

# Postgraduate Supervision and Support in Private Universities in Gauteng, South Africa: Challenges and Innovations

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**Abstract:** In recent years, the landscape of higher education in South Africa has undergone significant transformation, with private universities playing an increasingly vital role. The purpose of this paper is to explore the postgraduate supervision, teaching, and support systems within these private institutions, addressing the unique challenges and innovative strategies in private institutions postgraduate supervision to enhance educational outcomes. This research is particularly relevant for academics, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the development of postgraduate education within private higher education institutions. It underscores the potential of private universities to innovate and adapt in response to the challenges of contemporary higher education, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge and practice in the field. Despite their smaller scale and resource constraints compared to public universities, private universities in South Africa have developed distinct approaches to postgraduate education that prioritise individualised attention, flexible learning environments, and industry-aligned curricula. This study employs a comprehensive research methodology, including a review of institutional documents, such as policy manuals, curriculum guides, assessment rubrics, and support service records, from selected institutions within Gauteng. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including postgraduate students, supervisors, faculty members, and university administrators. The results of this research are expected to help private universities to benchmark their practices against identified best practices and standards. The research highlights the importance of inclusive teaching and learning practices, shedding light on effective methods to accommodate diverse student backgrounds and learning styles.

**Keywords:** Postgraduate supervision, Teaching practices, Student support systems, Private universities, Educational quality, Inclusive teaching

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## 1. Introduction

Master's and doctorate degrees are fundamental to South Africa's National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001). University instructors supervise postgraduate students, and student throughput is a productivity indicator. Private universities have become important actors in South African higher education in recent years. Despite their smaller size and fewer resources than public universities, private schools have grown in higher education, notably postgraduate studies. The supervisory process, however difficult to describe and multidimensional, is comparable to research. According to (Okeke-Uzodike, 2023), supervision is a formal process in which a supervisor helps a supervisee or candidate acquire competent and professional conduct. Few studies have been conducted on postgraduate supervision in private institutions. This study aims to bridge that gap by focusing on South African private institutions. The study is important because it addresses the challenges private universities in Gauteng, South Africa, confront in providing competitive postgraduate education. Private universities have successfully prioritised customised attention and aid for postgraduate students despite several challenges. The study examined Gauteng private colleges and universities' postgraduate supervision and assistance procedures. The study objectives were focused on the challenges and innovations in private university postgraduate supervision in Gauteng. The following sections cover the literature review and model underpinning this study; the research methodology is also given, and the findings are presented under clear themes and codes.

## 2. Background and literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Understanding the need for effective supervision is crucial for ensuring the success of postgraduate students. However, the current system sometimes does not have a clear professional structure for overseeing postgraduate students in university employment roles, which might hinder the quality of support provided (Costa, 2019; Costa, 2020). The challenges pertaining to postgraduate supervision in South Africa are not exclusive to any specific institution, but rather prevalent at institutions throughout the country (Namakula, 2024; Hansraj & Rampersad, 2022).

## **2.2 Kadusian Model of Postgraduate supervision**

Developed by Dr Amina Kadusi, this model is a student-centric strategy that caters to the unique needs and challenges of postgraduate students.

### *2.2.1 Key Components of the Kadusian Model*

#### *Personalised Mentorship*

Individualised Supervision Plans (ISPs) entail that each student is assigned a supervisor who collaborates with the student to create an ISP. It is tailored to the student's specific needs and research interests. Supervisors and students meet regularly (e.g., bi-weekly or monthly) to discuss progress, address challenges, and provide feedback. These meetings ensure continuous support and guidance.

#### *Structured Progress Tracking*

The model incorporates a system for tracking key milestones in the student's research journey, such as literature review completion, proposal submission, data collection, analysis, and thesis writing. Students are required to submit regular progress reports (e.g., quarterly) that outline their achievements, challenges, and plans for the next period. These reports help supervisors monitor progress and provide timely interventions.

#### *Collaborative Learning Environment*

Students are grouped into research clusters based on their research themes or disciplines. These clusters foster peer support, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. Regular workshops and seminars are organised to enhance research skills, provide updates on the latest developments in the field, and offer opportunities for students to present their work and receive feedback.

