

Review

Inclusive Supervision: Bridging the Cultural Divide

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Abstract: Inclusive supervision is an approach to supervision that prioritizes multicultural competencies and an ethic of inclusion. Inclusivity in doctoral (or PhD) supervision is of key significance due to the collaborative nature of the relationship between supervisors and supervisees. Scant research has been conducted that considers the multiple, intersectional influences and their impact within this relationship. This study employs a rapid review method to synthesize findings on the research evidence encapsulating inclusive doctoral supervision. A search of academic literature spanning the last ten years (2013–2023) led to the inclusion of nine empirical, qualitative research studies on inclusive supervision. A synthesis of the findings resulted in five key challenges to inclusive supervision that diverse students face: power dynamics and feedback, a lack of belonging and support, a racial lens on academic competence, (mis)understandings of cultural differences, and communication and language barriers. In discussing these findings, we employ an intersectional lens and introduce a conceptual framework for an inclusive collaboration between supervisors and supervisees.

Keywords: inclusivity; supervisor; PhD student; intersectionality; identity



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1. Introduction

Inclusive supervision is an approach to supervision that prioritizes multicultural competencies and an ethic of inclusion [1]. The concept of inclusivity is relatively recent; however, research has examined specific elements such as the importance of pastoral care from PhD supervisors for ethnic minority PhD students [2], the significance of PhD supervisors' beliefs and attitudes about the students' culture [3], and the general need for inclusive PhD supervision due to the increasing diversity among PhD students [4]. Many educational institutes have also developed their own 'toolkits' for inclusive supervision to direct and guide PhD supervisors to adequately support and address any challenges faced by diverse students (e.g., [5]). Much of the scholarly work in the field focuses on equipping PhD students with transferable skills for employment [6], student satisfaction and experience [7], and successful thesis completion [8].

These efforts provide a good foundation for understanding inclusive PhD supervision. Nevertheless, the significance of supervisory relationships in light of the multiple layers of complexity that arise from the diverse, intersectional identities (e.g., ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender, sexuality, age, and disability) of students and their supervisors requires more focus to improve supervisory practice and move the field forward. The identities of the supervisor and the student are central to the supervisory relationship, with the role of the supervisor seldom receiving the attention it deserves. The importance of addressing intersectional identities in PhD supervision is highlighted in the quote below.

We do not leave our identities as raced, classed and gendered bodies outside the door when we engage in supervision: instead, our personal histories, experiences, cultural and class backgrounds and social, cultural and national locations remain present (some might say omnipresent). Culture, politics and history matter in supervision. [9] (p. 368)

This paper enriches the available literature on supervisory relationships by foregrounding the impact of diversity on supervisory teams and students. In particular, we synthesize qualitative evidence on inclusive PhD supervision, focusing on how supervisors shape the experience of PhD students whose identities differ from their own. The roles of culture and context are explored insofar as they shape the norms of the student's interaction with their supervisor and factors that hinder PhD progression and completion. In this paper, culture encompasses both personal culture as well as institutional cultures that, instead of being supportive, promote an assumed neutrality or, worse, indifference.

The area of supervision is naturally vitally important for PhD students and for the continuing development of knowledge across disciplines. The discussion in this paper, informed by the contributions of three authors with diverse academic and personal backgrounds and identities, highlights elements that contribute to inclusive supervision. The perspectives of supervisors and students from a wide range of contexts are considered. A model to underpin initiatives to overcome the factors that hinder progression and completion is presented to inform inclusive supervisory practices and future research. This work is fundamental and relevant for new and experienced supervisors as it provides a framework to explore and discuss the hidden silences in supervision. The themes emerging from the rapid review connect the theory to societal knowledge.

2. Materials and Methods

We conducted a rapid review to synthesize evidence on inclusive PhD supervision. Rapid reviews, often referred to as rapid evidence summaries, provide an accelerated process of reviewing evidence compared to a systematic review. This is done "through streamlining or omitting specific methods to produce evidence for stakeholders in a resource-efficient manner" [10] (p. 78).

The research question guiding the rapid review was 'What is the evidence on inclusive PhD supervision?' The inclusion criteria consisted of evidence spanning the last ten years (2013–2023), empirical research, and peer-reviewed and published literature available in full-text format and in English. Quantitative evidence was excluded, and a focus on qualitative evidence was undertaken as it provides a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of the evidence and is more conducive to a narrative synthesis of the findings. Grey literature was excluded for efficiency reasons, as a common approach to completing a rapid review in a limited period is to narrow the scope of the search [11].

