A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF DIGITAL RESEARCH ADVISING

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Digital research advising to address the emerging needs of student researchers across different levels has become popular in recent times. This phenomenological study is aimed at exploring digital research advising as it is experienced by senior research advisers.

Methodology – Using a hermeneutic phenomenological design, the participants' lifeworlds, their lived body, lived time, lived space, lived human relations, and lived things were analyzed using Van Manen's contemporary model. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Categories of themes were identified after the process of linguistic transformation.

Findings – The following five themes captured the lifeworlds of the research advisers: acknowledging corporeal connections, redefining academic space, humanizing digital advising, leveraging the digital toolbox, and investing time.

Significance – This study renders value to academic institutions and active researchers who want to appreciate and understand the meaning ascribed to the nuanced experiences of senior research advisers transitioning from traditional to digital advising. It also offers a foundation of initial insights to inform future research in diverse academic settings.

Keywords: Digital research advising, lifeworlds, research advisers, remote advising, phenomenological inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

As higher education institutions adjust to remote work and instruction, terminal requirements in graduate programs are also transitioning to provide remote research advising to candidates who are ready to write their thesis or dissertation. Research advising done remotely has grown in popularity over the past years with the use of the internet, cell phones, messenger programs, or video conferencing (Garinger et al., 2019). A plethora of research indicates that advising, viewed as a dyadic and face-to-face engagement between an adviser and an advisee, has impacted the latter's academic performance and the retention of the self-efficacy perceptions of the students (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Campbell, 2019). However, some research revealed that several significant challenges have been overcome to ensure the effectiveness of remote research advising (Wang et al., 2022), namely the challenges with regard its effectiveness amidst social distancing (Majoni & Nyaruwata, 2015), and the prevalence of collaboration tools to fully engage in the process (Weldon, 2020). The responsibilities of an adviser require one to be conversant and knowledgeable in order to navigate the technology associated with online advising, such as video conferencing, screen sharing, sending and receiving electronic mail, and attaching, downloading, and uploading files. Further, it also requires one to have virtual presence and to be able to read the hundreds of submitted online pages before one can provide the relevant comments to improve the advisee's research paper.

Higher education institutions have set guidelines on who can qualify as research advisers per the order of the Commission on Higher Education (CMO 15, s. 2019). The qualifications include research productivity and a doctoral degree, with experience and expertise in research advising. As a result, only senior faculty members and those who have published in reputable journals are chosen as advisers. These advisers are expected to perform remote research advising to the best of their ability.

Several studies have already been conducted on students' satisfaction with research advising (Tindowen & Gavino, 2022), the role of academic advising in shaping student engagement (Ilinykh, 2023), the influence of research advisers (Miraj et al., 2022), and the relationship between advising and student success (Holland et al., 2020; Cadosales, et al. 2024). These researches have provided a snapshot of how advising, having taken into consideration the peculiarities of each learning institution, has been done. While existing literature has focused on the adaptability and benefits of digital platforms, there remains a concern beyond technical and technological competencies in effective research advising. The challenges and opportunities of digital research advising, particularly in comparison to traditional methods, require deeper exploration.

Existing literature has looked at digital advising in general (Dezuanne et al., 2019; Mangundu, 2022; Mendez and Arguello, 2020; Mondo, 2021; Wang and Houdyshell, 2021; Wang et al., 2022) and not specifically in relation to graduate school research work. Those that did, focused on student experiences (Tippayakulpairoj et al., 2022). To date, the nuanced experiences of research advisers navigating the transition from in-person to digital advising have been overlooked. However, Liu and Ammigan (2022) have conducted an integrative review of research articles from 2005 to 2020 on academic advising experience with technology, suggesting that future research must look beyond the Western experience and expand to include Eastern and indigenous perspectives. On this premise, the present study is aimed at exploring senior research advisers' experiences as they provide digital research advising since the pandemic. Through the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this study critically analyzes the research advisers' unique experiences in order to uncover deeper insights into this evolving academic practice, specifically with regard to research advisers in an Eastern context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research advisers in higher education are expected to provide students with essential professional guidance to complete their theses or dissertations. During the advising process, both advisers and advisees develop a special relationship characterized by support and trust. Eller et al. (2014) described effective advising relationships as including passion and inspiration, open communication and accessibility, caring for personal relationships, and mutual respect. The emotional bond between adviser and advisees, even without physical presence, is crucial for the timely completion of research. Furthermore, Tindowen and Gavino (2022) have argued that students' satisfaction with research advising depends on the adviser's knowledge, personal and professional qualities, and institutional support. Both perspectives highlight the relational aspect of advising; however, they are mostly based on traditional, face-to-face settings. The key question is whether these relational qualities can be effectively transferred into digital or remote advising environments, where physical presence is absent but emotional bonds remain essential for timely research completion.

