

Tracking Supervisory Feedback on Undergraduate Students' Theses

ABSTRACT

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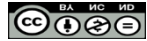
Received: 9 Jun 2025 |

First revision: 31 Oct 2025 |

Second revision: 9 Dec 2025 |

Accepted: 5 Jan 2026

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APA citation for this article:

Zhao, L., & Ting, S.-H. (2026). Tracking supervisory feedback on undergraduate students' theses. *Journal of Institutional Research South East Asia*, 24(1), 1-32.

To date, few studies have explored the relationship between the pragmatic functions of supervisor feedback during thesis supervision and students' subsequent revisions of their drafts. Little is understood about how supervisor feedback influences students' subsequent revisions of their drafts. The study investigated undergraduate students' revision in response to supervisor's feedback on drafts of thesis proposals. The objectives of the study were to: (1) examine types of feedback given by supervisors on undergraduate students' drafts of thesis proposals; (2) analyze revisions made by undergraduate students in drafts of thesis in response to supervisor's feedback. The data comprised 15 drafts of students' writing from five students (3 drafts each). Results on types of supervisor feedback show directive feedback (56.6% of 369 comments) was the most common, followed by referential feedback (29.8%) and expressive (13.6%) feedback. An analysis of feedback provided by the five supervisors across three drafts shows two trends. First, the number of comments decreased by the time students reach the third draft such as Supervisor 1 who started with 70 comments (57%) in the first draft, gave 38 comments (30.9%) in the second draft and only 15 comments in the third draft (12.2%). Second, other supervisors like Supervisor 5 maintained a consistent level of feedback in the first two drafts, with 29 comments (41.4%) each, but reduced to 12 comments (17.1%) in the third draft. The analysis of students' revisions indicates that expansion of information was the most frequent revision type, occurring 114 times (38.3%). Deletion of information ranked second with 48 instances (16.1%), followed by alteration of form, which occurred 42 times (14.1%). Both form alterations and proofreading - accounted for a combined 25.2%. In contrast, rewriting to improve coherence was observed only five times (1.7%). Students' self-initiated revisions were limited to just 18 instances (6%), and the data also revealed 12 cases (4%) of no revision. The study indicates that the students were generally able to follow the guidance given by their supervisors to improve their writing.

Keywords: supervisory feedback, undergraduate students, thesis writing, language functions, revision function

1. Introduction

Supervisory feedback refers to the information supervisors provide to help students close the gap between their current performance and the expected academic standard (Kumar & Stracke, 2011; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1989). Feedback is a central element of the supervisory process, serving as a key form of instruction (Benesch, 2000; Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Feedback enables students to reflect on their knowledge, abilities, and comprehension (Scott, 2014) and determine the necessary steps for advancing their academic writing (Basturkmen et al., 2014; Carter & Kumar, 2017; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Xu, 2017; Xu & Hu, 2020).

One line of inquiry has primarily examined corrective feedback provided by language teachers on language use. For example, several studies (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008; Karim & Nassaji, 2018; Sheen, 2007) suggest that direct feedback is more effective than indirect feedback, as it explicitly indicates how errors should be corrected. Conversely, other researchers (e.g., Ferris, 2003, 2006) argue that indirect feedback is more beneficial in the long term because it develops students' thinking skills and enable them to evaluate their own work.

In research writing, most research focused on applied linguistics (e.g., Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Xu, 2017). In both studies, the referential function of feedback is used more frequently than the directive and expressive functions. First, directive feedback involves the instruction and suggestion of specific tasks to the supervisee and questions are further categorized into clarification, eliciting information, confirmation and clarification. Second, expressive feedback conveys emotions and includes praise, criticism, and opinions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Specifically, feedback that acknowledges or encourages a student's work is classified as praise, while feedback expressing disapproval or dissatisfaction is categorized as criticism. The third type of feedback is referential feedback which involves providing information and corrections.

Researchers have found that feedback on language functions is effective as it enhances students' comprehension and utilization of the provided comments (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Saeed et al., 2021; Xu, 2017). Kumar and Stracke (2007) analyzed a supervisor's feedback on the first full draft of a PhD thesis in Applied Linguistics. They found that expressive feedback was more beneficial for the students than directive and referential feedback. Subsequently, Stracke and Kumar (2016) conducted a qualitative exploratory study that combined analysis of written feedback from supervisors and semi-structured interviews with four PhD graduates from Australia, Malaysia, and New Zealand to understand their experiences and perceptions of supervisory feedback. Their findings show that expressive feedback fosters academic writing development. Basturkmen et al. (2014) used the framework proposed by Kumar and Stracke (2007), and found a widespread use of referential comments focusing on direct corrections and factual information. Stracke and Kumar (2010) analyzed feedback provided by two supervisors and three examiners to a New Zealand PhD student and found that positive expressive comments boosted the confidence of students to improve their writing. Xu (2017) studied feedback given to a Chinese international doctoral student by a white supervisor and found almost no directive comments, showing an emphasis on autonomous learning by students. These studies reveal that while referential feedback is most commonly used for its clarity and ease of implementation, it is expressive feedback characterized by encouragement and praise, that plays a more important role in fostering students' confidence, and long-term development in academic writing.

Studies in non-Western contexts found frequent use of directive feedback. For example, Gedamu and Gezahegn's (2021) mixed-methods study in Ethiopia on 55 M.A. and Ph.D. students, four supervisors, and five thesis drafts, found that supervisory feedback was predominantly directive, with critical feedback significantly outnumbering praise and constructive suggestions. Similarly, Saeed et al.'s (2021) study on two Malaysian postgraduates' research proposals and their responses to feedback found more frequent directive clarification than directive instruction, indicating a greater emphasis on prompting students to elaborate on their ideas rather than making the corrections for students.

While existing studies have examined the types of feedback, this is inadequate as students may not do revisions as required. There is limited exploration of student responses to feedback, and how the supervisor feedback changes across different stages of a student's academic writing. According to Boiarsky's (1983) study, revision is operationally defined through six types of textual changes: alteration (modifying tone, voice, or style), reorganization (changing the order of content), coherence improvement (adding transitions), deletion (removing content), expansion (adding content), and emphasis (highlighting key points through structural changes).

This study examines types of supervisory written feedback (directive, expressive, and referential) on consecutive drafts of undergraduate thesis proposals and how students respond to feedback. The objectives of the study were to: (1) examine types of feedback given by supervisors on undergraduate students' drafts of thesis proposals; (2) analyze revisions made by undergraduate students in drafts of thesis in response to supervisor's feedback. Directive feedback involves the instruction and suggestion of specific tasks to the supervisee and questions are further categorized into clarification, eliciting information, confirmation and clarification. Referential feedback involves providing information and corrections. Expressive feedback conveys emotions and includes praise, criticism, and opinions. These operational definitions are based on Hyland and Hyland (2001), Kumar and Stracke (2007) and Saeed et al. (2021).

2. Theoretical Framework

The study on functions of supervisory written feedback is based on Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of written feedback as a key interactive process between supervisors and students, fostering both academic writing development and intellectual growth (Saeed et al., 2021), as shown in Figure 1.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory posits that higher cognitive abilities, including language acquisition, develop through socially mediated interactions. Learning occurs through engagement with more knowledgeable individuals (experts) in meaningful contexts, where guidance is provided for learners (novices) to internalize and apply independently over time. Experts are not limited to instructors but may also include peers (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2002), though the effectiveness of support varies depending on how it is implemented.

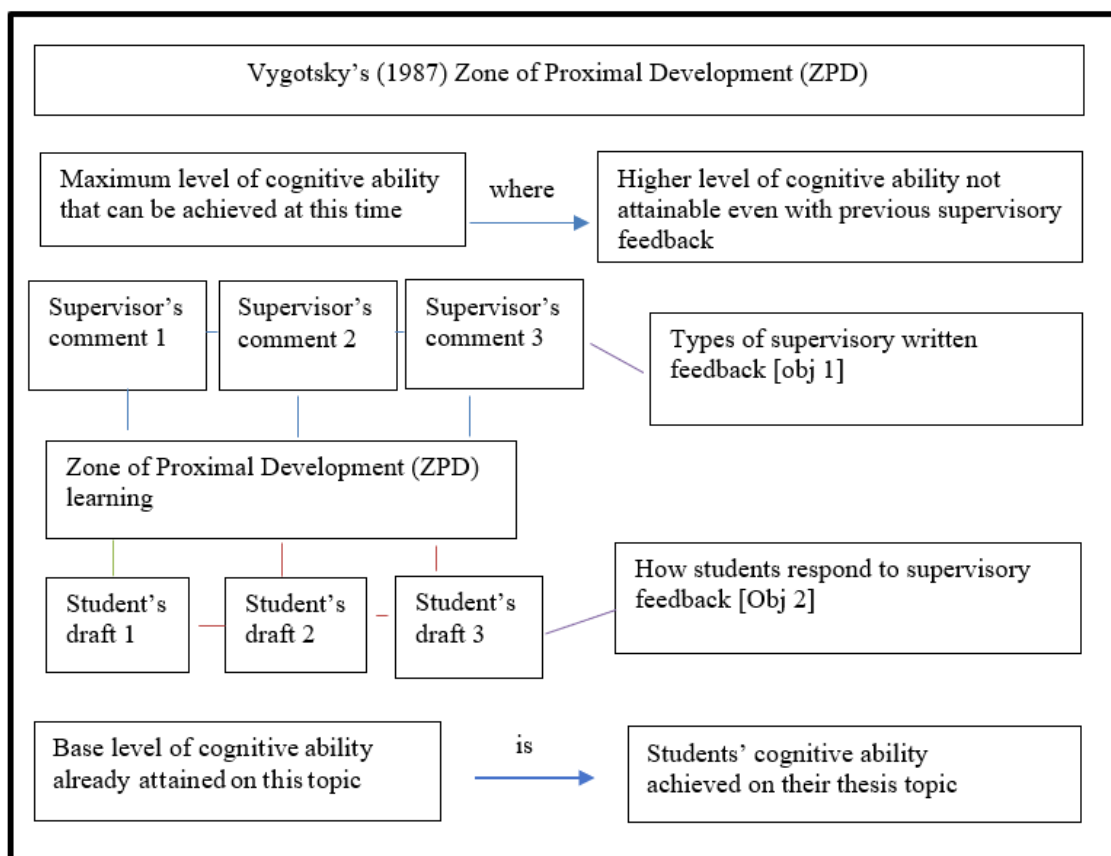


Figure 1: The relationship among theory, supervisory feedback, revision and research objectives

A central concept in Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory is scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976), which ensures that instructional support aligns with the learner's Zone of Proximal Development. Effective scaffolding involves three key principles: tailoring feedback to bridge the gap between current ability and future potential, dynamically adjusting guidance based on the learner's progress, and gradually transferring responsibility to promote independence (van Lier, 2000). As learners become more proficient, scaffolding is gradually reduced, allowing them to take increasing ownership of their learning.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory has been widely applied in L2 research, particularly in studies on individualized writing feedback (Lantolf, 2006). Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) mapped feedback strategies along a continuum from implicit cues, such as prompting learners to reassess their work, to explicit corrections. Their study found that although learners' linguistic abilities showed little immediate change over a two-month period, the nature of feedback they required evolved—they gradually needed less explicit guidance, reflecting increased self-regulation and learning. Similarly, Nassaji and Swain (2000) demonstrated that feedback aligned with a learner's Zone of Proximal Development was significantly more effective than randomly assigned corrections, reinforcing the idea that feedback should be both structured and responsive to learners' needs.

