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## EXAMINING THESIS WRITING PROCESS IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAM IN TÜRKİYE: SUPERVISOR SUPPORT AND POWER RELATIONS

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### Abstract

Along with the substantial spread of English in scholarly publishing (Canagarajah, 2002), there are more thesis studies in the English language. However, the already-challenging-process of thesis writing becomes harder when written in a foreign language. Considering the essence of theses in academia, it holds paramount significance to reveal how writers proceed in the process from several perspectives. Despite some studies in the literature examining thesis writing processes, little is known about supervisor support and the impact of power relations embedded in the process. The aim of this study is to explore thesis writing processes from the perspectives of supervisees and supervisors with a focus on (1) supervisor support, and (2) power relations in the supervision processes. In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four supervisors and 13 supervisees. Content analysis was used to analyse all the data collected. The findings revealed the participants' perceptions regarding the supervisor's role and support areas, the feedback process, and the impact of supervisor-supervisee relationships.

**Keywords:** *Academic writing, MA thesis writing, Thesis supervisor, Power relations.*

## TÜRKİYE'DEKİ BİR İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETİM PROGRAMINDA TEZ YAZMA SÜRECİNİN İNCELENMESİ: DANIŞMAN DESTEĞİ VE GÜÇ İLİŞKİLERİ

### Öz

İngilizcenin dil olarak akademik yayınlarda gittikçe yaygınlaşması ile (Canagarajah, 2002), bu dilde daha fazla tez çalışmasının ortaya çıktığı görülmektedir. Ancak, zaten zorlu olan tez yazma süreci, yabancı dilde yazıldığında daha da zorlaşmaktadır. Tezlerin akademiadaki önemi düşünüldüğünde, yazarların bu süreçte nasıl ilerlediklerini çeşitli açılardan ortaya koymak büyük önem taşımaktadır. Literatürde tez yazım süreçlerini inceleyen bazı çalışmalar olmasına rağmen, danışman desteği ve süreç içerisindeki güç ilişkilerinin etkisi hakkında çok fazla şey bilinmemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, (1) danışman desteği ve (2) danışmanlık süreçlerindeki güç ilişkilerine odaklanarak tez yazma süreçlerini danışanların ve danışmanlarının gözünden incelemektir. Bu nitel çalışmada, dört danışan ve 13 danışman ile yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Elde edilen tüm veriler içerik analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, katılımcıların tez yazımında danışmanın rolü ve destek alanları, geri bildirim süreci ve danışan-danışman ilişkilerinin etkisine ilişkin algılarını ortaya koymuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Akademik yazma, Tez yazımı, Tez danışmanı, Güç ilişkileri.*

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## **1. Introduction**

In this era, it is a truism that the English language has gained an immensely accepted global status recognised in academia and scholarly publishing (e.g., Belcher, 2007; Canagarajah, 2002; Flowerdew, 2000). It has been a requisite for graduate students to produce their theses in English to move forward in academia including graduate students of English language teaching (ELT) programs. This means that they need to be skilled enough in English as their foreign language to carry out their own processes of thesis writing in another language.

As well as the language factor itself, several aspects of thesis writing have triggered attention by researchers, and many studies which have been conducted to unearth scholarly writing in theses/dissertations exist (e.g., Bitchener and Baştürkmen, 2006; Fitria, 2022; Komba, 2016; Lestari, 2020; Paltridge, 2002; Saehu, 2013; Strauss, 2012; Yıldırım, 2020). However, few studies have attempted to understand and explore supervisor support practices and inevitable power relations experienced in the Master's (MA) thesis writing processes in ELT programs with the help of the opinions of both graduate students as supervisees and their supervisors.

In terms of the roles of supervisors and supervisees in MA thesis writing, the supervisor has an endorsed key role from the beginning till the end. Regarding the impact of the supervisor, supervision accommodates power that directly influences the quality of the thesis product and the successful completion of it (Chang, 2007; Frischer and Larsson, 2000; Zhang and Hyland, 2021). With this regard, the roles of a supervisor were specified as "team leader, project manager, writing mentor, wordsmith, and editor" (White, 1998:229) while Liu and Harwood (2022) found that proofreader, coach, commentator, counsellor, ally, and teacher were the common roles associated with supervisors. Zhang and Hyland (2021), on the other hand, highlighted that supervisors can be negotiators, collaborators, and facilitators providing advice and giving students the freedom to reflect on their own ideas. Wisker et al. also defined supervisors as "a role continuum ranging through dictator/authority figure/ 'God', manager, guide, mentor, facilitator, collaborator, friend, counsellor, mother/father" (2003:388). Accordingly, the supervisor, as a researcher and an academic writer, qualifies as a role model establishing an association between quality academic work and good supervision. In other words, in academic writing, "[g]ood supervision is central to successful graduate research, yet it is a pedagogy that is poorly understood." (Grant, 2003:1). Thus, the support provided by the supervisor is a central issue that requires delicate concern.

