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*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research*



Urmia University

TEFL Graduate Supervisees' Views of their Supervisors' Supervisory Styles and Satisfaction with Thesis Supervision

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ABSTRACT

Thesis supervisor supervisory styles play central roles in enhancing timely and quality completion of thesis works. To this effect, this study aimed at exploring TEFL graduate supervisees' perception of their thesis supervisors' supervisory style(s), the supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision, and the association between supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision. Accordingly, all available TEFL graduate supervisees (N= 70) from three universities were selected as participants of the study. In order to answer the supervisees' perception of their supervisors' roles of guidance and support in the supervisory processes, and the supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision, mean scores of questionnaire items were used. Pearson moment product correlation was also applied to examine the association between perceived supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision. To spot thesis supervisors' prevalent supervisory style(s), scatter plot was utilized. The result indicated that supervisees perceived their thesis supervisors discharged their roles of supervision through provision of various supports which range from emotional support to helpful timely feedback. Similarly, supervisees felt that they were provided guidance for quality and timely completion of thesis works. In addition, supervisors were perceived displaying contractual and laissez-faire styles. Moreover, supervisees reported that they were satisfied with the supervision they were offered. Furthermore, significant and positive correlations were obtained between supervisees' overall satisfaction with thesis supervision and the two supervisory styles (contractual and laissez-faire). Some recommendations were also forwarded to the concerned stakeholders.

Keywords: supervisee; thesis supervisor; supervisory styles; satisfaction; thesis supervision

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 21 May 2017

Revised version received: 11 Aug. 2017

Accepted: 5 Dec. 2017

Available online: 1 Jan. 2018

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10.30466/ijltr.2018.20490

Introduction

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has already taken commitment and determination towards expanding education at all levels. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are among these moves in an effort to build national capacity in human resource development. In order to meet qualified professional demands of the country, universities offer their trainees relevant courses to equip them with knowledge, skills and attitudes. The students in turn are also expected to complete the courses with academic competence required of them by their respective institutions in their stay on studies.

Having finished the courses successfully, the students are also required to carry out research undertakings as partial fulfillment of the requirement for their respective degrees at both under and postgraduate levels. Accordingly, writing satisfactory theses is mandatory for successful completion of a program of study. Through writing theses, students get a chance to develop their research undertaking skills. In addition, they build their problem solving skills for their life careers.

The opportunities and accesses of citizens to higher education institutions are desirable as development cannot be sought without having qualified professionals at all levels. However, quality of education should not be compromised as failure to address it could encumber the entire development endeavors (Birhanu, 2009; Damtew, 2015).

Although all programs at higher education are equally important, the focus of this paper is on postgraduate programs. Damtew (2015), emphasizing on the postgraduate program, states that “the backbone of effective research and teaching resides in strong graduate programs. Graduate programs sustain research and development in many countries around the world (para. 24).” The author further gives the instance of USA and explains that “graduates are the workhorses of teaching, research and innovations (para. 24).” Since Ethiopia could not be different from the rest of the world, it seems reasonable to say that trainees in postgraduate programs in Ethiopia are assumed to be key people to the development of the nation as they are thought to be innovators and are capable of solving societal problems. To this effect, due attention should be paid to the postgraduate research if innovations and quality research outputs competent to change the society are sought.

Concerning the quality of research works carried out by students, however, concerns have been expressed by some researchers even if the focuses of all are not on graduate levels (Miheretab, 2013; Nuru, 2005; Sivell, 2013; Zewdu, 2012). Nuru (2005) carried out a study on senior essay writing competence of students. It was an in-depth case study on five senior essays written by students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Addis Ababa University (AAU). The finding revealed that the quality of the written works produced by the students was found to be below the anticipated level. Similarly, Miheretab (2013) did a study on the practices of research undertakings as partial fulfillment of B.A degree in English language at Hawassa University from the stakeholders' perspectives. The result indicated that the level of concern given to the practices of research undertakings was low. Consequently, the quality of senior essays submitted was found to be below the standards specified in the curriculum.

