



NEGOTIATING ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN DIGITALLY MEDIATED DOCTORAL SUPERVISION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

NEGOCIACIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD ACADÉMICA EN LA SUPERVISIÓN DOCTORAL MEDIADA POR TECNOLOGÍAS DIGITALES: UNA REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA

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Suggested citation (APA, seventh ed.)

Yilihamujiang, Y., Ibrahim, N. A., & Abd Wahid, N. S. (2026). Negotiating academic identity in digitally mediated doctoral supervision: a systematic review. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 18(5). e6229.

ABSTRACT:

In digitally mediated doctoral supervision, students often work across several demands at once, including academic participation, supervisory expectations, and, in some contexts, cross-cultural or transnational conditions. In this process, academic identity is not simply developed but negotiated. Yet these areas have rarely been examined together. Studies tend to discuss identity formation, online supervision, doctoral writing feedback, and cross-cultural adaptation in separate strands. This systematic review brings these strands together by examining how academic identity is negotiated in digitally mediated doctoral supervision across international, intercultural, cross-cultural, and transnational higher education contexts. The search followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection were used as the main databases, with additional targeted searches conducted in Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and SAGE Journals. The search covered publications from January 2010 to May 2026. Of 215 records, 185 remained after duplicate removal, and eight studies were finally included. Because the studies differed in design and findings, thematic synthesis was used. Three themes were identified. First, supervisory interaction was a key space where academic, writer, and researcher identities were formed. Second, digital and online mediation changed how feedback, access, and support were organized across time and space. Third, international and cross-cultural doctoral

supervision involved ongoing adaptation, repositioning, and agency in hybrid academic settings. Overall, the review shows that contemporary doctoral supervision is more than a pedagogical process. It is also a relational, mediated, and context-sensitive practice through which identity, support, and adaptation are continuously negotiated.

Keywords: Doctoral supervision, Academic identity, Digitally mediated supervision, Doctoral education, Higher education, Intercultural supervision.

RESUMEN:

En la supervisión doctoral mediada por tecnologías digitales, el estudiantado a menudo debe responder simultáneamente a múltiples exigencias, entre las que se incluyen la participación académica, las expectativas de la supervisión y, en determinados contextos, las condiciones interculturales o transnacionales. En este proceso, la identidad académica no solo se desarrolla, sino que se negocia. Sin embargo, estas dimensiones rara vez se han examinado de manera conjunta. La literatura especializada tiende a abordar la formación de la identidad, la supervisión en línea, la retroalimentación en la escritura doctoral y la adaptación intercultural en líneas de investigación independientes. La presente revisión sistemática integra estas corrientes al examinar cómo se negocia la identidad académica en la supervisión doctoral mediada



digitalmente dentro de contextos de educación superior internacionales, interculturales y transnacionales. La búsqueda metodológica siguió las directrices PRISMA 2020. Se utilizaron Scopus y Web of Science Core Collection como bases de datos principales, complementadas con búsquedas específicas en Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink y SAGE Journals, abarcando publicaciones comprendidas entre enero de 2010 y mayo de 2026. De los 215 registros identificados, 185 permanecieron tras la eliminación de duplicados y se incluyeron finalmente ocho estudios. Dada la heterogeneidad en el diseño y los hallazgos de los estudios, se empleó una síntesis temática. Se identificaron tres temas principales: en primer lugar, la interacción en la supervisión constituyó un espacio clave en la configuración de las identidades académica, de autoría e investigadora. En segundo lugar, la mediación digital y en línea transformó la organización de la retroalimentación, el acceso y el acompañamiento a través del tiempo y el espacio. En tercer lugar, la supervisión doctoral internacional e intercultural implicó procesos continuos de adaptación, reposicionamiento y agencia en entornos académicos híbridos. En conjunto, la revisión demuestra que la supervisión doctoral contemporánea trasciende el proceso pedagógico, consolidándose como una práctica relacional, mediada y sensible al contexto, a través de ella, la identidad, el apoyo y la adaptación se negocian de manera continua.

