Exploring Factors that Promote Successful Completion of Master's Theses at University of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

Timely completion of postgraduate theses continues to be a concern in higher education, especially in subSaharan Africa where institutional constraints, supervision challenges, and financial limitations contribute to delayed graduation and attrition. This study explored the student-, supervisor-, and institution-related factors that promote the successful and timely completion of master's theses at UCC. Guided by General Systems Theory, the study adopted a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposefully selected master's graduates who completed on time, their supervisors, and university administrators. Audio recordings were transcribed and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti.

Six student-level enablers were identified: supportive academic relationships, feasible and interesting research focus, financial preparedness, research skills, commitment and self-discipline, and effective time management. Supervisor-level support included accessibility, regular meetings, timely and constructive feedback, cordial professional relationships, autonomy-supportive guidance, and methodological expertise. Institution-level facilitators included provision of research resources, capacity-building workshops, small research grants, progress monitoring, and efficient administrative processes.

It was concluded that successful thesis completion results from the alignment of motivated students, responsive supervisory practices, and supportive institutional systems. The study recommends enhanced early-stage research skills training, clearer supervision standards, consistent progress tracking, and strengthened funding mechanisms. Further research should examine the predictive power of each factor using mixed-methods or multi-site approach.

Keywords: thesis completion, postgraduate students, supervision, institutional support, University of Cape Coast, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Obtaining a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree, which has the preparation and defence of a thesis included than other master programmes do not have in higher education is one of the pinnacles of academic achievements worldwide (Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Mwamwenda, 2019). Students pursuing postgraduate courses in many universities worldwide must contend with rigorous and onerous procedures that include not just coursework, internships, and tests but also the preparation and defence of a dissertation or thesis (Kumar & Seth, 2020). The reason for this is that many universities worldwide demand the completion of a thesis as a requirement for graduation (Nouri, Larsson, & Saqr, 2019). Therefore, the master's thesis is the last official phase in most universities around the world.

Generally, students who enter postgraduate education programmes go through two major stages. (1) course work and (2) research and thesis writing, although many other studies show more detailed stages. Many students progress effortlessly through stage one (course work); nevertheless, some students' advancement is impeded at stage two (research and thesis writing) causing academic setbacks and even the abandonment of degree programmes leading to a low completion rate (Anim-Frimpong, Osei-Amankwah & Kyeremeh, 2020).

Given the situation mentioned above and its global implications, exploring the duration of postgraduate studies and the imperative to expedite students' completion of such programmes have assumed paramount significance. This matter is of relevance not only to postgraduate students and institutional administrators, but also to educational establishments, accrediting bodies, employers, benefactors, governmental bodies, and other stakeholders within the realm of higher education.

Several institutions in America and Europe have implemented measures to enhance the successful completion of research projects undertaken by postgraduate students (European University Institute, 2020; Gardner, 2019; Wright & Wilson, 2020). These initiatives include the implementation of many regulations and procedures aimed at incentivising students to submit their theses within the designated timeframe.

In the African continent, the completion rates for MPhil degrees though low, some students are seen to have completed their courses successfully within the designated timeframe (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman, 2018). The scenario in Ghana has similarities to occurrences seen in several global regions. Academics, policymakers, and other vested parties within the realm of higher education express concern about the prevailing issues of attrition, delay, and non-completion (Akparep, Jengre & Abaamah, 2017). Specifically, the negative consequences of this phenomenon extend to individuals, educational institutions, government agencies, and the overall prestige of the nation with its educational system. Data obtained from the Institutional Research and Planning Office (IRPO) at the University of Ghana, Legon, reveal that the completion rates for the MPhil programme in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021 were recorded as 16 percent, 41 percent, and 36 percent respectively (IRPO, University of Ghana, 2021). Amehoe and Bortha (2013) conducted a study titled "Postgraduate throughput at the University of Ghana," in which they reported completion rates for different courses.

Similarly, the University of Cape Coast is not immune to the worldwide trend of a progressive rise in the completion rates of postgraduate degrees. Each academic year, the university confers postgraduate degrees to students from many fields, but in a smaller proportion relative to the rates of attrition and extended time to completion. For example, the number of students that graduated in 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021, and 2021/2022 academic years are 279, 93, 336, and 549, respectively as against the number of enrolment (i.e. 1125, 1393, 1035 and 946 respectively) for the same academic years (UCC congregational brochure, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Many postgraduate students have difficulty in writing their theses, which causes academic setbacks and even the abandonment of degree programmes leading to a low completion rate. (Essuman, 2020; Akparep et al.,, 2017). Most universities worldwide have developed a range of policies, frameworks, and interventions aimed at improving completion rates (Smith-Norris & Hansen, 2018). Amid all this, delay and non-completion are on the rise.

Despite the challenges faced by postgraduate students in completing their theses, it is evident that not all students are confronted with these challenges. A few managed to complete within the stipulated time and acquire their degrees (García & García, 2021; Essuman, 2020). Nevertheless, how these students were able to overcome these challenges remains unknown. This poses a lot of questions about what these students did differently and how they navigated to complete their degree.

The persistent challenge of low thesis completion rates among postgraduate students, despite institutional interventions, suggests a knowledge gap regarding effective strategies employed by successful students. This gap necessitates this retrospective research to understand factors that promote students complete their master's programmes within the stipulated time at the University of Cape Coast.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

1. what student-related factors promote the successful completion of master's theses within the stipulated time?
2. what supervisor-related factors promote the successful completion of master's theses within the stipulated time?
3. what institution-related factors promote the successful completion of master's theses within the stipulated time?

General Systems Theory

The study was guided by Donald Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory, which is also known as Formal Systems Theory. Bertalanffy (1958) posits those formal organisations are entities that are founded to attain certain goals. The design of the organisation delineates how objectives are split and manifested in the organisation's subdivisions. The organisational structure is composed of divisions, departments, sections, jobs, functions, and tasks (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2020). The concept being discussed is a theoretical framework known as system theory, which involves the interpretation of observable entities and their surrounding environment from a systemic perspective (Bertalanffy, 1967).

The theory was deemed highly suitable for the present study since universities are complex organisations characterised by multiple levels of management, including faculties and departments. These entities are structured rationally, with clearly defined roles, objectives, and activities that are carried out per established rules, norms, and frameworks. As a result, the idea has been widely used in scholarly research and investigations about organisations within academic and corporate contexts. While the theory does not explicitly outline norms and regulations, it acknowledges entities as essential components in the achievement of organisational objectives.

Factors Determining the Successful Completion of Postgraduate Theses

The following factors have been empirically reviewed for the successful completion of postgraduate graduate theses:

Personal Social Factors

According to Ezelote, Eleanor, Judith, and Joy (2021), personal social characteristics have a crucial role in determining the academic achievement of postgraduate students. Postgraduate students face significant challenges in managing their time, energy, endurance, patience, and organisational abilities due to stress.

Graduate students see peer mentorship and social support as facilitating an open atmosphere for the exchange of ideas and getting assistance in achieving programme requirements, as well as making progress towards the successful completion of their degree (Baker, Pifer & Flemiken, 2022). Alkhateeb, Abushihab, Alkhateeb and Alkhateeb (2022), highlighted that some individual characteristics of students, such as self-discipline and positive self-concept, have a beneficial influence on their total academic achievement. Moreover, the aspiration of students to get a postgraduate degree serves as a driving force for them to effectively handle and adapt to stressors (Rong'uno, 2016).

Chaudhry, Tandon, Shinde, and Bhattacharya (2024), points out that students who get sufficient moral support from their peer groups, as well as assistance from their families and other social networks, tend to encounter lower levels of stress and have a higher likelihood of completing their theses within the specified timeframe. Nevertheless, research indicates that the impact of parental support and engagement is diminished in the context of postgraduate education (Ezelote et al., 2021). While the findings of research have shown that parental support does not significantly contribute to postgraduate performance, there is strong evidence indicating the influential role of spousal support. The presence of a supportive social and academic atmosphere within the faculty, as well as an effective supervision procedure, appears to have a positive impact on student resilience and their ability to complete their studies on time. Again, evidence that supports the notion of the beneficial impact of the institutional environment also cited in the work of Kahu, Picton and Nelson (2020).

Muthukrishnan, Gurnam, Hoon, Geethanjali and Chan (2022), mentioned there is a certain degree of effect exerted by student demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and marital status, on the rates of completion for thesis projects. Muthukrishnan et al., (2022), observed that male individuals and younger candidates tend to complete tasks in a comparatively shorter duration when compared to their female counterparts, as well as older and married pupils. Female postgraduate students often encounter challenges related to family duties and time constraints, which might impede their ability to complete their theses within the desired timeframe (García & García, 2021). Therefore, it is said that, averagely, men students exhibit marginally greater rates of thesis completion in comparison to their female peers within the same course, assuming all other factors remain equal. The primary obligations include those of both familial and occupational domains. African societies often lack the necessary flexibility to accommodate women with children who have rigorous schedules and obligations (Akparep et al., (2017), hence limiting their availability for postgraduate studies. This observation supports the underlying factors contributing to the modest gender disparity seen in many Ph.D. courses, where the enrolment of male students tends to marginally exceed that of their female counterparts.