At the same time, literature problematizes the assumption that advising always yields measurable success. Flicker (2015) noted a scarcity of robust evidence linking advising directly to student achievement, suggesting that the field may have overstated its impact without adequate empirical grounding. With the university's initiative to provide quality education during the pandemic, instruction and research advising were delivered online. With this new lockdown phenomenon, computer and internet literacy have become essential considerations. For example, Ligadu and Antony (2015) called attention to Mentor Tokou as a portal to support the advisers and the advisees; they were of the view that the portal would better facilitate student learning in a local university in Malaysia. In highlighting the many benefits of this digital platform, their study established that virtual instructional support was positively influencing the students' learning outcome. The result was attributed to the accessibility and availability of the advisers to guide the advisees in their academic journey, anytime, anywhere. However, as Flicker (2015) has pointed out, there still exists a gap in the empirical research into the link between advising and student academic performance. Although advising is seen as beneficial, its specific contributions are less systematically measured and theorized, particularly in digital settings.

As outlined in the handbook by Dezuanni et al. (2019), the key principles that impact effective online research advising include the following: the advisee's motivation, the advisor's facilitative spaces, the development of a connection, and the presence of well-defined targets. Therefore, the adviser's role is pivotal in the completion of the advisee's research. Faced with the unprecedented outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, remote advising becomes unavoidable. In the context of higher education, Mynard et al. (2023) highlighted the autonomy-supported climate in online settings, while Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2020) explained that mentoring, just like advising, whether done in-person or remotely, helps the students in so many ways; it helps them to become familiar with academic topics, increase academic performance, reduce attrition, and to keep them focused. Together, these studies reveal a palpable tension: while the shift to digital platforms has been seen as a chance to maintain advising during crises like the occurrence of a pandemic, it remains unclear as to what extent these conditions replicate or fall short of the relational depth of face-to-face advising, particularly in the work of research advising.

Technical and Technological Knowledge

Notwithstanding the many facets that are involved in online research advising, designated research advisers, despite their age, are expected to champion their advisees by showcasing what they can do and offering opportunities to carry out new and challenging tasks towards the completion of a program. Their setting of specific research advising goals, committing to advising, and taking responsibility for their personal and professional advancement will bring about their advisees' success.

Dezuanne et al. (2019) stressed that while resources can be accessed, the guidance of a research adviser is crucial. Being assigned as a research adviser, one is expected to be technologically and pedagogically competent to guide a student-researcher. Initiating contact and actively participating in an online discussion is an elementary skill that both advisers and advisees have to be adept at. Social and emotional learning, which is the foundation of a relationship-based strategy, has contributed considerably to the academic growth of students and has helped them maximize their potential. Hagan et al. (2019) underscored socio-emotional development as closely akin to the 21st-century soft skills, cognitive skills, and character. As advisers and advisees are engaged in remote academic advising, the development of social and emotional learning provides a healthy, stable learning environment to navigate the challenges of flexible learning (Wang & Houdyshell, 2021).

Taken together, these studies suggest that effective digital advising demands a dual capacity: advisers must master digital tools while also fostering socio-emotional growth in their advisees. However, this dual role is not without challenges. While Dezuanni et al. (2019) affirmed the indispensability of adviser guidance, the literature remains underexplored on how advisers balance the technical and affective dimensions in practice. This gap underscores the importance of examining the lived experiences of advisers, a focus that this phenomenological study addresses.

From In-person to e-Advising

For quite some time, face-to-face research advising has taken center stage and has been acknowledged as the learning support for most students. Institutions in the United Kingdom provide advice on both face-to-face and electronic advising to support undergraduate students (Shrestha et al., 2009). Everwise (2019) identified the distinct skill sets and experiences of advisers as contributing to student success. Notably, advising frameworks and models are constantly reconfigured to account for the changes in advising modalities that are taking place in an institution. This is what Muller (2009) has emphasized as the importance of understanding online or e-advising in schools. The focus should include both electronic media and face-to-face sessions whenever possible and feasible. However, Mendez & Arguello (2020) argued that the shift from in-person to online advising has posed several challenges and this has paved the way for the evolution of the adviser's roles.

Technology tools have supported advisers and advisees in the new learning environment. Digital advising, as noted by Ligadu and Anthony (2015), can complement face-to-face communication by providing support through the use of electronic chats, emails, instant messaging, and video conferencing. Remote support can boost advisees' motivation. However, Everwise (2019) and Mondo (2021) argued that technology can also hinder communication. Challenges include the difficulty of accessing online systems and bandwidth issues.

