

# Postgraduate TEFL Students' Perceptions towards Thesis Supervision Quality in Thailand: The Role of Expectations and Negotiation in Supervision Quality

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Article information	Abstract
<b>Article history:</b> Received: 4 May 2023 Accepted: 28 Aug 2025 Available online: 31 Aug 2025	<i>Despite the growing number of postgraduate students in Southeast Asian countries, specifically in Thailand, there is a shortage of studies on supervision quality in the Thai context of research supervision. This study aimed to obtain in-depth qualitative insights into postgraduate students' perceptions of thesis supervision quality in Thailand by looking into the expectations and negotiations and their influence on supervision quality. Ten TEFL Master of Arts students who had completed their thesis between 2021 and 2022 were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy in two private universities in Thailand. The data were collected using email interviews followed by member-checking and then systematically analyzed. Students believed that all expectations should be established and negotiated clearly between the supervisors and them. Most of the students' expectations from supervisors were about supervisors' soft skills such as adaptability, communication, dependability from total dependency to total autonomy, listening, work ethic, and teamwork. Most participants deemed negotiation of the roles necessary and practical. The study has several theoretical and practical implications for aligning students' expectations with the actual supervisory practices to improve the quality of thesis supervision.</i>
<b>Keywords:</b> Postgraduate TEFL students Thesis supervision quality Expectations Negotiation	

## INTRODUCTION

The landscape of postgraduate education has evolved significantly over the years, with its roots traced back to the mid-1950s when Sweden introduced postgraduate studies incorporating coursework. Within this framework, the role of supervisors has expanded to encompass a wide range of responsibilities, from defining research objectives to reviewing final manuscripts (Jensen et al., 1991, as cited in Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007). This evolution in higher education is part of a global shift. Taylor (2012) highlights the transformation of higher education from an elite system to a mass system, accompanied by profound changes that have reshaped traditional academic independence.

This study delves into the realm of postgraduate education in Thailand by recognizing the importance of students' perspectives in educational discussions. It aims to provide qualitative insights into how postgraduate students perceive the quality of thesis supervision in Thailand and how these perceptions align with or differ from reality in this context. While postgraduate research programs have gained prominence in many developing countries as a pillar of national development strategies (Wan et al., 2018), there remains a dearth of research on students' experiences in postgraduate education, particularly in Thailand.

In educational literature, it is widely acknowledged that students' unique perspectives on teaching and learning are invaluable (e.g., Alavi et al., 2019; Harvey & Askling, 2003; Siew et al., 2022). However, research on students' learning experiences at the postgraduate level in Thailand is notably limited. Consequently, effective student participation in discussions about teaching and learning becomes essential (Cook-Sather, 2006; Harvey & Askling, 2003). Postgraduate TEFL students bring their expectations and perceptions to the supervision process. These include expectations regarding the supervisor's role, communication style, feedback, and support.

Furthermore, supervision in higher education has its own set of complexities, with the role of a supervisor extending beyond traditional academic and research skills. It is a pedagogical challenge that postgraduate education institutions worldwide grapple with. Issues such as lengthy completion times, high rates of non-completion, and inadequate funding have plagued postgraduate education (Gunnarsson et al., 2013). Furthermore, the dynamics of the student-supervisor relationship can be intricate, often influenced by vague or misunderstood expectations (Baydarova et al., 2021). While a growing body of literature emphasizes the importance of clarifying student-supervisor expectations (Stracke & Kumar, 2020), the roles and responsibilities of each party in this relationship remain undefined (Davis, 2019; Mantai, 2019).

For example, Master's students find thesis writing challenging due to their inexperience, limited understanding of thesis requirements, and the high standards demanded (e.g., Basturkmen et al., 2014; Bitchener et al., 2010; Li et al., 2017). Students often perceive thesis writing as a substantial undertaking within their academic journey (e.g., Sadeghi & Khajepasha, 2015). The quality of supervision plays a pivotal role in completing postgraduate degrees (Hunter & Devine, 2016) but significantly impacts students' overall research experience (Roach et al., 2019).

Research supervisors are also confronted with evolving expectations regarding their skills and styles of supervision. Gatfield and Alpert (2002) identified two dimensions, namely structure and support, on which supervision styles have been categorized, resulting in the paradigms that reflect the supervisor's perceived roles in project management, candidate support, and resource provision.

Despite the long history of supervision in higher education, the persistent gap between expectations and reality continues to frustrate both students and supervisors, given the resource-intensive nature of higher education. This study takes place in Thailand, a country

that has invested significantly in admitting international students and, therefore, relies heavily on the quality of the supervisory process to ensure students acquire the necessary research skills and attitudes. This qualitative study aims to explore postgraduate TEFL students' perceptions of thesis supervision quality in two selected private Thai universities. It is hoped that this study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities within postgraduate education, particularly at the Master's level, in a dynamic and resource-dependent environment. Therefore, the following qualitative research questions (RQs) were proposed in this study:

**RQ1:** How do postgraduate students perceive the role of expectations and negotiation in supervision?

**RQ2:** How do challenges and motivation influence the quality of supervision?

**RQ3:** What are the specific challenges faced by postgraduate students during thesis supervision, and how do these challenges impact the quality of supervision?

**RQ4:** How do motivation factors influence both postgraduate students and supervisors in the context of thesis supervision, and how do they contribute to the overall quality of supervision?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Supervision is a dynamic and interactive process characterized by a more experienced individual guiding and nurturing the development of a less experienced person, thereby facilitating their professional growth (Bahtilla & Oben, 2022). In postgraduate programs, students are often assumed to possess foundational theoretical and research skills that equip them to transition into independent researchers. This journey toward research independence is nurtured through intellectual discussions with supervisors, gradually preparing students to conduct research autonomously (Manathunga & Goozée, 2007). Moreover, effective communication is pivotal in the supervision process, clarifying doubts, expectations, and negotiating meanings. Recent studies have highlighted the significant impact of supervisors on student satisfaction, persistence, and academic achievement (e.g., Gube et al., 2017). It is well-established that the quality of the supervision process is closely linked to the overall satisfaction and fulfillment of students, which, in turn, contributes to successful graduation (McCulloch, 2010).

