

Factors Influencing Postgraduate Students Graduation Rate at Arba Minch University

Yohannes Tigro Tilbe¹, Girma Mekuria¹, Muluken Tesfaye Kabtyimer¹, Damtew Darza Sozo¹, Beta Tsemato¹

¹Arba Minch University, Arba Minch, Ethiopia

Corresponding Author: yohannestigro@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study examined postgraduate students' graduation rates and investigated the institutional, supervisory, and personal factors associated with students' motivation to graduate on time. A cross-sectional survey and document analysis were conducted using data collected from 307 postgraduate students and 106 faculty members at Arba Minch University. The findings showed improvements in postgraduate enrollment and graduation rates. The overall graduation rate was 77.4%, with the highest rate recorded in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities (87.7%) and the lowest in the College of Business and Economics (57.8%), indicating considerable variation across colleges. Furthermore, institutional, supervisory, and students' personal factors were significantly associated with motivation for timely graduation. Significant differences were also observed between students' and faculty members' perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors. These findings provide valuable insights for postgraduate students, thesis supervisors, university administrators, and policymakers seeking to improve timely postgraduate completion.

Keywords: graduation rate, postgraduate students, institutional factor, student personal factor, supervisory practices

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate education plays a critical role in developing the highly skilled workforce and research capacity required for a knowledge-based economy. Universities worldwide have expanded postgraduate programs to meet the growing demand for advanced professionals and researchers, leading to a substantial increase in postgraduate enrollment (Priyadarshini et al., 2022). However, expanding access alone does not guarantee successful outcomes. Ensuring that students complete their studies within the prescribed timeframe remains a major challenge for higher education institutions globally. Delayed graduation and attrition not only

affect students' academic and professional careers but also reduce institutional efficiency, increase educational costs, and limit the availability of qualified professionals.

In Ethiopia, strengthening postgraduate education is a national priority for achieving the country's ambition of becoming a middle-income economy by 2030. To support this goal, the government has implemented policies aimed at expanding higher education and increasing the production of highly qualified professionals and researchers (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2020). Consequently, Ethiopian universities have substantially increased postgraduate enrollment to address the growing demand for academic staff with master's and doctoral qualifications and to meet the country's expanding need for skilled human capital.

Arba Minch University, one of Ethiopia's first-generation public universities, reflects this national agenda. As part of its strategic plan, the university intends to increase postgraduate enrollment from 1,858 students in 2020 (1,730 master's and 128 PhD students) to 10,108 students by 2030 through the introduction of numerous new master's and doctoral programs. plan to increase postgraduate students' enrolment rate by 2030 expansion, timely completion of the graduates remains a significant concern. According to 2022 unpublished report from the School of Postgraduate Studies, 559 of the 798 students expected to graduate failed to complete their programs within the prescribed period. This finding contradicts the university's postgraduate regulations, which require completion of master's programs within two years and PhD programs within four years, except under approved extensions. Such delays have important implications for influencing students' career progression, university efficiency, and the national supply of highly qualified professionals.

Evidence from previous studies indicates that delayed graduation is influenced by multiple interrelated factors. Studies conducted in Eastern Africa have identified inadequate research resources, limited institutional support, financial constraints, and supervision-related challenges as major contributors to delayed postgraduate completion (Mbogo, 2016; Tamrat, 2021). Extended study duration has also been associated with increased psychological distress, reduced motivation, and diminished career opportunities for postgraduate students. Furthermore, previous research has shown that institutional conditions, supervisory practices, and students' personal characteristics are associated with academic success and research completion (Arabacı & Ersözlü, 2010; Hadi & Muhammad, 2019). These findings suggest

that timely graduation depends on both institutional support systems, including supervisor-related factors, and individual student factors.

Although postgraduate enrollment has expanded rapidly in Ethiopia, evidence regarding graduation outcomes and the factors associated with timely completion remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on academic performance, research challenges, or student experiences, with little attention given to graduation rates and students' motivation to graduate on time, particularly within Ethiopian universities (Kassaw et al., 2024). Moreover, no empirical study has simultaneously examined postgraduate graduation rates and the institutional, supervisory, and personal factors associated with students' motivation for timely graduation at Arba Minch University.

