

Knowledge-transfer Practices in Postgraduate Supervision: An Analysis of Selected South African Universities

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Abstract. Postgraduate supervision is a critical aspect in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) especially considering the targets set by government regarding the production of PhD students across all disciplines. The efficacy of tacit knowledge transmission during postgraduate supervision significantly influences student achievement, rendering it a crucial element in higher education outcomes. The success or failure of a PhD thesis is heavily dependent on knowledge-transfer techniques in postgraduate supervision. The study explores the nature of knowledge transfer practices in postgraduate supervision in selected South African universities. The study employed a mixed methods research approach philosophically grounded in pragmatism, gathering survey data through questionnaires and qualitative insights via interviews with PhD holders who are postgraduate supervisors at four selected HEIs in South Africa. The survey instrument demonstrated strong reliability, indicated by a Cronbach alpha of 0.8. Additionally, thematic analysis was conducted utilising NVivo software, version 14. The research findings indicate that South African universities employ coaching and mentoring strategies to facilitate the transfer of supervisory tacit knowledge among experienced, aging, and early-career supervisors albeit some serious challenges. Supervisory knowledge is often implicit and largely held by experienced supervisors and researchers, making it challenging to transfer through formal organisational structures and systems. The study reveals that postgraduate supervisors in South African universities play a crucial role in knowledge transfer practices that enhance current and future supervision capabilities. While these practices—such as informal knowledge sharing, feedback, co-supervision, collaboration, writing retreats, and formal meetings—are largely effective, there remain areas for improvement. The study's empirical exposure of knowledge-transfer processes in postgraduate supervision at a few South African universities makes it unique as it brings into the limelight unique cases relating to knowledge-transfer practices in postgraduate supervision in selected South African higher education institutions.

Keywords: Knowledge transfer practices, Postgraduate supervision, South Africa, Higher education institutions

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are vital for generating knowledge and producing graduates with advanced research degrees necessary for a competitive knowledge-based economy. Public HEIs in both developing and developed economies are encouraged to produce more graduates with advanced research degrees to tackle the complex societal issues characteristic of the knowledge-based economy. This global trend requires improved capacity development via tacit knowledge transfer practices in postgraduate education and supervision to adequately address such demands. Global research indicates significant supervisory capacity issues, primarily due to limited knowledge flows and retention strategies (Chugh 2017). Current research indicates that HEIs function primarily as systems for knowledge creation and sharing (Ngulube 2021). Nevertheless, the existing literature on knowledge management has largely overlooked the practices of transferring tacit knowledge specifically in the context of postgraduate supervision even though HEIs are facing some serious issues in sharing tacit knowledge in postgraduate supervision (Mpungose et al. 2025; Alves and Pinheiro, 2022). In South African HEIs, challenges are intensified by the mobility of individuals with doctoral degrees and a dwindling number of older postgraduate research supervisors (Makoni and Makoni 2022; Ngulube 2021). This situation affects the supervisors' capacity to effectively mentor graduate candidates required for positioning the country in the global knowledge-based competition. Literature reviews indicate that many South African HEIs face significant risks related to the potential loss of tacit knowledge transfer in postgraduate education and supervision (Mpungose et al. 2026). Knowledge related to postgraduate supervision is predominantly tacit and lacks formal documentation, which poses risks for Higher Education Institutions when supervisors exit or retire. Due to the rising mobility of research supervisors, it is imperative that HEIs adopt and invest in practices that facilitate the sharing and retention of implicit supervisory knowledge. Phaladi and Mamorobela (2026) argue that practices enabling the sharing of tacit knowledge play a vital role in enhancing both the absorptive and retentive capacities of organisations. In organisational settings, this type of practice fosters knowledge acquisition and retention.