Moreover, suboptimal supervision can lead to increased stress and health issues among students, negatively affecting the quality of research outcomes and progress toward degree milestones (Haag et al., 2018). In this regard, defining students' and supervisors' roles and expectations, particularly in the early stages of candidature, is widely discussed in the literature (Boud & Lee, 2005; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Pugh, 2014) as it helps prevent potential frustrations and dissatisfaction.

Challenges in the supervision process, such as time constraints (Zaheer & Munir, 2020) and resource management (Roberts & Seaman, 2018), have far-reaching consequences that can significantly impact the quality of postgraduate education. These consequences are multifaceted and affect various aspects of the educational experience. Institutions and supervisors should actively address time and resource-related challenges to mitigate these

consequences. This issue can involve providing additional support, seeking external funding opportunities (Torka, 2018), optimizing resource allocation, and implementing time-management strategies (Zaheer & Munir, 2020). Moreover, fostering a culture of understanding and flexibility can help students and supervisors navigate these challenges more effectively (Koon et al., 2023)

Personal factors such as setbacks, complaints, and attrition rates (Pitchforth et al., 2012) are important indicators of the student-supervisor relationship's health and the supervision process's effectiveness. When managed effectively, these challenges can lead to improvements in supervision practices, ultimately enhancing the quality of the student's educational experience and the research outcomes. Communication, support, and a commitment to addressing issues are crucial to navigating these challenges successfully.

Throughout the literature, scholars have proposed various theoretical frameworks to elucidate the multifaceted student-supervisor relationship, encompassing psychological/emotional dimensions, pedagogical aspects, and the competencies of both parties. Several prominent frameworks (e.g., Benmore, 2016; Gatfield, 2005; Gurr, 2001; Lee, 2010; Spear, 2000) are examined below.

To help students move toward competent autonomy, Gurr (2001) presented the Supervisor/Student Alignment Model, which classified supervision methods as hands-on or hands-off and students' levels of dependency on supervisors. Based on changing student requirements, supervisors may use a variety of pedagogical approaches (Gurr, 2001). Power relations change as students negotiate their identities and academic norms during doctoral supervision (Petersen, 2007). The supervisory profiles identified by Wright et al. (2007), which represent several approaches to supervision and emphasize research and information transmission, include "Quality Assurer," "Supportive Guide," "Researcher Trainer," "Mentor," and "Knowledge Enthusiast." Education environments are strongly impacted by power disparities in student-supervisor relationships, and ethical concerns are crucial for resolving these issues (Hemer, 2012). Both favorably and adversely, these dynamics impact students' autonomy and personal growth.

The direction of research projects, thesis themes, and resource availability are just a few examples of the many areas of a student's academic or professional path where supervisors have significant decision-making power. This power may restrict a student's autonomy and raise questions about the impartiality and fairness of evaluations (Cohen & Baruch, 2022). Power disparities may also impede honest communication, which lowers the quality of mentoring. Supervisors provide helpful direction and mentoring, but too much influence over students might stifle their "creativity" (e.g., Dai et al., 2023). Students' long-term professional development may be hampered if they feel pressured to follow their supervisor's preferences rather than pursue their learning interests (e.g., Geng et al., 2024). Power disparities that go unchecked can lead to abuse of power, injuring students physically, emotionally, or intellectually (Cohen & Baruch, 2022), resulting in stress, worry, and mental health problems (Aik et al., 2020) that disproportionately impact students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such disparities may jeopardize the integrity of research and may encourage students to act

unethically. 'Authorship' (recognizing creative ownership), 'Discipleship' (recognizing power-knowledge asymmetry), and 'Apprenticeship' (emphasizing incremental power-sharing) are three concepts used by Lee and Green (2009) to shed light on supervision. These viewpoints draw attention to the complicated power dynamics in relationships between students and teachers (Copeland et al., 2011).

Negotiating "acceptable academicity" is a challenging component of the supervisory process (Petersen, 2007). This idea entails constant dialogues between students and supervisors about academic expectations, norms, and ethical limits. On academic objectives, the extent of the study, anticipated results, and ethical criteria, such as authorship, research integrity, and autonomy, must be agreed upon (Boehe, 2016). Discussing feedback procedures can help to ensure that constructive criticism aids in learning. To sustain research integrity, it is also important to consider academic integrity standards, including avoiding data falsification and controlling conflicts of interest. As educational projects develop, regular meetings and adjusting expectations are necessary. Negotiating academic standards balances power relations and promotes professionalism, accountability, and critical thinking (Zeng et al., 2023). It encourages ethical research techniques and empowers students in their academic endeavors. Conflicts can be avoided by proactive negotiation.

Supervision models evaluate the interactions between students and supervisors based on support, interaction, and guidance, but none are successful without considering mutual expectations (Baydarova et al., 2021). Practice changes are necessary for research supervision, which is seen as a type of teaching (Vereijken et al., 2018). According to the "*negotiated order model*," expectations regarding supervision are negotiable and adaptive (Benmore, 2016).

### **Supervision models**

According to Acker et al. (1994), supervision models offer organized frameworks for establishing supervisory relationships and tasks. The majority of the literature, which is divided into "methods" (sequence steps and thesis components) and "management" (thesis completion and supervision) categories, is advised for applicants (Acker et al., 1994; Spear, 2000). However, few studies are conducted from the viewpoint of students. Academics are pressured to guarantee that students graduate on time due to the evolving higher education landscape and market-driven focus (Grant, 1999). Flexible supervision techniques are required to meet the various requirements of students (Mantai, 2019). Supervisors may use scaffolding to encourage independence in research within individualistic research cultures, providing initial support but expecting self-reliance after that (Parry & Hayden, 1999).

According to Acker et al. (1994), other types of supervision include technical rationality, which emphasizes processes, and negotiated order, which allows for student engagement. According to the intensity of the interactions, Spear (2000) divides supervision into three categories: strong (complex research), intermediate (post-course thesis), and weak (minimum supervisor engagement). The objective is to foster independent researchers (Phillips, 1992). The "Continuum Model" (Anderson, 1988) promotes supervisory ideas and actions subject to self-evaluation. Distinct categories, however, might not accurately capture the changing

character of Supervision (Anderson, 1988). Existing models stress the gradual growth of independence while recognizing the uniqueness of each learner (Grant, 1999). “We did it ourselves” is the desired response from pupils under supervision, according to Anderson (1988).

