

## Original Article

**Exploring the Impact of Delayed or Insufficient Feedback from Thesis Supervisors on Postgraduate Scholars' Timely Degree Completion**

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This paper uses a mixed-methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative methods of research have been used to assess the quality of feedback, establish the reasons for delays in feedback, and evaluate the effects of disruptions and problems in feedback on students' academic performance and well-being. The findings of this paper indicate that the major reasons for delays in giving feedback to students include the supervisor's workload, lack of clarity and ambiguity in policies, and communication problems and gaps. These delays in feedback have an impact on students' academic progress, which in turn delays their graduation. To resolve and overcome these problems, this study proposes a framework to emphasize the importance of providing clear feedback timelines, communication, and institutional support to resolve delays. This framework aims to enhance the quality of postgraduate supervision through better feedback practices. In addition, this study offers suggestions for supervisors, students, learners, and institutions to improve feedback practices and resolve delays to enable students to complete their studies on time. Thus, by resolving these problems associated with feedback, institutions can enhance the quality of postgraduate learning and enable students to complete their learning objectives on time.

**Keywords:** *Keywords Feedback Delays, Postgraduate Supervision, Degree Completion, Supervisor Workload, and Academic Stress: A Conceptual Framework*

**INTRODUCTION**

During postgraduation, the research is an academic rigorous and time-consuming process that involves extensive independent study, analysis, and writing. As students continue with their research, the role of thesis supervision becomes critical to their academic success. Feedback is an important aspect of successful thesis supervision. Feedback refers to the direction, comments, modifications and recommendations made by the supervisor to guide students in improving their work to meet academic standards. Feedback is critical as it helps students to improve their research, overcome possible flaws, loopholes and continue with their research endeavors.

For postgraduate students, feedback is a major challenge they encounter. Research indicates timely feedback is delayed or not clear, it can hinder the research process, increase completion times, and lower the quality of the

outcome (Chen & Martin, 2022). The problem of delayed feedback has become a critical issue, especially with the increasing pressures that academic supervisors encounter, especially in institutions with large student enrollments where supervisors have multiple responsibilities.

Feedback is very crucial and important for ensuring that postgraduate students make progress and complete their degrees within timeframe. Unfortunately, many postgraduate students face the problem of not getting feedback on time because there may be a number of reasons for which the supervisor may not be able to give feedback to the students on time. These may include the workload of the supervisor, inefficiencies in the institution, and a lack of communication between the students and their supervisors (Fowler & Peters, 2023; Silva & Tavares, 2025). As a result, students may have to wait for feedback for several weeks, and they may not have any idea about how to



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proceed with their research.

This study examines the effects of delays or lack of feedback from thesis supervisors on the time for the completion of postgraduate qualifications. It also examines the reasons behind these delays, their effects on postgraduate students' academic progress, and possible solutions to fill the gap in feedback provision for postgraduate research. Through the examination of the feedback process from the students' point of view, this research seeks to determine strategies for effective feedback provision and minimizing delays to enhance postgraduate students' experiences.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of delays in the receipt of feedback from thesis supervisors persists and affects postgraduate students' ability to complete their research work within the expected time frame. Feedback is critical for academic development because it enables students to enhance and strengthen their work and stay within the required academic standards. The problem of delays in the receipt of feedback is mostly important because it may result in delays in the completion of thesis work.

Postgraduate students often face challenges and obstacles when they receive delayed feedback, which makes them question whether their work is on track or not. Delayed feedback may cause stress, lack of motivation, enthusiasm and, in some cases, loss of confidence (Quan & Zhao, 2023). The problem of delayed feedback is particularly important during the critical stages of research work, such as data analysis, when students need guidance from supervisors on how to interpret and approach the methodologies.

Also, the lack of transparent communication between the students and the supervisors with regard to feedback is a factor that has exacerbated the problem. In many cases, the students get stuck without knowing the exact time they expect feedback on the work they submitted. This has caused a lot of frustration among the students. Consequently, the academic work is affected.

In spite of these challenges, there has been limited research on the structural and institutional factors leading to delayed feedback in postgraduate studies. This study sought to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the role of institutional policies, supervisor workload, and communication barriers in delayed feedback.

Additionally, it will explore how these

delays affect students' academic performance, emotional well-being, and their ability to graduate on time

### Research Objective

- Exploring the Impact of Delayed or Insufficient Feedback from Thesis Supervisors on Postgraduate Scholars' Timely Degree Completion.