Psychosocial Factors

Tinto (1993) mentions that a certain degree of integration is necessary for students to develop a sense of commitment toward their academic pursuits. This commitment, in turn, plays a crucial role in fostering persistence among students. According to Tinto (1993), there are two distinct forms of integration: academic integration, which refers to formal aspects, and social integration, which pertains to informal aspects. In the context of postgraduate studies, academic integration encompasses active participation in professional endeavours and prospects, collaborative engagement with fellow researchers, regular interaction with peers, assimilation into the departmental community, and the exchange of academic assistance among students and faculty members (Muthukrishnan et al., 2022).

One additional psychological construct that is of importance is the concept of a sense of belonging. This refers to the subjective experience of feeling linked and seeing oneself as significant and valued by others within an organisational context (O'Meara, Kuvaeva & Nyunt, 2017).

Following previous studies on supervision, which have shown that students place a high value on autonomy (Ali, Watson & Dhingra, 2016; Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden & Gisle, 2017), the extent to which postgraduate students are granted independence in the planning and implementation of their research endeavours may have implications for their levels of achievement and contentment. In their study, Meng and Zhao (2018) found a significant correlation between the level of autonomy granted to postgraduate students in terms of planning and expressing their thoughts and their overall happiness with their postgraduate course. Hence, it is important to prioritise students' autonomy and happiness throughout the thesis writing process.

Financial Factors

It has been cited that financial support and availability of viable and stable funding sources is a major predictor of the successful completion of postgraduate study (Muthukrishnan et al., 2022; Amoah, 2020). The inability to secure stable funding will become a major obstacle to students especially when they are required to carry out data collection during research (Amoah, 2020). Thus, it is not surprising that students who receive scholarships have been more successful in their postgraduate studies completion (Khozaei, Naidu, Khozaei & Salleh, 2015) and have often record shorter periods to complete their theses compared to those without scholarships (Mills & Birks, 2019).

Rong'uno (2016) confirmed that adequate financial support is the "nervous system" in any academic research undertaking. Mills and Birks 2019) also emphasised that research is very relevant, but researchers cannot achieve anything without the necessary support which include research materials and finance. They conclude that adequate research materials and finance will ensure the quality and relevance of research output. Financial constraints can significantly impact research master's students' ability to complete their programmes on time, highlighting the need for adequate financial support and resources.

Student Commitment and Persistence

Lindsay (2015) conducted research that examines the affective domain within the context of PhD student writing. The study highlights the significance of recognising the intrinsic emotions experienced by students, as these emotions might influence their writing techniques. Miller (1995), identifies three categories of graduate students that may be differentiated depending on their level of perseverance. These categories include the "direct current," the "alternating current," and the "weak battery" types. According to Miller, the direct current graduate student is characterised by their ability to sustain a continuous level of exertion throughout the whole of the dissertation process, leading to expedited attainment of their academic degree. When faced with a challenge, this student promptly seeks help.

Writing Skills and Regulatory Strategies

Research has shown that students' academic writing abilities play a crucial role in their ability to complete their thesis successfully (Rauf, 2016; Zheng, Wang & Zhang, 2019). Specifically, students with strong academic writing skills can articulate their research goals, methods, and findings clearly, thereby producing a coherent and well-structured thesis. Moreover, effective writing skills facilitate the development of a well-planned writing schedule, enabling students to manage their time efficiently and make steady progress on their thesis.

In addition to possessing strong academic writing skills, students can benefit from various strategies that facilitate their development. For instance, feedback on student work is a key pedagogical instrument for teaching and learning research writing (Rauf, 2016; Zheng et al., 2019). Participation in social writing and critiquing contexts, such as writing groups, writing retreats, and peer feedback writing, is also crucial for improving writing skills (Rauf, 2016; Zheng et al.,, 2019). Furthermore, research expertise and training in research methods are closely linked to writing skills, and students who possess these skills are better equipped to create well-organised, logical, and cohesive papers (O'Neil & dos Santos, 2018). This, in turn, contributes to their ability to complete projects on time.

The role of supervisors and institutions is also vital in supporting students' development of academic writing skills. Supervisors can play a critical role in assisting students with the development of academic writing, and collaboration between supervisors and students can improve self-regulation, motivation, and writing quality (Rauf, 2016; Zheng et al., 2019). By providing feedback, facilitating social writing and critiquing contexts, and fostering research expertise and collaboration, supervisors and institutions can provide students with the necessary support to achieve their academic goals.

Relationships, Availability, and Expectations

Odularu and Akande (2024) assert that the supervisor-postgraduate-student relationship holds significant importance, as evidenced by numerous studies indicating a correlation between the quality of this relationship and both the completion of students' theses and their overall satisfaction (Shin, Kim & Lee, 2018; Liang, Liu & Zhao, 2021). Therefore, this thesis takes into consideration the student-supervisor connection.

One fundamental aspect of supervision pertains to the accessibility of the supervisor. This accessibility encompasses not only regular physical presence, but also frequent interactions with the postgraduate student, prompt responses to inquiries via email, and timely provision of feedback on the student's written work (Meng & Zhao , 2018; Arthur, 2022). Multiple studies have shown that postgraduate students place significant importance on the accessibility of their supervisors. This includes aspects such as receiving prompt feedback, rapid replies to inquiries, and regular meetings (Liang et al., 2021; Arthur, 2022). Additionally, some research has shown a correlation between regular supervision and a decreased likelihood of attrition (Odularu & Akande, 2024; Arthur, 2022).

Research indicates that supervisors' expectations significantly influence postgraduate students' performance. Prior qualitative research reveals that supervisors expect postgraduate students to demonstrate dedication, independence, and engagement in publishing activities before submitting their thesis (Arthur & Fenyi, 2023;

Arthur, 2022). Supervisors may also expect students to publish in high-impact journals, establish international networks, participate in committees, and engage in side projects, among other expectations (Odularu & Akande, 2024).

Institution-Related Factors

The factors that impact postgraduate completion rates and time to completion include administrative aspects within institutions. These factors comprise the student selection process, student mentorship initiatives, study environment, and programme processes (Odularu &Akande, 2024). Arthur and Fenyi (2023) emphasise the vital role of faculties in supporting postgraduate students, stating that "faculties must move beyond the mere provision of high-quality education to foster a supportive learning environment that encourages student engagement, motivation, and ultimately, successful completion" (p. 12). Odularu and Akande. (2024) propose six practices to enhance postgraduate support, including: enhancing administrative mechanisms, improving advising and mentoring processes, offering financial support, establishing an academically supportive environment, providing research experiences that encourage social interaction, and offering curricular support in areas such as thesis writing skills.

According to Amoah (2020), mentor circles, which involve small groups of mentors and students, can enhance connectedness and facilitate effective social and academic integration of graduate students. This, in turn, may contribute to successful course completion. Research highlights the significance of support in navigating academic programme components, including coursework, qualifying examinations, candidature, and thesis writing (García & García, 2021; Essuman, 2020). To improve thesis completion rates, postgraduate education curricula should prioritise practical preparation for thesis writing.

According to Arthur and Fenyi (2023), institutions that provide adequate psychological and student welfare support services tend to have lower student attrition rates and higher completion rates. Gyamera and Asare (2023) note that clear institutional administrative expectations, well-defined departmental norms, and administrative duties facilitate successful thesis completion. However, departmental politics and personal disagreements among faculty members can hinder thesis progress.

Research indicates that obtaining a master's degree in social sciences and humanities often takes longer and is more expensive due to increasing resource requirements (Matsolo et al., 2018). Consequently, African universities have produced limited postgraduates in these fields over the last two decades. The scarcity of committed faculty members and administrators capable of overseeing

Postgraduate students exacerbate this issue.

In many departments, a lack of academic personnel hinders the successful completion of postgraduate programs. Postgraduate students often face external obligations and express concerns about their supervisors' limited familiarity with contemporary literature and theories (Arthur, 2022). Hiring freezes have worsened the situation, creating generational and intellectual disparities among faculty members (García & García, 2021).

The significant increase in students' enrollment has strained existing resources, including faculty members and infrastructure. Akparep et al. (2017) argue that introducing more postgraduate courses is insufficient to achieve the desired objectives.

Supervisor-Related Factors

Effective research supervision is essential for the successful completion of a thesis. According to Arthur and Fenyi (2023), research is a collective endeavour requiring faculty members to guide students in producing high-quality scholarly publications. Supervisors must possess a strong research background and understanding of methodologies. They should also provide opportunities for students to develop essential proficiencies (Arthur & Fenyi, 2023).