### **Technical rationality model**

The technical rationality model represents an organized and conventional method of thesis supervision (Acker et al., 1994). In this model, the supervisory relationship is characterized by a hierarchical and directive dynamic, where the supervisor assumes a position of authority and expertise. This model was defined by Cornbleth (1990) as “a mode of reasoning, investigation, or planning that gives priority to considerations of procedure or technique” (p. 19). According to the technical rationality model, the supervision process follows a defined and sequential structure with clearly stated stages and expectations. In this situation, the supervisor has much decision-making power and gives the student clear instructions and direction at every research process step. It is similar to an apprenticeship model in that the student is supposed to learn from the supervisor’s knowledge and follow accepted standards and procedures in the industry. This model strongly emphasizes adhering to accepted practices and approaches to ensure the effective and timely conclusion of the research project. Because the supervisor’s advice and orders are so important in the decision-making process, students frequently have little autonomy in determining the course of their study.

### **Negotiated order model**

The “negotiated order” model in thesis supervision emphasizes student autonomy and active participation in determining the phases and significance of their journey through the supervision process. It challenges the conventional hierarchical structure, promoting a cooperative approach where the student and supervisor have a voice in decision-making, fostering inclusivity and ownership in the research process.

### **Benmore’s supervision model (2016)**

Researchers highlight the need for both compatibility (Petre, 2010) and mutual trust, confidence, and respect (Cryer, 2006; Hemer, 2012). Without these, doctoral “orphans” can feel abandoned and disoriented, and their reduced confidence may impede their progress. Indeed, this critical shift in the philosophy of supervision has enacted a parallel change of power between students and supervisors (Benmore, 2016), providing students with a more significant say in what, how, and where they learn depending on their backgrounds, capabilities, needs, and levels of preparation. This new context has imposed yet another shift in supervision practice from what Acker et al. (1994) call a technical rationality model to a negotiated order model. The former considers a supervisor a manager whose ultimate objective is to achieve a specific outcome (i.e., Ph.D. thesis) by providing the necessary guidance and motivation to a relatively passive student.

In contrast, the ‘negotiated order model’ considers supervision as a process open to negotiation between supervisors and students, including negotiating expectations (Acker et al., 1994; Benmore, 2016).



Benmore (2016) explored the concept of “boundary management” to shed light on the dynamics of the doctoral supervisory relationship. The author introduced boundary management as a theoretical framework that helped clarify and describe the roles that supervisors assume at different stages of the doctoral process and how they navigate transitions between these roles. The study was based on the inspiration that boundaries apply to various aspects, such as physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and relational limits, that determine how roles are delineated. In the context of doctoral supervisory relationships, Benmore (2016) categorized boundaries into two primary dimensions: temporal and cognitive, and secondary: physical, emotional, and relational. Managing immediate boundaries is seen as crucial throughout the entire doctoral journey. However, it was emphasized that engaging with secondary dimensions is equally important, as they play a significant role in shaping how supervisors guide and negotiate essential elements like time management and cognitive development throughout the doctoral process (Benmore, 2016).

### **Supervision styles**

Supervision styles refer to the personal and interpersonal qualities, approaches, and attitudes that supervisors bring to the supervisory relationship. They reflect the supervisor’s demeanor, communication style, and interpersonal skills. There is a vast body of opinion about the supervision styles that academics should adopt to thoroughly meet research students’ needs. There is an increasing recognition that supervisors need to be adaptable, particularly within the field of education, where cognitive apprenticeship may be essential. Thus, the whole issue of supervision styles needs to be discussed openly, as it has implications for the relationship between supervisor and doctoral candidate.

Spear (2000), in comparison, has categorized supervision styles based on the level of interaction (weak, intermediate, and strong) between student and supervisor. This approach offers a nuanced understanding of how the supervisory relationship can vary, providing insights into how different levels of interaction can influence the research process and the overall experience of doctoral students.

If we consider research supervision as a specialized branch of teaching (Vereijken et al., 2018) or as a pedagogy (Benmore, 2016), then adopting a student-centered paradigm in supervision implies the need for significant changes in supervision practice. To provide a more critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks and models introduced above, it is essential to consider their limitations, criticisms, and empirical validation, as well as their ability to address the complexities of the student-supervisor relationship:

### **Limitations of the existing models**

**Prescriptive Nature:** Some models discussed above may be overly prescriptive, attempting to fit diverse supervisory relationships into rigid categories. Critics argue that such models may not account for students’ individuality (Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004) and supervisors, or the unique dynamics of each relationship.

**Time-Bound Models:** Models that describe supervision in discrete stages or categories, such as the Continuum of Supervision Model, may not adequately capture the evolving and dynamic nature of the student-supervisor relationship over time (Everett et al., 2011).

**Discipline-Specific Challenges:** Disciplinary differences exist in supervision practices. Some models may not sufficiently address these differences, potentially making them less applicable in interdisciplinary or diverse research environments (Carter et al., 2017; Grossmann, 2021).

**Lack of Empirical Validation:** While these models provide theoretical frameworks, it is crucial to assess their practical applicability. Lack of empirical validation can raise questions about their utility.

### **Addressing complexity and nuances**

**Individualization:** Supervision models must acknowledge and accommodate students' individuality and the unique contexts in which they work. Adequate supervision often requires tailoring approaches to meet each student's needs and goals (Solo, 2019).

**Power Dynamics:** The evolving power dynamics (Copeland et al., 2011) within the student-supervisor relationship are critical. Models should consider how these dynamics shift over time and impact the supervisory process.

**Adaptability:** The ability of supervisors to adapt their styles and approaches to match the evolving needs of students is vital (Watson & Blair, 2020). Models should promote flexibility rather than a one-size-fits-all approach (Tangen, 2018).