### Research Question

- What is the Impact of Delayed or Insufficient Feedback from Thesis Supervisors on Postgraduate Scholars' Timely Degree Completion?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The course of research supervision for postgraduate research is an complicated and complex process. The process requires effective communication, timely feedback, and expectations. However, one of the critical elements that influence the process of postgraduate research is the feedback process. Feedback is an essential tool for the student. It enables the student to improve the quality of their study work and research design, rectify the methodology of the research, and enhance the quality of their academic writing. However, several research works have established that the feedback process is often delayed. The delay in the feedback process has hindered the completion of the research by the master's and doctoral students within the expected time frame. This literature review aims to discuss the dynamic forces of the feedback process, the implications of the feedback delay, the proposed frameworks, and the feedback delay.

### Feedback Timing and Supervisory Practices

The literature on postgraduate supervision has perpetually emphasized the significance of feedback in the academic development of research students. Supervisory feedback is not only evaluative in nature but is also seen as having an important scholastic function in the development of research approaches, problem-solving skills, and academic identity.

In their comprehensive review of the literature on postgraduate supervision, Chugh, Macht, and Harreveld (2022) emphasized the significance of supervisory feedback in the research success of postgraduate research students. The results of the literature review indicate the significance of feedback timing in the research success of research students. The results show that feedback

timing enables research students to make continuous improvements in their research, particularly during critical research phases such as the research proposal defense, data analysis, and thesis writing.

Similarly, the importance of engagement in the feedback interactions and integration between the research supervisors and the research students has been highlighted by Bastola (2024). The findings and results of the literature review indicate the significance of the perceptions of the research students regarding the timing and the relevance of the feedback to the research confidence and the quality of the research. Abeid et al. (2025) conducted an empirical study to examine the perceptions of the postgraduate supervisors regarding the postgraduate supervision in the medical education field. It was found that the delays in the feedback were acknowledged as a major problem by the postgraduate supervisors. It was also found that the supervisors were faced with a heavy workload, academic pressures, and a lack of clarity over the institution's expectations. These findings are consistent with the consensus that supervisors acknowledge the importance of timely feedback but face difficulties in providing the same.

### Effects of Delayed Feedback on Postgraduate Completion

The academic and psychological effects of delayed feedback on postgraduate students are critical. Literature has always pointed out that delayed feedback has significant effects on the academic confidence of postgraduate students. A research article published by Higher Education Research & Development (2025) on the causes of postgraduate research delays identified that one of the major reasons for the delay in the completion of postgraduate research is the latency of feedback from supervisors. It was identified that postgraduate students who had to wait for weeks to get feedback from their supervisors would not be able to meet the internal deadlines and would not be able to proceed with their research work.

The psychological effects of delayed feedback on postgraduate students are discussed by Quan and Zhao (2023). It was identified that the psychological effect of delayed feedback on postgraduate students is that the students would feel anxious and stagnant while waiting for the feedback from the supervisors. It was identified that the reason for this feeling of stagnation is

the lack of guidance and academic autonomy. Particularly, delays longer than two weeks were identified as especially disruptive, causing students to doubt their decisions or postpone research tasks until they received feedback.

The PMC article on the barriers faced by the students in the supervision process for postgraduate students (2025) also states that the feedback process is often delayed, especially during the critical stages of data analysis and interpretation. According to the students, it was difficult for them to maintain the enthusiasm and eagerness required for the next stage of the research process, as the feedback process was often delayed. Chugh et al. (2022) also stated that the feedback process, if delayed, can also disrupt the feedback loop, which is a continuous process for the students, i.e., the students will again end up committing the same mistakes, which will prolong the overall time for the research process.

### Supervisor Workload and Institutional Factors

Supervisor workload is an important aspect that needs to be understood while analyzing the reasons behind feedback delays. Various studies emphasize the fact that supervisors tend to carry out multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Abeid et al. (2025) studied the reasons behind feedback delays and found that supervisors' work overload and time constraints were the major reasons behind feedback delays. Supervisors explained that due to their multiple responsibilities, they did not find adequate time to give detailed feedback. Haiping (2025) studied the supervision of postgraduate students at the University of Namibia and found that institutional factors affect feedback delivery significantly. The absence of feedback deadlines and supervision guidelines resulted in inconsistent feedback. It is evident that institutions with proper policies and guidelines regarding feedback delivery tend to give consistent feedback.

Similarly, the research on *Assessing the Impact of Supervision Quality* (2025) highlights the need for university institutions to have effective support systems, such as workload management and feedback policies, which are associated with the effectiveness of supervision. The universities without effective support systems experienced an increase in feedback delays, which in turn influenced the completion of degrees.

