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# Measuring International Students' Individual Power Distance and Their Response to Academic Feedback

*A Vignette Questionnaire Study*

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# Abstract

Feedback is deemed as one of the essential elements to enhance learning in higher education when students make use of feedback comments on their work. The paradigm shift in feedback studies has further highlighted the capacity feedback-as-dialogue can contribute to assisting students' understanding of feedback, increasing students' responsibility and activeness in feedback practices, and possibly extending feedback influence on learning beyond higher education context.

However, these benefits cannot be fully enjoyed if students do not engage in feedback dialogues. Hence, this thesis intends to shed light on students' intention to read and use academic feedback as well as their willingness to engage in feedback dialogues (the outcome variables). Since individual difference variables are proven to be correlated to students' responses to feedback, this study wishes to contribute to the field by possibly identifying other individual difference variables that have a correlation with students' responses to feedback. Due to the particular power relationship between teachers and students in higher education, students' individual power distance (IPD) is chosen as the predictor variable.

IPD builds on the cultural dimension of power distance (PD) developed by Hofstede et al. (2010), who noticed behavioral differences between people from low and high PD cultures. Relating to students' responses to feedback, it can thus be assumed that international students with different cultural backgrounds will differ in their IPD. Consequently, they may be more or less willing to engage in feedback dialogue and use the provided comments. Furthermore, there is a recognized vulnerability of international students despite their growing higher education enrollment in the past decades. Considering the reasons above and that postgraduate feedback experience is under-researched, this thesis focuses on international master's students studying in public Norwegian higher education institutions.

This study used an online questionnaire with a built-in vignette to investigate the relationship between the variables by analyzing the quantitative data collected through the survey. The findings show that international master's students with high IPD are slightly less likely to engage in feedback dialogues. Additionally, those who are more willing to engage in feedback dialogues are also relatively more likely to read and use feedback. Furthermore, the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver is relatively higher among students

studying in Mathematics and Natural Science than those studying Humanities. Even though there is no relationship between the measured feedback behaviors and other background variables such as nationality, this study still illuminates that Hofstede's model is not suitable to be used at the individual level and the assumption of homogeneity among students from the same country should be avoided in future studies.

Collectively, this study provides valuable insights to feedback givers, academics, and policy makers. The discovery also raises the awareness of teacher-student power relationship, the use of 'power' in feedback practices, and of the possible encouragement difference in feedback dialogue engagement between disciplines. It is encouraged to use the improved version of this thesis model for further investigation in another country context, with different student groups, or between higher education institutions that differ in their teacher-student relationship policies. Finally, it would be fascinating to see whether and how feedback dialogues can improve students' psychological feedback processes and remove the barriers that prevent them from using feedback.

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## List of Abbreviations

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
FD	Willingness to Engage in Feedback Dialogue Scale
HK	Hong Kong
IPD	Individual Power Distance
ISU	International Students' Union
K-S	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
NTNU	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
PD	Power Distance
RU	Intention to Read and Use Feedback Scale
UiA	University of Agder
UiB	University of Bergen
UiO	University of Oslo
UiT	Arctic University of Norway
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The past decades, there have been many changes in higher education. The educational focus, as one of the changes, has shifted from teaching to learning. Teacher-centered model has gradually been considered an outdated approach that pays too little attention to students' learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). On the other hand, a more student-centered model has invited discussions and investigations on understanding learners and learning, which include the growing focus on feedback and formative assessment. Feedback especially is deemed as one of the essential elements to enhance learning in higher education. As Sadler (2010) said, "feedback is central to the development of effective learning, partly because assessment procedures play a key role in shaping learning behaviour, and feedback can significantly accelerate that process" (p. 536). Feedback should, therefore, enhance learning and give students the tools to self-regulate as students are given more responsibility for learning (Carless, 2006).

In the Norwegian context, higher education underwent a policy reform in 2003, as a response to the Bologna Process (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This reform moved the assessment focus in Norwegian higher education towards more formative assessment, as students are required to pass assessment task(s) to qualify for the final exam. This has led to students getting more opportunities to produce work and receive feedback. However, more feedback does not automatically imply that students' learning has been enhanced (Henderson et al., 2019). Previous studies have identified many challenges of why feedback sometimes fails to serve its purpose of enhancing learning. For example, students lack the capabilities to decode feedback, the curriculum does not provide students subsequent tasks to enact feedback, or students do not act on feedback (Henderson et al., 2019). Besides the modular curriculum design that often does not allow students to easily carry feedback forward to the next course, the identified challenges suggested that it is either the teachers' responsibility (e.g. to use clearer comments and avoid using jargons) or the students' fault (e.g. not using feedback) for feedback's limited enhancement on learning. Some feedback scholars disagreed with such statements of blame and called attention to the recent paradigm shift in feedback studies (Carless, 2006; Nash & Winstone, 2017).

Together with the pedagogical shift from teacher-centered to student-centered model in higher education, there is also a noticeable change in feedback studies and practices, i.e., the transition from feedback-as-telling to feedback-as-dialogue. Feedback-as-dialogue allows students to join the construction and reconstruction of feedback, engage in discussion, seek clarification, or negotiate with the teachers (Higgins et al., 2001; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). In other words, feedback should be seen as a process of communication (Higgins et al., 2001), which requires participation of both teachers and students. Hence, it is argued that both teachers and students are responsible for students' feedback understanding, reading, and using (Nash & Winstone, 2017), which are what feedback-as-dialogue emphasizes on ensuring (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017) as students' understanding and use of feedback are essential for effective feedback (Ramsden, 1994; Sadler, 2010). However, social relationships and power are central to feedback-as-dialogue (Higgins et al., 2001). On top of that, some feedback studies have suggested that the power relationship between teachers and students can be problematic in habiting productive dialogues (Boud, 1995; Crossouard & Pryor, 2009; Higgins et al., 2001; Ivanic et al., 2000; Lea & Street, 1998).

The concept of power is complex and is rooted in many different wider strands of literature. This thesis, aligned with the reviewed literature, has a view of power that is not static but circulates in relationships. Among the teacher-student power relationships identified by Symonds (2021), it is found that a traditional power relationship, in which teachers have more authority and exercise more power, is the most accepted relationship by academics and students. Meanwhile, feedback scholars noticed that the way students perceive the teacher-student power relation seems to have an influence on the way students accept or respond to feedback (Crossouard & Pryor, 2009; Higgins et al., 2001, 2002). In other words, it is suspected that the problematic teacher-student power relationship might make it more challenging for students to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, which may lessen the effect feedback-as-dialogue has on students' feedback understanding, reading, and using.

This thesis is interested in students' individual power distance (IPD), "the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations" (Clugston et al., 2000, p. 9). IPD is an individual difference variable (such as culture, gender, or previous experience), which is assumed to have a correlation with students' responses to feedback (Evans, 2013; Evans & Waring, 2011a, 2011b; Henderson et al., 2019; Tian & Lowe, 2013). IPD is based on the cultural dimension of power distance (PD) developed by Hofstede

et al. (2010), who claimed that there is an observable difference in PD among people from different nations. Even more so, there is an observation that members from low PD cultures behave differently from the ones from high PD cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). In relation to students' responses to feedback, it can therefore be assumed that international students with different cultural backgrounds will differ in their IPD and in consequence may be more or less willing to engage into dialogue with the feedback giver and make use of the provided comments.

Based on these assumptions, this thesis intends to investigate whether there is a correlation between international students' IPD and their intention to read and use feedback comments as well as their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. Besides, the growing number of international student enrollment worldwide and internationalization in higher education called for the need to pay more attention to the international student population (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021; OECD, 2020). Along with the attention, it is suggested that international students' cultural factors and past experience are correlated to their perceptions of feedback comments and thus should be taken into account when providing feedback (Paul et al., 2012; Warner & Miller, 2015). Moreover, a large-scale quantitative study by Ryan and Henderson (2018) suggested that international students are more vulnerable in the sense that there is a higher likelihood, in comparison to domestic Australian students, for international students to have negative emotional reactions to feedback.

## **1.2 Research Aims and Questions**

Based on the above, this thesis aims to shed light on international students' intention to read and use academic feedback as well as their willingness to engage in feedback dialogues and contribute to the field by possibly identifying other individual difference variables that have a correlation with students' feedback behaviors. To this end, international students' intention to read and use feedback as well as their willingness to engage in a dialogue with the feedback giver are measured as the outcome variables. Drawing on the theory that feedback dialogue can further assist students' understanding of feedback and perhaps increase their chance of using it, it is assumed that there is a correlation between the outcome variables. Next, IPD is chosen to be the predictor variable due to the relevance of power in feedback and in teacher-student relationship as well as Hofstede et al.'s observation about PD difference between countries and the corresponding behaviors. Before introducing the research questions, it is necessary to note

that this thesis focuses on student-teacher feedback practices, which have a recognized particular social relationship between two parties. To address the research aim, this study uses a questionnaire with built-in vignette to measure the relationship between predictor and outcome variables with research questions as follows:

- RQ1.** Is there a correlation between international students' IPD and their intention to read and use feedback?
- RQ2.** What is the relationship between international students' IPD and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver?
- RQ3.** Is international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver correlated to their intention to read and use feedback?
- RQ4.** Are there any differences in international students' intention to read and use feedback as well as their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver depending on their background variables such as age, gender, discipline, and country of origin?

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 offers fundamental background information, significance and purpose of this study, and research questions that serve as a guideline through the empirical process. Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of relevant literature that is organized into five parts. The first two parts elaborate on how feedback can aid learning and how the feedback trend is shifting. Building on the previous sections, section three comprises feedback responsibility between teachers and students and how students' individual difference variables can shape the feedback relevant behaviors. The next section elaborates on the teacher-student power relationship as a groundwork on how power in the relationship is relevant to feedback. The last section rounds up the main points and the identified literature gaps before entering the conceptual framework in chapter 3. Chapter 3 presents individual power distance and draws on relevant theories regarding power distance, feedback engagement, and feedback dialogue. Thereafter, hypotheses made based on the theories are laid out. Chapter 4 offers the methodology used in this thesis, including research design and strategy, population and sampling, questionnaire design with a built-in vignette, data collection and analysis, and methodological quality. Chapter 5 presents the primary findings of the quantitative study whilst

chapter 6 discusses how the findings have answered the research questions, contributed to the field, and given practical implications to academics, feedback givers, and policy makers. Thenceforward, the study design as well as the limitations of the study are reflected upon. Then, recommendations for future research are presented. Finally, chapter 7 concludes the study with a brief summary of this thesis.



## **2 Literature Review**

There are increasingly more students traveling to foreign countries to pursue higher education for better job prospects (Hoang et al., 2019), personal development (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), leisure (González et al., 2011), and other benefits (OECD, 2020). Norway, as one of the targeted countries where many international students choose to enrich their education, underwent a policy reform in 2003 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The reform moved the assessment focus in Norwegian higher education towards more formative assessment that gives students more activities to produce work and receive feedback. As higher education institutions invest resources in setting up programs and degrees taught in English, helping international students accommodate themselves in the new environment, and internationalizing curriculum (Altbach & Knight, 2007), more awareness should be put on how institutions can facilitate learning for international students via feedback. Specifically, it is crucial to investigate how international students' individual difference variables are correlated to students' responses to feedback. In the following literature review, the evidence of how feedback can enhance learning is presented, accompanied by an overview of a shift in feedback studies. Afterwards, factors that play important roles in feedback engagement are covered, i.e., the feedback gap between teachers and students, a discussion of feedback responsibility, the relationship between students' individual difference variables and their response to feedback. Despite the underlying emphasis on understanding students' individual difference variables, the topic has yet received sufficient attention. Therefore, five empirical studies on discovering the relationship between students' individual difference variables and feedback are laid out as the groundwork for this master's thesis. Next, literature on power, power distance, power dynamics between teachers and students in higher education, and how power relations correlate to feedback are presented as a foundation for conceptual framework. The last section comprises the identified literature gaps this thesis aims to contribute to.

### **2.1 Feedback and Learning**

'Feedback' in this paper follows the definition "all dialogue to support learning in both formal and informal situations" by Askew and Lodge (2000, p. 1). In this thesis, both written and oral feedback interactions are considered as 'dialogue' between students and teachers. To begin with, the influential meta-analyses on feedback conducted by Hattie et al. (1996), Black and

William, (1998), and Hattie and Jaeger (1998) have confirmed the centrality feedback has on learning. Black and William summarized 578 articles with “extensive feedback lead to greater student engagement and higher achievement” (p. 23), and that feedback is effective in promoting learning. The evidence of its importance to learning can also be found in a United States (US) longitudinal study of learning by Mentkowski et al. (2000) and in the distilled comment: “Students observed that feedback procedures assisted them in forming accurate perceptions of their abilities and establishing internal standards with which to evaluate their own work” (p. 82).

Although feedback has been proven to enhance learning, feedback is not always effective in assisting learning. The work of Boud and Molloy (2013) and Evans (2013) indicated that feedback does not fulfill their purpose of enhancing learning as students may not understand feedback comments given by tutors. This is in accord with the four psychological processes and the corresponding barriers that prevent students from using feedback (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017), which are elaborated in section 2.3.1. These barriers are related to the issue that feedback is often traditionally seen as a one-way transmission process. Such transmissive feedback often leads to insufficient results as students do not have the background experience that empowers them to act on the comments satisfactorily. In the recent years, this has led to a shift in feedback studies from transmissive feedback, also known as feedback-as-telling, to feedback-as-dialogue.

## **2.2 From Feedback-as-Telling to Feedback-as-Dialogue**

In advance of addressing the transition from feedback-as-telling to feedback-as-dialogue, it is helpful to review the history of feedback. Corrective feedback played a pivotal role in the industrial revolution and the development of engines, in which outputs were monitored and information was fed back to the mechanical system to control the engine or its output (Bunch & Hellemans, 2004). Such practice was taken up for human systems and in educational contexts in the mid-twentieth century. Feedback then was unilateral and monologic information transmitted from teachers to students with an assumption that the information was understood as intended and could incentivize changes that bridge the gap between learners’ level and teachers’ reference level of the academic performance (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Feedback-as-telling does not consider students’ involvement and whittle learners into passive recipients with low volition, little agency, and high dependence on educators. Furthermore, Hattie and

Timperley's (2007) empirical research also showed that such a feedback model has a limited influence that rarely benefits learners beyond the context feedback is given in. Such a restricted view of learning was criticized whilst there has been an increasing emphasis on lifelong learning in higher education.

Since feedback has not reached its full potential in aiding students' learning, Higgins et al. (2001) urged people to see feedback as a process of communication, in which social relationships, power, and dialogue are central to understanding feedback. Higgins et al. (2001) argued that understanding feedback as dialogue can enable teachers and students to "construct and reconstruct meaning from implicit messages" (p. 273), allowing students to see how feedback is constructed and let tutors tap into students' sense-making of feedback, assessment, and the learning context. Laurillard (2002) further emphasized the importance of teacher-student dialogue in forming effective feedback. This is echoed by one of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) seven principles of good feedback, i.e., "encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning" (p. 210). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick criticized feedback-as-telling for ignoring students' active role in making sense of feedback and acting on feedback. Additionally, feedback-as-dialogue can make sure that students understand feedback as intended and allow them to engage in discussion, clarification, and negotiation with teachers about the given feedback and further actions (Higgins et al., 2001; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Carless (2006), through an empirical study that is covered in section 2.3.1, also argued that dialogues may aid in reducing the gap in feedback perceptions.

The mainstream in feedback studies has clearly shifted from feedback-as-telling to feedback-as-dialogue after sustainable feedback is introduced. Building on Boud's (2000) sustainable assessment, Hounsell (2007) introduced the notion of sustainable feedback that ought to carry impact beyond the current context, enhance students' role in feedback, and form environments that encourage productive dialogues. Carless et al. (2011) took this on further and emphasized students' role in Askew and Lodge's (2000) definition of feedback "all dialogue to support learning in both formal and informal situations" (p. 1). Through an empirical study of interviewing award-winning university teachers, Carless et al. (2011) identified characteristics of sustainable feedback such as "involving students in dialogues about learning which raise their awareness of quality performance" (p. 405).