In addition, Zewdu (2012) conducted a PhD dissertation on the research culture of TEFL program of AAU. Specific to the supervision of PhD research, the result showed differences between advisors and advisees on the provision of critical feedback and allotment of time for discussion (conferencing). Besides, feedback provision was found unsatisfactory in depth and breadth. Moreover, the relationships between advisor-advisee were not friendly which, in turn,

affected the quality of the dissertation and the commitment of the candidates to carry out their studies.

It is palpable that students write their theses under supervision of assigned supervisors who are thought to assist them with the research undertakings. It is believed that supervisor assignment to students gives them chances to access expert for being mentored and supported while conducting their studies (Nuru, 2005). However, studies (Miheretab, 2013; Nuru, 2005) indicated that theses produced by students were below required quality standards despite the professional supports students' were rendered. Thus, this may instigate one to question the quality of supervision that supervisors offer to the supervisees as there is direct effect of supervision on the quality of theses students produces (Alam, Alam & Rasul, 2013; Cullen, Pearson, Saha & Spear, 1994).

Studies carried out by Nuru (2005) and Miheretab (2013) were both on undergraduate senior essays at Addis Ababa University and Hawassa University, respectively. Moreover, both were limited to English major students. With regards to the focus of the study, Nuru's (2005) study was on senior essay writing competence of the students taking few senior essays as samples. Furthermore, the study viewed only the end-products (senior essays) and it did not take into consideration the supervisory process. On the other hand, Miheretab's (2013) study was on the practices of research undertakings from the perspectives of students, supervisors and institutional supports. However, the study did not statistically test the supports stakeholders claimed they rendered with what the supervisees believed they had received. Therefore, it seems that the former study paid no attention to the supervision process while the later one fell short of generalization. Similarly, Zewdu's (2012) study was limited to TEFL specialization at PhD level at Addis Ababa University. Although the result indicated discrepancies between supervisees and supervisors with regards to the provision of feedback, conferencing and supervisee-supervisor relationship, none of them was statistically tested.

Couples of local studies reviewed above depicted that the quality of theses produced by students is generally low. Research works indicated that low theses quality could also emanate from poor / inadequate thesis supervision (Alam, Alam & Rasul, 2013; Nuru, 2005). Nevertheless, to the knowledge of the researcher, no study has been carried out on the thesis supervision from the perspective of the supervisees at second degree level. Therefore, thesis supervisors' guidance and support in the supervisory processes, their prevalent supervisory styles as perceived by supervisees, the supervisees' levels of satisfaction with the supervision being offered and the association between supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision were gaps left uncovered yet. With the hope to fill the stated gaps, this study was carried out on regular and summer M.A in TEFL students and their respective supervisors at Arba Minch, Hawassa, and Dilla Universities. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following basic research questions:

- (1) How do thesis supervisees perceive their supervisors' support and structure/direction components of the supervision?
- (2) What are the prevalent supervisory styles of thesis supervisors as perceived by their supervisees?
- (3) What are the supervisees' perceived levels of satisfaction with thesis supervision rendered by supervisors?
- (4) What is the association between supervisory styles of the thesis supervisors' and supervisees' perceived satisfaction with thesis supervision?

The results of this study may provide considerable empirical outputs to thesis supervisors, higher education institutions and supervisees. Accordingly, the result may allow supervisors to revisit the direction and support they offer, their supervisory styles, supervisees' satisfaction level with supervision they render, and let them be aware of the association between supervisory styles and supervisees' satisfaction with supervision. Based on informed knowledge, thus supervisors may improve their supervisory practices and maintain thesis quality.

Similarly, the finding of this study may give higher education institutions insight to establish or improve their thesis supervision frameworks/ directives to enhance better quality service delivery to their students' needs. Specifically, the finding of this study may assist higher education institutions to reconsider graduate thesis supervision and provide improved support for timely research completion, quality thesis supervision and output.

In addition, the students are thought to be indirectly beneficiaries of the study output. It is believed that quality thesis supervision rendered by supervisors and institutions support jointly would increase students' completion and success in the program.

