Master's Degree Students' Experience Towards Feedback on the Thesis Writing

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ABSTRACT

This study, entitled Master's Degree Students' Experience Towards Feedback on the Thesis Writing investigates master's degree students' experiences with feedback and expectations during thesis composition at Tribhuvan University. This qualitative research examines how students perceive, interpret, and respond to supervisor feedback, recognizing that good thesis supervision involves intricate emotional, relational, and intellectual aspects. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with recent graduates who evaluated their supervisory interactions and feedback mechanisms. Thematic analysis revealed three primary themes: roles of supervisors' feedback in thesis writing, explicit and directed feedback, and expectations from the supervisor. The findings underscore the essential function of supervisors in delivering clear, prompt, and constructive feedback, which profoundly influences students' motivation, emotional reactions, and academic autonomy. The research concludes that misaligned or unarticulated expectations between students and supervisors can result in frustration and hinder advancement, highlighting the importance of clear agreements and continuous communication. Recommendations include establishing organized institutional frameworks for feedback dissemination, providing professional training for supervisors on effective feedback methodologies and emotional intelligence, and enhancing student feedback literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

A thesis is a comprehensive written report that summarizes the author's research findings and conclusions, submitted to obtain professional accreditation or an academic degree. According to Paltridge (2002), a thesis is the recorded result of a methodical study that follows a supervisory structure. It is possible to view writing a thesis as an essential part of a bachelor's or master's degree program, requiring the successful completion of independent research (Hart, 2005). Additionally, it is usually a requirement for admission to more complex degree programs and is an essential step in earning a degree and graduating with honors. In Nepal, master's theses are specifically identified as such when they are presented to academic institutions in order to meet the requirements for a master's degree.

Murray (2011) states that a thesis is a much larger endeavor than most students have attempted. It necessitates greater independent study and self-motivation, and students find writing a thesis more difficult than other assignments.

Paltridge and Starfield (2007) argue that practical instruction is essential for authors of theses and dissertations composed in a second language. When learners are directly supervised, a figurative bridge is built, allowing them to overcome obstacles. The supervisor and the learner should discuss their mutual expectations, roles, and responsibilities for their shared benefit.

The institution reserves the right to assign a supervisor to ensure that students complete this assignment in a relevant way. Supervisors provide methods based on their vast expertise and experience. This paper discusses the importance of appropriate coaching and students' expectations during the thesis-writing process. Writing a research paper is a challenging task that demands considerable time, energy, knowledge, and proficiency. The researcher and the participants shared expectations and experiences regarding the supervisor's feedback on this work.

At Tribhuvan University, writing a thesis is a requirement of the semester system. It requires a time frame for completion and ongoing supervision from a designated supervisor. Students do many literature reviews during this phase. To do this task successfully, students

need to have strong research abilities. Educators are essential to ensure that this activity is completed successfully.

Writing a thesis is an essential and demanding aspect of higher education, especially for students at Tribhuvan University, where it is a requisite for degree completion. This procedure requires robust research abilities, intrinsic drive, and continuous oversight (Murray, 2011). The efficacy of thesis supervision and feedback often hinges on the relationship between students and supervisors, which is frequently complicated by divergent expectations, emotional responses to feedback, and cultural or disciplinary disparities (Turner, 2009).

The current literature highlights the need for constructive feedback, feedback literacy, and effective communication in thesis supervision (Carless & Boud, 2018). Nonetheless, deficiencies remain in comprehending the lived experiences of students and supervisors, especially within the context of Nepalese higher education. For instance, qualitative insights into how students perceive feedback, manage emotional responses, and negotiate expectations with supervisors remain limited (Yang & Carless, 2013). Moreover, the emotional labour experienced by supervisors and the impact of institutional constraints on feedback quality are insufficiently examined (Hemer, 2012).

This study investigates the experiences of Master's students at Tribhuvan University about feedback and expectations during the thesis writing process. Specifically, it identifies how feedback is delivered, interpreted, and acted upon, alongside the emotional and relational dynamics that influence this process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of writing a thesis is a complex academic activity that involves intricate relationships between students and their supervisors as well as intellectual and personal progress. Expectations and feedback greatly influence this experience. To provide a thorough foundation for the current study, this literature review examines earlier research on expectations management, feedback literacy, emotional dynamics, thesis supervision, and the form of feedback.

It is common to characterize thesis supervision as a delicate balance between providing direction and encouraging self-reliance. Lee (2008) divides supervisory styles into five categories: functional, enculturation, critical thinking, liberation, and developmental relationship. These approaches emphasize a variety of topics, from skill development to the essential encouragement of autonomy. Grant (2003) emphasizes the relational aspects even

more, arguing that supervision involves emotional and psychological involvement in addition to academic communication.

