Unveiling Supervisor-Supervisee Relationships in Master's Thesis Writing: Insights from Students' Voices

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Abstract
One of the issues that Master's students frequently experience when writing their theses is how they view and communicate with their supervisors. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of supervisor-supervisee relationships in Master's thesis writing. The study's objective is to explore Master's students' supervision practices, their interactions with supervisors, and their implications for humanistic education and holistic student development. Participants at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia took the online survey using Google Forms, which contained questions about their thesis writing and other connected concerns. The accounts gathered from the 35 students who responded to the questions were processed as data and interpreted using Krippendorf's qualitative content analysis and Polkinghorne's narrative inquiry. The framework employed was intersectionality. The study reveals that the participants perceived supervisors as (1) affable and professional academic mentors, (2) intellectual partners, and (3) personal confidantes. The participants' accounts may provide insight into the ideal supervisor-supervisee relationship. The supervisees' perspectives suggest that supervisors' triple roles assist students in managing relationships and promoting whole-person growth. Several implications for strengthening humanistic education and self-development are highlighted in the study, including supervisory responsibilities, *cura personalis*, emotional support, and holistic development. This study contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the often-overlooked perspectives of thesis students in Indonesia, particularly at the Master's level.
Keywords: intersectionality; personal stories; supervisor; supervisee.

Отношения между научным руководителем и студентом во время написания магистерской диссертации: мнения студентов

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Аннотация
Один из вопросов, с которым сталкиваются магистранты во время написания диссертации, – это их взаимоотношения с научными руководителями. Цель настоящего исследования – получить представление об отношениях между научным руководителем и студентом во время написания диссертации. Задачи исследования – изучить практики научного руководства студентами магистратуры: характер взаимоотношений выпускников с руководителями и их влияние на гуманистическое образование и целостное развитие личности студента. Студенты частного университета в Джокьякарте приняли участие в онлайн-опросе, содержащем вопросы о процессе написания выпускной работы. Данные, полученные от 35 участников через Google формы, были проанализированы с помощью качественного контент-анализа и нарративного анализа Полкингхорна. В качестве теоретической рамки использовалась интерсекциональность. Было выявлено, что участники воспринимали научных руководителей как (1) приветливых и профессиональных академических наставников, (2) интеллектуальных партнеров и (3) личных доверенных лиц. Ответы участников дают представление об идеальных отношениях между научным руководителем и студентом. По мнению респондентов, многофункциональная роль руководителей помогает студентам управлять отношениями и способствует развитию личности в целом. В работе подчеркивается влияние данного опыта на укрепление гуманистического характера образования и саморазвитие учащихся, определяются обязанности научного руководителя, необходимость его заботы и эмоциональной поддержки, его всестороннего развития. Работа вносит вклад в существующий корпус исследований высшего образования, прежде всего магистрантов из Индонезии.
Ключевые слова: интерсекциональность, личные истории, научный руководитель, студент.

Introduction

Unlike a tutor, friend, or colleague, the position of supervision is defined as a professional connection or a personal/professional/political relationship, and it is more dependent on goodwill and free time (Wisker, 2012). She maintained that a supervisor's

responsibility as a researcher is to guarantee that the supervisee can also do research in the future. In reality, as evidenced by several studies (e.g., Grant, 2018; Krauss & Ismail, 2010; Neupane Bastola, 2022), one of the difficulties encountered in finishing a Master's thesis is how supervision is carried out. Renowned for her work on supervising Indigenous doctorate candidates in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Grant (2018) concluded that persistent battles over identity and belonging are responsible for thesis supervision in a post-colonial setting. Similarly, conducting their study in institutions with diverse non-Western students in Malaysia, Krauss and Ismail (2010) found that thoughtful management strategies are crucial for supervision and thesis completion. Bastola (2022) emphasizes the importance of supervisory for Master's students who often lack extensive research and academic writing experience. Recent studies on supervision during pandemics (e.g., Ferreira-Meyers, 2022; Hendrickse, 2022; Opoku et al., 2022) claim that Master's thesis writing is collaborative work, and collaboration can be fostered or hindered in times of crisis. One participant in Ferreira-Meyers' research, for example, confessed that online supervisory is not a bad idea, saying "The pandemic has also given us more tools of engagement, which is good" (Ferreira-Meyers, 2022, p. 288).

