed for exploring their perceptions and practices of master's thesis supervision. As master's degree students developed a master's thesis in the second year of their studies, the interviews were conducted with the second-year master's students. Both male and female participants were involved in the interviews to learn the perspectives of diverse people.

Sampling Techniques

In this study, probability, non-probability, and purposive sampling were employed. Non-probability sampling methods recruit participants on non-random criteria which are often utilized in qualitative and exploratory research (McCombes, 2022). Probability sampling is related to random selection of participants while non-probability sampling is based on convenience data collection aiming to initially understand a small and under-explored population (McCombes, 2022). As one type of non-random sampling, convenience sampling was utilized for selecting the students in which practical criteria such as geographical proximity, accessibility, availability at the planned time, or the willingness to participate in the interviews will be considered (Etikan, et al., 2016). However, the selection of the supervisors was based on purposive sampling meaning to interview supervisors of previously-chosen students purposefully which became useful to make comparisons between supervisors' and students' perceptions (Etikan, et al., 2016). Before conducting interviews, an email was sent to the universities to get permission. After receiving permission, participants were contacted through emails or phone numbers provided by the institutions or people in my social circle.

Data Collection Techniques

As a research instrument, online and onsite interviews were conducted with both master's degree students and supervisors. Interviews were held individually to enable the interviewees to share their ideas freely and comfortably (Creswell, 2013). Using interviews as a method of collecting data works well when the purpose of the research is to understand people's perspectives and beliefs (Flick, 2017). In this study, interviews helped to learn about master's students and supervisors' perspectives and understandings of the supervision process. Seventeen open-ended interview questions in a semi-structured format were asked of the interviewees. In this type of interview structure, the organization of the interview questions is not tightly formatted meaning follow-up "probe" questions may be asked based on the interviewees' responses (Flick, 2017). Interviews were audio recorded using a mobile device and a computer upon the permission of the participants due to ethical considerations (Creswell, 2013).

Secondly, document analysis was held as a second method of data collection to review governmental policies and state legislation on higher education. Document analysis is considered a systematic procedure to review or evaluate both printed and online documents to gain understanding and elicit meaning (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis

Flick (2014) defines data analysis as a process to classify and interpret linguistic or visual material to make meaning from the implicit and explicit data and to understand what it represents. The collected data was transcribed by listening to the audio recordings repeatedly which was considered the first step in data analysis (Bailey, 2008). The interview transcripts were read two or three times and data were categorized thematically regarding the students' and supervisors' perceptions of the supervisors' roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, codes were created based on each theme which was explained as a process of assigning short-cut designations to the different aspects of the data to make it easily accessible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Validity and Reliability

Considering validity and reliability in qualitative research is related to ethically conducting the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity refers to the "appropriateness" of data, process, and tools ensuring that the research question aligns with the outcome, the methods utilized to lead to answering the research question, and the sampling and data analysis are appropriate to the context and conclusions (Leung, 2015). Reliability in qualitative research means consistency meaning the researcher has not misrepresented or invented data (Carcary, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative studies are representatives of multiple perspectives and interpretations of reality which can be addressed using member checks and triangulation to ensure the accuracy of data (Flick, 2017). Triangulation refers to utilizing "multiple data collection methods, multiple data sources, multiple investigators, or multiple theories" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) In this study, triangulation of multiple data sources and data collection methods was used. Interviewing both students and supervisors as well as collecting data from four different higher education institutions enabled me to utilize several educational institutions as multiple information sources. In terms of various data-gathering methods, governmental policies and legal documents were analyzed for collecting data through document analysis. Furthermore, interviews were planned to be conducted in English as the interviewees were master's students or supervisors in English-medium programs who were assumed to know the English language sufficiently. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim to avoid misinterpretations of data. When it comes to member checking, transcripts were sent to the participants to make any necessary corrections after the interviews (Carlson, 2010).

Ethical Consideration

Ethical challenges may occur regarding the data collection process and the dissemination of the research findings which are likely to underlie the relationships between the participant and the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Tracy (2013), informed consent and a "do not harm" policy are the main means of ethical considerations. Hence, before conducting

interviews, a permission letter was sent to the higher education institutions, and a consent form was handed to the interviewees in advance to inform them how much privacy and protection from harm would be ensured.

Moreover, the identity of the participants was masked, and pseudonyms were assigned to individuals as well as institutions to protect their anonymity (Creswell, 2013). Data were stored on a computer, mobile phone, and Google Drive which were accessible only for the researcher.

Positionality

My research interest related to master's thesis supervision stemmed from my position as a master's degree student in an English-medium program at an Azerbaijani public university. I am in the second year of my studies meaning I am currently developing a master's thesis proposal and meeting with my supervisor regularly. Working on a thesis development was a complicated experience for me when I was looking for academic support and guidance from my supervisor. Furthermore, my brother is also a second-year master's degree student in another higher education institution in Azerbaijan studying an English-medium master's degree program. Comparing my brother's experiences with mine, I could notice significant differences in terms of supervisor support. While I was meeting with my thesis supervisor every week to track my progress, receive feedback, and request guidance about the next step, my brother had not met with his supervisor once yet. Furthermore, I held three interviews with three master's degree students who had graduated from the public HEIs located in Baku for collecting preliminary data. While responding to the question about the frequency of their meeting with their supervisors in the first year of their master's studies, two students stated that they had not had any meetings with their supervisors during the first term of their second year at university while the other student mentioned that she had had only one meeting with her supervisor during the fall term. The disparity in the supervision experiences of these three public universities in Azerbaijan drew my attention to the fulfillment of the supervision process, supervisors' roles, and responsibilities which had never been investigated so far.

