

"Chasing my supervisor all day long like a hungry child seeking her mother!":

Students' perceptions of supervisory feedback

Abstract

Students' perceptions of supervisory feedback can have a profound impact on their engagement with and agency in learning. Understanding students' perceptions is vital to tailoring feedback to their needs. However, little is known about student perceptions of supervisory feedback on master's theses. To address this lacuna, the present study collected feedback perceptions with a written questionnaire from 434 students in four disciplines (English Education, English Studies, Physics, and Engineering) at a Nepalese university. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that the students as a group did not receive sufficient supervisory support and found their supervisors' feedback practices unsatisfactory. Despite the inadequate support, they reported emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement with the supervisory feedback that they received, and their perceptions of supervisory feedback significantly predicted their self-reported engagement. Furthermore, perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement varied significantly across the disciplines. Implications are derived from these findings for improving supervisory feedback practices.

Keywords: master's thesis; supervisory feedback; student perceptions; student engagement; Nepalese higher education

Introduction

Students' perceptions of supervisory feedback can significantly influence their engagement with such feedback, sense of responsibility, and agency in learning (Davis & Dargusch, 2015) by mediating their learning process (Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). While positive perceptions can enhance academic satisfaction and learning (e.g., de Kleijn, Meijer, Pilot, & Brekelmans, 2014; Harks, Rakoczy, Hattie, Besser, & Klieme, 2014), negative perceptions may result in frustration, alienation, plummeting self-esteem, and suboptimal engagement with feedback (Carless, 2006; de Kleijn et al., 2014). Since feedback is a dialogic process, it remains incomplete without meaningful engagement on the student's part (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Although staff tend to believe that students do not engage with the feedback that they provide (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017), "relatively little is known about how students perceive feedback and even less about the immediate influence of this perception on further

learning processes” (Harks et al., 2014, p. 272). Against this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate how master’s students perceive various aspects of supervisory feedback on their theses, to what extent they engage with such feedback, and how disciplinary background may influence student perceptions and engagement.

Purposes of supervisory feedback

The primary purpose of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between students’ current and desired levels of performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) by providing guidance and support for the next level of development (Carter & Kumar, 2017). Effective feedback informs students of their strengths and weaknesses, contains learning-rich information for improving their future work, and encourages them to set appropriate goals for further development (Carless, 2006). In the long run, effective feedback nurtures students’ “capabilities for independent judgment, problem-solving, self-appraisal and reflection” (Yang & Carless, 2013, p. 286) and socializes them into their disciplinary community's discursive and knowledge-making practices (Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2014). **In general, feedback has “the potential to determine the successful outcome of a student's learning” (Zhang & Hyland, 2021, p. 35).** Therefore, students need to appreciate “the purpose of feedback processes and how they can operate to their benefit” (Henderson, Molloy, Ajjawi, & Boud, 2019, p. 22). However, despite their importance, purposes of supervisory feedback “in master’s thesis projects are rarely researched” (de Kleijn, Bronkhorst, Meijer, Pilot, & Brekelmans, 2016 p. 1464). A very small body of previous research showed that students who truly appreciated the purposes of thesis writing and supervisory feedback were motivated to learn research skills and possessed a greater sense of commitment, agency, and responsibility for their research than those who did not do so (Anderson, Day, & McLaughlin, 2008; Katikireddi & Reilly, 2017). **Furthermore, students’ awareness of feedback goals was found to be one of the “most important determinants of feedback seeking [practices]” (Joughin, Boud, Dawson, & Tai, 2021, p. 5).** Thus, more research on students’ views of the purposes of supervisory feedback and thesis writing is needed to understand their needs and improve feedback practices.

Foci of supervisory feedback

It is worth noting that conducting research and reporting it in academic discourse are demanding tasks for novice researchers, such as graduate students, irrespective of their language background (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010; Carter & Kumar, 2017), but the

challenges are particularly pronounced in the case of English-as-an-additional-language students (Bitchener et al., 2010; Yu, Zhang, Zheng, Yuan, & Zhang, 2019). Extant research has demonstrated that students writing a thesis generally struggle to communicate effectively at the macro level (i.e., paying attention to the intended audience and purposes, developing and expressing arguments in a coherent manner, and distinguishing their ideas from those borrowed from the literature) and the micro level (i.e., formatting, spelling, grammar, and bibliographical referencing) (Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz, & Nunan, 1998). It is worth noting that thesis writing does not only involve a final product but is a lengthy process that consists in selecting a researchable topic, reviewing the relevant literature, deciding on an appropriate methodology, conducting the planned research, and interpreting the empirical results. Students may face challenges in all these respects (Hajar, 2018). Arguably, the process of thesis writing is more important than the product itself. The effectiveness of the process largely depends on the nature of support that students receive because “most of the real work of research training is done in the dissertation itself” (Maunder, Gordon-Finlayson, Callaghan, & Roberts, 2012, p. 31). In this regard, the areas that supervisors focus on in their feedback can play a significant role in helping students overcome challenges they face and socializing them into their disciplinary community. A limited body of extant research (e.g., Basturkmen et al., 2014) revealed that supervisors focused on various aspects (e.g., content, coherence/organization, expected components of a thesis, and language and academic writing conventions). While students found feedback on these aspects beneficial (Xu, 2017), a recent study (Authors, in press a) also showed that many students were unsatisfied with the feedback that they received because it did not sufficiently address their feedback needs. Since the main goal of supervisory feedback is to support further learning, it is crucial to explore students’ perceptions of feedback foci so that supervisors can design and adapt feedback to their needs and expectations.

Effectiveness and challenges of supervisory feedback

It has now been established that effective coursework feedback is process-oriented and tailored to students’ needs, helps them improve their work, involves them in dialogue, creates opportunities for them to use feedback productively, engages them both cognitively and emotionally, and enhances their self-regulation and zeal for lifelong learning (Beaumont, O’Doherty, & Shannon, 2011; Carless, 2006; Yang & Carless, 2013). Previous studies on PhD students also demonstrated that they welcome and appreciated feedback that challenged and helped them expand their thinking and supported them to find their voice (Eyres, Hatch,

Turner, & West, 2001), assumed a suggestive rather than an authoritative tone, enhanced their autonomy and intellectual development, and promoted a respectful and trustful supervisor-student relationship (Denis, Colet, & Lison, 2018).

