

Communication Dynamics Between First-Year Doctoral Students and Supervisors

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Abstract: *Building and maintaining a relationship with the supervisor is crucial for a doctoral student to guarantee stable progress. One of the important aspects is owing to both written and spoken communication, for example, in email and direct conversations. This study examines sample communication activities of three Indonesian doctoral students and their supervisors to unfold the construction of shared values between them. An appraisal system analyses the linguistic mechanism of engagement, attitude, and graduation systems through which power and relationship are built between first-year doctoral students and their supervisors.*

Keywords: *appraisal system, doctoral students, linguistic mechanism, student-supervisor communication*

Abstrak: *Membangun dan mempertahankan hubungan dengan pembimbing sangatlah penting guna menjamin stabilitas perkembangan studi mahasiswa doctoral. Salah satu aspeknya adalah bentuk komunikasi lisan dan tertulis, misalnya melalui email dan percakapan langsung. Penelitian ini memanfaatkan data yang diperoleh dari sampel aktivitas komunikasi tiga mahasiswa doctoral asal Indonesia dengan pembimbingnya untuk memahami nilai-nilai yang ada di antara mereka. Analisis dilakukan dengan sistem appraisal terhadap mekanisme linguistik, terdiri atas sistem engagement, attitude, dan graduation, yang digunakan untuk membangun sistem hubungan dan kuasa antara mahasiswa doctoral tahun pertama dengan pembimbingnya.*

Kata Kunci: *mekanisme linguistik, komunikasi mahasiswa-pembimbing, mahasiswa doctoral, sistem appraisal*

This study examines the communication experiences of Indonesian doctoral students in their first six months into candidature. At the doctoral level, good communication between student and supervisor is one of the most critical factors in determining the establishment of the project proposal, as well as the success of the overall research project. Building and maintaining an excellent interpersonal relationship with the supervisor is crucial to guarantee

consistent study progress. Experience with a supervisor plays a pivotal role in the successful completion of a research degree (Lee, 2008, p. 268), and the success of the supervision process, leading to earning the degree, depends on a good relationship between the student and supervisor (Unsworth, Turner, Williams, & Piccin-Houle, 2010, p. 875). However, both student and supervisor must understand their respective roles to ensure the success of

the supervisory relationship (Hodza, 2007, p. 1159). The present study is based on the premise that building and maintaining a relationship with the supervisor depends on written communication using email and direct conversations.

The theoretical framework guiding the study is based on research by Bitzer and Albertyn (2011, p. 884), who proposed a framework for planning for a range of approaches to supervision unique to specific supervising contexts. The framework is called the hybrid model of supervision. The study analyses sample written and spoken communication between students and supervisors. The appraisal analysis framework (Martin & White, 2005, p. 38) helps examine the roles of language in constructing student-supervisor interpersonal relationships. This scheme works through the mechanisms of language expression termed engagement, attitude, and graduation systems. The study aimed to gain insights into the dynamic patterns of student and supervisor authority as reflected in spoken and written communication to understand how both parties play their roles in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships at the first stage of a doctoral career.

Pearson and Kayrooz (2004, p. 110) state that higher degree research study differs from traditional undergraduate education in terms of the demand for students' independence to question, develop and manage ideas and write a sound thesis. Therefore, Eshtiaghi, Robertson, and Warren-Myers (2012, p. 2) suggest that the relationship between student and

supervisor is fundamental to guarantee productive study progress, the foundations of which should be built early on. Eshtiaghi, Robertson, and Warren-Myers (2012, p. 4) further describe that different roles between students and supervisors are inherent to different relationships' power. Supervisors' communication of their supportive role and work would create a collegial atmosphere with the students. In addition, Gunasekera, Liyanagamage, and Fernando (2021, p. 4) also suggested that the feeling of safety and security within a supervisor-student relationship is a critical factor for developing a healthy relationship between both.

The roles of supervisors are diverse. In one of the earliest research, Phillips and Pugh (2005, p. 54) state that supervisors' responsibilities include providing a conducive environment for a research culture, having a detailed understanding of the research area and research processes, and providing constructive feedback for students' work in a timely fashion. Due to these various responsibilities, Bernard and Goodyear (2019, p. 10) suggest that adequate supervision would require different techniques and approaches. Hodza (2012, p. 96) also states that supervisors must often adjust the relationships to meet students' learning needs. On the other hand, higher-degree students are responsible for committing themselves to the demands required for the whole process of higher-degree research (Hodza, 2007, p. 1161).