Limitations

One of the limitations was related to the data triangulation. As the supervision process was not easily-accessible due to its being held at a flexible time, I was not able to observe how the supervision of the master's thesis occurred between supervisors and master's students.

Moreover, I could interview two male and seven female supervisors in the data collection phase as the majority of the supervisors were women (Holdcroft, 2007). Hence, my sampling may be considered gender-biased due to the imbalance between male and female participants.

Another limitation was related to the number of HEIs planned to be visited. Initially, four HEIs were targeted to be involved in the study; however, one of the HEIs did not respond to the permission letters provided by ADA University meaning it was inaccessible. Therefore, the number of HEIs became three instead of four which I was initially planning. Thus, the number of participants was increased from sixteen to eighteen meaning six participants were interviewed in each research site rather than four.

Chapter IV. Study Findings

This chapter of the study is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What supervising models do supervisors utilize during the master's thesis supervision process in English-medium master's degree programs of public higher education institutions in Azerbaijan?
 - a. What are supervisors' perceptions of the supervision process, their roles, and responsibilities?
 - b. What are master's thesis students' perceptions of the supervision process, supervisors' roles, and their responsibilities?

For this reason, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen participants including nine second-year master's degree students and nine master's thesis supervisors in three different public universities. The data collection process was carried out at the beginning of the spring term in the 2022-2023 academic year. The supervisors comprised two male and seven female professors with a doctoral degree. They all are experienced faculty members. Besides, one-on-one interviews were held with the graduate students. They consisted of four male and five female students who were studying in English-medium master's degree programs at three universities. The supervisor of each student was identified to involve in the interview. The supervisors were teaching those studying business administration, chemistry, information technologies, public and international affairs, or history. The supervisors are indicated with an abbreviation of SP while students are named as ST.

This chapter contains three sections that present findings to the research questions. They are supervision and its aspects, supervisors' roles and responsibilities, and supervision models.

Supervision and Its Aspects

At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked overarching questions to explore their perspectives about developing a master's thesis and the supervision process.

According to two supervisors, the master's degree students they were supervising knew how to start master's thesis preparation because they already worked together and developed a thesis for a bachelor's degree (SP1 & SP3). While three supervisors responded that as their students did not know how to start, they assisted students in starting to develop their master's thesis (SP2, SP4, & SP5). Three other supervisors mentioned that students took a "research methods" course in which they were taught how to write a thesis (SP 7, SP8, & SP9), whereas one supervisor emphasized, "Students can take information from the internet" (SP6). Thus, supervisors considered that their students partially knew how to start their master's thesis; however, they also guided the students in terms of the procedures and requirements.

Master's degree students who were supervised by those supervisors also provided similar answers as their supervisors. ST6 stated: "I was informed of how to write a thesis at lessons by our tutors, by my advisor, and by university".

In terms of selecting a thesis title and a thesis supervisor, all eighteen participants indicated that they chose both almost at the same time. Three supervisors and their students stated that the students choose their thesis title and supervisor in September or October in the first year of their studies (SP1, SP2, SP3, ST1, ST2, & ST3). Those participants explained that they selected their thesis title among the list of suggested thesis titles based on their interests and then he/she approached the instructor whom he/she knew well and their research areas were relevant to the selected topic. ST2 stated: "At the beginning of the first year I was given a bunch of topics, and I selected the appropriate one". Three other supervisors mentioned that students were required to choose their thesis titles and supervisors at the beginning of the spring term in their second year among the suggested topics (SP4, SP5, & SP6); however, some students stated that their topics were confirmed by the director late so they could not start writing a thesis on time (ST7, ST8, & ST9). ST4 highlighted:

My thesis topic was confirmed in February although I chose it in September. That's why, I delayed starting my thesis. I have not started writing it yet. I am so worried about this situation.

To summarize, most of the supervisors and students stated that the master students chose their thesis titles at the beginning of the second term in the second year based on their interest and then approached the supervisor whose research area was similar to the selected topic; however, they sometimes suggested modification to the thesis title as the topic should be worth studying and focus on the gap in the literature (SP7, SP8, SP9, ST7, ST8, & ST9).

Based on the participants' responses, a majority of the supervisors did not require an individual plan of the research from the master's degree students they supervised in two research sites. Nevertheless, the supervisors in the third university asserted that a course called Master's Thesis 1 required students to write a thesis proposal by the end of the fall term in their second year (SP7, SP8, & SP9).

In terms of the frequency of the meetings between supervisors and students, both mentioned that they met whenever students had some questions or needed a consultation. Some supervisors talked about their WhatsApp groups with students in which they communicated online easily; however, few students and supervisors considered online meetings a drawback that halted face-to-face interaction and clear understanding (SP5 & ST5).

Based on the transcripts, all supervisors provided constructive feedback when the master's degree students handed in a draft of the chapters stating both positive sides and parts for improvements. SP8 specified:

Of course, you can criticize, but also it is important to find something positive... This is prominent in terms of giving constructive feedback as a standard of the sandwich model. So you start with positive comments and then state your criticism.

ST5 mentioned, "If I am wrong, she kindly tells me that you are wrong". However, some students stated that they could not see positive written comments in the drafts (ST7 & ST8).