Although supervisors and students are the main stakeholders of the feedback process, its effectiveness is mediated by various factors (Kumar & Stracke, 2017; Author 1, in press a). First, students may find it difficult to communicate in academic discourse and utilize feedback productively because of their suboptimal academic language proficiency (Beddoe & Maidment, 2017; Bitchener et al., 2010). Students with insufficient academic language proficiency are likely to be further disadvantaged because their writing may elicit supervisory feedback focusing on linguistic accuracy at the expense of in-depth feedback on content and argument development (Salter-Dvorak, 2017). Second, some supervisors may not have enough time to provide their students with detailed, in-depth, and constructive feedback due to their multiple responsibilities (Beaumont et al., 2011; Carter & Kumar, 2017; Authors, in press a). Third, some supervisors may only have limited experience to draw on to support their students because they have hardly received any formal and systematic preparation for the complex role of supervision (Other and Author 2, 2019). In some cases, master's thesis supervisors might even lack the experience of writing a thesis themselves (Author 1, in press a). Fourth, supervisors' limited capabilities are, at times, reported to have hindered rather than **facilitated** the process of thesis writing (Pokhrel, 2020). Finally, students' limited access to academic resources may hamper their ability "to understand and make use of the provided comments" (Esterhazy, 2019, p. 78). Therefore, it is vital to explore what constitutes effective feedback for students writing their master's theses and what challenges they face.

Student engagement with supervisory feedback

Effective feedback is a dialogic process that engenders student engagement (Henderson et al., 2019; Winstone & Carless, 2020), and feedback is impactful only when students understand and act on it (de Kleijn et al., 2016, 2016; **Price, Handley, & Millar, 2011**). Engagement has multiple dimensions: affective, behavioural, and cognitive (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Yu et al., 2019). *Affective engagement* involves both positive (e.g., motivation and interest) and negative (e.g., boredom, sadness, and anxiety) emotions experienced in relation to feedback (Han & Hyland, 2019; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Such emotions mostly hinge upon the types of comments that students receive. While positive comments may provide students with a sense of support, encouragement, and the incentive to act on feedback (Finn & Zimmer, 2012), too much criticism can damage students' self-confidence (Henderson et

al., 2019) and may even lead to failure and eventual drop-out (Tai, Dawson, Bearman, & Ajjawi, 2019). *Behavioural engagement* refers to students' involvement and participation in desirable learning activities leading to a successful outcome (Fredricks et al., 2004). It includes "effort, intensity, persistence, determination, and perseverance in the face of obstacles and difficulties" (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 24). It is worth noting that behaviourally engaged students tend to elicit better academic support (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). *Cognitive engagement* involves students' "investment in deep learning, self-regulation, perceived future relevance of learning, thoughtfulness, and willingness to exert necessary efforts" (Author 1, in press a, p. 3).

Contrary to staff's generally held beliefs regarding students' inaction on feedback (Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011), students reported that they engaged with feedback (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017; Author 1, in press a). Students' engagement may remain invisible to supervisors if there is no observable change in their behaviour and performance. However, even "no change" may be the outcome of engagement if a student rejects feedback comments after careful consideration (Xu, 2017). Students' passionate and deep engagement with thesis writing may lead to "authentic transformations in knowledge, understanding, and perspective" (Cooper, 2019, p. 12). Previous research exploring the interrelationship between different dimensions of engagement has suggested that students' emotional engagement played a significant role in their thesis writing and determined their level of self-regulation (i.e., cognitive engagement) (Wagener, 2018). In this regard, the few extant studies, mostly utilizing a case study design, suggested that good supervisor-student relationships, better supervisory support, frequent communication, constructive discussion, and students' trust on their supervisors contributed to students' engagement with supervisory feedback (Wagener, 2018; Zheng, Yu, Wang, & Zhang, 2020). A large-scale study of how students view their own engagement with supervisory feedback can provide useful insights into both issues impeding their engagement and factors promoting their agency in learning.

Disciplinary variation

Supervisory feedback occurs in a specific disciplinary culture, that is, "sets of taken-for-granted values, attitudes, and ways of behaving" (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 23). With regard to knowledge making, disciplinary cultures vary in terms of "characteristics in the objects of enquiry; the nature of knowledge growth; the relationship between the researcher and knowledge; enquiry procedures; extent of truth claims and criteria for making them; the results of research" (Becher & Trowler, 2001, pp. 35-36). Based on their cultural

characteristics, disciplines are broadly divided into four groups: hard-pure (e.g., Physics), soft-pure (e.g., History), hard-applied (e.g., Engineering), and soft-applied (e.g., Education) (Becher & Trowler, 2001). The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of a discipline require distinct rhetorical and discourse conventions to encode its epistemic (knowledge) and social (knower) relations (Author 2, 2018). Such disciplinary conventions have been revealed, for example, in the use of various linguistic features in academic discourse (Author 2 and Other, 2015; Other & Author 2, 2021). Thus, discipline-specific language use is an important window on the inner workings of a discipline, and academic discourse provides a crucial means of socializing novices into disciplinary knowledge-making practices (Dysthe, 2002; Authors, in press b).

The socializing role of academic discourse has important implications for thesis writing and supervisory feedback as paramount avenues “for understanding the values, ideologies and research perspectives that are prioritized in the students’ area/s of study” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2019, p. 4). Disciplinary influences on supervision and feedback practices, however, have been an under-researched topic. While a few studies (Basturkmen et al., 2014; Bitchener et al., 2010) found little disciplinary variation in feedback practices, other studies (Authors, in press a, in press b) provided some empirical evidence of the impact of disciplinary culture on supervisory feedback. More relevant to the present study, Ylijoki’s (2000) anthropological study revealed different disciplines’ distinctly different “basic values, norms and aspirations” (Ylijoki, 2000, p. 341). For example, Sociology and Psychology underscore the virtues of intrinsic motivation, theoretical work, critical thinking, originality, open discussion, intellectual growth, long-term devotion, academic freedom, and alternative perspectives. On the other hand, following a ready model uncritically, getting the degree done in a hurry, and working for external rewards (e.g., a well-paid job) are viewed negatively. Students in these disciplines are enculturated to a belief in the power of their disciplines to change the plight of the marginalized and the oppressed. In contrast, the applied disciplines (i.e., Public Administration, Computer Science, and Library and Information Science) stress rapid graduation, hard-expertise, practical knowledge, and employment. Such discipline-based perceptions can be expected to have a profound impact on supervisory feedback and student engagement with feedback (Winstone & Carless, 2020). However, inquiry into disciplinary influences on supervisory feedback, student engagement, and their relationship is thin on the ground (K. Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Against this backdrop, the present study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive the purposes, foci, expectations, and challenges of supervisory feedback?
2. What levels of engagement with supervisory feedback do students self-report?
3. Do students' perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement vary across disciplines?
4. How do students' feedback perceptions relate to their self-reported engagement?