Two databases were selected to conduct the searches: ERIC (EBSCOhost) for a more general and interdisciplinary search and ProQuest Education Database for a more refined search focused on education. Keywords for searches included 'PhD,' 'doctoral,' or 'doctorate,' and 'supervision,' or 'supervisor' or 'advisor,' and 'inclusivity' or 'diversity' or 'equity.' The searches amounted to a total of 2659 results. Fourteen duplicates were located and removed. The remaining 2645 results were screened based on title and abstract, resulting in the exclusion of 2573 results, and 72 results were deemed eligible for full-text screening. Following this, the full text of the 72 studies was retrieved from electronic sources, and after screening, a total of nine studies were deemed fit for inclusion in the rapid review. The majority (98%) of the excluded studies were not relevant to the topic of inclusive PhD supervision. For instance, some studies focused on higher education but did not specify PhD or doctoral supervision and were excluded. Other studies that emphasized work-based supervision, including the counselor and doctor–trainee supervision, or studies on PhD supervision that did not focus on inclusion but on subject knowledge or student stress and wellbeing, were excluded. The remaining 2% of excluded studies were quantitative and were excluded based on the methods used in the study. Only one reviewer was involved in the screening process as resources were limited, a practice commonly undertaken by researchers conducting rapid reviews [11].

Quality appraisal of the nine included studies was conducted using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program qualitative checklist [12]. Quality appraisal is conducted to establish the validity, reliability, and objectivity of research. In qualitative research, Edwards and

colleagues [13] state that one approach to assessing evidence is to create a balance between the methodological shortcomings of a study and the relevance of the findings to the research question(s). Certain core criteria need to be met in order for a study to be included in a review. These include ethical research conduct, the use of appropriate and rigorous methods, and clear and coherent reporting of findings [14]. Overall, qualitative research needs to be both reliable and rigorous to meet quality criteria. The CASP qualitative checklist [12] is a useful tool that provides an assessment of the quality of studies by asking questions in three broad domains: validity of the study, reporting of the results, and transferability of the evidence. More specifically, the section on establishing validity asks questions concerning the appropriateness of design, methods, data collection, and clarity of aims. Ethical considerations, rigor in data analysis, and clarity in reporting are addressed under the domain of reporting the results. Finally, the transferability of findings asks questions concerning the value of the research and whether the findings help local populations (see Supplementary A).

Post quality appraisal, a data extraction form was devised to obtain information from the studies that answered the research questions (See Supplementary B). This was done in two steps. In the first step, administrative information and general study characteristics were obtained. Study characteristics included title, authors, country, year of publication, and aims of the study. Following this, information on the sample, including demographics, study methods, and study findings relevant to PhD supervision and inclusivity, were also extracted. As with the screening of studies, a common approach in rapid reviews is a single reviewer extracting data from included studies [15].

Evidence from the studies was synthesized narratively. Studies were arranged into homogenous groups based on the reporting of themes. Extracted data from each study enabled the organization of the synthesis. Similarities and differences were recorded across studies and themes, and summaries for each theme were created, elaborated upon with direct quotes from the studies, and put into context using extracted data from each study.

3. Results

Quality appraisal of the nine included studies resulted in eight of the nine studies being ranked as moderate quality while one was ranked as high quality (see Supplementary C). No studies were ranked low; therefore, none were excluded based on the quality appraisal criterion. For validity of results, five of the nine studies did not consider or report the participant–researcher relationship. Appropriateness of data analysis, ethical considerations, and clear reporting of results were consistent across all nine studies. With respect to transferability, six of the nine studies did not report on the wider implications of the findings.

Characteristics of included evidence are detailed in Table 1. All nine studies focused on the cross-cultural experiences of the doctoral supervisory relationship. Five studies had PhD students as participants, and the remaining four had both students and supervisors. Two studies were conducted in the United Kingdom, two in Australia, and one study each was conducted in New Zealand, Canada, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and Denmark. From the nine studies, interviews were the most commonly used method, followed by reflexive and narrative accounts. One study also utilized student logs along with interviews. Four of the included studies had only partial findings that were relevant to the topic of inclusion in PhD supervision. Some of these studies had findings about subject knowledge, student support utilization, and student stress and wellbeing, which were not linked to inclusivity and were not included in the review. This section describes the themes from the studies included in our review that highlight the barriers to inclusive supervision.

Table 1. Included study characteristics.