Therefore, this study aimed to determine the graduation rate of postgraduate students and examine the institutional, supervisory, and personal factors associated with students' motivation to graduate on time at Arba Minch University. The findings are expected to provide evidence that can inform institutional policies and interventions designed to improve postgraduate completion and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of postgraduate education in Ethiopia. In light of the realities presented above, the following research questions have been formulated for this study: (1) What is the graduation rate of postgraduate students at Arba Minch University? (2) Do institutional, supervisory, and personal factors impact the graduation rate of postgraduate students? (3) Do students and teachers perceive institutional and supervisory factors differently?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several discoveries were made regarding numerous factors related to program completion, which included interpersonal, environmental, social, and cognitive aspects (Carroll et al., 2009; Dziuban et al., 2013; Tinto, 2006). For instance, Carroll et al. (2009) found three important determinants of non-completion in postgraduate studies are situational factors, which pertain to a student's personal circumstances; dispositional factors, associated with students' beliefs, attitudes, and values; and institutional factors, linked to university policies, procedures, and structures. In line with these perspectives, the present study also concentrated on three overarching dimensions: student, supervisor, and institution. More specifically,

student-related aspects such as self-management and research competencies were examined in detail.

Postgraduate Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's postgraduate (PG) education sits within an evolving policy framework aimed at expanding access while strengthening quality and relevance. The Higher Education Proclamation No. 1152/2019 set out updated rules for staffing, program quality, and inter-university support, and clarified the Ministry's authority to set minimum academic staff ratios and to strengthen PG provision. The 2018–2030 Education Development Roadmap and the current Education Sector Development Program VI (ESDP VI, 2020/21–2024/25) articulate reforms, including curriculum renewal, digital integration, teacher/academic development, and system governance, to improve tertiary education and research performance (MoE, 2018). Institutional quality assurance has also been restructured: the former HERQA has been transformed into the national Education and Training Authority (ETA), with an expanded mandate and powers under Proclamation 1263/2021 to regulate and accredit higher education, directly affecting PG program oversight.

Ethiopia has continued to expand access to tertiary education over the last decade, though participation remains below global averages. The World Bank/UNESCO series shows that tertiary gross enrolment has been rising over time, with persistent gender gaps that vary by field and level (Tareke et al., 2024). Public universities have multiplied, and private providers now contribute meaningfully to enrolment, particularly in urban centers, widening the pipeline into taught master's and doctoral programs (Tareke et al., 2024). PG education is predominantly offered in public universities, with Addis Ababa University, Jimma, Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Mekelle, Arba Minch, and others serving as key hubs for master's and PhD training. There are still restrictions on competitive funding, but specialized programs like World Bank-funded Centers of Excellence have sought to develop capacity in doctoral supervision and inter-institutional peer comparison. Internationalization of higher education continues to grow (co-supervision, joint research endeavors, mobility) but unevenly (Gonfa et al., 2024).

The expansion of higher education opportunities in Ethiopia has led to a substantial increase in students' demand for quality education within higher education institutions. In particular, the rise in the number of graduate students has generated substantial development within such

institutions. In addition, timely graduation among postgraduate students is a core indicator of the performance of such institutions. Completing PG programs on time greatly affects students, supervisors, and the institution. On the contrary, poor graduation rates associated with dropouts, prolonged graduation, and incomplete programs can be considered losses in terms of financial and human resource investments within institutions (Gonfa et al., 2024; Styger et al., 2014). Thus, it is important to track students' progress and instill motivation within them to ensure that they complete their programs successfully within the stipulated time.

The Status/Level of Postgraduate Students Graduation Rate

Graduation rate" is calculated in different ways (e.g., probability of first-time graduation before an age limit; cohort completion within X years). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses first-time graduation rates by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level, typically before age 35 for Master's/Doctoral, and excludes international students for that indicator (OECD, 2024). Master's completion is generally higher and faster than Doctoral. Across OECD systems, Master's programs show higher completion rates than Doctoral programs, with most completions within a few years of the nominal program length; completion rates rise further when measured two years beyond the nominal time (OECD, 2024). Doctoral completion commonly ranges 50–70% within 7–10 years, varying by field and country. Long-run studies and system dashboards consistently find that around half to two-thirds of PhD entrants complete within a decade, with higher completion in life/health sciences than in the humanities and some social sciences. Recent examples: a large U.S. public system reports >70% doctoral completion within 10 years; sector syntheses and policy briefs still cite ~50% long-run attrition as a persistent pattern (Mensah, 2025).

Australia (Higher Degree by Research (HDR)—research Master's & PhD): The Department of Education publishes national completion and attrition rates for Higher Degrees by Research, disaggregated by level and cohort, providing one of the clearest official baselines for postgraduate research completion. South Africa: Official stats report graduation rates by level for public universities. In 2022, headline rates were 21.6% (postgraduate below Master's), 17.9% (Master's), and 14.6% (Doctoral), illustrating that the annual "graduation rate" (stock-based) is not the same as a cohort completion rate, but still useful for cross-level comparison. United Kingdom: HESA/sector surveys track PGR (postgraduate research)