With the emphasis on dialogue in sustainable feedback, experts in feedback studies are hoping that feedback in practice will gradually induce the following positive changes. Move

from having monologic inputs to forming a reciprocal relationship between teachers and students. Shift the feedback emphasis from being content- and delivery-focused to being a socially co-constructed communication. Treat students as active agents instead of passive recipients. Break through the restricted and short-term view on learning within the higher education context and adopt a broaden vision that helps students develop the capability to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2006; Higgins et al., 2001, 2002; Nicol, 2010; Price et al., 2010). With that said, there are still debates on whether it is the responsibility of the students or of the teachers when feedback is not used.

## **2.3 Students' Perspective on Feedback**

Comparing to the amount of research done on *giving* feedback and survey about students' satisfaction with the given feedback (e.g., annual National Student Survey in the UK), the other side of the coin, *receiving* feedback and information about how students understand, read, and use feedback, hasn't received an equal amount of attention (Winstone & Boud, 2019).

### **2.3.1 Feedback Gap and Responsibility**

A feedback gap was identified in Carless's (2006) mix-method studies, where perceptions of feedback's detail level and usefulness are found to be strikingly different between teachers and students. The results of the large-scale survey participated by 460 staff and 1740 Hong Kong (HK) Chinese students showed that 66% of the teachers believed students were often or always given detailed and useful feedback while only 12.6% of the students shared the same view. Furthermore, 38.3% of teachers believed that feedback was often or always followed by actions while only 12.9% of students reported to do so. Moreover, in the open-ended question, teachers blamed the ineffective assessment practices on students for being grade-oriented and disinterested in feedback. On the flip side, feedback studies by Evans (2013), Henderson et al. (2019), Higgins et al. (2001), and Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al. (2017) presented feedback issues identified by students that educators should put in effort solving, i.e., the volume, content, quality, clarity, timing, generality, specificity, usefulness and transferability of feedback.

Instead of pointing the finger at educators or students for ineffective feedback practices, it is suggested that feedback should be a shared responsibility (Nash and Winstone, 2017). Different tasks should be delegated to both parties based on Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al.'s

(2017) qualitative findings of students' four psychological processes in feedback (i.e., *awareness, cognizance, agency, and volition*) and the corresponding barriers that prevent students from using feedback. *Awareness* refers to students' understanding of feedback and its purpose. Its barrier is the lack of knowledge or ability to decode or understand feedback, e.g., jargon, terminology and unclear comments in feedback. *Cognizance* refers to students' awareness of suitable strategies for using feedback or of sources that can provide guidance in how to use feedback. Its barrier can be poor knowledge of available assistance or strategy, e.g., not aware of possible strategies to use feedback or of whom they can ask for help in understanding or using feedback. Lack of *agency* can make students feel disempowered, or that it is futile to use feedback. Its barrier can be not knowing how to translate feedback into action or not seeing the long-term potential feedback has on learning beyond the current context. For example, students struggle to see how feedback from course A can be used in course B or other future courses (Gleaves et al., 2008), and feel that it is vain to read and use feedback given in course A. Students with little *volition* are not motivated and proactive enough to scrutinize, seek, and use feedback. For example, students do not find the time and effort invested in engaging feedback to be fruitful, or that they lack proactivity or commitment to read and use feedback or approach the feedback giver that can provide them with helpful strategies.

With the idea of a shared feedback responsibility, Nash and Winstone (2017) suggested that educators use less jargon and unclear comments. Meanwhile, educators should design program curricula and feedback to be more transferable between courses, support students with possible strategies on implementing feedback. Furthermore, educators should encourage feedback dialogue, which may help students understand feedback's applicability and effect beyond the context feedback is given (Hounsell, 2007; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017). On the other hand, students should select and test strategies. Additionally, they should be proactive in reaching out to teachers and peers for clarification or guidance in how to use feedback. Lastly, it is important for students to recognize that the applicability and effect of feedback is beyond the given context. Hence, it is necessary for them to be willing to scrutinize feedback and use it to make changes.

After establishing that feedback responsibility should be shared by teachers and students in various areas with different levels of effort required, there are other factors such as individual difference variables that are correlated to students' responses to feedback.

### **2.3.2 Individual Difference Variables in Feedback**

To involve students in the feedback activity, it is vital to understand how students perceive feedback. The work of Shute (2008), Draper (2009), Maringe (2010), Evans and Waring (2011b) is summarized by Evans (2013) that “It is known that individual difference variables such as gender, culture, and income impact on student and lecturer access to feedback, perceptions of feedback, and performance” (p. 95). Furthermore, Higgins et al. (2001) stated “the salient features in the feedback process are related to issues of emotion, identity, power, authority, subjectivity and discourse” (p. 272). This statement is also supported by Black and Wiliam (2009) that students’ internal world needs to be explored to further understand feedback. However, as Evans (2013) discovered in her review article of higher education feedback studies from 2000 to 2012, “Only 4% of the articles’ central focus was on individual learning needs, including aspects such as gender, culture, learning styles, and how individuals make sense of and use feedback” (p. 78), totaling nine empirical articles on the topic.

Following Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al.'s (2017) insightful findings that allow educators to tap into students’ general psychological feedback processes and engagement obstacles, Evans’s (2013) review article pointed to a more specific need to investigate whether and how individual difference variables such as culture, gender, or previous experience, shape students’ reading and use of feedback. Such investigation is attracting more attention as globalization and internationalization of higher education bring in an increasingly diverse student body (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The following sections present five empirical studies on the topic of students’ individual difference variables and feedback.

#### **Students’ Past Experience and View on Feedback**

Warner and Miller (2015) researched international students’ cultural dimensions of feedback at an Australian university with questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. There were 134 participants recruited to uncover how international students with different cultural backgrounds view and experience feedback. The results showed that the participants’ experience and view on feedback vary greatly. Based on their previous experience, some participants saw the definition and purpose of feedback as an error correction, a confirmation of assignment submission, or a tool to help lecturers adjust their teaching method. Inherently, the way students see feedback changes their perception of feedback. For students who saw feedback as a tool to correct errors, the amount of feedback equated to the number of

mistakes found in the submitted work. Furthermore, it matters what color of the ink it was used to produce written feedback. There were 29% of the participants who considered the color red an indicator of an unsatisfactory performance. Some reported that red colored feedback upset them. One Namibian student noted that red feedback meant that the feedback is a “closed decision of a lecturer and is non-negotiable” (p. 427). These are implications that show the differences between students’ internal worlds.

This research gave an implication that, due to participants’ different cultural dimensions, they shared very different views on feedback. However, the volunteer participants came from 33 countries in Africa, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the participants were studying in different disciplines. Hence, it can be argued that the research is less about cultural dimensions of the international students and more about how their previous experience in general shaped their view on feedback. Yet ‘past experience’ of international students is too broad as it should theoretically also apply to local students. Furthermore, participants’ program level varies from bachelor to PhD, which itself may lead to different perceptions on feedback regardless of one’s past experience.

### **Cultural Variables and Feedback Perceptions**

To further explore the relationship between feedback and students’ cultural background, Evans and Waring (2011a) did a study with a mixed-method approach involving three *cultural* groups of students from three postgraduate programs at two UK universities: A) 59 indigenous students that studied physical education, B) 34 international students from five different countries (e.g., America, Canada, and Pakistan) that studied religious education, C) 23 indigenous students that studied mathematics education. In the study, significant differences such as program structures and means of the lecture between the programs were presented. To examine the relationship between feedback and students’ cultural background, a questionnaire with 12 closed questions and six open-ended questions was conducted. The questions ask participants about their feedback preferences, self-regulation ability, and views on learning and assessment. This was followed by individual and focus group interviews. The collected quantitative and qualitative data was respectively analyzed via SPSS and ANOVA. By making comparisons between the groups, it was found that group B preferred one-on-one feedback over group feedback, appreciated detailed and comprehensive feedback, prized the opportunity to receive feedback on drafts, focused on feedback on process, and desired explicit guidance and clear instructions from tutors. The findings suggested a significant correlation between

participants' cultural variables (UK vs. non-UK) and the preferences on assessment feedback. Yet, the study assumed homogeneity of the student groups even though the non-UK group consisted of students from five foreign countries.

### **Feedback Culture Shock – Chinese Students in UK**

Tian and Lowe (2013) extended Evans and Waring's (2011a) study by focusing on Chinese students who had never experienced learning in a western context. Audio diaries were recorded daily by 13 Chinese students in a one-year master's program at a British university and there were three rounds of follow-up interviews after three feedback sessions throughout 12 months. In the recordings and follow-up interviews, participants show 'cultural learning shock' to their first written formative feedback as they interpreted the comments as summative criticism of their personal and academic performance, which led to the reported discouragement in reading and using feedback, negative emotions, and self-confidence loss. This was because the participants interpret feedback with their previous feedback experience in China, which has strong Chinese cultural elements that are quite different from UK's practices. The authors identified certain cultural traits such as the custom of not questioning authority and the embarrassment caused by the violation of 'face' (pride) with feedback (criticism) had hindered the participants from taking feedback into use. Unlike the previous two studies, this qualitative research focused on Chinese only participants within one discipline. Despite the valuable in-depth analysis, there is a low comparability of how individual difference variables correlated to feedback due to the research design.

### **Individuals' Background and Feedback-Seeking Behavior**

The study by Morrison et al. (2004) investigated cultural differences, operationalized via individualism, collectivism, low PD, high PD, and organizational socialization process (formal and collective versus informal and individual) in newcomer feedback-seeking behavior by comparing participants from the US and HK. This quantitative study used surveys answered by 69 US students with previous full-time working experience in the US, studying a full-time MBA program at New York University and 48 HK students with recent work experience in HK, studying a full-time MBA program at the Chinese University of HK. Except for gender composition, both samples have no significant characteristics differences. This study adopted three of Singelis's (1994) items for self-assertiveness, and seven items of Earley and Erez's (1997) scale for PD, and Ashford and Black's (1996) scale for feedback seeking behavior and



asked respondents to self-report their experience in the first year of their the last job. The results showed that nationality, self-assertiveness, and PD were significantly related to feedback-seeking behavior. The data showed that self-assertiveness is positively related to feedback-seeking behavior while PD is negatively related to feedback-seeking behavior. For example, participants from HK have less self-assertiveness, score higher on PD, and are less frequent on feedback-seeking behavior. However, the study on feedback-seeking behaviors had a corporate focus and did not see feedback as a teaching and learning event in higher education.

### **Should Feedback be Adjusted to Feedback Receiver's Culture?**

Taking a different angle on cultural variables and feedback, the study by Sidi-Ali et al. (2019) took the feedback givers' perspective and investigated whether feedback was adjusted according to the recipient's cultural backgrounds. The study was first conducted with a qualitative method with focus-groups and then followed by another quantitative research. In both pieces of research, Hofstede's Five Dimensions of Culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) - Power distance (PD), Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty avoidance (UA)<sup>1</sup>, and Long-term orientation are employed to portray the cultural background of the recipients. The results collected in the qualitative and quantitative researches discovered that the participants believe feedback should be adjusted according to feedback recipient's cultural traits. As feedback givers, the participants adjusted their feedback towards different levels of UA learners. Specifically, they gave harsher performance feedback to high UA learners who feared ambiguity and confusion; and more praise, like emotional support, to low UA learners who were more comfortable with unclear comments. Despite such insightful discovery, participants' background (such as age and occupation) varied greatly and the study was not conducted in a higher education context.

## **2.4 Teacher-Student Power Distance and Feedback**

The previous sections showed that the perceived power relation between students and teachers seems to be one of the relevant factors that can explain differences in feedback relevant

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<sup>1</sup>*Uncertainty Avoidance* is defined as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 191).

behavior. Inspired by the literature, this thesis aims to dive deeper into discovering the relationship between teacher-student power relation and feedback. This section presents: 1) a brief review of how power and power distance (PD) are defined in the literature, 2) typical power relationships between students and teachers in higher education, and 3) how power relationships matter for the way students perceive and use feedback.

### **2.4.1 Power and Power Distance**

The concept of power is complex and is rooted in many different wider strands of literature. This thesis, aligned with the reviewed literature, has a view of power that is not static but circulates in relationships. Power is subjective to the person in the way he views himself, his identity, and the truth of himself that he and others recognize. In other words, power is subjective to others due to societal dependency but also to himself due to self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982). This is in accordance with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) definition of PD - “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (p. 61). PD, as a cultural value, is a set of convictions people have about what is normal, appropriate, important and otherwise, that shapes a person’s behavior (Luthans & Doh, 2017). It has been observed that low PD cultures have lower tolerance towards inequalities and less centralization of authority. Additionally, the emotional distance between subordinates and superordinates is relatively small, making it easy for subordinates to approach and contradict the superordinate. Conversely, higher PD cultures show greater acceptance for inequalities and preference for authoritarianism. With larger emotional distance between subordinates and superordinates, it is unlikely for subordinates, who have considerable dependence on superordinates, to give input to, question, or disagree with the superordinate openly (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010). In short, PD seems to be able to explain certain behavioral differences.

Although scholars have cast doubts on how Hofstede’s model is based on data collected from employees at a single multinational firm and that he overgeneralized all individuals in a targeted country and its culture to exhibit similar behavior (Blodgett et al., 2008; Hunt, 1981), further research has endorsed the relevance and utility of Hofstede’s framework for understanding differences in cultural values. Besides Hofstede’s power distance, other scholars have also identified similar cultural values related to power such as Schwartz's (1994, 1999) *hierarchy-egalitarianism* that distinguishes cultures by how much hierarchical roles are

accepted, Inglehart's (1997) *tradition versus secular-rational* that distinguish cultures by how much authority and tradition are respected, *power distance* in the GLOBE's (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) studies by House et al. (2004), and Maznevski et al.'s (2002) dimension for hierarchy preference. The next section discusses different types of teacher-student power relationship and the implied PD behind each relationship.

## **2.4.2 Teacher-Student Power Relationships in Higher Education**

Following different changes in higher education such as massification (Trow, 1970), marketization (Johnstone, 2003; Jongbloed, 2003), and pedagogical emphasis shifting towards constructivist (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Fry et al., 2009), Symonds (2021) identified three types of teacher-student power relationships: traditional power relationship, consumer-provider power relationship, and partnership power relationship. In the qualitative study, Symonds (2021) engaged in semi-structured interviews with 12 academics and 20 undergraduates from two post-1992 universities (modern universities) with institutional policies that encourage student partnership in England. The post-1992 universities were chosen as most students there require “lots of pedagogical and pastoral support” (Taberner, 2018, p. 144) and have a higher likelihood to see themselves as customers (Universities UK, 2017). In addition, post-1992 universities are perceived to have “more aggressive marketing strategies than their pre-1992 university counterparts” (Lomas, 2007, p. 41). Those characteristics ought to provoke more conflicting reactions that flout the traditional power relationship. Due to the low relevance, this literature review does not include the consumer-provider power relationship.

### **Traditional Power Relationship**

When asked about their opinions on the traditional power relationship in the interviews, academics expressed that the traditional power relationship is embedded in the roles and in the expected behaviors of learners and teachers. Hence, such a power relationship is natural, inescapable, and inevitable. One academic pointed out that undergraduates, being in a passive position, feel safe when told what to do because the academics have more knowledge on the topic. Another argued that such a power relationship exists in the structure of higher education and not in the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students. Undergraduates revealed that the belief of respecting teachers' authority of knowledge in a hierarchical system has been drilled in since previous educational settings. In short, a traditional power relationship where teachers have more authority or power is natural for academics and students.

## **Partnership Power Relationship**

Partnership power relationship, interestingly, is welcomed and resisted by academics and students on different levels. Respondents had a positive view on teacher-student partnership due to the pedagogical emphasis that gives students the responsibility for learning, lessens the power differential, and directs to reciprocal, democratic and open arrangements. However, academics noticed that students struggle with the independence, freedom, responsibility, and authority given to them to be in charge of their learning in higher education. Moreover, students did not consider themselves to be at the same level with academics and should only exercise limited power on decision-making. This was echoed by the academics and one of them stated that “I am willing to listen, but ultimately, I am the specialist” (Symonds, 2021, p. 137). Meanwhile, another academic urged people to see the partnership differently. Instead of viewing the partnership as an A versus B unilateral relationship like the traditional power relationship, it should be seen as an A plus B relationship, which both can contribute to knowledge production. Lastly, Symonds (2021) summarized that it will be hard for both academics and students to truly embrace partnership power relationship without moving past the traditional power relationship and the social practice that positions teachers hierarchically higher than learners.

