Original Article

Giving Feedback on Postgraduate Thesis Draft: An Episodic Reflection on My Supervision Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Supervising postgraduate students in higher education (HE) is a key responsibility of the graduate faculty to assure quality control and the production of valid and reliable knowledge. This autoethnographic study explores my supervision journey while guiding a student's Master's thesis. By reflecting on personal experiences, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of supervisory practices and offer insights into the feedback mechanisms of novice supervisors. I analyze my feedback comments on Chapter Four of the student's thesis draft, focusing on data analysis and interpretation. Undergoing supervision training made me curious to retrospectively examine my feedback on the thesis using my newly acquired knowledge as a foundation for improving future practices. I selected this thesis draft because I primarily used online communication tools to provide feedback. The study focuses on the dynamic and iterative process of supervision, particularly through episodic WhatsApp messages exchanged during the feedback process. To facilitate interpretation during analysis, I categorized my feedback comments into referential, directive, and expressive types. Without prior training, and before I embarked on supervising this particular student, I had gained some supervision experience as a postgraduate student, past supervision (I had already supervised another master's student), and from colleague supervisors. Looking generally at the feedback I gave to this student, it demonstrates that the feedback spectrum was not fairly covered and did not follow a systematic approach. I attribute these deficiencies to the guesses and choices I made while giving feedback. Therefore, I recommend that Higher Education Institutions should offer postgraduate supervision training to graduate faculty a priori. This training will ensure that before the novice supervisor delves into the deep "waters" of supervision, they have a rough idea of the expected topography and inherent challenges, and are equipped with possible mitigating strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are assigned to supervise a Master's student together with a lead supervisor you barely know: You as a junior academic, a first-time supervisor, and newly employed in the university having taught in secondary school for eight years, with no prior training, induction, or orientation of any kind on postgraduate supervision. This was my case when I was first assigned to co-supervise a Master's student.

In my first staff meeting, I remember the Chair of the Department (COD) read out the requirements for a supervisor of a Master's student, I had to raise my concern about being appointed as one without most of the requisite qualifications. Due to the increasing number of postgraduate students, a provision was made to "involve" the novice in the co-supervision of Master's students if the COD was satisfied with the junior staff's ability to do so. In the COD's judgment, I was admitted into this group of co-supervisors. This was an enormous responsibility put on my shoulders, and I had to promise myself that I would do my best possible despite the apparent plunge without prior induction.

Two reasons held me back from seeking training or formal guidance in postgraduate supervision. First, no sooner had I introduced myself to my first Master's student than I was diagnosed with an illness that resulted in paraplegia, which held me down for nearly two years and prevented my active participation in some departmental activities. Secondly, there was no formally established induction program for postgraduate supervision in our department to initiate junior staff.

For this first student I was assigned, I interacted with her on several occasions to make my contribution. Rather than perceive my inability to provide comprehensive feedback as a limitation, I actively embraced it as an opportunity to demonstrate resilience against the debilitating effects of my illness, proving that it was insufficient to define my capabilities. I had to make this choice, and consciously so, against all odds that were pinning me down because of my interest in entering into the "society" of graduate faculty. The feedback comments on her thesis provided a foundation for me to develop further supervisory skills. The student successfully graduated with a Master's degree three years later.

In 2019, a second opportunity arose. I was appointed to co-supervise my second Master's student. By this time, I had been awarded a doctorate three years earlier after stressfully and successfully going through my doctoral studies for six years, four years post-illness diagnosis. With the PhD, I was admitted as a member of the Graduate Faculty.

With our guidance as supervisors (the lead supervisor and I), the second student worked on his proposal, defended it, and went to the field for data collection by the first quarter of 2020. Before the official declaration of reported cases of COVID-19 in Kenya in March 2020, the student had started analyzing data. After the declaration and in our continuous interactions, I was able to offer supervisory guidance and gave feedback through synchronous and asynchronous online via WhatsApp instant messaging (IM) tool and made comments on the electronic thesis draft using the Microsoft Word processor, using the "Insert > Comments" function. The two modes of giving feedback ensured that there were preserved records of my comments. In this paper, I delve into my experiences in giving feedback to this particular student through a selected number of WhatsApp chronological episodic comments.