Study	Aims	Country	Sample	Method	Complete or Partial
Alebaikan et al., 2020 [16]	To explore opportunities and challenges associated with distance and cross-cultural PhD supervision	Saudi Arabia	Three female Saudi students and five PhD supervisors	Student logs, interviews with students and supervisors, reflexive dialogue	Complete
Elliot & Kobayashi, 2019 [17]	To examine the cross-cultural facets of PhD supervision	Denmark	Six pairs of international PhD students and supervisors	Interviews	Complete
Kidman et al., 2017 [18]	To explore the experiences of international PhD students during the first two years of their doctoral studies.	New Zealand	12 PhD students	Three 1–1 interviews and two focus groups	Partial study—only included findings related to inclusive supervision
Acker and Haque, 2015 [19]	Explore narratives of stress and struggle of PhD students	Canada	27 PhD students	Interviews	Partial study—focused on findings relevant to inclusive supervision
Walker, 2020 [20] (book chapter)	To provide a reflexive account of three PhD students' experience of racism in their supervisory relationship	UK	3 PhD students	Reflexive narrative	Complete
Mattocks and Briscoe-Palmer, 2016 [21]	To examine barriers/challenges faced by women, Black minority ethnic (BME) groups, and students living with a disability throughout their PhD studies	UK	70 PhD students	Interviews	Partial—only those findings relevant to inclusive supervision
Nomnian, 2017 [22]	To explore practices that impact Thai students' experiences during their PhD supervision	Australia	9 PhD students	Interviews, qualitative case study	Complete
Pinto et al., 2020 [23]	To explore PhD research experience across languages and cultures	Portugal	12 PhD students and four supervisors	Interviews	Partial—only findings relevant to inclusive supervision
Winchester-Seeto et al., 2014 [24]	To explore experiences of doctoral supervision in a cross-cultural context	Australia	46 PhD students and 38 Supervisors	Interviews	Complete

3.1. Themes

Five themes emerged from the included studies around inclusive doctoral supervision. The most frequently occurring theme was 'power dynamics and feedback.' This was found in six out of the nine included studies. Following this, a lack of 'belonging and support' was identified in five out of nine studies. The theme 'racial lens and academic competence' was found in four studies, while 'misunderstanding cultural differences' was found in three. Finally, the theme of 'communication and language barriers' was only found in two studies. Table 2 displays the themes, their frequency, and a brief summary of each.

Table 2. Themes, frequencies, and summaries.

No.	Theme	Frequency	Summary
1	Power dynamics and feedback	6	This theme centered on the expectations around the supervisor's feedback and the challenges associated with this. The power imbalance between supervisor and supervisee was highlighted, especially in expressing disagreements.
2	Lack of belonging and support	5	This theme focused on a lack of belonging experienced by ethnic minority PhD students, many of whom were also international students. It also captured the experiences of some students who felt that they did not receive adequate emotional or pastoral support from their PhD supervisors.
3	Racial lens and academic competence	4	This theme captured PhD supervisors' views on some international students' lack of academic competence. PhD students express potential unconscious racism and stereotyping by supervisors.
4	(Mis)understanding cultural differences	3	The behaviors associated with cross-cultural exchanges are emphasized in this theme, and some students discuss the challenges associated with modifying these cultural behaviors.
5	Communication and language barriers	2	This theme encapsulated both PhD students' and supervisors' views on challenges with verbal and non-verbal communication and corresponding support.

3.1.1. Power Dynamics and Feedback

This theme focused on the expectations regarding supervisor feedback and the difficulties inherent in navigating these expectations both from the supervisor's and supervisees' perspectives. It particularly underscored the power dynamics between supervisors and supervisees, especially in how disagreements are expressed and resolved. In Alebaikan et al.'s [16] study, feedback from PhD supervisors was considered challenging, but students had different perceptions about what aspect of feedback was challenging. Students expressed a lack of clarity in the supervisor's feedback, and some stated that the supervisor's way of addressing questions was to ask further questions that students found difficult to comprehend. Other students had issues with the timelines associated with making suggested changes in supervisors' feedback. For instance, one PhD student stated, "I told [my supervisor] when you give me feedback or a comment on a paragraph, you think I can change it or correct it in a few days. But because I'm writing in and reading in a different language, it took months to correct each comment" (p. 24).

There also appeared to be a power imbalance between PhD students and their supervisors in which students felt unable to comment on or question the supervisor's feedback. In Acker and Haque's [19] study, PhD students who were female and from an ethnic minority felt hesitant to speak up and grappled with being misjudged due to not speaking up. One Asian female student stated, "...you have to be quite vocal. . .you have to present yourself as quite competent. . .here in Western culture, silence means you don't know" (p. 235).