**Student-centered Paradigm:** The shift towards a student-centered paradigm in supervision emphasizes the importance of students' voices and choices in their educational journey. Models should align with this paradigm by emphasizing collaboration and negotiation (Tăușan, 2016).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study explores postgraduate students' perceptions of thesis supervision quality in Thailand. The study employed a qualitative research design. The data was collected from two private universities in Northern Thailand between September 2022 and October 2022. The total number of participants was 10. They had completed their thesis in 2022.

The rationale for selecting a sample size of 10 participants in this qualitative study is rooted in the need to explore the research subject comprehensively. Qualitative research aims to delve deeply into the intricacies of a topic, and a smaller sample allows researchers to allocate ample time and resources to each participant, enabling thorough data collection and exhaustive analysis for a more profound understanding of the research question (Nakkeeran & Zodpey, 2012). Despite these advantages, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations, including



reduced generalizability, potential sampling bias, contextual constraints, limited variability, and challenges in establishing trustworthiness, all of which should be addressed within the study's specific context.

The participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The researchers designed the interview questions and protocol and validated them with the help of three content experts. The criteria for the experts' selection and inclusion were: a Ph.D. holder in education-related programs, experience in research publishing and developing questionnaires and interview questions, and at least five years of teaching experience at the tertiary level (universities or colleges) in at least one university in Thailand.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via email and member-checking with the same participants. This is an acceptable way of collecting data when access to participants is difficult due to time, distance, cost, etc. (Creswell, 2012).

Regarding using email interviews as the primary data collection method in this study, we took several measures to address the limitations and ensure the integrity of this research. As email interviews may limit the depth and quality of data compared to face-to-face interactions, to mitigate this, we provided participants with clear and detailed instructions to encourage comprehensive responses. We also employed a follow-up email to seek clarification and additional information when needed, compensating for the absence of real-time probing. Furthermore, we acknowledged the challenges of misinterpretation and the lack of non-verbal cues. These steps were taken to maintain data rigor and quality while recognizing the practical necessity of email interviews in our research context, where face-to-face interviews were not feasible.

The interviewees were purposefully selected based on several criteria (age, gender, program, and education level). Participants aged 25 to 35 had enrolled in the MA TEFL program. The enrolment statistics reveal that most students in this program are female, accounting for the higher number of female participants (seven) in our study. During the data collection process, member checking (to validate and confirm the accuracy of data collected during qualitative research, particularly in interviews) with the interviewees was carried out to enhance the accuracy of the responses. Member checking was followed by a comparison with the results of similar studies to address the reliability of the study. Each interview follow-up for member-checking took about 20 minutes. The data was eventually triangulated to integrate all the responses.

## FINDINGS

The participants were 10 TEFL graduates. There were seven female and three male participants ranging between 24-29 years old. Among the participants, seven were Bhutanese, two were Thai, and one from Myanmar. All of them were teachers with at least three years of experience. Seven participants were primary school teachers, one from junior high school, and the other two from high school teachers.

This section presents the thematic analysis of data focusing on two key themes: expectations/negotiations (technical rationality model) and supervision quality (negotiated order model). Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between top-down (theory-driven) and bottom-up (data-driven) thematic analysis approaches. This study adopts a top-down approach, aligning with established theories and research questions. The top-down approach involves straightforward research questions, initial coding, data coding, constant comparison, theme development, review, refinement, and report writing. The analysis begins with defined research questions informed by existing literature and theories. Initial themes, reflecting theoretical assumptions, are identified. These broad codes guide systematic data coding. Constant comparison ensures ongoing refinement of codes and their organization into higher-level themes.

The thematic analysis of data unveiled key themes illuminating graduate students' expectations, negotiations, and experiences during their research journeys. These themes align with the technical rationality and negotiated order models, providing insights into multifaceted academic and personal growth.

## Expectations and negotiations

### Theme 1: The influence of social-cultural and educational background on supervision quality

This theme encapsulates the diverse ways students engage in the research process, influenced by their social-cultural and educational backgrounds. Participants revealed various psychological factors, soft skills, adaptation strategies, and additional support mechanisms that played pivotal roles in their research journeys.

**Table 1**  
**Learning based on social-cultural and educational background**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Self-motivation/Encouragement/Passion/Perseverance	"Self-motivation, however, is insufficient to keep us inspired; instead, we require encouragement from family, friends, and, in particular, university faculty members helping us through the research journey because we lack research experience."
Critical thinking/Creativity/Curiosity/Communication/Collaboration/Soft skills	"My learning has been greatly facilitated by skills such as critical thinking, creativity, effective communication, and collaboration with others in English."  "I really believe that soft skills and collaboration are fundamental."
Adjustment to new academic environments/Cultural exploration/Adopting new norms	"Adapting to the new academic environment means exploring cultural norms, comparing and contrasting them, and ultimately embracing new ones."
Extra writing and reading/Building a strong research background/Seeking extra guidance/Changing learning styles	"To prepare, I prefer reading research papers and also browsing YouTube for tips; it's been extremely helpful."  "I think sometimes we need to unlearn certain things and if necessary, even change to a new learning style."

Students used different techniques and styles to prepare, learn, and improve their research journey based on their social-cultural and educational background and environment. The codes could be categorized into psychological factors, soft skills, adaptation strategies, and additional support from others.

The soft skills mentioned by the interviewees were highlighted in the context of their importance for successful graduate studies. The interviewees specified soft skills as critical thinking, problem-based learning, and curious mind development.

The students mentioned adaptation strategies, such as adjustment to the new academic environments, social and cultural exposure, comparing, contrasting, and exploring cultural norms, and adopting new ones.

The factors related to learning strategies were stated as extra writing and reading, raising awareness on the lack of research background, building a strong research background, additional validation of any information, changing the learning styles, and learning vs unlearning.

Finally, receiving guidance from the seniors and peers, interacting with new groups of students, and obtaining additional social resources were stipulated by the interviewees as the extra support that they would deem as effective methods to cope with the socio-cultural and educational differences that could be involved in the process of their research.

## **Theme 2: The influence of needs and preferences on supervision quality**

This theme delves into how students' needs and preferences impact their research journeys, touching on psychological attributes, professionalism, and the influence of promotion practices on their career development.