I provide a comprehensive account in response to the question, "How was my supervision experience in 'giving feedback' on postgraduate student thesis draft?" Two questions specific questions were: (a) How did I balance academic rigour with empathy when providing feedback on student work? (b) What lessons did I learn from supervising this student

during the global pandemic? I will give sample feedback comment extracts to support my analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postgraduate Supervision

Postgraduate studies is an educational program that aims towards an award of qualifications higher than an undergraduate/Bachelor's degree. Master's and Doctoral degrees are the two main qualifications at this level of study offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Research is a basic requirement for postgraduate qualifications, and it is undertaken over some time with the guidance of at least one supervisor who acts as a mentor(s) among other roles. Postgraduate research supervision is an important constituent of the HEI's academic environment (East, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012). In institutions or departments where appointed supervisors are at least two, one assumes the role of a lead supervisor and often comes from the postgraduate student's area of specialization. The need for postgraduate supervision is "the key to both quality and efficiency in higher degree research" (Bastalich, 2017, p. 1145). Consequently, supervisors are guarantors of quality in postgraduate research and mentors of the students who ensure the timely and successful completion of postgraduate research work.

The majority of first-time (novice) supervisors take up supervision of postgraduate students without prior formal training (Fulgence, 2019; Makoni, 2022). This is also true for a majority of practising supervisors who were exposed to uncertainty, a feeling of inadequacy, and an involuntary fallback to supervising through imitating one's postgraduate supervisors and making use of the residual supervision effects as a student. There is evidence of how novice supervisors learn to supervise (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009). This learning takes place as a result of one's (a) *experience as a postgraduate student* by imitating how one was supervised during postgraduate studies (Master's and PhD), (b) e*xperience as a supervisor* which entails using one's previous supervision experience in supervising a postgraduate student to completion, and (c) from *colleagues* which comprises gaining mentorship directly from co-supervision experience

with a senior supervisor, besides occasional learning through as an internal or external examiner of postgraduate theses (Makoni, 2022).

Comparing the contribution of each source of learning supervisory roles, I learned mainly through experience as a postgraduate student. At both my Master's and PhD, I had two supervisors respectively and I can claim that each had their strengths that complemented each other and thus diminished possible weaknesses. However, learning from them and picking the best from each did not make me a "good" supervisor (East, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2012; Bastalich, 2017; Fulgence, 2019) in my initial journey of supervision. While co-supervising the student whose feedback on his thesis draft is the subject of this paper, I had already co-supervised (albeit with many challenges) my first Master's student to completion, as indicated earlier. Training supervisors is yet to take a central place in preparation for postgraduate supervision. However, in the words of Knowles (2015), "There is now an increase in regulatory measures and [a] greater focus on explicating research/writing practices through 'skills' training for students and supervisors" (p. 295), indicating that the preparation of upcoming supervisors is fairly secure. Yet again, Daramola (2021) highlighted the need for universities to promote in-service training for supervisors in doctoral supervision, research philosophy, and educational research, painting a less optimistic picture than Knowles' (2015) outlook.

Giving Feedback

In this section, I will attempt to explore the following aspects: the meaning of feedback in the context of academic writing, the goal of giving feedback to postgraduate students' written texts, models/techniques of giving feedback, and categories/types of feedback comments. By exploring these aspects, I intend to shed light on the intricate "dimensions" typical in "giving feedback" on postgraduate academic writing, particularly on thesis drafts.

"The Advanced Oxford Dictionary" defines feedback as "advice, criticism or information about how good or useful something or somebody's work is." This definition entails making a *judgment* on

some "work" of interest, such as, in this case, written text. However, the definition seems to ascribe a normative value to "feedback" as "good" / "useful" (or "bad" / useless!). Formative feedback on the postgraduate thesis texts does not aim at a binary distinction as either "good or bad" but as a building block that serves iteratively as a corrective or regulatory value towards an improved or a finer thesis product. Accordingly, supervisory feedback is a key element in postgraduate supervision (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin, 2012; Chur-Hansen & McLean, 2006). In this paper, I consider feedback as either one comment or a "collection" of comments made on a specific aspect of a thesis text.