The studies mentioned above were set in New Zealand, Malaysia, Nepal, South Africa, and Taiwan. Likewise, in Indonesia, the majority of academic writing supervisory studies center on the problems and obstacles that are faced during both undergraduate (e.g., Barus, 2022; Safitri et al., 2021; Tiwari, 2019) and master's thesis supervision (e.g., Lambey et al., 2017; Maryono et al., 2018; Rizqiyyah et al., 2021; Sharma, 2017). For example, Barus (2022) claims that undergraduate thesis writing depends on literacy proficiency, self-efficacy, and academic motivation. Rizqiyyah et al. (2021) argue that despite using metacognitive strategies in thesis writing, Master's students' time management, consultation system, technical challenges, and psychological factors contribute to thesis completion delays.

While existing studies highlight various factors influencing thesis writing success and failure, none specifically examine the supervisee's diverse experiences. Arguing the importance of thesis students' voices, the present study examines the perceptions of 35 graduate students in Indonesia regarding their supervisory relationships. It will investigate the forms of supervision received and how participants managed their interactions. Using intersectionality to interpret the graduate students' narratives and social identity markers, the research intends to unveil potential factors influencing a successful supervisor-supervisee relationship.

Literature Review

Article Nine of the "World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Mission" emphasizes the importance of new educational approaches, specifically creativity and critical thinking (cited in Supratiknya & Sunardi, 2008). The declaration emphasizes that higher education institutions must prepare students to become citizens with broad experience, critical thinking, and social problem resolution. Next, according to Article Ten, Item C of the declaration, decision-makers at the national and institutional levels must prioritize students as primary collaborators. Given the importance of students' agency and rights, the current study is urgent as it attempts to consider the supervisees' perspectives on thesis supervision.

Furthermore, the United Nations advocates intersectionality to fight racism and protect minority rights to ensure that no one is left behind, including students (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf). The broad concept of intersectionality is that individuals and groups face several forms of discrimination and concurrent forms of

oppression on two or more grounds, rather than just one. Unlike school leavers, graduate students usually experience more multiple intersecting dimensions of identity and social categories. Their age and the corresponding life stage, whether they are early-career or mid-career professionals, can intersect with other factors like family responsibilities, career goals, and study habits, which can influence their interactions with supervisors. Power relation is inevitable in thesis supervision and intersectionality is therefore essential.

Intersectionality is a useful framework for interpreting such rich data (Crenshaw, 2017). Crenshaw's intersectionality theory emphasizes the premise that individuals see identity and social categories as interrelated facets of their lived experiences rather than as separate entities. The thesis students' overlapping dimensions of identity can significantly influence their perceptions of supervisors, expectations, and experiences during the thesis supervision process.

This current research involves Master's students in Yogyakarta, in contrast to most studies in Indonesia, which focus on undergraduate students (e.g., Barus, 2022; Safitri et al., 2021; Tiwari, 2019). It is worth noting that known as the "city of students", the multiculturally rich Yogyakarta is a popular destination for Indonesians seeking higher education (Roostika, 2017, p. 250). Thus, this study seeks to fill in the gap by selecting participants in such a dynamic educational setting. Studying supervisees' stories via an online survey offers rich data on power dynamics and students' social identity markers. Understanding these intersections can provide a more nuanced examination of the relationships between Master's students and their supervisors. The objective can be broken down as follows:

• investigating the diverse types of supervision provided to Master's students during their thesis writing process,

• exploring how graduate students perceive and manage their interactions with their thesis supervisors and

• identifying the implications of these relationships for strengthening humanistic education and promoting holistic student development.