This paper explores the research questions regarding the programmes or strategies employed by HEIs in South Africa to support tacit knowledge transfer among postgraduate supervisors, such as mentoring, training, and

coaching. It also examines the effectiveness of these programmes in enhancing supervision capacity, especially for early-career supervisors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Transfer in South African Higher Education

Knowledge transfer is a fundamental process within knowledge management in South African higher education, where it plays a critical role in capturing and sharing knowledge to mitigate the risk of loss when staff including academics exit institutions (Durst and Zieba 2020). It involves the exchange of information, skills, expertise, and experience among individuals, enabling universities to retain valuable knowledge and apply it to teaching, learning, research, and community engagement (Lartey *et al.* 2022). Within this context, knowledge transfer is essential for sustaining institutional memory and strengthening academic capacity, particularly in a system undergoing transformation and skills development (Khumalo and Du Plessis 2023).

In South African universities, knowledge transfer involves both tacit and explicit knowledge. Mentorship, Communities of Practice (CoPs), and collaborative research are the best methods for sharing tacit knowledge between academics and researchers. These informal and relational approaches are especially important in addressing capacity gaps and developing emerging scholars. In contrast, explicit knowledge is codified and disseminated through formal channels such as publications, institutional repositories, policy documents, and structured training programmes (Chigada and Ngulube 2016; Makhubela and Ngoepe 2018). The transfer of tacit knowledge is particularly critical in the South African higher education sector, where expertise is often concentrated among experienced academics. Ensuring that this knowledge is shared and embedded across institutions requires deliberate efforts to identify knowledge holders and create enabling environments for knowledge exchange (Chugh 2017). This is especially important given ongoing challenges such as staff turnover, retirement, and deficit in supervisory expertise. Effective knowledge transfer therefore supports the preservation of institutional knowledge, enhances research productivity, and contributes to the broader transformation and sustainability of the higher education system (Santos, Carvalho and Martins 2024; AlQhtani 2025).

2.2 Knowledge Transfer Practices in Postgraduate Supervision

HEIs use knowledge transfer to shape how expertise is shared, developed, and sustained. Supervisory knowledge is sticky, making it difficult for experienced supervisors to share with younger colleagues (Mpungose *et al.* 2026). As a result, supervisors and students increasingly collaborate and share knowledge. Co-supervision, for instance, facilitates the deliberate exchange of expertise among experienced and early-career supervisors, increasing supervisory capacity and ensuring institutional knowledge continuity. Similarly, cohort and group supervision models create CoPs that encourage collective engagement, shared learning, and the development of new insights (Bitzer 2022; Jacobs and Frick 2024). These approaches promote more inclusive participation, reduce hierarchical barriers, and support synergistic learning among supervisors (Condy *et al.* 2024). Such models are particularly relevant in the South African higher education context, where institutions face increasing postgraduate enrolments amid a deficit of experienced supervisors (Cekiso *et al.* 2019). By distributing expertise and fostering collaborative learning environments, these supervision practices contribute to institutional capacity building and enhanced support for postgraduate students. In this regard, structured initiatives such as the Postgraduate Research Support Programme (PRSP) play an important role. Through workshops, writing retreats, and research hubs, these programmes provide targeted support across key stages of the research workflows, including proposal development, methodology, data analysis, and thesis writing. This integrated approach enhances both student success and supervisory practices while aligning with national goals to improve postgraduate throughput and retention (Emekako, Shemfe and Merisi 2025). Collaborative supervision also addresses limitations of traditional one-on-one models, particularly student isolation and limited exposure to diverse perspectives. By engaging in group-based learning environments, early-career supervisors' benefit from peer interaction and broader academic support (McKenna and van Schalkwyk 2024). However, challenges may arise when multiple supervisors provide differing feedback, potentially leading to confusion. To address this, clear role definition, effective coordination, and agreed milestones are essential, alongside institutional investment in resources and programme development.

The concept of knowledge arbitrage further strengthens understanding of knowledge transfer in postgraduate supervision. It refers to the intentional movement of expertise from areas of surplus to areas of need, enabling knowledge to be applied in new contexts to enhance innovation and performance (Sithipolvanichgul *et al.* 2024).