The student-advisor relationship is vital for thesis completion. Senyametor, Domaley, Ahorsu-Walker, Abreh, & Mills (2022) emphasise that efficient communication of educational skills by supervisors is crucial. A positive rapport between advisors and advisees is crucial for timely completion, whereas a negative relationship can hinder progress (Odularu & Akande, 2024). Bazrafkan, Yousefy, Amini, and Yamani, (2019) found that students believe appropriate mentoring by supervisors is crucial for successful graduate degree completion.

A positive student-supervisor relationship, congruence in interests and expectations, and supervisor support can enhance academic achievement. Supervisors who offer assistance, flexibility, and autonomy can foster student success (Rong'uno, 2016). Conversely, a poor advisor-advisee relationship can lead to extended completion times (Odularu & Akande, 2024).

Supervisor proficiency and Aptitude

Effective supervision requires that supervisors possess both knowledge and expertise in the research domain (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). According to Antwi (2020), successful supervision demands research competence, enabling supervisors to critically reflect on and analyse research processes. In addition, Essuman (2020), García and (2021) suggest that students should prioritise selecting supervisors with a proven research record, including recent publications, research funding, and conference invitations.

While a supervisor's broader subject competence may be satisfactory, their lack of expertise in the specific thesis domain can hinder effective guidance (Gyamera & Asare, 2023). Some supervisors may lack training in the latest research methodologies, hindering their ability to effectively guide postgraduate students and provide them with the necessary skills and research competence.

Ensuring that supervisors possess the essential skills and qualities of research methodologies and domain expertise will ultimately enhance the quality of thesis guidance and improve successful thesis completion.

Supervision style

Effective communication is crucial in supervision, as it facilitates student guidance. To achieve this, supervisors should demonstrate a willingness to accept constructive feedback and engage in dialogue. They should also possess the ability to communicate transparently and truthfully (Gyamera & Asare, 2023; Ali et al., 2016).

Moreover, active listening and providing sincere feedback are essential communication skills for supervisors (Kumar & Seth, 2020). Regular communication between students and supervisors is vital throughout their academic pursuits (Meng & Zhao , 2018; Arthur, 2022). A supervisory style that promotes excellent communication enables students to address specific writing concerns and receive timely guidance.

Another key aspect of the supervision style is providing regular feedback. This feedback is crucial as students rely heavily on it during their research and thesis writing (Adefulu, Farinloye & Mogaji, 2020). Supervisors are experts in postgraduate thesis writing, guiding students from basic to advanced writing competence while minimising external support (Senyametor Domaley, Ahorsu-Walker, Abreh & Mills, 2022). Furthermore, supervisors provide both oral and written feedback on students' thesis writing, with written feedback being particularly important for addressing specific writing concerns (Senyametor et al., 2022).

In addition to providing feedback, supervisors also play a crucial role in guiding students through their academic journey. They provide essential information regarding thesis preparation, reporting and review requirements, and departmental policies. Effective supervision involves providing regular guidance, support, and feedback to students. By doing so, supervisors can help students navigate the academic landscape and achieve their goals.

Academic, Personal, and Autonomy Support

The provision of academic, personal, and autonomy support is crucial in postgraduate supervision. According to basic needs theory, the fulfilment of three fundamental psychological needs competence, relatedness, and autonomy is necessary to attain autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Academic support is essential for postgraduate students' success. It involves providing research-related assistance, including aid in acquiring academic competencies and process-oriented abilities (Meng & Zhao , 2018). This type of support is significantly associated with timely degree completion and satisfaction (Devos et al., 2017; Meng & Zhao , 2018). Specifically, academic support encompasses assistance in acquiring research methodologies and scholarly writing skills, as well as aid in cultivating process-oriented abilities, such as organisation and coordination.

In addition to academic support, personal support is also vital. It involves demonstrating concern for the postgraduate student's well-being (Meng & Zhao , 2018). Personal support can be shown through friendliness, understanding of private circumstances, and providing reassurance during times of stress (Ali et al., 2016; Devos et al. 2017). Research has shown that personal support is significantly correlated with postgraduate student satisfaction. Research has shown that autonomy support is positively correlated with several outcomes, including continuation of postgraduate studies, higher levels of satisfaction, and increased research self-efficacy (Meng & Zhao , 2018).

Teaching/Learning Resources

Teaching and learning resources play a crucial role in academic research endeavours. Libraries serve as a vital resource for researchers, offering access to factual knowledge and various educational materials (Attakumah, 2023). These resources include printed materials, such as books and journals, as well as digital resources, like online databases and e-books.

The availability of teaching and learning materials is essential for academic success. Students who have sufficient access to these resources tend to perform better academically (Attakumah, 2023). The resources available include a variety of components aimed at enhancing research practices, such as educational materials on improved methodologies, comprehensive catalogues of research materials, well-informed researchers equipped with up-to-date knowledge, and specialised physical facilities that provide an optimal work atmosphere conducive to research activities.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become an essential tool for researchers, providing access to a vast array of global information and academic resources (Kwafoa, Barfi & Agyapong, 2019). The integration of communication technologies and digital libraries facilitates equitable access to academic materials, significantly enhancing research opportunities in institutions located in non-metropolitan areas.

University libraries also play a critical role in providing access to research outputs, including master's and postgraduate theses (Attakumah, 2023). However, there is a need for effective systems to access these publications.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed purposive sampling to select all 21 Master's students from the University of Cape Coast (UCC) who completed their programs in 2021 within the stipulated two-year period without extensions (University of Cape Coast *Congregation brochure* (2021), 21 principal supervisors who supervised their theses and 2 senior members at the School for Graduate School (SGS). Their graduation and timely thesis completion offered valuable insights into factors facilitating successful completion. To enable the researcher to reach the participants, a letter was sent to SGS requesting their phone number and email address. The SGS provided the list of students who completed their thesis on time, their phone numbers, and email addresses confirming the 21 Master's students. College of Ahad 4students, followed by the college of B with 3 students,

college C, 8 students, college D, 6 students and college E which had not yet introduced M'Phil progrmme had none. Due to tight schedules of the supervisors, the authors decided to settle on 1 from each of the four colleges in the University. According to Creswell (2018), the sample size between 5 and 25 is suitable for qualitative study. In totality, 21 students, 4 supervisors and 2 staff from the SGS (27participants) formed the sampled frame. However, some participants did not take part due to reasons such as not reachable, tight schedules and others best known to some participants. Those who availed themselves for the study were 7 students, 3 principal supervisors and 2 SGS staff (12)

Data Collection Instruments

The instrument used for the study was the semi-structured interview guide. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), an interview as a research instrument involves the collection of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals. The primary advantage of this approach is its capacity to adjust effectively to various circumstances. Semi-structured interviews include the use of a comprehensive but flexible interview guide by the researcher.

To explore the factors contributing to the successful completion of University of Cape Coast (UCC) Master's students' theses, semi-structured interview guides were developed. Three sets of interview guides were crafted to align with the study's research questions, targeting students, supervisors, and institutional administrators.

The semi-structured interview guides (Appendices D, E, and F) were designed to elicit in-depth responses regarding the students', supervisors', and institutional factors influencing thesis completion. Before deployment, the interview guides underwent expert review by the researcher's supervisors to ensure suitability and reliability.

A pilot test was conducted at the University of Education, Winneba, to validate the instruments. The total participants were 5, consisting of 3 students, I supervisor and 1 SGS staff. It was really difficult to access the participants but since the authors wanted to get a sense of the field work and to test the instruments as well, we settled on the 5 participants. This exercise led to significant refinements, including a reduction in the number of questions: Master's students (20 to 16), supervisors (15 to 10), and administrators (12 to 7), streamlining the interview process, and reducing participant time commitment from 150 minutes to 90 minutes. And clarification of ambiguous questions to enhance specificity and clarity.
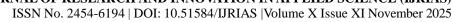
Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilising self-administered face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method. The interview protocol consisted of a series of open-ended questions, designed to elicit in-depth responses from respondents. An introductory letter obtained from the Office of the Director, Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA), was used to introduce the researcher and explain the purpose of the study. This introductory letter was presented to respondents via email and in person.

Respondent selection and appointments were arranged for in-depth, face-to-face interviews, at specified times and locations. Respondents were informed that all information provided would be used solely for research purposes. Moreover, respondents' consent was solicited to record the interviews using audio recorders, which facilitated the review and analysis of the study results.

Data Processing and Analysis

In organising the data, the researcher imported audio files of interviews into ATLASti software and transcribed them using the software's transcription tool, converting the recordings into written text while ensuring that words were correctly written out, formatting and style were uniform and all audio content was captured. Data was organised into documents/memos for easy navigation and management. Initial codes were assigned to data segments to identify preliminary patterns.