Method

Research context and setting

The research was conducted in the graduate program at Mrican (a pseudonym) University, a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The program has two departments: Cultural Studies and English Language Studies. The student body reflects a diverse educational background, with participants hailing from the university's undergraduate programs, other universities across Indonesia, and even a limited number of international students throughout the program's 20-year history. The university's goal is to provide a holistic education system that combines academic excellence and human values using methods that are focused on self-care, dialogic, pluralistic, and transformative, and is grounded in Pancasila's five principles (Indonesian's state philosophical foundation). Notably, some participants who completed their undergraduate degrees at the same university participated in a unique formation program similar to coaching during their first six semesters. At the heart of the university's compulsory coaching is Ignatian Pedagogy, i.e., a teaching method that integrates context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation to foster each student's intellectual and spiritual growth. Attention to individual students to guarantee holistic growth encompassing mind, body, and spirit is important (Bogel, 2012). As a result, this emphasis on holistic development creates a potential point of intersection with graduate program experiences. During the thesis supervision process, students from different universities may have varying expectations,

academic preparation, and prior experiences with supervision. The graduate program dynamics were thereby enhanced by internal and external coaching, enabling participants to understand their experiences and define their identities.

Data collection and analysis

This study is part of a larger study on graduate student guidance. Data were collected by sending questionnaires with 14 open-ended questions via Google Forms to master's program alumnae from 12 May 2023 to 14 June 2023. The survey was distributed through WhatsApp and emails. Participants were informed about the research, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. They were asked 7 questions about demographic data, self-description and narration. The remaining 7 questions focused on interactions with lecturers, supervisors, students and academic staff, changing perspectives after graduation, the study's relevances, and, if applicable, the impacts of online learning during the pandemic on academic performance. The information table below provides demographic data on participants, including age, gender, undergraduate institution, and study duration, with N/A for ongoing thesis.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographic Data*

Gender							
Male				*Female*			
Name	*Age*	*Study Length*	*Undergraduate Institution*	*Name*	*Age*	*Study Length*	*Undergraduate Institution*
Alexey	35	5	Mrican University	Kristina	24	N/A	Mrican University
Anzor	32	2	Mrican University	Nika	25	N/A	Mrican University
Czar	45	5	Other universities	Polina	35	3	Mrican University
Esenin	30	4	Non-specific	Raiza	40	2	Mrican University
Evgeniy	58	4	Mrican University	Regina	36	2	Other universities
Fyodor	51	3	Mrican University	Svetlana	35	3	Mrican University
Gleb	38	4	Mrican University	Sofia	34	4	Mrican University
Hedeon	28	N/A	Mrican University	Tamara	31	2	Other universities
Illarion	61	N/A	Other universities	Tatyana	44	5	Other universities
Keesa	49	2	Other universities	Ulyana	30	N/A	Other universities
Oleg	50	4	Other universities	Emilia	38	N/A	Other universities
Olexei	51	5	Other universities	Elvira	43	N/A	Mrican University
Rurik	39	3	Mrican University	Ludmila	28	3	Mrican University
Ygor	24	N/A	Mrican University	Natalya	23	N/A	Mrican University
Yury	29	N/A	Mrican University	Darya	25	N/A	Mrican University
Zakhar	22	N/A	Mrican University	Oksana	37	N/A	Mrican University
Alexey	35	5	Mrican University	Maya	23	N/A	Other universities
				Vera	26	N/A	Mrican University
				Yana	27	4	Mrican University

Table 1 depicts the participants' ages at the time of the survey, which ranged from 22 to 62 years old. Their backgrounds were diverse, as evidenced by their narratives: some were married with children, others were full-time students and the third was managing work and study. The table shows 19 female and 16 male students whose undergraduate studies were from Mrican University and other universities across the country. One participant did not specify where he or she received the Bachelor's degree. As shown in the table, the

duration of their study varied: 14 participants were in their thesis completion stage; 4 finished their study in two years; 6 in three and four years and 5 graduated in five years. All participants were given pseudonyms as shown in Table 1 to ensure confidentiality throughout the analysis. These pseudonyms will be used when reporting findings to protect the identities of the individuals who participated in the study. Also in pseudonyms, the supervisors involved were Barislav, Dimitri, Saban, Sergei, and Nikita. Next, a qualitative analysis of the 35 data sets related to thesis supervision was conducted, which involved gathering feedback, categorizing comments, drawing insights and reporting. The analysis was limited to document analysis; no interviews or observations were conducted.