This power imbalance was also highlighted in Eliot and Kobayashi's [17] study. In the study, PhD supervisors expressed frustration that students verbally agreed with the feedback but did not make the changes. The reluctance to contradict or disagree with the supervisor may be a result of cultural differences associated with hierarchy and manifestations of what is culturally considered respectful in an academic setting. One South Asian student explained that "in my country, it is not just about the grades or number of publications, it's also about your attitudes" (p. 23). Supervisors in the study devised strategies that seemed effective in counteracting this phenomenon. This included urging students to voice their disagreements, being empathetic, reading students' facial expressions or body

language for signs of disagreement or lack of understanding, and saying things like, “I can see you disagree; shall we discuss this?” (p. 23). One student expressed the effectiveness of this strategy and stated that if there was a lack of understanding, then the supervisor would ask follow-up questions to ensure that the student understood what was being communicated.

Nomnian’s [22] study also highlighted the power imbalance, and a Thai PhD student who had an Australian supervisor expressed that “. . .sometimes I want to argue with my supervisor. . . I think silence is golden. I don’t want to cause bad feelings between my supervisor and me” (p. 40). Another student spoke about not expressing her disagreement with the supervisor, highlighting that the supervisor had more knowledge and experience and, therefore, questioning or insisting on ideas would not be appropriate. The same study [22] emphasized a positive experience in which one Thai student described her relationship with her supervisor metaphorically as that of husband and wife in which both work together towards a collective goal of thesis completion.

In contrast, a Black PhD student disagreed with her white supervisor and felt that their relationship came under threat because of the disagreement. The supervisor suggested that the student collect new data (in her fourth year of the PhD), which the student rejected. As a result, the student stated that she felt “oppressed” [20] (p. 99) and under some pressure to conform to the supervisor’s suggestions.

An international PhD student from Africa at an Australian University stated that cultural background determines how the students view the supervisor, which then impacts the dynamics within the relationship. “I’m from Africa where lecturers or senior academics of repute are viewed as demi-gods. . .” Another student from the same cultural background further expressed that criticism towards a supervisor may be construed as disloyalty [24]. The study also highlighted variations in cultural traditions on what constitutes learning in which East Asian students, for instance, may approach learning in terms of paying attention, listening, and being silent as signs of respect. For example, an East Asian PhD student expressed that not arguing with the supervisor or remaining silent may be misunderstood by supervisors, and they may interpret the student as either not grasping the information or even as a sign of disrespect [24].

Eliot and Kobayashi’s [17] study, which had Dutch supervisors and Asian PhD students, found a mismatch in feedback processes. Students in the study expressed that they were not sure about their performance based on the feedback they received, and they desired some assessment or judgment of how they were faring in their research. On the other hand, the study emphasized the Danish supervisors’ perspectives based on confidence in the students’ abilities to master their goals, resulting in more task-oriented feedback rather than an overview of the student’s performance.

3.1.2. Lack of Belonging and Support

This theme highlighted the lack of a sense of belonging felt by ethnic minority PhD students, many of whom were also international students. Additionally, it encapsulated the accounts of students who perceived a deficit in emotional or pastoral support from their PhD supervisors. A study conducted at a New Zealand University highlighted the importance of belonging among international PhD students [18]. One student felt that having their PhD supervisor encourage them to attend social events at the university would be helpful in making the students feel welcomed [18].

One female PhD student remarked that coming from a foreign country as an international student and being ethnically diverse makes it more difficult to feel a sense of belonging. “. . .as a woman of color, surrounded by white people, that academe, no matter how critical the work we’re doing, is still mostly a white space, and being a white space, it always leaves us outside. We’re always outsiders” [19] (p. 236). A Thai student at an Australian University suggested that there need to be more informal and social networking events designed to get to know the PhD supervisors and build a trusting rapport and a close relationship with them before starting PhD studies. He described his own positive

experience in which the supervisor fostered a friendly relationship, and as a result, the student felt comfortable disagreeing with the supervisor and asking questions [12].

In Mattocks and Briscoe-Palmer's [21] study in which PhD students from the UK were participants, they found that many of the minority PhD students expressed a lack of support from their PhD supervisors while white students did not. Walker [20] discussed her experience of being referred to an academic panel by her supervisor for not making enough progress. As a result of this, Walker suffered from depression and anxiety and was unable to feel emotionally supported by her supervisor. She instead joined a forum for Black PhD students and sought and found comfort from fellow students from the same racial background. Additionally, Acker and Haque's [19] study highlighted this lack of support whereby a student stated, "...we are students of color and some of us don't have funding and even the emotional support" [19] (p. 236).