These differing views show digital advising is not a perfect substitute or extension of face-to-face practices. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how advisers experience this transition, especially in graduate research advising.

Advising in the Digital Age

A thesis or dissertation adviser is appointed based on his/her expertise, experience, commitment, and competence to provide the necessary guidance for graduate students to become future members of the research community. With the growing popularity of research advising, access to advisees and the adviser's online advising ability are fundamental to its successful implementation. Dezuanne et al. (2019) described access as the measure of internet access and the availability of digital technologies. Digital ability, on the other hand, refers to the set of competencies, attitudes, and skills in navigating the online platform. They added that regardless of circumstance, one has to maximize the use of digital technologies. This idea finds support in the studies by Tippayakulpairoj et al. (2022) and Kaufmann (2022). Their findings revealed that advisers needed to have strategies for enhancing their effectiveness by customizing research advising in the digital age. Remote research advising relies heavily on the use of social media and online chat communication via smartphone, tablet, or computer. ICT has transcended geographical barriers, allowing advisers and advisees to build virtual relationships.

Online technology has changed the nature of providing support (Iqbal, 2020; Cadosales et al., 2024). Through computer-mediated communication platforms, a virtual adviser-advisee relationship can be established. Higher education institutions were left with no choice when they were compelled to close because of the Covid-19 lockdown. An alternative modality of advising was adopted to meet the needs of the advisees who wanted to complete their degree programs on time. However, Schwartz et al. (2014) cited the dearth of data on program policies regarding the use of various forms of digital communication during research advising. They added that there was a seeming lack of evidence on the effect of communication platforms on the quality of adviser-advisee relationships. While the shift to digital research advising has introduced innovative ways of maintaining adviser-advisee relations, it has also highlighted gaps, such as the challenges and opportunities advisers experience in transitioning from in-person to online advising.

Although digital advising has been discussed in previous studies, much of the focus has been on undergraduates, general academic support, and were primarily from the perspective of students. Therefore, there is a significant gap in understanding how graduate research advising is experienced, where advisers play a central role in guiding advanced scholarly work. The present study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of graduate research advisers through a phenomenological approach, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities of digital research advising.

Research Objective

In light of the foregoing discussions, this study is aimed at exploring the lived experiences of senior research advisers in online research advising.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative research employed the hermeneutic phenomenological design in exploring the lived experiences of research advisers engaged in online research advising. To arrive at a deep understanding of the phenomenon, the data obtained were analyzed using Max van Manen's contemporary model, the lifeworlds of existentials. Throughout the study, the researchers' assumptions, personal experiences, and intuitions were documented, adhering to the reduction principles or the phenomenological method of bracketing. The purpose was to prevent the interpretation of participants' experiences from being affected by the researchers' pre-existing beliefs and perspectives. The thematic categories that captured the description of digital research advising would lead to a better appreciation of it. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative design is suitable when the objective is to comprehend the meaning attributed to a phenomenon by the participants, in this case, their digital advising experiences. Throughout this process, factors such as evolving questions and methods, data gathered in a natural environment, data analysis, and meaning construction are considered to unveil the participants' experiences in providing research guidance remotely.

Research Environment and Participants

This study was conducted in a state university recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as one of the centers of excellence (COE) in the Philippines. This university has offered undergraduate and graduate studies for the past 20 years. Through a purposive sampling technique, in which the selection of participants was based on the study's inclusion criteria, eight research advisers were selected as the study participants. The criteria used in selecting the advisers included their designation as research advisers to at least five advisees and as research panel members to more than 10 candidates for the past three years, from the pre-pandemic year until 2023. They have handled classes in graduate studies programs, have attended at least three online oral defenses per candidate (an average of 45 online oral defenses), provided the necessary online advising before, during, and after the oral defense of each candidate, and were willing to articulate their wealth of advising experiences. The focus was on the depth of their experience and their unique institutional context might provide a foundation for further exploration in diverse settings. Data collection was terminated after having reached data saturation with the participation of all seven participants. Pseudonyms (Professors Cecilia, Ge, Beatrice, Andrea, Christopher, Patricia, and Jessica) were used as an important ethical safeguard to prevent the identification of the advisers who provided the data in this research.