#### *Professional Development*

The model includes training sessions on essential skills such as academic writing, presentation skills, research methodologies, data analysis, and project management. Supervisors provide guidance on career planning, including advice on publishing, networking, attending conferences, and applying for academic or industry positions.

### *2.2.2 Implication*

#### *Initial Assessment*

At the start of the program, supervisors conduct a comprehensive assessment of each student's research proposal, skills, and career goals. This assessment informs the development of the ISP.

#### *Development of Individualized Supervision Plans*

Supervisors and students collaboratively develop ISPs that detail the research objectives, timelines, and milestones. The ISP is a living document that is updated regularly to reflect the student's progress and any changes in research direction.

#### *Regular Monitoring and Feedback*

Supervisors monitor student progress using milestone tracking and progress reports. Regular feedback is provided during one-on-one meetings and through written comments on progress reports.

#### *Facilitation of Collaborative Learning*

Research clusters and collaborative activities are established early in the program. Supervisors encourage active participation in these groups and organise workshops and seminars relevant to the students' research areas.

#### *Continuous Professional Development*

Professional development activities are integrated throughout the postgraduate program. Supervisors identify opportunities for skills training and career development and encourage students to participate in relevant activities.

### *2.2.3 Benefits of the Kadusian Model*

The personalised and structured approach ensures that students receive continuous support tailored to their individual needs, leading to higher satisfaction and reduced attrition rates. Regular feedback and milestone tracking help maintain high standards of research quality and ensure the timely completion of research projects.

Implementing the Kadusian model requires significant resources, including time, trained supervisors, and administrative support. Institutions need to ensure they have the necessary infrastructure and personnel.

### **2.3 Availability of postgraduate assistance and facilities**

The achievement of postgraduate research students, irrespective of the learning method, depends on the cooperation between students and supervisors, as well as the existence of strong support networks inside universities (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2018). According to Saidi (2024), there are several important variables that must be addressed to increase access to and success in postgraduate education. These factors include student funding, supervisory capability, and support services. In addition, initiatives by the Department of Higher Education and Training seek to enhance research productivity, specifically among disadvantaged postgraduates and distance learners (Matatiele, 2024). Postgraduate supervisors in South Africa frequently get research incentives as specified in the South African Research Funding Framework of 2003 (Ngulube, 2021). Many students lack the research methodologies and expertise necessary to succeed in postgraduate (Lee, 2010). Without considerable skill improvement and sufficient support, they might not be able to pull through.

### **2.4 Availability of expert postgraduate supervisors**

According to Kiani and Jumani (2010), supervision entails not only helping students develop their research skills but also helping them build their self-esteem and providing guidance so they can become independent researchers with the capacity for conceptualisation and critical thought. However, there are obstacles that need to be addressed, such as supervisors lacking expertise and being overwhelmed with responsibilities, inadequate preparation for research, and insufficient financial assistance for postgraduate students (Cobbing et al., 2017). These obstacles can impede the academic advancement and achievement of graduate students, especially in universities with a history of disadvantage. The C.O.S.T.A. Postgraduate Research Coaching Model provides an alternative method to conventional supervision, emphasising rigour, psychology, and coaching to improve the postgraduate research process (Costa, 2019; Costa, 2020). Coaching models can offer further help and direction to students that go beyond conventional supervision approaches. The recruitment tactics for postgraduate students in South Africa, which involve forming foreign alliances to boost the enrolment of PhD students, have a substantial impact on the postgraduate education environment (Konyana, 2023).

### **2.5 Private institutions in Gauteng, South Africa**

South Africa provides many private and independent higher education institutions for different needs and specialities. These institutions are categorised by ownership, funding, and programmes.

#### *2.5.1 For-profit private universities*

Private universities are owned by individuals or corporations and operate for profit. They provide many undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional programmes. Monash South Africa, currently part of IIE's Varsity College, and Pearson Institute of Higher Education are examples.