experience and progression; recent surveys include items on confidence to complete on time and considering leaving, which are leading indicators of completion/attrition pressures, even when a single national “completion rate” figure isn’t published in one place. Ethiopia: The Ministry of Education’s Education Statistics Annual Abstract (MoE, 2023) provides current counts for enrolment and graduates by level (including postgraduate). It’s the authoritative source for national totals and trends; deriving cohort completion rates typically requires linking successive cohorts over time. Postgraduate program completion remains a significant challenge in Ethiopia. Although national statistics on master's and PhD completion rates are limited, available evidence indicates that a substantial proportion of postgraduate students do not complete their studies within the prescribed timeframe. Delayed graduation has been associated with factors such as inadequate supervision, limited research funding, insufficient institutional support, weak research infrastructure, competing work and family responsibilities, and students' research-related competencies. These challenges have been identified across several Ethiopian universities, highlighting the need for institutional and policy interventions to improve postgraduate completion and research productivity (Ministry of Education, 2018; Kassaw et al., 2024).

Factors Influencing Postgraduate Students' Graduation on Time

Previous research has established that challenges in postgraduate research are not confined to developing countries; similar issues also arise in the developed world (Kearney, 2008). Nevertheless, developed nations have made more progress in addressing these challenges (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2007). Meerah (2010) notes that an increasing number of learners are entering doctoral programs, as countries seek to cultivate more researchers to enhance their human capital. In light of the above findings, this study proposes exploring the factors that affect the performance of postgraduate research students. Various studies have identified several interacting factors, both personal and non-academic (Meerah, 2010; Wareing, 2009), that affect research skills and academic performance. The following section will discuss how factors related to the institution, supervisor, and student influence postgraduate students' performance.

Institutional Factors

This study contends that the success of postgraduate students depends on institutional variables. Essentially, the reputation, costs, financial support, technical support, and

research culture tend to influence students' performance. Evidence from Wimshurst et al. (2006) and the University of Botswana indicates that the above variables contribute to the success of the postgraduate students. Moreover, MacKeracher et al. (2006) and Pitchforth et al. (2021) show that inadequacies in these areas can hinder progress and reduce completion rates. Therefore, this study will evaluate facilities, financial support, specialized training, and support services to identify which institutional factors most strongly drive student achievement. The significance of the institution's role has been identified as a critical success factor in the completion of postgraduate studies. According to the literature, institutional support includes academic resources and student services, as well as on-campus and online support and guidance (Rubin et al., 2013). Furthermore, the development of the learning community falls within the institution's support domain. It has been identified that Malaysian postgraduate students face challenges primarily related to a lack of library services and facilities, which consequently affect their research process (Teh & Choy, 2017). A Baporikar (2022) systematic literature review covering 14 countries found that successful postgraduate performance hinges on teaching/learning methods, quality of research supervision, capacity building, library services, workshops offered by postgraduate offices, and student characteristics.

Supervisory Practices

The skills used by university tutors in the mentoring process play a significant role in the training and development of postgraduate students. Some of the skills needed in the mentorship of postgraduate students include advising, role-modelling, knowledge transfer, and supervision (Harvey et al., 2009). As mentioned by Lunsford (2021), the issue of mentoring is significant in management academic journals. In the conventional approach, as reported by Harvey et al. (2009), postgraduate mentorship has been used to provide personal, professional, and organizational direction. According to a postgraduate business administration thesis by a research author, mentoring is a "relationship between two independent parties in the management configuration, in which one (mentor) directs the other (mentee) toward an established goal."

In the Kenyan universities, the relationship between the students and supervisors was identified as an important determinant. Success in the relationship depended on compatibility, feedback quality, review frequency, supervisor access, and emotional support, as well as

academic support. Supervisor characteristics that align with students' developmental stages are vital to this relationship (Matheka et al., 2025a). There are different types of mentoring processes, such as career supervision and psychosocial supervision. In Nigerian clinical pharmacy doctoral programs, a mixed-methods approach has found that multiple supervisors dedicated to the training process, in addition to support from departmental supervisors at universities, are decisive factors in graduating on time (Mosanya et al., 2022; Freedman, 2009). Career supervision entails processes that ensure the trainee achieves success in their life, whereas psychosocial supervision entails processes related to the trainee's personal area, as it aids in the development of the trainee's professionalism. The supervisor has been depicted as a crucial role in advancing the career of junior individuals within the same organization (Blickle et al., 2009; Freedman, 2009; Jessop & Maleckar, 2016; Maxwell, 2009). A mentor is defined as "a guide, an educator, a leader, and an organizer of the skills that facilitate an individual to recognize their dreams of a perfect life" (Allen & Eby, 2007). Wilson & Elman (1990) also outline some essential qualities of a good mentor, such as the ability to facilitate, encourage, communicate effectively, critically analyze, actively listen, and thoroughly understand mentees' needs. Therefore, existing research primarily highlights general traits and qualities of a mentor. In this case, this research work aims to bring out some good traits of research mentors, that is, approaching research methodology, providing appropriate research guidance, extending research support, showing commitment and interest in improving research skills of the mentee, objectively evaluating the research work of the mentee, providing continuous feedback regarding performance, and being accessible and available for fulfilling the research requirements of research students.