Data interpretation

Using the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2017), this study combines qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) and narrative reporting (Polkinghorne, 2013). Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis is an interpretive technique rooted in literary theory, social sciences and critical scholarship. It involves close reading of small textual matter, rearticulating it into new narratives within scholarly communities and acknowledging the interactive hermeneutic process. Qualitative content analysis involves "socially or culturally conditioned understandings" forming a hermeneutic framework, hence not in agreement with positivist views (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 17). Krippendorff's multifaceted technique is resonant with intersectionality theory. Here, data on supervisees' perception of their thesis guidance is interpreted dynamically given the graduate students' diverse identities. Narrative reporting was used because thesis supervision frequently entails unstated psychological strain, and narrating about oneself might be helpful. In his 1988 classic book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, psychotherapist Donald Polkinghorne contends that narrative produces and explains human activities. Polkinghorne defines narrative as a story involving events, arguing they have a unique explanation capacity and this self-story can be used as psychotherapy (Polkinghorne, 2013). Hence, this study interpreted stories from the participants (used interchangeably with "supervisees" and "thesis students"/ or pseudonyms) to ensure that their voices were heard.

Results

The analysis was undertaken to interpret the participants' responses to one single question (out of a total of 14 for the larger study): *Tell us about your interaction with your thesis supervisor(s) while writing your thesis.* Preliminary document analysis revealed that 20 out of 35 participants awarded their interaction with the thesis supervisor in the program a very good rating, 4 rated it good, 2 fairly good and the rest made comments without giving it a negative rating. Given the nature of open-ended inquiries, as Krippendorff (2019) suggests, a close reading of little textual matter would allow for greater clarity in the interpretation. Three focus categories emerged from the data analysis: (1) supervisor as an academic mentor, (2) supervisor as an intellectual partner and (3) supervisor as a confidant and/or personal support system. Each of these categories is explained below and illustrated with excerpts from students' narrations translated by the researchers.

Supervisor as an amicable academic advisor

The study participants identified a contribution of supervisors' expertise and performance to expediting the thesis writing process because they were easy to talk to and reachable. Participants revealed that the interactions between the supervisor and the supervisee were fluid and pleasant.

Excerpt 1
My supervisor was very approachable and always made his time available to discuss the thesis I was working on. Not only did he provide input, but he also offered me the flexibility and confidence to investigate the issues and theories used in the thesis (Yuri)

Excerpt 2
My supervisor was very considerate, even giving insights on what a perfect supervisor should do. Apart from being a discussion partner, the supervisor was also a confidant. Often when students disappear, it is the supervisors who look for them, and with a sense of friendship offer solutions. (Svetlana)

Excerpt 3
Alhamdulillah *[Praise be to God], we, the students, had very good relations with all supervisors. They really cared about our work and always took time out of their extremely busy time, especially my supervisor, Dimitri. He always reminded me and motivated me to keep working on my thesis. Even though we have long graduated, our supervisors are still pleasant every time we meet.* (Sofia)

A rigorous timetable like the accreditation process that keeps lecturers busy may deter the supervisees from talking to their supervisors. Here, it appears that there were times when thesis students often felt reluctant to contact their supervisors as indicated by the two accounts below.

Excerpt 4
My supervisor was very communicative. Only at that time [he] was a bit busy regarding accreditation so it was rather rare to meet to discuss further about my thesis. (Esenin)

Excerpt 5
Good. My supervisor was very supportive and diligent in asking me questions, even though the initial revisions took a long time, but towards my last year, he was active and diligent in asking me. I don't know, at the beginning of my thesis [writing], it was difficult to contact him, maybe because at that time he was busy [with accreditation]. However, I appreciate his enthusiasm at the end of my thesis. (Gleb)

According to the data, 20 out of 35 participants rated their interactions with their supervisors as very good. The impression gained from the following narrations further proved that the participants found supervisors professional and approachable.

Excerpt 6
My supervisor, Barislav, *facilitated the discussion, showed the correct theory, and monitored the development of the thesis until it was completed.* (Rurik)

Excerpt 7
My supervisor was Saban. He was a supervisor with a broad understanding, an open mind, and never made unilateral judgments. I was very grateful for the attention and moral support given to me. (Czar)

Meanwhile, of all the participants who responded to the question, one indicated that supervisory is part of character building. It was through the supervisor's different feedback that he grew into a more mature person. He said:

Excerpt 8
Supervisors provide proper advice and do not hesitate to give hard and severe criticism, which students really need. For me, mentoring is a forging process that leaves a lasting impact and forms the student's personality. (Anzor)

To recap findings in the first category, the participants found their supervisors to be professional, personable, and supportive of their morale. The supervisors gave students sound guidance and delivered frank criticism, which had a long-lasting effect on their personalities.