3.1.3. Racial Lens and Academic Competence

In this theme, the perspectives of some PhD supervisors regarding perceived deficiencies in the academic abilities of international students are emphasized. It also sheds light on the potential presence of unconscious biases and stereotyping among PhD supervisors as described by international PhD students. In Walker's [20] reflexive account of the breakdown of her and another student's relationship with their PhD supervisor, she expresses feeling out of place as a Black woman in academia but also being made to feel aware of her race. She stated, "...in academia, my color was what others seemed to define me by as though no other aspect of myself existed" (p. 99). This was mirrored by a male PhD student who stated that he was often asked about his perspective as a Black person. In one instance, the supervisor questioned the PhD student's work, which the student perceived as not being competent enough to produce good work. Walker attributed this to projections from the supervisor, which may potentially be fed by unconscious racism [20]. In Winchester-Seeto and colleagues' [24] study, an East Asian PhD student at an Australian University had a similar experience of being pre-judged and stated, "I think at the beginning they [supervisors] were treating me as very paternal kind of way. I don't know, maybe people have the impression that we are slower, or something" (p. 621).

Cultural differences in learning were also highlighted by PhD supervisors in Eliot and Kobayashi's [17] study. Supervisors stated that a critical lens needs to be employed in reading academic research, but some students tend to take the reading at face value and not question the findings or the methods. One supervisor remarked, "...it's very seldom that the international, [particularly] Asian students will ever [contradict authorities], they can have strong opinions, but they will align. And some will be extremely humble" (p. 20).

Pinto and Araujo e Sa's [23] study included both international PhD students and Portuguese supervisors as participants from a Portuguese University. One Portuguese supervisor described his perspective on international PhD students as lacking the academic knowledge needed to embark on a PhD and compared it to Portuguese doctoral students. Remarking on international PhD students, he stated, "the students who come to us have a great desire to do the doctorate, but they have an educational background and an academic path that has nothing to do with those of our national students. Their academic path is not the one we are used to, and, in this sense, they have deficits" (p. 283).

3.1.4. (Mis)understanding Cultural Differences

This theme showcases certain challenges inherent in navigating cross-cultural interactions between supervisors and supervisees and the difficulties some students face when trying to adjust to these cultural behaviors. A study by Alebaikan and colleagues [16] found that PhD supervisors considered acquiring an understanding of students' foreign culture as part of their academic duty and a way for them to enhance their 'global citizenship.' One UK supervisor stated that it was an "...opportunity to celebrate multiculturalism as a means of shaping ourselves as individuals" (p. 28). From the perspective of students, however, there was a need for shared cultural expectations and 'intercultural reciprocity.'

On the other hand, a study by Kidman and colleagues [18] detailed students from the Global South and their accounts of judgments and pre-conceived notions about their culture from PhD supervisors, which may be expressed in insensitive remarks or comments. One student described her experience, stating that her PhD supervisor made some negative comments about the student's culture without realizing that the comments may be offensive [18]. Another student brought food for their supervisor at meetings stemming from a cultural tradition and as a sign of respect for those in authority but was asked to stop doing that by the supervisor. Students reported changing their behaviors to 'fit in' even if it made them uncomfortable.

As a means of bridging the cultural gap between students and supervisors, one Portuguese supervisor recommended having cultural training sessions to equip supervisors with the cultural know-how to supervise cross-cultural and international PhD students effectively. The supervisor suggested having continuous cultural training for supervisors to ensure that when they are supervising a student from a different culture, they are well informed about the cultural differences [23].

3.1.5. Communication and Language Barriers

This theme encompassed the perspectives of both PhD students and supervisors regarding the obstacles encountered in verbal and non-verbal communication and the accompanying support needed in this aspect. The problems encountered by PhD students and supervisors when working across different languages were emphasized by one study [16]. A key challenge for international students was written communication in English. A student reported, "...it is not easy to write scientific research with another language perfectly and without errors. This matter makes me anxious so much, even when I send [the supervisor] emails" [16] (p. 22). Students also expressed difficulty in transferring their ideas between languages, whereby research ideas that are well formed in their native language are not as effectively articulated in English, either in written or verbal form.

With respect to support received from PhD supervisors in the same study [16], students described that for oral communication, supervisors checked if the student had understood what was being communicated, clarified points, and some even spoke slowly, and these efforts were found to be helpful. However, students sought external support for written communication, such as proofreading for their writing and translation services for data and research in English.