The level of supervision also depends on research experience (Ismail et al., 2011). To ensure research supervision reaches its highest level, most universities set criteria that supervisors must meet before they are eligible to supervise research for postgraduate students. For example, the first supervisor must normally have research supervision qualifications that are at least matched by those of their supervisees (Kiley. 2011). As a case example, at Deakin University, a Fast Track Supervisor Training Program was implemented to expedite qualification (Kiley. 2011).). The program was set to include several courses for academic staff to gain the knowledge and practical experience necessary to improve their skill level as research supervisors. The area of postgraduate research supervision and supervisors' practice in postgraduate education has been widely studied in previous research, with a range of

practices from good to unsatisfactory (Kiley. 2011). The literature regarding supervisor–student relationships has also identified persistent concerns and challenges within this dynamic. For supervisors, these challenges can be considered twofold. On the one hand, supervisors find themselves addressing the needs of postgraduate students regarding the knowledge and skills they lack in their research. There has been considerable emphasis on the need to improve students’ intrinsic motivation (Lynch et al., 2018), research capabilities, and ability to manage their time effectively (Nzewi et al., 2012), as well as their writing capabilities (Jeyaraj, 2018). On the other hand, supervisors find themselves dealing with a considerable number of university and organizational tasks (Abiddin et al., 2011a), which impacts their abilities and availability, as they struggle to cope, especially in the context of effective and affective interaction during the supervision session.

More contemporary research indicates that, for doctorates in particular, overall student satisfaction was found to be heavily dominated by supportive supervisors, with such support extending beyond mere academic considerations to encompass broader non-academic dimensions of student life (Dericks et al., 2019). In more recent years and within this specific context, it appears that preferences for supervisors who are people-oriented in their approach remain manifested in the views of postgraduate students themselves (Sidhu et al., 2013), more empathetic in their approach, more patient in their relations, and possessing strategies to employ in managing stressful encounters (Woolhouse, 2002). Furthermore, achieving timely completion requires extending supervisor–student engagement beyond cognitive or academic support to incorporate affective dimensions of supervision. At an institutional level, universities should also provide adequate resources, such as research facilities and capacity-building workshops, to strengthen postgraduate students’ research competencies and facilitate successful academic progression. Research also shows that supervisor commitment and presence are important for the timely completion of postgraduate programs (Burmeister, 2015; Ndayambaje, 2018). This is especially with respect to student-supervisor interaction sessions, as well as supervisor comments and feedback on their work (Burmeister, 2015; Ndayambaje, 2018). Indeed, committed and motivated supervisors play several roles in mentoring their respective supervisees. Often, they direct their supervisees to resources that assist them throughout their research process (Ellwood et al., 2015; Kamber El-Kholy et al., 2017; BetHELMeR et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2016).

Student Personal Factors

Students play an important role in ensuring the success of their studies, with their tireless efforts being a key requirement for achieving graduation within the required timeframe (Eyangu et al., 2014). Siamian et al. (2016) found that students with higher levels of awareness of the difficulties faced during their academic lives have the potential to attain higher levels of both academic and non-academic skills, which ultimately lead to their thesis success. However, several studies have analyzed the determinants encountered during thesis submission among graduate students and reported that these students faced various difficulties throughout their journey. Recently, Priyadarshini et al. (2022) found that the postgraduate students at the Malaysian Public University have shown moderate levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Many problems and difficulties faced by these students have been emphasized in the current literature, mostly associated with attitude (Siamian et al., 2016), thesis writing (Hoon et al., 2019), and financial difficulties (Mbogo, 2016). Moreover, several authors have suggested that various difficulties faced during thesis submission among students pursuing higher education have created major challenges, often considered important obstacles to their thesis submission. Moreover, Hadi and Muhammad (2019) concluded that the determinants faced during thesis submission of students pursuing higher education play an important role in their research. Evidence in the current literature indicates that students pursuing higher education have faced major difficulties during their postgraduate studies, particularly with thesis submission. Therefore, these students should have sound readiness, important skills, and an optimistic attitude toward their education. Therefore, self-management for students pursuing higher education has been defined as their capacity to handle difficulties in both their education and personal lives.