Methodology

Research context and participants

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design to collect both quantifiable responses to close-ended questions and qualitative answers to open-ended questions in a questionnaire with a view to triangulating the findings through these two types of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). It was conducted at a comprehensive university in Nepal as part of a larger project on supervisory feedback on master's theses. The university offers two-year master's degree programs in various disciplines, with a thesis written in English being compulsory for the English Education and Engineering programs but optional for the English Studies and Physics programs. Participants were selected from these four disciplines to represent Becher and Trowler's (2001) disciplinary groupings. With due permission from their department, graduates from the target programs who had defended their thesis within the previous 18 months were contacted individually. Altogether 989 students (255 in English Education, 224 in English Studies, 183 in Physics, and 327 in Engineering) had completed their thesis during the period. We contacted around 700 of these students, sent a link to a questionnaire survey administered via Google Forms to the 650 students who initially agreed to participate in the study, and received 462 completed questionnaires. This individualized approach, although time-intensive, offered a valuable opportunity to reach and talk to many potential participants, gain a deeper understanding of their experience, increase the response rate (i.e., around 66%), and receive well-constructed responses to the open-ended questions in the survey. A close scrutiny of the returned questionnaires led to the exclusion of 28 responses because they were either blank ($n = 20$) or marked the same option for all the close-ended questions ($n = 8$). Thus, as summarized in Table 1, valid responses were collected from 434 students (males = 70.51%, females = 29.49%). The students were between the ages of 20 and 32 years ($M = 24.06$, $SD = 2.83$).

Table 1 Distributions of the sample by discipline and gender

Discipline	Male	Female	Total
English Education	58	50	108
English Studies	52	41	93
Physics	74	12	86
Engineering	122	25	147

Instrumentation

A written questionnaire, Student Perceptions of Supervisory Feedback (SPSF), was developed in English to collect the data for this study. Items for the SPSF was generated through a corpus-based analysis of supervisory feedback, interviews with 16 students, and a review of the relevant literature. This process resulted in 73 items covering five different aspects of supervisory feedback, namely feedback purposes, feedback foci, student expectations about supervisory feedback, feedback-related challenges, and student engagement with supervisory feedback. The questionnaire required respondents to indicate their agreement with the given statements on a 6-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was trialled with 10 students and revised to improve its clarity of expression. The revised questionnaire was then piloted with 120 students, and principal component analyses (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation were run on the pilot data to establish the construct validity of the various scales. We chose PCA for two reasons. First, PCA “is a psychometrically sound procedure” (Field, 2009. p. 638) for validating a newly developed instrument. Second, our purpose was to reduce a large number of conceptually related items to an optimal set of items measuring a variable. We did not choose structural equation modelling (SEM) or other similar techniques because our purpose was not to test how well a theoretical model of latent factors fitted to our data. The component solutions of the PCAs from the pilot study were compared with the component structures obtained for the data collected for the main study. The PCAs run on the two datasets yielded the same factor structures, indicating the good construct validity of the scales in the instrument. Table 2 summarizes the scales in the finalized 55-item SPSF and reliability estimates based on the main study dataset.

Table 2. Perceptions of supervisory feedback components and internal consistency estimates

Scale	Number of items	α
Purposes of supervisory feedback	6	.73
Foci of supervisory feedback		
Core research aspects	9	.90
Content	4	.83
Language use & academic writing conventions	7	.88
Student expectations of supervisory feedback	5	.64
Feedback-related challenges		
Students' language constraints	3	.89
Supervisors' time constraints	3	.78
Resource constraints	3	.63
Student engagement with supervisory feedback		
Positive affect	3	.82
Negative affect	3	.71
Cognitive engagement	5	.84
Behavioural engagement	4	.68

Section 1 of the questionnaire consisted of six items describing various purposes of supervisory feedback, for example, developing research/academic writing/independent study skills and applying theoretical knowledge of research to practice. Section 2 comprised 20 items related to feedback on core research aspects (e.g., “I received feedback on research methodology”), language use and academic writing conventions (e.g., “I received feedback on coherence and cohesion [i.e., making ideas/sentences flow well]”), and content (e.g., “I received feedback on the relevance of content”). Section 3 included five items eliciting students' expectations of feedback (e.g., “Supervisors should provide positive comments along with negative comments”). Section 4 contained 9 items concerning supervisors' time constraints (e.g., “My supervisor does not give me enough time”), students' language constraints (e.g., “I find it difficult to express my ideas in English”), and resource constraints (e.g., “I cannot find reference materials related to my study”). Finally, Section 5 included 15 items concerning student engagement: positive affect (e.g., “I look forward to feedback from my supervisor”), negative affect (e.g., “I feel discouraged when I receive negative comments”), cognitive engagement (e.g., “I read feedback carefully to understand it”), and behavioural engagement (e.g., “I talk to my supervisor if I do not understand feedback”). As presented in Table 2, the reliability estimates for the PCA-based scales met the conventional standard. The SPSF also contained two open-ended questions that asked the participants to

share their memorable experiences and offer suggestions for improving supervisory feedback practices. [Appendix A presents the complete questionnaire.](#)

Data analysis

Several steps were taken to code and analyse the data. First, a scale score was computed for each participant by averaging his or her Likert-scale responses over the items on the scale in question. Descriptive statistics were computed for these scale scores to summarize the respondents' perceptions of supervisory feedback (RQ1) and gauge their self-reported engagement (RQ2). Second, a series of one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were run to determine if there were disciplinary variations in perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement (RQ3). Third, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to assess how the students' perceptions would relate to their self-reported engagement (RQ4). In view of previous research (e.g., Author 2 & Other, 2015; Author 2 & Other, 2014) that reported clear differences between hard and soft disciplines, disciplinary background was recoded as a two-level control variable (soft disciplines = English Education and English Studies; hard disciplines = Physics and Engineering) for the regression analyses. Finally, a thematic analysis was conducted via NVivo on the students' responses to the open-ended questions to identify themes relevant to all four research questions formulated for the present study.