### Communication Challenges in Supervision

The problems that are associated with

feedback delay are often made worse by communication problems that occur between the students and their supervisors. For effective supervision, it is important to set expectations regarding the feedback process. Palmer (2023) asserts that communication problems that include infrequent meetings, lack of clarity, or incongruences in goals often lead to feedback delay problems. For example, the students may not understand when they should expect feedback or what they should improve on. As a result, they may end up waiting to understand these issues, and this takes a long time to come.

Foster & Richardson (2023) also indicate that students often complain that the feedback they are given by their supervisors is not detailed enough. For example, the supervisors may give their opinion on the quality of the work that is done. However, they may not give sufficient information regarding the methods and concepts that were used in the implementation. Yang (2023) also examines the feedback process in the context of international doctoral students. According to this study, the feedback process may be affected in that the students come from different backgrounds.

### Supervisor–Student Relationship and Feedback Quality

The relationship between supervisor and student is a major theme in research on postgraduate research. Positive relationships, which involve a sense of respect and good communication, have been shown to be associated with better feedback quality and timeliness. In a research paper by Ndayambaje (2024), which examines the effects of supervisor engagement on postgraduate research completion, it has been shown that supervisors with high engagement levels, which involve timely and detailed feedback, enable smoother research processes and reduce the likelihood of research delays. Supervisors with low levels of engagement, however, result in delayed, vague, and unclear feedback, causing frustration for the students.

Peterson and Shearer (2022), writing for the *Journal of Student Affairs in Higher Education*, have shown that students who felt supported by their supervisors reported better research outcomes and reduced stress levels. Even when feedback was delayed, communication about the reasons for the delay helped alleviate negative perceptions. In the study by Janssen and van Vuuren (2023) on the well-being of graduate

students, the study revealed that timely and positive feedback to students motivated them. However, when the feedback was negative and did not offer suggestions, students experienced more self-doubt about their capabilities.

### Motivation, Well-Being, and Academic Productivity

Not only is there a logistic issue in terms of thesis development, but there is a psychological impact as well. In a study by Quan and Zhao (2023), it was found that students who are subjected to a high frequency of feedback delays tend to have lower motivation levels and are more likely to suffer from academic stress. This is because of the uncertainty of the research progress and the need to make changes to the thesis because of the feedback delays. Rahman and Hasan (2024) expand on the fact that academic burnout can be a result of feedback delays, as students may attempt to make progress on their thesis independently, only to have to make changes once the feedback is received.

### Conceptual Frameworks for Feedback and Supervision

Several studies have developed conceptual models to assist in the understanding and improvement of feedback processes within postgraduate supervision. A model of supervision effectiveness is discussed by Van der Berg (2025), which highlights the role of timeliness of feedback as an important factor affecting student performance. A supervision maturity model is discussed by White and Black (2025), which describes the varying standards of feedback quality from informal to more formal and timely feedback. This model highlights the role of feedback accountability and the establishment of feedback timetables.

Xu and Talib (2023) describe feedback ecosystems, where feedback is an interactive process between supervisors, students, and support systems within an institution. The feedback model emphasizes the need to improve communication channels, student expectations, and the student voice. In another study, Yilmaz and Cayirici (2024) describe feedback cycles and demonstrate the role of the timing of feedback delivery in the process of developing research work. The authors propose that institutions should develop feedback performance indicators to ensure supervisors follow feedback timelines.

### Synthesis of Literature and Research Gap

The body of literature presents a striking

consensus on several pivotal points regarding postgraduate research:

- In this context, the provision of timely feedback appears to function as a lifeline for students, whose indispensable role cannot be overstated in promoting the growth of students and ensuring the successful culmination of the students' research endeavors.
- On the contrary, the provision of delayed feedback appears to function as a formidable barrier to the research process, which significantly impacts the levels of stress experienced by students and the timeframe within which the students' degree program culminates.
- Some of the key factors that contribute to these frustrating delays include the often-overwhelming workload faced by the supervisors, the inflexibility of the institution's policies, as well as the communication barriers that often exist.
- However, the development of positive relationships between the students and the supervisors appears to function as a powerful antidote to the negative impacts of delayed feedback.
- In addition, conceptual frameworks seem to act as a powerful tool for fostering the development of the students' research experience.

The evidence effectively reveals that the timing of feedback is very crucial. Delays in receiving supervisory feedback are not isolated incidents; rather, they are systemic flaws and issues influenced by supervisor workload, institutional support, and communication practices. When feedback is delayed or inadequate, postgraduate students encounter academic, psychological, and structural challenges that can extend their degree completion time. To address and combat these challenges and obstacles, it is essential to raise awareness and establish formal policies, clear communication channels, and frameworks that ensure timely and constructive feedback for all postgraduate students.