In addition, performance of postgraduate students in their research work is affected not only by the quality of their supervisors' mentoring and expertise but also by students' characteristics, such as their learning competencies and motivation, which are essential to the successful completion of their research projects. Researchers studying educational contexts agree that the importance of students' ideas and perceptions about the learning process, as well as their level of dedication to their established goals, cannot be overstated (van Dinther et al., 2011; McKenzie and Schweitzer, 2001). Low self-efficacy students generally view their responsibilities as more complicated than they actually are, while more self-assured students generally feel calmer and succeed in their learning.

METHODS

Research Design

Using a cross-sectional design, this study examined the graduation rates of postgraduate students at Arba Minch University and the factors influencing their on-schedule program completion. The findings will provide valuable information regarding program completion.

Sampling and Participants

The study population comprised postgraduate faculty members and master's and doctoral students from the two institutes, five colleges, and two schools of Arba Minch University. During the 2022 data collection period, the university comprised 275 postgraduate faculty members and enrolled 3,013 master's and PhD students. Simple random sampling was used to select representative and proportionate samples from both groups. Accordingly, 340 postgraduate students and 130 faculty members were invited to participate. Of these, 307 postgraduate students (90.3%) and 106 faculty members (81.5%) returned completed questionnaires and were included in the final analysis.

Measures

The instruments in this study were adapted and validated by the authors, with items selected from existing survey instruments. Experienced professionals conducted validation. The item pool came from the postgraduate research experience questionnaire (Marsh & Hattie, 2002), supervisee and supervisor questionnaires (Teh & Choy, 2017), and the postgraduate motivation questionnaire (Igoun, 2010). The self-administered questionnaire consisted of 27 items for students and 18 items for teachers. It was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). To ensure validity, the questionnaires were pre-tested with 35 Master's and PhD students and 30 teachers in the university. The college/institutes/schools where the pilot study was conducted were excluded from the main study to avoid potential bias.

Document Analysis

In this study, postgraduate graduation rates were quantitatively analyzed. Data collected included students' academic records, achievements, sponsorship types, and work experience. Document analysis drew on records of students admitted between 2016 and 2020, aligning with Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II). Data sources comprised the University Student Management Information System, registrar and alumni directorate, and

the postgraduate school director's office. Relevant university guidelines, annual reports, and strategic plans were also reviewed.

Data Analysis

Before the analysis, data screening was conducted to check for missing values, errors, and extreme values. The reliability test was performed to check the reliability of the scales by assessing how each item correlated with other items within each scale. The following alpha values were computed independently for the institutional factor (Teachers $\alpha = .85$; Students $\alpha = .88$), supervisor factor (Teachers $\alpha = .84$; Students $\alpha = .94$); students personal factor $\alpha = .76$; and motivation to graduate on time $\alpha = .87$. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the psychometrics properties of the measurement model. Furthermore, a bivariate correlation was computed among the independent variables (i.e., institutional factor, supervisor factor, and students' personal factor) and the dependent variable, students' motivation to graduate on time. Subsequently, regression analysis was conducted, and variables with significant correlations for each independent–dependent variable pair were entered into the model. Finally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences between students' (N=307) and teachers' (N=106) perceptions regarding institutional and supervisory factors affecting students' motivation to graduate on time.

RESULTS

This study explored factors influencing on-time graduation among postgraduate students at Arba Minch University. The graduation rate and the predictive validity of institutional factors, supervisor factors, and students' personal factors for postgraduate students' timely graduation were also considered. The demographic profile of the respondents showed that 75% (230) of the students were male, while the remaining 25% (77) were female, and that all were enrolled in Master's by comprehensive research and PhD programs at the time of data collection. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the research participants.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Baseline Characteristic	Students		Teachers	
Gender	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	230	75	103	97
Female	77	25	3	3
Age				
Mean/Average	<i>M</i> =30.96	<i>SD</i> = 5.52	<i>M</i> =40.05	<i>SD</i> = 7.52
Programs Enrolled				
MA/MSc	275	90	–	–
PhD	32	10	–	–
Sponsorship Type				
Government	252	82	–	–
Self-Sponsor	55	18	–	–
Academic Rank				
Assistant Professor/PhD	–	–	92	87
Associate Professor	–	–	12	11
Professor	–	–	2	2
Teaching Experience				
Mean/Average			<i>M</i> = 13.00	<i>SD</i> = 5.25

Note. *N* = 413 (*n*₁ = 307; *n*₂ = 106)

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variable

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the psychometrics properties of the data collection tools. Those scales with factor loadings below 0.5 were dropped from the data because low factor loadings indicate a lack of convergent and discriminant validity. To ensure sufficient model fit, the cut-off points suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999) were used to assess whether the data adequately matched the hypothesized model. The values obtained were GFI (.906), RMR (.063), AGFI (.870), TLI (.934), CFI (.920), and RMSEA (.077). These results indicate that the data fit the hypothesized model adequately, providing a solid basis for further analysis. The result of this analysis was presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Fit Indices of the Data Collection Instruments*