Gedamu and Gezahegn (2021) highlight the relevance of Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory in analyzing linguistic functions and feedback focus. As students refine their writing skills, feedback is expected to evolve—both in quantity and style. Over time, feedback should become less directive and more facilitative, enabling students to take greater ownership of their

work. Ultimately, as students gain confidence in academic writing and improve in their language proficiency, they should develop the ability to assess and refine their writing independently.

3. Methodology

The descriptive research involved the analysis of drafts written by undergraduates enrolled in a global communication degree program in a Malaysian university. The undergraduate thesis constitutes a compulsory element of the bachelor's degree program, designed to cultivate students' fundamental research skills and academic writing abilities. The thesis carries three credits in semester five for the proposal and three credits in semester six for the report. The thesis, the student is expected to demonstrate the qualities of fluency, clarity, and informative content, as well as independent thinking.

Fifteen drafts of thesis were analyzed, consisting of three drafts each from five students (S1 to S5) under the supervision of five supervisors (T1 to T5). Written feedback from supervisors was analyzed. Based on the text, the data selection for the study followed four specific criteria to ensure the writing samples were suitable for analysis. First, the drafts had to be revised in response to supervisor's written feedback. Drafts with only oral feedback were excluded because the feedback process could not be documented. Second, to ensure continuity, all three drafts from a student were required to maintain thematic consistency on the same research proposal topic. Any drafts where the topic changed were excluded. Third, the drafts needed to show sequential revisions of a single, continuous piece of writing. Sets of drafts that included new, separate sections or chapters were not included as the changes couldn't be accurately analyzed. Finally, a complete set of three drafts was needed for each student supervised by each supervisor to be part of the study. Table 1 provides further information about the students' thesis drafts.

Table 1: Information About Students' Thesis Drafts

Student	Supervisor	Title of theses	Area of thesis	Words in length
S1	T1	Interpersonal communication strategies used in instagram by the modest fashion brands IN Malaysia	Malaysian culture	7823
S2	T2	The usage of interactive video games by ESL students to enhance their English-speaking skills.	language	9275
S3	T3	The use of Quillbot as an AI-based academic writing tool among Malaysian undergraduate students	language	2183
S4	T4	The influence of multiplayer games on enhancing speaking ability among Malaysian university students.	language	1220
S5	T5	A Study on Buddhist Chinese and Christian Chinese Obituary	Chinese culture	4852

Note: Length refers to the word count of the three drafts

To gather data on the types of supervisory feedback in undergraduate students' writing, the following procedures were implemented. First, the second researcher explained the study to supervisors. With the assistance of the supervisors, students were then informed about the research, and their consent was obtained to analyze both their writing and the feedback they received. Each of the five supervisors was asked to provide three drafts from one student. The drafts consisted of a total of 25,353 words, focusing on topics related to language and communication. Subsequently, Draft 1, along with the revised Drafts 2 and 3, and the corresponding supervisor feedback, were collected from the supervisors. To ensure confidentiality throughout data collection, identifying information was removed from reports and analyses. All data and materials were securely stored on a password-protected personal computer, accessible only to the research team.

The analysis framework for functions of supervisor feedback is adapted from Saeed et al. (2021), as shown in Table 2. The supervisory feedback is categorized into three types: directive, expressive, and referential. Directive feedback involves instructions and suggestions for specific tasks given to the supervisee. Questions within this category are further classified into clarification, elicitation, confirmation, and clarification. Referential feedback provides information related to content, editorial aspects, and organization and corrections. Expressive feedback conveys emotions and includes praise, criticism, and opinions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Specifically, feedback that acknowledges or encourages a student's work is classified as praise, while feedback expressing disapproval or dissatisfaction is categorized as criticism. Finally, feedback that offers guidance on improving the work falls under the category of opinions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). These classifications were based on Saeed et al. (2021).

Analysis of functions of supervisory feedback in the students' thesis drafts occurred through several stages. Supervisors' comments were initially read to check whether the framework of analysis was adequate for coding purposes. For example, "In this study, modest fashion refers to ..." looks like it may have a directive function or a referential function. Through a closer reading of the thesis draft and analysis framework, the feedback is an implicit instruction. This comment means the student writer needs to fill in the blank with the operational definition of term. No information was given, meaning that it is not a referential function. Therefore, this comment is coded as directive-instruction. Some comments conveyed the supervisor's feeling in the form of praise, criticism and opinion. These comments fall into the category of expressive comments (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Conversely, other comments articulated supervisor feeling, yet these fell into the category of approval or disapproval. For instance, the comment, "I don't want to edit from this point onwards because you need to move things around and rewrite" (Leng, 2014; Leng, Kumar, & Abdullah, 2013) conveys the supervisor's disapproval regarding the content.

Using Saeed et al.'s (2021) definition and AbuSa'aleek and Alenizi's (2023) definition, the following two comments are expressive feedback - criticism. However, Leng (2014) and Leng et al., (2013) coded these two comments, which express supervisors' negative feeling as expressive feedback - disapproval. For example,

I've stopped reading here as I don't see a flow of argument! (Leng, 2014)

Serious flaws in your work! (Leng et al., 2013)

And the same goes for approval and praise, both of the words should not be used at the same time because they have the same meaning. It is evident that the terms "disapproval" and "criticism", "approval" and "praise" are employed by researchers in different ways in the

previous studies. The ambiguity of the classification criteria among researchers gives rise to unreliable results. So, in this study, “praise” and “criticism” are employed to express supervisors’ positive and negative feeling respectively. For example, “goodness, you cannot differentiate between method and results” in the present study was coded as expressive-criticism. This comment shows a negative response of supervisor. The pragmatic feedback model (Table 2) is therefore an appropriate framework for this study.

Table 2: Analysis Framework for Functions of Supervisory Feedback Based on Saeed et al. (2021)

Feedback Function	Subcategory of feedback Function	Example
Directive	Eliciting information	Where are the citations for these numerous research?
	Seeking justifications	Why? Why only one? Who?
	Seeking clarification	There must be a specific place in IG where you take your data, not the whole world.
	Seeking confirmation	Are these part of your objectives?
	Instruction to do / not to do	to be discussed - must align to the gaps discussed after the problem statement.
	Suggestion to do/not to do	strategies – you should be defining this, and not only interpersonal comn.
Referential	Providing information	Find citations that focus on the benefits, perhaps one or two.
	Providing correction	YOU MUST PUT A COMMA HERE.
Expressive	Praise	This is the right research gap. The name of this section is OK
	Criticism	Too old. Not clear
	Opinion	I think no.

Note: Examples are from the present study

Typically, written feedback is provided directly by supervisors as annotations within the text. In this study, every comment, phrase or word that conveyed information to the student is considered an independent unit of communication (Table 2). The analysis is conducted in chunks of text, as shown in the following examples from the present study. The length of each text segment depends on the function of the feedback. The chunk may be one word (e.g., “incorrect”) or a few sentences (e.g., “Find citations that focus on the benefits, perhaps one or two”). For example,

I do not know what this means. **【*expressive- criticism on content】**, Citation? What benefits? **【*Directive- Eliciting on content 】**, Find citations that focus on the benefits, perhaps one or two. **【*referential- provide info on content】**

As for changes by students in their revisions, the analysis framework is adapted from Boiarsky’s (1983), as shown in Table 3. This framework provides a more detailed perspective on revision research, enabling a more systematic analysis of authors’ revision behaviors. The first researcher coded draft 2 and draft 3 based on Boiarsky’s (1983) analytical framework. This was checked by the second researcher. The analytical framework was improved and one of the changes made was to omit “Emphasis of information” because it includes all the other kinds of feedback. In addition, editing word choice involves making changes to words to

convey the meaning better, meaning that it can include single words or a phrase (if more than one word).

The analysis framework comprises “Alteration of form,” “Reorganization of information,” “Improvement of coherence,” “Deletion of information,” and “Expansion of information” . The definitions are based on Boiarsky (1983). “Alteration of form” refers to changing tone, angle, voice, point of view, person, or style. “Reorganization of information” involves reorganizing ideas, sections, paragraphs, sentences, or words. “Improvement of coherence” entails creating transitions between ideas, sections, paragraphs, sentences, or words. “Deletion of information” refers to deleting ideas, sections, paragraphs, sentences, or words. “Expansion of information” denotes adding ideas, sections, paragraphs, sentences, or words.

However, in student thesis writing, accuracy-related modifications should be categorized separately under “Editing/Proofreading.” This function refers to editing words for thesis appropriateness, which may involve adding, deleting, or changing words, but only within a sentence. In the present study, “Alteration of form” is defined as changes in form while maintaining meaning, primarily as style adjustments, such as changing tone, angle, voice, or point of view. Lexical changes include the addition or modification of content words and changes in word forms (excluding inflectional morphology) (Cotos et al., 2020). The goal is to develop a form that is effective and consistent with the intended purpose.