Regular student-supervisor communication is essential in tracking study progress.

Ives and Rowley (2005, p. 542) outline details of communicative events such as frequency, duration, and contact methods, which may vary throughout the candidature period. It is important to note that the supervisor-student relationship is at the heart of a complex and intimate academic and interpersonal relationship. While numerous best practice frameworks exist, supervision cannot be based on a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Each student should be seen as an individual and use open and honest communication from the outset to negotiate a pedagogical relationship that is flexible, context-specific, and mutually rewarding. To this purpose, an essential foundation of a healthy and solid student-supervisor relationship is communication in both spoken and written forms (Miller, 1998, p. 28).

The core of doctoral supervision is the intense interaction between student and supervisor in academic consultation and discussion sessions. In research dealing with student-supervisor interaction, Bitzer and Albertyn (2004, p. 881) found that it is necessary to pay more attention to the nature of doctoral supervision to change the current supervision strategies, especially regarding communication patterns. Due to the complexity of doctoral research experience, the roles of supervisors should be reconsidered to identify the purpose of the overall doctoral supervision process (McCormack & Pamphilon, 2004, p. 28). In light of this rationale, Bitzer and Albertyn (2004, p. 881) then constructed a doctoral supervision planning framework by summarising the body of literature related

to the roles of supervisors. The result is a framework model designed based on the identified alternative approaches to doctoral supervision. Termed a hybrid model of postgraduate supervision, the framework is expected to be applicable in any unique context of doctoral supervision. It consists of Individual Interaction (I), Expert (E), Group (G), and Administrator (A) approach to refer to the supervisor’s roles. Each approach would mean different planning strategies in spreading the supervisor’s workload to increase the efficiency of their roles and practices. Among the various benefits outlined in Bitzer and Albertyn’s (2004, p. 881) research, this study highlights the use of the doctoral supervision planning framework to form a basis for student-supervisor discussion during the initial stages of supervision. It is observed that the actual communication between student and supervisor through written and spoken communication in the first year of doctoral is essential in determining the quality of the relationship between them.

Written and spoken communication between doctoral students and supervisors provides this study’s principal information. The data analysis methodology is underpinned by the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, which posits an interconnection between language use and situational and social contexts wherein language operates to make appropriate meanings (Christie & Unsworth, 2000, p. 8). In a further development, Rose and Martin (2012, p. 12) argue that genre is also a key consideration in creating a

thorough understanding of meaning in language. SFL recognises three language registers as a systematic theory: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Each metafunction is realised in language expressions to refer to the 'what' or the topic, 'who' or the role relationships of interactants, and 'how' or the organisation of information that occurs in language use, whether spoken or written. This study focuses on the interpersonal function of language expressions, elaborating on the functions of language in enacting relations between language users and building relationships between supervisors and doctoral students.

The interpersonal function of language is detailed in Martin and White's (2005, p. 1) appraisal system, an extension of SFL's discourse semantic level for interpersonal language meanings. The appraisal system concerns 'how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and position their readers/listeners to do likewise' (Martin & White, 2005, p. 40). Also, the appraisal system relates to constructing texts of communities of shared feelings and values and the linguistic mechanisms for sharing emotions, tastes, and formative assessments. Collectively, the appraisal system approaches the linguistic resources in texts as systematic constructions of interpersonal meaning which, through close discourse analysis, reveal an author's underlying positionality and attitudinal meaning – that is, the functioning of stance (Martin & White, 2005, p. 40). In this work, they

acknowledged Eggins and Slade's (1997, p. 25) work in developing a system for analysing casual conversation. Language events, such as written and communication practices, are the sites to accomplish these objectives. For linguists, language events provide insights into how language is structured and used as a semiotic resource that enables us to converse, be social beings, and do social life (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 25). Goodwin and Heritage (1990, p. 285) echo this concept by stating that language's role in building relationships is critical to achieving a social construction whereby the members can share meanings, mutual understandings, and coordination of human conduct.