Theoretical framework

Supervisory style is the behavior a supervisor displays while interacting with, and responding to a supervisee in the supervision process (Kam, 1997). Since thesis work is a long process, how supervisor and supervisee interact with each other and how the supervisor respond to the supervisee are important aspects of supervision process which, in turn, determines the quality of research. Garfield and Alpert (2002) made the classification of supervisory style based on two dimensions- 'structure' and 'support' from which four paradigms of supervision styles emanate. Accordingly, the structural constituents are directive aspects which include the roles supervisor plays in organizing and managing the research project, establishing accountability with supervisee, and provision of skill trainings in agreement with the supervisee. On the other hand, the support component signifies the level to which the supervisor's style is inclined to make the research process conducive and easy. The support facets could be grouped into pastoral care, material requirements, financial needs and technical support (Garfield, 2005; Garfield & Alpert, 2002). On the basis of the two dimensions, four supervisory styles are derived and are named as contractual (high support, high structure), directorial (low support, high structure), laissez-faire (low support, low structure), and pastoral (high support, low structure).

Each supervision style describes the roles of the supervisor and supervisee concerning the organization and management of the research project, the provision of support and resources to the supervisees (Deuchar, 2008; Taylor & Beasley, 2005). In the early stage of the supervisory relationship, it is thought that each supervisee is on the level where he/she has limited and unclear thesis topic. At this stage, supervisee is assumed to be on broad literature review to focus his/her research topic and does not require much direction or support. Therefore, the supervisor's supervisory style to this point is considered to be the laissez-faire (Garfield, 2005; Garfield & Alpert, 2002). However, gradually as the supervisee goes forward and develop thesis subject, research area and research questions and begins to manage over the work, the supervisor is expected to offer more structure but less support (Garfield, 2005; Garfield & Alpert, 2002). Thus, supervisory approach at this phase is directorial one. This style, according to Grant (2005), is termed as 'the techno-scientific model.' Accordingly, the supervisor directs the thesis but gives less or no support to the supervisee. Moreover, the relationship between the two is expert-novice.

Subsequently, as the supervisee most probably engages in data collection and analysis, high levels of support and structure are most likely to be required from the supervisor (Garfield & Alpert, 2002). At this time, the supervisory style is contractual or consultant where the supervisor offers

suggestions and options for solving research problems. This stage of supervisory style is underscored as the most challenging in terms of the supervisor's time where balanced direction and support are sought (Garfield, 2005). According to Grant (2005), this model is known as neo-liberal which emphasizes accountability of both parties involved through established agreements.

The final supervisory style is the pastoral one which is put into effect towards the end of the supervision when the supervisee feels at ease with the research and the writing up (Garfield, 2005). According to this author, the very intent of this style is to develop the confidence and motivation and take the supervisee from dependent to independent and from novice to professional. Moreover, this supervisory style may also be employed at the time supervisee encounters crisis, discouragement or frustration as well regardless of the phases of supervision (Garfield & Alpert, 2002).

It is obvious that supervisors naturally have their own preferred supervisory styles. However, supervisors should be flexible, adaptive, and utilize all the supervisory styles to accommodate the developmental levels and the varieties of student needs (Deucha, 2008). On the contrary, inflexible or rigid supervisors that depend on only one supervisory style can severely limit the supervisor-supervisee interaction and impede development (Meissner, 2012). Therefore, eclectic approach to supervision is considered to be effective in ensuring satisfaction with supervision (Deucha, 2008; Lee, 2007). However, while being flexible and eclectic, supervisors have to know the stages when to support, direct and let students work independently (Swanson & Watt, 2011).

Since innovations and changes in outlooks and practices have been made possible with the aid of research, postgraduate thesis supervision plays a critical role in ensuring quality of the research work (Cullen et al., 1994), completion rate and satisfaction (Alam, Alam & Rasul, 2013). Thesis supervision could be explained as an activity undertaken by a senior member of a profession to a novice with the aim of developing the supervisee level of research competence until he/she becomes an independent professional researcher (Pearson & Brew, 2002 as cited in Swanson & Watt, 2011). In addition to this, it involves substantial technical and moral supports of the supervisor to the supervisee (Acker, Hill & Black, 1994; Burns, Westmacott, & Ferrer, 2016).

Supervision involves a focused and thorough assistance which could be realized with a real concern for supervisees' advancement and provision of quality and timely feedback (Cullen et al., 1994; Mehrani, 2017). This implies that the supervisor should regularly provide direction to the student's research work, criticize, assess and evaluate the direction the research is taking. In addition to provision of timely feedback, availability, thoroughness and timeliness in reading the work, and meetings through clearly established communication channels are attributes of quality supervision.