Data Collection

Upon receiving the signed consent letters, participant selection ensued, adhering to the pre-established inclusion criteria. Given that the study required interview-based data collection, each participant was informed about the details of study involvement, namely the study's objectives, time commitment, potential benefits, and confidentiality measures. This was necessary before obtaining the participants' consent to be part of the study. In this phenomenological investigation, the researcher served as the primary data collection tool, actively guiding the progression of interviews. Individual and in-depth interviews in English

were conducted in the first quarter of 2024 via Zoom or Google Meet, depending on the participants' preference. Prompts and probing questions were utilized, encouraging interviewees to offer more vivid and detailed descriptions of their digital advising experiences. Follow-up questions were used to encourage the participants to share additional information, ultimately leading to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The phenomenological interview was used as a means for gathering and exploring experiential material. Each online interview session, which lasted for more than an hour, was recorded. Prompts were used to encourage the participants to explicate the points shared and after answering the main question. After the interview, which was mostly in English, the recording was transcribed. The researcher then contacted the participants to present and discuss with them the interim interview transcriptions to determine whether they capture the participants' experience as fully as possible. This provided an avenue for the participants to validate their statements and for the researcher to seek clarifications, especially with regard to the significance of some of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

To provide a rigorous analysis of the participants' lifeworld's in online research advising and to arrive at an all-encompassing description, Van Manen's distinctive steps, as cited in Santiago et al. (2020) were followed. After repetitive reading of the transcripts, data were analyzed individually, noting key statements and categorizing them into the following four lifeworld's: lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived relation (relationality). Each researcher reviewed the categorized statements, reaching a consensus on their finalization. A constant comparison of the analyses and insights was conducted to ensure authenticity and accuracy. Deliberations on category decisions were documented, and insights leading to the identification of subthemes and themes were carefully discussed and agreed upon. Continuous reflections were undertaken to craft a coherent and detailed narrative that would bring out the essence of digital research advising. Participants' quotes were grouped to illustrate the key themes, as the goal of the study was to uncover the essential structures and meanings of the phenomenon through a process of description, reflection, and communication.

Ethical Considerations

Reliability and traceability are important aspects of any phenomenological study. They help to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings. The wealth of knowledge and understanding of research advising experiences are crucial ingredients. The researchers uphold the participants' rights, foster trust, and respect them as individuals capable of making informed decisions. Key ethical concerns in this study involved the following: (a) informed consent, (b) beneficence, (c) confidentiality and anonymity, and (d) privacy protection and the right to withdraw. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and this right was explained to them before their involvement in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research study has explored the experiences of digital research advisers through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The findings revealed the following five key themes: acknowledging corporeal connections, redefining academic space, humanizing digital advising, leveraging the digital toolbox, and investing time. These themes shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities of digital research advising, including the importance of collaboration, effective time management, adapting to virtual spaces, navigating dynamic circumstances, and mastering digital research tools.

The study's findings discussed herein offer insights into how digital research advisers regard research advising in the digital era through the existential lens of the four lifeworlds. Reality and value were explored to achieve what Rich et al. (2013) termed as the level of abstraction that uncovers essential structures and meanings. Hence, the fluid nature of the in-depth interviews and the application of Van Manen's four lifeworlds have helped to make tangible the more abstract components of the advisers' experiences in providing digital advising.

Theme 1: Acknowledging Corporeal Connections -- Ensuring Presence Although Being Physically Absent

The lived body or corporeality is defined as the bodily existence in relation to others. In the context of remote advising, this means the connections and interactions of both advisers and advisees, despite the physical distance. The participants highlighted the importance of creating and sustaining personal bonds through constant communication despite the limitation of space. The connection is corporeal even if there is physical absence most of the time because it is augmented by online presence. The number of times the advisers and advisees spoke during video and audio calls nurtures the relationships where presence is not physical but rather online. UNESCO's report (Technology in Education, 2023) discussed the wide adoption of technological tools in learning institutions. These digital channels have been constructive, as evidenced by the following narratives shared by the advisers:

> *I used video conferencing platforms for one-on-one meetings, online chat applications for instant communication, and even Facebook Messenger for sharing files. Through this, my advisees continued to receive necessary guidance during the unprecedented times. However, in terms of quality of advice, online advising happens almost anytime. Isn't the online setup for consultations in the past two years more frequent and more accessible? (Professor Cecilia)*

> *I don't even have to see them using a link, so I only use the comment section. Open the comment. I'll just give them some kind of instruction through messenger. Please click the comment box to see my suggestions, and please submit a week after they comply immediately with the suggestions; do not remove the comment box because I would like to look at how you will you highlight a particular area where you input the change. (Professor Ge)*

> *...for my two PhD, from Day one up to the day that they had their final oral defense, we did our activities online and never face to face. (Professor Christopher)*