The thematic analysis followed the 6-phase procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). To begin, the first author familiarized herself with the data by reading the responses multiple times for “intimately knowing the dataset” (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017, p. 23). Second, the entire dataset was examined to generate initial codes relevant to the research questions through the process of iteration and constant comparison. Third, after all the responses were coded, the related codes (e.g., “clear and timely supervisory support”, “good relation and constant communication”, “motivation, encouragement, and empowerment”, and “identification of reference materials”) were combined to form themes (e.g., “Expectations of supervisory feedback”). Fourth, all the data extracts coded under different themes were reviewed thoroughly, and those that did not fit well were un-coded and re-coded for suitable themes. Fifth, the themes and their sub-themes were named and defined to ensure that they were distinctive and meaningful to answer the research questions (see [Appendix B](#) for the complete list of themes and sub-themes found in our data). The final step involved the selection of relevant data extracts for the write-up of the report. Following the guidelines provided by Terry et al. (2017) and Clarke and Braun (2018) for this version of

thematic analysis, no attempt was made to establish coding reliability because it does not “cohere with the qualitative sensibility that underpins and shapes our approach [i.e., the approach adopted in our study]” (Clarke & Braun, 2018, p. 2). The rigor and trustworthiness of the thematic analysis were achieved through “an organic approach to coding and theme development” (Clarke & Brown, p. 2) that involved “immersion in, or repeated engagement with, the data” (Terry et al., 2017, p. 20).

Results

RQ1: How do students perceive the purposes, foci, expectations, and challenges of supervisory feedback?

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the students’ perceptions of supervisory feedback. A higher mean score indicates greater agreement with the given statements. With regard to the perceived purposes of supervisory feedback, the very high mean score of 5.13/6 indicated the students’ unanimous perceptions of the purposes of supervisory feedback as developing their research and academic writing skills, helping them apply theoretical knowledge of research to practice, and enabling them to make informed decisions when conducting their research.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for scale scores aggregated over disciplines

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Purposes of supervisory feedback	5.13	0.63
Feedback on core research aspects	4.58	0.84
Feedback on content	4.49	0.93
Feedback on language use & academic writing conventions	4.49	0.97
Student expectations of supervisory feedback	5.00	0.68
Students’ language constraints	3.60	1.10
Supervisors’ time constraints	2.62	1.29
Resource constraints	3.93	1.10

Although the students agreed about receiving supervisory feedback on core research aspects (i.e., the various components of a thesis), language and academic writing conventions, and content found in their thesis, their responses to the open-ended questions clearly voiced their dissatisfaction with the feedback received. Many students shared their struggle with core research aspects (e.g., selecting a research topic, reviewing the relevant literature, choosing a theoretical framework, developing a conceptual framework, collecting data, and analysing and discussing findings) and vented their frustration with the inadequate support provided by supervisory feedback. For example, one student confessed that he did

not understand the concept of “theoretical framework” even after completing the thesis. Many students also complained that they did not receive enough support to improve their academic writing.

The mean scale score of 5 also indicated that the students were rather consistent in their expectations of supervisory feedback. They expected to receive positive comments along with constructive suggestions, preferred both oral and written feedback, wanted their views to be respected, and did not like brief comments that lacked guidance for improvement. In their responses to the open-ended questions, they expressed their longings for: a) clear and timely supervisory guidance, b) motivation, encouragement, and empowerment, c) a cordial and trusting supervisor-student relationship, and d) supervisory support in sourcing reference materials. They also desired adequate time for consultation meetings, appointment punctuality, and constructive suggestions to improve their work. Although they recognized the value of critical feedback, they also longed for positive feedback from their supervisors to keep their spirits up in undertaking the arduous task of thesis writing. Some students felt strongly about supervisors “blaming failure on students and taking credit for success”. The common sentiments were that all criticism and no encouragement would make thesis writing an emotively frustrating undertaking. Quite a few students expected their supervisors to be "cooperative", "helpful", "friendly" and “receptive to students’ ideas”. Several students also confided the sufferings that they had to go through because of their supervisors’ humiliating comments.

As regards feedback-related challenges, although the mean score of 3.6 indicated that the students as a group only marginally agreed about having language difficulties, a sizeable number of responses to the open-ended questions described incidents of being “scolded” by supervisors for poor language, “worries about how to reach the targeted pages” because “no ideas were coming”, and constant struggles to paraphrase ideas from reading materials for fear of distorting them. As reflected in the relatively low mean scale score for supervisors’ time constraints, in general, **the students believed that time was not a problem for their supervisors if the latter wanted to provide them with proper guidance or read their thesis carefully**. In their responses to the open-ended questions, many complained that their supervisor was “always... in a hurry”, “was hardly available for a meeting”, “did not reply to [their] mail”, and “was out of reach for more than twenty days”. Sometimes, they had to wait “the whole day” or even “days and weeks” to see their supervisor, had to return without meeting their supervisor after waiting for “6 hours”, and go “to the university four times to

submit the same draft since [the] supervisor was not available". One student vividly described the experience of "chasing my supervisor all day long like a hungry child seeking her mother". Resource constraints were also generally recognized by the participants, as can be seen in the mean scale score of 3.93. Responses to the open-ended questions revealed that some students found it difficult to "interpret and analyse the data properly" because of limited access to references. Resource constraints were also responsible for one student "starting with one topic and completing [his] research on another topic". While the shortage of referencing materials appeared to be particularly acute in the soft disciplines (i.e., English Education and English Studies), research in Physics and Engineering was compromised by the lack of state-of-art laboratory facilities, unstable power supply, Wi-Fi unavailability, and/or computer malfunction.

RQ 2: What levels of engagement with supervisory feedback do students self-report?

The students' self-reported engagement with supervisory feedback was measured by four scales: positive affect, negative affect, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement (see Table 4 for the descriptive statistics). Clearly, they reported high levels of positive affective engagement. In their responses to the open-ended questions, some students shared experience of feeling good when their supervisors "became interested in [their] topic", "encouraged" them, and "helped [them] to find reference materials in the library". They appreciated it when their supervisor "was really kind and cooperative", "motivated them", and "treated [them] as a friend". Students who recognized the learning affordances created by their research found thesis writing a "joyful experience" because it offered them an opportunity to "develop research skills" and competence in self-regulated learning.

Table 4. Students' self-reported engagement with supervisory feedback

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive affect	5.35	0.55
Negative affect	3.87	1.12
Cognitive engagement	5.32	0.54
Behavioural engagement	5.00	0.63

Although the relatively low mean score did not suggest the prevalence of negative affect among the students, negative emotions invoked by supervisory feedback were frequently expressed in the responses to the open-ended questions. Many students identified their supervisors as the source of their negative emotions. Expressions like *disappointment*,

frustration, bitter experience, insulted, worried, scolded, hard times, too much stress, feeling panic, bored, felt like torture, rebuked, terrible, horrible, literally wept, and awful were often used to describe their negative feelings. They felt upset when their supervisors added "new and difficult" requirements, "asked totally irrelevant questions", "gave negative comments in an impolite way", "screamed at [them] using bitter words", and "embarrassed" them. The "lack of proper knowledge of citation and referencing" and the need for "revising [their] work again and again" also frustrated some students. One student equated thesis writing with a terrible choking experience, "like a stone which is stuck in your throat".