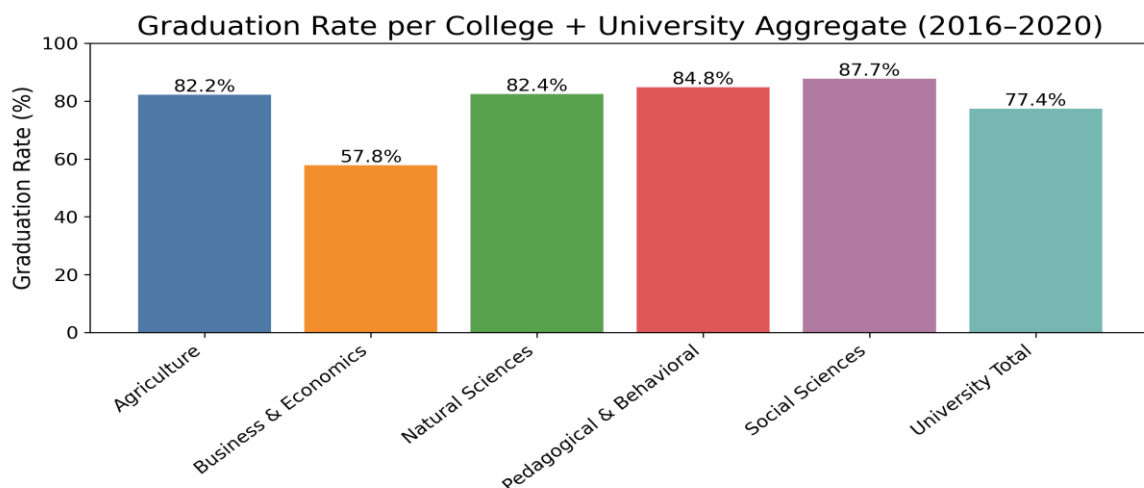
CMIN/DF	SRMR	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
2.828	.0629	.906	.870	.920	.934	0.077

Similarly, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were computed for all constructs. Hence, the values of graduate on time (CR = .85, AVE = .53); student personal factor (CR = .77, AVE = .63); supervisor factor (CR = .92, AVE = .64); and institutional factor (CR = .79, AVE = .54), indicating that the results were consistent with the cut-off points suggested by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and do not have the reliability, convergent and discriminant validity problems. The results are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3*Validity Analysis*

Constructs	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Graduate On Time	Student Personal Factor	Supervisor Factor	Institutional Factor
Graduate on Time	.85	.53	.57	.85	.76			
Student Personal Factor	.77	.63	.54	.79	.67	.80		
Supervisor Factor	.92	.64	.54	.94	.89	.74	.80	
Institutional Factor	.79	.54	.37	.95	.64	.60	.50	.73

The first research question addressed in this study concerned the status/level of graduation rate among postgraduate students. Results are indicated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***The Status/Level of Graduation Rate among Postgraduate Students*

As seen in Figure 1, the university-level graduation rate is 77.4%, except for engineering and technology, and the school of law. Total enrollment (5 years) is 1,181 students, while total graduates (5 years) are 914 students. A 77.4% graduation rate indicates that the university performs well overall. Most students who enroll eventually complete their programs. Across colleges/schools, the highest graduation rate (87.7%) was recorded in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, followed by the School of Pedagogical & Behavioral Sciences, with a very high rate (84.8%) despite lower enrollment; the school graduates a high proportion of its students. The College of Natural Sciences shows high enrollment but maintains a strong completion rate (82.4%), while the College of Agricultural Sciences maintains strong performance (82.2%). However, the College of Business & Economics recorded the lowest graduation rate (57.8%), indicating a significant gap between enrollment and graduation. Enrollment spikes in some years (e.g., 2019), but graduation does not scale proportionally.

The investigator's second research question sought to determine the influence of institutional, supervisory, and personal factors on students' motivation to graduate on time. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether institutional, supervisor, and student factors significantly predicted students' motivation to graduate on time. Tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Institutional Factor, Tolerance = .577; VIF = 1.732; Supervisor Factor, Tolerance = .569; VIF = 1.756; Student Personal Factor, Tolerance = .539; VIF = 1.856). It was hypothesized that institutional factors, supervisor factors, and student personal factors could significantly predict students' motivation to graduate on time. The model was significant, $R^2 = .608$, $F(3, 303) = 156.463$, $p < .001$; the institutional factor, supervisor factor, and student personal factor significantly predicted students' motivation to graduate on time. The model explains 60.8% of the variance in students' motivation to graduate on time, which is predicted by institutional, supervisory, and personal factors. Among the predictors, student personal factors made the strongest unique contribution to PG students' motivation to graduate on time ($\beta = .620$, $t = 10.489$, $p < .001$), followed by supervisor factors ($\beta = .121$, $t = 5.042$, $p < .001$). Institutional factors had the weakest, although still statistically significant, contribution ($\beta = .065$, $t = 2.819$, $p = .005$). Table 4 displays the result of this analysis.