In recent years, several studies have been conducted to determine the roles of a supervisor and the potential effects of supervisor support in academic writing (e.g., Gedamu, 2018; Harwood and Petric, 2020; Rogers, Zawacki and Baker, 2016; Yıldırım, 2020, Yu, 2020; Zhang and Hyland, 2021). In this sense, feedback on written work emerges as the primary tool for academic writing development (Hey-Cunningham, Ward and Miller, 2020). In their study, Rogers et al. (2016), for instance, analysed surveys and interviews with graduates and faculty members, to reach the conclusion that the two most useful supports were one-on-one conversations and written feedback while the least useful support was attending workshops offered by the writing centre. In an Ethiopian context, Gedamu (2018) also aimed to reveal the perspectives of 70 supervisees regarding their satisfaction level of various supervisory styles that range from the most interventionist approach to the least one by employing a questionnaire. The study showed that the most favoured supervision styles by the supervisees were contractual style, which is a more interventionist style, or laissez-faire style, which refers to a more nonrigid style. However, the researcher advised to use supervisory styles more flexible according to the developmental levels of the supervisees. In a quite similar study focusing on various supervision styles, Harwood and Petrić (2020) also emphasized the flexibility in the choice of supervisory models depending on the stages while writing a thesis; namely, starting with a more controlled approach while supervisee choosing his topic towards a less controlled approach towards the end in discussing findings and a final directive style to ensure the completion of the thesis. Yu (2020) also conducted a case study to explore tutor-tutee interactions in tutoring sessions and one tutee's writing revisions and text development in a semester by analysing eight tutoring sessions and 12 writing drafts for five writing tasks. The results suggested that the writing tasks seemed to be shaped by the problematic areas addressed by the tutor and his feedback's directiveness. The tutor seemed to use a more directive approach to tutoring and focus on rhetorical aspects while the tutee focused on sentence-level and text-level suggestions more in her drafts, but she started to focus on rhetorical aspects more with the help of her tutor's mediation. Additionally, contextual, interpersonal, and institutional forces seemed to influence her text revision decisions.

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Therefore, tutorial support sensitive to writers' emerging abilities in addition to their needs and responsiveness in tutoring sessions were suggested. More recently, Zhang and Hyland (2021) investigated how a supervision process went on between two student-supervisor pairs in terms of advice giving and constructing supervisor-supervisee interactions by analysing the observational data and supervision transcripts gathered via audio records in the supervision sessions by looking at the language choices specifically in the process of writing literature review chapter. The researchers used conversation analysis to explore language choices that indicate power. The findings suggested that the supervisor was viewed as a negotiator, collaborator, and facilitator who provided advice and gave students the freedom to reflect their own ideas. There was a dialogic and co-regulated process between the supervisors and students during the interactions, where both parties contributed to the ongoing dialogue and regulation of the research process at hand. It was suggested that supervision should include collaboration and distributed responsibility.

Attached to supervisor effect, another pivotal factor is the human relations experienced in supervisor-supervisee dyads. Each bringing their own identities into the process and having different statuses, these two players and their differences unarguably influence the way the whole writing process is handled. Supervisors may have supervisees with different personality types such as dependent, confident, or resistant as described in Diezmann's (2005) study. Status differences also directly influence the supervision process. As can be observed, there is an institutional power asymmetry in supervisor-supervisee relationship which can be due to supervisors' higher societal status, greater knowledge/expertise and more established language use practices (Thielmann, 2007). To our knowledge, there are a few studies conducted to investigate the power relations between supervisors and their supervisees in various fields (e.g., Grant, 2008; Inman et al., 2011; Straus, 2012). In the field of psychology, for instance, Inman et al. (2011) applied an online questionnaire to 109 doctoral-level supervisees from psychology departments to find that supervisor-supervisee rapport mostly depended on supervisees' fears of being perceived as unprofessional and was influenced by supervisors' availability and dependability. In the field of humanities and social sciences, to see the hierarchical bond tying supervisor-supervisee, Grant (2008) examined an extract of supervision dialogue between a supervisor and an MA student. The results revealed master-slave dynamics not only seemed to help but also disturbed supervisor and supervisee relationship because the supervisor dominated the conversation and seemed to strongly direct the advisee's thinking. Hence, thesis writing process seemed to be a complex and transformational three-way transactional process among supervisors, texts and supervisees.