The revision function, “Reorganization of information,” refers to the rearrangement of sentences, sections, or paragraphs without altering their content. This category does not include minor word-level reorganizations, as such modifications are considered paraphrasing. The purpose of reorganizing information may be to (1) achieve coherence or (2) place the correct type of information in the appropriate location. This involves structuring the information in a logical sequence to effectively convey the intended message (Batchelor, 2022; Sommers, 1980). The third revision function, “Improvement of coherence,” involves creating transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections by incorporating connections such as “however” and “thus far,” while refraining from altering content words. Additionally, it includes modifying sentence structures, such as shifting between active and passive voice or changing the subject of the sentence to emphasize different elements (theme/rheme). This approach aims to achieve coherence throughout the text while ensuring effective communication of the message, all while maintaining proper grammar and without making edits to correct errors or altering the content itself.

“Deletion of information” refers to deleting sentences, paragraphs, or sections (Faigley & Witte, 1981). This category does not include deleting words or phrases for minor editing purposes but rather focuses on removing larger textual segments. The aim is to eliminate parts that do not contribute to the clarity or purpose of the writing (Glynn et al., 1982), ensuring that only relevant information is retained.

Next, “Expansion of information,” involves adding sentences, paragraphs, or sections to enrich the content (Batchelor, 2022; Xu, 2017). This revision type does not include the addition of words for minor editing purposes but instead focuses on expanding the content to provide sufficient information relevant to the purpose of the text. Extended revision, where students further develop feedback in their revisions, also falls into this category (Stay, 1983).

Finally, two additional revision functions were added to Boiarsky’s (1983) analytical framework, that is, “No revision” and “Students’ own revision.” The “No revision” function

refers to cases where feedback did not trigger any revision. The “Students’ own revision” function encompasses self-initiated changes that were not directly linked to specific supervisor feedback. This function classification acknowledges instances where the rationale behind a revision cannot be solely attributed to the supervisor’s comments. As for tracking changes, the analysis framework is adapted from Boiarsky’s (1983), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Framework for Analyzing Revisions Made in Writing Based on Boiarsky (1983)

Revision Function	Definition	Example
Alteration of form	Changes in form involve maintaining the original meaning while altering the tone, perspective, person, voice, or point of view. Lexical changes include the addition or modification of content words, as well as changes in word forms (excluding inflectional morphology), among others. ¹ The goal is to develop a form that is effective and consistent with the purpose.	research has provided empirical evidence to support the importance of social media use for CRM.....(Charaensukmongkol and Sasatanun, 2016). →Empirical data from Charaensukmongkol and Sasatanun (2016) supports the significance of social media use for CRM(S1)
Reorganization of information	Reorganization of information, such as sentences, sections, or paragraphs, involves repositioning these elements without altering their content. It also includes changes that paraphrase the concepts in the text ² ; This process refers to moving larger chunks of text ¹ and does not include minor changes such as reordering individual words, which falls under paraphrasing. The purpose of reorganizing information may be (1) to enhance coherence or (2) to ensure that the appropriate type of information is placed in the correct location. This involves arranging content logically to effectively convey the intended message.	Imikan Nkopuruk (2018) studied: ‘A pragmatic analysis of selected Nigerian newspaper obituaries.’In this study, it focused on examining the pragmatic features of the cultural and linguistic aspects of obituaries.--Nkopuruk (2018) focused on examining the pragmatic features of the cultural and linguistic aspects of obituaries.(S5)
Improvement of coherence	Creating transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections by using connectors such as “however” and “thus far”, while refraining from altering content words. It also involves modifying sentence structures, for example, by shifting between active and passive voice or changing the subject of a sentence to emphasize different elements (theme/rheme). The goal of this approach is to enhance coherence throughout the entire text and its components, ensuring that the message is effectively communicated. Importantly, this process maintains grammatical accuracy without correcting existing errors or altering the actual content.	Immigrants once come to another country expected to know some certain thing.-- When immigrants come to the U.S., they are expected to know certain things ¹
Deletion of information	Deletion ³ of information, such as sentences, paragraphs and sections, that does not	

	contribute to the clarity or purpose of the text. It does not include the removal of individual words or phrases for minor editing purposes. Instead, it involves eliminating larger portions of text that are unnecessary, confusing, or irrelevant to the overall message.	
Expansion of information	It refers to the addition of information—such as sentences, paragraphs, or sections ³ , that expands the content and provides sufficient detail in relation to the purpose of the text. It includes extended revisions, where students develop and elaborate on the feedback received during the revision process ⁴ . This does not include the addition of individual words for minor editing purposes; instead, the additions must contribute meaningfully to the development of ideas.	In this study, it focused on examining the pragmatic features of the cultural and linguistic aspects of obituaries.--Studies on interpersonal communication strategies will provide a better understanding regarding the strategic way on how the founder promotes their products and how the audience reacts to the post by deciding to buy or even already bought the products. (S5)
No revision	The feedback had not triggered any revision	
Students' own revision	Students' self-revision (revision is not in response to supervisor's feedback).	'Man is constantly using language ' (p.25)-- According to Fishman: 'Man is constantly using language ' (p.25) (S3)
Editing / proofreading	It refers to editing words for appropriateness in academic writing, which may involve adding, deleting, or changing words, but only within a sentence. It includes surface-level revisions ⁵ , such as proofreading for omitted words and ensuring accuracy ⁶ as well as revisions at the word, sub-word, or phrase level ⁷ .	Imikan Nkopuruk (2018) studied: 'A pragmatic analysis of selected Nigerian newspaper obituaries.'-- Nkopuruk (2018) focused on examining the pragmatic features of the cultural and linguistic aspects of obituaries(S5)

Note on source of information:

¹ Cotos, Huffman, and Link (2020), ² Batchelor (2022), ³ Faigley and Witte (1981), ⁴ Stay (1983), ⁵ Myhill and Jones (2007), ⁶ Lindgren and Sullivan (2006), ⁷ Oblie (2023)

Boiarsky's (1983) framework was employed in a trial coding of one student's two revised drafts. To ensure reliability, the second researcher checked the analysis of the first researcher. The process was iterative. The intercoder agreement reached was initially 81.5%. The researchers compared the coding. The researchers reviewed the definitions in the analysis framework, repeatedly cross-checked the coding practices, and discussed differences in coding. but after several rounds of analysis, most of the disagreements were resolved and the percentage of agreement reached 91%. Figure 2 summarizes the steps from data collection to coding and analysis (for both feedback and revision functions).

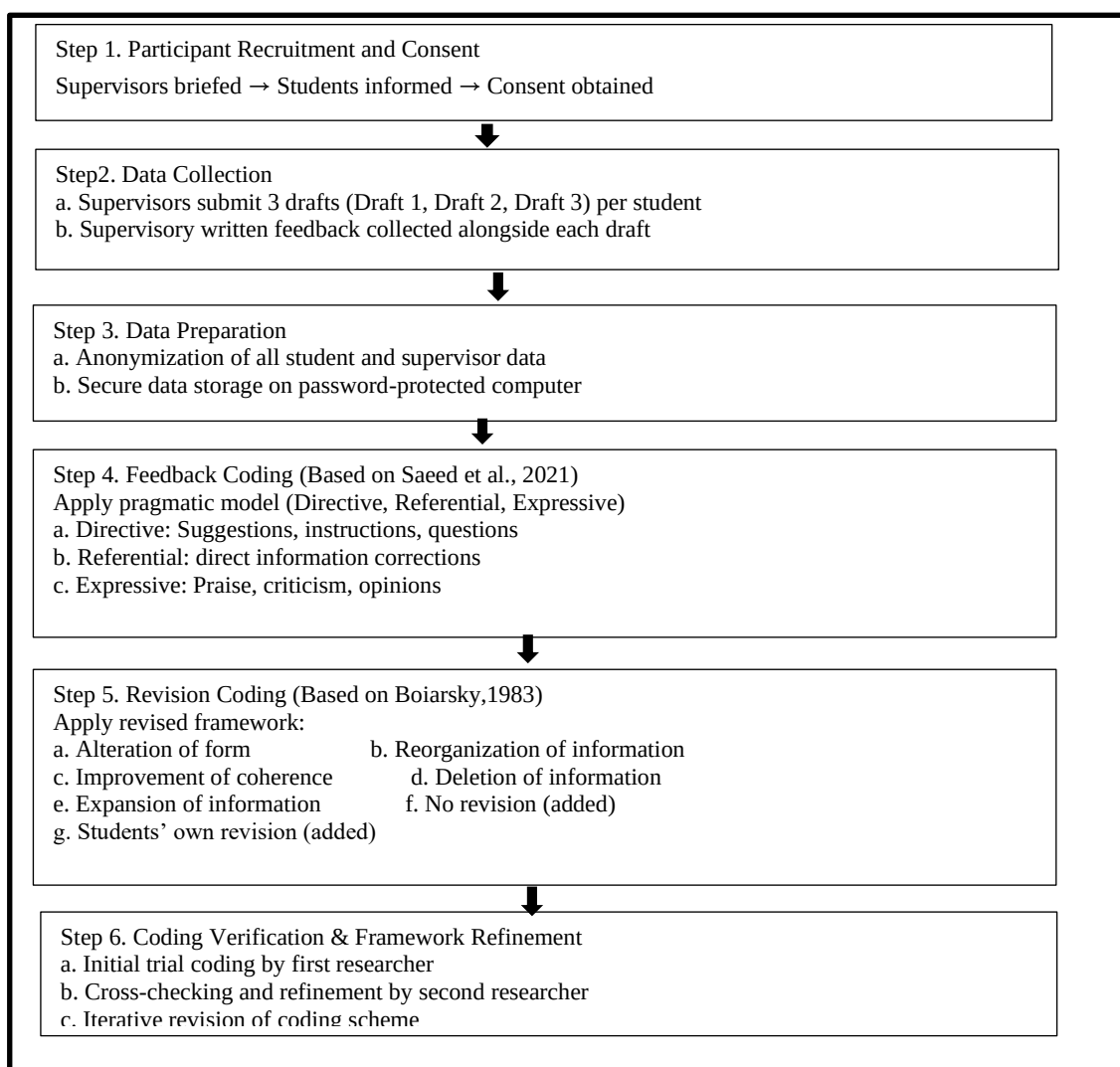


Figure 2: Steps from data collection to coding and analysis

4. Results

This study employs an analytical framework that combines quantitative statistics with qualitative tracking to examine the evolutionary characteristics of supervisory feedback during undergraduate thesis supervision. In this section, qualitative descriptions of types of supervisory feedback are provided before the frequency of the three types of supervisory feedback are described. The final section reports results on tracking supervisory feedback over three drafts. The supervisors' comments given as examples have not been edited for language correctness to retain the authenticity of the data.