The appraisal framework has been applied to investigate interpersonal stances in various discourses. Examples include understanding the threat of violence (Gales, 2011, p. 29), the corporate identities of companies and their relationships with stakeholders (Fuoli, 2012, p. 56), and the judgment of characters as persuasive functions in advertisements (Krizan, 2016, p. 200). In supervisory communication, limited research of relevant research is found. For instance, Ferguson (2010, p. 218) conducted a study to investigate the linguistic resources used in regular discussions of clinical educator supervisors and their students' linguistic resources utilised during routine evaluation discussions. The study resulted in a significant finding: a client-centred solid approach in the communication between both parties as reflected in using pronouns

and confinement of feelings in students as reflected in using the effect.

Considering previous research, the present study addressed the niche in the context of communication within higher education, highlighting the appraisal framework's usefulness in informing the construal of student-teacher interpersonal relations. The study aims to unfold interpersonal relationships through communication practices between students and supervisors in the first six months of doctoral candidature. In answering the aim of the study, the study is guided by the following questions: 1) How does the system of attitude manifest the respective roles of students and supervisors? 2) How does the engagement system manifest the egalitarian culture in an academic setting? 3) How does the graduation system manifest the participants' amplification of feeling. The questions are addressed in the elaboration of data analysis in the findings section.

METHOD

The study participants were three Indonesian doctoral students commencing their postgraduate studies in overseas universities. One participant was located in The Netherlands, while the two others were located in Australia. As a note, the participants in the study did their master's

studies in overseas universities in The Netherlands, Australia, and China. In both study levels, they used English to communicate with their supervisors. They reported that they started building their communication with their supervisors before the study commenced, following the procedure of doctoral student admission. The data were obtained from participants' communication documents within the first six months of the doctoral candidature. They consisted of written communication via email and transcribed spoken conversations between the participants and their supervisors.

Technical analysis for understanding language functions in the appraisal system is conducted by examining the realisation of domains of interactions, namely attitude, engagement, and graduation. See Table 1.

Table 1 summarises several aspects of language analysis using an appraisal system. The categories of domains of interaction presented in the left column are realised in language use through various expressions that carry different meanings, as listed in the right column. The first category is an attitude that concerns meanings related to feelings, emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour, and evaluation. Expressions in this category show inclination, happiness, satisfaction, capacity, tenacity, normality, response, and

Table 1 Summary of Appraisal System

Domains of Interaction	Meanings in Language Expressions
Attitude (AT)	Inclination, happiness, satisfaction, capacity, tenacity, normality, reaction, and valuation.
Engagement (EG)	Naming, technical words, slang, swearing
Graduation (GR)	Quantification, intensification, upscaling/downscaling measures.

Source: Martin and White (2005, p. 34-38)

valuation. The next category, engagement, deals with attitudes and the roles of opinions within a discourse. Engagement expressions include naming, technical words, slang, and swearing. Finally, the last category looks into graduation, namely how to grade a phenomenon whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred. This category is expressed through language hints at quantification, intensification, upscaling, or downscaling measures.

Accordingly, the data of written communication via email and transcribed spoken conversation between participants and their supervisors in this study are deconstructed based on their functions in the appraisal system, as presented in Table 1. A detailed description is provided for the function carried in each noted expression. In the data analysis, the expressions found in the data are supplemented with the labels. For example, the expression: *Enjoy your time with family* (AT/Valuation/+) means that the expression is categorised as an Attitude with positive valuation. Then, the data analysis results are interpreted to understand how language expressions enact their roles within communication for building and maintaining relationships between doctoral students and supervisors.

FINDINGS

Data analyses in the study are presented in three broad categories, i.e., how expressions of attitude reflect the respective roles of students and supervisors, how expressions of engagement suggest the egalitarian culture in the academic setting,

and how an expression of graduation shows amplification of feelings. Embedded in the description of the results is the interpretation of the student-supervisor communication patterns' dynamics.