In supervision, this is reflected in the sharing of expertise between senior and junior academics, as well as with postgraduate students, thereby improving mentoring practices and research quality.

Overall, effective knowledge transfer practices in postgraduate supervision are essential for strengthening postgraduate research supervisory capacity, enhancing research outputs, and ensuring institutional sustainability. Collaborative models can provide substantial advantages, but their effectiveness hinges on organised implementation, nurturing institutional cultures, and intentional strategies that foster trust, coordination, and ongoing knowledge exchange (Mazorodze and Buckley 2020; Luyimbazi and Habinka 2025; Mpungose *et al.* 2025; Mpungose, Phaladi and Chisita 2026).

3. Methodology

The study explored the nature of knowledge transfer practices in postgraduate supervision in four selected South African universities located in the KwaZulu Natal province. The pragmatic paradigm was selected to underpin Mixed Methods Research (MMR) thus enabling researchers to use diverse methods to reveal the dynamics of knowledge transfer during postgraduate supervision. A combination of sequential design and mixed methods provide rigorous, pragmatic, and justice-oriented explanations of postgraduate supervision. MMR was deemed pertinent for addressing the research problem, critical questions, and goals. By blending quantitative and qualitative methodologies, MMR enabled the researchers to gain a more thorough knowledge of the complicated phenomena pertaining supervisory knowledge transfer and to mitigate related tacit knowledge risks (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). With regards to the sampling techniques during the quantitative phase of the study, probability sampling was used in the form of random sample, giving every possible responder an equal chance of taking the online survey. The researchers mapped out the study population, assigned identities (IDs), randomly selected participants and responded to them with the survey link, and transparently documented the process using the online survey. In contrast, the qualitative phase employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. In the first quantitative component, 285 randomly chosen postgraduate supervisors out of a population of 1208 postgraduate supervisors received online survey questions via email. This involved selecting supervisors who could contribute rich, diverse, and relevant perspectives to the topic.

The survey instrument demonstrated strong reliability, indicated by a Cronbach alpha of 0.8. In the second phase, qualitative data were collected through interviews with purposively selected 26 postgraduate supervisors. The data were subsequently analysed using thematic analysis with NVivo software, version 14. To enhance the validity of the research instrument, pre-testing was conducted prior to data collection. Inferential statistics, such as correlation, regression analysis, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), were employed to investigate variable relationships and derive conclusions from the quantitative data.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Quantitative Research Results

This section presents the survey results regarding the various knowledge transfer strategies aimed at tackling the challenges related to postgraduate supervision capacity in HEIs in South Africa, illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2.

The study revealed that 3.1% of respondents strongly disagreed, 19.9% disagreed, 20.5% were neutral, 46.6% agreed, and 9.9% strongly agreed regarding the university's use of coaching programmes for knowledge transfer. Overall, it concludes that coaching programmes are utilised by the university for this purpose.

Approximately 60.9% of respondents agreed that their universities employed mentoring programmes to develop and share knowledge with early-career supervisors. Conversely, 3.7% strongly disagreed, 13% disagreed, 14.3% were neutral, and 8.1% strongly agreed with this statement. Universities implemented mentoring programmes to facilitate the development and sharing of knowledge among early-career supervisors. In the study, it is noted that postgraduate supervisors implemented mentoring programmes as a strategy to cultivate and share their supervisory tacit knowledge with early-career supervisors.

67.1% of respondents agreed, and 18% strongly agreed that their universities offered training and development opportunities to enhance postgraduate supervision knowledge and skills. Conversely, 6.8% disagreed, 0.6% strongly disagreed, and 7.5% were neutral on this aspect. This data suggests that universities offer training and development opportunities that enhance the knowledge and skills of postgraduate supervision.

Results revealed that 5% of respondents strongly disagreed, 31.7% disagreed, 19.9% were neutral, 35.5% agreed, and 8.1% strongly agreed that their universities had programmes for experienced supervisors to transfer

knowledge to early-career academics. Given the results, it remains unclear if universities had programmes for experienced supervisors to share knowledge with new academics.