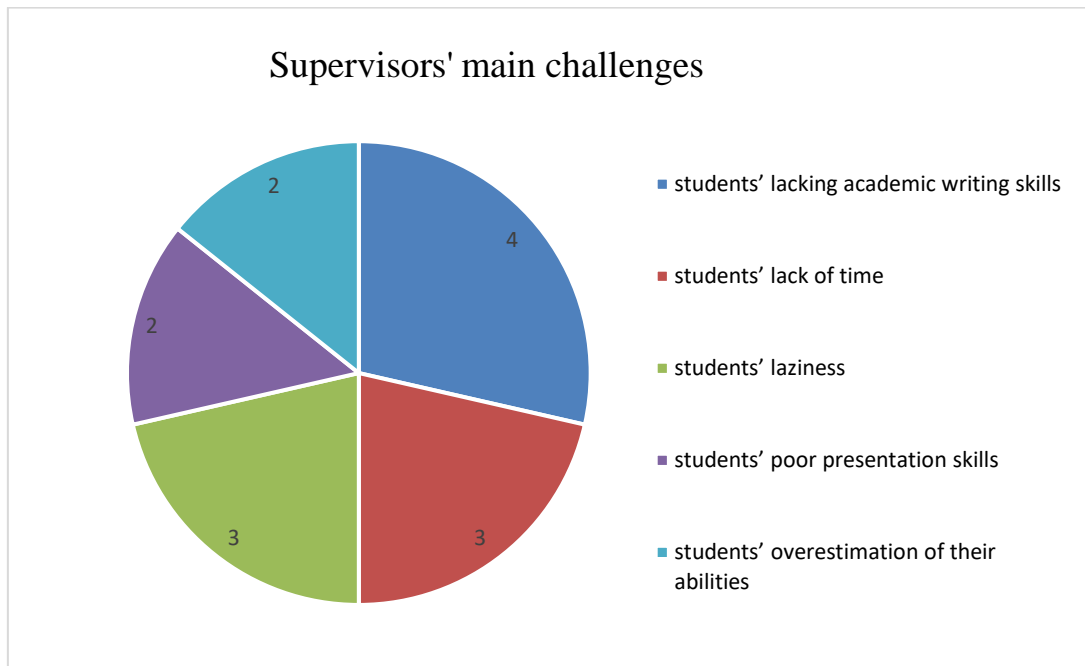
As a response to the question about understanding how to improve the work, most supervisors asserted that they provided oral or written feedback on the student's work based on the content and organization of the paragraphs rather than grammar whereas some supervisors made grammatical corrections as well (SP4 & SP5). Moreover, SP2 and SP6 gave students

feedback on the WhatsApp platform by sending voice or text messages. Students also mentioned that their supervisors provided sample papers for them that they could use to improve their work (ST 2 & ST3). Some students underlined that their supervisors provided written feedback on the document showing the sentences or words to be modified, “I sent my work to my supervisor in Word format then she highlighted the sections where I can improve my chapter” (ST5).

When it comes to the challenges in supervising master’s thesis students, supervisors indicated students’ lacking academic writing skills, students’ lack of time due to their jobs, students’ laziness, students’ poor presentation skills, students’ overestimation of their abilities, their workload & time restrictions, not being able to publish thesis, meeting online because of time limits, lack of access to international libraries, lack of equipment in laboratory & high costs to buy new ones, students’ complains about difficulties, students’ negative characters, having less time allotted for supervision, choosing the thesis topic, keeping students under control, and students’ poor language skills (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Supervisors’ main challenges regarding the supervision process.

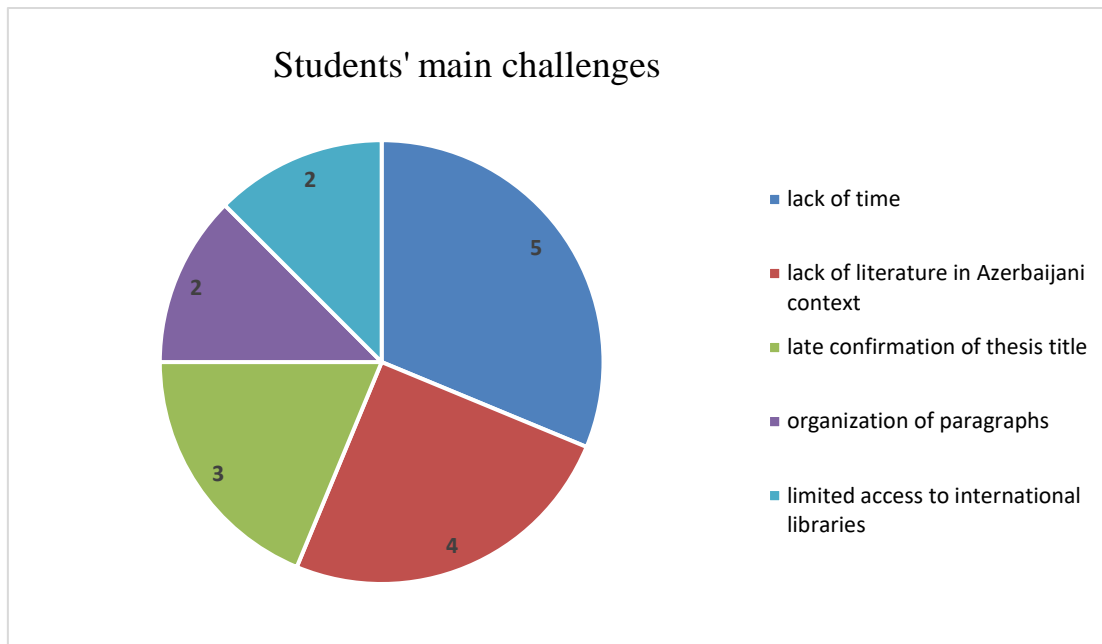


In response to similar questions about challenges, students reported a lack of time, lack of literature in the Azerbaijani context, late confirmation of thesis title, organization of paragraphs,

limited access to international libraries, an abundance of information about the topic which created confusion, choosing right data analysis method, it was a tiring process, lack of experience in writing a thesis, limited access to the previous student's work, and page limits (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Students' main challenges regarding thesis development.