More broadly, the goal of supervisory feedback is exclusively to refine the quality, form, and content of the thesis in a developmental process, not as a finished product which would imply feedback whose end is summative evaluation (Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin, 2012). Therefore, supervisory feedback should be formative and targets "to improve the learning process, rather than passing judgment on whether one passes or fails" (Chur-Hansen, & McLean, 2006, p. 67). In other words, written feedback acts as a tool for communicating issues, strengths, or weaknesses in academic writing (Saeed, Al Qunayeer & AL-Jaberi, 2021). Written feedback, in essence, is dialogical and demands clarity and succinctness to communicate its intent with diminished "noise" for greater and effortless decoding by the postgraduate student.

One model or technique of giving (providing) feedback on written texts uses positive-negative-positive feedback comments (Chur-Hansen & McLean, 2006). This technique is also known as the sandwich (Stracke & Kumar, 2010). This triadic sandwich model represents a cycle: First, you give a positive comment such as pointing out the strengths of the text; second, you identify the specific flaw or weakness (this constitutes a negative comment); and finally, you motivate the student by providing a positive statement, indicating opportunities for enhancing the text. A closer look at the sandwich technique reveals that the first positive comment serves as an appreciation or recognition of the efforts made so far by the student while the last positive comment serves to reenergize

the student to do more and provide a "soothing effect" from the criticism offered in the sandwiched negative comment(s). The sandwiched negative comment highlights the flaws and consequent pitfalls as a basis for correcting misconceptions, errors, and inaccuracies in content, methodology, editorials, and so forth. The sandwich technique guarantees that the student is not perturbed by heavy criticism or pampered by superfluous praising.

The work of Lee (2014) offers three qualities of mediated learning interaction that are adopted as characteristics for the effective provision of feedback. The three qualities are intentionality/reciprocity, transcendence, and meaning. Applied to postgraduate supervision, *intentionality* refers to the supervisor's deliberate effort "to assist learners to detect and solve issues in writing" (Saeed, Al Qunayeer & AL-Jaberi, 2021); *reciprocity* refers to the supervisor-supervisee interaction during which the supervisee takes an active role in the dialogical feedback process rather than being a passive recipient of feedback, participating actively in constructing knowledge and shared understanding of the academic discourse, and finally, *meaning* refers to the productive interaction, achieved by the supervisor upon the supervisee being able to interpret and accomplish the tasks – determines the desired productivity of the feedback cycle. Giving feedback in general means that the supervisor thoughtfully and intentionally raises concerns or identifies issues in the written text and requires the supervisee to offer a critical analysis and response to every issue raised from a position of knowledge.

A model has been developed to categorize supervisor's written feedback by recognizing that "feedback could be most adequately explained by describing its function(s), i.e., by analyzing what the comments do" (Kumar & Stracke, 2007, p.463), into three main categories; referential, directive, and expressive. The referential function of feedback is to provide information focusing on the context which serves as the subject matter. The directive function of feedback tries to get the supervisee to act on something/issue in the text. The expressive function of feedback is to express or convey the supervisor's attitude, emotions, or feelings. For each function,

there are three subcategories, namely: Referential is divided into editorial, organizational, and content matters; directive is divided into suggestions, questions, and instructions, and finally, expressive utterances are divided into praise, criticism, or opinion (Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Bastola, 2021). Studies have used this categorization and demonstrated its efficacy (Bastola, 2020; Basturkmen, East & Bitchener, 2014; Xu, 2017). In this paper, I will adopt this categorization scheme to evaluate my experiences in giving feedback.

METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that puts the researcher at the centre as the object of analysis (Daramola, 2021). Self-reflection on the lived experiences of the researcher in the past acts as anchors that enhance understanding of a cultural or social phenomenon. This study is an evocative autoethnographic written account of my experience in giving feedback on a thesis draft. Autoethnography is defined by (Adams, Ellis & Holman Jones, 2017) as a research method that has three components: "auto" – the use of personal experience, "graphy" – to describe and interpret, and "ethno" – cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices. Autoethnography refers to the work of a conscious 'self' who is both the researcher and the researched, and whose "own life is the source of information" (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). An autoethnographic gives an account that is emotionally engaging and employs a critical self-reflection of the researcher on the topic of interest (Daramola, 2021).