In a survey regarding succession planning for employee development aimed at internal recruitment, the responses were as follows: 6.8% of respondents strongly agreed that their universities had such a program, while 37.9% disagreed. Additionally, 23.6% of participants neither agreed nor disagreed, 26.1% agreed, and 5.6% strongly agreed. A careful analysis indicates that universities lack a succession plan programme focused on employee development for internal recruitment.

The results indicated that 5.6% strongly disagreed, 27.3% disagreed, 16.1% were neutral, 43.5% agreed, and 7.5% strongly agreed that their universities encouraged postgraduate supervisors to participate in CoPs. Based on the results, this study concluded that South African universities actively promote the involvement of postgraduate supervisors in CoPs.

The study found that 3.7% of respondents strongly disagreed and 28% disagreed that current knowledge transfer strategies were effective for developing postgraduate supervision capacity. Meanwhile, 23.6% were neutral, 40.4% agreed, and 4.3% strongly agreed on the effectiveness of these strategies.

Table 1: Knowledge transfer strategies in South African universities

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
Coaching programme	5(3,1%)	32(19,9%)	33(20,5%)	75(46,6%) ¹	16(9,9%)
Mentoring programme	6(3,7%)	21(13,0%)	23(14,3%)	98(60,9%)	3(8,1%)
Training and development	1(0,6%)	11(6,8%)	12(7,5%)	108(67,1%)	29(18,0%)
Experienced supervisors	8(5,0%)	51(31,7%)	32(19,9%)	57(35,4%)	13(8,1%)
Succession plan	11(6,8%)	61(37,9%)	38(23,6%)	42(26,1%)	9(5,6%)
Communities of practice	9(5,6%)	44(27,3%)	26(16,1%)	70(43,5%)	12(7,5%)
Develop current and future postgraduate supervision capacity	6(3,7%)	45(28,0%)	28(23,6%)	65(40,4%)	7(4,3%)

4.2 Results (Correlation Coefficients)

Table 2 below presents the results of correlation coefficients based on the data presented in the previous section. The study identified a strong positive correlation between knowledge transfer and coaching programmes ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that South African universities utilise such programmes to facilitate knowledge transmission. Additionally, a strong positive intercorrelation was observed between knowledge transfer and mentoring programmes ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting these programmes are employed to foster knowledge development and sharing among early-career supervisors. Conversely, a weak positive relationship was established between knowledge transfer and training and development programmes ($r = 0.444$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that while such opportunities do contribute to improving postgraduate supervision skills, their impact is less robust. Furthermore, a weak positive correlation (but the relationship is inconsistent and unreliable) was found between knowledge transfer and experienced supervisors ($r = 0.365$, $p < 0.01$), implying that universities have initiatives in place for experienced supervisors to convey knowledge to developing academics, albeit some serious issues.

Moreover, the study found a significant positive relationship between knowledge transfer and succession planning in South African universities ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that these institutions have implemented succession plan programmes focused on employee development for internal recruitment. Additionally, there was a robust positive correlation between knowledge transfer and communities of practice ($r = 0.644$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that universities actively promoted the involvement of postgraduate supervisors in such communities. Lastly, the analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between knowledge transfer and the enhancement of postgraduate supervision capacity ($r = 0.685$, $p < 0.01$), leading to the conclusion that the current knowledge transfer strategies are effective in fostering the development of existing and future postgraduate supervision capabilities.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients of knowledge transfer strategies in postgraduate supervision