In the field of ELT, Strauss (2012) examined the interaction among a supervisor, the supervisor's two postgraduate L2 English students and the researcher herself as an English for academic purposes practitioner to describe challenges in thesis writing for second language speakers of English. An analysis of students' drafts and supervisor-practitioner-student interaction showed that a warm and supportive relationship between the practitioner and supervisees was crucial. Besides, rather than English knowledge, students' perception of themselves as 'lacking' appeared to have a serious effect on their self-esteem. The linguistic difficulties also seemed to negatively affect supervisory relationships due to the different assumptions and expectations of the supervisors and students from one another.

In sum, there exist studies exploring the difficulties of students during their thesis/dissertation writing processes in their L2 English (e.g., Bitchener and Baştürkmen, 2006; Strauss, 2012), however, in terms of studies focusing on supervision and/or supervisors, we have observed that studies mostly touched upon supervisors' feedback types or their supervising styles (e.g., Bitchener and Baştürkmen, 2006; Gedamu, 2018). Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that not much is known about supervisor support (Kamler, 2008) or the effect of power relations (Cotterall, 2011) on the thesis writing process. In addition, these foci (i.e., supervisor support and power relations in academic writing) are newly emerging concerns existing in some of these recent studies overviewed. Thus, in line with these new concerns in L2 academic writing and following the paths of this limited number of works, the present study attempts to explore the nature of supervisor support and of power relations embedded in thesis writing by analysing the perspectives of both some students and their supervisors in an ELT program of a Turkish university. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1.How do a group of supervisees view the support provided by their supervisors during their thesis writing processes?

2.How do a group of supervisors view the support they provide while their students are engaged in the thesis writing process (i.e., their self-assessment)?

3.How do participating supervisors and supervisees view the nature of the power relations existing between the two parties in their engagements during MA thesis writing?

## **2. Methodology**

Since qualitative inquiry enables researchers to understand some aspect(s) of the lived world better (Richards, 2003), a qualitative study approach was adopted in the present study to examine the nature of supervisor support and of the power relations between supervisees and supervisors during the thesis writing process.

### **2.1 Participants**

While selecting participants, the study used both convenience and purposive sampling methods. There were 17 participants in total composed of four supervisors, seven MA graduates, five currently ongoing supervisees, and one drop-out student. All supervisors were currently working in the ELT Department of a state university in Turkey. While Supervisor 1 was currently working as a professor and had 33 years of academic teaching experience, other supervisors were currently working as assistant professors at the same university. Supervisor 2 had five years of academic teaching experience whereas Supervisor 3 had 19 years and Supervisor 4 had 15 years of academic teaching experience. They differed from each other in terms of their age and work experiences.

As for the supervisees, all the graduates had their MA degrees from the ELT department of the same state university recently. All had their BA degrees from various public universities and had teaching experiences of at least two years as English teachers except for Advisee 4 and Graduate 7 who had teaching experience of less than a year. In addition, it needs to be acknowledged that there were three types of supervisees: (1) five supervisees who have recently graduated, (2) seven advisees, who were still in the act of writing their MA theses and also (3) one drop-out student indicated as Drop-out. The word 'supervisee' was used to refer to all these three types in discussions. General information about the supervisees can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. General information about the supervisees**

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Work with</b>
<b>Graduate 1</b>	24	female	Supervisor 1
<b>Graduate 2</b>	30	female	Supervisor 1
<b>Graduate 3</b>	25	female	Supervisor 2
<b>Graduate 4</b>	25	male	Supervisor 2
<b>Graduate 5</b>	34	female	Supervisor 3
<b>Graduate 6</b>	31	female	Supervisor 4
<b>Graduate 7</b>	26	male	Supervisor 4
<b>Advisee 1</b>	32	male	Supervisor 1
<b>Advisee 2</b>	25	male	Supervisor 2
<b>Advisee 3</b>	36	male	Supervisor 2
<b>Advisee 4</b>	25	female	Supervisor 3
<b>Advisee 5</b>	25	female	Supervisor 3
<b>Drop-out</b>	38	female	Supervisor 1

## **2.2 Data Collection**

We gathered data with online interviews and a background questionnaire. We, as the authors of this study, formed the interview questions after a perusal of existing studies. To increase the validity of the measurement instrument, we gathered the expert opinions of four professors working at the ELT department of state universities in Türkiye. We also piloted the interview questions with one supervisor and two supervisees. From the responses we obtained, we realised that certain questions in the interview appear to overlap in their content, which leads to redundancy in the inquiry process. Furthermore, we formed a background questionnaire to learn about the participants' demographic and academic backgrounds after getting all participants' consent. Then, the first and the second author shared the participants and interviewed them with the use of semi-structured interview questions for about an hour via Zoom. The interviews were all conducted in English.

