

A Supervisor's Roles for Successful Thesis and Dissertation

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The success of a thesis or a dissertation for a graduate student relies upon the roles of their supervisor. The student not only needs to be equipped with the knowledge, but also be able to manage others and external factors at the same time. The journey during the period of conducting research is mixed with various tasks. Five supportive roles of a supervisor involving the supervision system are specific technical support, broader intellectual support, administrative support, management, and personal support brings about the output of the study. A supervisor's roles for successful thesis and dissertation is reported by using the survey on graduate students in the universities in Thailand probing for the current practices of supervisor and the expectation of student towards the supervisor's roles. The reflection from the students' perspective can help develop relationship between supervisor and student for undertaking a successful thesis and dissertation.

Keywords: supervisor's roles, thesis and dissertation, graduate study

Introduction

The world in the 21st century is so demanding. There is greater struggle among people to be more qualified, knowledgeable, changeable, and adaptable to the situations. The competitiveness among the group of people, individuals, and organizations is taking place in order to make themselves and their organization survive and to be successful in their goal. As the world is changing rapidly everyday, it leads to the adjustment in social system, value, attitude, and economy. Some good things in the past of last century never exist anymore. With the change in social system, people tend to have less face-to-face interactions. At the same time, a new form of social network of interaction between people is taking place, this online interaction is rapidly increasing worldwide. The youth in the 21st century are called as digital citizens who reflect the sense of development, while the human value, morale, and relationship are shifting down. The 21st century skills require the next generation learner to decorate themselves with such learning and innovation skills as creativity and innovative, critical thinking and problem-solving, and communication and collaboration (Kay, 2010). The outstanding ability of a learner who is competent in the 21st century skills will keep themselves abreast of updated on learning and adjusting to change. With the 21st century skills, people are classified to get high wage, high skill, and to be able to move up on the economic ladder.

Thus, it is essential to be a learner in the 21st century as all business settings and all fields of works in this competitive era demand qualify staff. The need in studying for further degree in the field related to their work is increasingly demonstrated. The goal of studying in graduate level is not only for the degree or certificate, but also for creating new knowledge in the field of their interests. Most of graduate students enter the program with certain notions due to experiences gained along the way of their careers while some want to fulfill their needs

with the very high ambitious goal but yet very abstract ideas.

Factors to Success in Thesis and Dissertation and the Roles of a Supervisor

To achieve the master degree and doctoral degree, a graduate student must complete his/her own research called “thesis for master degree” and “dissertation for doctoral degree” depending upon the rules and regulations of an institute. After the student has completed his/her coursework, there will be time for conducting a research project. The student is assigned to work with a supervisor in order to undertake a research with quality process for the best possible output as an excellent thesis or dissertation. The expectation of having a smooth running period and ending up the project with the best output is not as easy as one thinks. Like a marriage, the feelings of happiness, sadness, sorrow, and some other feelings occur. Remember to set up your goal only to graduate, there is nothing to stop you. In dealing with the supervisor, graduate students of master degree and doctoral degree programs must concern some factors enabling successful thesis and dissertation. The factors can be reviewed in very broad ideas as the followings (Rugg & Petre, 2007):

Factor 1: Management: As with marriage, both student and supervisor have to make an agreement to work together. The time of management on meeting, deadlines, and goals has to be set as a master plan. It is the responsibility of both the student and the supervisor to work on it and trust each other;

Factor 2: Administrative support: A student also needs help for acquiring funds and other resources. Sometimes, many regulations and some administrative difficulty within the school or university may be an obstacle of the research progress. Then, the supervisor should be the one who provides support and helps the student to overcome that problem;

Factor 3: Specific technical support: The skill that needs to be trained for example—skill in using the specific software, searching the relevant literature, using the library, providing contacts with the researcher in the field, structuring the thesis and dissertation, and training in critical reading—all of these skills should be assisted by the supervisor;

Factor 4: Broadening intellectual support: It is very important to help student to have an ability to develop his/her critical thinking and discussion by providing or guiding to the high-level knowledge and the specialist in the field of study. These skills could help student while presenting and defending the thesis and dissertation;

Factor 5: Most of all such personal support as emotional support, motivation, encouragement, giving advice, listening to the personal issues can improve the work and relationship. Student and supervisor are working under trust, love and care that will create magnificent masterpiece.