**Table 2**  
**Learning based on level of needs and preferences**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Independence/Self-exploration	<p>"I felt empowered when my supervisor encouraged me to explore my own research interests and be more independent."</p> <p>"The freedom to choose my thesis topic allowed me to truly express my learning journey with confidence."</p>
Passion	"Having a supervisor who understands me and shares my passion for the subject made the supervision experience good."
Teaching experience	"My supervisor's experience and qualification played critical roles in ... success of my research."
Persistence/Individual effort in reading/Reading extensively	<p>"Sometimes I wanted to give up, but my supervisor's belief in my potential motivated me to keep going."</p> <p>"I had to try over and over ... and read a lot. I think knowledge and success come from putting extra effort in reading many journals and books."</p>

Codes	Quotation Example
Comprehensive needs analysis	"Regular check-ins with my supervisor helped address any uncertainties I had concerning my research direction. My supervisor kept track of my progress based on what needs to be improved and what I need to learn further."

A few students specified the roles of work-related matters affected by education ministries as the decision-makers in shaping those needs and preferences. They highlighted the impact of promotion practice on career development.

Independence and self-exploration; being passionate, persistent, and perseverance in doing research, the personal worldview; handling emotions; having self-confidence, interest, and determination in conducting research; being motivated, optimistic, patient, and diligent, and finally having faith in supervisor were the psychological factors stated by the interviewees.

Other preferences were related to professionalism and academic experience in conducting research, such as reading extensively, the positive influence of having teaching experience on research, and choosing an interesting topic.

### Theme 3: The influence of preparation on supervision quality

This theme highlights the significance of preparation in students' learning experiences, focusing on learning strategies, psychological factors, work-related matters, and soft skills.

**Table 3**  
**Learning based on level of preparation**

Codes	Quotation Example
Boundary management	"Supervisors should push beyond limits."
Self-motivation/Motivation from others/Interest in the topic/Independence	"A student must keep reading and ask for help from the supervisor."
Assistance-seeking/Work-related matters	"Assistant supervisors have to solve the workload issue for the main supervisors who struggle with time."

The students believed that their learning quality based on the level of preparation depends on their learning strategies, psychological factors, work-related matters, and soft skills.

The learning strategies were classified as individual effort in reading, utilizing online teaching platforms, methods, and resources such as browsing through YouTube for valid research and educational tips, a comprehensive needs analysis of the current research trends, improving English for those who are not their first language, and examining the information to comprehend the details (e.g., in problem and solution cases).

The interviewees indicated psychological factors as another aspect that could influence their learning quality. Among those factors were self-motivation, motivation from others, and showing and retaining interest in the selected topic.

One of the interviewees stated that work-related matters could influence the level of preparation and learning quality due to the enforced and compulsory requirements of career development in some institutions for obtaining higher degrees. In their study, Wan et al. (2018) argued that postgraduate research programs have become an essential pillar of the national development strategies for many developing countries.

In addition to the essential soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity, effective communication, and time management, this theme also encompasses the crucial abilities of mind mapping and organizing thoughts, prioritizing both personal needs and academic expectations, and fostering productive collaboration with peers and supervisors, all of which are instrumental in ensuring academic success and research excellence in a graduate or doctoral program.

#### Theme 4: The role of supervisors in motivating students

Participants unanimously emphasized the pivotal role of supervisors in motivating students, touching on psychological support, learning strategies, professionalism, and personal characteristics of supervisors.

**Table 4**  
**The role of supervisors in motivating students**

Codes	Quotation Example
Positive feedback/Encouragement	<p>"Constant words of encouragement, apart from expert advice on the work, is one thing that can impact the quality of research work by the students."</p> <p>"The consistent encouragement from my supervisor boosted my confidence alot and I think improved my skills."</p>
Soft skills/Critical thinking/Creativity/Communication/Collaboration	<p>"My supervisor's ability to apply critical thinking and creativity among students has enhanced my learning process."</p>
Supervisor's expectations and passion	<p>"Supervisors should have strong passion and high expectations... That keeps me going."</p> <p>"Having a supervisor who is genuinely passionate about the subject made a lot of difference in my motivation and enthusiasm"</p>
Supervisor's patience/Consistency	<p>"An ideal supervisor provides extra effort, is consistent and constant with the feedback, and is approachable."</p> <p>"My supervisor patient, making it easy to discuss challenges and seek help."</p>

The main positive psychological result that was mentioned as influential on students in motivating them was helping students by signifying the positive points when the students made some progress, or taking an interest in the student's study, and offering timely and helpful feedback that could contribute to the "good" management of the student's mental health.

The learning strategies suggested by the students as motivational solutions that the supervisors could offer were encouraging research students to work independently, motivating them to consult senior students, teaching them how to conduct a mini project before leading research and developing ideas through extensive reading.

Another factor highlighted by the interviewees was adherence to professionalism in research, such as supervisors' following the fundamental research process, updating their knowledge continuously and encouraging students to watch videos on research, preparation before consulting students in the meetings, assisting students in recognizing their flaws, timely research management, and allowing the students to present their work in any chance the students get. Two participants mentioned that personal characteristics, such as being approachable, friendly, patient, consistent, and ready to make sacrifices, e.g., in their time during weekends, are essential factors that could motivate the students in their research.

### Theme 5: Supervisors' ideal level of support

This theme focuses on students' expectations regarding the ideal level of supervisor support, encompassing soft skills, professionalism, and additional assistance.

**Table 5**  
**Students' perceptions about supervisors' ideal level of support**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Approachability/Knowledge/Supportive attitude	"A competent supervisor should be approachable, polite, and knowledgeable to give a comprehensive support."
Technical knowledge/Feedback/Quality check/Knowledge building	"I think the quality of the supervision affected my experience, and academic achievements;  "I believe negotiation of the expectations really important to clarify all the matters."  "My supervisor's knowledge was the key in my successful completion of my study especially when I had lost my direction."
Personal commitment/Professionalism	"The amount of work and multi-tasking that my supervisor did was great."