The academic environment, especially regarding postgraduate supervision, is the culture or social phenomenon of interest in this study. Without prior initiation into the culture of postgraduate supervision, I struggled to be admitted into the "society of supervisors." It appears that one remains an outsider until one has successfully demonstrated the ability to guide a postgraduate student (especially a Master's) to completion.

In pursuit of an autoethnographic account, I make meaning of my lived experiences in postgraduate supervision, focusing on the practice of giving feedback (Keleş, 2022). I also write to reveal some of the struggles a novice postgraduate supervisor encounters in trying to learn the pedagogy of supervision, given a lack of prior formal training. This paper will analyze chronologically samples of feedback with an initial categorization based on the scheme by Kumar and Stracke (2007).

Data Collection and Management

Often, an autoethnographic source of data is the "memory" (Adams, Ellis & Holman Jones, 2017; Chang, 2016; Polczyk, 2012), which is a result of recalling personal experiences. The data presented in this paper emanated from experiences in giving feedback documented in WhatsApp communication (messages) I gave to the student during the development of Chapter Four, "Results and Discussion" of the thesis draft.

In this study, episodic comment extracts referred to specific segments of comments that represent distinct themes or ideas within a larger conversation. For example:

- A single feedback point addressing a specific concept of the thesis (e.g., statistical analysis).

- A sequence of messages discussing a proposed suggestion on expected changes.

- A chat to clarify doubts about statistical interpretation.

To transcribe the chat messages from WhatsApp, I used the "Export Chat" function into a *.txt file and thereafter, I generated a *.docx file with the MS Word processor for final analysis. To select the episodic comment extracts, I focused on comments that relate to Chapter Four of a Master's thesis, particularly on the results (data analysis) and interpretation. This was the chapter that we mainly discussed through WhatsApp asynchronously. Any other comments which did not fall into this category were excluded. There were more or less comments from the conversation of Chapters One and Two which were then excluded.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I categorized the feedback comments based on the classification scheme of

Kumar and Stracke (2007). Moreover, the context of these comments to situate the feedback in the developmental process of the chapter draft will be described. The analysis consisted of "episodic" comment extracts.

The episodic comment extracts were deductively coded starting with pre-determined codes based on Kumar and Stracke's (2007) classification frameworks. This coding approach is a top-down approach, where I applied these predefined codes to analyze the data systematically. This method ensures alignment with prior knowledge and focuses on testing or extending existing theories.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, the following ethical issues are accounted for. The first is informed consent. Although this autoethnography study focused on the researcher's subjective experience, the postgraduate student whose thesis feedback is being analyzed is indirectly included in the narrative. I obtained explicit consent from the student (now a senior high school teacher) before including any details about the feedback process. Privacy and confidentiality are the second issues addressed. There were no express references to the student, and thus the use of pseudonyms was not necessary. Thirdly, the issue of avoiding harm was considered by focusing on constructive aspects of feedback rather than overly critical commentary. Any content perceived to cause emotional distress to either party was excluded. Finally, on the researcher's vulnerability, any disclosed information is not expected to evoke negative professional implications. This is because any information provided concerns supervision and learning experiences that are part of academic growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are verbatim chronological episodic comments extracted from the WhatsApp IM tool. The feedback comments are categorized and analyzed based on the work of (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). To categorize the feedback texts, I coded the feedback comments and made minor changes/corrections (that do not alter the meaning of the feedback) as described below:

- I numbered the comments (a sentence or a part of it) as 1, 2, 3, and so on to provide an easy means of reference.

- I indicated an incorrect word using "sic" and I placed the correct word in square brackets [ ].

- I replaced lowercase letters that start a sentence with a corresponding uppercase letter, to enhance editorial presentation.