The conceptual model illustrates the relationship between the different independent variables that influence feedback delays, as well as the effect of feedback delays on the completion of a postgraduate degree. It shows the independent variables, including supervisor workload, institutional policies, communication,

among others, that affect the feedback process. It also shows the effect of feedback delays on the dependent variables, including academic stress, motivation, among others. It shows that feedback delays will influence the completion of a postgraduate degree.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In the current research, the conceptual framework acts as a basis for the research design, which identifies the variables and their relationships. The research design is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, as it involves conducting a survey and interviews. The research design will enable the researcher to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of the timing of supervisory feedback on the ability of postgraduate students to complete their degrees on time. The research design adopted in this study is mixed methods. The mixed-methods research design combines both quantitative and qualitative research designs. The mixed-methods research design will enable the researcher to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of delayed or inadequate supervisory feedback on postgraduate students' ability to complete their degrees on time. The mixed-methods research design will enable the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, as it combines numerical data with qualitative data.

The quantitative component of the research involves conducting a survey aimed at finding out the incidence of delays in providing feedback, the causes of the delays in providing feedback, and the effects of delays in providing feedback on the academic development of the students. The qualitative component of the research involves conducting interviews with postgraduate students and their supervisors. This will provide an in-depth understanding of the effects of delays in providing feedback on the academic and psychological development of the students.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The online survey was carried out among the postgraduate students of various universities. The questions were both closed and open-ended types. The information was collected regarding the following aspects of feedback:

- Feedback timing: The time period between the submission of the academic work and the

feedback provided by the supervisor.

- Feedback quality: The students' perception of the quality of the feedback provided.
- Impact of feedback: The impact of feedback on the research progress, motivation, and academic stress of the students.
- Factors that influence feedback delays: Factors that influence the feedback provided.

The online survey was sent through the official university email list, and the participation was completely voluntary. In order to make the sample representative, the postgraduate students of various departments, such as the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, were invited to take part in the online survey.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Apart from the survey, another research method that was conducted was the use of semi-structured interviews, targeting a sample of postgraduate students (n = 20) and thesis supervisors (n = 10) through a purposive sample. These interviews were designed to explore students' personal experiences with feedback delays, their effects, and the student-supervisor relationship. For the thesis supervisors, the research aimed to understand the underlying reasons for feedback delays, including workload commitments, roles, and the importance of feedback in postgraduate supervision. The use of the semi-structured interview method was advantageous, as the participants were able to provide more information about the research, while the method was consistent throughout the interview sessions.

The interview protocol included questions such as:

For the postgraduate students:

- How would you describe your experiences of receiving feedback from your thesis supervisor?
- What impact has delayed feedback had on your research progress and academic performance?
- How do you perceive the communication between you and your supervisor regarding feedback?

For the supervisors:

- What challenges do you face when it comes to timely feedback for postgraduate students?
- How do you handle the expectations of postgraduate students regarding feedback timelines?

All the interviews were conducted virtually. Informed consent of the participants was obtained, and the interview was audio-recorded, later transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

### Data Analysis Techniques

#### Quantitative Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify patterns in association with feedback timing, student experiences, and factors that result in delay in feedback. The data was analyzed using SPSS software. The results were presented using frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency such as mean and median to:

- The average duration of feedback delay.
- The proportion of students who experienced feedback delay for a period of up to two weeks.
- The perceived impact of feedback delay on academic performance and level of stress.

These analyses gave an overall idea about the feedback delay among postgraduate students.

#### Qualitative Data Analysis

The transcripts were coded and analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a qualitative approach for identifying and reporting themes present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The rationale for using this approach was the need for a systematic and flexible interpretation of the data.

The analysis followed a six-step process:

- Familiarization of the data: Data was read and re-read again for a comprehensive understanding of the data.
- Generating codes: Key characteristics of the data, which were relevant for the research questions, were identified and systematically coded.
- Searching for themes: Codes were combined to create broader themes.
- Reviewing themes: Emerging themes were refined and reviewed for a clear understanding of the data.
- Defining and naming themes: Clear definitions of the themes were created for a clear understanding of the data.
- Writing the report: Emerging themes were related to the research questions and existing literature.

This analytical approach offered a more

profound understanding of the perspectives of both students and supervisors on the issue of feedback delay, and the emotional and academic consequences thereof.