As indicated by the mean scale scores, the students reported high levels of cognitive and behavioral engagement with supervisory feedback. Some students who commented on these aspects mentioned that they considered thesis writing and supervisory feedback excellent learning opportunities and revised their writing carefully before submitting it to their supervisor (i.e., cognitive engagement). They worked long hours to accomplish their task and collaborated with their friends to learn new things (i.e., behavioural engagement).

RQ 3: Do students' perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement vary across disciplines?

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the various measures of student perceptions and self-reported engagement, and Table 6 summarizes the results of the one-way ANOVAs conducted to determine if there were statistically significant cross-disciplinary differences in these measures. Significant differences were found in perceptions of feedback foci (i.e., core research aspects, content, language use and academic writing conventions), expectations of supervisory feedback, and feedback-related challenges (i.e., students' language constraints, supervisors' time constraints, and resource constraints). As indicated by the η^2 values in Table 6, the effect sizes for most of these differences were medium ones (i.e., around the critical value of $\eta^2 = .06$).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for perceptions and self-reported engagement by discipline

Scale	EE		ES		PH		EN	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Purposes	5.23	0.55	5.08	0.68	5.18	0.54	5.07	0.68
Feedback foci								
Core research aspects	4.74	0.74	4.49	0.84	4.76	0.73	4.42	0.92
Content	4.74	0.79	4.44	0.87	4.69	0.85	4.23	1.02
Language use & academic writing	4.78	0.87	4.54	0.86	4.79	0.74	4.08	1.07
Expectations of supervisory feedback	5.06	0.72	5.14	0.64	4.83	0.68	4.98	0.65
Feedback-related challenges								
Students' language constraints	3.86	1.02	3.60	1.19	3.43	1.14	3.49	1.06
Supervisors' time constraints	2.50	1.14	2.80	1.40	2.02	0.97	2.94	1.36
Resource constraints	3.69	1.09	3.66	1.12	4.05	1.01	4.22	1.08
Self-reported engagement								
Positive affect	5.44	0.50	5.43	0.52	5.27	0.59	5.29	0.56
Negative affect	3.98	1.03	4.13	1.12	3.31	1.15	3.94	1.07
Cognitive engagement	5.36	0.56	5.26	0.61	5.42	0.42	5.27	0.55
Behavioral engagement	5.02	0.61	4.86	0.77	5.06	0.54	5.03	0.58

Note. EE = English Education, ES = English Studies, PH = Physics, EN = Engineering

Table 6. Results of ANOVAs on perceptions and self-reported engagement ($N = 434$)

Scale	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Purposes	1.65	.177	0.01
Feedback foci			
Core research aspects	5.03	.002	0.03
Content	8.13	.001	0.05
Language use & academic writing conventions	16.61	.001	0.10
Student expectations of supervisory feedback	3.40	.018	0.02
Feedback-related challenges			
Students' language constraints	3.29	.021	0.02
Supervisors' time constraints	10.68	.001	0.07
Resource constraints	7.66	.001	0.05
Self-reported engagement			
Positive affect	2.81	.039	0.02
Negative affect	9.81	.001	0.06
Cognitive engagement	1.91	.128	0.01
Behavioral engagement	1.85	.137	0.01

Bonferroni post hoc tests revealed that the English Education and Physics students received significantly more feedback on core research aspects, content, and language use and academic writing conventions than the Engineering students did (see Table 7). The effect sizes for these pairwise comparisons ranged from medium (i.e., $d = .5$) to large (i.e., $d = .8$). In their responses to the open-ended questions, some Engineering students admitted that they struggled with topic selection and spent their precious time “wandering here and there for a research topic, without knowing what to do and how to do”. They also faced trouble in collecting “relevant data for answering the research questions”. The English Studies students also reported receiving more supervisory feedback on language use and academic writing conventions than the Engineering students did, with the effect size being a medium one. In addition, these students had stronger expectations of balanced, interactive and comprehensive feedback than the Physics students did.

Table 7. Results of post hoc tests for multiple comparisons

Scale	Discipline	Discipline	p	d
Feedback on core research aspects	EE	EN	.013	0.383
	PH	EN	.012	0.409
Feedback on content	EE	EN	.001	0.559
	PH	EN	.001	0.490
Feedback on language use & academic writing conventions	EE	EN	.001	0.718
	PH	EN	.001	0.772
	ES	EN	.001	0.474
Student expectations of supervisory feedback	ES	PH	.016	0.469
Students' language constraints	EE	PH	.035	0.398
	EE	EN	.046	0.356
Supervisors' time constraints	ES	PH	.001	0.648
	EN	PH	.001	0.779
	EN	EE	.034	0.351
Resource constraints	EN	EE	.001	0.488
	EN	ES	.001	0.509
Negative affect	EE	PH	.001	0.614
	ES	PH	.001	0.722
	EN	PH	.001	0.567

Note. EE = English Education, ES = English Studies, PH = Physics, EN = Engineering

The English Education students perceived more acute language constraints than their counterparts in Physics and Engineering did, with medium effect sizes found for the

differences. Consistent with these quantitative results, some English Education students confided in their responses to the open-ended questions that they found it difficult to “generate new ideas”, “get gist from others’ academic work”, “connect ideas with previous research articles” and were “scolded” by their supervisors for poor language. Perceived challenges arising from supervisors’ time constraints were more prominent in English Studies and Engineering than in Physics and English Education, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. Several English Studies students complained that they “waited for their supervisors for hours” to have a supervisory meeting, did not “get an appointment easily” and received feedback only “after three months”. Some Engineering students also had a hard time securing consultation meetings because their supervisors were “super busy”. Finally, the Engineering students as a group perceived greater resource constraints than their counterparts in English Education and English Studies did, with medium effect sizes obtained in both cases. Quite a few Engineering students’ responses to the open-ended questions revealed that they had to wait long for access to a lab and were unable to “conduct required tests for output” or “validate results”. In their views, “the quality of research” in their discipline was suffered from a lack of funding.