Qualitative Descriptions of Types of Supervisory Feedback

Directive feedback:

Some supervisors utilize directive feedback to instruct students by eliciting information, clarifications, justifications, and confirmations, as well as to suggest and instruct what actions to take or avoid in their writing. These following comments from the present study may give

instructions (Excerpt 1) and elicit information on content (Excerpt 2), suggest what to do on appropriateness issues (Excerpt 3), or give instructions on appropriateness (Excerpt 4), and give instruction on organization (Excerpt 5).

Excerpts 1-5:

1. Since you are using the consumer and advertising as a reason to say that social media is a good place for businesses to target to increase sales, the yellow should move later (draft 1/T1)【*Directive-instruction on content】
2. IS THIS YOUR OWN TRANSLATION? IF YES, NEED TO STATE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHY DON'T YOU DIRECTLY QUOTE HIS ENGLISH ORIGINAL? (draft3/T5)【*Directive -Eliciting information on content】
3. PREVIOUS STUDIES SHOULD FOCUS MORE ON LATEST STUDIES (YEAR 2017/2018-2023). (draft1/T2)【*Directive suggestion on appropriateness】
4. try your best not to repeat the same style of "according to"(draft 2/T3)【*Directive instruction on appropriateness】
5. Explain in steps, what is the first thing to do. what is next, etc, etc.(draft1/T2)【*Directive -instruction on organization】

For example, in Excerpt 1, the supervisor directly instructs the student to move a highlighted section to a later part of the text. This directive aims to improve the logical flow of argumentation and enhance organizational coherence. Similarly, in Excerpt 2, the supervisor elicits information by prompting the student to clarify whether a translation is their own and suggesting an alternative approach (quoting the original text). This reinforces source attribution and academic integrity, demonstrating how directive feedback helps address both content and citation issues.

Moreover, Excerpt 3 illustrates a directive suggestion, where the supervisor advises the student to prioritize recent studies (2017–2023). While not a strict command, this guidance steers the student toward more appropriate academic choices, reflecting the flexibility within directive feedback. In Excerpt 4, the supervisor explicitly instructs the student to avoid repetitive phrasing, offering stylistic direction to improve linguistic sophistication and readability. Finally, Excerpt 5 highlights directive instruction on organization, where the supervisor directs the student to structure their explanation step by step, ensuring clarity and coherence in their argument.

Referential feedback:

Referential feedback aims to provide information and corrections concerning content, editing, and organization. Excerpts 6-9 from the present study illustrate instances where supervisors offer guidance and corrections in these areas.

6. Wrong way to cite (draft1/T1)【*Referential-Provide information on appropriateness】
7. This paragraph is written in the style for Chap 2 (draft1/T1) 【*Referential-providing info on organization】

8. For Chap 1, you take what is necessary to build the argument for the gap (draft1/T1) **【*Referential-providing info on content】**.
9. This requires quasi-experimental research design (pre- and post- test) to be able to measure the effects better. If perceptions or self-reported effects alone, it may be “questionable”. (draft2/ T3) **【*Referential provide info on content】**

Unlike directive feedback, which explicitly tells students what to do, referential feedback allows them to interpret and apply the information to improve their academic writing. In giving referential feedback, a supervisor may identify an error in citation style, ensuring adherence to proper academic conventions (Excerpt 6). Additionally, another supervisor highlights a mismatch between the writing style for a paragraph in relation to Chapter 1, pointing out structural inconsistencies (Excerpt 7). The supervisor also provides guidance on the expected focus of Chapter 1, ensuring alignment with the broader research objectives (Excerpt 8). Besides academic writing conventions, supervisors also focus on knowledge of research methodology. Excerpt 9 shows that the feedback is in the form of an explicit recommendation to use a more rigorous experimental design to enhance the validity of the study.

Expressive Feedback:

There were few instances of expressive feedback to convey emotions, opinions, and evaluations regarding students’ writing. Expressive feedback may involve criticism of the content or editorial aspects (Excerpts 10-11 from the present study), or may involve opinion about organization (Excerpt 12).

10. This purple is not clear(draft1/T1) **【*Expressive -criticism on content 】**
11. Please don’t do this Luq! Very UPSR-ish. (draft2 /T3) **【*expressive criticism on appropriateness】**
12. I feel very disturbed, because the paragraphs no longer join(draft1/T1) **【*Expressive-opinion on organization】**

Excerpt 10 shows a supervisor’s criticism of the clarity of the content. Excerpt 11 shows the frustration of a supervisor with his student who writes like primary school students. UPSR in Malaysia is the Primary 6 examination at the end of the six years of primary education before they proceed to secondary school. Excerpt 12 illustrates the frustration of a supervisor with the poor coherence of the piece. The phrase “I feel very disturbed” the supervisor conveys an emotional reaction, signaling to the student that structural issues significantly affect readability but without specific revision suggestions, the student may struggle to improve cohesion. These excerpts for expressive feedback show the supervisors directly critiquing the quality of expression without offering explicit guidance for revision. However, in other instances, the supervisor gave indirect suggestions for improvement like making the writing clearer (Excerpt 10) and improving coherence between paragraphs (Excerpt 12).

Frequency of Different Types of Supervisory Feedback

Table 4 shows frequency and percentage of supervisory feedback on undergraduate students’ theses. Out of 369 feedback instances provided by supervisors on students’ theses, 56.6% were directive feedback. This suggests that supervisors frequently provided specific instructions or

suggestions for improvement. In contrast, referential feedback accounted for 29.8% of the comments, indicating a focus on providing information or corrections.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of language functions of supervisory feedback

Language functions	Number	Percentage
Directive	209	56.6%
Referential	110	29.8%
Expressive	50	13.6%
Total	369	100%

The least common type was expressive feedback (13.6%) showing the little emphasis on praise or criticism and greater emphasis on practical, task-oriented guidance in supervisory feedback, with less focus on emotional or motivational support. Next, the three types of supervisory feedback are explained with examples.

Tracking Supervisory Feedback over Three Drafts

Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage of the types of supervisory feedback given by five supervisors (T1 to T5) on three drafts (D1 to D3) of their undergraduate students' work (S1 to S5). Directive feedback is the most frequently used (63, 51.2%), followed by referential (44, 35.8%) and expressive feedback (16, 13%). Overall, feedback is most intensive in Draft 1 (70, 57%), declines in Draft 2 (38, 30.9%), and is minimal in Draft 3 (15, 12.2%), indicating that the supervisor provides more guidance initially and gradually reduces input as the student revises writing. Two trends are evident, that is, there is a decrease in the number of comments across the three drafts, and the feedback comments remain consistent in the first two drafts but drastically drops in Draft 3 (seen as Figure 3).

Table 5: The Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of D1, D2, D3

Feedback	T1 - D1	T1 - D2	T1 - D3	T2 - D1	T2 - D2	T2 - D3	T3 - D1	T3 - D2
Directive Total	34 (27.6%)	25 (20.3%)	4 (3.3%)	15 (16.5%)	28 (30.8%)	12 (13.2%)	12 (37.5%)	7 (21.9%)
Elicit info	2 (1.6%)	3 (2.4%)	2 (1.6%)	1 (1.1%)	6 (6.6%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)
Seek justifications	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.2%)	3 (3.3%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Seek clarification	1 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (5.5%)	6 (6.6%)	3 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Seek Confirmation	0 (0%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Instruct	27 (22%)	19 (15.4%)	2 (1.6%)	6 (6.6%)	12 (13.2%)	4 (4.4%)	8 (25%)	5 (15.6%)
Suggest	4 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)
Referential Total	29 (23.6%)	9 (7.3%)	6 (4.9%)	1 (1.1%)	14 (15.4%)	8 (8.8%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
Provide info	18 (14.6%)	9 (7.3%)	6 (4.9%)	1 (1.1%)	14 (15.4%)	8 (8.8%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
Correct	11 (8.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Expressive Total	7 (5.7%)	4 (3.3%)	5 (4.1%)	2 (2.2%)	10 (11%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (9.4%)	1 (3.1%)
Praise	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)
Criticize	5 (4.1%)	4 (3.3%)	2 (1.6%)	2 (2.2%)	5 (5.5%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)
Give opinion	2 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.4%)	0 (0%)	4 (4.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Grand total	70 (57%)	38 (30.9%)	15 (12.2%)	18 (19.8%)	52 (57.1%)	21 (23.1%)	17 (53.1%)	8 (25%)

Table 5: The Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of D1, D2, D3 (Continued)

Feedback	T3 - D3	T4 - D1	T4 - D2	T4 - D3	T5 - D1	T5 - D2	T5 - D3
Directive Total	5 (15.6%)	8 (15.1%)	11 (20.8%)	11 (20.8%)	12 (17.1%)	16 (22.9%)	9 (12.9%)
Elicit info	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (7.1%)	1 (1.4%)
Seek justifications	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Seek clarification	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Seek Confirmation	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	6 (8.6%)
Instruct	4 (12.5%)	6 (11.3%)	6 (11.3%)	11 (20.8%)	12 (17.1%)	6 (8.6%)	2 (2.9%)
Suggest	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	4 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (5.7%)	0 (0%)
Referential Total	1 (3.1%)	2 (3.8%)	4 (7.5%)	5 (9.4%)	13 (18.6%)	11 (15.7%)	2 (2.9%)
Provide info	1 (3.1%)	2 (3.8%)	2 (3.8%)	5 (9.4%)	13 (18.6%)	9 (12.9%)	2 (2.9%)
Correct	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2.9%)	0 (0%)
Expressive Total	1 (3.1%)	2 (3.8%)	7 (13.2%)	3 (5.7%)	4 (5.7%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Praise	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	2 (3.8%)	3 (4.3%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0%)
Criticize	1 (3.1%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	1 (1.4%)
Give opinion	0 (0%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (5.7%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Grand total	7 (21.9%)	12 (22.6%)	22 (41.5%)	19 (35.8%)	29 (41.4%)	29 (41.4%)	12 (17.1%)