The literature frequently discusses power dynamics in the supervisory relationship. According to Manathunga and Goozee (2007), the intrinsic imbalance, in which supervisors have evaluative authority, can cause conflict and make the feedback process more difficult. Vulnerability is common among students who depend on their supervisors' approval to progress, which might affect how feedback is received and interpreted.

In academic contexts, feedback has several purposes, including directing development, reiterating accomplishments, and encouraging critical thought (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Timeliness, specificity, and constructiveness are characteristics of effective feedback. However, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that rather than treating students as passive recipients, feedback ought to be dialogic, actively involving them.

Feedback on thesis writing can take several forms, including oral talks, written remarks on drafts, and more general developmental dialogues. According to Boud and Molloy (2012), who present the idea of "feedback as dialogue," iterative discussions are more effective in fostering learning than single statements.

In recent years, the emotional aspect of getting feedback has come under increasing scrutiny. Wisker (2012) highlights that feedback is inherently evaluative and typically bears emotional weight. Unfavourable or poorly worded feedback can make students feel inadequate, frustrated, and demotivated.

According to Yang and Carless (2013), students' emotional reactions to feedback can either help or hinder learning, depending on how they interpret and respond. A student's attitude can significantly impact how they react emotionally and cognitively to feedback, depending on whether they have a growth or fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006).

Supervisors face emotional difficulties, especially when juggling constructive criticism with maintaining students' confidence and drive (Hemer, 2012). Although sometimes overlooked, this reciprocal emotional labour is essential to understanding the feedback process.

Feedback literacy, as defined by Carless and Boud (2018), is the ability of students to understand, analyse, and apply feedback efficiently. Fostering students' capacity to value feedback, generate opinions about their work, and take action based on that feedback is essential to fostering feedback literacy.

Higher academic resilience and better thesis results are correlated with improved feedback literacy. According to Sutton (2012), developing feedback literacy ought to be a

clear goal of postgraduate education, requiring student growth and a rethinking of supervisors' approaches to creating and providing feedback.

Expectations must be communicated clearly for proper thesis supervision. Research shows that unspoken or mismatched expectations are the source of many confrontations and frustrations (Ives & Rowley, 2005). While supervisors may expect independence, critical initiative, and perseverance, students often expect thorough supervision, frequent feedback, and emotional support.

In order to prevent misconceptions, Barnes and Austin (2009) recommend having early, clear conversations regarding expectations, such as communication frequency, draft review procedures, and feedback types. One helpful strategy for defining expectations is to create a written supervision agreement (Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007).

The literature identifies several practical techniques for providing feedback, including constructive feedback framing that begins with compliments before addressing criticism (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and offering practical advice, which should include specific suggestions for improvement (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Promoting reflection, according to Boud and Molloy (2012), involves encouraging students to consider criticism and plan their adjustments. Maintaining regular communication through consistent meetings helps keep progress on track and clarifies changing expectations.

The way that feedback is given, received, and interpreted is greatly influenced by cultural background. According to Turner (2009), pupils from individualist cultures might value directness, whereas those from collectivist cultures might view it as disrespectful. Supervisors' feedback procedures need to be sensitive to cultural differences.

Discipline standards influence expectations for feedback in a similar way. In contrast to the sciences, where feedback is typically more prescriptive and focused on methodological rigour, the humanities usually include interpretive conversations and critical debates (Pare, 2011).

Despite the development of best practices, many obstacles to providing effective feedback still exist. For instance, time restraints limit supervisors' ability to provide in-depth feedback, as they frequently balance several duties (Hemer, 2012). Insecure students may be discouraged from actively seeking feedback due to their fear of criticism (Boud & Molloy, 2012). Supervisory Inexperience: New supervisors may lack the training to provide constructive criticism. Institutional support, supervisor professional development, and the development of a feedback-positive culture are all necessary to address these issues.

Digital solutions for giving feedback have proliferated in recent years, such as learning management system (LMS) platforms, annotated PDFs, and voice comments. Technology can improve the accessibility and depth of input, but Henderson and Phillips (2014) warn that it cannot replace real conversation.

Intentional tactics are necessary to maintain relational quality and clarity since virtual supervision, which has grown in popularity in the post-pandemic context, adds new dimensions to feedback delivery (Cotton et al., 2015).

The current study aims to close these gaps by offering a thorough qualitative investigation of expectations, management, and feedback in the context of thesis writing. The objective of the study is to explore the students' experiences and feedback from their supervisors during the thesis-writing process.