Significant cross-disciplinary differences were also found for positive and negative affective engagement with supervisory feedback, with a small and a medium effect size respectively. Bonferroni post hoc tests did not yield any significant pairwise comparison in the case of positive affective engagement but revealed that the English Education, English Studies, and Engineering students reported experiencing more negative emotions than the Physics students did. The effect sizes for the differences were either medium or large. Corroborating the quantitative results, a number of English Education students confided that they were “shouted at”, “threatened”, and “scolded like an enemy”; forced to write their theses “on topics of interest to their supervisors”; and had their proposal and thesis “rejected”. Similarly, some English Studies students were “upset” by their supervisors’ negative comments, frequently had the “terrible experience” of waiting long to meet their supervisors, and faced “embarrassing questions” from their supervisors during the viva. Two English Studies students even described thesis writing as “an emotional tragedy” and a “horrible experience”, respectively. Engineering students’ negative affect resulted from “revising the thesis again and again”; receiving “negative”, “inappropriate” and “irrelevant” comments; and being “constantly interrupted” during the viva.

RQ4: How do students' feedback perceptions relate to their self-reported engagement?

Hierarchical linear regressions were run to examine the relative contribution of students' perceptions of various aspects of supervisory feedback (i.e., purposes, feedback foci, students' expectations, and challenges) to the different types of self-reported engagement with such feedback (i.e., positive affect, negative affect, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement). Disciplinary background (i.e., soft vs. hard disciplines) was entered as a control variable in the first step, and all the perception variables were entered as a block in the second step. The results of the hierarchical linear regressions are summarized in Table 8. While disciplinary background (i.e., soft vs. hard disciplines) accounted for a small but significant amount of variance in positive affect ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\beta = .13$) and negative affect ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\beta = .15$), it did not contribute significantly to cognitive engagement or behavioural engagement. Perceptions of purposes, feedback foci (i.e., core research aspects, content, and language use and academic writing conventions), expectations of feedback, and feedback-related challenges (i.e., students' language constraints, supervisors' time constraints, and resource constraints) collectively accounted for a significant amount of variance (ΔR^2 s = .11 - .20, $ps < .001$) in all four types of engagement with supervisory feedback, over and above disciplinary background.

Perceptions of feedback purposes was a positive predictor of both positive affect and cognitive engagement. Consistent with the quantitatively established relationship, the qualitative data showed that students who appreciated the learning affordances of thesis writing learnt “more and more through thesis writing”, gained “cutting-edge knowledge” and developed various academic, research and technical skills. As a result, they found thesis writing “exciting”, “joyful” and “awesome”, and were “strongly attracted towards research work”. Such students also took challenges positively and sustained their efforts in the face of difficulties because they received encouragement” and “inspiration” from their supervisors.

Feedback on core research aspects was a significant positive contributor to all four types of engagement. Responses to the open-ended questions indicated that such feedback engaged students cognitively in “a critical thinking process” and induced behavioural engagement such as working for “a whole night to revise all the graphs” or conducting numerical simulations “repeatedly”. While criticisms included in such feedback on core research aspects “disappointed” or “frustrated” some students, supervisors' support in “preparing proposals”, “writing methodology”, “applying theory”, “discussing and

interpreting results”, and “developing argument” engendered positive affect in other students. Similarly, expectations of supervisory feedback also positively predicted all four types of engagement. In their responses to the open-ended questions, some students explained that “constructive” and “proper” guidance provided “in a timely manner” with “a sense of respect” would help students overcome fear and anxiety associated with thesis writing, “catch up every step of thesis writing” and “bring out their best” in the form of “a good thesis”.

Students’ language constraints, supervisors’ time constraints, and resource constraints positively predicted negative affect. As reported above, some students with limited English language proficiency struggled to express their ideas in English and received harsh criticisms from their supervisors. The qualitative data also revealed that many students experienced negative emotions because their supervisors did not make enough time for them and deprived them of much-needed support. Furthermore, limited access to resources such as a lab and reference materials impeded progress in thesis research, prevented students from “conducting necessary tests”, and made it difficult to “interpret and discuss data” in relation to the literature. Unsurprisingly, supervisors’ time constraints was a negative predictor of positive affect and cognitive engagement. As one student explained, lack of supervisory time not only “promoted negative attitude towards teacher and university” but also deprived students of much-needed “constructive feedback” to engage in thesis writing and learn from the process.

Table 8. Results of hierarchical regressions predicting self-reported engagement from feedback perceptions and disciplinary background

Predictor	PA		NA		CE		BE	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.02**		.02**		.00		.01	
Disciplinary background		.13**		.15**		-.03		-.07
Step 2	.11***		.19***		.20***		.13***	
Purposes		.12*		-.06		.11*		.07
Core research aspects		.16*		.16*		.17*		.14*
Content		.02		-.04		.08		.06
Language use & writing		-.04		-.10		.03		.11
Expectations of feedback		.15**		.11*		.16***		.14**
Students' language constraints		-.09		.18***		-.06		-.01
Supervisors' time constraints		-.11*		.23***		-.18***		-.01
Resource constraints		.10		.12*		.04		.01

Note. PA = positive affect; NA = negative affect; CE = cognitive engagement; BE = behavioral engagement; * = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

Discussion

Student perceptions of supervisory feedback

The students participating in the survey apparently understood that supervisory feedback potentially offered them valuable opportunities for acquiring and enhancing skills in scholarly writing, independent learning, and academic research; applying theoretical knowledge of research to practice; developing ethical research practices; and making informed decisions regarding research. In general, the students agreed that they received feedback on core research aspects, content, language use and academic writing conventions. However, echoing findings of previous research (e.g., Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Hajar, 2018; Authors, in press a), their responses to our open-ended questions also clearly indicated that they faced great challenges with regard to the same core research aspects (e.g., selection of a researchable topic, review of the relevant literature, development of a strong research design, data analysis, and interpretation of empirical results) and that they were mostly unsatisfied with the quantity and quality of the supervisory feedback that they received. They felt better supported when they were directed to the relevant literature, though this did not appear to be a common practice. Like students in previous studies (e.g., F. Hyland, 2003), our participants valued feedback on language use and academic writing conventions because they lacked confidence in their own language abilities (Ferris & Kurzer, 2019). Consistent with extant research (e.g., Beaumont et al., 2011; Davis & Dargusch, 2015; Harks et al., 2014), they desired adequate supervisory support; motivation, encouragement and empowerment; good supervisor-student relationships; and guidance in locating and accessing research resources. Many of them were, however, utterly frustrated in actual practice when they had only limited guidance, received little informative feedback, were hurt by humiliating supervisory comments, and suffered at the hand of their supervisor. As a result, they did not benefit as much from writing a thesis as they had hoped to (Authors, in press b).