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

While analysing the data, we used qualitative content analysis. In essence, following the steps of qualitative content analysis suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the first and the second authors conducted the conventional type of qualitative content analysis separately on the whole data to build themes and categories. While coding, commonalities and differences among the investigated components were identified. Finally, interrater reliability (92.3%) was measured to check consistency in this coding, and the discrepancies were resolved through further negotiation.

## **3. Results and Discussions**

In this section, the findings obtained in interviews for each research question were reported and discussed respectively.

### **3.1. Supervisees' views on the supervisory support received**

#### **3.1.1 Theme 1: Supervisor support**

The interview data indicated that the supervisees attained certain roles to their supervisors in the thesis writing process and described these roles in a favourable way. All supervisees stressed that a supervisor had a central role in the thesis writing process from the beginning till the end. Some roles attributed to supervisors by the supervisees were a guide, facilitator, motivator, supporter, mentor, feedback giver, resource giver/provider, observer, leader, proofreader, and helper. The findings in our study highlighted the crucial role of supervisors in completing a thesis study from the perspectives of the supervisees. In the literature as well, this central role was emphasised by many studies on thesis writing, and similar attributes were defined for supervisors (Fitria, 2022; Liu and Harwood, 2022; White, 1998; Wisker et al., 2003; Zhang and Hyland, 2021). Fitria (2022), in this sense, found the supervisor as the primarily responsible figure for guiding students to write acceptable theses while Zhang and Hyland (2021) suggested that the process of supervision itself was decisive for students to get the sense of producing knowledge in their subject fields. Quite similarly, in our study, the expertise of the supervisors both in the content knowledge and research skills put them in a dignified position in the eye of supervisees and that the biggest role of the supervisor is felt especially in terms of timely completion of theses.

Besides, the supervisees defined the support areas provided by their supervisors. All supervisees highlighted that they lacked substantial information about how to write a thesis at the beginning of this process and thus, needed a great deal of academic help. They noted they were not provided courses related to thesis writing during their MA program, and so when the process started, they immediately felt the need to get support from their supervisors. All supervisees were mainly supported first in their topic selection, organising the thesis frame, determining the methodology including finding data collection tools, deciding on data collection and data analysis methods. Besides, whenever they had problems while constructing parts in a thesis, they contacted their supervisors. They all underlined their supervisors helped them with every stage, showed them how to design parts in a thesis and gave feedback whenever necessary. These findings show parallelism with the literature regarding the supervision concept. Similar to our study, Saehu (2013) revealed some findings related to several problems of supervisees in thesis writing and underlined that the students had difficulties on how to start writing

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their theses and also lacked rhetorical knowledge in thesis writing. As in our study, the students tried to solve these problems mainly by consulting their supervisors or friends. As can be seen in Yu (2020), supervisors were perceived to provide support sensitive to their supervisees' emerging abilities and needs while writing their thesis. Another point reviewed in the literature is that supervision is never a trouble-free engagement but instead a long-term interactional process in which supervisees should gradually be freed from reliance on their supervisors and learn to become more autonomous researchers through the support provided by their supervisors (Grant, 2003; Harwood and Petrić, 2020; Manathunga, 2007; Whisker et al., 2003; Yu, 2020). However, our study showed that the supervisees in our research context felt a need for the constant power of their supervisor over them as they expressed their appreciation of being pushed by them. As reported by the supervisees in the present study, the support they were provided during the process helped them manage their own completion of their thesis journey without being lost thanks to their supervisors. In this process, however, rather than being totally independent, the supervisees unanimously reported that they were in habitual need of referring to the support of their supervisors. In that sense, Graduate 1 described the support provided by her supervisor stating that *"My supervisor was everything to me... he is the one who shows what to do exactly, enlightened my perspective and triggered my creativity."*, while A1 said: *"Thesis writing is a long-term process. When you feel down while writing, your supervisor can give you some good comments which can help you restart and write your thesis."* In other words, it is seen that they had the desire to perceive their supervisors more like an authoritative figure who is always there as a steady hand on the tiller, which points to the favour of supervisees for a reliance on their supervisors. The underlying reason can be because of a cultural disposition of viewing teachers/instructors as ultimate knowledge providers and is most probably the belief that their supervisors will always stay as honourable wiser figures who will always be needed in terms of academic and non-academic support.