Concerning the association between thesis supervisors' supervisory styles and supervisees' satisfaction with supervision, it was uncovered that there is association between the two variables in counseling psychology (Meissner, 2012). The only worth mentioning study on thesis supervision was done by Hermann, Hansen and Jensen (n.d). This study found a positive correlation between satisfaction with supervision and hands-on supervision style while a negative and very weak correlation was obtained between satisfaction with supervision and hands-off supervision style. Nevertheless, the study was based on narrow supervisory styles perspective which did not provide ranges of supervisory styles. Therefore, research on the relation between thesis supervisors' supervisory styles and supervisees' satisfaction with the supervision seems to be scarce if any.

Method

Participants

The study took place at federal government universities located in Southern part of Ethiopia, which included Arba Minch University, Hawassa University and Dilla University. Among the various programs in the stated universities, this study focused on regular and summer postgraduate (2nd degree) students in TEFL and their respective thesis supervisors in 2015/6 academic year. Accordingly, all TEFL graduate students that constituted 70 in the three universities were the participants of this study. The corresponding thesis supervisors who were rated in the eyes of the supervisees were totally 20 in number in the stated Universities.

Research Design

This study intended to explore TEFL graduate supervisees' perception of their thesis supervisors' direction and support roles to thesis, supervisory styles, the supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision, and the association between supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision. To this end, descriptive survey design was adopted dominantly to describe the existing situations.

Instrument of Data Collection

Questionnaire to the supervisees was the only data collection instrument employed. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit quantitative data from supervisees concerning their perceived views of their supervisors' direction and support to thesis, supervisory styles and their perceived level of satisfaction with thesis supervision. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from various sources to fit to the purposes of this study (Garfield & Alpert, 2002; Hermann, Hansen & Jensen (n.d); Swanson & Watt, 2011).

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section was to elicit the supervisory styles of thesis supervisors' as perceived by supervisees. This section had two sub-sections: the structure/directive and support components of supervisory styles. The second section was to get data on the supervisees' perceived level of satisfaction with thesis supervision. The items were in five point Likert-scales which ranged from strongly/highly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

Methods of Data Analysis

In order to analyze data gathered through questionnaire, both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized. Accordingly, mean score of each item and the scale were employed in order to answer the supervisees' perception of their supervisors' provision of direction/ structure and support to thesis supervision. Similarly, mean score of each item and the scale were used to pinpoint supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision. Pearson moment product correlation was applied to examine the association between perceived supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision. In order to spot thesis supervisors' prevalent supervisory style(s), z-scores of the raw data obtained from the structure and the support components of thesis supervision via questionnaire were scattered on x-axis and y-axis, respectively. Scatter plot with grids divided into four quadrants was utilized to spot the supervisory styles of the supervisors as perceived by supervisees.

Accordingly, the dots that will appear in the first quadrant represent contractual style while dots that fall in the second quadrant signify the pastoral style. Similarly, the dots in the third and fourth quadrants stand for laissez-fair and directorial styles, respectively.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Supervisees' Perception of Their Supervisors' Provision of Direction to Thesis Supervision

No	Directive/structural component	Mean	Std
1	Established shared responsibilities of supervision at an early stages of the process	3.86	1.23
2	maintained contact/meeting on mutually pre-arranged schedules	3.83	1.15
3	set agenda/topic for supervision	3.91	1.09
4	Made clear expectations/goals I had to achieve at different phases of the supervision	3.69	1.26
5	Available when I needed him/her	3.69	1.26
6	allowed me consistent contact with him/her	3.70	1.37
7	adapted the supervision to my level of competence and confidence	3.97	0.67
8	provided pointed/focused supervision	3.94	0.85
9	scheduled supervision meetings/contacts in agreement	3.86	1.16
10	set benchmarks/standards required of my thesis	3.61	1.31
11	advised me on ways I can make the most effective use of time	4.08	1.29
12	oriented me on oral presentation skills that I needed for defense	3.80	1.05
13	provided me input relevant to my research	4.09	1.26
14	provided me helpful feedback on my progress at various phases	3.90	1.25
15	asked me if supervision was meeting my needs	4.16	0.90
16	established deadlines for submission of particular parts of thesis	4.30	1.02
17	rendered me guidance on features of thesis writing (methodology, review, tools, etc)	4.41	0.49
	Scale Mean	3.93	1.03