The interviewees' response to their expectations about the supervisors' ideal level of support was mainly related to their technical knowledge of the subject, soft skills, professionalism, and additional assistance.

In terms of professionalism and knowledge, the students believed that a competent supervisor should have technical knowledge, e.g., in statistics and academic writing, use their experience and qualifications to help students identify their weaknesses, provide insightful and meaningful feedback and consistent with the input, be informed about the standard of work expected of students, train students in, stress the significance of coming up with decent research questions, and support students in the knowledge building process.

In the interviewees' description of an ideal supervisor, it was found that additional assistance, such as helping students to look for resources, assisting students to publish their work, and going beyond to provide extra personal time and effort, were deemed necessary by the interviewees.

Most interviewees (nine out of 10) believed they received adequate supervision from their supervisors. The student who claimed she did not receive adequate supervision assumed it was due to the supervisor's work overload.



The other nine students believed that their supervisors had “flexibility,” gave “continuous support,” and provided “sufficient feedback and support.” These nine students were satisfied with the supervisors because of the timely feedback, positive suggestions, data monitoring, financial support, relevant materials, availability for critical comments, being approachable but frank and honest, and providing students with constructive and encouraging feedback.

### Theme 6: Direction provided by supervisors and the quality of research

This theme delves into how supervisors’ direction and guidance influence the quality of students’ research. Key aspects include time management, additional assistance, mentoring, and using precise instructions.

**Table 6**  
**Direction provided by supervisors and the quality of research**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Timely Supervision/Monitoring progress/Ensuring accuracy	“My supervisor checks in on my progress regularly and provides feedback sooner rather than later, which helps me stay on track.”
Multi-tasking/Offering additional assistance	“My supervisor is always guiding me in multiple tasks and offers additional assistance whenever I need it.”  “Whenever I’m juggling multiple projects, my supervisor steps in to help me prioritize tasks and ensure I’m not overwhelmed.”
Serving as mentors/Monitoring academic progress	“Supervisors try to transfer their passion and knowledge of the subject to their students.”  “I feel like my supervisor genuinely cares about my growth as a researcher; she shared her experiences and insights to encourage me.”
Precise instructions	“When I receive clear and specific guidance from my supervisor, it really helps me understand what is expected, and I perform much better.”

The essential qualities of a supervisor stated by the students were time management, offering additional assistance, mentoring, and giving the most accurate instructions. The importance of using the most accurate verbs in supervisee-supervisor interactions was highlighted.

Seven students stated that timely supervision helped them stay on the right track by supervisors’ keeping track of the student’s academic development. The students expect additional assistance and multi-tasking to help them with the research direction and quality, mainly related to providing notes, materials, and resources by the supervisors, proofreading, editing the drafts, and helping students publish academic papers.

The supervisors were expected to “serve as mentors,” e.g., in monitoring the students’ overall academic progress, helping the students discover how well they communicated their ideas and thoughts to make them as presentable as possible, assuring accuracy in thesis quality check, motivating, and preparing for the proposal defense and Viva Voce sessions. Furthermore, the interviewees believed that learning based on personal and professional capabilities was significantly related to the quality of their research.

An interesting point was related to the “suggestions” instead of the supervisors’ instructions. The student believed that he was usually confused as to what extent the suggestions offered by the supervisors and even examiners were mandatory or negotiable and whether he had to follow them even though he could think of “better solutions” for the “problems and mistakes.” In some cases, he narrated that despite his assumption that there could always be “better suggestions,” he was eventually asked by the supervisors and examiners to follow those suggestions like instructions. This dilemma could indicate that supervisors must choose the most accurate verbs when communicating with the supervisees.

## **Theme 7: Expectations and negotiations based on negotiated order model**

This theme focuses on negotiating expectations and roles between supervisors and students. It also considers how these expectations influence research outcomes.

### **Subtheme 7.1: Negotiation of expectations**

This subtheme explores the importance of negotiating expectations between supervisors and students, particularly regarding time management, mutual understanding, handling unpredictable situations, independence, and faculty’s overall approach.

**Table 7**  
**Negotiation of expectations**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Mutual understanding/Handling unpredictable situations	<p>“It’s really important for both of us to be on the same page regarding what I can realistically achieve, especially when things don’t go as planned.”</p> <p>“Expectations must be clearly defined, and they must be achievable and measurable.”</p>
Effective communication/Flexible scheduling	<p>“I was able to continuously chat with my supervisor to ensure that we both understand the unpredictable situations.”</p> <p>“Keeping an open line of communication with my supervisor made it easier for me to adapt our schedules when unexpected challenges arise.”</p>

Students emphasized flexible scheduling, early expectation negotiation, and effective communication in giving and receiving feedback. They believed both students and supervisors should explicitly articulate their thoughts and expectations, fostering mutual understanding.

Handling unpredictable situations was another aspect as most of the students believed that supervisors and students should learn how to manage the unwritten or unspoken “rules” and norms. Again, the role of effective communication was stressed here.

Furthermore, the students expected their supervisors to emphasize independence in conducting research by helping them reach a certain level of autonomy, overseeing students’ strengths and shortcomings, and motivating them.

## Subtheme 7.2: Negotiation of roles between supervisors and students

This subtheme discusses the critical nature of negotiating roles between supervisors and students, encompassing role clarification, conflict of interest, and alternative role reversals. The students unanimously agreed that expectations between supervisors and students should be negotiated, particularly regarding time management, mutual understanding, handling unpredictable situations, independent research, and the faculty's overall approach to treating the students.

**Table 8**  
**Negotiation of roles between supervisors and students**

Codes	Quotation Example
Role clarification/Conflict of interest - Alternative role reversals	"We often had to sit down and discuss what responsibilities each of us has, especially when our goals seemed to clash."
Formalizing roles	"I think the supervisor and student should clearly express their expectations."  "It's crucial for both my supervisor and me to regularly check in and clarify our roles to avoid any misunderstandings."