I realized that when we talk about greater productivity, it could also be because when the advisee sees that we are online, they might feel our online presence. It may feel like I am monitoring them like in Messenger, so they could also be reminded that they still have to submit something. Unlike before, if I don't text them, then they won't do anything. But I think our mere online experience can motivate them to become more productive. (Professor Beatrice)

The connection was further highlighted by how the advisers perceived their role and what they could establish by building a relationship with their advisees. This was reflected in the two sub-themes, the first being the adviser's investment of self for shared success. The advisers seemed to believe that the success or failure of their advisee was shared, and therefore, conducting the advising process online was not only an investment of time and effort, but also of oneself. The codes under this sub-theme included the adviser's ownership, physical constraints, navigating through the shift, and the need for a consideration of the adviser's welfare. Thuan and Hiep (2021) considered teachers' presence during reciprocated interactions as contributing to the students' heightened engagement in an online setup. The following statements from the advisers clearly highlighted the first theme:

We also want to have quality work because our name is also printed in the book. People will know who the adviser is and who the panel members are, so these are the things that we need to protect. (Professor Cecilia)

I hold dry runs for presentations, especially for those who need clarification using a PowerPoint presentation. I also feel nervous as an adviser because, whatever happens, I feel responsible for my advisee's performance. (Professor Andrea)

The problem now is that due to online classes, especially in math, there are gaps in the students' learning because you cannot fully assist them because the instruction is online. If only the student is well-equipped with the knowledge that they need in the dissertation, online advising is not an issue. (Professor Christopher)

Despite having a subject in research and experience in doing research, maybe just like us when we were beginning researchers, I find that they still encounter many difficulties in doing it. (Professor Andrea)

In terms of the lived body, the corporeal connection of adviser and advisee is augmented by their online presence as facilitated by remote advising using online tools, despite the inability to meet face-to-face. By availing themselves of the opportunity presented by online advising, the advisers shared how they invested themselves for shared success with due consideration for the advisee's potential and constraints. The theme has provided further support for the postulates of technology-mediated learning theory (Bower, 2019) by demonstrating how digital platforms could facilitate meaningful academic relationships. However, this study has extended the groundwork of such theories by showing that, in graduate research advising, online presence also functions as a marker of shared responsibility and professional identity, since advisers' own reputations are tied to their advisees' work. This differs from most literature on general or undergraduate advising as it suggests that institutions should not only provide digital platforms, but also develop structured advising strategies that recognize the dual role of advisers as both technical facilitators and co-owners of their advisees' success.

Theme 2: Redefining Academic Space -- Embracing Virtual Bridges in Scholarly Discourse

This theme not only encapsulates the dynamic interplay between physical distance and the benefits of virtual spaces in academic pursuits, but also recognizes the institutional nuances that shape scholarly interactions. It acknowledges the evolving research environment, where remote advising systems enable collaboration across geographical boundaries. By acknowledging the importance of establishing boundaries and understanding the nuances of each discipline, the theme underscores the multidimensional nature of academic discourse within virtual landscapes. The study of Bacus et al. (2022), on emergency remote teaching in higher education institutions revealed that instructors had redefined learning spaces during the pandemic as they adopted educational tools and adapted their teaching pedagogies to respond to the emerging needs of the students.

Under this theme were the following two sub-themes: the restructured advising architecture and the integration of contextual distinctions. The codes under the restructured advising architecture covered the shift in the overall research environment, which involved the enabling systems for remote advising, the benefits and challenges of the virtual space, and the bridging of physical distance. The participants mentioned school systems and the role they played in the steps of thesis and dissertation writing, even as far as asking for a revision of the manuals to provide a guide in this changing educational landscape. Some of the narratives of the advisers on these matters included the following:

> *During the physical reporting, you have to wait for the students to come and students had to travel from Bohol, Negros, Leyte, or Manila. Then you have to wait for them because they have to bring their paper. Sometimes they will email in advance and then you discuss with the student... they want it [the comments] to be written… and so it really takes time… (Professor Patricia)*

> *It is easier to do it online because we can talk anytime. Before the pandemic, especially since my advisees were not from Cebu, you really had to allocate time when you were available and they were also available. For example, sometimes they're not available on a Saturday, so sometimes you spend time on your Sunday for them, especially for those who travel from afar, but it is different online; that is the silver lining. (Professor Andrea)*

> *Within the school, control, in a way, a school should have supportive systems. The school supports the adviser, and at the same time, the adviser supports the advisee. Please choose a good department chair or program coordinator who has published research. Please make sure that there is a point person who answers the concerns of the students in the graduate school promptly. Now more than ever, we need to support the candidate in this online environment. (Professor Jessica)*