Palabras clave:

Supervisión doctoral, Identidad académica, Supervisión mediada por tecnologías digitales, Educación doctoral, Educación superior, Supervisión intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

Doctoral supervision is central to research-based doctoral education, supporting students as they learn to conduct research, negotiate academic expectations, participate in scholarly communities, and develop academic identities. This process may involve uncertainty, isolation, and struggle, while supervision can strengthen scholarly identity, motivation, and independence (Leshem, 2020). Becoming a scholar also depends on how students perceive themselves and how others recognize their competence, confidence, autonomy, and agency (Choi et al., 2021). For international doctoral students, identity formation can be particularly complex, and supervisory empowerment and academic belonging may strengthen their developing scholarly identities (Phan, 2023). From an academic socialization perspective, participation in discourse communities is similarly shaped by feedback, uptake, power relations, and identity negotiation (Duff, 2010; Morita, 2004).

Doctoral supervision has also become increasingly mediated by digital communication. Email, mobile communication, shared online spaces, and other technologies

can support contact, collaboration, and academic community when used for clear pedagogical purposes (Maor & Currie, 2017). The expansion of remote and online supervision has further changed how supervisors and students maintain continuity and informal interaction across distance (Palmer & Gillaspay, 2021). This is particularly relevant in international doctoral education, where mediated communication may connect participants across time zones, institutional expectations, and cultural boundaries. Digital mediation can consequently influence the rhythm and visibility of feedback, access to support, and expectations of availability. Media richness theory further suggests that communication effectiveness depends not only on a medium's technical characteristics but also on how it is used for particular tasks, especially when uncertainty, feedback, or ambiguous expectations are involved (Ishii et al., 2019). Digital communication has therefore become part of how contemporary supervision organizes feedback, support, contact, and everyday interaction.

Intercultural and transnational conditions add another layer of complexity. Cross-cultural feedback may involve emotional strain, cultural adjustment, and academic negotiation as students encounter different academic systems, writing norms, and supervisory expectations (Tian & Lowe, 2013). Academic socialization research similarly shows that students entering new discourse communities must negotiate norms, participation, identity, power, access, and agency (Duff, 2010; Morita, 2004). Communication expectations also vary across academic communities and are influenced by cultural and local practices (Zhu, 2017). For international doctoral students, supervision may therefore involve negotiating feedback and relationships across cultures, languages, and academic systems while reconsidering their identities as scholars (Bui, 2021). Academic guidance, emotional support, and collective belonging may further contribute to greater security in academic identity (Huang et al., 2026).

Despite growing attention to these issues, they have largely been examined separately. Research on doctoral identity has focused on scholarly becoming and identity formation (Choi et al., 2021; Leshem, 2020), while studies of technology have examined digital supervision and supervisory pedagogy (Maor & Currie, 2017; Palmer & Gillaspay, 2021). Other scholarship has addressed academic discourse socialization, participation, and cross-cultural feedback (Duff, 2010; Morita, 2004; Tian & Lowe, 2013). Less clear is how supervisory interaction, digital mediation, and intercultural or transnational conditions intersect in everyday doctoral supervision.

This systematic review addresses this gap by bringing together studies of digitally mediated doctoral supervision in intercultural, cross-cultural, and transnational contexts. It examines how supervisory interaction contributes to identity construction, how digital and online communication

reshapes feedback, access, and support, and how doctoral students adapt, reposition themselves, and exercise agency across academic and cultural boundaries. By integrating these dimensions, the review conceptualizes contemporary doctoral supervision as a relational, mediated, and context-sensitive practice that shapes doctoral formation, academic participation, and identity development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection were the primary databases, supplemented by targeted searches in Taylor & Francis Online, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and SAGE Journals to broaden coverage. The search included publications from January 2010 to May 2026 and combined terms related to doctoral supervision, academic identity, digital or text-mediated interaction, and intercultural or transnational contexts. Filters for publication year, document type, and language were applied where available. Table 1 summarizes the search strategies and records retrieved from each source.

Table 1. Databases, time window (2010–2026) and Core Search Strings for Studies on Academic Identity in Digitally Mediated Doctoral Supervision.