Attitude: Respective Roles of Students and Supervisors

Students and supervisors have unique roles in the study process. The respective roles relate to their capacities and responsibilities in the progression of each doctoral career milestone. As noted above, prior to study commencement, participants have built communication with the supervisors in agreement for the study plan. In expressing the respective roles, the supervisors used explicit expressions, featuring inclination such as: (a) "I would be happy to supervise your Ph.D." (AT/Inclination/+), or (b) "Let me know when you would like to discuss such further plan" (AT/Inclination/+). Examples (a) and (b) are excerpts from emails discussing study commencement preparation. These samples indicate the positive inclination of the potential supervisors as they express willingness to supervise the potential students' doctoral study. Note also that the choices of expressions are informal, such as let me know, instead of, for example, I would appreciate it if you would let me know.

Other samples of inclinations were found in the communication after the study commenced. Here, both parties acknowledged each other as members of the communicative event using inclusive pronouns such as: (c) "I hope

we have something novel to publish” (AT/Inclination/+), or (d) “Let us have a catch-up, maybe this Friday?” (AT/Inclination/+). The inclusion is then augmented with the lexis choices, such as something novel to publish. This example reflects that the student and supervisor have active roles in the study, including in the publication plan. On the other hand, example (d) has a more informal tone as an invitation to have a casual meeting.

In the academic culture of Western universities, students and supervisors are expected to work together in partnership. This means that there should be a mutual understanding and willingness from both the student and supervisor to cooperate for the study’s success. However, different professional roles require that each fulfil their respective responsibilities. For example, a supervisor may impose their authoritative power in one way or another. In the data, the collaborative nature of the student and supervisor is expressed in various casual tones. The first examples are expressions (e) “Here is a draft questionnaire that you may want to improve and make a little bit more smooth to read.” (AT/capacity/+) and (f) “Highlights of the changes I made: I combined task 1 and task 3 together because I think they complement each other and added the methods after each task in Tier 2.” (AT/capacity/+).

Example (e) contains an instruction, i.e., to improve a questionnaire for its readability. The modality used may, however, soften the instruction’s tone, making it less directive and more friendly. Example (f) is a note

expressed in an ellipsed expression whereby the sentence seems chopped from a more extended version. Students may express their ownership towards the project they do in collaboration with the supervisor, for example: (g) “I have sent our abstract via online registration” (AT/capacity/+). Here, a student used the pronoun ‘our’ to express his or her sense of belonging. This implies an egalitarian position between student and supervisor. Another example is shown as: (h) “Be in touch. We can take a cab tomorrow morning up to QIT Plus’ office for a 1-hour meeting” (AT/Capacity/+). This expression is presented as an imperative. However, the use of ‘can’ as a choice of modality also makes the expression of instruction sound softer.

Another example of written communication shows students can express their authority over a task: (i) “I added a couple of questions to encourage it and describe it before the main questions.” (AT/capacity/+). Here, a student expresses his or her contribution to improving a questionnaire. This example illustrates that students and supervisors have active roles by enacting their authority and responsibilities.

In the sample data, appreciation is also revealed between students and supervisors in their regular communication. In sample (j), a student reacted to a supervisor’s comment with gratitude for comments and feedback. In example (k), on the other hand, the supervisor uses appreciation albeit using a simple, contracted expression to respond to the communicated issue in emails, such as: (j) “Thank you (AT/Reaction/+) for

your comments and corrections” and (k) “Abstract good (AT/Reaction/+ AND/OR Valuation) and just a couple of minor things, but there is quite a lot of published work on SCFA, PBMCs, and epithelial cells.”

Details that follow in the sample (k) are an elaboration of the reaction from the supervisor. In other cases, students may impose a less powerful position when they are inclined to express their expectation for a favour from their supervisors. At times, a student hopes to receive a response from his or her supervisor in the study process, such as: (l) “Looking forward to receiving feedback from you” (AT/Inclination/+). This is a positive inclination for a student to maintain a relationship with the supervisor by expecting a response, which would mean keeping the conversation, hence the connection active.

Supportive feedback from supervisors is often expressed using valuation, another language expression within the attitude category. Valuation is an expression related to cognition or opinions (Egins, 1997). For example: (m) “I believe it is consistent with your research question (AT/Valuation/+), very well written—thanks” (AT/Valuation/+), or (n) “Nice job, (name of student)” (AT/Valuation/+). In sample (m), the expression is supplemented with another lexis, i.e., consistent, indicating that the student is on the right track. Positive valuation using simple praises such as very well-written (m) or nice job (n) may be trivial; however, all forms of positive valuation can strengthen the confidence of first-year research candidates.