Variables	r/p	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Knowledge transfer strategies	<i>r</i>	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coaching programme	<i>R</i> <i>P</i>	0.721** 0.000	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mentoring programme	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.758** 0.000	0.645** 0.000	1.000	-	-	-	-	-
Training and development	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.566** 0.000	0.380** 0.000	0.444** 0.000	1.000	-	-	-	-
Experienced supervisors	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.827** 0.000	0.455** 0.000	0.550** 0.000	0.365** 0.000	1.000	-	-	-
Succession plan	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.782** 0.000	0.414** 0.000	0.430** 0.000	0.315** 0.000	0.623** 0.000	1.000	-	-
Communities of practice	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.797** 0.000	0.473** 0.000	0.415** 0.000	0.348** 0.000	0.601** 0.000	0.644** 0.000	1.000	-
Develop current and future postgraduate supervision capacity	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	0.857** 0.000	0.483** 0.000	0.599** 0.000	0.337** 0.000	0.746** 0.000	0.663** 0.000	0.685** 0.000	1.000

4.3 Qualitative Research Results

This section presents qualitative data results from interviews with postgraduate supervisors, focusing on knowledge transfer practices in South African universities. Based on interviews, the study identified ten main themes of knowledge transfer practices in South African Higher Education Institutions: informal knowledge sharing, informal feedback, supervision techniques, co-supervision, collaboration, writing retreats, discussion topics, continuous support, cohort supervision, and formal meetings. Qualitative insights show quantitative trends, identify convergences and divergences, and present a coherent narrative that illustrates how MMR guarantees more convincing and practical results.

4.3.1 Informal knowledge sharing

A significant number of participants indicated that informal knowledge sharing among supervisors is common and advantageous. Participants engage in discussions about theoretical frameworks, research problems, and methodologies to assist one another in overcoming challenges. They also frequently participate in informal knowledge sharing during meetings with colleagues involved in postgraduate supervision. One participant sums up their views as follows:

“Informal knowledge sharing among supervisors is frequent and beneficial. They often discuss theoretical frameworks, research problems, and methodologies to help each other navigate challenges” (P1 UoT1: 2025).

Another participant also concurred with this view, indicating:

“Knowledge transfer among supervisors primarily occurs through daily informal interactions with colleagues within the same department, rather than through structured programmes” (P7, UoT2: 2025).

4.3.2 Informal feedback

From the interviews conducted in the study, it was revealed that informal feedback plays a crucial role in facilitating knowledge sharing within South African HEIs. Participants noted that following presentations at retreats, they received constructive feedback from colleagues, which enriched their understanding of the literature review. Such interactions contribute positively to the knowledge enhancement of both students and supervisors.

4.3.3 Supervision techniques

The findings indicated that supervision techniques play a vital role in knowledge sharing practices within South African HEIs. Participants noted that the primary focus of the knowledge shared revolves around general supervision practices, including the management of student relationships and expectations, rather than focusing on technical subject matter. The emphasis is particularly on assisting new academics in acclimating to their roles.

One supervisor expressed his view on the research question as follows:

“The knowledge shared is primarily about general supervision practices, such as managing student relationships and expectations, rather than technical subject matter, with an emphasis on helping new academics navigate their roles” (P3, TU1: 2025).

4.3.4 Co-supervision

The participants noted that the shared knowledge largely revolves around general supervision practices, focusing on managing student relationships and expectations. There is a significant emphasis on assisting new academics as they navigate their roles, rather than delving into technical subject matter.

4.3.5 Collaboration

Research collaboration facilitates the cross-border exchange of ideas and information, contributing to the development of new knowledge. The study's results confirm that collaboration is essential for the transfer of knowledge within South African HEIs as summarised by one supervisor below.

“To achieve professional growth, it is essential to collaborate with others. Supervising or publishing alone is often insufficient, as many publishers now encourage collaborative work. Some journals may even reject manuscripts submitted by a sole author, as they increasingly value multiple perspectives in knowledge sharing” (P4, TU1: 2025).

4.3.6 Writing retreats

This study found that writing retreats play a significant role in knowledge transfer practices, with most postgraduate supervisors agreeing on their effectiveness for transferring tacit knowledge within HEIs. One postgraduate supervisor emphasised the significance of knowledge-sharing practices via writing retreat programmes. They noted their recent experience at a university-organised retreat that aimed to enhance knowledge transfer and collaboration through research publications and funding.