Supervisor as a low-profile intellectual partner
In this second category, detailed personal stories reveal more about how thesis students perceive their supervisors. The accounts are provided below.

Excerpt 9
My supervisor was one of the people I admired the most. My mistake was that I wanted to be on the same footing as him in the scientific sphere, even though my experience and level of education were vastly different. But it was this that frequently made me feel insecure during the guidance process. It's still a long way from what he was expecting. But, as I later discovered, he had consistently pushed me to attain the peak of my research. To break through limit after limit of all my restrictions. Until I realized he genuinely cared about his students. He thought I was capable of doing better. Of course, this is encouraging for a stubborn student like me; none of this was surely communicated verbally. (Oleg)

Excerpt 10
I had a relaxed supervisor who allowed me to explore my topic and write. Despite being bogged down here and there. But, in the end, he made a specific, simple, and straightforward suggestion. Not instructing, but pointing out the right track. Without my violent trip and search, I doubt I would have understood his advice. I was obliged to study it first, and then there was some type of direction in the end. (Keeza)

Excerpt 11
My supervisor is very cooperative and inspiring. He has strict logic and an open mind. I learned a lot from him. He even became a buddy to talk to outside the university barrier. (Alexey)

One of the study participants wrote, without specifying whether the supervision received was substandard or bad:

Excerpt 12
My supervisor was unfamiliar with the theory I employed for my thesis; thus, he was unaware of my misunderstanding. (Fyodor)

Thus, it would be a mistake to view that all reflections in this category can be rated good or satisfactory since doubts may arise in certain instances.

Supervisor as a personal support system
The third category *supervisor as confidante* theme emerged from participants' differing voices on how supervisors were helpful. What came into view from this category

is the participants' voice on how the university's *cura personalis*, i.e., concern for the full person as well as concern for each student in his or her individuality was fully applied (cited in Bogel, 2012, p. 488). Supervisees often experience financial difficulties with which supervisors can directly or indirectly help. One thesis student wrote,

> Excerpt 13
> *Non-academically [the supervisor] was very helpful, especially when I had difficulty paying tuition. Academically, he was quite helpful in providing alternative thoughts. In the past 12 months, my perspective has evolved and recently been fixed. I suppose he was quite considerate about my [changing] intention.* (Ludmila)

The length of thesis completion varies, as indicated in Table 1, from 2 to 5 years. The varied study durations highlight another dimension of intersectionality. Students at different stages of their academic journey may have different needs and challenges. Students in the thesis completion stage may have distinct concerns compared to those in earlier program stages. Below, another supervisee who was a part-timer described how helpful her supervisor was:

> Excerpt 14
> *I had to work while studying at that time. Because I was not a really bright student, I was a little* keteteran, *lagged. At last, when writing my thesis, I decided to stop working, and I finished it in less than 10 months. Sergei was my supervisor at the time, and it was thanks to him that I was able to complete my thesis. This is a significant experience in my life.* (Yana)

The table shows that more female students are participating than male students. Two female thesis students in the survey said they felt comfortable discussing non-academic matters with supervisors of the same gender. One participant was fairly frail after giving birth to twins, while the other seemed uneasy about becoming (or not becoming) a mother.

> Excerpt 15
> *I'm touched and thrilled that my supervisor,* Nikita, *always encouraged me and double- and triple-checked my thesis as if she truly thought I could do it. This is so important to me in my fragile state that I have some hope. I am quite grateful.* (Tamara)

> Excerpt 16
> *Very tender-hearted and sympathetic to me like a mother. When I'm down, there's always a solution and someone to motivate me. I was honest with her about my difficulties at college, including my mental and emotional ups and downs when attending lecture sessions.* (Regina)

As also indicated in the table, participants in this study hailed from Mrican and other institutions. Coincidentally, the two accounts above come from supervisees who obtained Bachelor's degrees from state universities.