The feedback comment extracts were given based on the Chapter Four draft during the 2020 lockdown as a result of COVID-19. During this period, there was a feeling of uncertainty about the future. The student was eager to work on his work, and for this reason, I found no sensible ground to fail walking with him at a time when "tomorrow" was unpredictable. I chose to play this role, albeit reluctantly because it acted as a distraction from the scary news of the ravaging and devastating effects of COVID-19. I cannot convince myself that this commitment was purely voluntary, but it was a mix of fortunes.

We should take note, however, that "many of the examples given are utterances [comments] that could fall into more than one category" (Kumar & Stracke, 2007, p.464). In my analysis, you will therefore encounter comments that are given more than one category, for example, the following comment: "*In analysis, you present in-text description of tables, charts, figures etc before them*", which requires the student to be acquainted with "content" of the academic discipline in interpreting tabular data and its implications (Referential/Content) and the order or "organization" on the flow of information (Referential/Organization)". In the following sections, I present the context of the comments, the comments themselves, and an initial attempt to categorize the comments (Kumar & Stracke, 2007).

April 28, 2020: The Student Shared a Draft of Chapter Four on "Data Analysis" for My Input.

The student had successfully collected, coded, and analyzed data, and this feedback was given six weeks after Kenya had declared a lockdown as a result of COVID-19. The student was hopeful and committed to his work, so he requested me to work with him despite all the surrounding circumstances.

On this day, April 28, 5:44 PM, the student shared his "raw analysis" (in his own words) for my input. I had been advising him on the use of the SPSS data analysis tool for a while now.

Table 1 presents an extract of feedback I gave on April 28, after I received the raw analysis of the student's data. The student had managed to compile a rough draft of the chapter. Table 1 shows that most of my comments in the feedback were expressive, and as a whole, followed the sandwich technique (Chur-Hansen & McLean, 2006; Kumar & Stracke, 2007). However, the intermediate/sandwich comments consisted of several other comment categories. For example, comments 2 to 5 were all expressive but served different purposes, such as opinion and criticism. I also made several referential comments (6 and 7) on "content" and "organization."

Table 1: Feedback on April 28, 2020

Feedback	Category
6:44 PM: [1]Finally, your work is giving the taste I expected!!!	[1] E/P
[2]Though your presentation if (sic) [is] brief, [3]I expect that it only grows better.	[2] E/C
[4]The crosstabs are not yet complete. [5]I may ask you to give me the data so I can see how best some questions can be answered.	[3] E/O
	[4] E/C
Note:	[5] E/O
1) [6]In analysis, you present in-text descriptions of tables, charts, figures etc before them	[6] D/I; R/C; R/O
2) [7]In discussion, you state what your data "told you", explain what it means and provide supportive evidence/arguments from prior studies.	[7] D/I; R/C
[8]We are on the right track: Bravo!	[8] E/P

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; E/P = Expressive/Praise; E/C = Expressive/Criticism; E/O = Expressive/Opinion; R/C = Referential/Content; R/O = Referential/Organization

It seems that the emphasis of this initial cycle of comments was on expressive feedback and referential/content alignment of the text. The comments were set out with the following objectives in mind:

- To assure the student of his capability to handle the tasks inherent in the thesis chapter consequently providing positive feedback on his self-efficacy by use of positive and encouraging language, see comment 1,

- To highlight the weaknesses in the work, constructive feedback, comments 2 and 3, and

- To give guidelines to "be" followed in addressing observed weaknesses.

I was rather deterministic or instructive in what I expected from the student. It might initially seem therefore that I gave directives that were intended to yield precise results with little or no space for nonconformity. Our continuous interaction throughout the project cycle enabled the student to take charge of text production progressively.

May 27, 2020: This was a Follow-up on the Chapter Four Draft Incorporating Earlier Comments

The student had taken time to work on Data Analysis as already advised. In this feedback, I required the student to submit to me the Chapter Four draft which was our focus, and to accompany it with research questions and the questionnaire (see Table 2, Comment 9). This request was intended to verify systematically the suitability of the analysis and the harmony of the chapter within itself and the chapters of the thesis. My feedback consisted of brief comments that were more directive/instructional with referential/content and expressive/criticism issues too. The data collected was categorical, and the student was trying to provide descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) that were not appropriate in the context of the study.