These five factors can also be reviewed as the roles of a supervisor (Rugg & Petre, 2007; Wisker, 2008, 2005). The roles of a supervisor are professional roles. The supervisor concurrently may act in many roles as a coach, teacher, friend, colleague, trainer, good role model, and guide. Coaching the skills builds trust and understanding between the student and the supervisor (Robertson, 2009). The specific skills of a student should be trained by the supervisor and the specialist. Beside coaching and training, the supervisor also acts as a good role model who listens and guides the student to achieve the goal. The master plan for conducting research can be illustrated as a cycle of research (Wisker, 2008) as the stages of ideas—plan—activities—assess and evaluate—ideas—re-plan—activities—assess and evaluate. The cycle that moves on each stage is accumulated with experiences of previous stages of cycle as confirming and reflecting for the new knowledge. A study on the students' persistence in a distributed doctoral program in educational leadership in higher education (Ivankova & Stick, 2007) mentioned that the feedback from an academic advisor is beneficial and helpful for a student to succeed in his/her thesis and dissertation. Furthermore, a good supervisor requires the leadership skills: a mixture of three-skill approach (Northouse, 2010)—technical skill, human skill, and conceptual skill—to help a student in producing the best outcome.

Current Practices and Expectations

The survey reflected the current practices of the supervisor and the expectations of the student towards the roles of supervisor. The survey questions were asked to find the practices of supervisor and the expectations of student towards supervisor's practice. Thus, the 25 questions were created by using the five factors of supervisor's roles. Then, the quantitative data were evaluated from a five-point rating scale, which resulted with a mean score higher than 4.00 which means the supervisor mostly often does and the student mostly often expects the supervisor to do. The first set of the results show the current practices of supervisor that often does only three items as show in Table 1.

Table 1

Current Practices of Supervisor

	Role of supervisor	Mean
1	Guide on structuring the thesis and dissertation	4.30
2	Make student feel more confident when working with the supervisor	4.11
3	Agree to have the goal together	4.07

Meanwhile, the second set of the results, the quantitative data were evaluated from five-point rating scale, presented the mean score higher than 4.00 which means the student mostly often expects the supervisor to do. The results show the expectations from student toward the supervisor's roles, 15 demands express as show in Table 2.

Table 2

Expectations of Student toward Supervisor's Roles

	Role of supervisor	Mean
1	Make student feel more confident when working with the supervisor	4.59
2	Guide on structuring the thesis and dissertation	4.52
3	Agree to have the goal together	4.48
4	Listen to student problem	4.41
5	Enforce and help student to overcome the obstacles	4.41
6	Guide student to gain high level of knowledge	4.37
7	Give student an emotional support	4.30
8	Set up the plan/manage time with students' agreement	4.30
9	Guide to read related documents and researches	4.30
10	Provide the experts and researcher related to the field of study	4.26
11	Meeting schedule and contract set up based on students' agreement	4.26
12	Train student to present and defend	4.26
13	Aware of deadlines	4.19
14	Guide/direct student for the research publication	4.19
15	Train student how to think critically	4.15

As for the results, the first three items from both current practices and the expectations seem to be the same items. So, students need a leader who keeps them on track and makes them feel confident. The supervisor's roles are critical, the success of the student depends on supervisor's ability to tell the student the truth and respond to what needs to be done. The supervisor should know the strengths and weaknesses of the student. At the same time, the supervisor should know how to provide relevant documents, experts, advice, and emotional support, and allow the student to learn self-motivation to reach all of their goals.

Conclusion

As the foundation of an original idea of academic advising, it can be applied to the roles of supervisor, the vital idea concerned for student "personal" development. Thus, the concentration for academic advising is designed to facilitate "total" development for each student (Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, & Associates, 1984). Meanwhile, the goal of being a good supervisor is aimed to help student as advisee to complete in the thesis and dissertation. Thus, the supervisor's roles take effect not only the successful of student thesis and dissertation, but also the whole development of the life of student.

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