Database	Search Strategy	Number of Results
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(((«doctoral supervision» OR «doctoral mentoring» OR «supervisory feedback» OR supervision OR supervisor) AND (identity OR «academic identity» OR voice OR agency OR belonging OR «academic socialization»)) AND (digital OR online OR virtual OR email OR Zoom OR WhatsApp OR WeChat OR «written feedback» OR «instant messaging» OR «text-mediated»)) AND (intercultural OR «cross-cultural» OR international OR transnational») AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND (LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE, «English»))	69
Web of Science Core Collection	TS=(«doctoral supervision» OR «doctoral mentoring» OR «supervisory feedback» OR supervision OR supervisor) AND TS=(identity OR «academic identity» OR voice OR agency OR belonging OR «academic socialization») AND TS=(digital OR online OR virtual OR email OR Zoom OR WhatsApp OR WeChat OR «written feedback» OR «instant messaging» OR «text-mediated») AND TS=(intercultural OR «cross-cultural» OR international OR transnational) with filters: English; 2010-01-01 to 2026-05-07	39
Taylor & Francis Online	(«doctoral supervision» OR «supervisory feedback») AND «academic identity» AND (intercultural OR international OR transnational) with filters: Articles; Publication date 2010–2026	53
ScienceDirect	(«doctoral supervision» OR «supervisory feedback») AND «academic identity» AND (intercultural OR international OR transnational) with filter: Year 2010–2026	31
SpringerLink	(«doctoral supervision» OR «supervisory feedback») AND «academic identity» with filters: Article + Research article; English; 2010–2026	19
SAGE Journals	(«doctoral supervision» OR «supervisory feedback») AND «academic identity» AND (intercultural OR international OR transnational) with filters: Research article; January 2010–May 2026	4
Total:		215

The database and platform searches identified 215 records in total. After 30 duplicates were removed, 185 records were screened by title and abstract. The titles and abstracts were then checked against the inclusion criteria. To be eligible, studies had to: (1) be published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) be written in English; (3) be published between January 2010 and May 2026; (4) report empirical research; and (5) examine doctoral supervision in digitally mediated, text-mediated, or closely related online supervisory contexts. One further condition was applied. Included studies either needed to address intercultural or transnational doctoral supervision directly, or examine identity-related processes linked to doctoral formation, such as scholarly voice, agency, academic socialization, independence, belonging, or recognition.

Studies were excluded if they were not peer-reviewed, were not written in English, did not report empirical data, focused on non-doctoral educational contexts, or lacked a clear supervision component relevant to the review focus. Examples included dissertations, conference abstracts, editorials, and book chapters. Reviews and theoretical papers were excluded unless they included original empirical evidence relevant to the review question. Table 2 summarizes the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher conducted the screening and eligibility assessment. Screening decisions were checked again during manuscript development to ensure that they remained consistent with the review focus.



Table 2. Operational eligibility criteria for study inclusion and exclusion.

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Note:
Time range	Publications from January 2010 to May 2026	Publications outside this period	The time window was set to capture contemporary research on digitally mediated doctoral supervision and academic identity in higher education.
Language	English-language publications	Non-English publications	English was selected to ensure consistency in screening and interpretation.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Dissertations, theses, conference abstracts, editorials, commentaries, books, and book chapters	The review focuses on peer-reviewed scholarly evidence suitable for systematic synthesis.
Study design	Empirical studies, including qualitative, mixed-methods, and other empirical designs with analyzable data relevant to the review question	Purely theoretical, conceptual, opinion-based, or review papers without original empirical evidence	The review synthesizes original empirical evidence rather than conceptual discussion alone.
Educational focus	Studies examining doctoral supervision or dissertation-stage supervision	Studies focused exclusively on undergraduate, taught post-graduate, school, or other non-doctoral supervision contexts	The review is specifically concerned with doctoral education.
Interactional mode	Studies involving digitally mediated or text-mediated supervisory interaction, feedback, or communication	Studies focused solely on face-to-face supervision without a clear digital or text-mediated component	Digital or text-mediated interaction is a core criterion of the review.
Substantive relevance	Studies that directly address intercultural or transnational doctoral supervision, or analyze identity-related processes central to intercultural doctoral formation	Studies unrelated to intercultural or transnational supervision, or unrelated to identity-related processes in doctoral formation	Relevant identity-related processes include scholarly voice, agency, academic socialization, independence, belonging, and recognition.
Topical relevance	Studies examining how supervisory interaction, feedback, or communication relates to academic identity formation, negotiation, or positioning	Studies focused only on digital supervision as logistics, administration, or technology use without identity-related or supervision-process relevance	Priority was given to studies that addressed the review question directly.
Data adequacy	Studies reporting sufficient methodological detail and findings for interpretation and synthesis	Studies with unclear methods, unverifiable findings, or insufficient reporting for analysis	Adequate reporting is necessary for thematic synthesis and cross-study comparison.
Source quality	Articles published in recognized scholarly outlets identified through the main databases or supplementary publisher-platform searches	Non-scholarly or non-verifiable sources	The review combined database searches with targeted platform searches to improve coverage while maintaining source credibility.