#### *2.5.2 Non-Profit Private Universities and faith-based*

Non-profit private universities aim to be non-profit. Any excess revenue goes to improving teaching, infrastructure, and student services at these colleges. They often get major charity support and have religious or non-profit associations. South African schools include St. Augustine College and Cornerstone Institute. Educational institutions affiliated with religious groups impart religious values and teachings. These colleges offer programmes in theology, religious studies, and the liberal arts, among other things. Seventh-day Adventist Helderberg College and Islamic Regent Business School are examples.

#### *2.5.3 Specialised Institutions*

These institutions specialise in business, technology, and the arts. They offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees known for their expertise. AFDA focuses on film, TV, and performance, while the Da Vinci Institute develops management and leadership skills.

#### *2.5.4 Distance-learning and TVETs*

Distance education providers offer online and distance learning programmes. They provide flexible learning choices for people with employment, regional, or personal constraints. Examples include MANCOSA (Management College of Southern Africa) and UNISA (University of South Africa), which is publicly sponsored and offers many remote learning programmes. Private TVET colleges emphasise practical skills and job readiness. Students receive certifications to prepare for specific careers. They are crucial in addressing skills gaps in various economic areas. Such schools include Boston City Campus and Business College.

### **2.5.5 International Branch Campuses and Professional Institutions**

International universities have branch campuses in South Africa that provide curricula identical to those abroad. Examples include Henley Business School South Africa, a subsidiary of Reading University in the UK, and Monash South Africa, originally affiliated with Monash University in Australia. Professional institutes prioritise education and training in certain professions, often with industry associations providing professional certification programmes. Accounting, finance, and legal use them frequently. SAICA and ICSA are notable instances.

### **2.6 Accreditation, Autonomy, of private colleges and universities in South Africa**

The Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) regulates private colleges and universities in South Africa to guarantee high standards and student safety. DHET, CHE, and SAQA oversee higher education in South Africa. Creating a private company takes several crucial actions. Registering with the DHET is mandatory for private universities. Governance, financial stability, academic excellence, and infrastructure are required to register. Document academic curricula, governance structures, budget estimates, and quality assurance (Act 101 of 1997). The DHET inspects institutions rigorously for compliance. Private institutions can choose and hire staff according to their needs. This lets them invite industry leaders and experts with real experience and great ideas to offer in the classroom. They can set their own job terms, performance evaluation methods, and professional development programs, creating a dynamic and adaptive academic environment.

## **3. Methodology**

The study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach utilising document analysis and semi-structured interviews underpinned by an exploratory research design in order to unpack unknown challenges and innovations of postgraduate supervision (Saunders et al., 2019; Sekerani & Bourgie, 2019). The study population included all postgraduate students, supervisors, faculty research committee members, and university administrators from the five selected institutions. The study also used policy manuals, postgraduate supervision and assessment manuals, and support service records. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, with each institution contributing four study participants. Twenty representatives from the selected private institutions were interviewed semi-structured. Conducting semi-structured interviews with postgraduate students, supervisors, faculty research committee members and university administrators in five selected institutions helped provide qualitative information on the actual experiences and viewpoints of the individuals involved. Data analysis followed the major research issues indicated in the topic. It assumed a thematic approach based on the findings on challenges and innovations in private institutions' postgraduate supervision. The study also used content analysis to read and analyse institutional procedures by evaluating policy manuals, postgraduate supervision and assessment manuals, and support service records to provide a detailed analysis.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1 Data presentation from document analysis on postgraduate programmes in private institutions**

Data presentation for this study assumes a thematic approach driven by the major findings that emerged from the study.

#### **4.1.1 Structure of postgraduate studies in private institutions in Gauteng, South Africa**

The postgraduate courses in private universities in Gauteng are structured to provide flexibility, personalised attention, and alignment with industry requirements. These establishments generally provide a variety of advanced academic programmes, such as Honours degrees, Master's degrees, and Doctoral degrees.

### **4.2 Types of Postgraduate Programmes**

#### **4.2.1 Honours and Masters**

Postgraduate honours degrees are first-level. The curriculum takes one year for full-time students and two for part-time students. Honours courses typically entail coursework and research, depending on the university and topic. Research normally incorporates a thesis or research project, whereas education includes fields-specific modules. Short honours projects are typical. These programs strengthen students' field expertise and prepare them for master's or professional study. Students conduct real research in the master's program. Full-time study takes 1–2 years, part-time 2–3 years. Most master's degrees are research-based, although some are coursework-based or a blend. Curriculum-based degrees comprise modules and a mini-project or dissertation. An evidence-based master's emphasises a significant thesis or research project under supervision. Research and academic courses are expected in a combined master's. Students learn specific information and research abilities in such programs for professional or doctorate work.

