

Feedback in doctoral supervision: taking a sociomaterial approach in literature review

Joanna Tai¹, Margaret Bearman¹, Rachelle Esterhazy², Michael Henderson³, Elizabeth Molloy⁴

1. CRADLE, Deakin University
2. University of Oslo
3. Monash University
4. University of Melbourne

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Studies of doctoral supervision

Four types of studies seen in the literature

- Overbearing supervisors vs student autonomy
- Impact of government and institutional regulation
- Specialised pedagogical practice: research as education
- Post-structural position: supervision as power and reconstitution of academic discourses and structures

(Bastalich 2017)

What about feedback??



What is feedback? What is its purpose? Who is involved? What is involved? Where does it happen?

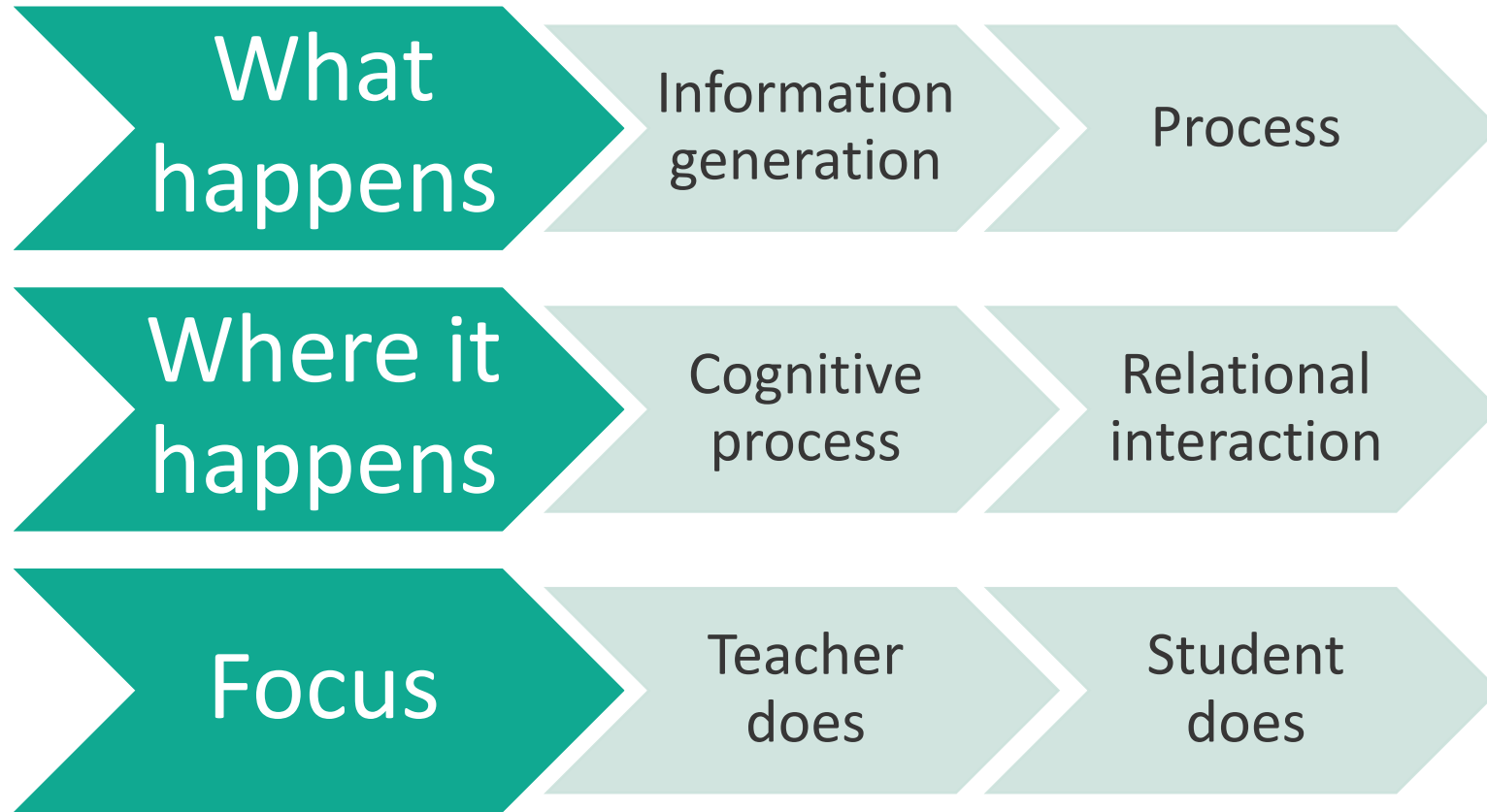


Changing conceptions of feedback

As input	As process (learner focus)	As process (process focus)	As process (outcome focus)
information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance (Hattie & Timperley 2007)	a state or activity of engaging actively with feedback processes, thus emphasizing the fundamental contribution and responsibility of the learner (Winstone et al. 2017)	a dynamic and co-constructive interaction in the context of a safe and mutually respectful relationship to support learning (Ajjawi and Regehr 2018)	processes in which learners make sense of performance-relevant information about their work to improve their learning (Henderson et al 2019)