After title and abstract screening, twenty-six-full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which eight met the final inclusion criteria (see Figure 1). The PRISMA flow diagram summarizes the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion process. Data extracted from each study included author and year, country or setting, participants, study design, mode of digital or text-mediated interaction where applicable, intercultural or transnational relevance, identity-related focus, and findings relevant to the review question. Data extraction and methodological quality appraisal were conducted by the researcher.

Given the heterogeneity of study designs and findings, no meta-analysis was performed. Instead, a thematic synthesis supported by summary tables was used to compare study characteristics and identify recurring patterns in academic identity negotiation within digitally mediated, text-mediated, and related supervisory contexts, with particular attention to intercultural and transnational higher education.

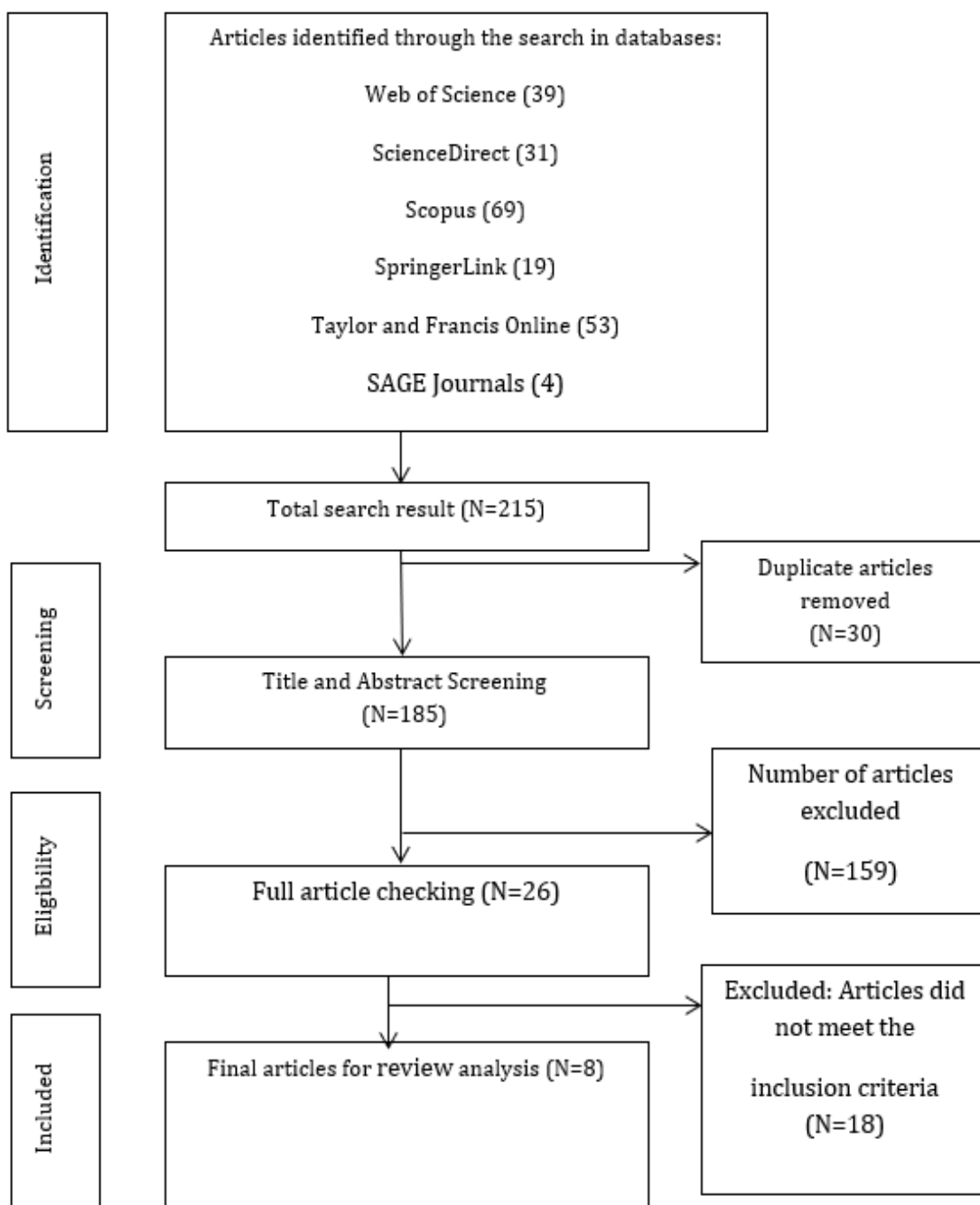


Fig 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the eight included studies. It begins with the study characteristics, including where the studies were conducted, who participated, what designs were used, and what forms of supervision were examined. Table 3 summarizes these details and the main findings. The section then turns to the thematic synthesis, where the main patterns across the studies are discussed.