#### 4.2.2 PhDs and professional doctorates

Private universities' highest postgraduate research-based degree. It usually lasts 3–5 years. Doctoral degree programmes emphasise research and require students to conduct original research in their subject. Coursework may be required for some professional doctorates. Programmes like an MBA leading to a Doctor of Business Administration exist since most private schools focus on industry-related certifications, and most doctorate degrees are in administration or professional knowledge. These programmes develop advanced research, critical thinking, and field expertise. Graduates are prepared for academic, research, and high-level professional careers.

#### 4.2.3 Postgraduate Components and Evaluation

This study found that most postgraduate courses need previous research modules for research postgraduate students. These courses deliver significant information on the student's subject and are often created with industry experts to ensure relevancy and usefulness. Recent research, methodologies, and practices are presented to postgraduates in seminars where industry leaders and academics make presentations. After research methodologies pre-research programs, postgraduate students must create a research proposal. Postgraduate students must propose their topic, method, and results. Postgraduate evaluations may involve tests, tasks, projects, and presentations, depending on the degree. The study concluded that internal and external examiners assess theses and dissertations for originality, rigour, and contribution. Most internal examiners evaluate honours and first-level postgraduate degrees. Approved examiners review masters and PhD theses. External examiners are private or part-time public academics. The student can defend their research in viva voce.

### 4.3 Data presentation from semi-structured interviews

**Table 1** Semi-structured interview participants

Institution	Postgrad Students	Academic staff	Admin staff	Totals
A	2	1	1	4
B	2	1	1	4
C	2	1	1	4
D	2	1	1	4
E	2	1	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>

Source: Authors, 2024.

The framework thematic analysis was used to analyse participant data. Thematic analysis is a versatile method that involves identifying, evaluating, and summarising themes from data (Saunders et al, 2019, Alam, 2021). After the interviews were conducted, all of the material was transcribed and added to ATLAS.ti. From the interview data, two main themes were established in line with the study objectives. Further, sub-themes emerged, which were discussed in line with these two main themes. Respondents' labels were created as follows: Supervisor (PS), Administrator (PA) and students (PGS).

#### 4.3.1 Supervision and staffing in private colleges and universities

The interviews started by establishing the staffing situation within these private institutions. This inquiry was addressed to the staff of chosen institutions. Most private universities surveyed prioritise hiring highly educated academics with advanced degrees, research experience, and industry expertise. This ensures that students receive high-quality education and mentorship.

*Participant PGS1: in this institution, we recruit industry professionals as adjunct faculty or guest lecturers to provide extra knowledge and real-world perspectives that complement academic learning. Together with our full-time staff, they play a central role in curriculum development, academic planning, and overall research. Adjunct staff, commonly referred to as part-time lecturers, bring specialised knowledge and expertise, enriching the academic offerings.*

The inclusion of staff members from established public universities ensures that the gap is narrowed and that postgraduate students from private colleges end up at the same level as their counterparts in public institutions.

*Participant PA2: Every student is allocated a supervisor or a supervisory committee to offer direction and assistance during the research process. Supervisors are usually seasoned academics who possess specialised knowledge in the student's study field. Postgraduate students are provided with a range of workshops and training programmes to enhance their research capabilities, academic writing abilities, and professional competencies.*

The response above reveals that these institutions offer a variety of support services, such as academic guidance, access to library materials, writing assistance, and career guidance

#### **4.3.2 Challenges in postgraduate supervision in private institutions in Gauteng**

This survey sought to identify problems with postgraduate supervision in private institutions. Private institutions have autonomy and a legal framework for innovation and reaction, yet respondents believed they encounter issues.

*Participant PGS3: In our discussions with other students from public institutions, we find we face a number of challenges as we prepare to embark on our studies, like the amount of time allocated to access supervisors.*

On the other hand, administrators acknowledged that private universities encounter various obstacles that can hinder their capacity to provide high-quality postgraduate education, notwithstanding the benefits they offer.