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics for the items on the supervisees' perception of their supervisors' provision of direction/ structure to thesis supervision. The mean for each item is almost close to 4 for most of the items while it is above 4 for few items. In addition, overall mean for the scale is 3.93 which is close to 4. This reveals that the majority of the supervisees tend to view that their theses supervisors rendered them the directions/guidance sought in the supervisory process. It is believed that provision of directions to thesis supervisees' helps thesis management process (Garfield & Alpert, 2002). This in turn would positively influence the quality of thesis and timely completion of the work.

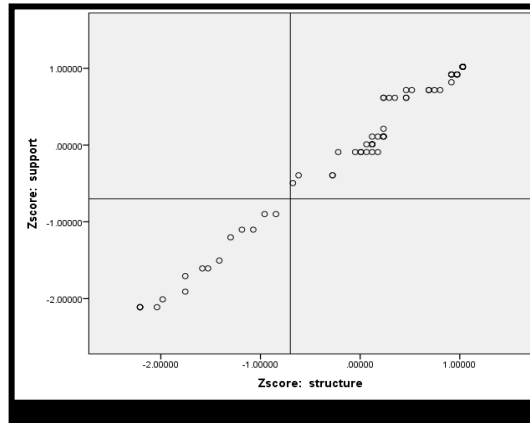
Table 2
Supervisees' Perception of Their Supervisors' Support to Thesis Supervision

No	Support component	Mean	Std
18	sensitive to my needs and expectations in the supervision process	3.98	0.88
19	mentored me on various areas I needed for	4.13	0.95
20	provided me practical support in carrying out my thesis work	4.01	1.09
21	gave me support and guidance to keep me on track	4.30	0.72
22	motivated and encouraged me in my research endeavor	4.41	0.74
23	inspired me to continue in my work	4.11	1.00
24	Provided me helpful feedback on my progress	4.26	0.99
25	made acceptable effort for solving my personal problem/s	3.68	1.11
26	paid close attention/commitment to the thesis supervision	4.02	1.07
27	initiated interactive dialogue in the supervision process	3.91	1.07
28	encouraged me to use thesis regulations in an effort to keep quality	4.04	0.87
	Scale Mean	4.08	0.89

Table 2 summarizes mean and standard deviation for each item and the scale on the supervisees' perception of their supervisors' support to thesis supervision. Accordingly, the mean for most of the items is above 4 while it is close to 4 for few items. Besides, overall mean for the scale is above 4 with standard deviation of 0.89. This indicates that supervisees perceived the substantial personal care and academic support their supervisors provided as part of thesis supervision to the completion of thesis work. It is thought that this support facilitates and smoothes the research undertaking process.

In summing up, the results presented under both tables above divulged that supervisees agreed that they have got both directions and supports from their thesis supervisors during the supervision processes.

The scatter plot on four quadrants below presents thesis supervisors' prevalent supervisory styles as perceived by their supervisees.



Scatter plot of structure (x-axis) and support (y-axis) as components of supervisory styles

As indicated above, the z-scores of the raw data obtained from structure and support components of thesis supervision are indicated on x-axis and y-axis. Scatter plot was used with grids divided into four quadrants (Fourier, 2015; Garfield, 2005) to spot the supervisory styles of the supervisors as perceived by supervisees. Accordingly, the majority of the dots were found scattered in the first quadrant (contractual style) followed by third quadrant (laissez-fair style) while no dots appeared in the second and fourth quadrants. In other words, the supervisors were perceived displaying contractual and laissez-faire styles while no pastoral and directorial styles of supervision were perceived. This reveals that the supervisors' supervisory styles vary from establishing close and regular interactive relationships with the supervisees and good management of the projects to "uncaring" and "uninvolved" styles (Fourier, 2015).

This finding corroborates with Fourier (2015) that the majority of the supervisors were generally perceived to exercise contractual style followed by laissez-faire style. However, unlike Fourier (2015), no pastoral and directorial styles were perceived in this study. Thus, supervisors were perceived being flexible between providing directions to the management of the thesis and maintaining good interpersonal communication, on the one hand, and low direction and support on the other side.