Table 3. Characteristics and Key Findings of the Included Studies.

Study (Author, year)	Setting / participants	Design / data source	Supervision mode	Key finding
Liu et al. (2026)	Hong Kong; 18 Chinese mainland doctoral students at a Hong Kong university	Exploratory qualitative study	Intercultural doctoral supervision	Identified three adaptation trajectories and showed that adaptation in Hong Kong's hybridized supervisory context was non-linear, selective, and marked by in-betweenness rather than straight-forward assimilation.
Sun & Trent (2022)	Hong Kong; one full-time Chinese mainland female PhD student and her Australian principal supervisor	Exploratory pilot case study using drafts, emails, supervisory session audio, and student reflection	Doctoral writing supervision through emails, a face-to-face meeting, and Word track changes across four rounds of feedback	Showed that dialogic, multi-medium feedback supported agentive engagement, stronger feedback uptake, and academic identity growth.
Wang & Liar-dét (2025)	Australia; three doctoral candidates coauthoring with supervisors	Multiple-case study using interviews, written reflections, and email correspondence	Supervisor-candidate coauthoring for publication	Found that coauthoring strengthened writer identity, confidence, authorial voice, and rhetorical awareness, while also revealing collaborative tensions around coordination and expectations.
Lu et al. (2025)	Cross-border Chinese doctoral contexts; three Chinese doctoral students in applied linguistics across the U.S. / East Asia	Collaborative autoethnography using prompt-based self-narrative journals, visual artifacts, social media posts, and emails	Supervision for publishing / scholarly publication	Showed that supervision and agency interacted to shape researcher identity reconstruction under distinct academic cultures and neoliberal publishing pressure.
Alebaikan et al. (2023)	Saudi Arabia / United Kingdom; Saudi Arabian doctoral students and UK- and Saudi-based supervisors	Qualitative study	Distance cross-cultural supervision supported by online communication technologies	Identified challenges and opportunities around roles and expectations, communication and technology, language, and professional development in cross-cultural distance supervision.
Li et al. (2025)	China; doctoral supervision in Chinese higher education	Semi-collaborative mixed ethnography / longitudinal study over three years using online and offline interviews, observations, and chats	Supervisory interactions in doctoral education	Showed how supervisory interactions shaped academic cultural reproduction, habitus, and identity through recurring patterns such as inheritance, dependence, imitation, confrontation, and recognition.
Bao et al. (2025)	Mainland China; one supervisor-doctoral student pair in a major research university	Digital micro-ethnographic case study using WeChat interactions, interviews, and artifacts over two years	One-to-one supervision conducted primarily through instant messaging (WeChat) during COVID-19	Showed how supervisory interactions mediated academic identity construction through transformative criticism, strategic recognition, and identity as pedagogy.
Amelia et al. (2021)	Australia; mixed-method study of 111 Indonesian doctoral students, with the article focusing on one participant's in-depth narrative	Mixed-method study with follow-up semi-structured online interviews	Cross-cultural online supervision through Zoom, email, phone, and online group meetings	Showed that online supervision could support repositioning, supportive relationships, peer connection, and identity negotiation in a cross-cultural crisis context.

Table 3 shows that most of the eight included studies used qualitative designs. They covered intercultural, cross-border, online, and digitally mediated supervisory contexts. The studies also focused on related issues, including academic identity, writer or researcher identity, positioning, agency, feedback, adaptation, and supervisory relationships. These shared concerns informed the thematic synthesis that follows.

Publication Trends and Study Characteristics

The eight included studies were published between 2021 and 2026, indicating that research on digitally mediated, cross-cultural, and identity-related doctoral supervision is relatively recent. Most appeared from 2023 onward, reflecting growing attention to online, hybrid, and intercultural supervision in the post-pandemic period. The studies were conducted in Hong Kong, Australia, Mainland China, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, as well as in cross-regional-Chinese doctoral contexts involving the United States and East Asia.