DATA AND METHODS

All three participants (E1, E2, E3) were deliberately chosen because they had already graduated from their Master's thesis, allowing them to have first-hand experiences of receiving and responding to feedback throughout the thesis writing process. The pseudonyms of the three respondents were E1, E2, and E3. The value of purposeful sampling lies in the fact that researchers can actively identify participants who can offer in-depth and pertinent information related to the principal research problem (Patton, 2015). E1 was chosen to illustrate a student who received extensive supervisory feedback throughout the writing process, E2 for experiencing difficulties in integrating feedback, and E3 as a case of the student who was eventually able to revise the thesis after several cycles of feedback from supervisors. This allowed diverse experiences to be represented (drawing on these multiple shades of experiences), so that a complete picture of how feedback was experienced, negotiated, and responded to might be developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher opted for a concentration on three participants owing to the qualitative principle of depth rather than breadth. The participants have already completed the process of thesis writing and defense in its entirety. They are, therefore, good informants for looking back on the impact of feedback on their academic writing pathway. Through a reduction of the sample, the interviewer was able to engage with interviewees, exploring contextualized meanings and resulting in an intricate and multi-layered thematic narrative consistent with qualitative practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

To ensure validity, the interview guide was closely linked to the research aim. Content validity was enhanced by checking over the items with the literature currently available on feedback in a higher education context (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Consistency across all interviews supported reliability. All participants were posed an identical list of core questions, with follow-up probes employed to the extent necessary for clarification or elaboration. Good agreement, along with audiotaping and verbatim transcription, contributed to the trustworthiness of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study used a semi-structured interview checklist instead of rigid survey questions. This approach allowed the researcher to explore areas where participants shared intense experiences, while still ensuring that all key aspects of feedback, such as clarity, usefulness, emotional impact, and influence on thesis improvement, were consistently addressed. This method is well-regarded for capturing the richness and complexity of respondents' lived experiences (Patton, 2015).

The researcher planned to disseminate knowledge on thesis writing and interviewed three educators who recently obtained their Master's degrees from Tribhuvan University. The participants were asked several questions and responded based on their knowledge and experiences of feedback processes at Tribhuvan University. This study used a qualitative methodology to examine participants' perspectives about feedback and expectations during the thesis writing process. The qualitative research is especially adept at examining intricate social phenomena, providing comprehensive and nuanced insights into participants' viewpoints and interactions (Creswell, 2013).

The interview questions aimed to gather information in the following areas: Participants' complete experiences related to thesis writing and mentorship, the characteristics and frequency of feedback exchanges, perceptions of feedback quality and usefulness, emotional responses to receiving or giving feedback, expectations regarding roles and responsibilities, and strategies used to manage or improve the feedback process. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim.

In this study, verbal consent was obtained from all three participants (E1, E2, and E3) before conducting interviews because verbal consent is considered an ethically acceptable practice in qualitative research, especially in contexts where cultures place greater value on oral agreements and written consent may introduce unwarranted formality or unease (Orb et al., 2001). Each participant verbally confirmed their willingness to participate after receiving a clear explanation of the study.

Confidentiality was upheld by anonymizing all participants with pseudonyms (E1, E2, E3). All audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Sensitive data will be destroyed after the study's completion in accordance with ethical research practices (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that data should be examined through thematic analysis. This research followed Braun and Clarke's six systematic steps: Familiarization: All transcripts were reviewed again for a comprehensive understanding. Initial Coding: Codes were generated inductively to identify recurring phrases, concepts, and patterns. Theme Development: Codes were systematically grouped into initial themes based on conceptual similarities. Reviewing Themes: Themes were carefully refined to ensure accurate data representation. Defining and Naming Themes: Clear definitions were established for each theme to ensure analytical clarity. Reporting: Themes were incorporated into the narrative of the findings, supported by illustrative quotations. The themes identified were the Roles of Supervisors' Feedback in Thesis Writing, Explicit and Directed Feedback, and Expectations from the Supervisor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Roles of Supervisors' Feedback in Thesis Writing

Carless, Salter, Yang, and Lam (2011) contend that constructive criticism is meaningful and sustainable if it can increase students' independence, self-control, autonomy, and passion for lifelong learning. Such long-term feedback must encourage children to utilize technology, engage them in conversation with classmates and professors, and raise thought-provoking questions rather than offering answers. In the same way, one of the respondents said

E3: *Yes, it is crucial. It is difficult for the students to write on their own. The thesis would be good if done according to the teachers' directions. The teacher gives us authentic ideas and directs us. It is like a tourist guide showing us directions while traveling to a new place. Proper feedback makes our job easier.*

Feedback from teachers is critical while developing a thesis or project. First, it provides pupils with insightful direction, enabling them to identify their areas of strength and growth. Giving constructive criticism helps to improve overall coherence, organize ideas, and strengthen arguments. It is a teaching tool that helps students understand academic writing style and polish their writing abilities. Furthermore, prompt feedback encourages a lively conversation between students and teachers and advances a deeper comprehension of the

material. Ultimately, instructors' contributions support students' ongoing academic growth and help them produce theses and assignments of the highest caliber and well-researched.