Symonds's (2021) work provided an in-depth understanding of power relationships and how they were welcomed or rejected by academics and undergraduates. It highlighted that the power relationship and the underlying PD are not objective phenomena but something that are perceived differently by different students. As a qualitative research with a purposive sampling method, the article is informative. However, the observed opinions towards the power relationships might be different for postgraduates and for students studying in universities that charge low or no tuition fee. Nonetheless, Symonds's article provided a good foundation of power relationships and the underlying power distance between teachers and students in higher education.

### **2.4.3 Power Relationship and Feedback**

Foucault (1982) noted that power relations exist in all social contexts. Studies have stated that feedback between teachers and students is no exception to such a principle. From the sections above, it is noticed that the way students perceive power relations to their teachers (and the underlying power distance perceived by students) is related to the way students behave in

higher education activities. Concerning one of the activities, feedback communication between teachers and students, Boud (1995) noted “We judge too much and too powerfully, not realising the extent to which students experience our power over them” (p. 43). Ivanic et al. (2000) and Lea and Street (1998) pointed out that higher education institutions have distinguished novice students from academics with expert authority. Correcting and judging feedback comments reinforced such separation. Furthermore, Higgins et al. (2001) added that feedback given by tutors, due to their expert position in the institutional context, is granted an elevated status. The qualitative study done by Crossouard and Pryor (2009) on formative assessment within a doctoral education found that when receiving feedback from the tutorial team that consisted of potential summative graders for assignments, “students attributed a greater authority to the comments than the tutor had sought” (p. 383).

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

In summary, feedback’s impact on learning is evident, yet the downfalls of transmissive feedback kept feedback from being effective. Thus, feedback-as-dialogue has been promoted to form a reciprocal teacher-student relationship, allowing students to be active feedback co-constructors, ensuring feedback engagement and helping students develop the capability to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning. The notion of shared feedback responsibility is introduced along with students’ four psychological processes in feedback (i.e., awareness, cognizance, agency, and volition) and the corresponding barriers. This has drawn the attention to investigate how students’ feedback perception and feedback relevant behaviors are shaped by individual difference variables, e.g., past experience, nationality, cultural background, PD. Next, power and power distance were defined. Then, two types of teacher-student power relationships are introduced and show how students perceive educators’ power or authority are related to how they see or use feedback.

Even though the literature has provided insights into how feedback dialogue can assist student’s understanding of feedback, there is still little understanding of the relationship between student’s willingness to engage in feedback dialogue and their intention to read and use feedback. Meanwhile, few studies have addressed the correlations between students’ individual difference variables and their responses to feedback. However, there is a lack of empirical studies on whether and how students’ IPD correlates to their feedback responses. To address these gaps, this thesis conducts a vignette questionnaire study to investigate the

relationship of international students' individual power distance and their willingness to engage in feedback dialogues as well as their intention to read and use feedback comments.

### **3 Conceptual Framework**

After the systematic presentation of various feedback literatures in chapter 2, this chapter focuses on the conceptual framework of this thesis. The chapter is broken down into four sections. Section 3.1 introduces IPD and elaborates why and how IPD is conceptualized as the predictor variable used in this thesis. Section 3.2 and section 3.3 lay out why and how the outcome variables, international students' intention to read and use feedback and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, are conceptualized. Section 3.4 presents four hypotheses established on theories covered in chapter 2 and section 3.1-3.3.

#### **3.1 Individual Power Distance**

After defining PD in section 2.4.1, it is worth noting that PD can be constructed at different levels (i.e., societal, group, individual level). Hofstede's model is at the societal level that helps explain behavior differences across nations. After having found large variation among individuals in a society and how the individual differences can have an impact, Clugston et al. (2000) constructed PD at an individual level – “the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations” (p. 9), which is the IPD definition this thesis follows. Later, Kirkman et al. (2006) reviewed 180 published studies that used Hofstede's cultural framework between 1980-2002 and found that Hofstede's cultural framework was examined more at the individual level than at the societal level. To avoid the overgeneralization that all individuals from X nation behave the same, this thesis constructs PD at the individual level. In this study, students are depicted as subordinates and teachers as superordinates since teachers still have the formal educational responsibility designing assessment and feedback (Evans, 2013). Additionally, the traditional power relationship in higher education appears to be the power relationship most accepted by academics and undergraduates where teachers have more authority (Symonds, 2021). In section 2.4, it shows that how students perceive power relations or PD to their teachers influence how they see or use feedback. Hence, this thesis uses IPD as a predictor variable to see whether there is a correlation between IPD and the outcome variables - international students' intention to read and use feedback and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver.

### **3.2 Intention to Read and Use Feedback**

The importance of feedback engagement to improving students' skills and performance is manifested in chapter 2. Nevertheless, it is not news that students sometimes have poor or absent engagement with feedback such as not collecting or reading feedback (e.g., Scott, 2014; Sendziuk, 2010), not paying attention to feedback comments (e.g., Rae & Cochrane, 2008), or not using feedback to make any changes. Additionally, there is little evidence that students use their past feedback for their future work (e.g., Crisp, 2007). However, there have been debates and discussions on what counts as a feedback engagement and what qualifies as a strong or weak feedback engagement. For example, Handley et al. (2011) consider it a weak feedback engagement when students receive and skim-read feedback without *further actions*. Yet the definition of *further actions* is blurry. Furthermore, it may be challenging to measure if a student's understanding has changed after reading the feedback and used what one has learned from the feedback in other contexts (e.g. another assignment, course, or education). Hence, this thesis aims to measure international students' *intention to read and use feedback* instead of their general engagement with feedback. The intention will be measured by how likely students will read and use feedback, the likelihood of re-reading feedback in the future, or the willingness of using feedback even though it may require certain dedication and effort.

### **3.3 Willingness to Engage in Feedback Dialogue**

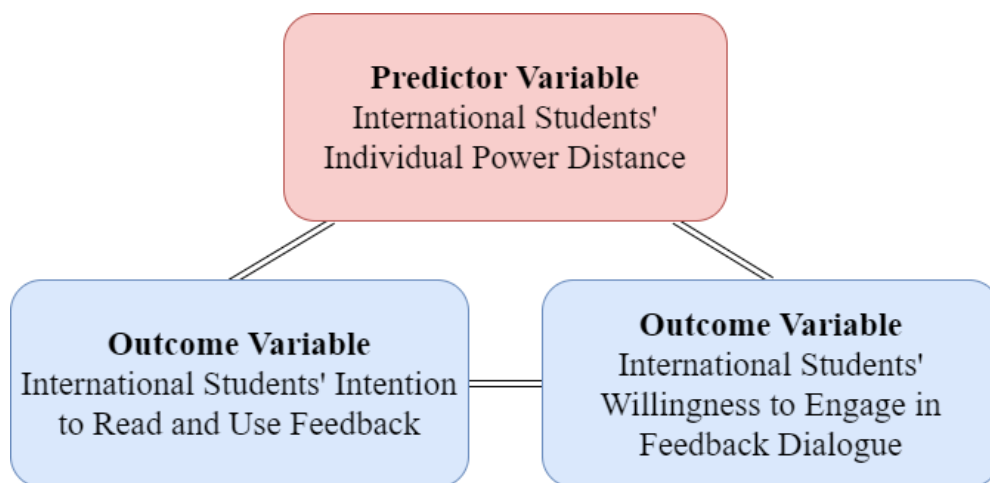
Building on feedback literature in chapter 2, feedback-as-dialogue is promoted to replace feedback transmission and highlight students' participation in constructing and reconstructing feedback. This ought to help students make sense of feedback information and use it to improve their learning, future work, or feedback strategies (Carless, 2006). Feedback-as-dialogue stresses students' active role, invoking a notion of partnership responsibility between tutors and learners, rather than simply blaming either side for ineffective feedback practices (Nash & Winstone, 2017; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017). Although such a partnership approach was argued to raise students' intrinsic motivation (Deeley & Bovill, 2017), it is challenging to achieve due to the history and culture of higher education in which teachers have mostly shouldered the responsibility of designing curricula, making assessment and giving feedback (Evans, 2013). With the traditional power relationship being well accepted by teachers and students while the genuine teacher-student partnership is contested or faced with doubts (Symonds, 2021), feedback-as-dialogue may face challenges in the case that students



may not be as comfortable to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. Therefore, the other outcome variable this thesis aims to measure is international students' *willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver*. The willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver will be measured by how likely students will request further discussions, the likelihood of challenging the feedback giver by expressing conflicting opinions, the willingness to approach feedback giver for assistance or clarification, or whether students will keep things to themselves despite having trouble understanding feedback. Figure 1 offers a relationship graph of the variables in this framework. Based on theory that feedback-as-dialogue can further assist students' understanding of feedback and therefore increase their chance of using it (Higgins et al., 2001; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017), a relationship between the outcome variables are also indicated in the figure.

**Figure 1**

*Predictor and Outcomes Variables Relationship Graph*



### 3.4 Hypotheses

First, considering the history, culture, and the particular power relationship between teachers and students in higher education, students are seen as subordinates and teachers as superordinates. Hence, building on the theory that one's PD correlates to one's behaviors and that subordinates with high PD have considerable amount of dependence on superordinates (i.e., they prefer such dependence) while subordinates with low PD prefer consultation (Hofstede et al., 2010), this thesis suggests that **(H1) international students' self-reported IPD is correlated to their intention to read and use feedback.**

Secondly, centered on the observation that subordinates with high PD are less likely to voice their opinion, doubt, or object the superordinate openly than those with low PD (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010), this thesis predicts that **(H2) international students' self-reported IPD is correlated to their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver.**

Next, drawing on the theory that feedback-as-dialogue can further assist students' understanding of feedback and perhaps increase their chance of using it (Higgins et al., 2001; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017), it is hypothesized that **(H3) there is a correlation between international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver and their intention to read and use feedback.**

Last, considering how different types of students' individual difference variables shape their feedback perception and their responses to feedback presented in section 2.3.2, the thesis poses hypothesis 4 **(H4) that there may be a correlation between international students' background (such as age, gender, discipline, or country of origin) and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, as well as their intention to read and use feedback.**

### **3.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the reasons why IPD, PD constructed at the individual level, is used as the predictor variable due to its relevance in the current higher education situation where teachers often have more authority due to the formal educational responsibility and the well accepted traditional power relationship with students. Thereafter, international students' intention to read and use feedback, is conceptualized as an outcome variable due to the importance of how it may improve students' skills and performance. Next, international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver is included as the other outcome variable as students' participation is equally necessary in moving towards feedback-as-dialogue, which stresses students' active role, assisting understanding of feedback, and possibly removing some barriers that prevent students from reading and using feedback. Yet the previous mentioned situation may make it challenging for students to engage in dialogue comfortably. Finally, four hypotheses are suggested based on theories and the methods used to test them will be introduced in chapter 4.

## 4 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted in this thesis, including research design and methods, population and sampling, questionnaire design, data collection and analysis, methodological quality.

### 4.1 Research Design and Methods

Chapter 3 listed out theories of how one's power distance affects one's action and behavior as well as how feedback and power relations influence one another. Four hypotheses derived from the theories were presented, with H1 and H2 as the overarching research question for this thesis, which aims to investigate whether there is a relationship between international students' IPD (i.e., the predictor variable), their intention to read and use feedback as well as their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver (i.e., the outcome variables). In other words, this thesis has a deductive approach and wishes to test theories and verify hypotheses. A quantitative research strategy is chosen due to its principal orientation and ontological orientation. Quantitative research approach has a principal orientation of theory-testing (Bryman, 2012), which is fitting to answer the research question and test the hypothesis that there is a correlation between the predictor and outcome variables. A cross-sectional design, specifically a survey research, is chosen to collect primary quantifiable data at a single point in time via a self-completion questionnaire with a built-in vignette to record variations between cases and make it possible to detect patterns of association between predictor and outcome variables (Bryman, 2012). With the consideration to the inconvenience and risk brought by COVID-19, the questionnaire is conducted online via Nettskjema, a secure and private platform made for collecting data through simple questionnaires.

### 4.2 Population and Sampling

As mentioned in section 1.1, this thesis intends to focus on international students. The population is further narrowed down to *international full-degree master's students studying at public Norwegian higher education institutions* for several reasons. First, postgraduate experience in feedback studies is under-researched (Evans, 2013; Winstone, Nash, Parker, et al., 2017); hence, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature gap. Second, bachelor students are excluded since most bachelor programs focus on facts and fundamental theories. In other

words, there often is little room for students to enter discussions and debates with their teachers regarding feedback on the assessment. Moreover, bachelor courses often have considerably more students than master's courses, which may influence students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver due to impracticality. Furthermore, there are very few bachelor programs in Norway that are taught in English, which means that there is only a small number of bachelor international students in Norway. Third, master's students on exchange are excluded after considering how their duration and motive studying in Norway may influence their intention to read and use feedback. Additionally, the number of exchange students during the period of data collection, spring in 2021, is expected to be small due to the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding policies made by nations, universities, and master's programs. For example, inbound exchange opportunities in 2021 spring semester are closed for students outside of Europe at University of Oslo (UiO, 2020). Lastly, international students in private Norwegian universities are not included to rule out the possibility of these students giving certain responses to feedback due to the apparent financial investment (i.e., tuition fee) in higher education.

#### **4.2.1 Data Collection Strategy**

The thesis collected data for this study by: 1) asking the international student office at public Norwegian universities with a good number of international students<sup>2</sup> to forward the survey to their international students, 2) posting the survey invitation (see Appendix A) on Facebook groups used by international students who study in public Norwegian universities, 3) sharing the survey invitation via thesis author's personal network, and 4) reaching out to non-profit organizations for international students studying in Norway such as Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and International Students' Union (ISU).

#### **4.2.2 Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame is all members of the population that can potentially be reached through the participant recruitment strategy. As universities have started to 'protect' students from

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<sup>2</sup>Such universities include Arctic University of Norway (UiT), Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), University of Agder (UiA), University of Bergen (UiB), and University of Oslo (UiO)

receiving too many emails, only UiT agreed to forward the survey to their international students. According to Norwegian centre for research data (NSD) (n.d.), there are 580 international master's students studying at UiT in 2020. It is not specified whether this number includes exchange students. Unfortunately, there was no reply from ESN and ISU to assist in forwarding the survey. Thankfully, the thesis author managed to post the survey invitation in Facebook groups used by international students in Norway (see table 1). Lastly, private survey invitation messages were sent to around 30 eligible students, who were also asked to forward the invitation to other international master's students. Table 1 presents a list of where the sampling units are drawn and the estimated number of members in each group. Please note that members in the Facebook groups include: 1) past and current full-degree and exchange students, 2) past and current degree and exchange applicants, 3) non-students. In addition, some students may be members in several groups and therefore an overlap is possible. Due to the unknown total number of potential participants that have read and received the invitation to the survey, it is not possible to calculate a response rate. In short, the sampling frame for this study is all students on the mailing list of the international office of UiT and members of several international student Facebook groups.

**Table 1**

*Names and Population of The Groups*

University Name	International Students
Arctic University of Norway (UiT)	580
Facebook Group Name	Members (as of May 12 <sup>th</sup> )
International Students at The University of Oslo (UiO) <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/1529843163741836/about">https://www.facebook.com/groups/1529843163741836/about</a>	5,100
International students in Norway <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/studentsnorway/about">https://www.facebook.com/groups/studentsnorway/about</a>	4,575
NTNU Trondheim - Erasmus and International students <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/137385156467232/about">https://www.facebook.com/groups/137385156467232/about</a>	6,300
Tromsø International Students <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/255507731218875/about">https://www.facebook.com/groups/255507731218875/about</a>	3,081
UiB International Students 2020/2021 <a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/620497891882256/about">https://www.facebook.com/groups/620497891882256/about</a>	768

Due to the scope of this one-semester master's thesis and the lack of funding, a

nonprobability sampling technique; convenience sampling was used. The respondents volunteered to fill out the questionnaire and are not randomly selected. Convenience sampling is commonly used in quantitative social research due to its accessibility and low cost despite its flaws in producing generalizable findings (Bryman, 1989, 2012).