In other cases, although communication between student and supervisor mainly revolves around academic matters, small expressions related to seasonal or family events are also found. Examples of these expressions are included in the data at the end of formal emails. They are: (o) “Have a lovely Easter holiday” (AT/Valuation/+), or (p) “Enjoy your time with family” (AT/Valuation/+). Sample (o) and (p) were taken from written emails talking mainly about academic matters. However, the email’s closing dropped the formality altogether to nudge at a more informal topic. At this point, students and supervisors took off the academic hats and played roles as equally positioned, ordinary human beings.

Engagement: Egalitarian Culture in the Academic Setting

a. Technical words

For research-related discourses, email is a preferable form of communication. Therefore, written communication in the data contains more technical words. They refer to the selected vocabulary for the communication topic about the academic activities. In the data, the technical words include *comments, feedback, abstract, draft, questions, paper, submission, proposal, and reports*. Comments and feedback refer to the drafting process in which supervisors write responses. These technical words are commonly used in discussing student and supervisor plans to submit a work for a conference presentation.

Considering that the drafting process is the core academic activity between the student and supervisor, technical words

such as *abstract*, *draft*, *questions*, *paper*, and *submission* are frequently found in the emails between students and supervisors. These technical words are commonly used in discussing student and supervisor plans to submit a work for a conference presentation.

On the other hand, a student's main job of drafting a doctoral thesis is reflected in the communication by using technical words such as proposals and reports. Again, the data in the study is taken from first-year postgraduate students, a stage in doctoral research wherein they were expected to produce a proposal for the thesis.

A part of the proposal writing also involves submitting progress reports for the milestone in the first semester of the study. These selected technical words are the realisation of the shared knowledge, hence the shared purpose between the students and their supervisors. Even though students and supervisors in this study practically work in the same building, email communication is usually preferable for clearer messaging and orderly documentation as the communication is saved within the email's digital system.

b. Naming

The sample data in this study were taken in academic settings, i.e., doctoral programs in The Netherlands and Australia. Although it is acceptable in Western culture to use first names, this is not always the case in an academic environment, especially between students from an Asian background and supervisors of Western cultural backgrounds.

However, in the doctoral study settings of the present study, it is acceptable to drop the formal addresses such as *Sir*, *Ma'am*, *Dr*, or *Prof*. Instead, using vocatives and proper names is more common in spoken and written communication. This feature is illustrated in most email conversations, implying the degree of closeness between the students and their supervisors. Before the commencement of the study, the participants approached their potential supervisors via email conversation. They greeted their potential supervisors using their academic titles and proper names at this stage. Once the study commenced, however, they began to call their supervisors by their first names, a common practice in Western culture. This can occur in written communication as well. For example, email greetings commonly use addresses such as *Dear Jerry*, *Dear Brian*, or *Dear John* instead of academic titles such as *Dear Dr. Walsh* or *Dear Prof. Winser*.

Other evidence from the data also shows that email openings can be as casual as saying *Hi* instead of the formal greeting of *Dear*. In spoken conversation, naming is also daily for various functions such as saying hello, indicating turns in discussion, etc. The use of naming, in this context, functions to reduce the tension in what otherwise would be an intense, lengthy cooperation between the students and supervisors during the doctoral study period.

c. Swearing

In the academic culture of the universities in the context of the present study, students and supervisors may engage

in an egalitarian culture in which students can have casual conversations with their supervisors. This is well reflected in the following examples, excerpted from spoken conversations.

Excerpt 1:

- Supervisor : “Thanks to that fucker, I gotta do damage control”
Student : “And I suppose that’s the reason you’re bringing me in?”
Supervisor : “Yeah, pretty much.”
Student : “Holy shit.”
Supervisor : “Don’t worry, you’re in good hands.”

Excerpt 2:

- Student : “It’s about time for the six-month report.”
Supervisor : “Shit! I totally forget.”

Interestingly, the use of swear words is found in the communication between students and supervisors; however, the use is not intended to make derogatory comments. As a feature in casual conversation, swear words lower the degree of formality and/or ease the tension/pressure in research-related discourse. In most cases, swear words reflect the degree of comfort within close relationships, such as a student-supervisor relationship.

d. Slang Expressions

The following excerpt uses slang expressions in conversations between students and supervisors.