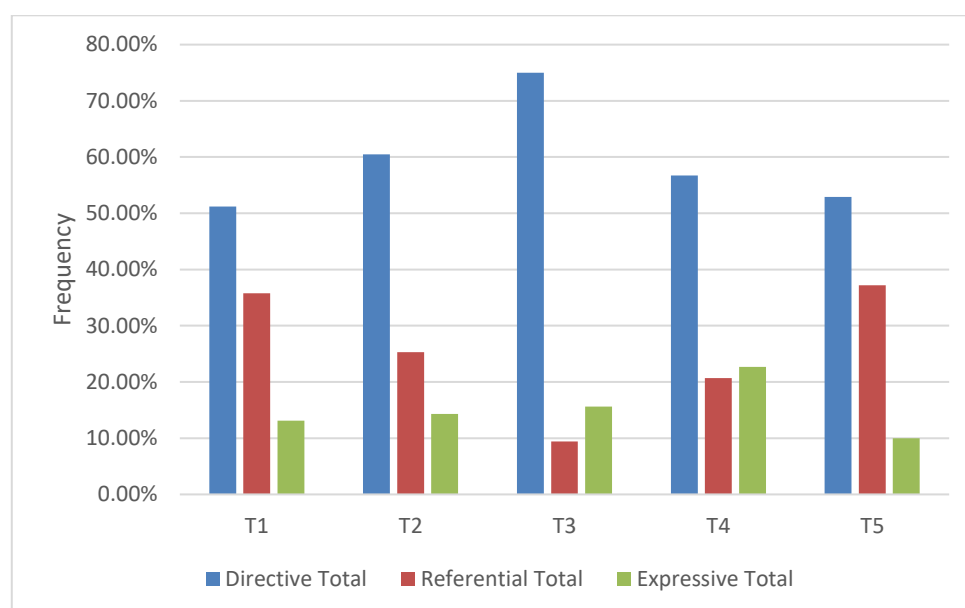


Figure 3: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T1, T2, T3, T4, T5

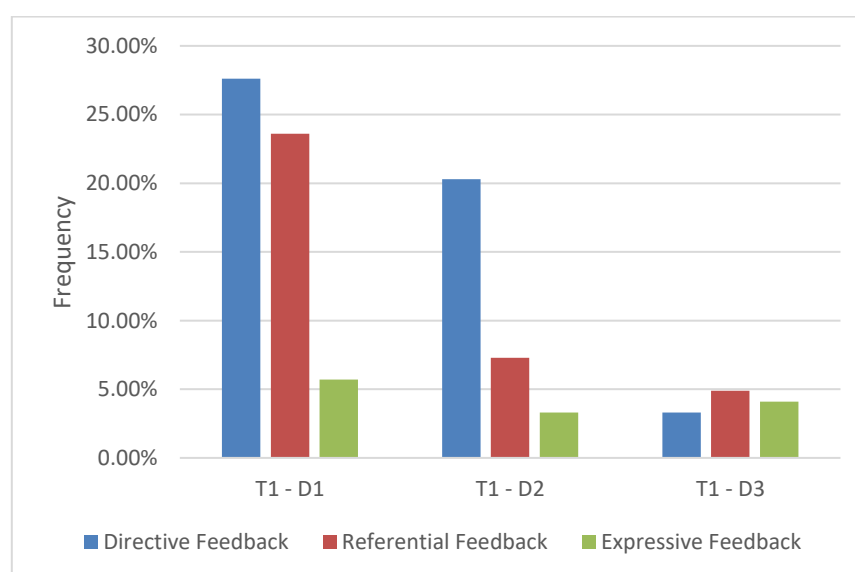


Figure 4: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T1

The supervisor (T1) primarily employs directive feedback in the early stages and gradually reduces it as the student revises, indicating a strong emphasis on guidance early in the revision process, which can be seen in Figure 4. In Table 5, directive feedback, particularly instructions on what to do or not to do, is the dominant form (48 comments or 39%), peaking in Draft 1 (27 or 22%) and then decreasing in Draft 2 (19 or 15.4%) and Draft 3 (2 or 1.6%). This decline suggests that the supervisor (T1) provides more direct instructions initially and expects the student to internalize and apply them in subsequent drafts. For example, “I find these 2 sentences in yellow disturbing the flow of ideas because they are general on social media users. Since you are using the consumer and advertising as a reason to say that social media is a good place for businesses to target to increase sales, the yellow should move later (*directive-instruction) (T1-D1)” Similarly, eliciting information peaked in Draft 2 but declined in Draft

3, while clarification and confirmation remained minimal, contrasting with previous studies (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021; Nurie, 2018), who observed frequent use of directive clarification. Referential feedback followed a similar downward trend, with information and correction both decreasing significantly from Draft 1 to Draft 3. Providing information is common in Draft 1 (18 or 14.6%) and Draft 2 (9 or 7.3%) but decreases in Draft 3 (6 or 4.9%), suggesting that the student progressively integrates the information provided by their supervisors. Providing correction, which is primarily found in Draft 1 (11 or 8.9%), disappears entirely in later drafts, implying that major language and structural issues are addressed early in the revision process. For example, “Wrong way to cite (*referential-providing info on editorial matters) Renckstorf and his colleagues (1996) ...(T1-D1)”. The overall decrease in referential feedback, from 29 (23.6%) in Draft 1 to 9 (7.3%) in Draft 2 and 6 (4.9%) in Draft 3, supports this trend. Expressive feedback remained low throughout, which accounts for 13% of the total criticism increases slightly in Draft 2 but falls in Draft 3, suggesting reduced negative feedback as the writing improves. Opinion-based feedback appears only in the first two drafts, and no praise is recorded at any stage, indicating the supervisor prioritized issue identification over positive reinforcement.

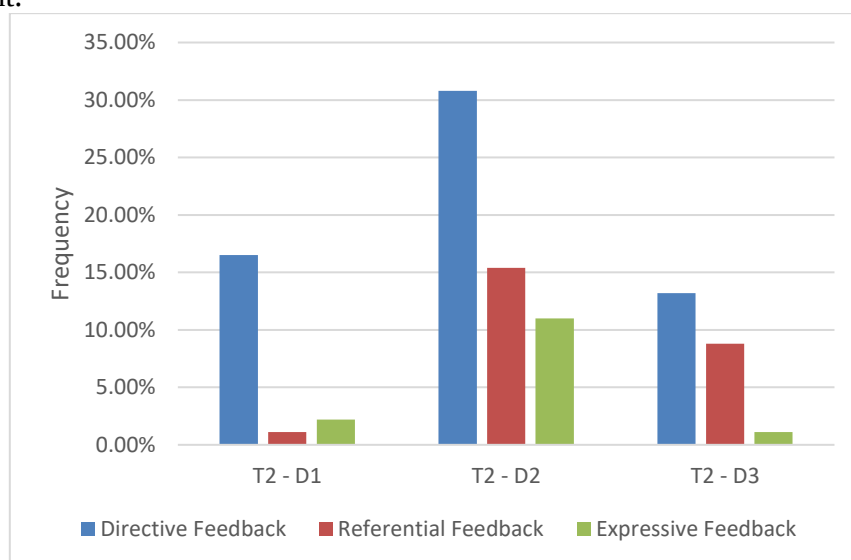


Figure 5: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T2

From Figure 5, the supervisor’s feedback of T2 shows a clear trend across the three draft stages. Overall, feedback was most concentrated in Draft 2 (52 or 57.1%), whereas Draft 1 (18 or 19.8%) received the least feedback, and Draft 3 (21 or 23.1%) saw a slight decrease, which can be seen in Table 5. This suggests that the supervisor provided the most guidance during the intermediate stage to facilitate revisions. Specifically, directive feedback remained the predominant type, accounting for 60.4% of the total number of feedback (or 55 instances). It peaked in Draft 2 (28 or 30.8%), was relatively lower in Draft 1 (15 or 16.5%), and decreased in Draft 3 (12 or 13.2%). The examples “Give examples of these interactive video games” and “What benefits? Find citations that focus on the benefits” from T2-D2 show that the supervisor gave very clear and direct instructions in Draft 2. In Draft 3, the supervisor used fewer direct commands, which may suggest an expectation that the student could revise more independently. Referential feedback also reached its highest point in Draft 2 (14 or 15.4%), was minimal in Draft 1 (1 or 1.1%), and slightly declined in Draft 3 (8 or 8.8%). This suggests that the supervisor provided more information in Draft 2 to help students refine their paper structure and language. Expressive feedback was relatively low overall (13 or 14.3%) but saw a

noticeable increase in Draft 2 (10 or 11%), while it remained lower in Draft 1 (2 or 2.2%) and Draft 3 (1 or 1.1%). This could indicate that the supervisor gave more personal evaluations during the intermediate stage while focusing on constructive revision suggestions in the early and final stages.