*Participant PA4: In private universities, unlike public ones, we do not receive direct financial support from the government. As a result, we must depend on tuition fees and private investments to sustain ourselves. This financial model restricts our ability to allocate funds towards research facilities, faculty development, and comprehensive student support programmes. Unfortunately, we are expected to still comply with specific criteria despite their limited resources, frequently requiring them to employ creative strategies to guarantee postgraduate students receive the necessary guidance and support.*

#### **4.4 Specific challenges in postgraduate studies supervision in private institutions**

The study established a number of challenges, as pointed out by the interview respondents. However, the challenges can be summarised into three main challenges: the lack of unified form across all postgraduate programmes, understaffing in experience supervision, and the limited choice of postgraduate areas of study due to the influence of the two challenges above.

##### **4.4.1 Lack of Supervisors**

All the respondents acknowledged this challenge. Postgraduate respondents felt that because private institutions rely heavily on part-time staff from industry and public institutions, they often face a shortage of qualified supervisors, which can limit their capacity to support postgraduate students effectively.

*Interviewee PGS3: It seems like the supervisors do not have the knowledge to guide us through it. it is difficult to follow instructions during supervision.*

*Participant PS2: There are very few of us who are dealing with postgraduate supervision; this will result in an increased workload for existing supervisors.*

*Participant PS4. Current full-time members are overwhelmed with high supervision loads, impacting the quality of mentorship and feedback.*

*Participant PS5: Since postgraduate studies rely on the generation of new knowledge, limited access to specialised expertise becomes real. Students may struggle to find supervisors with expertise in their specific research areas, potentially hindering the depth and scope of their research.*

*Participant PA1: The scarcity of supervisors leads to delays in assigning supervisors to students, which can slow down the research process and extend the time required to complete degrees.*

##### **4.4.2 Lack of unified formats**

The study indicated earlier that private colleges and universities affiliate with international institutions and organisations outside of South Africa. In some cases, one private institution may subscribe to different international institutions for each specific faculty or department.

*Participant PA2: We subscribe to different partners. For example, management studies may not be the same for ICT or other scientific-related college departments. That means one institution may end up accommodating a variety of postgraduate structures and formats to suit different offerings. This multiplicity of templates and formats for postgraduate programmes leads to inconsistencies in programme delivery, supervision, and assessment across different private institutions.*

*Participant PGS1: The implications of the absence of a unified format will result in a number of challenges. Without a unified format, the quality and rigour of postgraduate programs can vary significantly between institutions, affecting the credibility and recognition of degrees.*

*Participant PS3: Postgraduate students in the same institution may not be able to share and work together across faculties and departments. Students may face confusion due to differing programme structures, requirements, and assessment criteria, potentially impacting their academic experience and outcomes.*

These responses ultimately indicate that benchmarking all postgraduate studies in an institution will be a challenge. The lack of standardisation makes it difficult to benchmark programmes against national and international standards, hindering continuous improvement efforts.

#### **4.4.3 Limited choices of field of study**

The final major challenge that the study revealed was the limited choice of areas to study within each institution. The study discovered that these private colleges offer a limited range of fields of study for postgraduate programmes, restricting students' options and potentially impacting their career aspirations and research interests.

*Participant PA1: Due to their size and budget, private universities cannot offer everything in the academic arena at the postgraduate level.*

This results in narrow academic and research opportunities for students enrolled in private institutions.

*Participant PS2: Due to limited options, students may have to compromise on their preferred fields of study, which can affect their academic satisfaction and career prospects.*

*Participant PS5: One big challenge is the ability of private institutions to attract a wider range of prospective students.*

*Participant PGS1: they limit our range of postgraduate programmes, which makes private institutions less attractive to prospective students seeking specialised or niche areas of study.*

The lack of diverse fields of study has been seen to stifle innovation and opportunities for interdisciplinary research, which are crucial for addressing complex societal challenges.

#### **4.4.4 Recognition of qualification in the market**

In a wide market where employees are recruited from both public and private institutions, employees tend to doubt the credibility of qualifications obtained from private institutions. This challenge was raised by both the students and postgraduate supervisors.