Changing conceptions of feedback



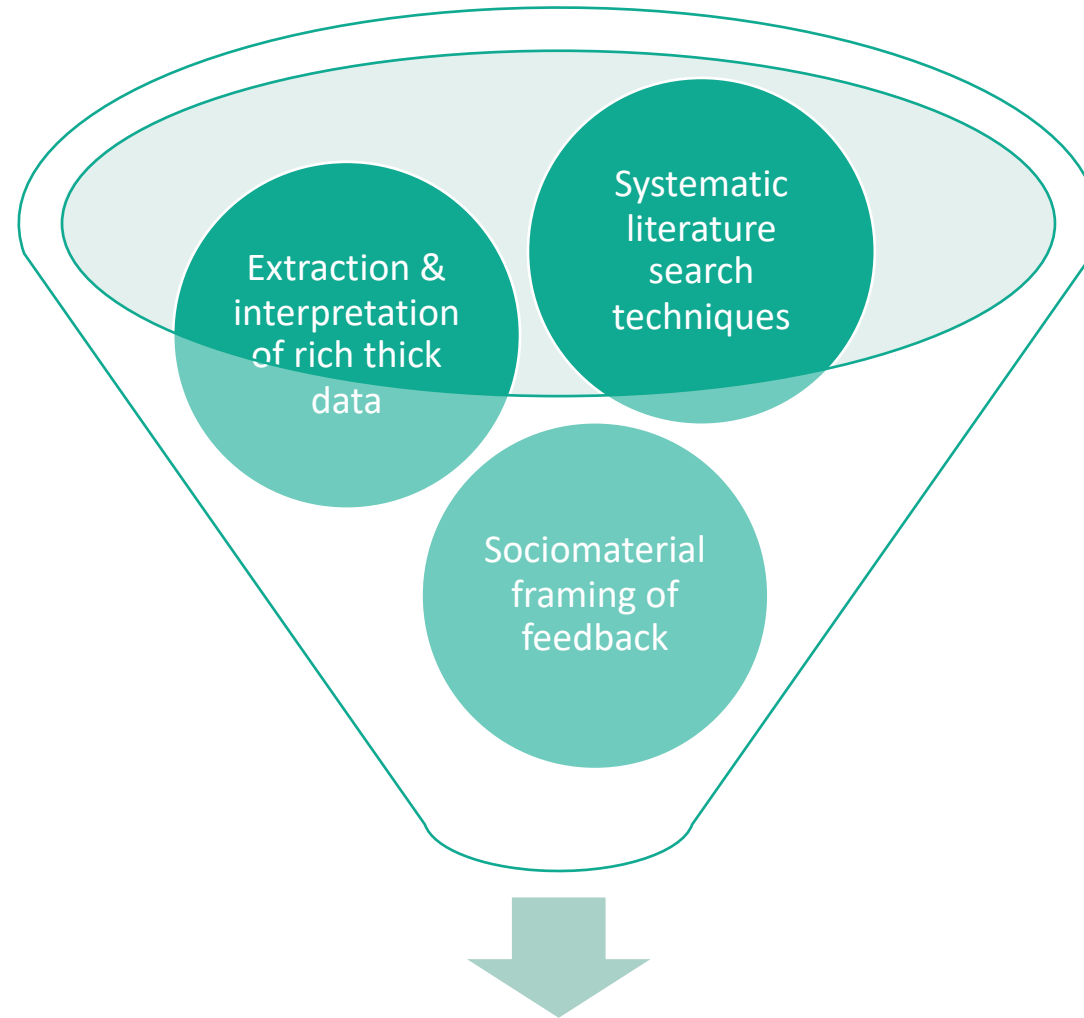
Review aims & methods

- To understand how feedback manifests in PhD supervision
- To synthesise rich descriptions of feedback practices
- To inform feedback pedagogies in PhD supervision

Framework-based synthesis (Dixon-Wood 2011)

Prompting questions to design the framework





A sociomaterial approach to feedback in HDR supervision?



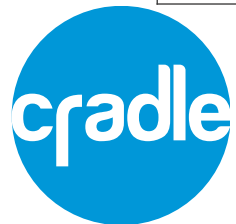
Qualitative synthesis

1. Reflect on what feedback is
2. Discuss framework
3. Extract according to framework
4. Discuss & refine framework
5. More extraction
6. Each researcher conducts synthesis across their own papers according to framework
7. Discuss findings
8. More papers, more synthesis
9. Lead researcher combines syntheses
10. We reflect on findings



The framework

Framework category	Including rich qualitative insights into ...
Social and cultural influences on feedback performances	Disciplinary cultures, PhD context, providing access, tacit criteria, pre-judging, institutional, milestones and standards
Personal perspectives and influences on feedback performances	Prior experiences, including of feedback, traits, conceptions of supervision/ research/ feedback
Materialities of the feedback performances	Written comments, feedback dialogues and discussions, spaces of feedback, technologies of feedback, avoidances/absences of feedback
Interpersonal aspects of the feedback performances	Negotiation, credibility judgements, supervision team dynamics, peers, power
Immediate impact of the feedback performances	Emotions, perceptions, impacts outside candidature, feedback labour
Temporalities, including multiple impacts of the feedback performances	Development of supervisor and candidate, feedback changing over time, longer term aspects of the feedback process



Literature search

Search terms: supervis* AND (PhD OR doctora*) AND ("higher education" or university)

Databases: Scopus, ProQuest Central, Ebscohost (ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Source)