The analysis of data involved refining the coding scheme by assigning specific codes to relevant data segments. The codes were organised into hierarchies to identify relationships and patterns. These were segmented into meaningful themes based on research questions. ATLASti summary tool generated an overview, highlighting key points and trends. The researcher conducted member checking by sharing the data with participants to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

Data interpretation involves connecting codes to overarching themes and concepts through conceptual frameworks. The researcher documented insights and analytical decisions using memoing (Software). This aided the researcher in using the data visualisation technique tool in ATLASti to facilitate the illustration of relationships and patterns, informing conclusions based on the findings.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and acceptable procedures were followed in administering interviews. The researcher also ensured the reliability and validity of the data collection process. A pilot study was conducted to test the interview protocol, and the researcher's familiarity with the research context facilitated a deeper understanding of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview responses were analysed using ATLASti software, ensuring the rigor and transparency of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Research Question One

What Student-Related Factors Promote the Successful Completion of Master's Theses within the Stipulated Time?

Research question one sought to determine the student-related factors that promote the successful completion of Master's theses within the stipulated time. From the analysis of the data, the themes that made up these student-related factors are academic relationships, area of focus, financial standing, research acumen, student commitment, and time management.

Academic Relationships

This theme is concerned with the relationships that students form with faculty, colleagues, and other students and how these relationships create an avenue for the successful completion of a thesis. Participants described academic relationships in their instances in the quotes below

"When I got to UCC, I quickly made friends with people across the divide. I had coursemates who could read through whatever I have drafted before I could even forward it to my supervisor." (STU1)

"The relationship that the student has with his or her immediate colleagues is another criterion that helps in the successful completion of the thesis." (STU2)

Student participants shed more light on how academic relationships motivated them. This is what they had to say:

"...colleagues within the School of Agriculture who were also doing Agriculture were of support when we met at the Graduate Study room. Anytime we needed information for something, some guys were ready to help. They were ready to support me." (STU3)

"My colleagues in the programme were equally highly motivated people. We were all punctual and checking up on each other on the stages of our work so I will talk about the fact that my colleagues were equally motivated so they influenced me as I also equally influenced them." (STU4)

Participants further stated that receiving support from students and lecturers is vital through the building of relationships. The quotes below reflect this assertion.

"... colleague students played a part. When I'm unsure, I seek feedback from them, share my concerns, and consider their input, which ultimately influences my work. Aside from seeking feedback, I also approach experienced lecturers with specific challenges I'm facing. I ask questions, and they respond with clarifying questions of their own. Their insightful questions help me identify areas to focus on and find solutions." (STU5)

"Getting support is a key factor to a student completing on schedule. ...they can add on and they are like this one, take it out, get here you will get this material and read on." (STU7)

"... if your friends are supportive, they can also help you in finishing early. You can give your write-ups to

them to vet for you." (ADM2)

A participant who was a student also threw light on the fact that these relationships not only help in the actual thesis writing but also help students cope with the stress of academics by giving companionship. This is what the student had to say:

"... anytime I was feeling bored, I could go to them and we would watch movies for some minutes. That

companionship was there. Apart from academic work, we could discuss other things such as family, business, and among other things. This made me relaxed." (STU1)

A supervisor stated that cordial relationships among students and supervisors are essential. This is what was said

"Yes, cordial relationship with supervisor is also key." (SUP3).

Data from participants showed that the relationships they formed with other colleagues, who had already gone through the programme or same-year cohort mates, faculty, and other scholars, played either a direct or indirect role in their successful completion of the thesis. This shows how positive or negative relationships can be when writing a thesis.

Area of Focus

The area of focus covers the programme of study and ultimately the area of research. The area of focus has an impact on students finishing their thesis on time as a reasonable research problem with minimum expected challenges will be intriguing enough for students to finish successfully. This is what participants had to say about this theme:

"...the area was interesting and fascinating to me so I committed time and resources to it. I remained focused on the phenomenon of interest which was fascinating and motivating." (STU1)

"I develop an interest in the area of breeding from the undergraduate level so the interest is also one factor that can affect your early completion." (STU3)

Participants shared the view that the area of focus should not just be interesting but should also be researchable. This is what participants said

"Students have to know what they want to research about. You have to read to see that yes, this area is indeed researchable. The first thing students have to know is the ability to couch a good topic. If you get a good topic then you are making progress." (ADM1)

"Some topics are not researchable or as a novice researcher, you don't have to go for a topic that is too difficult." (STU6)

Participants suggested that to get such an interesting area of focus to enable successful completion, students must read extensively. The quotes below reflect this assertion.

"... knowing what you are really writing on, understanding of your topic and then knowing where to find your facts and figures from." (STU7)

"Thesis requires the student to put in much effort that is reading and research. The master's and Ph.D. work is about research. You have to read around broadly to enrich whatever your ideas are." (ADM1)

"I give them two books on research. One is on general research and another on research proposal and I ask them to read. ... they apply themselves to reading and I make sure that for each thesis you want to write you should at least have three samples that are similar to what you want to do, so that you don't go and reinvent the wheel." (SUP1)

A supervisor mentioned the adverse effect of not having an interesting area of focus and recommended that students should always come up with their area of interest to stay motivated to finish on time. This is what the supervisor had to say:

"A lot of times students come up with topics that are not coming from them. They are given the topics, so get to a point and they are not attached to the topic because they are not those who engineered them. Students should make it a priority to come up with topics that they have an interest in. This is the first step in fast-tracking your effort in completing within the stipulated time." (SUP2)

From the participants' assertion it has been noted that as students indulge in interesting research problems which is stimulating and reasonably challenging to satisfy their curiosity, they will be motivated enough to finish early. This suggests that a research area that is esoteric and abstruse will lead to unnecessary delays.

Good Financial Standing

Graduate education necessitates ample financial resources. In any research activity including thesis, there is a financial component that can ensure its successful completion. First of all, participants elicited how graduate education required financial planning. The following quotes reflect participants' take on financial planning.

"... financial issues can influence when you will complete your thesis. I had saved a little for my thesis, so there were no issues about finances. Being financially sound would help in completing your thesis." (STU3)

"I saved for one year and the second year whilst I was saving I enrolled in the programme." (STU4)

"Students should consider financial issues before jumping into the programme. You do not start midstream you start writing to us about financial issues." (ADM1)

Participants emphasised that graduate education requires significant financial investment due to various factors, highlighting the necessity of substantial financial resources to support academic pursuits.

"... if one does not have financial resources, he or she should not enroll in a master's programme. Graduate school is all about money. It is not about the fees but the finances you will need to survive on campus." (ADM1)

"Some of the research problems require a lot of movements by students. If students have the financial resources available, it also helps in a way." (ADM2)

"Thesis research frequently involves travel for data collection, placing significant financial demands on researchers. Family support can provide crucial assistance." (STU6)

"Students should consider grants, sponsorships, and external funding to overcome financial barriers in thesis research". (SUP2)

Participants also demonstrated how the grants and scholarships received from the university aided in the successful completion of the thesis. This is what participants mostly students had to say:

"what helped me complete on time is the scholarship money I got from Graduate School. It helped me because if I could remember, I went to a hospital (name withheld) not less than twenty times even before I started the data collection." (STU2)

"... we recently organised an award ceremony even amid hardships and also instituted a research fund. This award will be given to students to encourage them to write a good thesis and to finish on time." (ADM1)

Participants specified that graduate education requires a lot of financial resources and not being able to meet that can cause delays in the completion. According to participants, finances can be a factor in the successful completion of a thesis. It was also noted that graduate education required financial planning before admission to enable successful completion. Also, participants asserted that carrying out a research activity demands a financial aspect to fuel movement. Participants who received grants and scholarships spoke of the input of such aids in their successful completion.

Research Acumen of Students

Research acumen relates to students' previous research experience, skills, and knowledge. If students have

this in abundance it might accelerate the successful completion of a thesis. This theme is leased from the following quotes of participants:

"Apart from the courses we were taking during our undergraduate and the advanced research methods during the postgraduate, we were doing something practical. We go to the field, collect data, analyse, and present the findings. These basic things were polishing us along the line. I had knowledge which I would say was okay for me to write my thesis successfully." (STU2)

"If a student knows more about research, they will be able to organise their work and use their time appropriately." (ADM2)

Participants also indicated that some entities in the university such as departments and GRASAG play a support role in equipping students with research knowledge and skills. These are the voices of participants about such support.