Besides, supervisor support was seen to be synonymous mostly with supervisory feedback. The supervisees stated they were continuously provided with feedback support, which they considered as an imperative element in the process. This perception of feedback was also emphasised by Diezmann (2005) and Hey-Cunningham et al. (2020), who treated feedback as a cardinal means of writing development in postgraduate research. All supervisees were satisfied with the quantity of feedback they got. The feedback was mainly in the form of proofreading, especially when they finished certain sections. Upon sending those sections to their supervisors, they were provided with content and language support in a constructive and meaningful way. Regarding this finding, a vital point found in our study context was that the supervisees especially believed their supervisors were already there with their timely and adequate feedback to support them once they carried out their own tasks and consulted their supervisors for any completed part. In this sense, it is understood that the supervisees perceived themselves as the more responsible party. Another issue emphasised by all supervisees was related to the support the supervisees needed regarding their emotional status. All underlined the toughness of the process and felt the need to be braced by their supervisors for the health of their emotional states. Besides, the supervisees disclosed that they were not so knowledgeable about bureaucratic issues like getting ethical permission and other official procedures, but they were guided by their supervisors about what to do and how to do so.

In sum, the support areas included professional/academic support, emotional support and support on bureaucratic procedures. These areas were reported to be highly associated with the challenges experienced by the supervisees. Several similar challenging factors affecting thesis writing can be observed in the literature (Bakhou and Bouhania, 2020; Komba, 2016; Rogers et al., 2016; Yıldırım, 2020). One of the challenging factors defined by participants in several other studies was, for instance, a lack of academic writing skills (Bakhou and Bouhania, 2020; Komba, 2016; Yıldırım, 2020) or finding the time to write (Lestari, 2020; Rogers et al., 2016). However, none of the participants in our study complained about personal writing styles or cultural influences as an intervening factor in the thesis writing process. This may mean that the advisees did not find their local writing traditions as a threat to their academic writing in English as they were all in an ELT program where the supervisees' writing acts and engagements seemed to be shaped according to the Anglo-American writing styles. Unlike the findings in the studies by Yıldırım (2020) and Lestari (2020), in this study, the supervisees' English proficiency did not seem to create a big challenge because of their high proficiencies in English.

### **3.1.2 Theme 2: Feedback**

The supervisees' evaluations of the feedback process in thesis writing brought about the subthemes of feedback frequency, medium of feedback, feedback expectations, and section/s that require the most feedback. The findings revealed that the supervisees were provided with frequent feedback at various intervals depending on needs, and these feedback providing practices took place in several ways.

All participants expressed that their supervisors were available all the time and gave feedback immediately after the advisees finished a part, but the feedback frequency depended on the stage in the process, the thesis section focused as well as the supervisees' needs, as in the findings of Yu (2020). At the very beginning, the supervisees seemed to need feedback mostly about organising the thesis, deciding on their methodologies, and analysing data while towards the end, they needed feedback mostly about writing results, constructing tables, and getting prepared for thesis defence. As for the feedback medium, e-mail was the most frequently preferred medium. The supervisees expected constructive feedback in the proofreading of their writing in terms of their content and organisation as well as language structures and mechanics in their writing.

Additionally, for the supervisees, the feedback was reported to be an indispensable part of the success in thesis writing. In parallel with this finding, there exist some studies in the literature about the importance of feedback (Gedamu, 2018; Rogers et al., 2016).

### **3.1.3 Theme 3: Thesis writing process**

In terms of the overall views of the supervisees about the thesis writing process, the supervisees attributed the challenges they experienced to several factors such as not knowing how to write a thesis, time management issues due to their heavy workload and not knowing how to analyse data by using SPSS which is partially in line with the findings of the studies of Rogers et al. (2016) and Komba (2016). Different from some study findings in the literature (Casanave and Hubbard, 1992; Fitria, 2022; Yıldırım, 2020), the supervisees in our study did not attribute their writing challenges to their limited English knowledge, mostly because they were enrolled in an English-medium program, which means they had acquired certain linguistic competencies earlier. As for the facilitating factors, the supervisees viewed supervisor support and guidance, loving the thesis topic, getting constructive feedback, supervisors' motivation, advisees' inner motivation, supervisors' personality, reading a lot and getting expert help, especially on data analysis as the most facilitating factors, which is mostly parallel with Bakhou and Bouhania's (2020) findings.