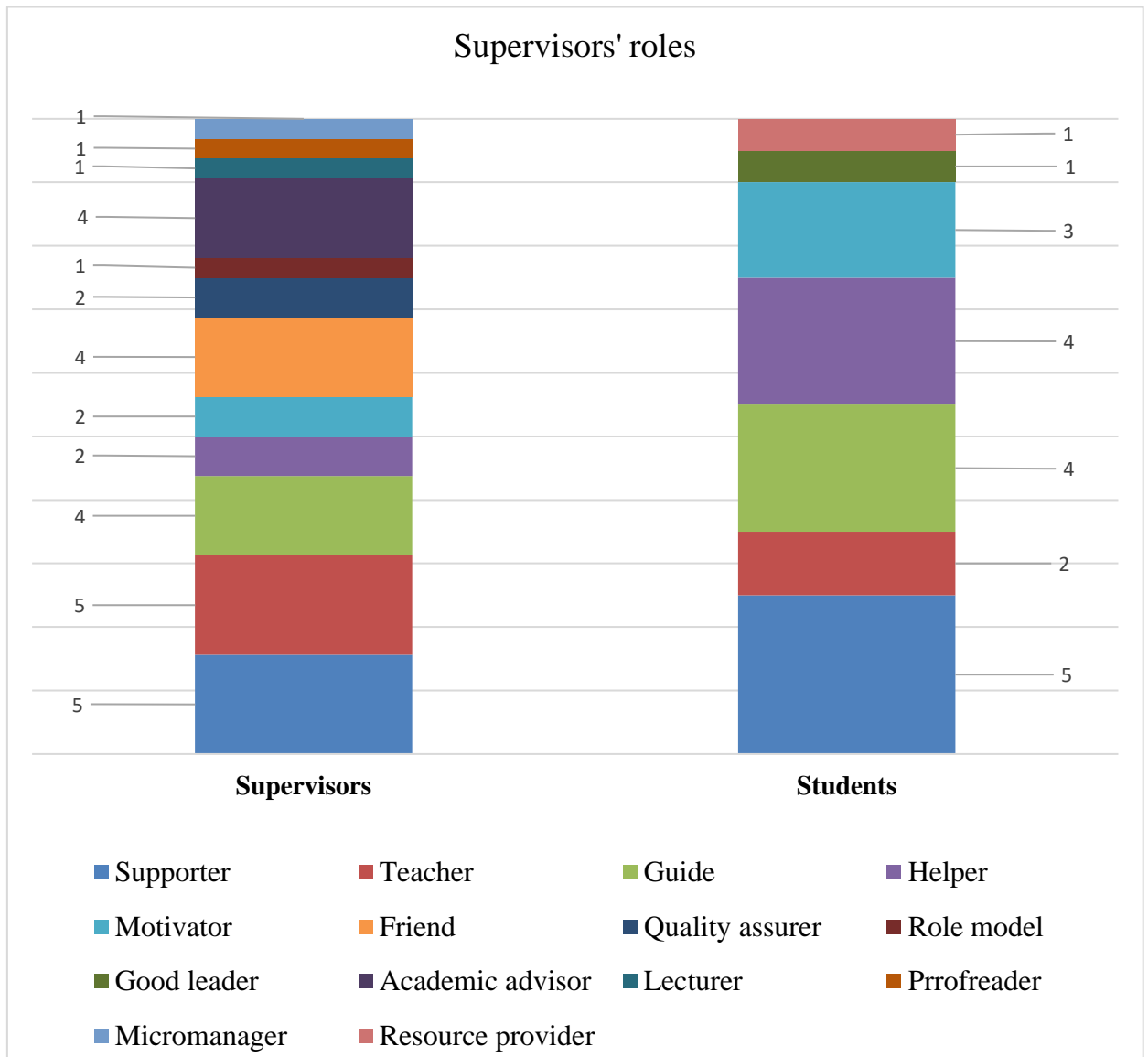
Supervisors' Roles and Responsibilities

The interviews revealed various perceptions about supervisors' roles and responsibilities from the students' and supervisors' perspectives.

To start with the supervisors' viewpoints, they considered their roles to be a teacher, a supporter, a guide, an academic advisor, a friend, a motivator, a helper, a quality assurer, a lecturer, a role model, a proofreader, and a micromanager. Likewise, students shared similar responses to their challenges while developing their thesis. The interviewed students included a role of a supporter, guide, a helper, a motivator, a teacher, a good leader, and a resource provider (see Figure 4). While the supervisors considered themselves as their students' friends, the students did not specify that role.

Figure 4

Supervisors' and students' views on supervisor roles



When it comes to the supervisors' perceptions about their responsibilities, most supervisors mentioned ensuring good quality of the work, suggesting literature, making content and structure-based corrections, making sure that students meet the deadlines, motivating them, arranging a meeting for consultation, and providing guidelines about how to write chapters. Moreover, a few supervisors believed that they should help students with selecting the right thesis title (SP9), and help them to select committee members (SP8), read the whole thesis to be aware of the content (SP9), provide practical advice when needed (SP4), check plagiarism (SP1), support students during the defense process (SP5), be open-minded (SP4), get the work done

(SP8), and give students such skills to believe in themselves that they can do everything in the field (SP6). SP3 added that she delegated her responsibilities to the doctoral degree students who supervised master's degree students and master's degree students who supervised bachelor's degree students (SP3) (see Figure 5). The SP6 explained:

My responsibility is to motivate students, and this motivation must be based on a strong feeling, of how to be helpful to their society, and their country. Because I'm a patriot, and I think that everything that I do, I do for my people for my country. Yes, maybe I do a very small thing, but I must do it well. I must do my best. My best is to give such skills to my students so that they believe in themselves, they believe that they can do everything in this field, and the field they chose. If they want that, they must be strong enough. I'm very sad when my students are disappointed in their work, disappointed in their universities, and disappointed in their country. In this case, I felt unhappy. I felt that I don't do what I must and that's why my sole responsibility is to support them not to run away from this country.