Table 2: Feedback on May 27, 2020

Feedback	Category
11:55 AM: [9]Sent me chapter 4. Accompany with Research Questions and questionnaires, I wish to see how suitable analysis is!	[9] D/I
3:06 PM: [10][Student Name], your analysis should RUN away from calculating means and standard deviations BUT just frequencies and chi-square through crosstabs.	[10] E/C; D/I; R/C

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; E/C = Expressive/Criticism; R/C = Referential/Content

The feedback in Table 2 shows that I was keen on details regarding chapter/thesis alignment to the level of measurement of research constructs concerning data analysis. However, in retrospect, I have realized I did not sufficiently explain myself in comment 10, where I "instructed" the student to abandon the computation of means and standard deviations. Did the student understand why I gave this directive? I cannot tell for sure at this point, but allowing the student latitude to offer a justification for this might have helped to reinforce his understanding or clarify doubts. It might happen that, as supervisors, we get impatient (by giving students limited or no time to work out reasons for some actions demanded from them) with the student and give directions without clarifications that may leave the student in suspense, opting to just conform to our demands. This supports the idea that "the supervisor cannot know how students will read the comments or ensure that they will be taken in the ways intended" (Knowles, 2015, p.4). The implication of this is that the power of the supervisor-supervisee is vested disproportionately on the supervisor.

June 4, 2020: Giving More Directions on the Use of SPSS

Through an earlier brief communication, the student had sought advice on his Chi-square analysis. Table 3 shows the comments I made, giving directives/instructions on what to do, clarifying referential/content, and finally directive/instruction. These comments demonstrated:

- An instructional framework for guiding statistical analysis.

- A conversational tone aimed at reducing formality while maintaining clarity.

- Technical terminology appropriate for a statistics-related discussion.

- Informal grammar, reflecting casual communication rather than polished academic prose.

Generally, this feedback contains comments that seek remedial actions on the student's knowledge of the analysis using the SPSS tool.

Table 3: Feedback on June 4, 2020

Feedback	Category

2:24 PM: [11][Student Name], I want you to try the following ([12]remember I told you your analysis [is] mostly crosstabs/chi-square NOT using means and standard deviation?): In SPSS
  1) Go to Frequencies then crosstabs, put the independent variable on Rows and the dependent variable on Columns and run chi-square, see what happens!
  2) This tells us the effects of IVs on DVs
	[11] D/I [12] R/C

2:25 PM: [13]If you [do] not understand, e (sic) [I] will give you screenshots of the analysis tomorrow.	[13] D/S

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; R/C = Referential/Content; D/S = Directive/Suggestion

Table 3 illustrates further my emphasis on the provision of directions/instruction. Did I indicate to the student that the procedure in the itemized list, point (1) of Table 3 results in a Chi-square statistic and a p-value? No, I expected the student to obtain these values and make sense of them. In a way, I allowed the student to make meaning and construct an understanding of the chi-square analysis. I benefitted a lot too because I had access to the data which enabled me to closely walk through the student's learning progress.

June 6, 2020: After the Student Had Appropriately Conducted the Chi-square Analysis

The student had managed to perform chi-square analysis as earlier guided. Therefore, the first comment was expressive/praise in recognition of the efforts that the student had put into this analysis. This was followed by directives/questions requiring the student to make more sense of the analysis performed. These questions were mainly concerned with the student's knowledge of content (referential).

Table 4: Feedback on June 6, 2020

Feedback	Category
9:34 AM: [14]Good, this is it! [15]Now do you see anything in these? Can it answer your questions? [16]Can you interpret a significant chi-square test?	[14] E/P [15] D/Q [16] D/Q; R/C

Note: E/P = Expressive/Praise; D/Q = Directive/Question; R/C = Referential/Content

The feedback in Table 4 depicts my interest in giving the student space to make sense of his work, construct knowledge, and partake in the shared meaning of the results in question. It was this active role taken by the student that gradually built his understanding. However, in a situation where the converse prevails, where a student assumes a passive stance, an insufficient or lack of understanding of the work will be an inevitable outcome.