Our respondents, in general, did not seem to think that they suffered serious language constraints, as suggested by the mean scale score (i.e., 3.60/6). There were two possible interpretations of this self-assessment of their language proficiency. First, the three items constituting the scale of students' language constraints did not cover the full range of language difficulties that the students encountered. Second, students with suboptimal language proficiency might have been "largely unaware of just how deficient their expertise is" (Dunning, 2011, p. 249) and, consequently, held a more optimistic view of their English proficiency than was warranted. The responses to our open-ended questions in the survey did

reveal many language difficulties not covered by the scale and the common belief that “corrective linguistic feedback is necessary and beneficial” (Authors, in press b, p. 10), thus supporting the first rather than the second interpretation.

Notably, although the students as a group did not think that their supervisors worked under serious time constraints (i.e., the mean scale score = 2.62/6), there were common complaints that their supervisors did not give them sufficient time and that they had to chase their supervisor for days and weeks for a meeting. The apparent discrepancies were indicative of the students’ unhappiness with their supervisor’s poor time management or unwillingness to make time for them. The students, especially those in the two hard disciplines, recognized the existence of constraints on material resources (i.e., reference materials, laboratory facilities, and financial support), as indicated by the mean scale score of 3.93/6. The lack of adequate access to needed resources could have a negative impact on their research (Esterhazy, 2019; Authors, in press a). The main cause of resource constraints could be attributed to Nepal’s inadequate higher education budget (accounting for only 0.3% of the national budget), most of which is spent on salary (Mathema, 2019). Against the resource constraints, students particularly appreciated their supervisor’s efforts to direct them to free resources, provide them with a collection of references, or introduce them to the latter’s academic networks. However, only a small number of students were lucky enough to receive such support.

Students’ self-reported engagement with supervisory feedback

The students as a group reported a very high level (i.e., mean score = 5.35/6) of positive affective engagement with supervisory feedback. In line with previous findings (Han & Hyland, 2019; Molloy, Noble, & Ajjawi, 2019; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Yu et al., 2019), they mostly associated their positive emotions with supportive, encouraging, and inspiring supervisors who showed genuine interest in their work. The responses to our open-ended questions provided clear evidence that supervisors’ support and care contributed to their students’ positive affective engagement with their feedback on the latter’s research and thesis. Although a mean score of 3.87 for negative affect did not indicate a widespread serious problem, responses to the open-ended questions revealed an abundance of negative emotions, mostly resulting from less than optimal supervisor-student relationships and/or expressly negative and overly judgemental feedback comments. As attested by these responses, students’ humiliating interactions with supervisors and upsetting comments from the latter often resulted in the former’s plummeting self-confidence, demotivation, and a

negative attitude toward thesis writing itself (Henderson et al., 2019; Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). The apparent discrepancies between our quantitative and qualitative results could be explained in terms of who answered the open-ended questions and what they typically put down in their responses. As not all participants replied to these questions, those who did tended to share experiences that stuck in their memory, which were often either very negative or highly positive.

On a more positive note, the students indicated high levels (i.e., 5.32/6 and 5/6) of cognitive and behavioral engagement with thesis writing and supervisory feedback. In their open-ended responses, they shared experience of persisting in the face of difficulties, self-regulating their learning, and valuing learning opportunities made available to them (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). They engaged more with supervisory feedback given by caring, motivating, and inspiring supervisors who were competent and showed genuine interest in their work (see also Davis & Dargusch, 2015). While they attended closely to what they perceived as “meaningful and relevant” comments (Beaumont et al., 2011, p. 680), they were less likely to act on comments that were “non-binding” or were insufficiently detailed (Author 1, in press a, in press b; Zheng et al., 2020).

Disciplinary variation in feedback perceptions and self-reported engagement

As reported earlier, there were significant cross-disciplinary differences in the students’ perceptions of supervisory feedback. The Engineering students reported receiving less feedback on core research aspects, content, language use and academic writing conventions in comparison with their counterparts in English Education, Physics, and English Studies. This difference arose from the predominance of oral feedback in the Engineering program, which limited the amount of supervisory feedback, especially that on written language, which could be provided within a short time frame (Authors, in press a). The significant difference found in expectations of supervisory feedback between the English Studies and Physics students could be interpreted as suggesting the Physics students’ lesser dependency on supervisory feedback due to their stronger academic competence and the availability of peer support. The Physics program was known for attracting academically capable students because of its quality assurance practices, such as competitive admission, merit-based selection of students for thesis writing, close matching of supervisors’ and students’ research interests, and fostering of a collaborative learning culture (Author 1, in press b; Authors, in press a).

The greater language difficulties perceived by the English Education students in

comparison with their counterparts in Physics and Engineering could be explained by a combination of contextual and disciplinary factors. First, because of its lower prestige, the English Education program recruited students with less academic and English competence than those admitted into the Physics and Engineering programs. Second, because of the “greater epistemological separation of ideas and language in hard disciplines than soft ones” (Author 2 & Other, 2019, p. 307), an English Education thesis poses greater language demands than a Physics or an Engineering thesis does, hence the greater language difficulties experienced by the English Education students. Third, in our larger project, we found that many Physics supervisors provided extensive feedback on language use and were willing to help their students polish up the theses, whereas their counterparts in English Education tended to take a more hands-off approach and expected their students to assume responsibility for language use by virtue of their disciplinary specialization in English teaching. Without their supervisors’ extensive linguistic support, coupled with the greater linguistic demands posed by writing a soft-discipline thesis, it was little wonder that the English Education students perceived more language constraints in themselves.

As can be seen in Table 7, the English Studies and Engineering students found insufficient supervisory time a more serious problem than did their counterparts in Physics or English Education. The differences could be attributed to a number of contextual, disciplinary, and/or student-related factors. In our larger project (Authors, in press a), we found that supervisors in the English Studies program had a much heavier supervision load than those in the other programs. In one extreme case, an English Studies supervisor had to supervise 35 master’s students at the same time. Given the large number of students in their charge, it was understandable that they did not have enough time for each student. Furthermore, as a soft-pure discipline, English Studies values the development of personal voice and individual perspectives, hence the common expectation among supervisors that students should work independently. In the case of the Engineering students, the more acutely perceived time constraints appeared to result mainly from the difficulties that their supervisors had in meeting them outside normal office hours and providing oral feedback on their theses because most of these students had a full-time job. Notably, the Engineering students also reported more resource constraints than the English Studies and English Education students did. This difference could be explained by the disciplinary characteristics of their research projects (Becher & Trowler, 2001): To design new or better engineering products requires not only reference materials, as in the case of research projects in English

Studies and English Education, but also access to laboratory facilities and resources, which are rather limited at the focal university.