### **4.3 Questionnaire Design**

Following NSD's regulations, the first part of the questionnaire presented respondents with a general information of the thesis and how the personal data will be handled and stored along with the information-consent letter that required respondents' electronic consent. This was followed by demographic questions which help to ensure that participants fit the population characteristics mentioned in section 4.2. The third part consisted of questions that measure IPD. The fourth part laid out a vignette feedback scenario. The participants were asked to answer the fifth part, measurements of international students' intention to read and use feedback as well as their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, based on the vignette feedback scenario presented.

#### **4.3.1 Demographic Questions**

After giving consent to participate in the survey, participants were asked to answer background questions such as age (dropdown list from 18-65 years old), gender (male, female, other), discipline (checkbox with predefined disciplines), student status as a master's student (checkbox), student status as a full-degree student in a Norway (checkbox), and nationality (dropdown list). If the participants were not sure about which discipline or faculty the program they were studying belongs to, they were able to specify the program with text answers. If the participants had dual nationality, they were asked to select the one that they identify with the most or the one they spent the most time living in the country. Additionally, they could fill in their nationality with text answers if they were not able to find their nationality on the list. See Appendix B for demographic questions used in the survey.

#### **4.3.2 IPD Scale (Likert)**

As power distance has received a considerable amount of academic attention throughout the years, there is a decent amount of existing power distance scales. Among the existing scales

that measure power distance, scales made by Earley and Erez (1997) and Robertson and Hoffman (2000) have been adapted into many studies that involved power distance. However, the majority of the studies that adapted their scales had a heavy corporate focus or a specific target group (such as full-time corporate workers or university students that majored in business or management). Because of these characteristics, the scales are not used in this study as the thesis author does not wish to limit her participants to international students in business or management programs. Furthermore, she recognizes that the teacher-student relationship in higher education is more complex than the manager-employees or superordinate-subordinates relationship in a workplace (e.g., Symonds, 2021).

After further considerations, this study chose to use Sharma's scale (2010) of power and social inequality, which is a refinement of Hofstede's scale on PD. The scale was designed to measure individual-level cultural values. Its methodological quality (including cross-cultural measurement equivalence) was examined through recommended statistical procedures. Although Sharma's scale was originally designed to be applicable to cross-cultural consumer research, the items were phrased with a general focus. For example, "It is difficult for me to refuse a request if someone senior asks me" (p. 794). In comparison, scales by Earley and Erez (1997) and Robertson and Hoffman (2000) have a rather narrow focus in the business context. For example, "Managers should seldom ask for the opinions of employees" (Robertson & Hoffman, 2000, p. 45) or the item "Managers who let their employees participate in decisions lose power" (Earley & Erez, 1997, p. 179).

Hence, Sharma's scale is adapted to the research topic even though it hasn't been used or adapted in many research papers. For example, the original item "I easily conform to the wishes of someone in a higher position than mine" was changed to "I tend to follow the suggestions given by my teachers" (see Appendix C for the original scale by Sharma, 2010, p. 794 and Appendix D for the adapted version used in the questionnaire for the present study). As a person's IPD should not vary greatly between a general setting and an educational setting, item seven, "It is important for everyone to know their rightful place in society" (Sharma, 2010, p. 794) is not modified since the original item serves a good purpose for measuring participants' IPD in a general setting.

Studies with quantitative research strategy often use indicators to help measure the concepts that are less quantifiable. This study used Likert scale, a multiple-indicator that measures a cluster of attitudes or intensity of feelings around a theme, to measure the predictor

and outcome variable. Likert scale is commonly used in quantitative studies (Bryman, 2012). However, unlike most studies that use a 5-point or 7-point Likert scale with a neutral option, this study used a 6-point Likert scale that forces participants to pick a side that demonstrates their attitude on the topic with more clarity. Hence, the questionnaire used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*) to measure international students' IPD. Participants who have a high score on IPD, perceive more power distance between themselves and their teachers.

### **4.3.3 Vignette Feedback Scenario**

In order to collect data on the outcome variables (i.e., international students' intention to read and use feedback as well as their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver), this thesis included a vignette feedback scenario in the questionnaire and asked outcome variables questions related to the vignette. Skilling and Stylianides (2020) defined vignettes as the following:

written, visual, or oral stimuli, aligned with relevant research paradigms and methodologies, reflecting realistic and identifiable settings that resonate, with participants for the purpose of provoking responses, including but not limited to beliefs, perceptions, emotions, effective responses, reflections, and decision making. (pp. 542-543)

Vignette applications can be seen in both qualitative and quantitative research and have several strengths (Al Sadi & Basit, 2017). To begin with, vignette provides a hypothetical scenario that helps address issues such as avoiding simplification of attitudes in survey research (Finch, 1987). Secondly, vignettes use a story-telling approach that makes doing the questionnaires an amusing and entertaining experience for the respondents (Al Sadi & Basit, 2017). Additionally, vignette can engage participants in the situation and stimulate their interests on the topic (Finch, 1987; Wilks, 2004). Thirdly, the vignette approach allows researchers to include participants who are not knowledgeable about the investigated issue or topic since necessary information is provided in the vignette to measure participants' attitude or judgment. Furthermore, vignette can assist readers in comprehending abstract concepts (Gould, 1996). Lastly, vignette can help researchers "make reference to important points in the study of perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes" (Hughes, 1998, p. 381) and are suitable for value-laden studies (Torres, 2009)

Vignette is a good methodological approach for this thesis for several reasons. First and



foremost, having a vignette feedback scenario can ensure that all participants are relating to a similar feedback situation when answering the questionnaire. Instead of asking students how they generally respond to feedback, which bears the risk of students thinking about very different scenarios (e.g. negative, positive, detailed, general, satisfying or unsatisfying feedback), vignette was used to avoid such situations. Furthermore, feedback comments are contextual to the work that the student has produced. If this thesis used an actual feedback example a certain student has received, it might be irrelevant for other students who did not produce the commented work. Moreover, the comments can be inapplicable to students from another discipline considering the differences in disciplinary cultures and beliefs and the inherent differences in educational practices (Becher, 1994; Crina Damşa et al., 2017). Hence, an actual feedback example is not used as the consideration of not limiting the participants to be from a specific discipline as it would also lead to difficulties in collecting sufficient quantitative data for a proper analysis.

### **Vignette Construction**

This thesis followed the vignette design framework proposed by Skilling and Stylianides (2020) (see Appendix E) and constructed a vignette for this thesis. In the first paragraph, a realistic situation is provided, in which the participant needs to produce an academic product to pass the course. It can be an essay or a project depending on one's discipline. To provoke responses, the feedback giver in the vignette was made *a well-known professor (see vignette section 1)* in the area of the course the participant is attending. This was meant to increase the likelihood of evoking feelings of power distance or the emotional distance between the *participant*, an international master's student who sits at the lower academic hierarchy and *a well-known professor* who sits at the higher academic hierarchy. This is followed by a short description of *a common progress that students often go through when producing an assignment (see vignette section 2)*, e.g., encountering challenges, feeling uncertain, and finding solutions. The vignette deliberately gave participants the impression that *they have worked hard and devoted valuable time into completing their work and are satisfied with the end product (see vignette section 3)*. This aligns with Higgins et al.'s (2001) understanding of students' view on feedback and assignment "The student makes an emotional investment in an assignment and expects some 'return' on that investment" (p. 272) and with Wingate's (2010) argument that students will be more willing to engage with feedback if the expectation of being successful is high.

## Constructed Vignette Feedback Scenario

*Please read the following scenario and immerse yourself in it.*

As a master's student in a Norwegian university, you are taking a master's course that you find really interesting. **(1)** The professor who teaches the course is a well-known researcher in the field. To pass the course, you need to make a small project or write a 10-page long essay on a relevant topic of your choice. **(2)** You find the task challenging and are a bit uncertain about what exactly your teacher is expecting from you. **(3)** However, you try your best and after having worked hard for two weeks, you deliver your work. All in all, you are pretty happy with it and have confidence in your work.

After one week, you receive feedback from the professor. **(4)** Many of the comments are useful and you can see how that can help improve the quality of your work. **(5)** However, there are some challenging comments that you are not sure whether you agree with. You also find some comments hard to use. The professor tells you that your work is out of focus with some fundamental errors and that better work was expected considering the given time. Furthermore, you realize that using the comments will require you to make major revisions to your text and will most likely require quite some effort and time.

**(6)** The professor gives you a week to revise and resubmit your work. If you do so, the re-submission will be graded, instead of the original submission. However, the revision and re-submission is not mandatory. In that case, you will get a grade on your original submission.

*\*Note: The headline and section marks were to increase the readability of the thesis and were not visible to survey respondents.*

In the second paragraph, vignette feedback comments followed the principle of being “concrete enough to approximate the reality of a situation but, on the other hand, be abstract enough to allow participants to form their own interpretations, understandings and beliefs” (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020, p. 545) (*see vignette section 4*). There is a heavier focus on *challenging and controversial feedback comments to create a conflicting situation between the student and the professor (see vignette section 5)*. This is meant to make measuring the

correlation between students' individual power (IPD) distance and responses to feedback easier. Furthermore, the sharp comments as well as the demanding modification should further provoke responses this study aims to discover (i.e., hypothesis 1 and 2).

The last paragraph wrapped up the vignette feedback scenario while *making students aware that the assignment is not graded yet (see vignette section 6)*. This design is based on the argument that having a chance to revise and resubmit before getting their final mark makes it more likely for students to read and use the feedback they receive (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

Although the vignette slightly exceeded the recommendation limit of 200-words, it is succinct. Language usage was kept easy and simple. Since age and gender can have certain influence on one's power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010), the written text is age and gender neutral. The questionnaire gave clear instructions that the participants are to immerse themselves in the feedback scenario and answer the following questions (described in the next section) based on how they themselves will react.

#### **4.3.4 Intention to Read and Use Feedback Scale (RU)**

Items RU1-10 (see Appendix F) are designed to measure the outcome variable - international students' intention of reading or using feedback. For example, "Even though I find some feedback disputable and hard to use, I will still read all comments closely". The RU scale is a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to 6 (*Extremely Likely*). Students who have a high score on the RU scale are more inclined to read and use feedback comments on their assignments. The items developed for this thesis followed Likert scale construction guidelines by Bryman (2012) that the items are statements related to the same object, vignette feedback scenario, and are interrelated. The thesis author also tried her best in designing the items with both positive and negative framing and making sure that the items are short, simple, and concise to avoid survey fatigue.

#### **4.3.5 Willingness to Engage in Feedback Dialogue Scale (FD)**

Items FD1-10 (see Appendix G) are designed to measure the other outcome variable - international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. For example, "I will ask the professor for an explanation if I do not know how to use the feedback". The FD scale is a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) to 6 (*Extremely Likely*).

Students who have a high score on the FD scale are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. The same principles as explained above were also used to develop the FD Likert scale.

## **4.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

Due to the inconvenience and risk brought by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as national regulations to contain the situation in Norway, the survey is conducted online by using Nettskjema to design questionnaire format and collect data. Participants recruitment strategy and sample frame are included in section 4.2. The survey was open from March 29<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup> and collected 146 opt-in responses.

### **4.4.1 Data Preparation for Analysis**

Before importing data to SPSS version 27, a statistical software often used to analyze quantitative data, raw data set exported from Nettskjema is re-coded into an SPSS readable format. As items RU2, 3, 9, 10 and FD1, 5, 7, 8, 10 are reversed items, their values were flipped before calculating the average of each scale. Cronbach's alpha was used to examine scale validity and identify items that have a low correlation with the overall scale, which were removed before calculating the average of the scales as new scale variables. As all the questions are mandatory for respondents to answer, there were no missing values in the data. If the scale data is normally distributed, the outliers will not be removed. If it is not normally distributed, non-parametric tests will be used to analyze the data. Results with and without outliers were compared to see whether there is a significant difference. The following sections laid out a list of different statistical methods this thesis used to answer the research questions and test hypotheses. The findings will be presented in chapter 5.

### **4.4.2 Correlation Tests - Bivariate analysis**

Bivariate analysis is used to investigate whether two variables are related (Bryman, 2012). To answer research questions 1-3, which consisted of three questions investigating correlations between variables, Pearson's  $r$  and Kendall's Tau-b are chosen based on the type of the variables (ordinal/interval) and whether the collected data is normally distributed. This thesis uses Kendall's Tau-b as the non-parametric correlation test over Spearman's  $\rho$  because Kendall correlation is more robust to errors and is more suitable for studies with small sample size (Croux & Dehon, 2010; Statistics Solutions, n.d.). Likert-type questions, produce ordinal

variables (Bryman, 2012). But when ordinal data is converted to numbers, it is acceptable to treat it as interval data, e.g. an overall (mean) score of the Likert scale (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). This research followed the common recommendation of using parametric tests such as Pearson's  $r$  on normally distributed data and non-parametric tests otherwise (Jamieson, 2004; Norman, 2010; Sullivan & Artino, 2013). As commonly used in social science, statistical significance lower than 0.05 is used to reject the null hypothesis (Bryman, 2012). If the  $p$  value is lower than 0.05, it rejects the hypothesis that there is no relationship between the two variables.

#### **4.4.3 Normality Test**

Normality tests are used to see whether the data has a normal distribution, which is crucial to examine before using parametric tests. Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk tests are commonly used to test normality. Yet K-S, despite its popularity, was reported to have low power (Thode, 2002). The Shapiro-Wilk test "is based on the correlation between the data and the corresponding normal scores (10) and provides better power than the K-S test" (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012, p. 487; Steinskog et al., 2007). Hence this thesis uses Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality test. If the  $p$  value of the test is greater than 0.05, the data is normally distributed. As recommended, visual examination is also used to test normality.

#### **4.4.4 Significance Difference between Groups ( $t$ Test)**

Research question 4 aims to uncover whether international students' intention to read and use feedback and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver differ depending on their background (e.g. gender, discipline). Hence, an independent two sample  $t$ -test, which is commonly used to test whether there is a significant difference of the means between two groups, is used. To use independent  $t$ -test, the independent variable needs to be categorical. If there are very few participants that identify themselves as 'other' gender, only male and female groups are tested with  $t$ -test. If the  $p$  value is bigger than 0.05, there is no significant difference between groups (Yockey, 2017).

### **4.5 Reliability and Validity**

While the quality of qualitative research is established on trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln

and Guba (1985), a quantitative study is required to pay attention to its reliability and validity. A study's reliability depends on the consistency of measures employed, which includes three prominent factors: stability, internal reliability, and inter-observer consistency (Bryman, 2012). Stability and inter-observer consistency are not applicable to this study for two reasons. First, a *test-retest* method that measures stability throughout time is extremely difficult due to limited time given to produce this quantitative study. Second, the present study uses cross-sectional research design with a self-completion questionnaire as research instrument, which requires little subjective judgement to analyze statistical data (Bryman, 2012). Lastly, Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure the internal reliability of the scales.

Since the present thesis used Likert scale as the research instrument, internal reliability, which assesses the consistency of the indicators in a scale, should be tested. One can use the *split-half* method to test internal reliability and this thesis will use Cronbach's alpha to calculate "the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients" (Bryman, 2012, p. 170). A computed alpha coefficient ranges from figure 1 (perfect internal reliability) to 0 (no internal reliability) (Bryman, 2012). The acceptable figure varies from 0.6 to 0.95 but 0.8 is most commonly employed as the standard (Berthoud, 2000; Bryman, 2012; Kelley & Graaf, 1997). By running Cronbach's alpha, the researcher is able to see how intercorrelated each item is in the scale. This helps researchers identify item(s) that have little correlation with the total scale and remove the item when calculating the average of each scale to increase scale validity. How the thesis author ensured internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha is elaborated in section 5.2.