"... your department too will have to support you in a way. Your department can organise workshops about how to write the various chapters of the theses." (STU6)

"When you go to the student front, GRASAG as a student institution also played a very vital role because there were several seminars the student leadership organised towards research and even data analysis." (STU1)

Most participants attended seminars, programmes, and workshops organised by their department and student institutions like Graduate Student Association and this boosted their research acumen thereby facilitating their successful completion. These programmes cover most parts of the thesis and how to write them effectively. Also, these programmes cover essential statistical tools for data analysis which come in handy for thesis writing. Again, courses run for students to improve their knowledge of advanced research methods needed for thesis writing were a factor for students' successful completion.

Student Commitment

This theme is about students' motivation to complete aptly even when faced with difficulties. It also looks at

students' discipline and dedication to the thesis writing. The following quotes from participants reflect this theme

"I will say motivation is a factor because if you are a student and you are not motivated to do the work, laziness sometimes sets in." (ADM2)

"... if you look at the students themselves you notice that they were students who were very self-motivated (and that is why they completed early)" (SUP1) Emphasis added

"...the composition of the student is a great factor coupled with other factors that influence their completion of the thesis positively or negatively. These compositions include; Interest in the thesis work. This arises when the student has an understanding of what the thesis is all about. With such an understanding, they can spend quality time on the thesis and forego other equally important things. This interest serves as a catalyst or motivation for the student to complete within the time allotted. You know, motivation itself is an essential factor that works magic when a student has a lot of it." (SUP3)

"... the bottom line is the preparedness of the student. Yes, supervision is another level but you the student should show that you are ready to do the work." (ADM1)

From the data, another aspect of student commitment is focus on the phenomenon of interest. This is where student stay focused on thesis process. Following are student voices on that:

"... I was focused on the phenomenon of interest, that is, what I was going to research about." (STU1)

"I did not allow anything personally to be a setback to me while I was taking the programme." (STU4)

"You might have other things doing but you have to allocate more time to writing your thesis." (STU6)

"... student commitment to their studies plays a role. As a student you must be committed to do what you are

supposed to do here, that is to study." (ADM2)

Another aspect that participants highlighted to be essential in student commitment is hard work, discipline, consistency, and dedication. These quotes from participants encompass these features

"It was just hard work, dedication, and discipline. These were the things that helped and I was also ready to read." (STU3)

"... I was working hard every day, it is not partial work, it was a full-time job, I was involved and very hard working." (STU4)

"... you have to be disciplined and time conscious in writing the thesis. There shouldn't be a day that you don't write an aspect of your thesis. You should always be committed to it." (STU6)

"I can also say showing commitment is another factor. Is commitment that will see you through the thesis work. No matter how easy or difficult the thesis is to a student, being committed to your work will yield results." (SUP3)

Participants were of the view that being committed is key to early completion and preventing delays as seen in how consistent, zealous, and passionate one is in the thesis work. The following statements by participants confirm their opinions

"I will say it's consistency and being committed to the work. These are very key to my completion on time. Reading and writing, reading and writing was all I was doing, having time for the work and foregoing some pleasures." (STU5)

"… if you are not committed to what you do, it's going to take you longer to finish your programme." (SUP2)

Furthermore, being able to accept corrections goes a long way in thesis completion and it reflects student commitment. Participants said this

"I was not shy to accept those corrections that my colleagues made. That was one thing that helped me." (STU1)

"… any correction that you have been told to do, do it. If there is any point about the correction you don't understand, you have to fall on your supervisor for explanation." (STU6)

In a suggestion to students to stay committed, a participant said this about being goal-oriented.

"Students should also be goal-oriented. For what purpose are they embarking on the thesis?" (SUP2)

According to participants, thesis writing demands a lot of hard work, dedication, consistency, and discipline to complete it successfully. Participants also suggested focusing on the phenomenon of interest and being motivated in the process as some of the features to ensure prompt completion. Moreover, participants hinted that being goal-oriented and capable of accepting corrections are also indicators that might result in the opportune completion of the thesis.

This theme talks about how Time Management

planning and time management come into play in student successful completion. In every task, efficient use of time is one of the factors that will ensure its apt completion and the same can be said for the thesis as indicated by the study's participants. From the data gathered from participants' interviews, participants were made to prepare a timetable/schedule for their thesis and this helped their prompt completion. The subsequent quotes relish this plan.

"I have a timetable for writing my thesis and I was disciplined to the scheduled time." (STU5)

"During our proposal writing you had to design a plan of when you are starting and when you are ending." (STU7)

"… we develop time frames or lines for each of the areas we want to cover. And then we try as much as possible to meet those time frames," (SUP1)

Another participant stipulated that being able to meet deadlines set by both parties, that is the student and supervisor also had a positive impact on the successful completion. This is what was said.

"… the ability of the student to also meet deadlines because there are times you are asked to submit this at this time so when you can do that then it means you can move to another level." (STU7)

A participant postulated that there was ample time given for him or her to finish the thesis as a study leave was granted and this also ensured the successful completion of the thesis. The voice of the participant is as follows.

"I had ample time juggling between my studies and work because I had study leave. This allowed me all the time I needed to work on the research." (STU1)

From the interview data participants of this study indicated how time management can also influence the prompt completion of the thesis. Participants postulated that the ability to meet deadlines, stick to a timetable/schedule, and have ample time will contribute to successful completion.

Research Question Two

What Supervisor-Related Factors Promote the Successful Completion of Master's Theses within the Stipulated Time?

In answering Research Question Two which sought to explore the supervisor-related factors that contribute to successful completion of Master's theses within the stipulated time, seven themes emerged from the responses of the participants. They were knowledge of thesis supervision, accessibility of supervisors, prompt feedback from supervisor, frequency and mode of meeting, relationship with supervisor, individual supervisor factors, and suggestion for supervisor-related factors. Their responses indicated varying sentiments about these student-related factors.

Knowledge of Thesis Supervision

To ensure effective supervision of the thesis, there should be policies guiding and binding parties involved in the thesis writing. These policies will also bring a level ground when inconsistencies and confusion arise in the process of thesis supervision. From a participant's voice, this theme gives a bit of insight into the policies surrounding thesis supervision. Participant's voice along this theme is established as follows.

"Graduate school collaborates with departments and faculties to run postgraduate programmes. So, when it comes to the appointment of supervisors. Departments would nominate and we would appoint the supervisors. We appoint, and they nominate based on some criteria. Whether this person has what it takes to supervise the work, looking at the qualification of the person and rank. If it is an M.Phil or Ph.D, then it requires a certain minimum rank so like in your case being an M.Phil student who is writing a thesis, you should be supervised by someone who is a Senior Lecturer and above. That person must not necessarily have a Ph.D. In the case of a Ph.D student, the supervisor ought to be a Senior Lecturer and must have a Ph.D. All of this comes into play in nominating supervisors. Even now at the master's level, we are saying that only one supervisor should be supervising students." (ADM1)

The participant continues to establish the way the Administration is going to disseminate to all stakeholders the contemporary policy on supervision. The participant asserted this.

"The whole of next week we are going to engage our stakeholders that are the Deans, Vice Deans, and Heads of Department to have a seminar and these are some of the issues we will be deliberating on. Also, we would talk about admission, supervision, and thesis examination as to who qualifies to do that. Even after viva and all that, there are still delays." (ADM1)

Through the same participant postulations, there have been some counter-complaints against the contemporary policy on supervision. This is what was revealed through the participant's quote.

"Now another complaint is coming up that the previous dual supervision was okay. It is funny how they were the same people who complained that they wanted their hands to be free." (ADM1)

Participant quotes making up this theme span from requirements for masters and PhD thesis supervision to current policy on supervision. Again, it was seen that there was a complaint about the current supervision policy which needs to be resolved.

Accessibility of Supervisors

This theme expounds on how readily supervisors were accessible to offer help and guidance in the thesis writing process. This theme is grounded in the following data from participants' interview

"... he presented himself as if we were colleagues. I could call him anytime, and he was always there to respond to my calls. ... he availed himself anytime we were to meet." (STU1)

"… on the spot, she will just give you what you want, she will correct you and then you go back sit down and then do the needful and then quickly come back to submit." (STU7)

Participants continue to express the conscious effort made by their

supervisor to avail themselves even during a pool of responsibilities. This is what the participants said.

"… he was burdened with a lot of responsibilities. Though he had extra responsibilities, he factored the supervision into his work knowing that it was an integral part of his responsibility at the university and he did it so well." (STU1)

Participants in their postulation expressed how accessible a supervisor is in contributing to the successful completion of the thesis. This is being available for meetings even amid numerous responsibilities to how easily to get in contact with a supervisor.

Prompt Feedback from the Supervisor

Prompt feedback from supervisors informs students about the direction and needs corrections to be made for progression in the thesis writing journey. This theme relates to participants' assertion about prompt feedback received from supervisors concerning their inputs. The quotes from participants on this theme are enlisted as follows

"I will promptly review your drafts, provide feedback, and collaborate with you to refine the content, ensuring timely and high-quality output" (SUP1)

"Timely feedback from the supervisor is another factor that aids early completion of the thesis work." (SUP3)

Participants added that the feedback should be helpful to give the proper recommendations and directions for the thesis. They had to say this about helpful feedback

"… giving the right directions to students will make them complete successfully either early or on time."

