

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**WRITTEN FEEDBACK ON
POSTGRADUATE THESIS
WRITING: PERSPECTIVES OF
STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS IN A
MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY**

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of the requirements for the degree of
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia tries to strengthen its manpower through higher education as it targets to be a fully developed country by 2020. It aims to produce 60,000 PhD holders by 2023 to function in today's competitive global market. Unfortunately, to date, Malaysia has not been very successful in this effort due to high attrition and low completion rates among postgraduate students. Problems related to thesis writing have been the main factor leading to this situation. As most postgraduates rely on supervisors' feedback, it plays a crucial role that determines their success or failure in writing their thesis and completing their studies. This study was conducted to investigate how supervisors' written feedback is provided on postgraduate thesis writing and issues that relate to it. The descriptive study involved 64 postgraduate students and 34 supervisors from the faculties in the Social Sciences and Humanities as well as Business Management clusters in one public university in Malaysia. The study employed a mixed-methods research design where data was collected using questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis. The quantitative data was statistically analysed using SPSS version 22 while the qualitative data was analysed using the content analysis technique. The validity and reliability of instruments were established through experts' opinions and a pilot study. The overall reliability was established at 0.929 alpha level. The findings revealed that both students and supervisors perceived written feedback as a specific guidance to correct students' mistakes and improve their thesis writing skills. Most students preferred to get handwritten and detailed feedback. Although detailed feedback was necessary, supervisors believed that students ought to be trained to be independent. So, they mostly provided more feedback during the early stages of writing. However, students wanted more feedback in the other stages as well. Both parties agreed that one to two weeks was the most appropriate timing to give feedback but this timeframe was quite difficult for supervisors to meet. A majority of supervisors provided symbols, followed by deletions in the actual written feedback. They mostly opted for direct feedback and emphasized more on language accuracy when giving feedback. Most students utilized only what they understood from the feedback. Among challenges faced by students are the lack of details in written feedback, supervisors' poor handwriting, poor timing and insufficient amount of feedback. While challenges faced by supervisors comprised students' poor writing skills, their own limited knowledge and skills and time constraint. The findings imply that the provision of supervisors' written feedback on postgraduate thesis writing particularly in the Malaysian context leaves much to be desired. In order to increase the feedback effectiveness, this study proposes a Framework of Providing Written Feedback on Postgraduate Thesis Writing. Supervisors can use it to improve their way of providing feedback, while students can use it to enhance their utilization of feedback. Finally, postgraduate schools and the Ministry of Education (MOE) are recommended to include a course on written feedback to both students and supervisors.

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