> *The school adopted from advising and even unto defense. It is easier because I think the pandemic gave opportunities for our candidates to finish their degrees. (Professor Patricia)*

The second sub-theme on the integration of contextual distinctions included the codes of institutional and disciplinary nuances, and the establishment of boundaries. It two universities and disciplines are the same, the lived spaces of these advisers integrate the contextual differences in which they operate. It is revealed in the following advisees' statements:

> *When we arrived at the university, only a few could get on board with the research I was doing because it is not easy. Our topics are very specific, and they need to study how it is done before researching so the writing is better facilitated. If they were equipped with the needed knowledge, then I could easily handle the advising, even remotely and online. (Professor Christopher)*

> *It is expected that you have a good advisee if coming from a university because you have the same research wavelength paradigm, you operate in a similar academic culture, and you can expect that they are driven in their work. (Professor Jessica)*

This theme provides strong support for the work of Gruber et al. (2022), who emphasized the relational value of face-to-face communication, while showing that digital spaces can partially replicate such bonds through sustained virtual presence. It also extends Liang et al.'s (2024) assertion on psycho-social well-being by illustrating how advisers actively integrate institutional systems and disciplinary distinctions into their digital practices, shaping well-being at both personal and structural levels. In line with the findings of Shrestha et al. (2019) and Mendez and Arguello (2020), these observations further demonstrate that advising frameworks and adviser roles must adapt to new modalities; however, unlike general undergraduate advising, graduate advisers have highlighted how disciplinary cultures and institutional policies complicate the use of virtual spaces. Taken together, this theme shows that while virtual advising makes possible transformative academic bridges, it also demands rethinking advising models to account for the unique institutional and disciplinary contexts of graduate research supervision.

Theme 3: Humanizing Digital Advising: Exploring Dynamic Endeavors

This theme encapsulates the multifaceted approach to remote advising in the realm of academic pursuits, particularly thesis and dissertation endeavors. It highlights the transformative impact of remote advising in enhancing efficiency and resource utilization, thereby maximizing scholarly output. By acknowledging varying levels of productivity and perspectives on remote advising, the theme underscores the adaptability required to thrive in diverse academic landscapes, especially when faced with pandemic-related constraints. It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and accommodating personal circumstances, both for advisers and scholars, while continuously identifying areas for improvement to refine the remote advising process and ensure its success.

Under this theme were also two sub-themes, namely myriad roles and collaborators, and supportive and strategic discourse. In the first sub-theme, there were various codes which included the initiatives of the adviser to cater to the specific needs of the advisee, the various functions of the adviser (overseeing, nurturing, evaluating, liaising), the varying forms of advice (research process, manuscript, presentations), integration of peer review, the value of peer review and academic leadership, and the differences among

advisers. This covers the many demands of the advisers' work, which ultimately is aimed at forming a viable relationship with the advisee. This is objective of the advisees is reflected in the following remarks:

> *One of my adjustments is adjusting to my advisee's availability. Although there were instances when we lost our signal, we made efforts to meet halfway. With the pandemic, the advisee was adjusting, and so did I. (Professor Beatrice)*

> *It is always in my mind how to help my advisee to survive in the journey because I believe that as an adviser, if my advisee ever succeeds in this, then it will also be my success. It is very important also that as an adviser, we need to inspire our advisee. (Professor Cecilia)*

> *So, I tell them what's for chapter one and what they ought to write in this section. I also asked for their concept paper since it is the basis for the preliminary. The second is the deadline for when they need to submit their first three chapters, and then I will set another time to discuss the concepts with them. (Professor Andrea)*

> *We also video call, for example, when they are about to present. We do the video call and then practice how to answer the particular question. I will ask the question and they will answer it. Then I will tell them some things will happen in the actual presentation that cannot be covered in a rehearsal, so we need to go with the flow, whatever the questions of the panel are. I condition their mindset so that they will know what to do during their oral defense. (Professor Cecilia)*

In this special and close relationship between adviser and advisee, the adviser also draws in more input from other experts to help the advisee succeed. Advisers often felt the need to extend help beyond what was required of them. While schools have mechanisms to provide quality research advising, several studies have looked into the professionalization of advising (Jaeger et al., 2011; McGill, 2017; McGill et al., 2020). Notably, advisees perceived the adviser's personal qualities and competence as motivating factors for them to succeed. This is supported by the professors' stand that they encouraged their advisees to explore other perspectives and additional insights from other experts.