Negotiating the roles of supervisors and students is a critical aspect highlighted by eight out of ten participants in this study. Some students even suggested formalizing these roles through a "memorandum of understanding" with their supervisors. The clarification of roles was a unanimous point stressed by all interviewees. Students expressed a strong need for guidance and attention from their supervisors, who should assume roles as guides, facilitators, and teachers. This involves providing guidance, direction, teaching, and mentorship to facilitate learning. Regular research consultation meetings, often weekly, were suggested to fulfill these roles.

Additionally, conflict of interest was brought up by two participants, aligning with existing literature that underscores the importance of addressing potential conflicts to ensure a satisfactory experience for both supervisors and candidates.

Three participants mentioned alternative role reversal as an effective method for enhancing mutual understanding of their roles. This reversed role approach can create a dynamic learning environment and foster better understanding between students and supervisors. However, not all participants felt the need to negotiate roles, with some believing that roles should be clearly defined without negotiation.

## Subtheme 3: Influence of expectations on the research outcome

This subtheme explores how expectations set by supervisors can impact the research outcomes, both positively and negatively.

**Table 9**  
**Influence of expectations on the research outcome**

Codes	Quotation Example
Positive outcomes/Negative outcomes	<p>"Good results depend [<i>sic</i>] on positive thinking of the supervisor."</p> <p>"I noticed that when doubts are expressed, it affects my confidence and ultimately the quality of my research."</p> <p>"When my supervisor believed in my work, I felt motivated, and it really shows in the results."</p>

Positive outcomes were believed to be achieved by supervisors' positive thinking, positive attitude, open-mindedness, passion, and setting feasible, reasonable, and realistic learning expectations. The students expected the supervisors to give more opportunities to meet the supervisor, provide timely assistance, explicitly clarify the expectation, pushing beyond limits, and creating optimistic expectations.

On the other hand, the students thought very high expectations could be adverse or even "detrimental" if those expectations were not met, and the students would become demotivated. It was also pointed out that expectations made by different advisors, supervisors, examiners, and lecturers make it difficult for students to advance because students are sometimes confused with the person they should listen to. The interviewees stated that in addition to the research output, the overall quality of research is influenced by the expectations. Moreover, some study participants highlighted students' roles and responsibilities in achieving a "good" research output.

### **Theme 8: Students' suggestions to improve supervision quality**

These suggestions mainly encompassed academic support, communication, willingness to learn, managing student progress, and humanistic considerations.

The interviewees stated that providing additional guidance on research/academic writing and reading by the supervisions and institutions, making further efforts by the institutions in terms of maintaining a reasonable supervisor-student ratio, recruiting experienced and qualified researchers and content experts as supervisors, and assigning co-supervisors, especially for the "less experienced" or "busy" primary supervisors, and enhancing communication skills (listening to each other; good command of English language; constructive criticism) could improve the supervision quality. Other humanistic considerations were also suggested that could affect the supervision quality, e.g., understanding graduate students' social and personal life challenges and avoiding subjective evaluations and bias.

#### **Subtheme 8.1: Suggestions for supervisors**

This subtheme outlines suggestions for supervisors to improve supervision quality. Supervisors were mainly suggested to carefully manage the research students' progress by considering whether a graduate student falls behind in their plan, measuring their performance occasionally, and identifying their weaknesses.

**Table 10**  
**Suggestions for supervisors**

Codes	Quotation Example
Academic guidance	"It would be really beneficial if supervisors helped us learn the publication process more actively."
Maintaining a reasonable supervisor-student ratio	"I think supervisors should not accept too many students because it is hard to manage a big number."
Clarifying expectations/Standards	"When supervisors hold us to high standards, it pushes us to deliver our best work."  "...higher expectations may leads [sic] to successful results."
Passion	"Supervisors should have strong passion and high expectations."  "I think having a passionate supervisor who believes in our work makes a huge difference in our motivation."
Managing student progress	"Many times, my supervisor chased me for updating her...which although I was stressed, eventually it helped me make good progress."

### Subtheme 8.2: Suggestions for students

These suggestions promote a focused, receptive, and self-directed approach to learning, encouraging students to actively engage in their educational journeys.

**Table 11**  
**Suggestions for students**

Codes	Quotation Example
Clarifying expectations/Setting learning goals	"I think setting specific learning goals each semester really helped me focus my efforts on what I want[ed] to achieve."
Openness to learning	"I always try to approach feedback with an open mind; it's the best way to grow as a researcher."
Self-management	"A student must not only rely on the supervisor only."

### Subtheme 8.3: Suggestions for institutions

These suggestions focus on actions institutions can take to facilitate better supervision quality. Table 12 outlines suggestions for enhancing supervision quality, such as regular faculty check-ins, recruiting experienced supervisors, maintaining a reasonable supervisor-student ratio, offering communication workshops, fostering humanistic considerations, and providing bias training to ensure equitable treatment for all students.

**Table 12**  
**Suggestions for institutions**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotation Example</b>
Faculty support	"There should be regular check-ins with faculty ...to support for both supervisors and students."
Recruiting experienced supervisors	"I believe the quality of supervision can be improved when more experienced supervisors are brought on board."  "The amount of work and multi-tasking that my experienced supervisor did is admirable."
Maintaining a reasonable supervisor-student ratio	"The supervisors should not be overloaded."
Enhancing communication skills	"The universities can have workshops on effective communication to benefit both students and supervisors."
Humanistic considerations	"Supervisors should show they care about students' personal challenges ...and create a much more supportive environment."
Avoiding bias	"Training on recognizing and mitigating biases can help supervisors approach all students equally and fairly."

### Theme 9: Students' challenges in research

Students faced challenges in research, including a lack of foundational knowledge and low academic proficiency, which hinder their understanding of essential concepts such as data analysis and research writing, as well as language barriers that affect their ability to articulate ideas and comprehend academic texts. Moreover, the demands of research require students to exert considerable effort to meet academic expectations, while they also struggle with setting personal learning goals and navigating the complexities of the writing process, highlighting the need for clearer ethical guidelines and comprehensive support.