As regards engagement with supervisory feedback, the Physics students reported experiencing less negative affect than the students in the other three programs did. Several factors could have contributed to the difference. First, Physics supervisors made more time for their supervisees, as noted above, and directed them to free resources (Authors, in press a), which fostered supportive supervisor-student relationships and could reduce the latter's negative emotions when addressing the former's critical feedback (de Kleijn et al., 2014). Second, the greater academic caliber of the Physics students and the stronger supervision of their research would mean better quality of their thesis drafts, hence fewer chances for an inundation of critical comments or exclusively negative feedback, which could easily invoke negative affect in most, if not all, students. Third, the extensive feedback that the Physics students reported receiving on various aspects of their thesis drafts would reduce their confusion and provide clear directions for revision. Finally, the extensive feedback received could decrease the rounds of revision required and, consequently, the frustration typically resulting from many rounds of revision.

Relationships between feedback perceptions and self-reported engagement

The hierarchical regressions revealed interesting and interpretable relationships between the students' feedback perceptions and their self-reported engagement with supervisory feedback, with the effects of disciplinary background being controlled for. The positive associations of perceived feedback purposes with positive affect and cognitive engagement seemed to indicate that those students who understood the purposes of supervisory feedback well not only looked forward to such feedback (i.e., positive affective engagement) but also knew that it would require hard thinking and conscientious effort (i.e., cognitive engagement) to internalize and utilize such feedback. Feedback received on core research aspects significantly predicted positive affect (i.e., active expectation of such feedback) because students understood that such feedback would contribute crucially to the successful completion of their research projects. It positively predicted negative affect because such feedback contained a preponderance of criticisms that could invoke negative emotions such as disappointment and frustration. Feedback on core research aspects also positively predicated both cognitive and behavioral engagement because addressing feedback of this nature typically required both internal (i.e., cognitive) and external (i.e., behavioral) efforts.

These results are in line with Tuononen and Parpala's (2021) finding that those academic

competences addressed by supervisory feedback on core research aspects “are closely interrelated to the deep approach to learning” (p. 5)

Expectations of supervisory feedback (i.e., balanced, constructive, timely, and informative feedback) predicated positive affect because students understood the learning affordances of, and longed for, such feedback from their supervisor. Students who expected such feedback would be also willing to engage cognitively and behaviorally with their supervisors’ feedback. At first blush, the positive association between expectations of supervisory feedback and negative affect was an apparently paradoxical relationship. However, this association could be explained in terms of the predominantly negative (often harsh) feedback that the students actually received counter to their longings for balanced and encouraging feedback (Authors, in press a, in press b). On a related note, students’ language constraints positively predicted negative affect because such constraints often elicited harsh scolding and humiliating comments from supervisors, as attested by some students’ responses to our open-ended questions in the survey. Receiving insufficient attention from supervisors because of their time constraints could undermine students’ positive attitudes toward supervisory feedback (i.e., negative association with positive affect), greatly frustrate them (i.e., negative affect), and reduce their cognitive investment in such feedback. Finally, resource constraints could invoke negative emotions toward supervisory feedback because it often failed to help students alleviate or overcome such constraints, as many students pointed out in their open-ended responses.

The various relationships discussed above lent support to the findings of previous studies that students’ perceptions of positive supervisory support contribute to student satisfaction (de Kleijn, et al., 2014), whereas a perceived lack of support can make them feel deficient and experience plummeting self-esteem and agency (Authors, in press a). In line with the previous studies, our findings demonstrate that engagement with supervisory feedback is shaped and mediated by an array of factors related to students (e.g., their language competence), supervisors (e.g., their emotional intelligence and supervision load), student-supervisor relationship (e.g., mutual trust and respect), and institutional context (e.g., availability of resources) (Esterhazy, 2019; Authors, in press b; Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to examine master's students' perceptions of supervisory feedback and self-reported engagement at a major university in Nepal. It has yielded several thought-provoking findings. First, a large number of students were not satisfied with the supervisory feedback

that they received, and their expectations of supervisory support were largely unmet. Second, the students faced various challenges related to their insufficient command of English as an academic language, inadequate supervisory time, and lack of necessary resources. Third, the students reported high levels of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement with supervisory feedback, despite the limited support that they received and the many challenges that they faced. Fourth, the students' perceptions of supervisory feedback were influenced by contextual and disciplinary practices. Finally, perceptions of feedback foci, expectations, and challenges were significantly related to self-reported engagement with supervisory feedback.

Several pedagogical and policy implications can be derived from these findings. To begin with, the student perceptions collected in this study indicate that some supervisors were unable or unaware of the need to provide their students with timely and comprehensive feedback. Given the critical role of supervisory feedback in guiding and scaffolding students' learning and development, any cases of students feeling left alone, neglected, and discouraged should be taken seriously by the program concerned, and proactive strategies (e.g., clearly stipulated supervision guidelines in a staff handbook) should be adopted to address the issue (Harwood & Petric, 2017). Second, some participating students' supervisors also appeared to be incognizant of the importance of adapting their feedback to students' specific needs and expectations, using evaluative language sensibly (e.g., avoiding harsh expressions of negative feelings or condemning judgments on students' social esteem) to foster a collegial supervisor-student relationship, and providing balanced feedback that both recognizes what students have done well and identifies what further improvements they need to make. Thus, there is a clear need for faculty development programs that can enhance supervisors' feedback literacy (Katikireddi & Reilly, 2017; Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Third, whenever feasible, ensuring a reasonable supervision load and matching supervisors' and students' research interests could also enhance the quantity, quality and relevance of supervisory feedback (Harwood & Petric, 2017). Fourth, in a resource-poor context like Nepal, supervisors can do their supervisees a great service by directing the latter to free resources (e.g., references and facilities), sharing their own material resources, and providing the latter with access to their academic networks. Such support can foster a trusting supervisor-student relationship and contribute to students' positive and productive engagement with supervisory feedback. Last but not least, rather than assuming that students do not act on feedback (Mulliner & Tucker, 2017), supervisors should strive to create conducive conditions for student engagement with their feedback by providing "a wide range

of feedback” (Kumar & Stracke, 2017, p. 22) that is constructive, tailored to students’ needs, and contains clear guidance for improvement (i.e., feedforward; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Only when students engage deeply with their supervisors’ feedback can the power of such feedback be actualized.

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Author 1 (in press b)

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