One PhD supervisor stated expectations from supervisors around language and the support they are able to give needs to be managed and remarked, "I think one has to be very careful how much is asked of the supervisor in terms of the language side. I'm very happy to provide feedback if I'm asked but I'm not really happy to re-write the text in English for somebody" [24] (p. 618).

4. Discussion

This paper explores what it means to deliver inclusive supervision. Our review revealed themes that will be illuminated through an exploration of the unspoken complexities that influence the experience of supervisors and PhD students. We elucidate the silence whereby hidden differences are not acknowledged. Apart from the nine included studies in the review, the discussion also draws from relevant literature that did not meet the inclusion criteria for the review but helps illuminate some of the themes discussed.

It has been acknowledged that the relationship between supervisor and student is crucial to the success of PhD study. Delamont [25] draws upon Bernstein's [26] modes of socialization to describe the ways in which the relationship between the PhD student and supervisor can develop. Positional socialization proposes that both the supervisor and student have identities that are closed, fixed, and explicit. This can result in a 'technical rationality' model of supervision, where the supervisor plays the role of the manager or director while the student is the passive recipient [27].

The PhD student-supervisor relationship can be complicated by hidden agendas. Supervisors and students can become situated in an unequal power structure, which can disrupt the quality of their communication. Shadowy figures and relationships may lurk behind the student and supervisor, prompting unconscious reactions to one another.

They may remind each other of former significant others (and in some sense there are others present in the supervision meeting), of themselves even. They may feel strong feelings of gratitude, resentment, frustrations, disappointment, because of these reminders. [28]

To explore this relationship further, we first unpack inclusive supervision from the perspectives of both the supervisor and the student and provide a model of good practice (see Figure 1). We then discuss the five themes identified in our evidence synthesis. We adopt an honest approach, acknowledging that there is much more to be done in this area. To expand beyond the available evidence, we draw on some personal accounts and hypothetical examples to expound on the ideas presented below.



Figure 1. The development of inclusive PhD supervision.

4.1. Inclusive PhD Supervision

What does it mean to participate in and facilitate inclusive supervision? We initiate this discussion with the beginning of the supervision process, providing a diagram depicting the development of an inclusive PhD supervisory relationship (see Figure 1).

When the supervisor is approached by a potential candidate to be their supervisor, how do they respond? If their response is perhaps a 'great subject' but that they lack the capacity to take on another PhD student, then no additional discussion is required. However, what if they agree to take on the student, although the topic may not be relevant to their area of work? Despite this, they are still expected to provide support and expert knowledge and enable the students to feel they are in a safe pair of hands. As such, what does this look like? This is where inclusive supervision comes into the equation, and there is a need first to consider the composition of the supervision team.

In line with our findings from the evidence synthesis, identity is an important issue here [19]. While the supervisor might reflect on their own identity, what they may not be confident about is who else will be on the team. It is vital to be able to engage and not be fearful of the other supervisor(s). For example, if there are two supervisors, one is a white working-class male and the other is a South Asian middle-class female, while the student is an Eastern European male, what tensions might arise? Sensitive approaches acknowledging these differences must be adopted to prevent clashes.

As depicted in Figure 1, a valuable approach to the overall supervision process is to explore how the supervisory team can work together to achieve the best possible journey to completion. An analysis of the impact of a diverse supervisory triangle is time well spent. It is not helpful to nod in agreement, feigning understanding [17]. Any clashes and divergent understandings that emerge from the very different perceptions, experiences, and stances of the diverse supervisory team members must be openly acknowledged, debated, and resolved. Complexity may increase if a Black supervisor is part of the supervisory team, especially if the other supervisor is white [29].

It is beneficial to have an agreement in place to ensure that the supervisors have a shared understanding of the supervisory process. Indeed, many universities have developed such agreements to provide greater transparency in supervision and encourage a positive, productive relationship between the supervisor and PhD student [30]. Regulatory systems should be complied with, but this does not necessarily equate with cultural understanding and may not provide a strong basis for inclusive supervision. It is also important to set specific ground rules that are meaningful to all team members based on open, sometimes difficult, conversations. The most important contributor to this discussion is the student.

The purpose of supervision is for the student to be guided, mentored, and, in some instances, directed through an inclusive lens. That lens casts a light on intersectional differences in this context. The complexity here is the elephant in the room. Working class, middle class, male, female, and perhaps more. . .there are many identities to negotiate. Language is another complication [16]. The Eastern European student will not be writing in their first language. There may also be further complexities, such as hidden disabilities that are not declared. Is there a way of managing such complexities? Is there a viable strategy? This will be revealed as we analyze the options.