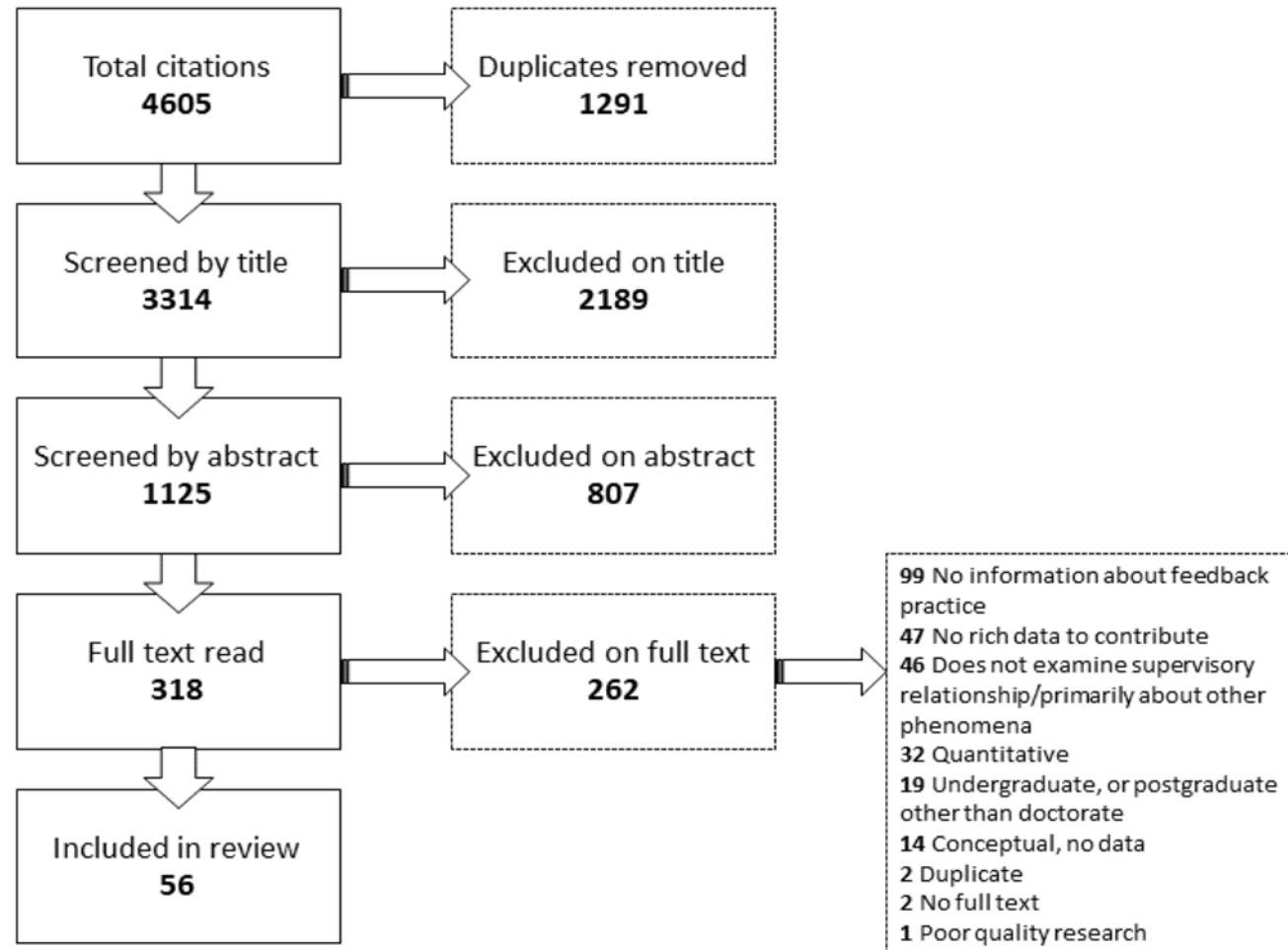
Final search 26 & 27 July 2018

Quality assessment based on rich nature of data

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the supervisory relationship or relationships; • Subject is a research doctorate (not other higher degrees), on any topic, and from any country. • Contains information on feedback; • Supervisors or candidates or documents can be source of empirical work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No information on feedback practices • Does not examine supervisory relationship or is primarily about some other phenomena eg acculturation • On clinical doctorates rather than research doctorates • Undergraduate, general postgraduate studies, masters rather than doctoral studies.
Study design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains rich qualitative data (including case studies); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual – no data • Quantitative studies, e.g. surveys, scale development • No rich data to contribute to the synthesis.
Study characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be in English • Must be peer reviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No full text



Search process



Contexts of feedback practices

National contexts

- Economic-political agendas led to “fast supervision” & completion rather than “independent agency” (Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick 2015, Carter & Kumar 2017)

Academic and disciplinary cultures

- Conventions according to discipline and discourse

Institutional contexts

- Supervisor constellations, progress requirements



How feedback is (not) enacted



“...I printed out the chapter on one side of the paper only and spread it across several tables .. it became clear to her that the chapter lacked a logical structure. This practical strategy had a profound effect on getting Liang to organise her text logically and coherently.”