Validity, on the other hand, is concerned with how consistent, well-founded, and accurate a concept and the measurements are in a study along with the conclusion it generates (Bryman, 2012). Different types of validity are construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and ecological validity. Firstly, construct validity in this present study regards whether the Likert scales that measure IPD and outcome variables are actually measuring what they were designed to measure. This study followed the recommendation of developing Likert scales, a multiple-indicator, and deducing hypotheses based on existing theories and knowledge in the relevant field of power distance, teacher-student power relationship, feedback and learning, and feedback communication (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, face validity of the questionnaire is established by consulting fellow colleagues studying the Master of Philosophy in Higher Education and validated by the thesis supervisor, Rachelle Esterhazy, an expert in feedback studies. Secondly, internal validity, which relates to forming causality, is not applicable to this

study as it aims to investigate correlation instead of establishing causation. Thirdly, this research does not give much external validity due to the employment of the convenience sampling strategy. Despite its limitation to generalize the study result, this study has the value of producing an exploratory work that could generate new theoretical ideas if the correlation between the predictor and outcome variable is established. Moreover, this study recognizes that the ecological validity, due to the inherent design of a self-completion questionnaire, is limited. Lastly, vignette, similar to other research instruments that acquire data from participants, faces validity issues in how well the investigated phenomenon is represented in the vignette and the level of variation within participant's behavior in vignette settings and in real life situations (Goerman & Clifton, 2011; Wilks, 2004). However, the issues can be resolved by consulting professionals about the validity of the vignette (Wilks, 2004), and by ensuring the compatibility of the vignette and the subject group (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Hence, the vignette along with 30 Likert scale items are piloted several times by consulting my thesis supervisor and my fellow colleagues in my master's program. The author has received valuable feedback regarding English language usage, questionnaire design, and the clarity of the questions from them. Due to time restriction, she did not invest more time in piloting the vignette and the items further.

## **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

On top of reliability and validity considerations aforementioned, it is essential to tackle ethical issues when human subjects are involved in the study. The issues can be resolved by following four main principles by Diener and Crandall (1978): 1) ensure no harm comes to participants, 2) inform and ask for consent, 3) protect participants' privacy, and 4) do not use deception. Prior to collecting data, this thesis obtained an approval letter from the NSD (see Appendix H), a Norwegian national center that provides advice on managing and protecting research data. NSD registered this thesis research and ensured ethical considerations were met. Following NSD guidelines, an Information-Consent Letter (see Appendix I) is presented as the front page of the online survey. The letter included detailed information about the research, responsible parties, participant's voluntary involvement, storage and usage of personal data, participants' rights, and an electronic consent form. The participants must sign the consent form before they can proceed to answer any questions in the authorized data collection platform, Nettskjema.

When presenting analyzed data, the link between a participant and one's background information such as age, gender, discipline, and nationalities is removed. In other words,

participants' identity is not recognizable. Lastly, using the quantitative approach has helped me keep an objective distance to the topic, which was especially important due to my own experiences with feedback as an international student in Norway.



## **5 Findings**

This chapter reports the primary findings of the collected quantitative data, the procedure used to ensure the reliability of the survey scales, the distribution of the collected data in each scale, the results of correlation and group difference testing following the null hypothesis derived from the research questions (see section 1.2).

### **5.1 Demographic Characteristics**

This thesis collected 146 responses. Most respondents took less than 10 minutes to finish the survey. After removing 20 responses answered by exchange students and non-master's students, there are 126 valid responses given by students from 43 different countries (see Appendix J for the country list). Among the participants, there are 60.32% female, 36.51% male, and 3.17% other. Participants' age varies from 21 to 56, with the average of 28.4. Certain disciplines only have a small number of participants and it can be challenging to sort some reported master's programs such as Fishery, Geology, Environmental Science, and Tourism into the survey's discipline list. Hence, the disciplines were first sorted into the pre-determined list based on a brief review of the possible programs' courses. Then, the disciplines were further sorted into STEM and Non-STEM by seeing which faculty they belong to on the Norwegian universities' webpage. Table 2 presented a summary of the sorted disciplines (STEM and Non-STEM) and the students' count in each discipline. After data importation in SPSS, appropriate variable data types were assigned to each variable. Please note that there is no missing data as all the questions require mandatory response before submission. The variables were re-coded for SPSS analysis. International students' IPD was coded as IPD, international students' intention to read and use feedback as RU, and international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver as FD.

**Table 2***Respondents' Discipline Sorted to STEM and Non-STEM*

Category	Discipline	Count (n =)
STEM	Architecture	1
	Engineering	12
	Information Technology and Electrical Engineering	8
	Mathematics and Natural sciences	23
	Medicine and Health Sciences	9
Total		53
Non-STEM	Art and Design	5
	Business, Economics, and Management	3
	Educational Sciences	14
	Humanities	23
	Law	7
	Social Sciences	17
	Psychology	4
Total		73

## 5.2 Reliability of Scales

This section elaborates how Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is employed to remove certain items that have a low correlation with the overall score of the scale. Items that are removed are not used in further analyses.

### 5.2.1 IPD Scale

Table 3 shows that the mean of IPD1 is quite high ( $M = 4.87$ ) and there is low standard deviation ( $SD = .89$ ). Frequency graph of IPD1 (Figure 2) further demonstrates that most participants answered (5) in the 6-point Likert scale to the statement "*I tend to follow the suggestions given by my teachers*". This shows that IPD1 had little variance and was not able to differentiate between participants. Moreover, its correlation with other items in the scale is low (.05). Therefore, IPD1 is not useful for IPD scale and is removed when calculating the

mean of IPD for further analysis. After removing IPD1, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of IPD scale is increased from 0.73 to 0.74.

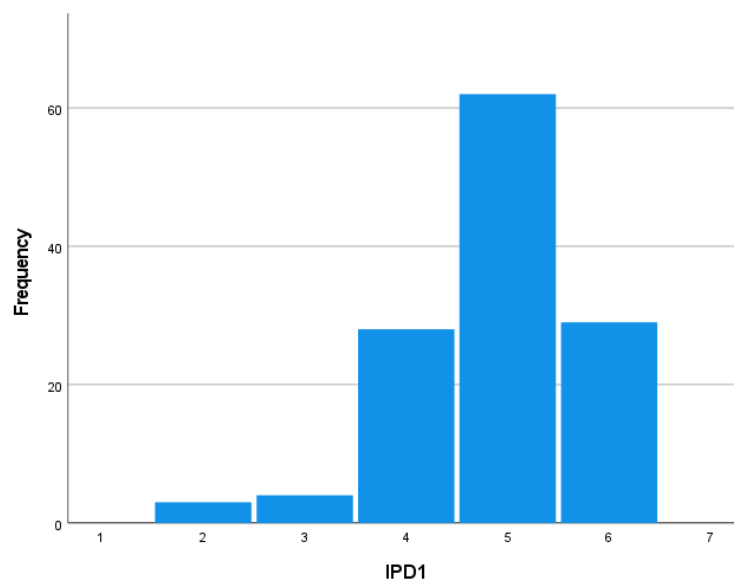
**Table 3**

*Item Statistics IPD1-10*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's $\alpha$ if Item Deleted
<b>IPD1</b>	<b>4.87</b>	<b>.89</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.74</b>
IPD2	4.35	1.42	.47	.69
IPD3	3.40	1.25	.57	.68
IPD4	3.51	1.35	.55	.68
IPD5	3.51	1.37	.44	.70
IPD6	3.89	1.40	.31	.72
IPD7	3.58	1.61	.28	.73
IPD8	2.72	1.37	.45	.70
IPD9	3.60	1.55	.42	.70
IPD10	4.26	1.44	.33	.72

**Figure 2**

*Frequency Graph of IPD1*



## 5.2.2 RU Scale

Table 4 shows that the mean of RU10 is the lowest ( $M = 3.81$ ) and standard deviation is high ( $SD = 1.41$ ). Frequency graph of RU10 (Figure 3) further demonstrates that there is a slightly left-skewed distribution ( $-.36$ ) in participants' answer to the statement “*Even though the feedback came from a well-known professor, I will not use the comments that I disagree with.*” As RU10 has a low correlation with other items (.11), it is removed when calculating the mean of RU for further analysis. After removing RU10, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of RU scale is increased from 0.74 to 0.76. Please note that RU10 is a reversed item and hence the values on the histogram are 1 (*Extremely Likely*) and 6 (*Extremely Unlikely*).

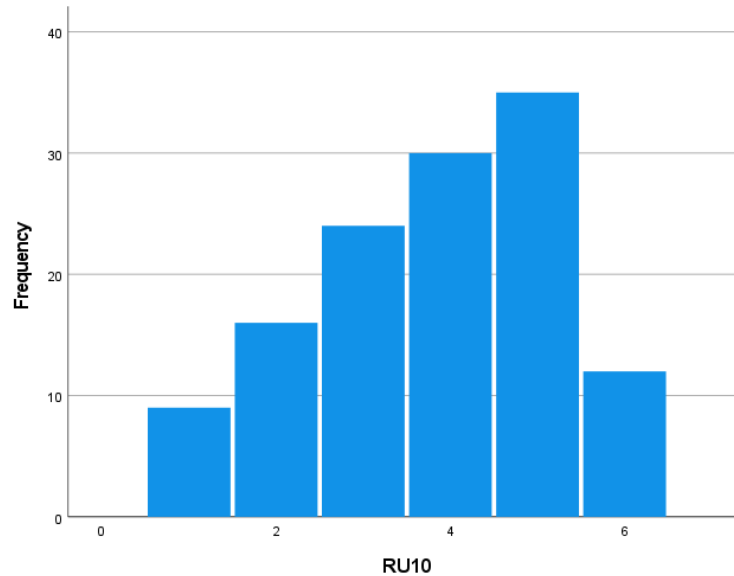
**Table 4**

*Item Statistics RU1-10*

<b>Item</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> if Item Deleted</b>
RU1	5.35	.80	.30	.73
RU2	4.19	1.42	.32	.73
RU3	3.85	1.49	.29	.74
RU4	4.83	1.13	.47	.70
RU5	4.21	1.35	.45	.71
RU6	5.03	1.15	.63	.68
RU7	5.02	1.05	.54	.70
RU8	5.10	1.02	.73	.67
RU9	3.94	1.45	.36	.72
<b>RU10</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.76</b>

**Figure 3**

*Frequency Graph of RU10*



### 5.2.3 FD Scale

Table 5 shows that the mean of FD1 is the lowest ( $M = 4.75$ ) and standard deviation is high ( $SD = 1.24$ ). Frequency graph of RU10 (Figure 4) further demonstrates that most participants answered (5) and (6) to the statement *“If I am not satisfied with the challenging comments, I will complain about it to the higher authority at the university.”* This shows that FD1 had little variance and was not able to differentiate between participants. Moreover, it has a negative correlation with other items (-.12). Therefore, FD1 is not useful for FD scale and it is removed when calculating the mean of FD for further analysis. After removing FD1, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of FD scale is increased from 0.82 to 0.86. Please note that FD1 is a reversed item and hence the values on the histogram are 1 (*Extremely Likely*) and 6 (*Extremely Unlikely*).

**Table 5**

*Item Statistics FD1-10*

<b>Item</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Item-Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> if Item Deleted</b>
<b>FD1</b>	<b>4.75</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>-.12</b>	<b>.86</b>
FD2	4.67	1.31	.68	.79
FD3	4.95	1.18	.74	.79
FD4	4.54	1.29	.56	.80
FD5	4.21	1.41	.63	.79
FD6	4.98	1.25	.64	.79
FD7	3.93	1.36	.66	.79
FD8	4.15	1.35	.53	.80
FD9	2.13	1.38	.16	.84
FD10	4.28	1.50	.68	.79

**Figure 4**

*Frequency Graph of FD1*

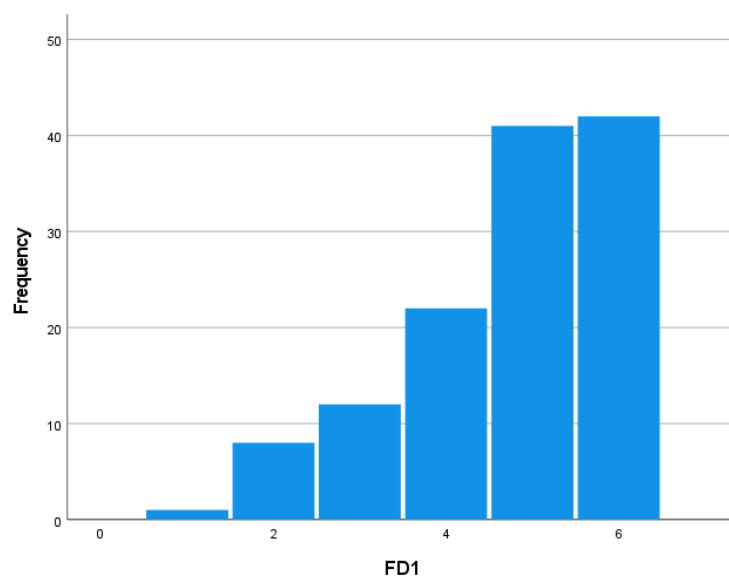


Table 6 presents a summary of the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  procedure with the initial figure of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each scale and the after-figure when the identified low-correlated item is removed. Table 7 shows the descriptive data of the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of each scale after item removal. The reliability of the scales was satisfactory (0.74 – 0.86).

**Table 6**

*Cronbach's Alpha – Initial Figure and Figure After Item Removal*

Scale	Initial ( $\alpha$ )	Removed Item (Intercorrelation in Scale)	After ( $\alpha$ )
IPD	.73	IPD1 (.05)	.74
RU	.74	RU10 (.11)	.76
FD	.82	FD1 (-.12)	.86

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics of Mean of IPD, RU, and FD Scale*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
IPD mean without IPD1	1.56	5.67	3.65	.81
RU mean without RU10	2.44	6.00	4.61	.72
FD mean without FD1	1.22	5.89	4.20	.92

### 5.3 Normality Test

Whether the data is normally distributed should be determined before choosing the appropriate correlation test. Table 8 presented Shapiro-Wilk normality test. As  $p = .63$  (IPD) and  $p = .06$  (RU), the IPD and RU data is normally distributed. On the other hand, FD data, with  $p < .001$ , is not normally distributed. Figure 5 shows the histogram of FD data, which have a moderately negative skewness (-.76). This means that the left tail is longer and there are more participants

with high FD mean. The boxplots from normality test also identified outliers, which is none in IPD scale, four in RU, and two in FD. As RU data is normally distributed, the four outliers are not removed as it is part of the normal distribution. Since FD data is not normally distributed and has two outliers, a non-parametric test is a better fit when testing FD correlation with other variables. After running the analyses (normality test, correlation test, *t*-test) with removed outliers, no significant difference is found. Hence, the outliers are not removed.