Figure 5

Supervisors' and students' views on supervisors' responsibilities.

Supervisors' views on their responsibilities	Students' views on their supervisors' responsibilities
Read the whole thesis to be aware of the content	Have information about the topic and examine the topic carefully
Suggesting literature	Suggest literature
Making content and structure-based corrections	Check, verify, and assess the information that I submit
Making sure that students meet the deadlines	Remind deadlines
Motivating students	Understand the students feeling with empathy
Arranging a meeting for consultation	Be available any time
Providing guidelines about how to write chapters	Provide knowledge about writing a thesis
Support students during the defense process	Guide till defense
Ensuring good quality of the work	Help to find connections and participants to interview
Provide practical advice when needed	Be ready to help in any condition
Check plagiarism	Say which methods to use
Be open-minded	Meet students' different needs

Get the work done	
Help them to select committee members	
Give students such skills to believe in themselves that they can do everything in the field	

Regarding students' perceptions about their supervisors' responsibilities, they emphasized that supervisors should have information about the topic and examine the topic carefully (ST1), be ready to help in any condition (ST2), provide knowledge about writing a thesis (ST3), remind deadlines (ST5), say which methods to use (ST6), check, verify, & assess information which is submitted (ST6), be available any time (ST6), guide till defense (ST9), help to find connections & participants to interview (ST8 & ST9), suggest literature (ST 7 & ST9), understand the students feeling with empathy (ST9), and meet students' different needs while writing a thesis (ST9).

According to the interviews, the majority of the supervisors assessed their supervision highly. One of the supervisors' commented, "I fulfill my responsibilities as a supervisor to the greatest extent. I think that I do what I am supposed to do" (ST7). Similarly, all students were very satisfied with their supervisors' fulfillment of their roles and responsibilities. ST3 stated:

She's a great professor. I am very grateful to her. She helps me a lot. I am sure that there are lots of highly qualified teachers here, but I think that she is the best one.

Overall, supervisors and students were partially aware of the supervisors' roles and responsibilities.

Supervision Models

One of the main purposes of the data collection process was to define which supervision models were utilized in Azerbaijani public universities. Therefore, I asked a question regarding the supervisors' preferable supervision strategies and supervision models utilized. All supervisors were unaware of the supervision models and it seemed that they had particular techniques which were practical although they were uninformed of the theoretical classification of the supervision models in the literature.

SP9 highlighted:

....so you can imagine that even though I have some pedagogical classes, while I was a Ph.D. student, I did it with a practical approach. I don't have any written documents. I don't have any theoretical model. I do everything practically. So just every year, I supervise my students, and I learn from my mistakes. And I also do like that.

Three supervisors stated that they collaborated with the master's degree students they were supervising rather than teaching them something new (SP3, SP8, & SP9). The rest of the supervisors asserted that they partially gave independence to the students who were the main decision-makers and creators of the thesis while they were also controlling the students' work.

SP8 stated:

...students can have their independent views and ways of doing things in this regard. I am a helper. It means I am just collaborating with you. If you have questions, I am helping you, I am giving my ideas and my input, but at the end of the day, it is your responsibility to be successful. I am not in this regard doing the so-called, micromanagement that is the small things of course. Yeah, that's just one way to look at things. The most important, critical point in students' work is that they can contribute to the academic literature.

Another supervisor also claimed (SP1):

I give them the chance to do it by themselves independently, even if they can choose which type of literature they can use, and how many sources they can use, they all can choose by themselves. I teach them when they don't know how to paraphrase or how to cite. I do not mean I need to teach him you know, just say that do whatever you can and just learn it by yourself. I will correct it if there's something not true or nothing in their place. And I will give it to you back and you can polish it off.

Likewise, SP2 emphasized giving independence to the students:

They have to give results. We make some meetings and we have to talk about the work they have done for this. I give them independence, but at the end of it, again as a supervisor, I have to check the independence.

In terms of the students' perspectives about their supervisors' preferred supervision models, students stated that their supervisors did not interfere with their work, but gave some advice, suggested corrections, and taught paragraph organization in the thesis. ST 5 mentioned: "She gives me advice that shows me where I am wrong, or where I am right. So that's enough, it's my work. Sometimes she teaches structure".