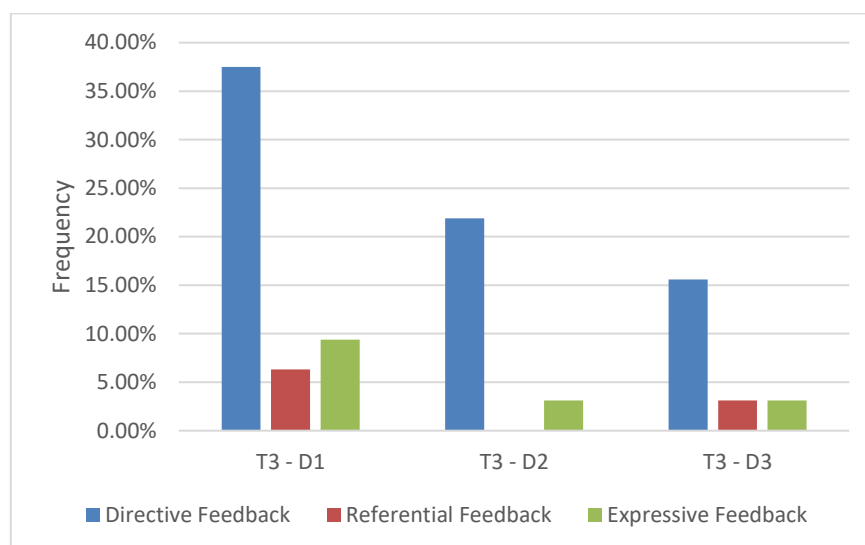


Figure 6: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T3

From Table 5, it is evident that the supervisor's feedback of T3 was the most frequent in Draft 1 (17 or 53.1%), then decreased in Draft 2 (8 or 25%), and remained nearly the same in Draft 3 (7 or 21.9%). This indicates that the supervisor provided extensive feedback in the initial draft but reduced intervention in later stages. This trend (seen from Figure 6) is particularly noticeable in directive feedback, which was the highest in Draft 1 (12 or 37.5%), decreased in Draft 2 (7 or 21.9%), and dropped further in Draft 3 (5 or 15.6%). This suggests that the supervisor provided more direct guidance in the early stages but gradually reduced instructions, likely to encourage students to make independent revisions. Referential feedback was relatively low overall (3 or 9.4%), with minimal presence in Draft 1 (2 or 6.3%), completely absent in Draft 2 (0 or 0%), and reappearing slightly in Draft 3 (1 or 3.1%). This pattern indicates that the supervisor provided informational support mainly in the initial and final drafts while intervening less in the middle stage. Expressive feedback (5 or 15.6%) was also relatively low, mostly concentrated in Draft 1 (3 or 9.4%), with limited presence in Draft 2 (1 or 3.1%) and Draft 3 (1 or 3.1%). For example, the comment on T3-D1 in the present study "This is the right research gap that can justify the purpose of this study" shows that the supervisor gave positive evaluation at an early stage. However, the later comments of T3 focused more on specific content revisions, such as "Add one or 2 more gaps from previous study on the use Quillbot, then state what is missing or not clear in their study that need to be addressed in future research. When you argue this, only then your research purpose can be supported or justified" rather than on emotional or attitudinal feedback.

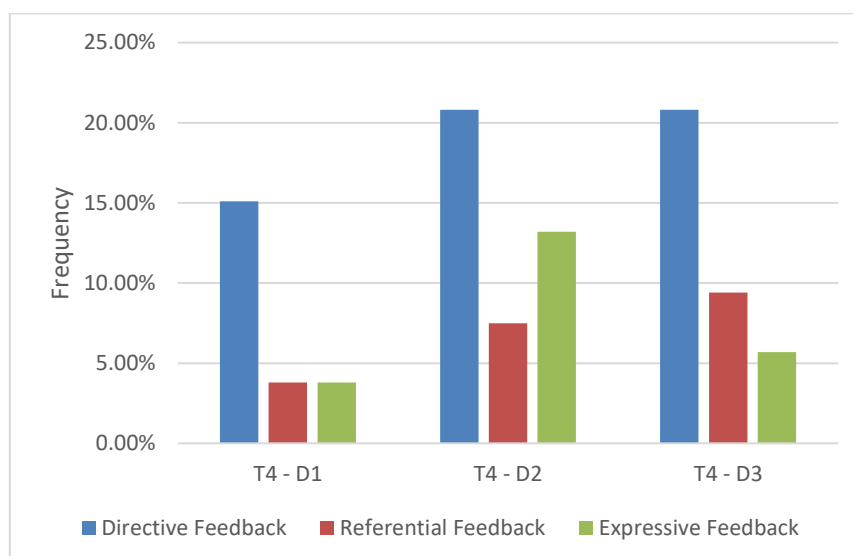


Figure 7: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T4

As for T4, directive feedback remains the most dominant category (30 or 56.6%), with its proportion increasing from D1 (8 or 15.1%) to D2 (11 or 20.8%) and maintaining the same level in D3 (20.8%) (Table 5). Within this category, instructions on what to do or not to do constitute the majority (43.4%), peaking in D3 (11 or 20.8%), indicating that supervisors provide more specific directives as the drafts progress. For example, the comment from T4-D3 “please proceed to Chapter 2. We stick to this from now on” is directive feedback. Referential feedback accounts for 11 instances (20.8%) of the total feedback, and it increased from Draft 1 (2 instances, 3.8%) to Draft 2 (4 instances, 7.5%) and Draft 3 (5 instances, 9.4%). This suggests that as the students refine their work, the supervisor offers more informational support, particularly in providing corrections. Expressive feedback constitutes 12 or 22.6% of the total, peaking in D2 (7 or 13.2%) before decreasing in D3 (3 or 5.7%), which implies that T4 gives more evaluative comments in the middle stage but shift their focus toward directive and referential feedback in the later stage (Figure 7).

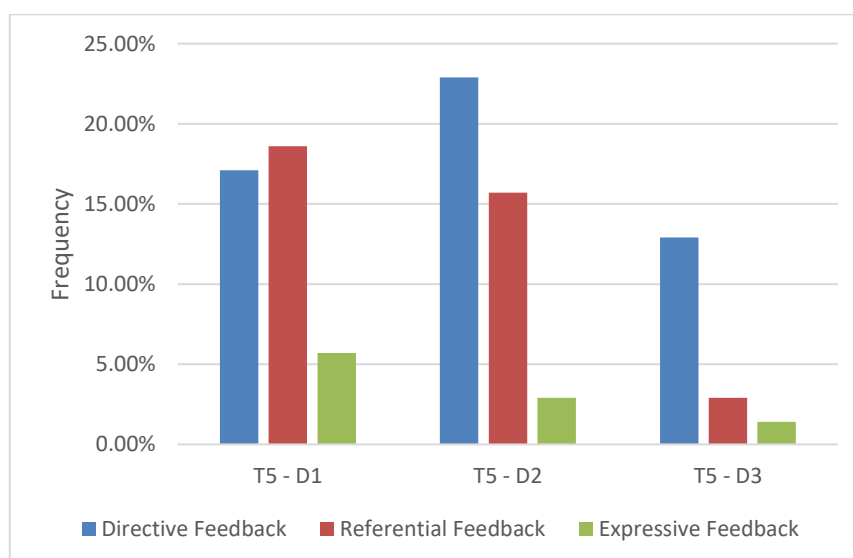


Figure 8: Frequency and Proportion of Supervisory Feedback Function Subcategories of T5

From Figure 8, it can be seen that T5 gave similar number of comments on D1 and D2, but decreased on D3. In terms of the type of feedback, the distribution among different feedback

function categories changed. Directive feedback consistently accounted for the highest proportion, ultimately reaching 52.9%. Within this category, the use of direct instructions telling the student what to do or not to do decreased. For example, “PROVIDE PINYIN FOR READERS WHO CANNOT READ CHINESE (original example from T5-D3)”. At the same time, feedback that asked questions or sought confirmation increased. For instance, the supervisor asked the student to check Holmes (2013) and identify which sociolinguistic theory should be used as the main framework in draft 2. For example,

YOU MENTIONED HOLMES (2013). TRY LOOK UP IN ITS TABLE OF CONTENT, WHAT THEORY WITHIN SOCIOLINGUISTICS THAT YOU WANT TO USE AS THE MAIN SKELETON FOR THIS STUDY. IS IT SPEECH COMMUNITY? IS IT SPEECH FUNCTIONS? IS IT LANGUAGE VARIATION? LANGUAGE AND GENDER? OR...? IDENTIFY THE SUITABLE ONE. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE YOU WILL ALWAYS USE THIS THEORY TO BACK UP YOUR DISCUSSION IN YOUR CHAPTER 4 [*Directive Eliciting on content] (original example from T5-D2).

This suggests that in later draft, the supervisor relied more on questioning and confirmation rather than giving direct instructions. Overall, referential feedback accounted for about 37.1% of all feedback, while feedback that simply provided information gradually decreased. But in later drafts, the supervisor may have reduced one-way information delivery and focused more on interaction. Expressive feedback remained around 10%, with “Praise” making up the majority, while “Criticism” and “Opinion” were relatively rare. This suggests that supervisor consistently adopted a more encouraging feedback approach across all draft stages. Overall, the changes in feedback from Draft 1 to Draft 3 reflect a shift from direct instruction toward more interaction and confirmation. Meanwhile, there was a slight reduction in information provision, whereas expressive feedback remained relatively stable.

Tracking Changes by Supervisory Feedback over Three Drafts

Based on Table 6, the average frequencies and percentages of various revision functions triggered by feedback, as well as students’ own revisions, can be observed for the five students. Table 6 shows that expansion of information is the most common type of revision, with 114 instances (38.3%), which indicates that supervisors generally prioritized content elaboration as a core direction of their feedback. Deletion of information, with 48 instances (16.1%), ranks second, closely followed by alteration of form (42 instances, 14.1%). This suggests that content reduction and linguistic refinement were also important parts of the feedback.

Table 6: Frequency and Percentage of Revision Functions by Supervisory Feedback

Revision Function	Number	Percentage
Expansion of information	114	38.3%
Deletion of information	48	16.1%
Alteration of form	42	14.1%
Editing / proofreading	33	11.1%
Reorganization of information	26	8.7%
Students’ own revision	18	6.0%

No revision	12	4.0%
Improvement of coherence	5	1.7%
Total	298	100%

Technical revisions including both alteration of form and proofreading collectively account for 25.2%, reflecting an emphasis on adherence to formal writing conventions. However, improvement of coherence appears only five instances (1.7%), highlighting less emphasis on logical and cohesive structuring. Notably, students' own revisions account for only 6%, revealing a general deficiency in students' ability to revise independently. The data also reveal 12 instances (4%) of no revision, which may indicate that certain feedback was not implemented.

Overall, the students' revisions show that supervisor feedback helped them add content and fix technical errors. However, students still struggled with logical thinking and revising on their own, especially when it came to improving coherence and making changes without being told.

Qualitative Descriptions of Changes Students Made in Their Writing:

Table 7 shows that a total of 298 revisions were made by the five students across the two revision stages. In terms of overall revision volume, the first response (R1) was more active than the second response (R2), with R1 accounting for 62.1% (185 instances) compared to R2's 37.9% (113 instances). Students revised a lot after the first round of feedback, but made fewer changes in the second round, showing a common pattern of many revisions at first, fewer later.