Excerpt 3:

- Student : “So, I guess the conclusion to what we just saw is: that population growth is bad, very bad.”

Supervisor : “Yeah, and you just had to have kids. You just couldn’t keep it in your pants, could you?”

Student : “What can I say? I’m a weak person.”

Excerpt 4:

Student : “I got another email from the composer, he said he’s not available for interview.”

Supervisor : “I can’t understand this bloke! Give me his phone number, I’ll talk to him!”

Similar to swear words, slang enables interactants to indicate degrees of identification with each other using ‘shared knowledge’ to signal solidarity and equal power between the members of the communicative event.

e. Graduation: Expression of Emotions

In the graduation category, language reflects the speaker or writer’s judgment of a phenomenon whereby feelings are amplified using language features (Martin & White, 2005). In this study, one example is found in the data. In an email conversation, a supervisor responded: *Yes – I saw it. Very frustrating (GR)*. In this expression, the supervisor articulates his concern about the changing schedule of an interview. The use of the word *significantly* highlights the degree of his concern concerning the sudden changes in the appointment. While the data in the study only shows one example, this is clear evidence that language has its way of indicating how language can reflect the intensity of emotions. It is quite common in the context of doctoral study that unexpected

factors hinder plans. Expressions of emotions, therefore, are commonly found in student-supervisor communication.

DISCUSSION

As a reminder, the study explores using the appraisal framework as a linguistic method to provide evidence for the construal of student-teacher interpersonal relations. The data analysis shows that some sample expressions used in written and spoken communication reveal the interpersonal relationships between students and supervisors in the early stage of the doctoral study program. Having said so, the overarching aim of this study supports the foundation study conducted by Bitzer and Albertyn (2004, p. 881) on the hybrid supervision model as a framework for student-supervisor discussion during the initial stages of a doctoral program. They claimed that the supervision model could avoid unstructured processes that overload supervisors and compromise the quality of students' work. The results of the present study resonate with this claim. Detailed analyses of spoken and written communication of our participants, namely three Indonesian doctoral students in their first year of candidature, provided insights into the pattern of language use in different aspects, which will be elaborated as follows.

The Power Dynamics Between Student and Supervisor

The communication between students and supervisors in the first year of doctoral candidature contributes to laying a good foundation for building good relationships

throughout the study. Language expressions manifest a diverse range of interpersonal functions essential in establishing respective roles, creating an academic setting that supports egalitarianism, and expressing emotions to a certain extent.

In most doctoral programs in Western universities, communication between students and supervisors began before the study commenced. The standard procedure for students pursuing a doctoral degree is contacting the potential supervisors via email to discuss the supervisor's expertise in a particular field of study, research opportunities, and supervisor availability.

This study achieved effective communication despite the different cultural backgrounds between students and supervisors. Mainhard, Van der Rijst, Van Tartwijk, and Wubbels' (2009, p. 369) study states that communication between supervisors and doctoral students is open and often unstructured. In this study, a flexible pattern is found in the way supervisors said their agreement at the initial stage of the program. This is exemplified in the expressions said when supervisors welcome the doctoral student candidate using expressions such as *I would be happy to supervise your Ph.D.* or *Let me know when you would like to discuss further plans*, which are different in tone but have a similar main idea, i.e., willingness to supervise.

These expressions warmly welcome the students to commence their doctoral studies. From the supervisors' side, these expressions provide clear and

direct information that would prevent misunderstanding. To doctoral student candidates, the language choice also indicates the openness toward continuous communication, which may further open opportunities for building a good relationship with the supervisor.

This study found that in a doctoral program, students and supervisors may exercise their respective roles in dynamic patterns. This finding supports Orellana, Darder, Pérez, and Salinas' (2016, p. 98) study, which highlighted that the role of supervisor should not be considered a key because even though a doctoral student may be a novice researcher, the effectiveness of doctoral supervision relies on the orchestration of expertise, interest and needs from both parties. Students and supervisors have respective authorities, which is equally essential to drive the study forward. For example, a supervisor may ask the students to do specific academic tasks within the educational setting, but students also have the right to request supervisor feedback. In addition, positive involvement through questions, responses, and reinforcements is also found in the communication process.