The most difficult and the easiest sections in thesis writing changed from one supervisor to another. While literature review, results and discussion were mostly foregrounded as the most challenging sections to write in a thesis similar to the findings in the studies of Ho (2013), Bitchener and Baştürkmen (2006) and Fitria (2022); methodology was commonly stated as the easiest section to write in a thesis.

Both advisees and graduates provided several suggestions such as building a good relationship with supervisors, motivating supervisees and forming regular contacts. This finding corroborates with that of Yıldırım's (2020) which provided some suggestions for supervisees and supervisors such as scheduling regular meetings, giving sample theses, creating a writing course, having a good study plan, and studying regularly to maintain a better thesis writing process. Besides, it also supported the findings of Zhang and Hyland (2021) which advised collaboration in supervision.

## **3.2 Supervisors' views on their own supervisory support**

### **3.2.1 Theme 1: Self-assessment**

Considering the importance attached to supervisors' support in the thesis writing process (Chang, 2007; Frischer and Larsson, 2000), it was essential to explore how the supervisors defined themselves in terms of their process management and supervision. The data analysis revealed two main themes as supervisors' self-perceived role and support areas which supervisors believed they needed to provide their supervisees with.

The findings indicated certain roles perceived by the supervisors in thesis writing such as acting like a friend, prompter, tutor, observer, planner, guide, and mother. The support areas described within the scope of their main responsibilities covered professional/academic support, planning/timing support, emotional support, and support on bureaucratic procedures. The findings gathered from the supervisors showed a high level of match with those obtained from the supervisees. In other words, the supervisors were also aware of the pivotal value of supervising in the thesis writing and Supervisor 1 put it by stating *"Supervisor has a very important role because if the supervisor doesn't do his job, the student may not complete the thesis"*

Considering the self-perceived roles, it was evident that all supervisors were aware of the pivotal value of supervising in thesis writing. For them, in line with Rogers et al. (2016), a supervisor's job was to ensure the finalisation of the thesis, provide frequent feedback through scheduled meetings, and make necessary changes and amendments while providing options for the topic and related parts. They noted that they provide feedback after each draft until reaching the final draft for all thesis sections. Feedback seems to be the primary tool for academic writing development (Hey-Cunningham et al., 2020). In line with Li and Vandermensbrugge (2011), the supervisors underlined the importance of knowing academic conventions as well as the necessity of meeting the expectations and standards specified by their institutions in academic writing.

### **3.2.2 Theme 2: Feedback**

Regarding the specific feedback preferences of the supervisors in the process, we came up with some subthemes centred around supervisors' feedback response time and preferred medium.

All the supervisors stated that they were available whenever their students needed them and responded to their supervisees in a couple of days. All preferred face-to-face interaction while giving feedback, but due to pandemic conditions and not living in the same cities with some supervisees, they mostly provided feedback through emails. Besides, they frequently used phone calls, WhatsApp, Zoom and Facebook.

Similar to the participating supervisees, the supervisors also defined giving feedback as the main act of supervision. They acknowledged their responsibilities of giving frequent feedback for each section of the thesis. This was in line with the literature showing the importance of feedback (Gedamu, 2018; Rogers et al., 2016).

### **3.2.3 Theme 3: Thesis writing process**

The content analysis revealed that the supervisors' general views on the thesis writing process contained some subthemes such as challenging and facilitating factors in supervising, the most difficult and easiest sections to write, and suggestions for supervisors and supervisees.

The supervisors thought that being inexperienced in supervision, dealing with huge paperwork, lack of motivation in supervisees and supervisees' personality traits were the most common factors challenging their supervision process, which was mostly in line with the study of Bakhou and Bouhania (2020). However, having good relations with supervisees and being experienced in supervision were the factors facilitating the supervision process. In terms of the most difficult and the easiest sections to write, the supervisors had different ideas just like the supervisees. For instance, while Supervisor 1 said that none of the thesis sections were easy to write, for Supervisor 3, the most difficult section to write depends on the supervisee's experiences.