The studies varied mainly by supervision mode rather than participant category. They examined intercultural or cross-cultural supervision, online or digitally mediated supervision, doctoral writing and feedback, publication and coauthoring, and broader supervisory interaction. These differences provided the basis for the thematic synthesis that follows.

Theme 1. Supervisory Interaction as a Site of Identity Construction

In the included studies, supervisory interaction extended beyond academic guidance, becoming a space where doctoral students negotiated their academic, writer, and researcher identities through dialogue, recognition, criticism, collaboration, and positioning (Bao et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2025; Sun & Trent, 2022). These interactions also shaped students' positioning within academic communities (Wang & Liardét, 2025).

Bao et al. (2025) illustrate this process through a two-year digital micro-ethnographic study of a supervisor–student relationship. Transformative criticism, strategic recognition, and identity as pedagogy supported the student's gradual negotiation of academic identity, combining professional guidance and authority with personal connection and collegial exchange.

Publication-oriented supervision revealed similar processes. Wang & Liardét (2025) found that coauthoring contributed to doctoral students' confidence, authorial voice, and rhetorical awareness, while requiring negotiation around authorship, coordination, and academic expectations. Similarly, Lu et al. (2025) showed that researcher identity was reconstructed through supervision, publication pressure, different academic cultures, and student agency.

Identity construction also emerged in broader intercultural environments. Li et al. (2025) linked supervisory interaction to academic cultural reproduction and habitus formation through inheritance, dependence, imitation, confrontation, and recognition. Liu et al. (2026) showed that students' adaptation trajectories in Hong Kong were related to their interpretations of supervisory expectations within a hybrid academic environment, while Amelia et al. (2021) demonstrated that online cross-cultural supervision facilitated repositioning, relational change, and identity negotiation. These findings indicate that supervision functioned as an identity-mediating process through which doctoral students were recognized, challenged, positioned, and socialized into academic life.

Theme 1 therefore identifies supervisory interaction as an integral part of doctoral formation, shaping how students develop as scholars and participate in academic communities. Because these interactions increasingly occur through different communication media, the next theme examines how digital and online mediation reshapes feedback, supervisory access, and support across time and distance.

Theme 2. Digital and Online Mediation Reshapes Feedback, Access, and Support

In the included studies, digital and online mediation did more than substitute for face-to-face supervision. Email, instant messaging, Word track changes, videoconferencing, phone communication, and online platforms

reshaped feedback, supervisory relationships, and access to support across time and distance (Alebaikan et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2021).

Sun & Trent (2022) illustrate this process through four rounds of feedback during a doctoral student's first research article. Feedback moved across email, a face-to-face meeting, and Word track changes, with each mode supporting different forms of engagement. Dialogic, multi-stage feedback promoted more agentive responses and supported academic enculturation, critical thinking, and relationship development (Bao et al., 2025; Sun & Trent, 2022).

Bao et al. (2025) provide a more explicitly digital example through a supervisor–student relationship conducted primarily via WeChat over two years. Instant messaging created a semi-synchronous and traceable space for continued negotiation of academic development, allowing criticism, recognition, and pedagogical positioning to occur iteratively.

Amelia et al. (2021) similarly showed that Zoom, email, phone, and Microsoft Teams helped maintain supervisory contact, emotional support, and peer interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. These practices supported continued academic work and the repositioning of supervisory and peer relationships despite separation and uncertainty.

Digital and distance supervision also presented challenges. Alebaikan et al. (2023) identified difficulties involving roles, expectations, language, feedback, technology, and mutual understanding in cross-cultural distance supervision. Effective interaction therefore required explicit discussion, flexible negotiation, reciprocity, and attention to both oral and written communication.

Theme 2 shows that digital mediation made supervision more flexible, traceable, and continuous while also creating new expectations around responsiveness, access, and communication. Because these practices often operated within intercultural and transnational contexts, the next theme examines adaptation, repositioning, and agency across cultural and academic boundaries.

Theme 3. Cross-Cultural and Transnational Supervision Requires Adaptation, Repositioning, and Agency

This systematic review synthesized evidence from eight studies on digitally mediated, intercultural, cross-cultural, and transnational doctoral supervision. Three main findings emerged: supervisory interaction contributed to academic, writer, and researcher identity construction; digital mediation reshaped feedback, communication, access, and support; and cross-cultural and transnational supervision required adaptation, repositioning, and agency within hybrid academic environments.