(ADM2)

"…their feedbacks were timely, helpful, and encouraging." (STU4)

A participant suggested to supervisors that they should evaluate aspects of the thesis sent to them by students on time as it aids in the successful completion of the thesis. This is the voice

"Reviewers should provide timely feedback on submitted works to enable prompt revisions."
(SUP2)

The theme covers the timely frequency and helpfulness of supervisors' feedback and how it contributes to the successful completion of thesis writing. In that, not every feedback can lead to successful completion but prompt and useful feedback will be advantageous in the successful completion of the thesis.

Frequency and Mode of Meeting

Participants enumerated the frequency and also the mode of meeting with their supervisors and saw this to be another contributing factor to their successful completion. Some participants said the usual mode of meeting was face-to-face. This is the voice of participants about such meetings.

"Mostly we met face-to-face and also through phone calls." (STU3)

"The mode sometimes was face-to-face but other times the work is sent through email and discussion made over the phone." (STU4)

"With the mode of meeting, the first of it was face-to-face." (STU5)

"At times I go to campus to meet him then at other times we were able to have Zoom meeting." (STU6)

"It was mostly face-to-face, we did the face-to-face meeting but when I'm writing and some of the corrections, I'm not able to get it, we do the correction on the phone but most of our meetings were face-to-face." (STU7)

"... when we have the physical meeting..." (SUP1)

"we can meet face-to-face and if the student is on the field and encounters a challenge, discussions are done over the phone. Sometimes through email..." (SUP2)

The face-to-face meeting was also supplemented with other means of meeting and this is what participants had to say about the other means through which the meetings were done.

"The face-to-face meeting was limited because we were always discussing it either through the mail, WhatsApp, or on the phone." (STU2)

"At times I go to campus to meet him then at other times we were able to have Zoom meeting." (STU6)

"The use of technology such as email, WhatsApp, zoom, and phone calls among others facilitated prompt feedback." (SUP3)

The frequency of the meetings varied across students and supervisors but the frequency did not exceed monthly meetings. These are the quotes to reflect the number of times meetings were done

"...we were meeting like three times within a month and there were times we had to schedule additional times." (STU1)

"With the meeting, it was quite a few numbers, in all we met about ten times for the year." (STU2)

"... within a month, we were able to meet about five times." (STU4)

"At least I met him once every week..." (STU3)

"My supervisor scheduled with me, that for every week basically on Fridays, I will have to submit my thesis work for assessment." (STU6)

Participants enlisted the main mode of the meeting as face-to-face and also went to list the supplement means for the meeting which is via emails and social network platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Participants again specified the frequency of the meeting. These meetings allowed for issues about the thesis to be discussed at length and also gave avenues for further mentoring and direction.

Relationship with Supervisor

This theme highlighted the type of relationship that existed between

students who completed the thesis successfully and their supervisor. Most participants described their relationships with their supervisors as good and cordial. Participants' responses are found in the voices ensuing.

"I had a good relationship with him." (STU2)

"Then also you have to develop a good relationship with your supervisor. The relationship between the student and supervisor must be cordial." (STU3)

"The relationship of supervisor and student is a key factor. I got a

supervisor who always asked me to come to him anytime am faced with any difficulty regarding the thesis. His openness to me enabled me to ask a lot of questions that brought clarity to my confusion." (STU5)

"In fact. I had a cordial relationship with my supervisor… My supervisor is even able to send me files this tells you that there was a good rapport between me and my supervisor." (STU6)

"Is just the lecturer-student relationship. It was more of the friendly type." (STU7)

"I strongly believe a cordial relationship between a supervisor and supervisee will promote an early completion of the thesis." (SUP1)

"Another thing that helped my student to complete on time was a good relationship that was built. I welcomed him into my office any time he arrived and answered his calls when appropriate.
When I'm in a meeting and can't answer his call, I send a text message to that effect. I made him

feel at ease to come up with anything that was a bother to him. Calling at times to find out how he is doing and how the thesis is also going. This I believe, broke any barrier." (SUP3)

On how to achieve this kind of good and cordial relationship, a participant uttered that, students have to try to bring about this friendship. The participant vocalised this by saying this.

"Prove to him that what you are doing is important. This will bring that friendliness. When you go to the supervisor, your posture and response to his questions will contribute to your relationship. You as a student will have to help the supervisor to have a good association with you." (STU3)

A participant also elucidated the reason why he or she prefers a professional relationship with students.
The participant remarked this

"…I would rather prefer a professional relationship because, to some level, cordial relationship is a double-edged sword. Sometimes, a student might take your cordiality for granted or see your leniency as a weakness. I believe that whatever the relationship is you should be professional." (SUP2)

This could mean that previous students have taken advantage of the cordial relationship established between the

participant and such students.

Most participants elicited that they had a good relationship with their supervisors. This kind of relationship will allow students to go to supervisors without any fear of intimidation to seek all sorts of knowledge and direction needed for the successful completion of the thesis.

Individual Supervisor Factors

This theme connotes participants' views on the specific factors of supervisor factors that contribute to students' successful completion of the thesis. First of all, participants especially student participants specified that supervisors gave them autonomy to choose aspects and also own the work with little guidance. The views on this are listed below.

"I did enjoy student autonomy one hundred percent and if there is anything more than one hundred percent, I did enjoy that. Because from conception to the design to the execution, the autonomy was always granted to me." (STU1)

"Of course, every aspect of the work I did myself. Everything about the work I did myself. My supervisor did not force me to do anything. He did not force me about which statistical tool I should use or the design.

Everything I did myself. For the freedom it was there, hundred percent." (STU3) I had that level of autonomy even though they played a major role in the work." (STU4)

"... students were told that the work is yours, not your supervisor's. I enjoyed autonomy in carrying out my work." (STU5)

Some participants classified the total quality of supervision received from their supervisor to be good and it can only be stipulated that this contributed positively to thesis writing. The following quotes throw light on the good description of the quality of supervision received

"I would not give excellent but it was very good" (STU3)

"I will say that it was great, I wouldn't say it was 100 percent but I think it was good work done because she taught me that even though she had gone through the work, I should equally give it to another person to also read through and submit the final work to her." (STU7)

Furthermore, a participant indicated that supervisors provided material and resource persons to facilitate the thesis writing and supervision. This is what some participants postulated about that.

"...in terms of resources as in literature that you need, he will get it for you. If you are finding it default getting it, he will get you something so you will have no excuse. Aside from that, he assigned me to two seniors from the earlier cohorts to guide me through the process. He made sure anything I needed was provided including making phone calls on my behalf." (STU2)

Participants were also of the view that supervisors' adequate knowledge in the area of research and the processes of research were of great advantage to their completion. Their opinions on this are as follows.

"With knowledge, he is fantastic, especially with methodology." (STU2)

"I will say that he is very competent." (STU4)

"To be a good and effective guide to students, you must show

mastery over the thesis knowing what goes into every component and more especially knowing the requirements of the university." (SUP3)

Another important factor based on individual supervisors is their willingness to accept the role of supervision

based on participants' data. This is supervisors' willingness to accept the task of supervising the student to undertake research in a particular field of study. Subsequent quotes of participants depict supervisor readiness

"... supervisor should be ready to supervise you. If the supervisor is ready and accepts the role from the onset, it is a plus." (STU3)

"Mostly a student should be given a supervisor who is interested in your topic or the area of interest of the student…" (ADM2)

Again, participants' responses showed that supervisors' requests for the development of a work plan did contribute to successful completion. Participants' assertions on this factor are envisioned in the quotes below

"First and foremost, he (Supervisor) tasked me to develop a work plan. He (Supervisor) made inputs into this work plan and the two of us discussed that work plan." (STU1)

"What I usually do with my students is to develop a thesis work plan with them which usually has to do with when and where to submit and how long to submit a work for review." (SUP3)

Also, according to the study participants, the supervisor unique way of supervision by teaching research and aspects of thesis writing using their own experiences and practical examples. Also, supervisors making students read and apply knowledge smoothen the writing process thereby fostering early competition. Participants' views on this are below

"… if I want to do something, he will give me a sample work that this is what I want. For example if he wants your tables and results to be in a particular way, he will just give you a sample paper" (STU3)

"… from my own experience as a student until I became a lecturer,

… I used my ups and downs experiences to guide them, so they don't repeat the mistakes that I did." (SUP1)

This study also suggests that supervisors' motivation of students instigated the prompt completion of the thesis. This is how participants say they were motivated by their supervisors to allow for expedient completion of the thesis

"… there is always a motivation from him (Supervisor) aside from always reminding you of what to do." (STU2)

"My supervisor will ask why you didn't call. He will push you even when you don't want to." (STU7)

Lastly, participants indicated that a flexible supervision style also facilitated the apt completion of their thesis. Quotes below represent this postulation

"There were instances where instead of meeting in his office, he will prefer we meet at UCC Science parliament." (STU1)

Also in this flexible supervision, some supervisors allowed for group supervision where other master students were supervised concurrently. This was what a participant had to say about group supervision.