Discussion

Studies show that many students often struggle with establishing effective working relationships with their supervisors (e.g., Grant, 2018; Safitri et al., 2021; Opuku et al., 2022). In this current study, however, it is evident from Excerpts 1, 2, and 3 that the

thesis students cherish their good communication with their respective supervisors. The supervisor provided excellent support and guidance for the thesis, offering flexibility and confidence to investigate issues and theories. The supervisor was considerate, offering insights and being a confidant when students disappeared. Participants reported that all supervisors had great interactions with them. Supervisor Dimitri, in particular, is credited with inspiring and motivating the students while staying courteous and encouraging of the alumni. Stories from Yuri, Svetlana, and Sofia above demonstrate an amicable and flexible supervisor-supervisee relationship, with a traditional approach being employed by their supervisors. This finding confirms that able students tend to be independent as cited in a supervisory study conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Hendrickse, 2022). The traditional supervision model is more suitable for intelligent, self-directed graduate students who can become independent researchers with minimal supervision.

Here, the theme *supervisor as an amicable academic advisor* partly contradicts Wisker (2012) who believes that a supervisor's intention and spare time are crucial in supervision. Because the supervisor-supervisee encounter is a personal, professional, and political relationship, Wisker argues, supervisees usually have little or no power to disrupt the supervisor's agenda. However, it is evident from Excerpts 4 and 5 that the supervisors were quite accessible and welcoming although they were busy people. In this case, the accreditation process, which keeps lecturers busy, may deter supervisees from talking to their supervisors. However, the two accounts of Esenin and Gleb above show that supervisors were supportive during initial revisions. Despite challenges, supervisors were proactive in communication, and their enthusiasm after thesis completion was duly appreciated.

Intersectionality theory suggests that the students' social multiple identity markers have some impacts on their supervisor and supervisee engagement. Crenshaw's theory acknowledges that age and life stage are significant intersectional aspects. Whether the thesis students are early-career or mid-career professionals can intersect with other factors like family responsibilities, career goals, and study habits, which can influence their interactions with supervisors. Note that the participants' ages range from 22 to 62, as shown in the table above. The supervisor could be younger than the supervisee and vice-versa. Respect for the elderly and subordination of the young and lower class are just two instances of Indonesian cultural conduct and etiquette. It would not be surprising if an awkward situation occurred between the supervisor and the supervisee. For example, mature students with more life experience may have different needs and expectations from their supervisors compared to younger students. Furthermore, given the diversity of the graduate students' backgrounds (in terms of their undergraduate training as seen in the table), it is likely that some graduate students may hold such crucial responsibilities outside of the classroom context as deans, school principals, senior writers, religious authorities, etc. Young supervisors may be hesitant to criticize older or respectable supervisors, while senior thesis students may feel humbled to speak to younger supervisors. The scenario may be more complicated than this. The 2022 *Guidance Note on Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination, and Protection of Minorities* highlights the potential for structural framework to perpetuate inequality in society and within specific communities (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf). Thus, inequality is inevitable when the differing subjects interact with each other. Interestingly enough, it was proven in this study that supervisees received equitable treatment from supervisors. One participating thesis student, Svetlana, mused, "When requesting via WhatsApp, the supervisor was helpful and quick to respond."

Over 65% of participants found their supervisors professional and approachable, with Barislav facilitating discussions and Saban providing broad understanding and moral support (See Excerpts 7 and 8). They appreciated the supervisor's support and guidance throughout their studies. One participant, Anzor, believes supervisory support is crucial for character building, as it helps students grow into mature individuals. Thus, supervisors offer moral support, advice, and criticism, fostering a positive learning environment and lasting impact on a student's personality.

By comparison, another study on the supervision of Master's students in one accounting program in Indonesia finds opposing results in that supervisees had high expectations of the supervisors. They expect students to become excellent in research methods, experienced, senior, international publications, information technology, research topic knowledge, direction and thesis proofreading while maintaining close relationships, effective communication, and excellent research writing skills (Lambey et al., 2017).

For now, supervisors' constructive criticism, mentorship and guidance significantly influenced thesis students' personalities, fostering long-term positive influence among the study's participants. Supervisors were generally approachable, flexible and supportive of student's thesis progression, providing input and confidence. Some were considerate and good company, motivating and reminding students to continue working on their thesis. This study aligns with previous literature stating that thesis writing requires supervisor-supervisee joint involvement (Sharma, 2017). Furthermore, this study supports the notion that friendly and competent supervision enhances thesis completion when a comfortable interaction occurs (Ferreira-Meyers; Neupane Bastola, 2022).