*Participant PGS3: we are not sure if our qualification can be accepted if I want to progress at a public institution. I want to complete my masters and do doctorate.*

*Participant PGS4: I want a qualification that competes everywhere. I hear someone say this one is not good in some companies.*

*Participant PA5: Our programmes are competent because we affiliate with reputable international institutions. It is up to the companies to rate us.*

*Participant PA4: We have heard something like that, but we are registered with DHET, which means we are offering competitive programmes.*

All administrative staff in postgraduate offices expressed trust in their products, although they acknowledged other organisations might doubt them.

*Participant PS2: I don't think that will be a problem because, in most cases, the same supervisors in public institutions are also supervising here. The product is the same*

### **4.5 Innovations for Quality Assurance in Postgraduate Supervision**

Due to the foregoing challenges, private universities have developed various innovative postgraduate alternatives. These include personalised supervision methods that focus on students, technology to enable flexible learning, and business partnerships to make academic curricula more relevant and practical. These strategies help private universities overcome resource constraints and become flexible higher education institutions.

#### **4.5.1 Professional Development for Postgraduate Supervisors**

Professional development for postgraduate supervisors is crucial to ensuring high-quality supervision and the successful completion of postgraduate studies.

*Participant PA1: Tailored professional development programs are essential in private universities, because resources and institutional support structures may differ significantly from public universities.*

*Participant PA2: development programmes help supervisors stay updated on best practices, enhance their skills, and address the unique challenges of supervising postgraduate students in private institutions.*

*Participant PS2: Effective supervision requires a range of skills, including mentoring, project management, conflict resolution, and academic advising. Professional development programs provide us with the tools and techniques necessary to guide our students successfully.*

*Participant PS4: Professional development helps maintain high standards of supervision across the institution, ensuring that all students receive consistent and high-quality guidance.*

The academic landscape is constantly evolving, with new research methodologies, technologies, and educational paradigms emerging. Continuous professional development ensures that supervisors remain current and can adapt to these changes.

#### **4.5.2 Student Support Services for Postgraduate**

Effective student support services are essential for the success of postgraduate supervision. These services help students navigate academic research challenges, manage personal and professional responsibilities, and achieve their research goals. According to the interview responses, various tailor-made support services are crucial in private universities due to the unique environment and resources available.

*Participant PGS: we propose the establishment of writing centres. Writing centres provide one-on-one consultations, workshops, and resources to help students develop their academic writing skills. This is a common phenomenon in public institutions in South Africa.*

*Participant PA4: Students have proposed regularly conducting research methodology workshops, which offer training in research design, data collection, and analysis techniques specific to various disciplines. We always do that regularly.*

The rest of the postgraduate students and their supervisors also agreed that postgraduate students proposed the creation and belonging to *Thesis/Dissertation Support Groups*. These groups facilitate peer support groups where students can share feedback and advice on their research projects.

#### **4.5.3 Introduction and exposure of postgraduate students to current software applications**

The study established that private institutions have incorporated current software applications in the postgraduate studies which assist students with their research. Many software programmes are available to postgraduate students to help with many of their academic and research demands. These programmes cover project management, data analysis, writing and referencing, productivity, collaboration, and research management.

*Participant PA1: as an institution, we have subscribed to a number of software applications to assist our postgraduate students in managing their studies*

*Participant PA2: We are currently checking and subscribing to all the latest softwares that are used for data presentation and analysis.*

*Participant PS1: I know that postgraduate students have access to software, but I am not good enough to teach them.*

*Participant PS3: our work is assisted by the software that is available to the students here. I am afraid they are now using too much AI applications, too*

*PGS2: Our studies work because we use applications here. I also use ChatGPT to help me*

*Participant PGS4: I need more training, but the softwares makes it easy to present findings and analyse.*

The study revealed that storage, filing, data presentation and analysis, as well as referencing, are all supported by a variety of software applications.

#### **4.5.4 International Affiliation**

All the selected private institutions acknowledged affiliation to international reputable universities. International linkages boost South African private colleges and universities' intellectual and operational

capabilities. Alliances, joint enterprises, shared efforts, and satellite campuses are examples of these partnerships. These partnerships offer access to worldwide academic standards, cooperative research, and improved reputation and student attractiveness. Several private institutions in South Africa function as satellite campuses of international universities.