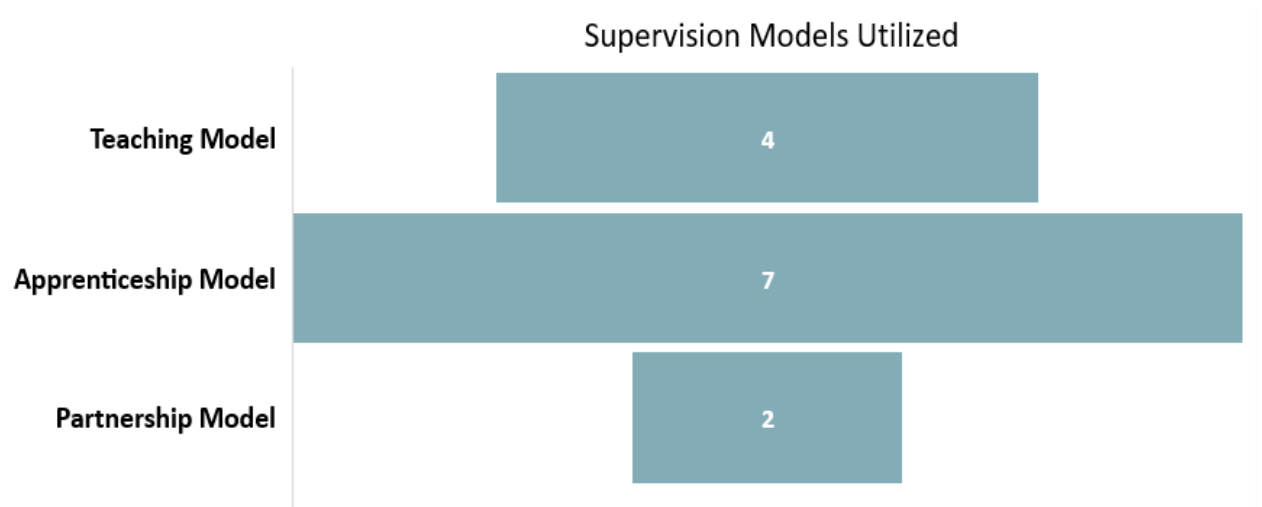
ST9 explained the balance between independence and dependence on the supervisor:

I would say that it is 70% independence, 30% support. I would say just support like, for example, initially he gave me a suggestion on the topic. He just said, you know, there's this kind of topic. Would you be interested in writing about that topic? And that topic? Probably it was something of interest to him. He would be interested in conducting research, but I was not very into that topic. So, I kind of said that you know, I'm more interested in this kind of research in this field. And for that field, he also gave his suggestion. And we kind of came to a common ground. But as I said, for example, when it comes to literature, I don't know how other supervisors are. Maybe none of them does that but from my side, I was independent. When it comes to the literature review, I don't think that he can do something like No, I know what the title is decided to talk about it. It is easy to go and research it on your own JSTOR, Google Scholar, and other public domain fields so he didn't give me direction, not written the exact parsers or papers to read.

Similarly, SP8 contended, “I use liberal approach. Yeah, I'm not a dictator. And you're not teaching everything like, you're just guiding”.

Figure 6

Use of supervision models by supervisors in three public HEIs in Azerbaijan.



Considering all responses of the supervisors and the students interviewed, the main aspects of the supervisory practices in Azerbaijani public HEIs have been defined. Thus, the supervisors considered “students’ lacking academic writing skills” as a main challenge while most students asserted that “lack of time” is a major obstacle to developing a thesis. Moreover, both supervisors and students considered “being a supporter” as a main role which was undertaken by master’s thesis supervisors. Both groups of participants indicated “suggesting literature”,

“helping students when they need”, “being available for meetings”, “suggesting corrections on the thesis”, and “ensuring that deadlines are met” as supervisors’ responsibilities. In terms of the supervision models utilized, the use of the apprenticeship model was commonly observed among master’s thesis supervisors. However, supervisors also utilize a teaching model of supervision when students did not have basic knowledge about how to write a thesis (see Figure 6).

Chapter V. Discussion

The study aimed to explore what supervision models are utilized by supervisors during the master's thesis supervision process in English-medium programs of public higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. Besides, the study focused on master's degree students and their supervisors' perceptions of the supervision process, supervisors' roles, and their responsibilities.

The study findings related to the supervision process, supervisors' roles and responsibilities, and supervision models had been analyzed based on the previously-reviewed literature. Most findings were compatible with the existing literature whereas some findings did not align with the reviewed literature.

Supervision and its Aspects

The study findings revealed several aspects and procedures of the supervision provided by professors for master's degree students in Azerbaijan. According to the interviews conducted with supervisors and students, the majority of the participants stated that the master's degree students chose their thesis titles and thesis supervisor at the beginning of the second term. However, Azerbaijani state policies on education determined that students were required to select their thesis topics and scientific supervisors during the first three months of the first term; thereby, the titles had to be confirmed by the scientific council of the relevant department which aligned with the thesis field during this course of time (Resolution 15 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan of February 13, 1997). A study conducted in Finland asserted that the selection of the master's thesis title was considered one of the most significant aspects of the supervision process (Filippou, et al.,2019).

Furthermore, the findings showed that nearly 67% of master's thesis supervisors did not require a plan of the thesis from their students; instead, supervisors provided students with an outline of a thesis consisting of the requirements for each chapter based on the university guidelines regarding master's thesis dissertations. Azerbaijani legislation on education defined that master's thesis students had to prepare an individual plan of their work with the help of their

supervisors and hand in this plan during the first three months of the first term (Resolution 15 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan of February 13, 1997).

The interviews with master's degree students indicated that they chose their thesis titles based on their interests and then approached the supervisor whose research area was similar to the selected topic. According to the Decree of the Minister of Education (1998), the thesis title chosen by a student has to be related to the supervisor's field of research (Pub. L. No. 202). All students interviewed revealed that they had only one supervisor whom they mainly worked with; however, they could approach other professors with a different specialty in case their thesis titles encompassed various fields. Azerbaijani legislation empowers to work with several supervisors only when the thesis titles incorporate joint specialties (Ministry of Education, 1998, Pub. L. No. 202).

In terms of the supervisors' and students' challenges regarding the master's thesis development and supervision process, the most frequent responses during the interviews were related to lack of time, lack of local literature, students' poor academic writing skills, and issues about the thesis title. The literature emphasized the selection of thesis titles as one of the main factors contributing to the successful completion of the thesis (Heide et al., 2019; Koskenoja, 2019). However, my assumptions about the lack of support by supervisors and its impact on master's thesis completion were not indicated by students as their challenges. Yet, a few supervisors mentioned their heavy workload as a main factor in decreasing the frequency of their meetings with students. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) stated that master's degree students found supervisors' insufficient knowledge, lack of support by supervisors, change of supervisors, and supervisors' workload as main challenges during their thesis development.