I think an important knowledge-sharing practice is through writing retreat programmes, where people share knowledge and best practices. As I speak, I have just returned from a writing retreat organised by my university. The brain behind this programme is to foster an environment for knowledge transfer and collaboration through research publication and funding” (P2, UoT1: 2025).

4.3.7 Common discussion topics

The study indicates that participants view common discussion topics as vital for knowledge transfer, focusing on key areas such as literature review, research methodology, research problem formulation, and theoretical framework.

4.3.8 Continuous support

The study confirms that ongoing supervisor support enhances knowledge transfer among the experience and early-career supervisors in HEIs. Participants emphasised that this support is a continuous process, adapting to the evolving challenges faced by new academics in postgraduate supervision.

4.3.9 Cohort-supervision

The results highlight cohort supervision as a vital knowledge-sharing practice in South African universities, emphasising that its main objective is to enhance the quality of supervision rather than solely increase capacity. Additionally, it underscores the significance of postgraduate research supervision, including cohort supervision, for the successful completion of postgraduate programmes. These views were expressed as follows:

“We supervise students at the same time, based on the cohort model. So, this particular module is actually a model or method of supervision that allows you to critique other students' work. Through this process, knowledge can be transferred” (P20, TU1: 2025).

4.3.10 Formal meetings

The study findings indicate that supervisors in South African HEIs transfer knowledge primarily through formal meetings, enabling students to ask questions and clarify uncertainties.

The study indicated that postgraduate supervisors in South African public HEIs often transfer tacit knowledge of supervisory practices via formal meetings. Participants emphasised the importance of these meetings, stating they provide students the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity on unclear topics, which is a common practice in many universities.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data suggested mixed opinions regarding universities' use of coaching programmes for knowledge transfer. The study finds that coaching programmes are used by South African universities for supervisory and tacit knowledge transfer, but their effectiveness is questionable due to their informal nature. However, some form of formal structure appears to be inherent in supervisory models, particularly in cohort supervision models. The study emphasises that cohort supervision is a significant knowledge-sharing practice in South African universities, with its main aim of enhancing supervision quality rather than just increasing capacity (Naidoo *et al.* 2023). Cohort or team supervision enhances postgraduate research and capacity by incorporating various supervisors' expertise and perspectives (Nxumalo, *et al.* 2025).

Regarding mentoring programmes, the findings also provided empirical confirmation that South African universities employ mentoring programmes to enhance the development and exchange of knowledge among early-career supervisors, with experienced postgraduate supervisors using these initiatives to share tacit supervisory knowledge. However, such programmes seem informal, lacking formal contracting for experienced postgraduate supervisors to ensure effective knowledge transfer through mentoring initiatives. These initiatives need to be formalised through cohort supervision which is beneficial in programmes involving experienced and early-career supervisors, advanced higher degrees students engaged in related subjects, facilitating peer mentoring and providing support among participants (Robertson 2017).

The research findings highlighted the prevalence and advantages of informal knowledge sharing among supervisors as evidenced by the frequent discussions of theoretical frameworks, research problems, and methodologies to support one another in overcoming challenges. Participants noted that this informal supervisory knowledge sharing often happens during supervision meetings, with majority agreeing that such interactions facilitate knowledge transfer, exemplified by supervisors refining students' research topics. The empirical evidence emphasised that these interactions occur mainly through personal relationships rather than formal arrangements. There is a dire need to formalise some of these practices. As a result of the findings, existing research disclosed that knowledge transfer is primarily conducted through daily informal exchanges among supervisors within the same department and not across business units or departments of universities (Roth 2022). HEIs should focus on and invest in informal knowledge-sharing practices, as much supervisory knowledge is implicit. These interventions can significantly reduce or unlock knowledge stickiness inherent in postgraduate supervision, thereby improving knowledge transfer, absorption, and protection capacities.