**Table 13**  
**Students' challenges in research**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
Lack of research background/Low academic proficiency/Language barriers	"Poor technical knowledge limitations, such as poor understanding of data analysis and statistics, inability to apply the right research method, and poor understanding of the concepts of research on a deeper level, were the other challenges."  "I felt unprepared for the demands of research due to insufficient foundational knowledge, particularly in crucial areas such as research writing."  "Sometimes I struggled to articulate my ideas and comprehend academic texts effectively."
Students' hard work	"Students have to work hard to meet the expectations."  "We must put extra effort to meet the supervisors and the academic community standards."



Codes	Quotations
Setting goals	<p>"At the beginning stage, I had trouble setting my own learning goals."</p> <p>"I think it would be good for us to have ethical guidelines for research practices in our studies."</p>
Understanding the writing process	<p>"Understanding parts of the writing process, for example topic selection, finding a theoretical foundation, study design, and comprehending the comments made by supervisors and examiners... were challenging for me"</p>

## DISCUSSION

Focusing on anticipation and negotiation, this study aimed to explore postgraduate TEFL students in Thailand's views on thesis supervision quality. The findings offer a detailed picture of the supervisory relationship that aligns with and supports modern research supervision models, especially the boundary management (Benmore, 2016) and Negotiated Order models (Acker et al., 1994).

The study's key finding is the strong focus students place on negotiating roles and expectations. For supervision to succeed, all participants agree that expectations must be "established and negotiated clearly." This aligns with the shift in supervision philosophy from the Technical Rationality model, where the manager directs a passive student toward a set goal (Acker et al., 1994), to the Negotiated Order model, which views supervision as an "open to negotiation" process (Benmore, 2016). Our results in the Thai context show that students now see themselves as active collaborators rather than passive recipients. The need for supervisors to be flexible and move away from a one-size-fits-all approach is emphasized by this push for negotiation, directly challenging more hierarchical, top-down supervisory styles (Gatfield, 2005; Mantai, 2019).

Our comprehension of Benmore's (2016) boundary management paradigm is expanded by the discovery that students' main expectations focused on supervisors' soft qualities, such as communication, approachability, patience, and reliability. Although Benmore concentrated on cognitive and temporal boundaries, our findings imply that relational and emotional boundaries must also be managed well for supervision to be of high quality. An engaging and communicative supervisor successfully maintains the relational barrier, establishing a secure environment for discussion. Gurr's (2001) Supervisor/Student Alignment Model, which contends that supervisory techniques must change to meet the evolving requirements of students, is consistent with this conclusion. The transition of students from "total dependency to total autonomy" calls for a supervisor who can dynamically manage these relational boundaries, giving more hands-on guidance at first and then progressively stepping back as the student becomes competent.

Understanding the power dynamics in student-supervisor interactions is another key insight from the study. One participant's doubt about whether supervisor feedback was a negotiable "suggestion" or a mandatory "instruction" highlights a serious power imbalance that can

hinder the development of true autonomy. The literature on authority in supervision directly addresses this issue (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; Hemer, 2012). It suggests that well-meaning advice might be seen as coercive when there's no clear negotiation, potentially stifling critical thinking and creativity. Instead of a “discipleship” model marked by power-knowledge imbalance, students’ requests for role clarification and even a formal “memorandum of understanding” are practical ways to address these power issues. Such measures could create what Lee and Green (2009) describe as a more balanced “apprenticeship” model that emphasizes gradual power sharing.

The obstacles cited by students, such as lack of research experience, time constraints, limitations, and external factors are not unique to Thailand and reflect common concerns in postgraduate education worldwide (e.g., Gunnarsson et al., 2013; Roberts & Seaman, 2018; Zaheer & Munir, 2020). However, this study emphasizes that a supervisory relationship rooted in open communication and strong soft skills can significantly reduce these challenges. A supervisor who effectively manages time, provide prompt feedback, and hold regular meetings can help a student overcome both internal and external obstacles. Our participants desired a proactive and consistent support, which aligns with Spear’s (2000) classification of supervision styles based on interaction level.

Finally, these TEFL students’ perspectives strongly endorse a collaborative, communicative, and explicitly negotiated supervision model. The results provide strong evidence for the applicability of the Negotiated Order model in this context, demonstrating that excellent supervision involves managing a complex, dynamic relationship rather than merely imparting knowledge (Technical Rationality). Supervisors can more effectively guide students from dependency to autonomy by employing soft skills to balance power dynamics, intentionally managing relational boundaries, and explicitly negotiating expectations and roles. This approach will enhance the quality of the research outcomes and the student's overall academic experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study offers an exploration of the expectations, negotiations, experiences, and challenges faced by TEFL graduates in their research endeavors. The findings can be used to improve graduate research experiences and support systems by recognizing the diverse backgrounds and unique needs of graduate students, institutions to foster more inclusive and effective research environments.

Focusing on the themes of negotiation, expectation, and quality within supervision processes, the research highlights that students seek balanced and professional communication, rather than a hierarchical, one-sided dynamic. The participants also emphasized the importance of soft skills, such as adaptability, communication, dependability, listening, work ethic, teamwork, and academic abilities.

Finally, a key goal of education is to promote learner autonomy; effective supervision can facilitate this progression, allowing students to transition from dependence on their supervisors during thesis writing to becoming independent researchers. Future research can build on these insights to deepen our understanding of graduate research journeys and the role of supervision across various academic fields.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AI-assisted tools such as Google Gemini were used in refining and proofreading several sentences and paragraphs in this article. However, these tools were only used to improve clarity, coherence, and the academic tone of the article. All ideas, interpretations, and conclusions remain the original work and responsibility of the researchers.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview questions**

#### **Expectations and negotiation (Related to RQ1):**

1. Could you share your thoughts on what you expected from your thesis supervision when you began your postgraduate program?
2. Were there any formal or informal negotiations or discussions with your supervisor(s) regarding your expectations for the supervision process?
3. Can you provide specific examples of how the initial expectations or negotiations influenced your supervision experience?
4. Were there any instances where your expectations differed from those of your supervisor(s)? How were these differences addressed?

#### **Challenges and motivation (Related to RQ2):**

1. Can you describe any challenges you encountered during your thesis supervision journey?
2. How did these challenges impact your motivation to complete your thesis and the overall quality of your supervision?
3. Were there any strategies or support mechanisms that helped you overcome these challenges and stay motivated?