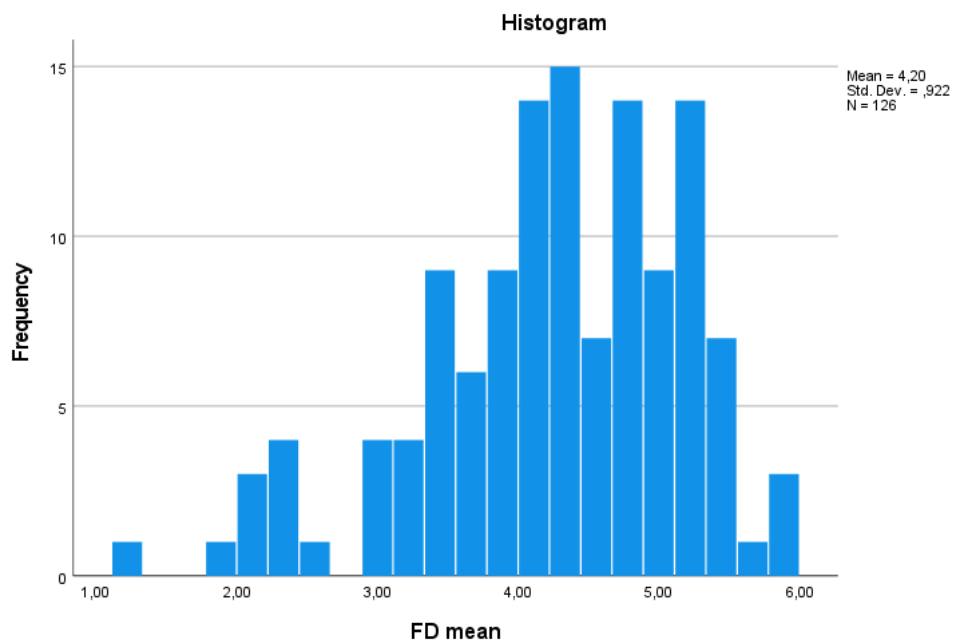
**Table 8**

*Shapiro-Wilk Test of Three Scales' Data*

Scale	Shapiro-Wilk		
	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	Sig.
IPD mean	.99	126	<b>.63</b>
RU mean	.98	126	<b>.06</b>
FD mean	.96	126	<b>.00</b>

**Figure 5**

*Non-Normal Distribution – Histogram of FD data*





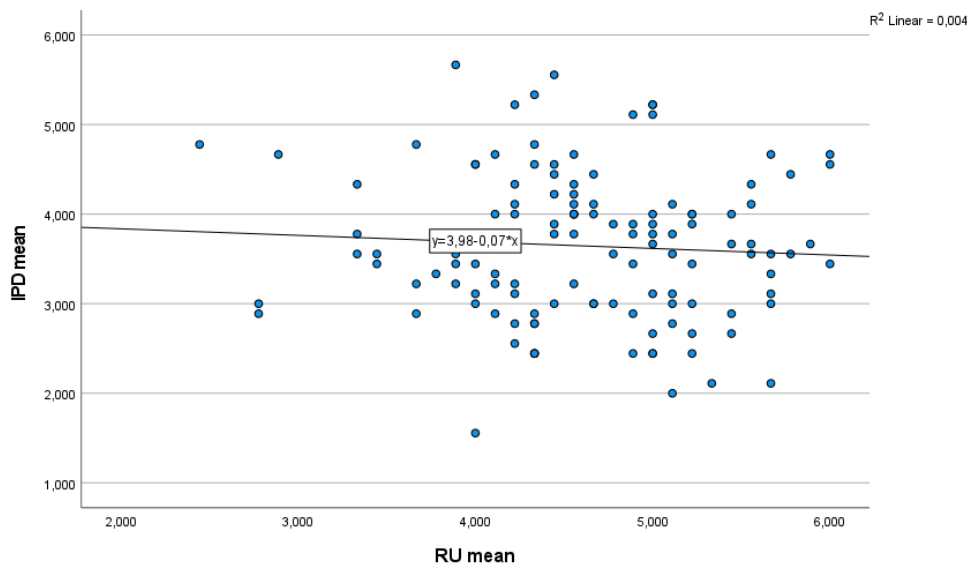
## 5.4 Test H1: Correlation between IPD and RU

**Null H<sub>1</sub>:** There is no correlation between international students' IPD and their intention to read and use feedback.

Centered on the theory of how one's PD is correlated to the actions and that high PD subordinates they prefer having dependence on the superordinate while low PD subordinates prefer consultation (Hofstede et al., 2010), this thesis plans to investigate whether there is a relationship between international students' individual power distance and their intention to read and use feedback. After establishing that IPD and RU data are normally distributed, the parametric test Pearson's  $r$ , was used to measure the correlation between the interval variables (mean of the scales). Figure 6 displays the scatterplots of IPD and RU for better understanding. No apparent correlation can be seen in the graph. SPSS analysis also indicated that there was a nonsignificant correlation ( $p = .47$ ,  $r = -.07$ ). Hence, null hypothesis 1 is not rejected, which means that there is no correlation between international students' IPD and the intention to read and use feedback.

**Figure 6**

*Scatterplots of IPD and RU*



## 5.5 Test H2: Correlation between IPD and FD

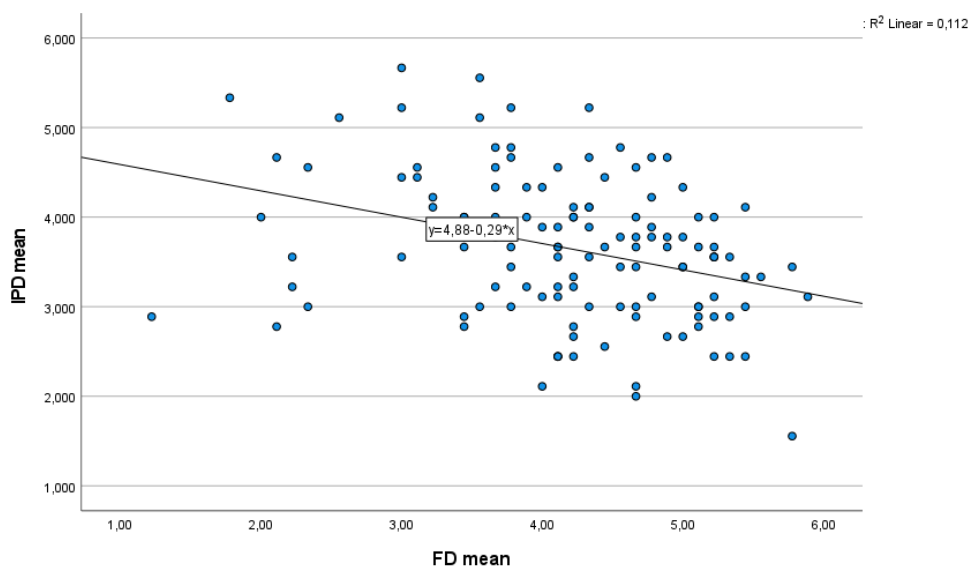
**Null H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no correlation between international students' IPD and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver

Based on the observation that high PD subordinates have a lower likelihood of expressing their opinion to, arguing with, or opposing the superordinate than low PD subordinates (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010), this study intends to uncover whether international students' self-reported IPD is correlated to their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver.

Since FD data was not normally distributed, a non-parametric correlation test, Kendall's Tau-b ( $r\tau$ ), was used to measure the correlation between IPD and FD. It was discovered that IPD and FD had a significant weak negative correlation ( $r\tau = -.24, p < .001$ ). Figure 7 presents the scatterplots of IPD and FD for better understanding. Therefore, null hypothesis 2 is rejected and it can be assumed that students who score higher on their individual power distance are less likely to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver and vice versa.

**Figure 7**

*Scatterplots of IPD and FD*



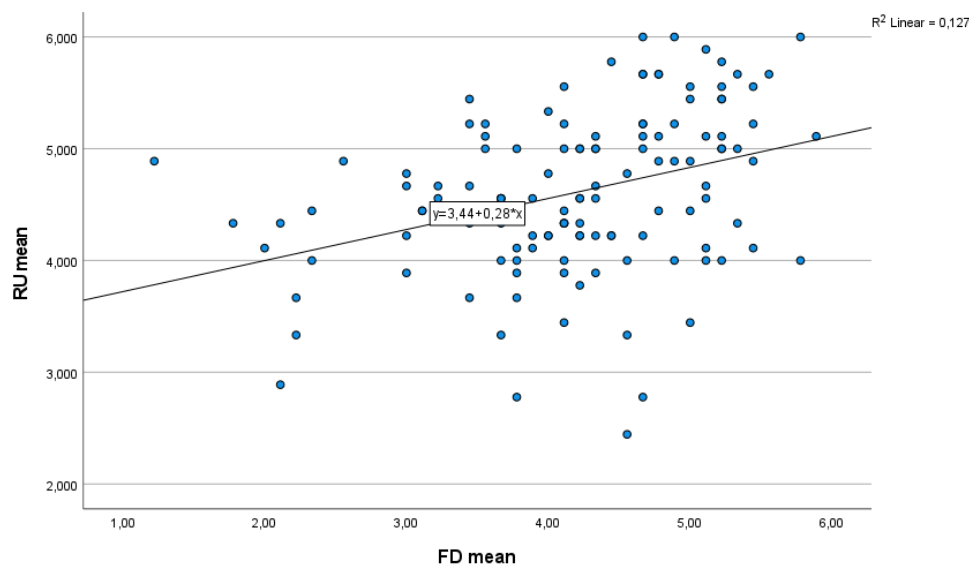
## 5.6 Test H3: Correlation between RU and FD

**Null H3:** There is no correlation between international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver and their intention to read and use feedback.

Considering the theory that feedback-as-dialogue can ensure students' feedback understanding, reading, and using, this thesis aims to discover whether there is a relationship between international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver and their intention to read and use feedback. Since FD data was not normally distributed, a non-parametric correlation test, Kendall's Tau-b, was used to measure the correlation between RU and FD. The results show a significant weak positive correlation between the variables ( $r\tau = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Figure 8 presents the scatterplots of RU and FD for better understanding. As null hypothesis 3 is rejected, it can be assumed that students who score higher on their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver are more likely to read and use feedback and vice versa.

**Figure 8**

*Scatterplots of RU and FD*



## 5.7 Test H4: IPD, RU, FD and Background Variables

**Null H4:** There is no correlation between international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, their intention to read and use feedback, and the background variables (i.e., age, gender, discipline, nationality).

Established on how students' individual difference variables can shape their feedback perception or feedback relevant behavior, this section is dedicated to test null hypothesis 4 with correlation test and independent two sample *t*-test.

### 5.7.1 Age

Since the age variable is interval data, correlation tests can be used to see if there is a correlation between age and IPD, RU, and FD. Normality test shows that age is not normally distributed (minimum = 21, maximum = 56,  $M = 28.42$ ,  $SD = 6.09$ , skewness = 2.08,  $p < .001$ ) and there are seven participants who are considerably older than the rest of the participants. The seven outliers are not removed as they are part of the sample to be examined to see whether there is a correlation. Due to the non-normal distribution, a non-parametric test is used. The results show that the null hypothesis is not rejected with IPD ( $r\tau = -.11$ ,  $p = .77$ ), RU ( $r\tau = .11$ ,  $p = .09$ ), and FD ( $r\tau = -.018$ ,  $p = .09$ ). Hence, there is no relationship between participants' age and their individual power distance, the intention to read and use feedback, and the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver.

### 5.7.2 Nationality

Nationality is a nominal variable. However, it can be treated as an ordinal variable by adopting Hofstede's power distance index for 76 countries from *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, 3rd edition, 2010* by Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov. The PD index represents the relative position of the countries. Hence, the nationality of each participant is coded into an ordinal variable with the index value. In Hofstede's data, there are two PD index values for Canada (Canada Quebec and Canada total). As the thesis author does not know where the Canadian participants are from, Canada total index value is used. Kenya and Zimbabwe are given the PD index of Easter Africa and Nigeria and Ghana of Western Africa. For countries that are not included in Hofstede's country list and are hard to be sorted into countries and regions used by Hofstede (e.g., Nepal, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Montenegro,

Jordan), this thesis uses open data from Hofstede Insights (n.d.), which has collected data from other research projects. After testing the correlation between nationality (Hofstede's PD index value), IPD, RU, and FD with non-parametric tests, there were no significant correlation between the adapted nationality and IPD ( $r\tau = .10, p = .13$ ), RU ( $r\tau = .02, p = .71$ ), and FD ( $r\tau = .05, p = .46$ ). In short, participants' adapted nationality (Hofstede's PD index value) does not have a relationship with the participants' individual power distance, the intention to read and use feedback, and the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver.

As another attempt, an independent two sample *t* test is conducted by sorting the Hofstede-coded nationality into low PD (1-50) and high PD (51-100) groups. For example, the PD index values of Taiwan and China are respectively 64 and 80, which are then sorted in the high PD group. The PD index values of Canada (total) and America are 39 and 40, which are then sorted in the low PD group. For IPD, low PD group ( $n = 33, M = 3.45, SD = .68$ ) and high PD group ( $n = 93, M = 3.72, SD = .84$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = -1.65, p = .10$ . For RU, low PD group ( $n = 33, M = 4.53, SD = .83$ ) and high PD group ( $n = 93, M = 4.64, SD = .68$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = -.74, p = .46$ . For FD, low PD group ( $n = 33, M = 4.13, SD = .92$ ) and high PD group ( $n = 93, M = 4.23, SD = .93$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = -.53, p = .60$ . With Hofstede's PD sorting model, it shows that there are significantly more people from the high PD group ( $n = 93$ ) that participated in the thesis survey than participants from the low PD group ( $n = 33$ ). In short, the test results show that there is no significant difference in international students' individual power distance, the intention to read and use feedback, and the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver between participants from low and high PD countries in Hofstede's data.

### 5.7.3 Gender

Since there are only 3.17% participants who identified themselves as other (non-male or non-female), the data is removed from the *t*-test grouping. For IPD, Male ( $n = 46, M = 3.49, SD = .12$ ) and female ( $n = 76, M = 3.76, SD = .09$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(120) = -1.81, p = .07$ . For RU, Male ( $n = 46, M = 4.65, SD = .78$ ) and female ( $n = 76, M = 4.59, SD = .70$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(120) = .44, p = .66$ . For FD, Male ( $n = 46, M = 4.36, SD = .93$ ) and female ( $n = 76, M = 4.07, SD = .91$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(120) = 1.70, p = .09$ . In short, the test results shows that the *p* values of the *t* tests are all above 0.05, which means that international students' individual power distance, their intention to read and use feedback, and

their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver between male and female are not significantly different.

#### 5.7.4 Discipline

Participants' discipline has been sorted into STEM and Non-STEM in section 5.1. The  $t$  test of this grouping shows that there is no significant difference in IPD, RU and FU between STEM and Non-STEM with the sorting method presented in section 5.1. For IPD, STEM ( $n = 53$ ,  $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) and Non-STEM ( $n = 73$ ,  $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = -.22$ ,  $p = .83$ . For RU, , STEM ( $n = 53$ ,  $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) and Non-STEM ( $n = 73$ ,  $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = .68$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = 1.57$ ,  $p = .12$ . For FD, STEM ( $n = 53$ ,  $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) and Non-STEM ( $n = 73$ ,  $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) do not differ significantly,  $t(124) = 1.71$ ,  $p = .09$ . In brief, the difference between international students' individual power distance, the intention to read and use feedback, and the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver between STEM and Non-STEM (see section 5.1) are not significant.

As the distinction of STEM and Non-STEM in certain disciplines is not clear cut and there are many debates on which categories the disciplines belong to (e.g., Architecture, Psychology), further  $t$  tests comparing two single disciplines were conducted. Disciplines with the highest participant number, i.e., Mathematics and Natural Sciences ( $n = 23$ ) and Humanities ( $n = 23$ ) were compared and found that international students studying Mathematics and Natural Sciences are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) compared to Humanities' ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .82$ ),  $t(44) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .02$ . However, no significant difference was found in students' individual power distance,  $t(44) = -1.23$ ,  $p = .201$ , between Mathematics and Natural Sciences ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = .83$ ), and Humanities ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = .88$ ). There is also no significant difference in international students' intention to read and use feedback between Mathematics and Natural Sciences ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), and Humanities ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = .47$ ),  $t(44) = .70$ ,  $p = .49$ .

Conversely to the first attempt, differences between groups were also found with a different grouping of the disciplines. For example, grouping A) *Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Information Technology and Electrical Engineering* and B) *Art and Design, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, Humanities, Business, Economics, and Management* are significantly different in FD where international students from grouping A has a slightly higher willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver ( $n = 43$ ,  $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = .70$ )

compared to international students from grouping B ( $n = 62$ ,  $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ),  $t(103) = 2.11$ ,  $p = .04$ .

To sum up, null hypothesis 4 is rejected only in the case of comparing the willingness to engage in dialogue with feedback between international students from: 1) Mathematics and Natural Sciences and 2) Humanities and between grouping A<sup>3</sup> and B<sup>4</sup>. It appears that international students from Mathematics and Natural Sciences and grouping A are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver than those from Humanities and from group B. Further tests to examine differences between other discipline groupings are omitted due to limitations elaborated on in chapter 6. The findings in this section show that there is no significant difference between international students with different age, gender, and Hofstede-coded nationality. However, international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver from different disciplines can be significantly different depending on how the disciplines are grouped. Further discussion on this topic is included in chapter 6.

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<sup>3</sup>Disciplines in *grouping A* are Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Information Technology and Electrical Engineering

<sup>4</sup>Disciplines in *grouping B* are Art and Design, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, Humanities, Business, Economics, and Management

## 6 Discussion

This chapter discusses how the research questions are answered by the findings and what the findings can contribute to the field. The thesis also gives suggestions to academics and administrative personnel working in higher education based on what the findings imply. After reflecting on the thesis design and its limitations, recommendations for future study are laid out.