Table 7: The Frequency of Changes in Writing Based on Five Students' Responses

Revision Function	S1-R1	S1-R2	S2-R1	S2-R2	S3-R1	S3-R2
Alteration of form	5(1.7%)	3(1.0%)	10(3.4%)	15(5.0%)	3(1.0%)	2(0.7%)
Reorganization of information	8(2.7%)	0(0.0%)	2(0.7%)	1(0.3%)	1(0.3%)	2(0.7%)
Improvement of coherence	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.3%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.3%)	1(0.3%)
Deletion of information	12(4.0%)	5(1.7%)	4(1.3%)	4(1.3%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.3%)
Expansion of information	26(8.7%)	8(2.7%)	16(5.4%)	13(4.4%)	9(3.0%)	4(1.3%)
No revision	2(0.7%)	2(0.7%)	0(0.0%)	5(1.7%)	1(0.3%)	0(0.0%)
Students' own revision	4(1.3%)	0(0.0%)	10(3.4%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Editing / proofreading	3(1.0%)	1(0.3%)	3(1.0%)	4(1.3%)	2(0.7%)	0(0.0%)
Total	60 (20.1%)	19 (6.4%)	46 (15.4%)	42 (14.1%)	17 (5.7%)	10 (3.4%)

Table 7: The Frequency of Changes in Writing Based on Five Students' Responses
(Continued)

Revision Function	S4-R1	S4-R2	S5-R1	S5-R2	Total
Alteration of form	1(0.3%)	2(0.7%)	1(0.3%)	0(0.0%)	42(14.1%)
Reorganization of information	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	10(3.4%)	2(0.7%)	26(8.7%)
Improvement of coherence	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.3%)	1(0.3%)	5(1.7%)
Deletion of information	4(1.3%)	2(0.7%)	9(3.0%)	7(2.3%)	48(16.1%)
Expansion of information	3(1.0%)	7(2.3%)	12(4.0%)	15(5.0%)	114(38.3%)

No revision	2(0.7%)	2(0.7%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	12(4.0%)
Students' own revision	0(0.0%)	3(1.0%)	0(0.0%)	2(0.7%)	18(6.0%)
Editing / proofreading	4(1.3%)	3(1.0%)	11(3.7%)	2(0.7%)	33(11.1%)
Total	14(4.7%)	19(6.4%)	44(14.8%)	29(9.7%)	298(100%)

In Excerpt 13 from the present study, the revision journey of the student (S1) from draft 1 through draft 3 reflects the interaction between supervisory feedback and student uptake.

In draft 1, the student (S1) wrote in section 1.1 introduction: “This research will go further on interpersonal communication used in Instagram platform with an insights of different communication pattern such as new function on the platform called Instagram TV apart from comments, IG Live and IG story. Therefore, this study will fill in the research gap by analyzing the interpersonal communication on Instagram and the founder’s language use.(from S1-D1)” The supervisor responded with both directive and referential feedback.

Here, the supervisor (T1) gave comments on the content of the original text of draft 1. For example, “Rewrite yellow【*Directive -tell what to do on content】, you are not supposed to mention yr study, this part is supposed to be positive justification, i.e. studies on xxx will provide a better understanding of blah blah 【*Referential-providing info on content】.” The directive comment clearly instructed the student (S1) to revise a specific section, while the referential comment provided contextual information about the rhetorical function of that part of the text. The student (S1) revised draft 1 accordingly by expanding the information and adding a specific research objective in draft 2, In response, the student revised his draft 2 following the feedback to: “Studies on interpersonal communication strategies will provide a better understanding regarding the strategic way on how the founder promotes their products and how the audience reacts to the post by deciding to buy or even already bought the products.” This revision reflects partial uptake of the feedback. The student removed direct reference to their own study and replaced it with a more general justification, showing an understanding of genre conventions. However, the justification still lacks depth in framing a clear research gap, and the expression remains somewhat awkward and vague.

In response to the student’s first revision, the supervisor (S1) provided additional feedback like “There is no argument on gap but just leave it since you are not able to improve it.【*Referential-provide information on content】 Need to move on to collect data.【*Directive-instruction on content】”. This feedback implies recognition of the student’s limited ability to articulate a theoretical justification, suggesting that further revision at this point may not be productive.

However, in draft 3, the student (S1) did not revise the sentence further, keeping the version from draft 2 unchanged. This stagnation illustrates the limit of feedback uptake when the student (S1) faces conceptual or linguistic challenges. It also shows the dynamic nature of scaffolding: the supervisor initially provided detailed input but later adjusted expectations and directed the student to proceed, highlighting a balance between ideal academic standards and practical constraints.

Excerpt 13 (from the present study)
S1’s draft 1

This research will go further on interpersonal communication used in Instagram platform with an insights of different communication pattern such as new function on the platform called Instagram TV apart from comments, IG Live and IG story. Therefore, this study will fill in the research gap by analyzing the interpersonal communication on Instagram and the founder's language use.

S1's draft 2

Studies on interpersonal communication strategies will provide a better understanding regarding the strategic way on how the founder promotes their products and how the audience reacts to the post by deciding to buy or even already bought the products.

S1's draft 3

Studies on interpersonal communication strategies will provide a better understanding regarding the strategic way on how the founder promotes their products and how the audience reacts to the post by deciding to buy or even already bought the products.

At the individual level, S1 and S2 had the most active responses in the first response to feedback, making 60 and 46 revisions respectively. S3 had the fewest total revisions, with only 27 instances, suggesting a relatively conservative response to feedback. Notably, S4 and S5 demonstrated higher engagement in the second response to feedback. In particular, S4 made more revisions in R2 (19 instances) than in R1 (12 instances), indicating a rebound in revision activity.

Regarding the distribution of revision functions, expansion of information was the most common type, with 114 instances (38.3%), especially prominent in S1-R1 (26 instances) and S5-R2 (15 instances), reflecting the general emphasis supervisors placed on content elaboration. Deletion of information ranked second with 48 instances (16.1%), peaking in S1-R1 (12 instances) and S5-R1 (9 instances), suggesting that some supervisors emphasized content reduction. For example, Excerpt 14 illustrates a revision instance on by S1 based on feedback from the supervisor. A comparative analysis of the three drafts of S1 clearly illustrates the student's revision trajectory and progress under the guidance of supervisor feedback. Draft 1 revealed a clear lack of theoretical depth, which the supervisor addressed through three types of feedback: referential feedback (indicating the need to incorporate theoretical support), directive feedback (explicitly requesting a distinction between theoretical and practical implications), and expressive feedback (criticizing inadequate literature engagement). The student responded actively in draft 2.

The replacement of "consumers" with "founders," which reflects a precise lexical adjustment, and the refinement of the transitional expression from "therefore" to "thus," contributing to enhanced linguistic formality and coherence. The second draft also features the removal of redundant information (e.g., eliminating repetitive statements) and the expansion of information, exemplified by the addition of an entirely new paragraph beginning with "All the seven modest fashion brands...preferences." This addition not only incorporates concrete industry data (seven brands) but also articulates the research value through an analysis of audience preferences.

Draft 3 builds upon these changes by maintaining draft 2's focus on the target audience while introducing a fully developed paragraph on practical implications. The previously vague statement "boost small business" is expanded into a concrete articulation of applied value—namely, "helping emerging entrepreneurs understand interpersonal communication strategies".

This marks a substantial transformation from merely describing research activity to clearly expressing the significance of the study.

Excerpt 14

S1's draft 1 and the supervisor's (T1) comments

"The theoretical significance of the study is that the finding will discover how interpersonal communication used by the consumers to influence their target audience. This study will also discover some of their interpersonal communication strategies used in persuading the social media users that may be outside their target audience in buying their products. Therefore, social media is a significant platform to promote products for the founders even though it might be out of their target audience. **[comment] Sig of the study is not the place for you to say what you WILL DO. It is to say the great importance of your results, when you get them later [*Referential -provide information on content]. To write theoretical sig, you need to know the gap because here, you tell people how ppl can now understand things better once you get the results. Practical sig – write about the businesses and how they benefit from your future results [*Directive --tell what to do on content]"**

S1's draft 2 and the supervisor's (T1) comments

"The theoretical significance of the study is that the finding will discover how interpersonal communication used by the founders [*Alteration of form] to influence their target audience. This study will also discover some of their interpersonal communication strategies used in persuading the social media users that may be outside their target audience in buying their products. **[*Deletion of information]**All the seven modest fashion brands focus mainly on one target audience which is female,[*Alteration of form] thus from this study, they will acknowledge their target audience preferences towards their products. **[*Expansion of information]** **[comment] This is poorly written because you have agak-agak idea of your study. Not enough readings. When you wrote summaries, you didn't understand much. Therefore, could not synthesise to write the gap in Intro. Which is why you cannot write the theoretical sig here. [*Expressive-criticism on content] Practical sig not written too. [*Expressive-criticism on content] Who can benefit from your results? What will it help them to do?[*Directive-eliciting information on content]"**

S1's draft 3

"The theoretical significance of the study is that the finding will discover how interpersonal communication used by the founders to influence their target audience. This study will also discover some of their interpersonal communication strategies used in persuading the social media users that may be outside their target audience in buying their products. All the seven modest fashion brands focus mainly on one target audience which is female, thus from this study, they will acknowledge their target audience preferences towards their products.

The practical significance of the study is that it is important to boost small business and e-commerce by doing this study so that can acknowledge the interpersonal communication strategies used by the founders of the modest fashion brands, thus, this study will benefit small business and entrepreneurs that is new to the industry to step up their business. **[*Expansion of information]"**

Alteration of form (14.1%) and editing/proofreading (11.1%), were particularly dense in S2-R2 (15 instances of form alteration) and S5-R1 (11 instances of proofreading), indicating a greater need for language and formatting guidance for these students, for example, Excerpt 15 from drafts 2 and draft 3 of S2 in the present study. In contrast, improvement of coherence accounted for only 1.7% (5 instances), scattered across a few stages (e.g., S3-R1), revealing a general neglect of guidance on logical flow and textual cohesion.

Excerpt 15

S2's draft 2 and the supervisor's (T2) comments

"This study involves 100 of ESL students across Malaysia that typically have a native language other than English, such as Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, or one of the various indigenous languages spoken in the country (Mohd Ali & Ayob, 2017).