Inclusive supervision rests on a recognition of how one's own identity matters during the supervision process. It is also vital to acknowledge that some aspects of identity confer disadvantages or bestow privilege in higher education [29]. The white male, who may be less expert, may count for more because of the way society perceives white men, no matter what they say. It is important to develop ways of disagreeing politely. The utterances of women in the presence of white males, especially those who belong to minority groups, may count for less and appear less credible [31].

It is essential to be open regarding the unbalanced role of the PhD supervisor and the student [32]. Awareness of the balance of power is pivotal. Some of the approaches to developing a healthy relationship with the student include the following: being transparent

and honest, setting ground rules, and having an open conversation about differences, types of tasks, expectations, ways of working, and what happens if there is a breakdown in the relationship.

4.2. Core Themes of Inclusive Supervision

Our rapid review identified five core themes representing some barriers to inclusive supervision. These themes include power dynamics and feedback, lack of belonging and support, racial lens and academic competence, (mis)understanding cultural differences, and communication and language barriers.

The theme, 'power dynamics and feedback,' is an area that is problematic across the spectrum of education from nursery to higher education [33,34]. The literature offers insight into the power dynamics and feedback experiences of PhD students [16]. The supervisor, as the provider of feedback, can be biased in the way they write the feedback without considering how the PhD student will perceive it. How prepared is the student to receive feedback? Does the feedback account for the writer's aims, which may not have been expressed with sufficient clarity, especially if there are language differences? If the provider of feedback does not understand the student's intent, a vicious circle may ensue. Feedback may be further impeded by another theme, 'communication and language barriers' [16]. When supervisors provide feedback, they must put themselves in the student's shoes and avoid expressions and metaphors that could be misinterpreted.

Communication is key to improving understanding in supervisory relationships. It is, therefore, advisable to discuss the text and its meaning with the student before commenting on it so that the consequences of feedback based on misunderstandings are avoided. If a supervisor who does not comprehend the student's intent writes comments that are not relevant to the true meaning of the text, this can have a far-reaching negative impact on the student's work [35]. Feeling out of place, as mentioned in the literature review, is nothing new and is often described as 'imposter syndrome.'

When the student is writing about a sensitive topic, for instance, discrimination based on race or any other protected characteristic, the supervisor may (consciously or unconsciously) react emotionally and even take the text as a personal insult. When a Black and/or minoritized PhD student is writing in research mode about their data, they are likely to be surprised by such a reaction. The supervisor must not take the student's writing personally; supervisors must be dispassionate. They must appreciate that the work is not about them, and they must not be on the defensive. This example may appear far-fetched, but it reflects recent occurrences experienced by the authors in academia. It is beneficial for all supervisors to participate in training to recognize and prevent bias to minimize such misunderstandings [36].

Power dynamics are an important aspect of a supervisor's feedback. How does power manifest itself when a supervisor provides unhelpful and even insensitive feedback? The confidence of the student will influence the course of events. Does the student keep quiet and suffer in silence [37]? Or discuss the situation with a friend? Perhaps the student challenges the supervisor with the accusation of not reading their work. The student may further turn to a higher authority for advice. Any of these developments can create problems for both the student and the supervisor, leading to the possible breakdown of the supervisory relationship. We need to explore the root cause of the supervisor's lack of attention to the meaning of the student's text. In light of the theme 'racial lens and academic competence,' this may be because of low expectations [24] or even because of bias [23]. The supervisor, who most likely is a white man [38] from a middle or higher social class background [39], is in a position of power. The resultant sense of powerlessness experienced by the student (who could belong to a minority group, be a woman, and/or from a working-class background) as a recipient of hasty and often misplaced negative feedback can erode the student's self-efficacy, making it less likely that progress can be made.

We will further consider the issue of 'Whiteness.' Henry and Tator's [40] book on racism in the Canadian academy describes a 'culture of Whiteness.' These authors highlight

the importance of the individual within the social setting. They propose, “Whiteness is not a monolithic status; rather it is fluid, situational, and sometimes related to its local geographical context” (p. 26). As Aker further explains [27], we need to consider how to balance discussions of what happens when individuals from different cultural backgrounds work together with the acknowledgment that institutional culture also shapes behaviors.

If the inherent power of ‘Whiteness’ vested in societal attitudes is not considered both within the individual and the broader institution, then the white supervisor is likely to be regarded as the leading voice, the expert font of knowledge within the supervision triangle of student, principal supervisor, and subsidiary supervisor. In the case of a white student, the ‘culture of Whiteness’ has the potential to upset the equilibrium of the supervisory triangle. The white student may even doubt the expertise of any supervisors who belong to a minority in terms of religion, ethnicity, or another characteristic.