After statistical analysis in chapter 5 and by testing the null hypothesis of relationship between variables, it is discovered that there is no correlation between international students' individual power distance and their intention to read and use feedback. Meanwhile, it is found that international students who score higher in the individual power distance are relatively less willing to engage in feedback dialogue and vice versa. At the same time, it is inferred that international students who have more intention to read and use feedback are also slightly more willing to engage in feedback dialogue and vice versa. Finally, age and nationality<sup>5</sup> do not appear to be correlated to the predictor and outcome variables. The *t* test between groups also shows no significant differences in the predictor and outcome variables between different gender and nationality groups<sup>6</sup>. Lastly, there is no significant difference in international students' individual power distance and their intention to read and use feedback between different disciplines. However, the *t*-test results show that international students' willingness to engage in feedback dialogue can be different in certain cases. For example, international students studying Mathematics and Natural Sciences are a little more willing to engage in feedback dialogue than those studying Humanities. Similar situations can also be found when comparing international students studying Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Information Technology and Electrical Engineering to those studying Art and Design, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, Humanities, Business, Economics, and Management. The former group is also slightly more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver than the latter group.

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<sup>5</sup>*Nationality* is coded with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) data.

<sup>6</sup>*Nationality groups* are the low PD and high PD groups based on Hofstede et al.'s (2010) data. The countries that have a PD index value below 50 are in the low PD group and those above 50 are in the high PD group.



## 6.1 Contribution to the Literature

This thesis has addressed the literature gap in feedback studies, which required more research on postgraduate students and on how individual difference variables shape feedback relevant behaviors. It discovered how the individual power distance, as one of the individual difference variables measured, shapes international master's students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver when studying in Norway.

### 6.1.1 IPD, Feedback, and Power Relations

This thesis found that there is a significant weak negative relationship between international students' individual power distance and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. This means that international students with high IPD are relatively less willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. The thesis's findings elaborate on the observation that subordinates from high PD countries are less likely to approach and contradict the superordinate directly (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 2010) and support the findings on how students with high PD are less likely to seek feedback from the superordinate (Morrison et al., 2004) by noticing a similar phenomenon at the individual level among international students in higher education in Norway. That is, international students with high IPD have a relatively lower likelihood to express their opinions, challenge, or oppose the feedback giver *openly*. 'Openly' in this case refers to a situation in which the feedback giver (superordinate) is aware of students' (subordinates) actions (e.g., approaching, challenging, defying, disagreeing). This may be an explanation of why the thesis did not find any correlation between IPD and international students' intention to read and use feedback. Perhaps the reason behind this is that international students think that the feedback giver will not be able to know whether they have read or used the comments. Or it might be that there really is no relationship between IPD and international students' intention to read and use feedback since literature on feedback also indicates that other factors might be more important to predict whether students use feedback or not (e.g. self-efficacy, goal orientation), but they were not measured in this thesis.

Still, the discovery allows a better understanding on whether and how an individual difference variable can shape feedback relevant behaviors (Evans, 2013). By measuring individual power distance, a set of convictions for what appropriate and inappropriate behaviors are for the person, it enables scholars to see how one's 'internal world' (Black &

William, 2009) can shape one's behavior regarding feedback dialogue engagement. It also helps explain how power and authority are related to feedback and the discourse element in feedback dialogue (Higgins et al., 2001). This also brings attention to the teacher-student power relationship and how that is involved with feedback. Building on how the power relationship can affect feedback practices and vice versa (Boud, 1995; Crossouard & Pryor, 2009; Higgins et al., 2001; Ivanic et al., 2000; Lea & Street, 1998), the results of the thesis research imply that a traditional teacher-student relationship, which creates a bigger power distance between teachers and students than the partnership relationship does (Symonds, 2021), can be less beneficial to students' learning since there is a slightly higher likelihood that students will be less willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. Such a situation is not favorable for learning since feedback dialogue should increase students' understanding of feedback (Higgins et al., 2001), which may also affect students' likelihood of using feedback (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017).

### **6.1.2 Feedback Dialogue and Reading and Using Feedback**

Despite not finding a correlation between IPD and international students' intention to read and use feedback, this thesis found a weak positive correlation between international students' intention to read and use feedback and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. In other words, international students who are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver are also a little more likely to read and use feedback. This can possibly be explained by examining the four psychological processes proposed by Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al. (2017) – *awareness*, *cognizance*, *agency*, and *volition*, which are relevant to the extent of whether students use feedback (see section 2.3.1). To begin with, feedback-as-dialogue highlights its assistance in ensuring students' understanding of feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), which increases students' *awareness* of the feedback's meaning. In some cases, feedback dialogues can increase students' *cognizance* when students recognize that dialogues with the feedback giver can aid their understanding of feedback and hence is a form of assistance they can seek. Moreover, dialogues with students are considered as a prerequisite of forming sustainable feedback (Carless et al., 2011), which should have an effect on learning beyond the context it is given in (Hounsell, 2007). As it stands, feedback dialogues may also improve students' *agency* by shedding lights on the long-term potential sustainable feedback has on learning. Finally, students who reach out to the feedback giver for assistance already have a good level of *volition*, motivation, or proactivity. Hence, it makes sense that

international students who are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver also have a relatively higher likelihood of reading and using feedback. It can be that their *awareness*, *cognizance*, *agency*, and *volition* are already at a decent level from previous feedback dialogue practices. Or that the willingness to participate in feedback dialogue is an implication of high *volition* that could lead to good *agency*, *cognizance*, and *awareness* as the benefits feedback dialogues may offer.

### 6.1.3 Feedback Dialogue and Disciplinary Difference

Initially, the thesis author did not expect to find any variable differences between international students studying programs in different disciplines. The reason why ‘discipline’ was included as a background question was to provide information to readers that the participants may be from different disciplines. Surprisingly, a significant difference in international students’ willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver was found between disciplines. For example, international students from Mathematics and Natural Sciences are slightly more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver than those studying Humanities. Additionally, there is a similar situation when comparing international students studying *Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Information Technology and Electrical Engineering* to those studying *Art and Design, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, Humanities, Business, Economics, and Management*. The former group is also slightly more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver than the latter group.

This finding is rather intriguing as Mathematics and Natural Sciences is considered to be in *hard pure* disciplinary grouping while Humanities is in *soft pure* (Becher, 1994). The *hard* disciplines<sup>7</sup> focus on facts and numbers and the methods used are usually more rigid. Differently, the *soft* disciplines<sup>8</sup> allow more room for interpretation and use more flexible methods (Becher, 1987). Hence, if there was a feedback behavior difference between discipline, the thesis author previously assumed that international students from soft disciplines should be more comfortable about discussing their opinions with the feedback giver, given that the

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<sup>7</sup>*Hard disciplines* included in the thesis are Engineering, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Information Technology and Electrical Engineering.

<sup>8</sup>*Soft disciplines* included in the thesis are Art and Design, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, Humanities, Business, Economics, and Management.

disciplinary culture is more open for interpretation, and hence should be more willing to engage in dialogue. However, the findings showed that hard disciplines international students are slightly more likely to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver and seek clarifications, discuss disagreements, or defend their work than those from soft disciplines.

Alternatively, the phenomena may be explained by examining other features of hard and soft disciplines. Hard disciplines are more gregarious and soft ones are more individualistic (Becher, 1987). Perhaps the identified traits are the reasons behind this phenomenon as international students from soft disciplines do not engage in the dialogue as a form of *agree to disagree* and hence feel no need to have a discussion. On the contrary, international students from hard disciplines might feel the need to be on the same page with the feedback giver.

#### **6.1.4 Underlying Meaning of No Correlation Found**

By coding the participants' nationality with Hofstede's data of country-based PD index value, the results show no correlation between participants' IPD and PD-coded nationality. The findings aren't very surprising since Hofstede has suggested against using his model on comparing individuals in future research (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013), and stated that "National culture scores are not about individuals, but about national societies" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 40). This also explains why there is no significant difference between nationality groups that were categorized to low PD and high PD based on Hofstede's data. This discovery also implies that the results of past research that declared the differences in feedback relevant behaviors were due to participants' nationality or produced findings about differences between participants who were grouped based on their nationality (e.g., Evans & Waring, 2011a) may require further scrutiny.

#### **6.1.5 Summary of the Contribution to the Literature**

In short, this thesis has contributed to the greater discourse by exploring how international students' individual power distance, as an individual difference variable, shapes their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. It is also uncovered how having feedback dialogues may possibly increase their likelihood to read and use feedback. By noting how international students perceive the power distance to their teachers and which discipline the students are studying correlates to their willingness to engage in feedback dialogue, it calls

for more attention and perhaps for policy changes on the topics. Lastly, it cautions against assuming homogeneity of students based on their country of origin for future studies.

## **6.2 Practical Implications**

This section includes practical implications derived from the study findings that may aid students' learning and feedback experience. To begin with, the findings on international students' IPD and their willingness to engage in feedback dialogue are especially relevant for practitioners who work with international students. For instance, it seems like some people believe that feedback givers should adjust their feedback based on the recipient's cultural backgrounds (Sidi-Ali et al., 2019). Therefore, it may be a good idea for practitioners to be more encouraging to high IPD international students, which may increase their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. Although such adjustment is feasible, it might not be welcomed in Norway where equality is highly valued in the sense that every student should be treated equally despite the differences between them. Furthermore, it is essential for students, graders, or feedback givers to remain anonymous to avoid any bias that could occur in Norwegian higher education. In this case, a policy that moves towards a partnership teacher-student relationship may be more helpful to all international students regardless of their IPD score. For example, such policy can be asking feedback givers to beware of the 'power' in the feedback language or in the teacher-student relationship as literature have shown how they can affect one another (Boud, 1995; Crossouard & Pryor, 2009; Higgins et al., 2001; Ivanic et al., 2000; Lea & Street, 1998).

Meanwhile, some findings like international students' behavioral differences between disciplines and the relationship of their willingness to engage in feedback dialogue and their intention to read and use feedback may be generalized and considered relevant also for domestic students. In that case, the author urges educators to form an environment that promotes feedback dialogues and encourages future research to investigate why the willingness to engage in feedback dialogue differs between students from different disciplines. So that academics and administrative personnel in Humanities (or soft disciplines) can adopt the practices used in Mathematics and Natural Science (or hard disciplines) that encourage dialogue engagement with the feedback giver.

### 6.3 Theoretical Reflection

After conducting the empirical research, the thesis author has reflected on the concepts used in conceptual framework and considered separating the variable of intention to read and use feedback into two sub-variables of reading and using. Since the act of reading feedback may be rather effortless and can be considered as a given reaction for most students when they have been given feedback, having two sub-variables can allow better measurement of whether there is a difference between students' intention to read *and* use feedback. This change may possibly also alter the final findings of the relationship between students' IPD and their intention to *use* feedback. In other words, perhaps there is no relationship between students' IPD and their intention to *read* feedback but it might be possible to see a relationship between students' IPD and their intention to *use* feedback by having two sub-variables than one merged one. With that said, this separation was considered when analyzing the collected data as the thesis author attempted to separate the items in *Students' Intention to Read and Use Feedback Scale (RU)* into two (read *and* use) subscales. However, the correlation test results of the sub-scales showed no significant difference from the results of the original scale. This may be that the original RU scale was designed to measure 'read and use feedback' variable and hence the line between read *and* use may be blurry for some items, e.g., "I will revisit these challenging comments when writing future assignments given by the professor". It is hard to determine whether students already have the intention to use the feedback comments before they decide to re-read them for writing future assignments. With the variable separated into two sub-variables, perhaps a better measurement can be made by having 10 items on each subscale with a clearer distinction between the two different concepts.

Other interesting variables that could be added are *reasons (not) to read and use feedback* and *reasons (not) to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver*. As observed in the literature, other factors such as self-efficacy and goal orientation can also predict whether students use feedback. Furthermore, by measuring *reasons not to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver*, it may give more insights of how teachers or administrative personnel can help facilitate an environment that is more encouraging for students to engage in feedback dialogue.

## 6.4 Limitations

In general, this thesis has not collected an abundant amount of data due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the limited amount of time given for this master's thesis. In addition, a non-probabilistic sampling approach was used, which also had an effect on data quality. Furthermore, the sample size is not big enough to make any generalizable conclusion despite the valuable discovery this thesis has managed to achieve. Next, the study's population is *international full-degree master's students studying at public Norwegian higher education institutions*. However, the questionnaire did not include an item that filters out possible respondents at private higher education institutions, even though the author mainly reached out to international students studying at Norwegian public higher education institutions.

Besides the possible adjustments of separating the RU variable into two sub-variables, the vignette might also have influenced the strength of the correlation results of the FD and RU variables. Perhaps the vignette feedback scenario did not cause participants to fully immerse themselves in the situation of getting feedback from a high-authority professor. Furthermore, there might be social desirability bias when participants answered IPD, RU, and FD scales. In other words, the survey respondents might have chosen the answer that they perceived to be viewed positively by others, which can lead to over-reporting or under-reporting certain feedback behavior (Bryman, 2012).

Despite the noticeable difference in international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver between Humanities and Mathematics and Natural Sciences, the sample size of each group is rather small ( $n = 23$ ). It is possible to re-examine the difference by grouping disciplines together, which gives a bigger sample size ( $73 \geq n \geq 53$ ). Yet different methods of grouping produce a variety of results as some groupings reject the null hypothesis while some groupings do not. The results from the  $t$  test are surely valuable. However, this thesis does not use probability sampling methods and the data of international students' willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver is not normally distributed. Hence, the results of the  $t$  test should be treated with caution due to validity and reliability consideration. Moreover, participants self-report their disciplines, a possible error could exist if they were not familiar with the classification of discipline. One possible solution is to ask the participants to provide the webpage link of the master's program they are currently studying in. However, this requires participants to give more information about themselves and make them more

identifiable in data collection, which might also reduce the number of participants that would be willing to participate in the online survey.

Lastly, as noted in section 5.7.2, there are considerably more participants from high PD countries<sup>9</sup>. This may or may not have an influence on the collected data as Hofstede's model does not seem to be applicable to the individual level as examined in section 5.7.2. Regarding this, it would have been possible to have a stratified sampling approach with enough participants from each group. Or the thesis author could have selected some of the participants from low and high PD countries and with high and low IPD score and interviewed them about their thoughts when answering the survey. This can help discover if there are any problematic items in the survey. However, this again requires participants to give more information about themselves in order for the thesis author to contact them later. Besides, conducting interviews and organizing and analyzing the qualitative data will surely take up more time, which might not be feasible considering the time constraint. Lastly, some participants' nations are not included in Hofstede's research data. To solve this issue, the author used data from Hofstede Insight, where data quality can be debatable.

## 6.5 Future Research

After this quantitative research, a future research using qualitative research strategy can aim to gain a better understanding of why and how the variables are correlated. Is it due to students' low IPD that they are slightly more likely to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver? If so, what are the feedback dialogue barriers for high IPD students? If not, what other factors are more probable in shaping their feedback behaviors? Researchers can also consider conducting the same quantitative study one more time but with better adjustments and with different participants (e.g., local bachelor students) or in different contexts. As Norway is considered a low PD country (Hofstede et al., 2010), it is hard to say whether the participants have unconsciously calibrated their behaviors to a certain level after living in Norway for a period of time. Hence, it is compelling to see if the same results can be found by recruiting

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<sup>9</sup>*High PD countries* are the countries that have a PD index value above 50 in Hofstede et al.'s (2010) data.



international students studying in a high PD country (e.g., Japan, China, France, Mexico) as survey respondents (Hofstede et al., 2010).

There are other new questions that will need a different study design to be answered. Hence, this thesis calls upon researchers to investigate further the relationship between how students perceive teacher-student power relationship and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver. This may give the academia more information about the possible benefits of forming a teacher-student partnership and perhaps what a higher education institution can do to help the transition from traditional to partnership power relationship. It may also be interesting to see whether the difficulty of transitioning from traditional to partnership power relationship is correlated to the IPD of students and teachers. In other words, is it perhaps easier for students and teachers with low IPD to welcome the idea of teacher-student partnership? Furthermore, researchers can recruit one group of participants at a higher education institution with policies that encourage teacher-student partnership. Compare them with the other group whose higher education institution does not have such policies to see whether there is a difference in students' willingness to engage in feedback dialogue.