Next, Polkinghorne's self-story as psychotherapy (2013) highlights the *supervisor as a low-profile intellectual partner* as the second theme. Listening to the participants' stories encourages indirect learning because favourable and unfavourable accounts allow vicarious learning and personal improvement for future reference. To quote Polkinghorne at length,

Reading and hearing stories is a means to learn from others' life lessons about ways of accomplishment – a kind of vicarious learning. Different cultures (a system that is beyond the capacity of single individuals) pass on favoured methods to new generations regarding successful and unsuccessful approaches for obtaining desired results (Polkinghorne, 2013, p. 24).

Excerpts 9 and 10 convey personal stories showing supervisors as individuals who actively contribute to students' intellectual growth and development. Supervisors are depicted as approachable, caring and intellectually engaging individuals who provide guidance and support without dominating students' learning processes. These stories corroborate Polkinghorne's vicarious learning ideas: the students' experiences provide valuable insights into how supervisors can be effective, low-profile intellectual partners.

Alexey's description of the supervisor as "cooperative and inspiring" in Excerpt 11 implies that his supervisor is more than just a distant authority figure, but rather someone who actively works with the student. The term "buddy" denotes a friendly and approachable relationship. Saying "strict logic and an open mind", the student means that the supervisor engages in intellectual debates and fosters critical thinking. This picture is consistent with the concept of a low-profile intellectual partner who engages in meaningful dialogues and contributes to learners' intellectual progress through collaborative learning. Meanwhile, Fyodor's account (Excerpt 12) suggests that either the supervisor posed himself as low-profile or he himself was misunderstood, if not to say smart-alecky. This episode demonstrates the importance of mutual trust when going on an intellectual journey. Although doubts about the supervisor as an intellectual collaborator sometimes

occur as in Excerpt 12, overall, the extracts demonstrate how personal stories disclose the supervisor-supervisee dynamics.

In sum, the personal accounts of thesis supervision underscore the supervisors' roles as low-profile intellectual partners who facilitate learning through collaboration, direction and encouragement. Regardless of the student's experience or learning capacity, the supervisor continually pushed them to realize their best potential. Supervisors had faith in supervisees' talents and encouraged them to research their topic. Despite the difficulties, in the beginning, the supervisor made helpful comments, guiding the student in the proper direction. The guidance provided by the supervisor was not verbal, but rather the outcome of the student's investigation and learning. At this stage, the findings in this category corroborate previous research (e.g., Barus, 2022; Rizqiyyah et al., 2021; Wisker, 2012) on preparing thesis students to become future independent researchers. This current study suggests that incorporating the supervisees' insights could potentially make thesis writing less challenging. After all, supervisors are merely human, and keeping a low profile is essential.

Finally, the last theme is the *supervisor as a personal support system.* The data show that participants, including those who hardly gave supervisors a positive rating academically, offered evidence to maintain their impression of supervisors who provided moral support far more than intellectual support. Ardi et al. (2023) suggest that providing such support can enhance interrelatedness and foster positive engagement throughout the supervision process.

Excerpt 13 details a student's experience with his supervisor providing non-academic aid, especially financial assistance. Excerpt 14 underlines the need for a supervisor's aid in assisting a part-time student in finishing their thesis. These instances show how supervisors can go beyond academic assistance to provide personal support, resulting in a confidante-like connection. This study further delves into the *cura personalis* concept or care for the whole person and individuality. Excerpts 13, 15 and 16 showcase this concept of supervisors providing emotional support, encouragement and understanding beyond academic issues. The supervisor's engagement in addressing non-academic difficulties and giving motivation is consistent with caring for students' entire well-being. This study has thus emphasized that paying close attention to each thesis student to ensure their holistic development is significant.