"He was doing it with us in a team. We were two students that were going to him so when it comes to similar things then we will do it together but when it got to individual topics, he will tackle it case by case." (STU1)

Suggestions for Supervisor-Related Factors

Participants came up with proposed solutions to aid students in the completion of their thesis. This ranged from team or group supervision to prioritising the success of students. These suggestions are reflected in the participants' quotes below.

"If you choose a topic the supervisor has no idea about, of course, the two of you will find it tough." (STU3)

"Mostly a student should be given a supervisor who is interested in your topic or the area of interest of the student." (ADM2)

"If you are a supervisor who has a lot of workloads on you, I don't think is appropriate that you accept to supervise a student once you know you are so much engaged with other works and you wouldn't be able to give the student enough time." (SUP2)

"There are special cases where departments are doing collaborative work or even the students, especially those in the medical areas. They will be doing something with collaboration from other institutes, we allow them just that the principal supervisor should be from the University of Cape Coast because the student is our student." (ADM1)

Research Question Three

What Institution-Related Factors Promote the Successful Completion of Master's Theses within the Stipulated Time?

This study also sought to identify institutional factors that promote the successful completion of Master's students' research and thesis writing within the stipulated time. From the analysis based on participants' experiential descriptions, three themes emerged. They are university promoters, department promoters, and recommendations. The themes are presented as follows;

University Promoters

According to participants, these are measures that the university has purposely put in place to facilitate thesis writing and supervision to ultimately lead to apt thesis completion. Participants prompted that one way the university does this is through the Graduate School and the following quotes represent their utterances.

"It is the Graduate School that assigns supervisors to students based on the topic of students and the specialisation of the supervisor." (SUP2)

"We also do progress reports with the students where we will call students to find out how they are faring with the programme and thesis." (ADM2)

"Graduate School also organised programmes where during our time, tackled problem statement and the research as a whole. And then we had one statistical tool another time they handled." (STU5)

"The other thing is the conferences, seminars, workshops and exchange programs organised by Graduate School and department for the students on thesis essential topics." (SUP3)

"It is about research. You will need the information to write your research so in partnership with the library, we are organising this programme for our students where they will be taught how to access information for their research." (ADM1)

"I also know the Graduate School, we are currently running an e-resource for first-year graduate students. During this period, students are taken through certain things they will need to help them in their thesis writing such as how to look for materials and now we have added the plagiarism test to it. These are some of the measures to help students gather information online. We also have a special hall for seminars." (ADM2)

Per participants, another measure that the university put in place to achieve successful completion is done through effective supervision. The university does this by way of improving supervisors thus positively impacting thesis supervision. Participants vocalise their take on this measure in the quotes below.

"Support system is also provided. For example, supervisors who are up to the task and have the requisite knowledge and experience in your area of research are assigned to you." (STU5)

"... the university is doing well in supporting students with their

research work. This can be seen in several ways, think about the qualified lecturers the university employs. Mention can also be made about seminars, conferences, and workshops organised for supervisors to service as a means of upgrade. Supervisors are also assessed and evaluated by students through performance appraisal. In short, the supervisors are a great asset of the university and the university makes sure that this asset works effectively and efficiently to contribute to the development of the students." (SUP3)

Additional participants also stated that the university is helping in the successful completion of the thesis by providing financial aid to students. These aids come in the form of grants and scholarships to lessen the

financial burden of students writing the thesis. These quotes reflect participants' postulations on the financial assistance from the university.

"Again, financial aid is given by the university in the form of grants, scholarships, and awards. These help students to complete their thesis on time, in that they are motivated and would not feel burdened or troubled to quit the program in search of money. I know the government also gives bursaries to research students in the course work or the thesis work or both." (STU5)

"I also had financial support from the school though it wasn't enough, it was able to solve a problem and all of these aided in my completion on time." (STU6)

"We recently concluded an awards program, carefully designed to motivate students. This initiative promoted through our media channels, supports students facing financial constraints. This year, we awarded grants to 57 students, ranging from GH¢2,300 to GH¢10,000, to assist with thesis completion. Notably, four recipients received GH¢3,000 each, while others received GH¢5,500. These grants are non-repayable, aiming to encourage timely completion." (ADM1)

"We support students with research grants to help them complete on time." (ADM2)

Participants also stipulated that the university provided infrastructure including internet access and libraries among other things. A participant was even of the view that resources were essential for academic performance. Below are the expressions of participants on resources provided

"I can say the university has done well in terms of resources but at the place where we were attending our lectures, there was Wi-Fi that you could connect anytime you wanted the internet to access materials. But all in all, resources for academic performances were provided". (STU1)

"The research common room for graduate students at the library was my second home. The place was conducive to air conditioning. The seating arrangement and everything were superb and was good for learning coupled with the internet facility." (STU5)

"Again, the environment of the learner plays an important role in the early completion of the research work and this is taken care of by the institution or the various departments through the provision of libraries, study rooms, cafeterias, lecture halls, IT resource centers, sports and games facilities, church/mosque to mention but a few. These things are continuously being upgraded to modern specifications all to make the student comfortable psychologically, socially, physically emotionally and spiritually." (SUP3)

A participant hinted that the university helps in students' successful completion by prompting students about the deadline and the accompanying penalty fees. This is what the participant divulged

"They also kept telling us that if you don't finish at a certain time, you will pay extra school fees and this pushed me to work hard to finish before the deadline. I believe this that they put in place helped us a lot." (STU7)

Lastly, in one of the instances, a participant opined that the university was

prompt to work on the ethical clearance to aid in data collection and this contributed to successful completion. This is what the participant enunciated

"Then when you send your proposal for ethical clearance too, I think they were able to work promptly to review your work and provide you with the letter, the letter that you will use to collect data." (STU6)

Departmental Promoters

In the view of participants, some departmental initiatives assist in the successful completion of the thesis.

Participants talked about how their various departments organised periodic seminars and work-in-progress presentations either on a weekly or monthly basis for example. Participants came out with these quotes.

"... seminars organised by the department. During the period when we were doing the weekly proposal defense within the same period, there were series of seminars we were asked to attend." (STU5)

"... the institution organised a workshop on how to develop your proposal, then in addition, how to also write the various chapters of your thesis that is one of them." (STU6)

Also, according to participants another measure that contributed to their successful completion was good relations with faculty and staff in the department. A participant opined that there were times when they were invited over to talk about issues in their thesis writing. Other participants also said good relationship with staff in the department was a great asset in the journey of time completion. Participants also expressed how faculty, including the Head of Department, had a good rapport and they were concerned about their success. Staff at the department also gave out vital information and reminded students about their thesis and deadline according to participants. This is vocalised as follows.

"In general, the relationship is okay that is between the graduate students and lecturers. The lecturers see graduate students as colleagues so, there is this friendly atmosphere there". (STU2)

"The Animal Science Department's collaborative atmosphere significantly contributed to my success. Lecturers set aside differences, providing constructive feedback during defenses and seminars. Their willingness to offer guidance outside formal settings, combined with laboratory technicians' support, greatly facilitated my research." (STU3)

"... we had the Head of Department in the person of (name withheld) who is now the (position withheld). He was punctual, regular, and ever ready to talk to you about your challenges, and on top of that the secretary to that office always served as a reminder and called us regularly, so we were not at the blind side of our work or what we were doing." (STU4)

"...the department invited us to find out where we have all gotten to and they kept asking why we are trailing behind, what you think you can best do, they kept asking us are there any issues regarding supervision…" (STU7)

Participants also said their departments provided them with helpful courses, tutorials, and resources including introductory letters to aid data collection. The following statements by participants confirm their opinions on the provision of resources and courses

"The department gave me a letter to submit to a hospital (name withheld)." (STU2)

"I remember some of the chapters we were called specifically to go through tutorials, so we know exactly what to put in there." (STU7)

When it comes to supervision a participant said the department put in much effort to ensure effective supervision was. This is what was declared about it. *"My department does well as they make sure that a supervisor does not have more than one student to supervise." (STU2)*

Finally, on this theme, participants postulated that the department instilled and instigated students to start the thesis early to complete it on time. A participant mentioned that it is the tradition of the department that students complete on time and this motivated the participant to finish timely and successfully. This is what was said about this issue.