Table 3
Supervisees' Perceived Levels of Satisfaction with Thesis Supervision

No	Perceived levels of satisfaction	Mean	SD
29	The amount of supervision you have received	4.04	0.87
30	The quality of the supervision you have received	4.02	1.10
31	Provision of quality feedback on your work	4.27	0.73
32	Provision of direction on your thesis work	3.97	0.96
33	Provision of support on your thesis work	4.41	0.64
34	Interpersonal relations with your supervisor	4.36	0.90
35	General expertise of your supervisor in supervising research	4.36	0.90
36	Timeliness of feedback	4.36	0.75
Scale Mean		4.25	0.80

Table 3 summarizes descriptive statistics for the items on the supervisees' perceived levels of satisfaction with thesis supervision. As indicated, the mean for each item is above 4 for almost all items. In addition, overall mean for the scale is 4.25. This reveals that graduate students felt that they are satisfied with the supervision they were offered. On the same line of discussion, research works show that supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision reflects the quality of supervision delivered (Hermann, Hansen & Jensen, n.d; Kam, 1997; Klein, 2013).

Table 4
The Relationship between Supervisory Styles and Overall Satisfaction with Supervision

Supervisory Style	R values for satisfaction with supervision
contractual	0.49*
Laissez-faire	0.53*

*significant at < 0.001

Table 4 shows the relationship between supervisory styles and supervisees' overall satisfaction with thesis supervision. Consequently, significant and positive correlations were found between supervisees' overall satisfaction with thesis supervision and the two supervisory styles (contractual and laissez-faire). The result shows that the more the supervisors exhibit contractual and laissez-faire styles in their supervisory processes, the higher the supervisees' satisfaction with the supervision. In this regard, Hermann, Hansen and Jensen (n.d) found a positive correlation between satisfaction with supervision and hands-on supervision style while a negative and very weak correlation was found between satisfaction with supervision and hands-off supervision style.

Conclusions

This study disclosed that supervisees perceived the directions/guidance and the support their thesis supervisors provided them in the supervisory process. It is believed that provision of directions to thesis supervisees' helps thesis management process which this again would positively influence the quality of thesis and timely completion of the work. Similarly, the substantial personal care and academic support supervisors provide is thought to be equally essential as it facilitates and smoothes the research undertaking process. Thus, EFL supervisors should keep up the provision of both direction and support to their supervisees. Correspondingly, postgraduate offices should institutionalize direction and support components of thesis supervision as good culture.

In addition, the finding revealed that EFL supervisors were perceived exhibiting contractual and laissez-faire styles. Nevertheless, pastoral and directorial styles of supervision were not perceived. This implies that supervisors are not fully flexible in applying various supervisory styles as there is

no fixed best way of supervision. To this end, EFL supervisors ought to be more flexibly apply the various supervisory styles depending on the needs and developmental levels of the supervisees.

Besides, the finding showed that the supervisees were satisfied with the supervision they were offered. This entails that the supervisees were rendered quality supervision as there is direct relation between supervisees' level of satisfaction with thesis supervision and quality supervision. Therefore, EFL supervisors should constantly seek feedback from their supervisees concerning their felt level of satisfaction with thesis supervision as reflective practices for development.

Last, significant and positive correlations were found between supervisees' overall satisfaction with thesis supervision and the two supervisory styles (contractual and laissez-faire). The more the supervisors exhibit contractual and laissez-faire styles in their supervisory processes, the higher the supervisees' satisfaction with the supervision. Consequently, supervisors should be cognizant of the supervisory styles the supervisees need at different stages of thesis writing in the supervisory process.

This study was conducted with reference to TEFL graduates at three universities among the thirty government owned universities in Ethiopia. In addition, it was carried out on small sample size. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable. Moreover, only questionnaire survey was employed to gather data from supervisees while multiple tools could have been employed. Therefore, further research should be done on large sample utilizing various additional tools from other stakeholders' perspectives as well for the comprehensive insight and generalization of the issues.

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Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to TEFL graduate students for their cooperation of giving valuable data and returning the questionnaire on time. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the three universities for their assistance during data collection. Last, many thanks to the editors of IJLTR and the anonymous reviewers for their precious comments.

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