(Chatterjee & Rosetto, p586)

“I sat there with him, at the keyboard, I don't like pen and paper because I believe that using a red pen on a colleague's work is detrimental.”

(Blicblau 2009, p206)



“I tell my students . . . ‘you must not be offended or shocked, or horrified by the amount of red ink that comes back. It is absolutely and utterly nothing personal’. If you say that to students, they’ll take it on board.”

(Aitchison, Catterall, Ross & Burgin 2012, p440)

“We have a cup of coffee, mull over what he’s been reading, talk about his ideas – basically to embed him in the department and give him a sense of belonging”

(Delamont, Parry & Atkinson 1998, p165)



"We found, without exception, that students refused to comment on their supervisors' performance and many participants, including the supervisors themselves, were reluctant to put sensitive information on a progress report."

(Mewburn, Tokareva, Cuthbert, Sinclair & Barnacle 2014, p517)



Dynamics of feedback relationships

Power



Co-constructed

Beyond the dyad



Emotional
responses



“I always make it clear that anything I say is merely in the nature of advice, it may be good advice which you ignore at your peril but nevertheless if you choose to disagree . . . then that's your responsibility.”

(Acker, Hill & Black 1994, p489)



“...I don’t want to be seen as either defensive or unable to handle criticism. I often feel very frustrated by this because I feel both that she has not put very much effort in reading or understanding my work, but I also often feel ashamed of the quality of my work and overwhelmed with guilt and despair ...”

(Devine & Hunter 2017, p340)



What supervisors and candidates bring to feedback practices

“I could never be the supervisors that I’ve had”

(Robertson 2017, p417)

Student feedback needs intertwined with supervision needs

Supervisors drew on their past experiences (positive and negative)

Supervisors’ interest and expertise on the topic

Less investigation of candidates’ prior experiences of feedback



Feedback as a temporal practice

Student responses to feedback

- Change assumed or taken for granted

Feedback changes over the lifecycle of the candidature

“At first they would offer suggestions, but in the last year would just circle things and expect me to know how to improve”

(Caterall, Aitchison, Ross & Bergin, 2011, p4)



Discussion

Feedback is powerful; power shapes feedback

- Benefits and pitfalls of a single intense relationship
- Mutual negotiation is critical

Pedagogical practices: talk and text

- Written comments closer to traditional notions of feedback
- Discussion more development and less evaluative – ephemerality can be problematic



Conclusions

Taking a sociomaterial perspective on feedback resulted in a different type of literature review

Feedback is a powerful part of doctoral supervision

Function of *talk* is overlooked

Feedback can promote independence over *time*

Feedback is a team activity

Candidates, supervisors, and institutions all have important responsibilities and roles to play



Productive feedback practices

Described within the reviewed literature

Talk with texts

Orienting and inducting into the discipline

Relational models

Multi-purposed commentary on work

Multiple perspectives



Productive feedback practices

Described in higher education literature

Orientation to standards

Goal setting

Developing independence through building evaluative judgement

Establishing expectations

Sadler 2010 , Boud & Molloy 2013, Tai et al 2018



Productive feedback practices

Sociomaterial interpretations

Half-yearly team review of feedback processes attending to shared responsibility, opportunities and outcomes

Closing the loop to supervisors on effectiveness of textual comments



Institutional implications

- Multi-supervisory teams
- Doctoral groups
- Supervisor & candidate education on feedback
- Mechanisms for review of feedback processes