"...the first motivation they gave me was that nobody had exceeded the two years for the M.Phil. I should maintain the record or do a better time, Also, concerning the commencement of the research work, the

department did not wait for me to finish the coursework before I started the thesis work. The department told me once I have my thesis topic, defend my proposal and it is accepted, I can start with the work." (STU3)

Suggestions for Institutional Factors

Participants made some practical suggestions and the first was the provision of requisite resources needed to facilitate and aid students' research activities. Participants uttered these quotes to reflect this suggestion.

"In the University of Cape Coast, each department needs to have a mini-laboratory and then there should be a central laboratory. If our mini laboratory can't handle a task, we move to the central laboratory." (STU3)

"... student sees the institution or department as their home and a

better support system will go a long way to facilitate students to finish on time because the department/institution should have all the necessary equipment or materials. For example, laboratories, chemicals, green-houses, libraries, etc. and they should be available at all times for students to use." (SUP2)

There was also a suggestion that administrators who work on documentation should attend to thesis documents swiftly to smoothen the thesis writing process. A participant expressed this suggestion in this quote.

"... once the documents are brought to the administrators, they should process them as quickly as possible to make it easy for students to complete on time." (SUP2)

The same participant also called for adequate human resources at the departments to man the position of supervisors for effective supervision of the thesis. A participant voiced this.

"You (department) should also have the human resource, talking about the lecturers who should be around to give students the information they need." (SUP2)

The participant continues to beseech that there should be effective communication between the Graduate School (*GS*) and the various departments to better serve students as they write their thesis. This is what the participant enunciated.

"The relationship between the GS and the department of the student should be flexible so that the department can easily communicate to the GS and vice versa, which will at least take away the bottom necks." (SUP2)

Lastly, there was the suggestion that students should abide by policies that govern thesis writing to avoid any inconveniences that will delay the thesis process. This is the quote the participant poured out about this suggestion.

"We (the institution) want students to abide by our policies. The policy will tell you that you have been admitted to a regular programme and have to work within the two years." (ADM1)

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study examined student-, supervisor-, and institution-related factors that promote on-time completion of master's theses at the University of Cape Coast (UCC). Across the three research questions, the findings converge on the importance of supportive relationships, well-matched research topics, timely and high-quality supervisory practices, and enabling institutional systems.

Student-Related Factors

Participants identified six student-level enablers: academic relationships, area of focus, financial stability, research acumen, commitment, and time management.

Academic relationships. Productive ties with peers, faculty, and broader scholarly networks offered formative feedback, troubleshooting, and emotional support. These accounts align with work linking social support to reduced stress and greater persistence (Chaudhry et al., 2024) and with mentoring literature emphasising peer guidance and collegial exchange (Baker et al., 2022). The pattern also resonates with the idea of "academic match" alignment between students' goals and programme contexts which is associated with timely progress (Crocetti et al., 2023).

Area of focus. Participants stressed that interest-driven, feasible topics sustain motivation and help avert derailment from overly complex or poorly scoped projects. This is consistent with evidence that interest heightens engagement and performance (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Practical strategies (e.g., extensive scoping reads, identifying comparable theses) were described as safeguards against selecting problems that exceed master's-level bandwidth.

Financial stability. Students reported planning and leveraging scholarships or small grants to cover travel, data collection, and living costs echoing findings that funding availability predicts programme completion and shorter time-to-degree (Khozaei et al., 2015; Muthukrishnan et al., 2022).

Research acumen. Prior exposure to research methods, workshops, and writing seminars smoothed progression through proposal, data work, and write-up. These map onto experiential learning logic: skill develops through cycles of concrete experience and reflective abstraction, and gaps at any stage slow learning and output (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; O'Neil & dos Santos, 2018).

Commitment and self-regulation. Accounts of sustained effort, responsiveness to feedback, and goal focus mirror classic descriptions of persistent graduate trajectories (Miller, 1995) and supervisors' expectations for visible student initiative (Arthur, 2022).

Time management. Students who set and adhered to schedules, while allowing modest flexibility, were more likely to meet interim and final deadlines. This complements evidence linking time management to academic achievement (Pyhältö et al., 2015) and practical heuristics such as the pickle-jar approach to prioritisation.

Implication. Admissions briefings and early-stage workshops should explicitly integrate topic-scoping tools, funding search tactics, and concrete planning templates; peer writing groups and co-mentorship structures can institutionalise the relational supports students find most valuable.

Supervisor-Related Factors

Six supervisory themes which are clear supervision policies, accessibility, prompt and constructive feedback, regular meetings, collegial relationships, and supervisor expertise/approach collectively supported timely completion.

Policy clarity. Participants described growing awareness of supervision norms (e.g., qualification thresholds, appointment processes) as the Graduate School disseminated guidance. Transparent procedures appear to lower uncertainty and align expectations, echoing prior calls for structured supervision frameworks to improve completion (Boakye-Yiadom, 2021).

Accessibility and feedback. Students valued short response times and actionable comments on drafts features repeatedly linked to satisfaction and progress (Adefulu et al., 2020). The data suggest that *quality* and *tempo* of feedback jointly matter timely guidance prevents stalls; specific, educative feedback advances writing quality.

Meeting cadence and modality. Regular, mostly face-to-face meetings supplemented by email/phone/Zoom kept momentum and accountability high. This aligns with evidence that availability of meetings, fast replies, and feedback are central to effective supervision (Meng & Zhao, 2018).

Relationship quality. Most students reported cordial, professional rapport that lowered barriers to asking questions and disclosing challenges, a pattern associated with lower attrition risk (Pyhältö et al., 2015) and higher satisfaction (Arthur, 2022; Shin et al., 2018).

Autonomy and expertise. Supervisors who granted autonomy while offering domain-savvy guidance and exemplars enabled students to "own" their work without feeling directionless. Autonomy is consistently linked to motivation and continuation (Meng & Zhao, 2018), whereas mismatched direction can undermine progress (Van Rooij et al., 2021). Participants also highlighted supervisors' methodological competence and willingness to model problem-solving from experience (Antwi, 2020).

Implication. Supervisors' development should emphasise fast, formative feedback; explicit meeting schedules; autonomy-supportive advising; and ready-to-use teaching artefacts (e.g., annotated exemplars, checklists). Workload-sensitive models (e.g., team supervision for methods-intensive projects) can distribute effort without diluting responsibility.

Institution-Related Factors

Institutional supports operated at university and departmental levels and were widely perceived as consequential.

University-level enablers. The Graduate School's role in supervisor assignment, progress monitoring, and capacity-building (seminars/workshops) reflects a systems perspective in which coherent structures and subsystems help organisations achieve goals (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2020). Financial assistance (small grants, scholarships) addressed common bottlenecks in fieldwork and materials (Mills & Birks, 2019). Access to eresources, libraries, and dedicated study spaces further underpinned research activity (Attakumah, 2023; Barrett et al., 2019). Participants also credited deadline reminders and efficient ethics review with preventing avoidable delays—administrative reliability that supports both compliance and pace.

Department-level enablers. Regular seminars, work-in-progress presentations, and targeted tutorials on thesis components created iterative feedback loops and raised methodological fluency, in line with experiential learning principles (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Departments that limited supervisory loads, issued timely introductory letters, and curated analytic tools lowered friction in data collection and analysis.

Implication. Regular presentation of thesis progress report by student , library-research training, and dependable administrative timelines (ethics, letters, exams) yields outsized returns in completion rates. Departmental "thesis studios" that combine recurring presentations, writing time, and on-call methods support can institutionalise productive habits observed among completers.

Synthesis

Taken together, the results foreground *alignment*: between students and topics (interest/feasibility), students and supervisors (availability, autonomy support, expertise), and departments and Graduate School (clear policies, predictable processes, targeted resources). Where these align, students' progress to finish on time. However, where they misalign, unclear expectations, thin feedback cadence, resource gaps among others delays accrue.

Practical Recommendations (anchored in the findings)

1. **Early scaffolding for students:** mandatory topic-scoping labs, funding mini-clinics, and time-block planning templates during the first semester.

2. **Supervisor practice standards:** service-level targets for feedback turnaround; agreed meeting frequency; autonomy-supportive advising; use of exemplars and checklists.

3. **Departmental thesis studios:** scheduled WIP seminars with structured peer feedback; embedded methods/writing consults; curated toolkits for analysis.

4. **Administrative reliability:** published SLAs for ethics review and letters; proactive deadline reminders; small, rapid-award research grants tied to milestones.

Limitations and Future Directions

As a qualitative study situated in one Ghanaian university, findings reflect participants' contexts and may not generalise wholesale to other settings. Future research could (a) test these predictors in multi-site designs, (b) quantify the relative contribution of supervisor feedback tempo, autonomy support, and funding to time-to degree, and (c) evaluate the causal impact of "thesis studio" interventions on completion outcomes

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