*Participant PA1: our institute provide programmes that are comparable to those provided at the main university, giving students qualifications that are recognised worldwide.*

An example is the Henley Business School South Africa, which functions as an affiliate of the University of Reading in the United Kingdom.

*Participant PA2: As a private institution, we have formed collaborations with international universities to provide joint or dual degree programmes. These agreements enable students to divide their studies between South Africa and a foreign partner institution, resulting in the attainment of degrees from both schools.*

An example of a partnership is the collaboration between Monash South Africa (now a member of IIE MSA) and Monash University in Australia.

*Participant PS1: International research collaborations allow us to actively participate in global postgraduate research programmes, have access to state-of-the-art research facilities, and interact with a wider academic community.*

*Participant PGS1: I like the exchange programme because it allows me to learn international things in research. I benefited from attending international Webinars on research with overseas universities.*

*Participant PGS3: these international links make us international too*

These programmes offer chances for cultural interchange, exposure to diverse academic settings, and enriched learning experiences. Several private universities seek accreditation from international accreditation groups to guarantee that their programmes adhere to global standards.

*Participant PS4: Membership in international higher education organisations and networks improves the institution's reputation and offers opportunities for collaboration and benchmarking.*

#### **4.6 Discussion of findings on Challenges and Innovations**

This study was carried out in order to establish the challenges and innovations that private institutions of higher learning are having to deal with in their postgraduate programmes.

##### **4.6.1 Challenges**

The major challenges that emerge from the study are the lack of sufficient qualified supervisors, different curriculum frameworks, and the failure to synchronise the postgraduate templates. The success of postgraduate research students, regardless of the instructional approach, relies on the collaboration between students and supervisors, as well as the presence of robust support systems inside institutions (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2018). Saidi (2024) identifies some crucial factors that need to be considered to enhance both the availability and achievement in higher education at the postgraduate level in South Africa. The study established that a shortage of supervisors or a delay in appointing supervisors to students might delay research and degree completion (Thompson et al., 2005). As such, private colleges' qualifications may not be competitive, as some organisations may not accept these graduates.

##### **4.6.2 Innovations**

The findings of the study established that private institutions hire industry professionals as guest-supervising lecturers to supplement academic learning. Their work influences curriculum, academic planning, and research. Part-time instructors, often comprising industry experts or public university academics, contribute valuable information and expertise. Supervisors often consist of highly knowledgeable academics with competence in the student's specific field of study. Many colleges provide mentoring schemes in which seasoned professors or industry experts provide guidance and assistance for career development. This confirms the earlier study by the C.O.S.T.A. Postgraduate Research Coaching Model, which provides an alternative method to conventional supervision, emphasising rigour, psychology, and coaching to improve the postgraduate research process (Costa, 2019; Costa, 2020). The study showed that institutions use joint research, publishing, and international conferences to improve postgraduate supervision programmes. They agreed that exchange programmes enable students and faculty travel between South African private universities and abroad.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concluded that private university postgraduate students, administrators, and supervisors face challenges, and they have devised innovative solutions to manage their programmes. The study provides advanced strategies and established norms for supervising and supporting postgraduate students. These institutions can serve as exemplars for other educational establishments, promoting the implementation of effective methods across private colleges in South Africa and potentially beyond.

## 6. Recommendations

It is recommended that experienced supervisors work together with less experienced faculty members in order to promote their own development as supervisors. There is a compelling argument in favour of having many supervisors. Students benefit from this in several ways, including the improvement of the supervisory process via the incorporation of other perspectives, the alignment of the approach to the issue, and the effective combination of methodological expertise.

## 7. Limitations of the study

Gauteng's private universities vary in focus, resources, and size. Due to this diversity, research findings from one institution may not apply to another. Further studies will expand to other provinces.

## 8. Contributions of the study

The investigation's findings should help private institutions evaluate and improve their operations in accordance with best practices and standards for postgraduate supervision. These can inspire efficient methods in South African private colleges and beyond.

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