Table 4

Regressions of Association Between Institutional Factors, Supervisor Factors, Student Personal Factors, and Motivation to Graduate on Time

Variable	β	SE	t	p
Motivation to Graduate on Time				
Institutional Factor	.065	.023	2.819	.005
Supervisor Factor	.121	.024	5.042	.000
Student Personal Factor	.620	.059	10.489	.000

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The researchers' third research question examined and compared students' and teachers' perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors within the university. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors. Results indicated a statistically significant difference in perceptions of institutional factors between the two groups, $t(411) = 3.93$, $p = .011$. Students ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.76$) reported significantly higher perceptions of institutional factors than teachers ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.64$). Additionally, a significant difference was found for supervisory factors, $t(411) = -3.60$, $p < .001$. Teachers ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.42$) reported significantly higher perceptions of supervisory factors compared to students ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.73$). Although students and teachers differed significantly in their perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors, the small effect sizes ($r = .19$ and $r = .17$) indicate that the magnitude of these differences was modest. This suggests that the two groups generally shared similar perceptions, with only slight differences in their views. Table 5 displays the result of this analysis.

Table 5

Independent samples t-test for perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors

Constructs	Students		Teachers		t(411)		p	Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD				
Institutional Factor	3.65	.76	3.33	.64	3.93	.011		0.19
Supervisor Factor	4.11	.73	4.38	.42	- 3.60	.000		0.17

DISCUSSION

This research clarifies knowledge about graduation rates and related factors at Arba Minch University. Enrollment and graduation rates have improved, but the dropout rate is also rising. The strongest influences on students' intention to graduate on time are institutional, supervisory, and personal factors. There is a clear difference in how students and lecturers view institutional and supervisory factors. This report initially focuses on the graduation rate of postgraduate students. The 77.4% graduation completion rate suggests the university is performing well, as most students finish their programs. However, the College of Business & Economics has a lower graduation completion rate of 58%, which reduces the university's overall rate. This lower rate in the College of Business & Economics could result from fluctuating enrollments seen in 2019, as well as challenges such as over-enrolled programs, limited advisory support, and restricted facilities. These factors may explain why higher enrollment does not necessarily lead to higher graduation rates in this college. Since significant attrition in the College of Business & Economics reduces the institutional average, targeted interventions are needed on academic advising, curriculum review, an early warning system for at-risk students, and support for high-enrollment departments.

The investigator's second research question sought to determine the influence of institutional, supervisor, and student factors on students' motivation to graduate on time. Results revealed that institutional factors, supervisor factors, and student personal factors significantly predicted students' motivation to graduate on time. This finding aligns with the previous systematic literature review covering studies from 2013 to 2023 highlights critical success factors such as quality research supervision, research capacity building, library and office of postgraduate workshops, and teaching and learning methods (Nwosu et al., 2024). Besides, the present finding is consistent with And findings of a case study conducted in Kenya that found a strong positive correlation between supervisory factors and timely completion ($\beta = 0.572$), and a moderate but significant effect of supervisee (student) factors ($\beta = 0.368$). Key delays stemmed from financial challenges, poor guidance, limited supervisor availability, procedural inefficiencies, and limitations in institutional infrastructure (Sosibo, 2024). Recent studies highlight the importance of institutional structures and capacities for timely graduation. For example, at Kenyan public universities, widespread challenges include the lack of enforcement of supervision policies and slow student progression. Issues include failing to hold meetings at scheduled times, providing delayed feedback, and failing to set

milestones (Nwosu et al., 2024; Rop & Mibei, 2024). Ineffective staff development, heavy supervisory workloads, and unclear criteria for supervisory roles are additional barriers to timely graduation (Rop & Mibei, 2024; Sosibo, 2024). Of note, there is an on-going project in Ethiopia aimed at building the capacities of PhD supervisors. The Ethiopian Superstars project is conducting specialized training at Arba Minch University and six partner institutions. The goal is to build the supervision skills of 210 academic staff by August 2026. This capacity-building signals an institutional effort to improve the quality of supervision for timely graduation. The challenge of providing satisfactory supervision has persisted. The supervisory role includes mentoring, project management, and providing emotional support and guidance for research students (Matheka et al., 2025b; Noel et al., 2021). Success factors include a good fit between students and supervisors, as well as quality, consistency, and responsiveness to students' emotional and intellectual needs (Matheka et al., 2025b). Delays in graduation can occur when supervisors' unrealistic expectations and heavy workloads lead to numerous revisions and prolonged timelines (Priyadarshini et al., 2022). Also, supervisors' absence, unavailability, and poor-quality feedback can undermine students' confidence and self-esteem, further delaying graduation (Priyadarshini et al., 2022; Rop & Mibei, 2024).