Supervisors' Roles and Responsibilities

One of the aims of this study was to investigate the roles and responsibilities that supervisors fulfill from both master's students and their supervisors' perspectives. When I inquired about the supervisors' roles and responsibilities, the participants thought for a few

minutes and tried to brainstorm through guiding questions posed by me which indicated that supervisors were hesitating to define their roles. According to Macfadyen (2019), interviews held with master's thesis supervisors revealed that some of them were unsure or unaware of their supervisory roles even if they were accomplishing their duties. The most common roles listed by supervisors were a guide, a supporter, a friend, a teacher, and an academic advisor. Likewise, graduate students expressed a role of a supporter, a guide, a helper, and a motivator which they considered more relevant to their supervisors. Yet some researchers have investigated and defined master's thesis supervisors' roles in higher education as follows: a director, a facilitator, an advisor, a teacher, a guide, a critic, a freedom giver, a supporter, a friend, a manager, and an examiner which should be revisited and modified by supervisors according to the situation (Brown & Atkins, 1988). Another researcher stated that supervisors' roles were not limited to helping students to complete their research as an advisor, but also contributing to students' personal development (Mhunpiew, 2013). However, none of the supervisors interviewed specified their roles to foster students' improvement. Moreover, in the Brazilian context, the study held by Martinez and Graf (2016) determined supervisors' role as *literacy brokers* in which supervisors contribute to the development of thesis students' writing skills which was not found out in this study.

When it comes to the findings regarding supervisors' responsibilities, they were regarded as ensuring a good quality thesis, suggesting literature, reminding students of deadlines, meeting students' needs, being available for meetings, and providing academic and emotional support. Based on the state policy on education (Ministry of Education, 1998), supervisors are required to recommend scientific-methodological literature, informational and archival materials, projects, and other sources needed for the master's degree students they supervise. Fillippou (2020) also concluded that supervisors perceived their responsibilities as initiating discussions with thesis students to meet their expectations, diagnosing and adjusting their supervision, and encouraging students to meetings in Finnish universities. One of the supervisors interviewed for this study

stated that she provided students with skills enhancing their future employability and helped them increase their confidence level so that they could do more research to contribute to the field, and even assisted them to find a job through her connections. Similarly, a comparative study found that supervisors in China focused on preparing students for future careers while the Dutch supervisors tended to provide emotional support and improve student well-being (Hu et al., 2016). Overall, most of the interviewed supervisors accomplish guiding their students and supporting them both academically and emotionally during the thesis development in three Azerbaijani public universities which is slightly different from the international experiences in Finland, China, and Netherlands.

Supervision Models

This study targeted to explore which supervision models are used by master's thesis supervisors in Azerbaijani public universities. In this respect, master's degree students and their supervisors were asked interview questions related to the supervision strategies and models used. According to the findings, neither supervisors nor students were aware of the supervision models in literature which was anticipated before the data collection process; however, the supervisors utilized particular strategies that had been shaped during the practice. Several supervisors stated that they preferred diagnosing students' needs and fitting their supervision into those needs to help the students succeed. Literature also showed that supervising was a constant and ongoing process that necessitated tailoring supervision to meet individual students' needs and demands of the institution (Halse, 2011).

Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) entailed three broad models of supervision such as traditional one-to-one supervision, team supervision with several supervisors but one student, and group supervision with one supervisor and several students. The study findings proved that one-to-one supervision was utilized in Azerbaijani public universities which was considered a traditional model. According to a study conducted in South Africa between 2010-2016, the traditional individualistic model was more prevalent in higher education compared to team and group

supervision (Guerin, 2015). Similarly, the individualistic approach was determined to be widely used in the United Kingdom while Australia shifted to team supervision (Chiang 2003; Backhouse 2010; Buttery et al., 2005; Robertson, 2017).

Depending on the supervisors' roles and responsibilities, the reviewed literature elucidated the existing three models of research supervision: teaching, apprenticeship, and partnership with the ascending level of the students' autonomy and descending level of the supervisors' guidance (Dysthe, 2002). The findings illustrated that supervisors gave independence to the master's degree students while developing the thesis and did not interfere with the student's selection of literature. Supervisors did not consider themselves either a teacher who was teaching everything to the students or a dictator putting much pressure on students. They rather defined their identities as a guide showing directions to the students and helping them when they had any difficulties regarding thesis development. Several supervisors also stated that their approach to supervision depended on the student's level of readiness to write a thesis meaning they sometimes needed to teach students how to cite and paraphrase whereas some students were already experienced in terms of writing research. Considering Dysthe's supervision models (2002), the most commonly utilized models were regarded as apprenticeship and teaching models depending on the situation. Most supervisors stated that they support and guide students when they need help as an indication of the apprenticeship model; however, they sometimes assist students with academic writing and organization skills meaning the teaching model of supervision is utilized in some cases. Similarly, research conducted in the five Finnish universities shows that the teaching model of supervision is mainly utilized in Finland as well (Filippou *et al.*, 2021).

Implications

In the Azerbaijani context, internationalization in higher education is often regarded as one of the ways of increasing the quality of education and advancing in international rankings which are becoming more popular in recent years (Suleymanov, 2020). This trend originates from the

tendency to adjust the current higher education system to international education principles ensuring the transparency of higher education, international competitiveness, and development of scientific research in Azerbaijan (Resolution 88 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan of May 12, 2010). The findings and discussions revealed that supervision was a process that was not paid much attention to in the Azerbaijani context compared to the Western and Asian countries. The latest governmental decree on developing a master's dissertation, its presentation, and defense of the Ministry of Education was passed in 1997 which consisted of a paragraph related to master's thesis supervision. However, detailed information regarding supervisors' roles and responsibilities had not been elucidated in that document. To meet the requirements of the new tendencies in higher education, new regulations may be considered to be added in terms of master's thesis supervision entailing well-structured and systematic organization of the process.