These findings support an understanding of doctoral supervision as a relational and socially mediated process. Interaction, recognition, criticism, positioning, and collaboration contributed to students' academic and researcher identities (Bao et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2025) and their socialization within scholarly communities (Sun & Trent, 2022; Wang & Liardét, 2025). Digital mediation further altered the timing and visibility of feedback and expanded opportunities for dialogue and support (Bao et al., 2025; Sun & Trent, 2022). Rather than simply replacing face-to-face interaction, online supervision required flexibility, communicative clarity, and negotiated expectations (Alebaikan et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2021).

Intercultural and transnational supervision added further complexity. Students navigated different institutional norms, communication practices, and supervisory expectations, while adaptation could involve selective adjustment, in-betweenness, and continuing repositioning (Alebaikan et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2021). Cross-cultural supervision therefore involved identity negotiation, agency, and relational transformation rather than straightforward assimilation (Liu et al., 2026; Lu et al., 2025). Taken together, the evidence positions doctoral supervision as a context-sensitive practice shaped by interconnected pedagogical, relational, technological, and cultural dimensions.

These findings have practical implications. Supervisors should combine intellectual guidance with dialogic feedback, recognition, and opportunities to negotiate expectations (Bao et al., 2025; Sun & Trent, 2022; Wang & Liardét, 2025). Digital communication tools should be used flexibly according to supervisory purposes (Alebaikan et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2021), supported by clear expectations and communication norms that facilitate meaningful feedback and access to support (Bao et al., 2025; Sun & Trent, 2022).

In intercultural and transnational contexts, supervisors and institutions should explicitly address academic expectations, feedback, language use, authorship, and cultural differences in communication (Alebaikan et al., 2023; Amelia et al., 2021). Students should also have opportunities to exercise agency and negotiate their positioning within hybrid academic environments (Liu et al., 2026; Lu et al., 2025). Support may extend beyond individual supervision through peer interaction, coauthoring, supervisory panels, writing groups, publication mentoring, and broader academic networks (Amelia et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2025; Wang & Liardét, 2025).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Only eight studies met the inclusion criteria, most using qualitative designs, which limits the generalizability of the identified patterns. The studies were concentrated in a limited range

of higher education contexts, particularly Hong Kong, Australia, Mainland China, and cross-border settings, and several involved individual cases or small supervisory relationships. The diversity of supervision contexts also introduced conceptual heterogeneity, meaning that the themes represent cross-study patterns rather than uniform characteristics. Finally, screening and eligibility assessment were conducted without independent double-screening, so some interpretive subjectivity cannot be excluded.

Overall, the review shows how doctoral supervision is being reshaped by digital mediation, interculturality, and cross-border academic conditions. Future research should examine more diverse national, disciplinary, and institutional contexts, employ broader methodological approaches, and investigate how supervisory relationships, identity development, and adaptation evolve over time.

CONCLUSIONS

This systematic review synthesized evidence from eight studies on digitally mediated, intercultural, cross-cultural, and transnational doctoral supervision. The findings show that supervision extends beyond academic support, functioning as a relational and context-sensitive process that shapes doctoral students' identities, engagement with feedback, and academic adaptation. Supervisory interaction was particularly relevant to the development of academic, writer, and researcher identities, while digital mediation influenced how feedback, communication, and support were organized. Cross-cultural and transnational contexts also required continuous adaptation, negotiation, and student agency.

By integrating research on online and distance supervision, doctoral writing, coauthoring for publication, and intercultural supervisory interaction, this review offers a broader understanding of contemporary doctoral supervision. Rather than being limited to feedback or academic monitoring, supervision emerges as a multidimensional practice influenced by communication technologies, interpersonal relationships, institutional expectations, and cross-cultural academic environments.

The review therefore supports an understanding of doctoral supervision as an evolving and context-dependent practice. Despite the relatively small evidence base and the limited diversity of research settings, the included studies suggest that effective supervision requires academic expertise alongside sustained dialogue, clear negotiation of expectations, support for identity development, and flexibility in digitally mediated and intercultural environments. Future research should extend this evidence across more diverse doctoral contexts and examine how supervisory relationships and practices develop over time.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Author Contributions

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