[comment] use present future, will involve, will conduct etc. [*referential provide info on appropriateness]"

S2's draft 3

"This study will involve (*Alteration of Form)100 of ESL students across Malaysia that typically have a native language other than English, such as Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, or one of the various indigenous languages spoken in the country (Mohd Ali & Ayob, 2017)."

Excerpt 15 illustrates a revision made by S2 in response to the supervisor's feedback. S2 changed the verb tense from the simple present to the simple future, as the draft in question is a research proposal rather than a completed research report. This shift in draft 3 aligns the verb tense with other future-oriented expressions mentioned in the feedback (e.g., "will conduct"), thereby enhancing temporal consistency and improving the academic rigor of the text. Additionally, this change reflects what Boiarsky (1983) terms a "voice change", wherein the verb tense is modified without altering the core content. Such a formal adjustment significantly contributes to the appropriateness of academic expression.

Students' own revisions were scarce, as seen in Table 7, with only 18 instances (6%) in total. Apart from S2's draft 2 (10 instances) and S4's draft 3 (3 instances), self-initiated revisions were virtually absent, indicating a serious deficiency in students' independent revision capabilities. For example, Excerpt 16 from the present study illustrates an instance of self-initiated revision by S2 in the absence of supervisor feedback. In draft 1, the student employed a vague expression-"usage and purpose"-to define the research objective. In the second draft, this was precisely revised to "usage of interactive video games". By introducing "interactive video games" as a specific research medium, S2 narrowed the scope of the study from the broad domain of ESL learning behaviors to the more defined area of digital game-based learning. This revision exemplifies the academic writing trajectory of moving "from vagueness to specificity", while also highlighting the non-linear nature of academic writing development among second language (L2) learners.

Excerpt 16.

S2's draft 1

"The aim of this study is to investigate the usage and purpose of ESL (English as a Second Language) students to enhance their English-speaking skills. To achieve the aim of the study, the objectives were:"

S2's draft 2

“The aim of this study is to investigate the usage of interactive video games [*student’s own change] of ESL (English as a Second Language) students to enhance their English-speaking skills. To achieve the aim of the study, the objectives were:”

To sum up, a comparison among students reveals varied revision trajectories. S1 showed a decline from draft 2 (60 instances, 20.1%) to draft 3 (19 instances, 6.4%) and S5 was from draft 2 (44 instances, 14.8%) to draft 3 (29 instances, 9.7%), while S2 remained relatively stable from draft 2 (46 instances, 15.4%) to draft 3 (42 instances, 14.1%). These patterns offer valuable insights into how students make revisions in response to supervisory feedback. Overall, the findings suggest that students focused more on content-level additions and deletions following supervisory feedback, while writing aspects such as logical cohesion and coherence were less frequently addressed.

5. Discussion

The study on the linguistic functions of supervisors’ feedback on undergraduate theses have led to two key findings which will be discussed.

Firstly, directive feedback remained prominent across drafts, as recurring errors and weak logical flow required supervisors to provide consistent, explicit guidance. Repeated instruction and signposting were essential in helping novice writers improve coherence and address persistent issues. The results indicate that supervisors primarily use directive feedback in their comments to instruct supervisees in taking or avoiding specific actions in their writing, similar to the findings of Nurie (2018) on written feedback from eight supervisors at Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia. Directive feedback, often in the form of questions or statements, helped students articulate their ideas more clearly by highlighting ambiguities and guiding revisions, particularly regarding theoretical frameworks and research designs. However, this finding contrasts with the results of Kumar and Stracke (2007). Through a qualitative analysis of written feedback on a doctoral thesis draft, Kumar and Stracke (2007) found that referential feedback was the most frequently used type and considered it the easiest to implement for PhD supervisors. Supervisees also perceived referential feedback as the easiest to process, allowing them to quickly revise and improve their work. Moreover, both supervisors and supervisees in Kumar and Stracke’s (2007) study believed that editorial and organizational issues should not appear in a PhD thesis. The supervisee was particularly cautious about editorial errors, viewing them as a reflection of the author’s attentiveness. As a result, they maintained strict control over these aspects during revision, ensuring consistency in style and improving the readability of the final draft. Meanwhile, the finding in this study contrasts with the study by Neupane Bastola (2021) who examined supervisory comment on English medium master’s theses in the English-as-a-foreign-language context of Nepal. Neupane Bastola (2021) found that expressive comment (48.78%) dominated comment, higher than referential (28.46%) and directive comment (22.76%). Directive comment are useful as they provide clear, operational suggestions that help students make targeted improvements in specific aspects of their thesis writing (Syafi’i et al., 2024). This prominence of directive comment stems from one key factor. The persistent errors and weak argumentative structures in student writing require repeated and explicit guidance, particularly suitable for undergraduate students as young or novice researchers. While other feedback types, such as referential or expressive, might have a greater impact for graduate students who have more research experience.

One clear trend emerged from the analysis. For some supervisors like T1 and T5, the amount of feedback significantly decreases in the third draft. For example, the supervisor T1 provides more directive instructions in the initial stages and expect the student to internalize and apply these comments as they revise. Similarly, eliciting information appears more in draft 2 but decreases in draft 3, indicating that as the student refines writing, they require less prompting. Vygotsky (1978) defined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). He also noted that “what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 211), highlighting the transformative potential of guided learning. Thus, in guiding student writing process, feedback functions as a form of scaffolding, helping students understand the supervisors’ comments and gradually take on the responsibility of developing as legitimate authors in their respective academic fields. The supervisor-student relationship is dynamic, evolving over time from an expert-novice model to a more collaborative and cooperative relationship.

Although data tracking students’ revision skills (Bell, 2002; Jones, 2001) are among the most valuable for research, the collection and analysis of such data pose challenges. On one hand, this challenge primarily stems from the complex mapping between supervisor feedback language functions and student revision functions. First, supervisor feedback language function is coded as semantically complete textual chunks, the length and structural composition of which vary dynamically depending on the specific purpose of the feedback. Second, the relationship between feedback functions and revision functions is not a straightforward one-to-one correspondence; rather, it is characterized by multidimensional and intersecting influences. Specifically, on the one hand, multiple feedback functions (e.g., a combination of directive and expressive comments) may result in a single revision action or even no revision at all. Empirical analysis has revealed a key pattern: supervisor feedback language function influences both the likelihood and depth of students’ revisions. On the other hand, some L2 students’ revisions may be self-initiated (Williams, 2004) rather than directly attributed to specific feedback (Hyland, 2003). When Vygotsky (1987, p. 209) first introduced the concept in *Thinking and Speech*, he pointed out that “with collaboration, direction, or some kind of help the child is always able to do more and solve more difficult tasks that he can independently”. While this observation was considered self-evident, Vygotsky (1987) emphasized that the key question lies not in the helper’s knowledge itself, but in understanding how such assistance contributes to the child’s learning and development. It is worth noting that some students in this study demonstrated a tendency to revise proactively. This suggests that by applying the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, supervisors guided students in understanding the feedback, which helped them gradually develop greater learner autonomy and take more responsibility for self-revision and independent learning. This highlights the positive role of feedback in fostering students’ autonomous learning abilities.

Secondly, the study found that supervisor feedback most frequently focused on content-related issues, which prompted students to primarily adopt expansion of information revision function. While deleting some redundant content, students supplemented key information to enhance the completeness and clarity of their arguments. When supervisors pointed out issues of logical coherence, students demonstrated a variety of revision strategies, including paragraph reorganization, content rewriting, and the addition of logical connectors. The finding is consistent with Zhang’s (2020) findings, whereby three second language learners showed varying attitudes toward the Automated Writing Evaluation feedback. Although all three

evaluated their writing after analyzing the feedback, they adopted noticeably different revision approaches, reflecting a preference for diverse revision activities during the drafting process.

6. Conclusions

The study on the language functions of feedback provided by second language supervisors and how students respond to supervisors' feedback during the process of guiding undergraduate thesis writing over one semester showed the frequent use of directive feedback, while referential and expressive feedback are used relatively less. Tracking the type of supervisory feedback showed a dynamic evolution of the supervisor-student relationship by draft 3. The findings show that while directive feedback dominated the first two drafts, there was a reduction in both the quantity and directiveness of comments by draft 3, indicating reduced scaffolding. This suggests the importance of examining how students engage with feedback during revision to better assess its impact on their writing development.

The findings of the study can serve as a reference for supervisors to enhance the effectiveness of guiding undergraduate thesis writing. Supervisors should moderately reduce directive feedback in the early and middle drafts and instead provide more informative comments to gradually foster students' ability to revise independently.

It is important to note that although this study focuses on students' revision strategies following supervisor feedback, there are some limitations. In particular, the study does not explore the underlying motivations behind students' revision behaviors, whether they are directly influenced by the feedback received or driven by students' own judgment. Future research could adopt qualitative approaches, such as student interviews, to gain deeper insights into students' genuine responses and thought processes regarding feedback. Additionally, future studies should investigate the internal factors that contribute to individual differences in students' responses to feedback, with the goal of optimizing personalized supervisory strategies.

Second, due to the small sample size, the generalizability of the findings may be affected. However, the small sample size is unavoidable. There were only 20 lecturers in the degree program in charge of supervising the students. As only one student was selected per lecturer, this limited the sample size to a maximum of 20. However, not all the lecturers agreed to provide their comments for analysis. Some lecturers gave verbal comments instead of writing them in the document. Other lecturers had students who submitted only one draft of writing per chapter. Three drafts of the same piece of writing could not be obtained for analysis. Given these constraints, only five students' drafts were analyzed but the total number of pieces of writing analyzed was 15 (three per student). The total number of comments and changes were adequate to see patterns of changes in the semester.

To expand the scope of data collection, future researchers can collect samples from various academic disciplines and encompass different sections of student writing (e.g., introduction, methodology, results) for analysis. This will provide insights on key factors influencing the characteristics of written supervisory feedback, such as disciplinary differences. Next, the present study showed a relatively low proportion of affective feedback. This phenomenon should be investigated further through interviews with the lecturers to find out reasons and preferences for their feedback because Kumar and Stracke (2007) and Stracke and Kumar (2016) showed that expressive feedback was useful in fostering students' academic writing development. These studies will lead to optimization of academic mentoring practices and support the enhancement of students' research capabilities.

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