All of these are expressed in both spoken and written communication. Spoken communication has a more casual tone, as reflected in the use of casual address by first names and occasional slang and swearing. To some extent, expressions of emotion are shown on particular occasions. Written communication via email is experienced differently than direct

spoken communication. When discussing academic matters, email communication is preferred, using the linguistic features of technical words related to the research contents. In such a communicative event, addresses may shift from *dear* to a casual *hi* in email openings. Although the content of the email may be related to academic matters, closing parts in emails may involve some greeting for everyday social events. So, a blend of formal and informal tones is evident in email communication.

To some extent, it may seem that the borders between personal and academic matters are blurred. Intense interaction between students and supervisors during the study makes it possible. This communication pattern will contribute to building relationships with the supervisors during the survey. This process may continue in the early stages of a doctoral study, a critical step in academic doctoral study (Thomas, 2016, p. 11).

Implication for Doctoral Supervision

The results of the present study may have further implications for several aspects of doctoral studies. First of all, potential doctoral students may find it insightful to know that supervisors are approachable with appropriate use of language. This aligns with Ferguson's (2010, p. 227) finding that various interpersonal communicative aspects should be accounted for throughout the program in supervisory activities. The study may be helpful for other stakeholders; for example, understanding communication patterns and power dynamics between students and supervisors is essential for

university administrators to ensure first-year doctoral research candidates receive the necessary support to commence their research process. Other stakeholders include student counsellors overseeing higher-degree research students because mental health breakdowns can emerge from the dynamics of communication between students and supervisors. This can be prevented and resolved by unravelling the communication and power relations between the two. To some extent, the study may be helpful to inform future higher-degree research students of what to expect at the beginning and to know their roles as well as the roles of their supervisors.

This study's results suggest that supervisors reflect on their supervisory practices. The present study utilised the appraisal system to shed light on constructing student-supervisor relationships through written and spoken communication in the first year of the doctoral candidature. At some points, the findings also provide helpful guidance for maintaining healthy communication and a constructive relationship between students and supervisors. The student-supervisor relationship is built upon a shared academic interest, i.e., theoretical perspective or practical application of the theory. This shared interest leads both parties to a similar purpose in literary society. Also, due to intensive contact between students and supervisors, sharing personal issues may have a pervasive effect. This can result in better bonding or otherwise, depending on the communication management.

In addition to the practical implication, some theoretical development can be considered based on the result of this study. Language plays a crucial role in construing communication purposes between students and supervisors; thus, it is critical in maintaining the relationship. While this study provides scrutiny from samples of language expressions in a student-supervisor relationship, an interdisciplinary approach may be made to link the language use and the impacts on various further aspects of doctoral studies, for example, pedagogical approach, management of professional attitude in academic contexts, formation of a community of practice and so on.

CONCLUSION

The overall study result shows that the student-supervisor relationship in post-graduate research is intricate due to various social factors such as gender, culture, and nationality. However, mentoring relationships between a supervisor and graduate students will always be ups and downs, so a supervisor must provide the impression that they are acting in the postgraduate's best interests. The present study has highlighted that building relationships between international doctoral students and their supervisors, regardless of their different cultural backgrounds, is feasible using various functions of language expressions. Appropriate language accounts for the enactment of respective roles, the creation of an egalitarian academic setting, and the expression of emotion in communication.

Study limitations include a small sample size and restricted data collection. The study involves only three Indonesian students' experience building and maintaining communication with supervisors in overseas universities. Also, the data are taken just from the first year of the study. To yield more robust and objective results that allow generalisation, it is recommended that the study be expanded to include participants from other countries with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds in various stages of study progress. In addition, follow-up for this study may consider investigating further the use of language elements such as gratitude that may contribute to the flourishing supervisor–student relationship. They also encourage going in the other direction by questioning whether the lack of communication would lower the quality of the supervisor–student relationship. Finally, bearing in mind the possibility of expanding into big data, a corpus of student-supervisor communication can also be built to facilitate further investigations into the patterns, contexts, topics, and impacts of long-term communication between students and supervisors.

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