Explicit and Directed Feedback

It is worth mentioning that different pupils may require different kinds of feedback. According to Wang and Li's (2011) research, students who possessed lower levels of self-confidence and academic competence expressed a need for explicit and directed feedback, whereas those who were more determined, self-assured, and had better academic competence expected instruction. Similarly, one of the respondents said

E2: *If the supervisor gives correct feedback, it will be easy for the students. Students need to learn to answer honestly, so if the supervisor gives wrong feedback, then students will be misled. I had a problem with the external because, initially, my supervisor said it was correct. My thesis, which was part of my M.Ed. in Economics, focused on agricultural farming. After the viva, I was about to take a signature from the external examiner. The external supervisor said it needed to be completed. At that time, I realized that if the supervisor had said it earlier, I would not have faced such problems.*

The researcher anticipates receiving helpful criticism from a supervisor who points out the work's advantages and disadvantages and seeks advice on making the thesis statement stronger, the argument more potent, and the logical flow of the work more cohesive. For methodological soundness, thorough input on data analysis and research methods is essential. Additionally, there are tips for enhancing writing style and communication clarity. The researcher also expects to learn more about how the study fits into the larger academic picture and comments on compliance with citation. Moreover, formatting rules further ensure scholarly rigor. In the end, constructive criticism is crucial for promoting intellectual development and raising the general caliber of the thesis.

Expectation from the Supervisor

An explicitly planned, stage-by-stage directive feedback approach with three key components "a writing focus from the beginning, prescriptive feedback, and support that encourages the development of an academic voice"—might be beneficial for students, as suggested by Beddoe and Maidment (2017) (p. 120). Similarly, one of the respondents said

E1: *Sometimes, the supervisor must pay more attention to the students. Supervisors get angry with the students. My seniors also faced numerous problems with the supervisor's aggressive behavior. Supervisors should provide enough materials for the students. Supervisors*

should consider themselves the students. They are doing a thesis to gain knowledge. Supervisors should be familiar with the students. Supervisors should guide the students in the right direction. This does not mean I did not get good advice, but the supervisor could change the perception of the thesis for the upcoming generation. Supervisors should use simple language and not show aggressive behavior toward the students. Then, only the feedback works, and they can develop their writing.

The researcher values a feedback method that incorporates both in-person and written exchanges, reflecting on certain aspects with the help of written comments, which offer a comprehensive and concrete reference for development. On the other hand, in-person conversations provide a more active interaction that helps clarify doubts and allows for a better comprehension of the comments. The interactive format allows for a closer relationship with the supervisor and encourages teamwork in problem-solving. Using a dual-mode method guarantees lucidity, fosters productive discourse, and adapts to various learning styles, thereby augmenting the feedback process and enhancing the overall efficacy of thesis work improvement. Supervisors should constantly expand their knowledge and research abilities to serve as role models for pupils. One of the respondents said

If the student copies, they will receive the transcription, but they must understand *the thesis. The supervisor should then have a precise inspection. Only the thesis could be authentic and original.*

Specific guidelines on improving data analysis and study methods would be essential for methodological soundness. Scholarly rigor requires constructive criticism of writing style, language, and citation adherence. Furthermore, it would be helpful to understand how unique and essential the study is in the academic community. A supportive and motivating evaluation, combined with practical recommendations for enhancement, would establish a favorable learning atmosphere supporting intellectual development.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative research examines the complex dynamics of thesis supervision and feedback at Tribhuvan University, highlighting the essential role of clear, constructive, and timely feedback during the thesis writing process. Adequate thesis supervision extends beyond academic guidance to include emotional and psychological support. Feedback must be dialogic and tailored to meet the specific needs of individual students, considering their differing levels of confidence and academic proficiency. The results indicate that explicit communication of

expectations substantially reduces conflicts and improves the overall experience for students. Supervisors must effectively balance their evaluative roles with supportive mentorship to foster an environment that promotes learning and academic independence. The study recognizes the importance of feedback literacy and the need for deliberate development of this competency to enhance feedback effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, institutions should create structured frameworks for thesis supervision that include written agreements outlining expectations, frequency, and types of feedback. Supervisors should receive professional development training centered on effective feedback strategies, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity to meet diverse student needs effectively. The institutions should promote feedback literacy by organizing workshops and seminars to improve students' ability to interpret and use feedback effectively. Regular, structured meetings and written and verbal feedback should be established to ensure clarity and promote continuous dialogue. Additionally, fostering a supportive supervisory environment, free from aggressive or discouraging behaviors, is essential for enhancing students' thesis writing experiences and academic outcomes.

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