In addition, this study targeted to raise local researchers' awareness of the issue investigating educational topics and lead to further studies in master's thesis supervision in the higher education context. This qualitative research may be followed by a quantitative study involving more participants from various public universities in Azerbaijan to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, as this research only focused on supervision in master's degree programs, a further study may be conducted to explore supervision practices in undergraduate and doctoral programs. Moreover, another research may involve programs held in Azerbaijani and Russian as well rather than only English-medium programs.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored how the supervision of a master's thesis took place in English-medium master's degree programs, what the perceived roles and responsibilities of the supervisors were, and which supervision models were utilized in three public universities in Azerbaijan. According

to the interviews, supervisors had different perspectives on supervising master's degree students, and likewise, students were unaware of their supervisors' responsibilities determined by the education law. Therefore, in-service seminars with supervisors and students should be conducted to raise their awareness of the supervisors' roles, responsibilities, and the supervision process the Ministry of Education (1998).

Secondly, observations of thesis supervision practices should be held by outsourcing supervisors to determine in-service supervisors' strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, training should be provided by those professionals to ensure that this process is held in a regular, structured, and efficient way benefitting students.

Finally, implementing the partnership model of supervision in Azerbaijani HEIs may contribute to students' scholarly development more than teaching and apprenticeship models. As the partnership model requires more independence from students, utilizing this model may compel them to work on a thesis on their own getting minimal help from their supervisors. As a result, students' inquiry skills may improve through doing research independently and collaborating with their supervisors as peer researchers.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Students

1. Which master's degree program are you studying?
2. Did you know how to begin your master's thesis writing preparation? If yes, how? If not, why?
3. Have you chosen the title of your thesis? If yes, how and when? If not, why?
4. Have you chosen a supervisor? If yes, how and when did you do that? What is the procedure? If not, why?
5. Have you already made an individual plan for your research and given it to your supervisor? If yes, when? If not, why?
6. What help did you expect your supervisor should provide while working with you?
7. How often do you meet with your supervisor?
8. How does your thesis supervisor support you? Be specific, provide a few examples.
9. What strategies does your supervisor use while providing supervision? Be specific and name at least three of them.
10. What are the thesis supervisors' roles? Be specific and name at least three of them.
11. What are the thesis supervisors' responsibilities? Be specific and name at least three of them.
12. To what extent does your supervisor fulfill his/her roles and responsibilities? Be specific and elaborate on this point.
13. How do you feel that your supervisor understands you? Be specific.
14. Do you think that your supervisor sees the positives, not only the negatives in your work? If yes, be specific, and provide a few examples.
15. How does your supervisor help you to improve your work? Be specific and three ways of help you get from your supervisor.

16. What are the main challenges in developing your thesis? Be specific and name at least three of those challenges.

17. When and how does thesis defense usually happen? Be specific and elaborate on the point.

Interview Questions for Supervisors

1. What is your position at X University?
2. Do the master's degree students you supervise know how to begin their master's thesis writing preparation? Be specific.
3. When and how are students required to choose a thesis title?
4. When and how are students required to choose a thesis supervisor?
5. Do you require students to hand in an individual plan for their research? If yes, when do they have to do it? If not, why?
6. What should the master's degree students you supervise expect while working with you?
7. How often do you meet with the master's degree students regarding their master's thesis?
8. As a supervisor, what type of support do you provide for master's degree students?
9. What supervision models and strategies do you use as a thesis supervisor?
10. What roles do you fulfill while providing master's thesis supervision? Name at least three of them.
11. What are your responsibilities as a master's thesis supervisor? Name at least three of them.
12. To what extent do you fulfill your roles and responsibilities as a master's thesis supervisor? Be specific and elaborate on this point.
13. How do you feel that the master's degree students you supervise understand you? Be specific. If yes, be specific, and provide a few examples.
14. Do you think the master's degree students you supervise feel that you see the positives, not only the negatives in their work? If yes, be specific, and provide a few examples.
15. How do the master's degree students you supervise understand how to improve their work? If yes, be specific, and provide a few examples.

16. What are the main challenges for you related to the master's thesis supervision? Name at least three of those challenges.
17. When and how does thesis defense usually happen? Please be specific and describe the process.

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

Research practitioner: Latifa Vahidzada

Consent to take part in research on “Supervising Master’s Thesis in English-Medium Programs in Public Universities in Azerbaijan: Roles, Responsibilities, and Models”.

Participant:

- I am voluntarily participating in this study.
- I have read the information in this consent form
- I have no financial expectations of benefits from participating in this research
- I understand that I am free to ask any questions to the researcher I may have now or later
- I can ask for a copy of the transcript of my interview and make some changes to ensure the confidentiality and trustworthiness of my data
- I understand that I will be asked questions related to the research topic as a participant
- I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview
- I understand that the data I will be providing will be utilized confidentially and my personal information will remain anonymous
- I agree that the researcher will keep an audio recording of the interview and the transcript until the results of the study are confirmed
- I understand that I can freely contact the people involved in this study and request further information about my participation

SUPERVISORS' ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUPERVISION MODELS

If you require further information on the research, please feel free to contact Dr. Yunusova, the Master's Thesis supervisor, via e-mail at vyunusova@ada.edu.az or by phone at (012) 437 32 35 ext (476).

Signature of participant

Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

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