August 8, 2020: With the Chi-square Done, Some Data Were Not Amenable

After the student had performed a chi-square analysis, some data were not amenable to this statistic. The student had performed Fisher's exact and Freeman-Halton tests based on expected frequencies that were less than five (in at least 20% of the cells in a chi-square table/crosstabs).

From the feedback comments (Table 5), I opined that explaining (and interpreting) the statistical tests was important at the moment, especially in the discussion of the results (comment 17, expressive/opinion). I expected the student to understand the analyses in question (referential/content). The last expressive/opinion required the student to own his work (the student seemed a little confused. I required him to put more effort with little 'direction' from me).

Table 5: Feedback on August 8, 2020

Feedback	Category
8:17 AM: [17]So, don't worry about the statistics so much but the explanations. [18]Freeman-Halton and Fisher's are used when "expected frequencies" in chi-square are less than 5. [19]I will guide you on the software and calculation of these. [20]Because it is your work, I wish you own it first, not to be SHOWN but GUIDED!	[17] E/O [18]D/I; R/C [19] R/C [20] E/O

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; E/O = Expressive/Opinion; R/C = Referential/Content

Though comment 17 might easily be misconstrued resulting in controversy, that statistics is as important as its interpretation, the essence of the comment was to advise the student to go easy on spending lots of time than necessary trying to follow how the computations arose but to concentrate more on making sense of or interpreting them and their implications. I was concerned about the student owning his work: being able to actively construct whatever knowledge is accessible and can be gleaned as he enters into the realm of shared understanding of disciplinary knowledge.

October 2, 2020: Responding to the Student's Concerns on P-values and Raw Values/Frequencies by Giving Some Clarifications

The student had made the following comment/request (at 8:39 AM): "If I get a hint why cross tabs and p- values in some cases are not agreeing resulting in wrong hypothesis interpretation, I will be the happiest person." The student had encountered a scenario he termed "conflicting" and was experiencing a blockage, a cognitive disequilibrium that halted meaningful

progress. He had considered "observed frequencies" in a crosstab as "relatively different from each other," yet the chi-square test does not indicate any significant difference. The "observed quantitative difference in frequencies" was not statistically significant, but from the student's view, there was an observed difference (after eyeballing) after all!

In comment 22 (referential/content), I tried to explicate the difference between "raw/observed frequencies" and "p-values as a test of statistical significance", that a conclusion is necessarily based on the statistical significance of the p-values. The directive/instructions (comments 23 and 24) required the student to interpret p-values as tests of

statistical significance. Comment 25 helped to distinguish the use of Fisher's exact test and its extension, the Freeman-Halton test.

The feedback indicated the student's misconceptions about the statistical interpretation of significance tests against their "raw" frequencies. One reason could be that these statistics (Fisher's and Freeman-Halton) were new to the student, and therefore, he struggled to make sense of them within the constraints of his research work. The other reason could be the difference in the calculation of "p-values" for Fisher's and Freeman-Halton tests, while the chi-square test results in a "chi-square value" and a "p-value."

Table 6: Feedback on October 8, 2020

Feedback	Category
8:39 AM: [22]What you see in crosstabs are raw data and what you can only do is eyeballing. Alpha values are used for statistical inferences and talking about significance. There is nothing like the two agree or disagree: alpha tells you that it is not by chance < .05 the (sic) [this] can't be said for crosstabs! [23]You should draw all your conclusions from alpha!	[22]D/I, R/C
5:58 PM: [24]You ONLY NEED INTERPRET THE p-values, which in this case is not statistically significant: interpret just like chi-square!	[23,24] D/I; R/C
6:03 PM: [25]A 2×2 is Fisher's exact test while an extension, that is larger than this is the Freeman-Halton test	[25] R/C

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; R/C = Referential/Content

My tendency to give directive instructions emerged in this feedback strongly besides referential/content. This implies that my main interest was to ensure that the student followed a definite path in working on the chapter contents: it is like, "Do as I say and get the content right!" I can be accused of imposing myself more than necessary at this point because my presence was conspicuously evident. However, my presence yielded speed in the completion of the chapter draft and was able to generally give the student a reasonable space to perform his act. This may raise the question, "To what extent and how does the supervisor need to get involved in a student's work?"