As a supervisor, knowing who they are in relation to the intersectional complexity of their identity is a fundamental prerequisite of inclusive supervision [31]. If a supervisor does not take account of the behaviors that develop as a result of their identity, then they may not be able to recognize the origins of the problems that may arise in supervisory relationships. Moving towards racial knowledge and supporting academic competence will help to develop the supervisor to be in a position to provide inclusive supervision.

Another important element that is encountered by all students, but more acute in the case of under-represented minority and women PhD students, is the theme, ‘lack of belonging and support’ [18]. A sense of belonging is a key factor in the mental health, engagement, and completion rates of PhD students [41]. Experiences of belonging and non-belonging are [re]produced through institutional cultures and systemic inequities that thrive in academia [42]. These experiences are often reinforced by ‘(mis)understanding cultural differences’, another theme, exacerbating feelings of isolation and non-acceptance. For example, stretching out a supporting hand could be seen as an indication that the PhD student is perceived as weak rather than representing an attempt to indicate empathy on the part of the supervisor.

Research shows that the supervisory relationship, along with the culture and structure of the PhD program, contributes to a sense of (non)belonging for PhD students [41]. This is not about being a ‘savior,’ where the supervisor comes across as patronizing or disingenuous in their approach [29]. Instead, what is needed is genuine empathic support, which enables the student to feel encouraged and guided as they progress on the PhD journey. Effective ways to create a sense of belonging for PhD students and in research groups/programs include engaging in self-reflection; using correct pronunciation of names, preferred pronouns, and diverse cultural and linguistic norms; promoting proactive engagement and communication; fostering connections through shared working practices; and asking for regular feedback [43]. Anonymous feedback might be especially useful for continually improving PhD programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of diverse students.

According to Bean’s Student Attrition Model [44], students’ beliefs and attitudes about belongingness are affected by experiences within the institution. Hence, the role of institutions in transforming change and enabling a wider inclusive culture, such as addressing implicit biases, diversity training of staff, and provision of adequate support systems, cannot be overlooked. Further research addressing institutional cultures and how this impacts the PhD supervisory relationship can enable a deeper understanding of the role of institutions and allow for systemic change.

4.3. Limitations

This rapid review has a few limitations worth noting. First, the review disproportionately relies on studies that include international students. This represents a challenge in generalizing these findings to other PhD student populations. While valuable insights into the barriers faced by cross-cultural PhD students are synthesized, it is uncertain how many of these barriers are also faced by local student populations within a country. This

complexity is further accentuated when addressing the issue of racism. However, some of the barriers identified may be mirrored among ethnically diverse populations within a country's local context. Identification of issues within themes, such as misconceived notions about academic competence, issues of feedback, and power dynamics inherent in a supervisor and student relationship, may reflect unconscious bias and racial nuances. Similarly, the review is based only on qualitative studies with small populations across several cultures. These points raise the issue of generalizability, and findings should be interpreted with caution as they may not apply to all PhD students and their supervisors. This is particularly true for diverse student bodies that were not well-represented in the included literature (e.g., students with disabilities). There is a need for further reviews incorporating quantitative studies and studies with larger and more diverse populations to help illuminate the findings. Another potential limitation of the research that we draw out is the focus on supervisory pairs and specific institutions and programs, further limiting the generalizability of the findings. Lastly, only one reviewer selected and appraised the studies for quality and reliability was not checked with other authors. While this is usually done in rapid reviews, it can pose a limitation regarding the reliability of the findings.

5. Conclusions

In synthesizing evidence on inclusive PhD supervision, we find that most qualitative research focuses on aspects of supervision that are non-inclusive rather than inclusive practices. To close this gap, we have proposed our own model of inclusive supervisory practices. We have focused on how the supervisors can enhance the inclusivity of supervision. Our findings, and often the examples we provide in the discussion, highlight race and culture. However, we acknowledge that PhD supervisors and students have multiple identities and other power differentials, such as age, status, and ontological/epistemological stances, which must be considered when establishing and reinforcing the supervisory relationship. As research is increasing exponentially in this area, we hope our findings can be updated with further insights into inclusive supervision in future papers. Both PhD students and their supervisors stand to benefit. We have started a discussion of often sensitive and unacknowledged issues, a discussion which merits further research and development.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/encyclopedia4010016/s1>, Supplementary A: Quality Appraisal—CASP Qualitative Checklist; Supplementary B: Data Extraction; Supplementary C: Quality Appraisal of Included Studies.

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