Meanwhile, in terms of gender, two female thesis students in the study acknowledged that they could be frank in discussing non-academic issues with their supervisors. Gender is a critical dimension in intersectionality, as it can affect how students perceive and engage with their supervisors. Gender-related expectations, communication styles, and experiences of bias or discrimination may all play a role in shaping these relationships. The supportive nature of a female supervisor, who is compared to a mother figure and portrayed as compassionate and understanding, is emphasized in Excerpts 15 and 16. Here, both Tamara and Regina appear to gain a supportive environment to alleviate double or triple duties when they can talk about personal experiences without feeling afraid, ashamed, or even threatened. The study found that discussing personal experiences significantly enhances positive student-supervisor relationships, especially for female students. This aligns with intersectionality, where gender influences how students perceive and engage with supervisors.

Sabrina Syed explored the experiences of international female Doctorate students in Australia via the perspectives of intersectionality and feminist theory (Syed, 2017). Due to social constraints, women find it difficult to advance in their graduate studies because they traditionally have more domestic duties. These duties include a variety of family roles that are socially assigned to women, such as caring for the home, raising children, and

even earning money for extra expenses. Although the two female participants discussed had slightly different experiences and backgrounds from graduate students in Syed's research, it can be argued that they found comfort after having confided with supervisors about their situation. Sharing intimate stories with a "stranger" of the same gender appears easier.

Voice is important in qualitative content analysis because researchers explore diverse interpretations by considering diverse voices, perspectives, critiques and text uses. Krippendorff says,

> Qualitative researchers search for multiple interpretations by considering diverse voices (readers), alternative perspectives (from different ideological positions), oppositional readings (critiques), or varied uses of the texts examined (by different groups). (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 103)

In short, examining different voices and opposing viewpoints from the thesis student participants paves the way for a deeper comprehension of the difficulties in thesis supervision. Using thesis students' personal experiences and diverse voices, this research reveals challenges in thesis supervision in navigating personal support, mentorship and holistic growth within the academic setting. These experiences are consistent with the notion of supervisors working as confidantes and emphasize the value of being concerned about students' overall well-being and academic development. Their voices demonstrate the university's concern for full personal growth as well as respect for each student's uniqueness.

Conclusion, Implications, Limitations

The issue highlighted in this study is the difficulty that Master's students frequently have in viewing and communicating with their supervisors. This difficulty has the potential to significantly influence the quality of the supervising relationship and, as a result, the success of the student's thesis completion. Results from this study have confirmed previous findings on how graduate students themselves perceive their supervisory relationships. As perceived by almost all research participants, a comfortable situation is essential to ensure that the thesis writing process runs well. Discoveries about these generalizable pleasant and warm academic environments in the present research provide further insights into the use of personal stories and intersectional perspectives not clearly shown in previous research. The inclusion of a cultural context from Yogyakarta, Indonesia, broadens the scope of this inquiry. It provides additional perspectives on how cultural factors influence supervision dynamics in Asian regions that may differ from those in European settings. The study highlights the influence of contextual factors like undergraduate coaching and reflective pedagogy on the formation of supervisor-supervisee relationships. Diverse voices from supervisees about their supervisors might be used to make thesis writing less difficult. To conclude, graduate students are varied in terms of personal, rational, and cultural backgrounds as well as opportunities. Graduate studies, culminating in thesis completion, will not be a pleasant and fulfilling journey until mutual understanding is achieved between supervisors and supervisees.

In terms of practical implications, the study's findings reveal three topics to help improve humanistic education and self-development. *First*, supervisors' multiple roles (affectionate mentors, intellectual partners and personal confidantes) can enhance supervisor-supervisee interactions. *Second*, in reflective pedagogy, *cura personalis* offers supervisors with emotional support, encouragement and understanding beyond academic topics that students require, particularly during thesis writing challenges. *Third*, whole-person education can be achieved by paying attention to the holistic growth of each thesis student. The supervisors' supportive actions and commitment to developing students'

academic, emotional and personal progress are critical in fostering humanistic learning and personal development.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations due to its small sample size, reliance on document analysis and focus on student perspectives. Possible extensions of this study could be to validate the document analysis with in-depth interviews and observation. Additionally, given that this current study was conducted in the Master's program, it may be worthwhile to investigate similar issues in the Doctorate program to determine whether the results presented here reflect the general situation of thesis supervision at all graduate levels. Finally, future studies should include supervisor perspectives in other cultural settings to provide a more balanced view.

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