

## CERM-ESA Master's Programme

The nature of postgraduate student-supervisor relationship in the completion of doctoral studies in education: An exploration in two African universities

### Introduction

- Research has shown that the student-supervisor relationship is key in the completion of doctoral studies
- Completion rate of doctoral studies in Africa is very low
- There are few documented studies that have established the nature of the student-supervisor relationship in completion of doctoral studies in African universities
- This study was therefore focused on the nature of the student-supervisor relationship in the context of an African setting

### Research question

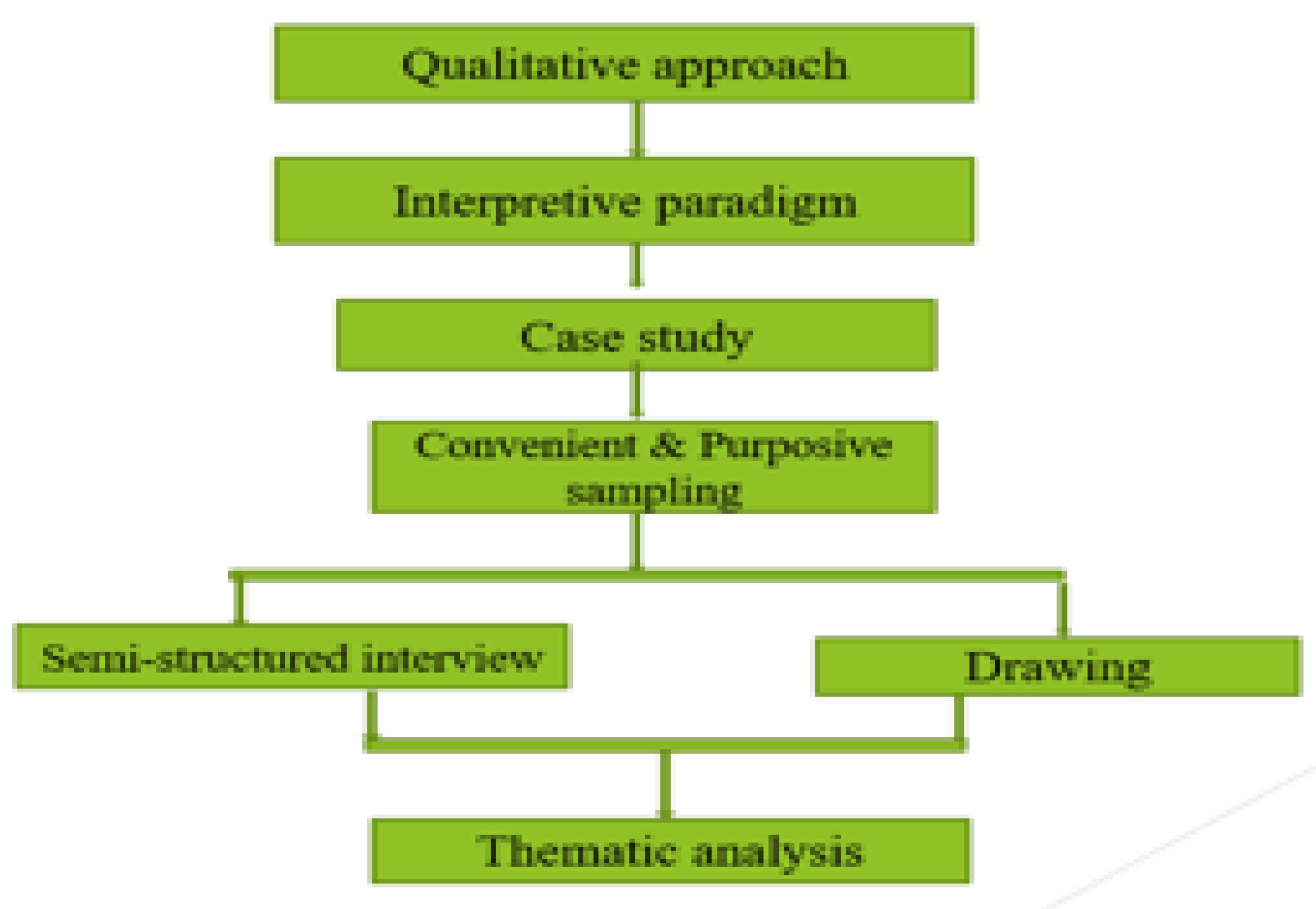
*What is the nature of the student-supervisor relationship as experienced by the graduates who recently completed their educational doctoral studies in African universities?*

### Literature

The literature covered the following bodies of knowledge:

- The status of postgraduate studies
- Postgraduate supervision
- Postgraduate supervisor-student relationship and
- Trends in doctoral studies and postgraduate supervision

### Methodology



### Findings

The findings were discussed under the followings four areas:

#### Expectations of the student-supervisor relationship

Doctoral students expect the following in their relationship with their supervisors:

- Effective mentoring towards getting the PhD done
- A collaborative relationship
- Integrity in the relationship

#### Experiences of the student-supervisor relationship

The experiences emerged as both fulfilling and unfulfilling:

- Fulfilling experiences include a relationship with a bond where the supervisor also inspires the student
- Unfulfilling relationship marked by discontent and minimal engagement between the student and the supervisor

#### Negotiating the student supervisor relationship

It emerged that:

- Negotiation should be a continuous process throughout the research period
- It must also be diplomatic; which involves a mutual negotiation done openly

#### Perceptions of the student-supervisor relationship on what leads to succesful completion of doctoral studies

- Supervisor nurturing; which includes quality guidance and positive encouragement
- Supervisor efficiency; which involves expedient feedback and effective communication
- Supervisor-student obligation; this refers to a negotiated commitment and mutual commitment

#### Conclusion

African universities struggling with the throughput of doctoral students could learn from this research in order to improve student-supervisor relationships and promote the success rate of doctoral students.



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### Implications

- (i) Establishing policies that promote negotiation and frequent guidance (ii) Invest in developing the academics to strengthen their supervision skills (iii) Not overloading supervisors so as to have time to mentor the students (iv) Ensuring that supervisors supervise areas of their specialisation (v) Establishing a regular formal review of doctoral students' progress