More than the roles and the people in the lived relations, this theme explores the dynamics revealed in the second sub-theme, which is supportive and strategic discourse. This theme covers the codes on adviser-advisee communication and their synergy, the recognition of the reconfiguration of practices, the value of offline human connection, and the communication gaps in remote advising. Looking into the codes covering the discourse, it is worth noting that they underscore the humanity of remote advising despite the interventions of digital tools. The experiences of the advisers show how the interaction, like many other human relations, has certain flows that are imperfect but still functional to facilitate the success of the process. This is revealed in the following experiences shared by the advisers:

> *I really don't like it that much because the relationship really has a gap. We just met online, especially when the advisee, for example, is in Laguna and I am in Cebu City. (Professor Jessica)*

> *What is a good thing is that they ask permission first, "Would it be okay, Ma'am?" And then, we just set a schedule. If I am unavailable, I will just schedule and ask, "Is this time okay with you?" Something like that. So, it's a matter of negotiation. (Professor Cecilia)*

> *I require them to publish so that the reviewers can comment in case there are things I as an adviser, need to see. At least others, including the panel members, can see and comment on it. (Professor Christopher)*

> *What if we ask someone to look at your work so that you can get their feedback? So, that is what I did. This approach is not just effective; it is essential for skill improvement. Seeking feedback from others is a sign of competence and capability. Because of that, they are more motivated to comply because the comment did not come from me only but from others as well. (Professor Cecilia)*

This theme provides firm support for Kalbfleisch's mentoring enactment theory (2002, cited in Ragins & Kram, 2008) by showing how proactive and negotiated communication strategies are central to sustaining online advising. Moreover, it also extends the theory by situating it within graduate research contexts where advisers juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. It also supports the study by Liu et al. (2020) by emphasizing the value of accomplished advisers in guiding skilled advisees, while highlighting that digital advising requires additional collaboration with peers and experts to compensate for the limits of remote interaction. These findings suggest that humanizing digital advising involves not only relational care, but also the strategic use of networks and discourse, pointing to a more complex model of mentoring than has been captured in earlier studies.

Theme 4: Leveraging the Digital Toolbox: Optimizing Technology

On the existential question about lived things, the theme is leveraging the digital toolbox, which ranges from gadgets to applications for phones and computers and the use of the Internet. This theme highlights the need for various forms of media to facilitate remote advising, particularly the role of the Internet in providing connectivity and access to information. Under this theme were two sub-themes, which were the resources for remote advising, and technical skills and processes. The codes under resources for remote advising included the use of online tools and the technological problems associated with them. Wang et al. (2022) cited how Google Meets, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams were widely adopted advising services when universities were forced to move their traditional onsite academic advising to online academic advising. This is evident in some of the observations shared in the previous sections. Here, what is highlighted is the struggle with the persistent issue of unstable internet connection:

> *In the middle of my advising, the discussion ran smoothly because of that technology so that time I had no more problems with my students. We used Google Meet most of the time. The only problem is that we are doing it remotely, and the internet connection is a big problem. (Professor Christopher)*

> *That's my experience the first time I was assigned as an adviser during the pandemic. I usually requested an online consultation, which was actually using a Zoom application or using a video messenger. We also used Google Meet since it was a convenient way. It*

> *was very helpful in the conceptualization of the problem, particularly the theory that the student would like to develop. (Professor Patricia)*

> *So, we held our dialogues in Google Meet, and then I made my follow-up through Messenger. (Professor Beatrice)*

On the other hand, the codes for technical skills and processes included the need for a responsive graduate school manual and the technical challenges that the advisers encountered in the conduct of remote advising. Not only were the processes new, but there was also a need to put new systems into writing in order to facilitate the use of resources in the advising process. In time, they were able to successfully navigate their way through this process, and found success in their advising, as shared by the following participants:

> *We need the manual of operations where the steps of the process are discussed and the forms needed are in place. This includes applications for online defense and application for adviser. (Professor Jessica)*

> *The only problem for doing at is the start and since we are not familiar with the technology, we are using. I could not write during our discussion online through Zoom or Google Meet, but when I learned the technology on how to convey, how to communicate with my students online especially writing the equations discuss using PowerPoint that we can actually write. (Professor Christopher)*

These findings corroborated those in the study by Wang et al. (2022), who noted the widespread adoption of digital platforms, but extended the discussion by showing how graduate research advisers had to also navigate institutional processes and manuals that were not initially designed for online use. Our findings also support Scherer et al.'s (2018) application of the Technology Acceptance Model, which emphasized that acceptance alone is insufficient—advisers must continuously adapt their technical skills to meet the complex demands of research supervision. In this way, the present study demonstrates that digital competence in graduate advising is both a matter of tool adoption and of re-configuring academic processes to sustain rigorous research guidance.