## **FINDINGS & RESULTS**

The participants were a total of 150 postgraduate students, and the response rate was 45%. The participants were from a variety of subjects, such as the social sciences, which made up 45%, humanities, which made up 30%, and natural science, which made up 25%. Moreover, 20 postgraduate students and 10 thesis supervisors participated in the semi-structured interviews.

### **Survey Results**

#### **Feedback Timing**

**Prevalence of Feedback Delays:** The research showed that 65% of the students had experienced delays in receiving feedback from their thesis supervisors. Of these, 40% had experienced delays of more than two weeks, while some students had to wait for up to 6 weeks for feedback. The average delay in the provision of feedback was up to 3 weeks

#### **Impact on Academic Performance**

**Progress and Completion:** Many learners (75%) reported that delayed feedback slowed down their research progress and extended their time to degree completion. Students who experienced feedback delays longer than two weeks were 50% more likely to report issues with meeting deadlines and submitting drafts on time. **Stress and Motivation:** Students who faced feedback delays also reported higher levels of academic stress. 60% of students cited stress as a direct effect of waiting for feedback, with some expressing feelings of uncertainty and frustration regarding the quality and timing of the feedback.

#### **Factors Contributing to Delayed Feedback**

**Supervisor Workload:** The most common factor cited for the delay in feedback was the supervisor's workload. As a matter of fact, 45% of students claimed that their supervisors were not able to provide timely feedback due to their teaching responsibilities, administrative duties, and supervising more than one student at a time. **Communication Barriers:** 30% of students noted that unclear communication about when to expect feedback was a significant problem. Some students mentioned that they were unsure

of how long feedback would take, leading to uncertainty

## **Discussion**

The results of this study confirm that existing literature has depicted the significant academic and psychological impacts of delayed feedback on postgraduate students. In support of the available literature, it was found that 65% of the participants experienced delayed feedback, with an average delay of three weeks. This was integrated to reduced research progress, difficulties in meeting deadlines, and increased times to complete the degree. The results of this study support the claim made by Chen and Martin (2022) that feedback needs to be provided in a timely manner to ensure that research progress is maintained and academic success is achieved within timeframe. When feedback is provided in a timely manner, students can revise their work, adjust their research focus, and continue with their research projects. However, when feedback is delayed, this process is disrupted. The psychological aspect of delayed feedback was also found to be a major theme in this study. In support of the assertion made by Quan and Zhao (2023), it was noted that participants suffered from increased stress, uncertainty, and lack of motivation due to delayed feedback. This further contributed to the long period taken to complete the task.

The consequences of the results of this study are of significant importance to postgraduate supervision. First, the results of this study highlight the need for timely feedback with the aim of promoting the academic progress of students. Supervisors form a crucial contestant in the formulation of the research path followed by the student, and any delay on the part of the supervisors may pose a significant challenge to the student with the aim of meeting the deadlines set by the institution. Secondly, the results of this study highlight the need for effective communication on the feedback expectations. The formulation of feedback timelines at the beginning of the supervisory relationship may help address the issue of feedback delay. The formalization of feedback timelines and the formulation of feedback expectations may enhance the supervisory experience. Lastly, the results of this study imply that the institution must address the structural issues associated with the delay in feedback. The workload and supervision policies developed by the institution may be reviewed with the aim of ensuring the supervisors' capacity to provide timely feedback.

The issue of feedback delay must be a collective responsibility among the supervisors, the students, and the institution.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the impact of supervisory feedback delays or inability on the timely completion of postgraduate qualifications. The findings revealed that delays in feedback are a common phenomenon among postgraduate students. It was revealed that 65% of the students experienced a delay of more than two weeks, on average, around three weeks. The impact of the delay is seen to be severe and profound. The students experienced delays in research work, difficulties in meeting deadlines, loss of motivation, and increased levels of stress. The findings revealed the importance of timely feedback as a vital ingredient for the continuation of research work and the completion of the degree. Furthermore, it is also revealed through this research that not only is the delay in feedback a student-level phenomenon, but it is also influenced by structural factors.

## Recommendations for Improving Feedback Systems

- From the outcomes, the following recommendations and suggestions are proposed for the betterment of feedback practices and timely degree completion:
- Build clear institutional feedback policies that define reasonable timelines for providing supervisory feedback.
- Provide training and professional development for supervisors, focusing on effective time management and constructive feedback delivery.
- Encourage structured and regular communication between supervisors and students to clarify feedback expectations and reduce misunderstandings.
- Observe supervision workload distribution to ensure supervisors have adequate capacity to provide timely feedback.

Implementation of the above steps can help minimize feedback delays, improve student well-being, and improve the outcomes of postgraduate research studies.

## Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any competing interest.

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