Regarding process management and time allocation, the supervisors differed in their approaches. While Supervisor 1 preferred to provide his support and feedback whenever his supervisees sent a part, S2 pushed her advisees to write more and send their parts according to a fixed schedule. Supervisor 3, on the other hand, seemed to provide feedback depending on the supervisees' personality type and motivation. Supervisor 4 also seemed to be available all the time, but she criticised supervisees by stating that *"Supervisees are not available most of the time, but I am"*. Following Yu (2020), supervisors seemed to provide support sensitive to their supervisees' needs while writing. Nevertheless, all the supervisors believed supervisees should never be given total independence while writing their thesis, and they followed a contractual supervision style as in the study of Gedamu (2018). However, contrary to this finding, several studies (Grant, 2003; Manathunga, 2007; and Whisker et al., 2003) pinpointed the essence of postgraduate supervision as enabling students to gain independence from

their supervisors. Turkish supervisees in the study expected a contractual supervision style from their supervisors and Turkish supervisors in this study, on the other hand, highly considered the importance of the guiding power of a supervisor (Chang, 2007; Frischer and Larsson, 2000), and of giving feedback (Hey-Cunningham et al., 2020; Li and Vandermensbrughe, 2011; Rogers et al., 2016), it can be pointed out that this difference can be related to the cultural difference of the study. Not in line with the study by Yıldırım (2020), these supervisors seemed eager to deal with students' language-related problems, especially as a part of their supervising responsibilities.

While giving suggestions for supervisors and supervisees, in line with the literature (Chang, 2007; Frischer and Larsson, 2000; Grant, 2003; White, 1998; Wisker et al., 2003), the supervisors underlined that supervisors should have good relations with supervisees, be models to them, motivate them, tell them what to do rather than doing that for them and encourage students to do well-designed research so that they can be members of the academic community. All supervisors advised supervisees to plan everything while writing their theses and expected some content knowledge at the beginning, ongoing respect and motivation, which is in line with the suggestion of Zhang and Hyland (2021) that supervision should include collaboration and distributed responsibility.

### **3.3 Supervisors and supervisees' views of power relations embedded**

#### **3.3.1. Theme 1: Supervisees' views on power relations**

The supervisees' views on power relations revealed three subthemes including the description of these relations, the effects of having good relations with the supervisor, and power perception.

The supervisees defined their relations with their supervisors in various ways. While most of the supervisees mentioned a friend-like relationship, they all underlined that this should be in an official manner. Moreover, they felt comfortable in their communications with their supervisors and never hesitated to ask questions or mention their ideas or objections. In the relationships with their supervisors, the supervisees were aware of the authoritative power of a supervisor and respected their supervisors as the supervisors were their teachers and more knowledgeable than them, which is in line with Thielmann's (2007) institutional power asymmetry. Nevertheless, they all stated that they did not have a strict relationship type based on order and command chain, either.

Within the scope of personal relations with a supervisor, mostly in line with the study of Inman et al. (2011), all of the supervisees noted that they established good relations with their supervisor and believed maintaining successful personal contact and interaction with a supervisor positively affects the quality in a thesis. There were two supervisees who had to change their supervisors before their current ones, and they specifically stressed the influence of getting along with a supervisor and supervisors' availability, as discussed in the study by Inman et al. (2011). For instance, Advisee 2 changed his supervisor due to some communication problems and chose the current one intentionally since he knew her from one of his courses, and he believed that this changed his attitude and motivations considerably positively. He started to write his thesis and seemed to regain his motivation. Graduate 5 also experienced a supervisor change although she had not experienced any clashes with her previous supervisor in the process. She stated she felt better with her new supervisor as he was her old colleague. She felt quite relaxed in the process thanks to this familiarity. Moreover, a good relationship, regular contact, pushing statements and directing questions like "*What have you done this week?*" were reported to have an impact on the supervisees' motivation levels and their dedication to continue. This is partially in line with the findings of Gedamu (2018) which stressed that supervisees' overall satisfaction with thesis supervision was higher when the relationship was in a contractual form, in which there was high interference and high support from the supervisors. This difference may arise from a cultural difference between Ethiopian participants in that study, and our participants who seemed to prefer contractual forms of relations mostly.

The final subtheme was related to supervisees' perception of supervisor power. Supervisees all stated that their supervisors were not in a mode of exercising power and authority over them; rather, they were doing their job. This finding contradicted that of Grant (2008) who underlined that the master-slave form of relationship can be disturbing but helpful to the thesis writing process. On the other hand, our study context revealed that a positive relationship rather than a master-slave relationship seemed to support the supervisor and student

relationship. In addition, the case study conducted by Harwood and Petric (2020) showed that the approach used by a supervisor to support his supervisee may change depending on certain stages of the thesis writing. In their case study, there were shifts among different styles such as the traditional teaching model having the supervisor with ultimate control, the partnership model with collaborative work of both parties, the contractual model with the supervisor adjusting the amount of support according to student needs and non-interfering model. Comparing the styles, the supervisees in our study, however, expected to feel the academic authority of their supervisors and felt the best approach was the traditional teaching model, in which the supervisor is more in control, correcting the student's work, and the supervisee is more dependent on the supervisor.