The study suggests that universities offer training and development opportunities that enhance the knowledge and skills of postgraduate supervision. Such capacity development opportunities will certainly enhance absorptive and retentive capacities of supervisory practices (Phaladi and Mamorobela 2026; Mpungose *et al.* 2026). The findings also indicate that significant number of universities offer capacity building programmes for experienced supervisors to transfer knowledge to early-career supervisors. Nonetheless, given the results, it remains unclear if universities had strategies for experienced supervisors to share their supervisory tacit knowledge with new supervisors or recent recruits.

In a survey question on succession planning for employee development and internal recruitment for postgraduate supervision. Overall, the analysis suggests that universities lack a succession planning programmes for employee development related to internal recruitment. This indicates that universities lack a deliberate approach to enhancing supervisory capacity for effective internal recruitment and sharing of supervisory experience, skills, and practices. This was also confirmed by the results of qualitative component of the study which indicate that the sharing of such supervisory knowledge and related practices remains largely informal. Furthermore, the research results indicate that South African universities have some strategies for experienced supervisors to share knowledge with early-career academics, but significant issues arise primarily from the absence of formalised knowledge management systems. The findings also suggest that the selected universities

in the study actively promoted the involvement of postgraduate supervisors in CoPs albeit not formalised through dedicated structures and support in some cases.

The outcomes of the study point to the fact that postgraduate supervisors in HEIs of South Africa are actively involved in knowledge transfer practices that fosters the development of existing and future postgraduate supervision capabilities. Such practices seem too effective to the larger extent albeit areas for further improvements. These practices include informal knowledge sharing, informal feedback, supervision techniques, co-supervision, collaboration, writing retreats, discussion topics, continuous support, cohort supervision, and formal meetings. The findings of this study will enhance the existing body of knowledge regarding tacit knowledge-sharing practices among postgraduate supervisors. It explores the individual, structural, and institutional factors that influence these practices.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research Studies

Utilising South African universities as a case study, this study sought to examine knowledge transfer practices in postgraduate supervision at South African HEIs, aiming to influence discourse, policies, research, theories, and practices in knowledge management and supervision. The study employed a mixed-method explanatory sequential design and was carried out in a selected four public universities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, from a total of 26 national universities. The findings are plausible to generalise to other HEIs in similar market industries. In future studies, a larger sample size, a wider variety of universities, and longitudinal approaches should be used to better understand tacit knowledge transfer strategies among postgraduates and early-career supervisors.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research findings indicate that South African universities employ coaching and mentoring strategies to facilitate the transfer of supervisory tacit knowledge among experienced, aging, and early-career supervisors albeit some serious challenges. Supervisory knowledge is naturally implicit or tacit and largely embedded in the minds of experienced and ageing supervisors and researchers. This type of knowledge is sticky and difficult to transfer through formal organisational systems and structures. To address this problem, HEIs should incentivise expert and ageing supervisors through performance systems to share their essential knowledge, competencies and skills with early-career supervisors. The study concludes that postgraduate supervisors in South African HEIs play a crucial role in knowledge transfer practices that enhance current and future supervision capabilities. While these practices, such as informal knowledge sharing, feedback, co-supervision, collaboration, writing retreats, and formal meetings are largely effective, there remain areas for improvement. HEIs should focus on practices that enable the sharing of supervisory tacit knowledge to enhance their ability to absorb and retain information, thereby fostering an environment conducive to knowledge acquisition and retention. South African universities appear to lack succession planning strategies for employee development in internal recruitment, indicating an inadequate approach to enhancing supervisory capacity. This conclusion is supported by numerical and narrative study results, which highlight that the sharing of supervisory knowledge and practices occurs mainly in informal settings. Researchers of the current study underscore the need for HEIs to focus on developing knowledge-friendly policies. They specifically highlight the importance of managing succession and post-retirement contracts to support seasoned postgraduate supervisors and professors who are approaching retirement. This approach aims to motivate these experienced individuals to share their valuable insights and knowledge with early-career supervisors.

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