It is apparent that feedback dialogue can assist students with their understanding of feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), which ought to increase students' *awareness*, one of the psychological processes that if increased, may also remove some of the barriers that prevent students from using feedback (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, et al., 2017). As suggested in section 6.1.2, feedback-as-dialogue may also increase *cognizance*, *agency*, and *volition*. It will be a great investigation to see to what extent feedback dialogues have on improving the psychological processes and what barriers can be removed by engaging in the dialogues.

In order to avoid researcher bias and increase measurement accuracy, this thesis encourages future research to select future participants from two specific disciplines. With sufficient knowledge of what courses students from the disciplines are taking, the conclusion of whether there is a relationship between students' discipline and their willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver should be more reliable than the one in this present thesis. It might be a good idea to select two disciplines that have observably different traits so that they can be sorted into STEM and Non-STEM more easily. If there is a correlation, it is rather intriguing to understand why or how the two variables are correlated.

## 7 Conclusion

The importance of feedback to learning is agreed upon, yet the complexity of feedback calls for more research. For example, how the students' internal world can shape their willingness to engage in feedback dialogue. Feedback dialogue has been a focus in feedback studies due to its capacity to enhance students' understanding of feedback, reposition students' role in feedback practices, and create a promising outlook for lifelong learning. Furthermore, international students are in a vulnerable position despite their increasing higher education enrollment in the past decades. Moreover, review studies have shown that feedback experience at the postgraduate level is under-researched. Therefore, this thesis set out to discover whether there is a relationship between international master's students' individual power distance, a measurable individual difference variable that serves as an indicator of a set of convictions regarding what behavior is usual, suitable, and vital, and the intention to read and use feedback as well as the willingness to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver, considering the teacher-student power dynamics in higher education.

The results of the analyzed quantitative data collected through an online survey using Likert scales and a built-in vignette reported that international master's students studying in Norway with high individual power distance are slightly less likely to engage in feedback dialogue in comparison to those with low individual power distance. In addition, those who are more willing to engage in dialogue with the feedback giver are also slightly more likely to read and use feedback. Interestingly, it is found that those studying Mathematics and Natural Science have a slightly higher willingness to engage in feedback dialogue than those studying Humanities. Along with the discovered correlation between the measured variables, the findings of non-correlated variables also give an insight on how Hofstede's model is not applicable to the individual level and future studies should avoid assuming homogeneity among students from the same nation.

The discoveries made in the thesis not only contributes to the field but also calls for further investigation on the noted phenomena before making new policies that push towards teacher-student partnership, raise the awareness of the 'power' in feedback (language), and make changes in certain disciplines to encourage feedback dialogue engagement. Future studies can use an improved model of this thesis and investigate whether the phenomena are generalizable with different student groups or in different national contexts. It is also intriguing to find out

whether there is a behavioral difference between students studying in a higher education institution with policies that encourage teacher-student partnership and those studying in other higher education institutions. It is compelling to find out to which extent feedback dialogues can improve psychological processes and possibly removing some barriers that prevent students, and international students in particular, from using feedback.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Survey Invitation Post in Facebook Groups

Hi fellow international master's students!

Do you want better academic feedback?

Fill out this online survey <https://nettskjema.no/a/193605>.

It only takes 5-10 minutes.

This is for my thesis, which aims to know more about international students and their responses to receiving feedback.

You do NOT need to physically be in Norway to participate.

Feel free to forward the survey to fellow students.

# Appendix B

## Demographic Questions

Mandatory fields are marked with this star \*

1. What is your age? \*

2. What is your gender? \*

- Male
- Female
- Other

3. What faculty or discipline are you currently in? \*

- Architecture
- Art and Design
- Business, Economics, and Management
- Educational Sciences
- Engineering
- Humanities
- Information Technology and Electrical Engineering
- Law
- Mathematics and Natural sciences
- Medicine and Health Sciences
- Nursing
- Psychology
- Social Sciences
- Other (Please specify)

4. Are you currently a master's student? \*

*(This includes all students in a 2-year master's program OR students in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year in a 5-year BA+MA program.)*

- Yes
- No

5. What is your student status in Norway? \*

- Full-degree student
- Exchange student

6. What is your nationality? \*

*(If you have dual-nationality, please select the one that you identify with the most or the one you spent the most time living in the country. We are not interested in racial or ethnic origin. Choose "other" at the end of the list if you cannot find your nationality on the list.)*

## **Appendix C**

### **Power Distance Scale by Sharma (2010, p. 794)**

#### Power (POW)

13. I easily conform to the wishes of someone in a higher position than mine.
14. It is difficult for me to refuse a request if someone senior asks me.
15. I tend to follow orders without asking any questions.
16. I find it hard to disagree with authority figures.
17. People in higher positions have more power those in lower positions

#### Social Inequality (IEQ)

18. A person's social status reflects his or her place in the society.
19. It is important for everyone to know their rightful place in the society.
20. It is difficult to interact with people from different social status than mine.
21. Unequal treatment for different people is an acceptable way of life for me.
22. I believe some people have an advantage over others in every society.

## Appendix D

### Adapted Scale to Measure Individual Power Difference (IPD)

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.

1 (*Strongly Disagree*) - 6 (*Strongly Agree*)

*(If you haven't encountered certain situation mentioned below, please refer to how you would response in your previous educational settings.)*

**IPD1.** I tend to follow the suggestions given by my teachers.

---

**IPD2.** It is difficult for me to refuse a request from my teachers.

---

**IPD3.** I tend to follow my teachers' suggestions without asking any questions.

---

**IPD4.** I find it hard to disagree with my teachers.

---

**IPD5.** Teachers should have more power over educational decisions than students.  
*(Educational decisions can be curriculum and exam design, course content, teaching method, grading method, standard of performance, etc.)*

---

**IPD6.** An individual's scholarly rank reflects his/her place in the educational hierarchy.  
*(A scholar's rank can be Master, PhD, Postdoc, Associate Professor, Professor)*

---

**IPD7.** I think it is important that everyone knows their rightful place in society.

---

**IPD8.** It is difficult to engage with people with different scholarly status than mine in educational settings.

---

**IPD9.** It's acceptable for me that people have different attitudes towards PhD students and Professors.

---

**IPD10.** I believe people with higher ranks have an advantage over others in educational settings.

## Appendix E

### Vignette Framework Proposed and Organized by Skilling and Stylianides (2020, p. 544)

**Table 1.** Vignette framework: key elements, characteristics, and descriptors.

Key elements	Characteristics	Descriptors
Conception	Capturing content	Draw on conceptual or theoretical frameworks, existing literature, and practical experiences to reflect the essence of the research topic.
	Realistic and hypothetical portrayals	Portray characters and events that are representative of and meaningful to those experienced by the participants, balancing hypothetical yet realistic situations.
	Purpose/function	Construction guided by the research purpose, data sought, and respondents (e.g. promote/focus/stimulate discussion, solve problems, identify attitudes, seek beliefs, report practices, models of practice, norms, understandings). Vignette functions as the sole method or part of a multiphase data collection.
Design	Presentation	The nature of vignettes requires succinct (not necessarily complete or exact) portrayals of selected information. Brevity and incompleteness allow for participants to interpret/respond in unique and nuanced ways.
	Length	Written vignettes usually range between 50–200 words. Visual tools may be single or multiple images (e.g. comics). Video vignettes are typically a few minutes long. The length should consider maintaining interest, time for absorbing information and responding to it.
	Settings and terminology	Consider participants' degree of familiarity with the vignette situation (settings/ language specific to a particular cohort or profession) and ability to adequately respond to it. Also consider the appropriateness of using age-relevant and gender-neutral language.
	Open or closed questioning	Consider the purpose of the vignette to decide the type and format of questions. Open questions allow for more detailed, realistic, and independent reactions to the situation posed in vignettes. Questions may be in a written or verbal form (e.g. if vignettes are part of an interview situation).
	Participant perspectives	Consider from which perspective(s) the participants is (are) being asked to respond to the vignette (e.g. from a vignettes character's perspective, another role, or from their own perspective).
	Piloting	Pilot the vignette prior to use to assess the extent of how representative it is of situations and participants.
	Administration	Instructions
Timing and responses		Consider the phase within the research study the vignette will be given (e.g. as the starting point or to follow other data collection methods) and provide adequate time for responses.
Delivery mode and frequency		Consider how the vignette will be delivered (e.g. in person, on-line) and how this might influence completion and quality of responses. Oral delivery may be appropriate but consider possible bias if read by the researcher or another. Multiple and frequent use may lead to a lack of responses and risk 'carry over' effects.

## Appendix F

### Students' Intention to Read and Use Feedback Scale (RU)

Imagine yourself in the situation above. Please answer the following questions based on how you will react in such situation. 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) – 6 (*Extremely Likely*)

*(Feel free to re-read the scenario if you need to.)*

#### When it comes to reading and re-using the challenging comments...

**RU1.** Even though I find some feedback disputable and hard to use, I will still read all comments closely.

---

**RU2.** Considering the challenging comments, I will be more reluctant to read future feedback given by the professor.

---

**RU3.** I will be less excited to read any future feedback, considering how professor's challenging comments make me feel.

---

**RU4.** I will revisit these challenging comments when writing future assignments given by the professor.

---

**RU5.** I will revisit these challenging comments when writing future assignments given by other lecturers.

#### When it comes to modifying and resubmitting my work...

**RU6.** Even though it is not mandatory, I will modify my assignment because I'm expected to.

---

**RU7.** Regardless how the challenging comments make me feel, I will use it to modify and resubmit my work.

---

**RU8.** Even though a major revision requires extra time and effort, I will modify and resubmit my work.

---

**RU9.** I will not modify my work if I am not sure how I can use the feedback.

---

**RU10.** Even though the feedback came from a well-known professor, I will not use the comments that I disagree with.

## Appendix G

### Students' Willingness to Engage in Dialogue with the Feedback Giver Scale (FD)

Imagine yourself in the situation above. Please answer the following questions based on how you will react in such situation. 1 (*Extremely Unlikely*) – 6 (*Extremely Likely*)

*(Feel free to re-read the scenario if you need to.)*

#### When it comes to feedback communication...

**FD1.** If I am not satisfied with the challenging comments, I will complain about it to the higher authority at the university.

---

**FD2.** If I am unsatisfied with the challenging comments, I will ask the professor for additional feedback.

---

**FD3.** I will ask the professor for an explanation if I do not know how to use the feedback.

---

**FD4.** If I feel that my work is misunderstood by the professor, I will defend my work.

---

**FD5.** Even if I disagree with the comments, I will not discuss my disagreements with the professor.

---

**FD6.** If I am not sure, I will ask the professor for further clarification.

---

**FD7.** If I do not understand the challenging comments, I will just interpret the meaning on my own.

---

**FD8.** I will not ask for additional feedback even though I do not want to use the given challenging comments.

---

**FD9.** I will tell the professor how the challenging feedback makes me feel emotionally.

---

**FD10.** Even if I find the feedback challenging to use, I will not ask for further clarification from the professor.

# Appendix H

## NSD Approval of Letter



### NSD's assessment

#### Project title

Measuring students' individual power distance and the behavioral response to receiving feedback

#### Reference number

740723

#### Registered

25.01.2021 av Wei Ling Peng - weilp@uio.no

#### Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Universitetet i Oslo / Det utdanningsvitenskapelige fakultet / Institutt for pedagogikk

#### Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

Rachelle Esterhazy, rachelle.esterhazy @iped.uio.no, tlf: +4722858113

#### Type of project

Student project, Master's thesis

#### Contact information, student

Wei-Ling Peng, weiling82jenny@gmail.com, tlf: 94081087

#### Project period

15.02.2021 - 31.08.2022

#### Status

23.03.2021 - Assessed

#### Assessment (3)

---

#### 23.03.2021 - Assessed

Behandlingen av personopplysninger er vurdert av NSD. Vurderingen er:

We find that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 23.03.2021, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to continue.

We have now registered 31.08.2022 as the new end date for the processing of personal data. The interview guide and information letter are revised. The project will be processing general categories of personal data



until 31.08.22.

#### FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow-up the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Line Raknes Hjellvik

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

#### **23.03.2021 - Assessed**

We find that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 23.03.2021, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to continue.

We have now registered 31.08.2022 as the new end date for the processing of personal data. The interview guide and information letter are revised. The project will be processing general categories of personal data until 31.08.20.22.

#### FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow-up the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Line Raknes Hjellvik

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

#### **04.03.2021 - Assessed**

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 04.03.2021, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

#### SHARE THE PROJECT WITH THE PROJECT LEADER

For students it is mandatory to share the Notification form with the project leader (your supervisor). You can do this by clicking on "Share project" in the upper left corner of the Notification form.

## NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we

---

explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

## TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will be processing general categories of personal data until 31.12.2021.

## LEGAL BASIS

The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing general categories of personal data is therefore consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a).

## PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA

NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

## THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data. We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

## FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

## FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

# Appendix I

## Survey Information-Consent Letter

### Measuring Students' Individual Power Distance and Their Responses to Academic Feedback

Page 1

#### Information-consent letter

**Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Measuring International Students' Individual Power Distance and Their Responses to Academic Feedback"?**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project, which has the main purpose of measuring international students' acknowledgment of social situations around oneself and the corresponding norms, values, and beliefs, and whether these correlate with their behavioral response when receiving feedback. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### Purpose of the project

How a person sees oneself and other people in society or a community can shape one's norms, values, and beliefs. Different perspectives of oneself and others are believed and observed to influence one's actions and behaviors. Hence, this project aims to measure how international students see themselves and other academics in a Norwegian university and whether that correlates with their behavioral response when receiving feedback. This master thesis project is a 30-credit course that lasts for a semester.

#### Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

#### Why are you being asked to participate?

Our population is international students with different levels of power distance studying abroad. Hence, this project is recruiting participants who are international Master's degree students studying in public Norwegian universities. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the participants do not need to be physically present in Norway.

#### What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you fill in an online survey. It will take about 5-10 minutes. The survey includes questions about your power distance and your feedback behavioral response. Your answers will be recorded electronically.

#### Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

#### Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- In connection with the institution responsible for the project, the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the personal data.
- The possibility of identification due to background variables is small and I will store the data on a research server, encrypted.
- Participants will NOT be recognizable in publications.

## What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2022. The personal data will be archived and locked away at the end of the project.

## Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

## What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Oslo, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

## Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- University of Oslo via Rachele Esterhazy ([rachele.esterhazy@jped.uio.no](mailto:rachele.esterhazy@jped.uio.no)), the supervisor, and Wei-Ling Peng ([weilp@student.uv.uio.no](mailto:weilp@student.uv.uio.no)), the student researcher.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Roger Markgraf-Bye ([personvernombud@uio.no](mailto:personvernombud@uio.no))
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader: Wei-Ling Peng

Supervisor: Rachele Esterhazy

## Consent form \*

I have received and understood information about the project “Measuring International Students' Individual Power Distance and Their Responses to Academic Feedback” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

- I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. the 31st of August 2022.

## Appendix J

### Nationality of the Participants

*Sequenced by Count (High - Low)*

Number	Nationality	Count (n =)
1	American	13
2	Chinese	11
3	Iranian	8
4	Taiwanese	7
5	Pakistani	7
6	French	7
7	Indian	6
8	Nepalese	5
9	Canadian	5
10	Nigerian	5
11	Italian	4
12	Russian	3
13	British	3
14	Spanish	3
15	Indonesian	3
16	Vietnamese	3
17	Polish	2
18	Dutch	2
19	Serbian	2
20	Bangladeshi	2
21	Ukrainian	2
22	Mexican	2

23	Greek	1
24	German	1
25	Colombian	1
26	Jordanian	1
27	Irish	1
28	Kazakhstani	1
29	Turkish	1
30	Brazilian	1
31	Croatian	1
32	Zimbabwean	1
33	Ghanaian	1
34	Hong Kong	1
35	Singaporean	1
36	Montenegro	1
37	Australian	1
38	Moroccan	1
39	Japanese	1
40	Austrian	1
41	Kenyan	1
42	Finnish	1
43	Latvian	1