In addition to institutional and supervision considerations, personal and situational factors critically influence postgraduate students' program completion. Mudzi and Sepeng (2023) identified six themes—support, work-life balance, scholarships, writing for publication, location, and program design—that shape students' experiences. Access to full scholarships facilitates program completion, whereas students who balance work and study struggle to devote sufficient time to educational requirements. In South Africa, financial and familial responsibilities challenge Master's students, underscoring the importance of community support and publication-writing skills. Sabeeh Ullah (2024) further notes that personal difficulties and administrative delays slow program progress. Key supports include supervisory guidance, research writing ability, and work-life balance (Mudzi et al., 2022). Poor mental health—often rooted in stress, isolation, or workload—is a significant, sometimes hidden factor contributing to program abandonment (González-Betancor & Dorta-González, 2020), exacerbated by weak supervisory relationships and heavy workloads.

The investigator's third research question examined and compared the perceptions of students and teachers regarding institutional and supervisory factors. The study's findings revealed

significant differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of institutional and supervisory factors. Students rated institutional factors more positively than teachers did, suggesting that students may perceive institutional policies, facilities, and administrative support as more visible or beneficial to their academic engagement. Previous studies indicate that students often evaluate institutions based on access to resources and immediate support services, which may lead to more favorable perceptions than those of teachers, who are more exposed to administrative constraints, workload demands, and policy limitations (Hoy & Miskel, 2013; Bush, 2011).

Conversely, teachers reported significantly higher perceptions of supervisory factors than students. This finding aligns with literature suggesting that teachers tend to view supervision more positively when it is perceived as collegial, supportive, and professionally oriented (Glickman et al., 2018). Teachers' closer interaction with supervisors and greater understanding of supervisory roles may contribute to higher satisfaction levels. In contrast, students may have limited or indirect exposure to supervisory practices, which can affect their perceptions (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

Overall, the perceptual differences observed between students and teachers support existing research that emphasizes how role-specific experiences influence stakeholders' views of institutional effectiveness and supervision. These findings highlight the importance of fostering transparent communication and inclusive supervisory practices to bridge perceptual gaps and enhance institutional functioning (Fullan, 2014).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are many drawbacks to the present study, along with suggestions for future research. First, the sample size for the present study was small. A larger number of participants would have made the study more robust. Larger samples would also increase the likelihood of obtaining strong correlations that are not observed in some variables in the present study. Though the sample is randomized, it does not fully represent Ethiopian Universities, and the generalization of the results might be limited. Therefore, larger sample sizes could be used in the future. Second, the cross-sectional design used in this study prevents the determination of cause-and-effect relationships among the variables. Third, this study did not explore other personal factors, such as family background and financial issues, that may influence the motivation to graduate on time. Additionally, a limitation of the study was the sample

characteristics, which encompassed students from both master's and PhD programs. Future research could focus on a specific year and program of study. Fourth, this study utilized regression analyses to yield results. Multilevel modeling should be used in the data analysis to more precisely account for students nested within classrooms with teachers. Fifth, this study is solely based on quantitative data. Qualitative studies that allow for the prediction of motivation to graduate on time can help investigate the influence of student factors, institutional factors, and supervisory practices on postgraduate students' graduation rates. Finally, this study relied on self-reported Likert-scale measures, which may be subject to social desirability and response biases. Consequently, common method bias cannot be completely ruled out. Future studies should incorporate multiple data sources or objective measures to minimize these potential biases.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The findings indicate that while postgraduate enrollment has increased, timely graduation remains uneven across colleges, with an overall graduation rate of 77.4% and considerable variation among academic units. Institutional factors, supervisory practices, and students' personal factors were all significantly associated with motivation for timely graduation, highlighting that timely completion is influenced by multiple, interrelated factors. The observed differences between students' and faculty members' perceptions of institutional and supervisory support further suggest the need for better communication and shared expectations throughout the postgraduate journey.

These findings have important implications for practice. Universities should strengthen institutional support by improving research infrastructure, administrative services, and academic resources while promoting effective and consistent supervisory practices. Capacity-building initiatives for supervisors, regular monitoring of students' progress, and interventions targeting colleges with lower graduation rates may help improve timely completion. In addition, programs that enhance students' research skills, self-efficacy, and motivation should be integrated into postgraduate education. Such coordinated efforts can contribute to improving postgraduate completion rates and the overall quality of graduate education.

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