### **3.3.2 Theme 2: Supervisors' views on power/personal relations**

Considering the description of the relationship with their supervisees, the supervisors thought they had a student-teacher relationship which should be different from a close friend relationship. Moreover, they needed to build a good rapport with their supervisees by showing mutual motivation, respect, tolerance and sharing in a formal way. Furthermore, unlike the studies by Grant (2008), but in line with the ones by Ives and Rowley (2005) and Strauss (2012), all supervisors thought that a warm and supportive relationship between supervisees and supervisors rather than a master-slave form of relationship had a positive effect on thesis writing. According to Inman et al. (2011), building a good rapport was associated with the supervisor's availability and giving constant support. Likewise, the supervisees all mentioned the high availability of their supervisors and noted that their constant communication with their supervisors encouraged them to keep on writing.

As for the power perception, the supervisors did not see themselves as superior to their supervisees, yet they underlined both supervisees and supervisors had certain roles in the thesis writing process to follow. However, while the other three supervisors expressed that there must be a professional relationship between supervisors and supervisees, Supervisor 2 was in favour of behaving with her supervisees like a friend and sharing her own thesis writing experiences with them comfortably. She also attached importance to the rapport built between supervisees and supervisors and highlighted the necessity of mutual motivation and respect. Her statements were in line with the findings of Strauss (2012) while the other supervisors underlined the institutional power asymmetry in the supervisor-advisee relationship following Thielmann's (2007) study findings.

## **4. Conclusion**

These qualitative study findings revealed that the act of supervising a master's thesis especially written in another language plays a crucial role in its successful completion. The supervisees were observed to view their supervisors such exalted figures that they feared without whom they would get lost easily in the process. Our interpretations of the verbal data emphasized culture/cultural values existing as an important element that is likely to play an essential role in the expectations of supervisees regarding their supervisors' roles. In our context, different from some findings in the literature, the supervisees, who often culturally and readily accept instructors as the ultimate authority in decision-making at any educational level, had a tendency to be supervised in a contractual style, in which they feel comfortable to be directed by their supervisors rather than being freed in their writing to find their own voices. While this was the case, the supervisees still liked to build their supervisor-supervisee relationships in a friend-like but professional manner. Likewise, the supervisors all highlighted that they needed to build rapport with their supervisees with the help of mutual motivation, respect, and tolerance by emphasizing their leadership power at the same time. Supervisors had different views regarding the nature of their power and showed adaptive styles depending on certain periods of the thesis writing process and the changing needs of the students (Yu, 2020). This also corroborates Harwood and Petric's findings (2020) highlighting the case of a supervisor using a hybrid model of supervision styles by sometimes having more control and sometimes less control in certain periods of his students' thesis writing process.

As a result, this study sheds light into the value of effective supervision in the context of thesis writing to eliminate the potential challenges involved in the process. In this sense, consistent support of a supervisor through regular feedback sessions and positive supervisor-supervisee relationships function as empowering factors in the process. As it is a small-scale study, further research with more participants in different contexts could be conducted by using different data collection tools from all stakeholders to reveal other aspects of supervisor support, and power relations during supervision.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

With a focus on the MA thesis writing process from the perspectives of both students and supervisors, this study provides several pedagogical implications for supervisors, students, and institutions. In the light of this study, first, it seems crucial for supervisors to be aware of this challenging process of thesis writing and be in regular contact with their supervisees who need their constant support. Accordingly, it can be highly beneficial for both supervisors and supervisees to maintain informed schedules and timely interaction. As part of supervisor-supervisee interaction, it is vitally crucial that supervisors desuggest their supervisees' concerns, worries and even sometimes lack of self-confidence through their support and good rapport. Also, setting clear deadlines by supervisors for specific parts of the thesis can function as a highly motivating factor for students so that they do not lose their foci in the process. Institutions, on the other hand, can encourage curriculum developers to design more comprehensive thesis writing courses in MA programs so that supervisees become more knowledgeable about how to conduct a thesis study and write their texts academically better. Besides, considering the arduous nature of thesis writing, institutions can support supervisees through special writing centres. Supervisees can also be provided with some personal development workshops, with the help of faculty members and other graduate students, on how to better manage the writing process, how to improve their time management skills, and how to sustain their motivation. Thus, thesis writing process could be more facilitated and students can feel more empowered.

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