October 17, 2020. Giving General Comments on Chapter Four

The feedback given here referred to Chapter Four in general, having successfully worked on the "short-range" comments all along in previous comments to arrive at a fairly complete and coherent chapter. The various comments in this feedback were focused mainly on referential (content, editorial, and organization) and directive (instructions and suggestions) categories. The overall comments on this chapter looked mainly at the "form/structure" and, to some extent, the "content" of the chapter.

Table 7: Feedback on October 17, 2020

Feedback	Category
8:41 AM: These are the main comments.	
1) [26]Rewrite the obj, & hypothesis. [27]May not use questions.	[26] D/I
2) [28]redraw tables as indicated	[27] D/S
3) [29]Delete the tables on chi-square. [30]In fact, a majority will use Freeman-Halton and Fisher's tests	[28,29] R/E
	[30] R/C
4) [31]Rearrange sections in Chapter Four.	[31] R/O
[32]Anyway, go though (sic) [through] it. [33]Though I looked at the other chapters, let's get chapter 4 in order first!	[32] D/I
	[33] D/S

Note: D/I = Directive/Instruction; D/S = Directive/Suggestion; R/E = Referential/Editorial; R/C = Referential/Content; R/O = Referential/Organization

More referential comments came at the end of the chapter synthesis/creation, suggesting that these comments essentially "oversee the overall rigour, coherence, and conformity to acceptable standards by the chapter and to a greater extent the whole thesis." Directive comments seemed to emphasize restricted rage and specific attributes of the chapter.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Without formal training in postgraduate supervision, I used my experience as a postgraduate student (Master's and PhD) and to some extent from my first supervision experience. Trying to make an initial categorization of feedback comments was a means to understand my supervision practice in retrospect. By sheer coincidence, the comments were varied but not fairly distributed across all categories. However, my approach/technique of giving feedback was inconsistent but spontaneous based on the student's presented work and requests. This might have, in a way, caused some negative effect on the student without my knowledge (Chur-Hansen & McLean, 2006; Botha, 2023). The sandwich technique of giving feedback might seem productive if novice supervisors are equipped by being exposed to initial supervision training.

The sandwich technique is a feedback strategy that involves structuring feedback comments in three parts: starting with positive feedback, followed by constructive criticism, and ending with another positive comment. This approach is used to soften the impact of criticism and make it more palatable for the feedback receiver, the student. When applied to giving feedback on a postgraduate student's thesis, this strategy aims to encourage the student while at the same time addressing areas of weakness that need improvement. From its structure, the sandwich technique encourages motivation, softens criticisms, strengthens trust in the supervisor-supervisee relationship and emphasises the growth of both the supervisor and the supervisee. On the flip side: Does such a deliberate, regular pattern not incite a feeling of insincerity by the supervisor? Can important critique not be drawn in a "sea of praise" if the balance is not carefully crafted? Finally, can mixed messages not lead to student confusion on the priority and urgency of their work?

The feedback in chapter four, to a greater extent, lacks (or represents nominally) the complete spectrum of comments that would be given. Some comments were more amenable to providing input on the "overall" form/structure of the chapter or the thesis than others, which are specific and targeted at corrective measures in the formative developmental process. It appears that most of my comments were referential/content followed by directives/instructions. These comments imply that I was most concerned about the content of the thesis chapter, and thus I gave out more instructions to try and "push" the student to conform.

Eventually, in the pedagogy of giving feedback, the postgraduate student "sees" in the actions of a supervisor refined, deliberate actions (the front end) arising from a reflective process (the back end). The student is not exposed to the intrigues and the raw effort spent in putting up the feedback responses they receive. It is safe to say that, though the supervisee does colossal work during postgraduate thesis development, the supervisor too handles no less work.

One recommendation of this study is the need to further understand the role of "informality" in

feedback. I noted throughout the feedback spectrum that there was frequent informal communication between the supervisor and the supervisee. Although the study did not establish its effectiveness, there was no observed negative impact on the student as a result.

Competing Interest

I declared no apparent conflicts of interest concerning all the aspects of this article.

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