Theme 5: Investing Time: Making the Most of Online Interactions

The interviews reveal that online interactions have become an integral part of thesis and dissertation advising when universities are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme highlights the effectiveness and productivity of online interactions during remote thesis and dissertation advising. As universities shifted to online platforms, advisers' adaption of advising strategies contributed to the completion of their advisees' research and academic growth. To make the most of online interactions, research advisers employed various techniques, such as engaging advisees in meetings, preparing the meeting agenda, encouraging active participation, using interactive tools, providing timely feedback, and setting clear expectations.

One of the sub-themes under this theme is the dynamic conditions that describe the lived time of the advisers. The codes under this theme included setting timelines and goals, understanding pandemic-related

constraints, and the personal circumstances of the adviser and advisee. As much as plans were made in advance, some factors could affect the time for remote advising, as shared by the following remarks made by the advisers:

> *So, one of the downsides is really not on the platform in itself but basically on the student prioritization and probably on the part of the adviser if either of them is very busy and unable to respond to the concerns of the other. (Professor Patricia)*

> *One of the challenges of the pandemic is that we have lost the opportunity for face-to-face conversation. Although we converse through Messenger, there may be gaps in the communication. I find myself asking, did I say the right things? Was I understood? (Professor Jessica)*

> *I also changed some of the practices. Before the pandemic, they came to me with their concept paper, but with online, I contacted the advisee first upon my receipt of the notice that I am an adviser. The first thing I do is schedule a preliminary talk with them regarding their approved title. So, after the preliminary talk, I ask them what their timeline is. I ask them what their plan for the year is and what they plan to achieve, and then from that, I set their schedule. (Professor Andrea)*

> *Having a clear plan for each meeting helps to stay focused and ensures that important topics are covered. (Professor Beatrice)*

Because of the multifaceted nature of remote advising, the next sub-theme revealed divergent outcomes. The codes under this sub-theme included varying levels of productivity and varying perspectives on remote advising, even as the advisers reported an increase in efficiency and the maximization of resources. The varying perspectives of the advisers are revealed in the following adviser remarks:

> *Still the same, online or not online, still the same, but I prefer online because it happens anytime, anywhere. (Professor Beatrice)*

> *I think online is good because it is more convenient for my experience, and I am more productive and can better extend my help. (Professor Andrea)*

> *Advising during the pandemic was difficult, especially for me as I would like to be able to have close interaction. (Professor Jessica)*

These findings complement Méndez and Arguello's (2020) discussion of best practices in digital advising by showing that graduate research advisers not only used online portals and tools, but also invested significant personal time to adapt strategies around dynamic conditions and student needs. While their study emphasized system-level innovations, the present findings have extended the discussion by highlighting the human dimension of time investment and relational negotiation that underpins successful research advising. This suggests that in graduate contexts, optimizing online interactions requires more than access

to digital platforms—it needs institutional recognition of advisers' time commitments and the development of supportive structures that sustain meaningful advising relationships.

The insights from present study have highlighted the distinct nature of digital research advising in graduate education, where advisers carry greater responsibility for guiding advanced scholarly work and where their own reputations and professional identities are closely tied to their advisees' success. By foregrounding the voices of faculty, this study addresses a gap in the literature that often privileges student perspectives and general forms of academic advising. Situated in an Eastern context, the findings reveal how cultural expectations of respect, shared responsibility, and collective achievement shape the ways advisers navigate digital platforms and sustain meaningful relationships despite the constraint of physical distance. At the same time, the study underscores areas that remain under-explored, such as how institutional structures, disciplinary traditions, and cultural norms influence the practice of digital research advising. These insights point to the need for further inquiry across diverse contexts to deepen understanding of how graduate research supervision evolves in an increasingly digital academic landscape.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The themes which have emerged from our analysis collectively testify to the resilience and adaptability of the academic community in embracing digital transformation. By leveraging available technologies, drawing support from colleagues, and investing time in honing digital skills, advisers can thrive in an increasingly interconnected and digital academic landscape. Through continued collaboration, effective time management, and technological proficiency, academics can navigate challenges and seize new opportunities, and this will ultimately advance research, innovation, and academic excellence.

While this study offers valuable insights into the life worlds of the research advisers in providing digital research advising, it is important to acknowledge the roles of the broader academic community by involving more diverse participants from various higher education institutions. The small sample size and institutional homogeneity primarily reflect the unique culture, policies, and practices of digital advising in specific contexts. Future research could consider advisers from multiple institutions. While the findings may be only relevant to the institution studied, they provide a foundation for further exploration in diverse academic settings, offering initial insights that could inform future research.

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