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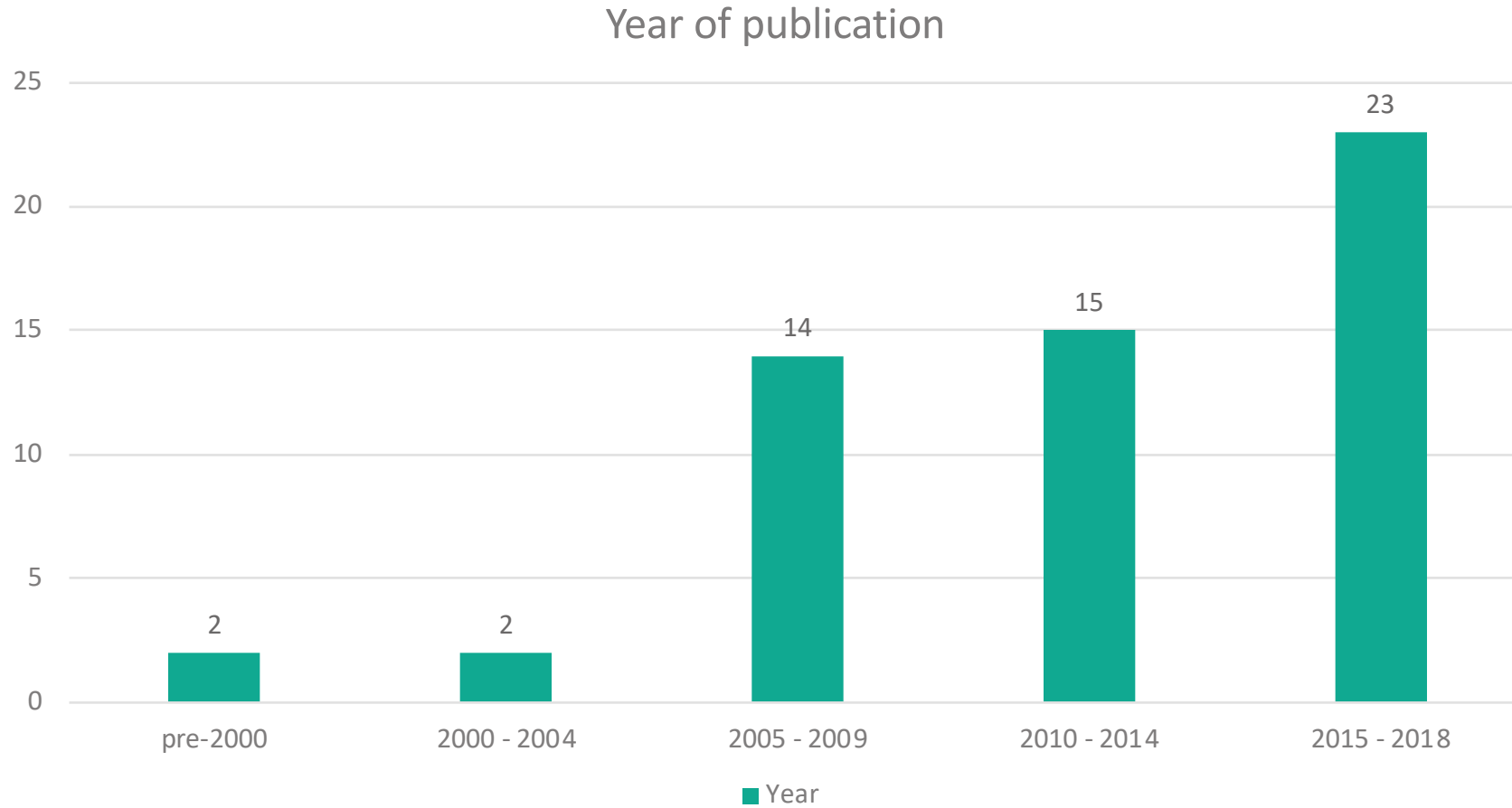
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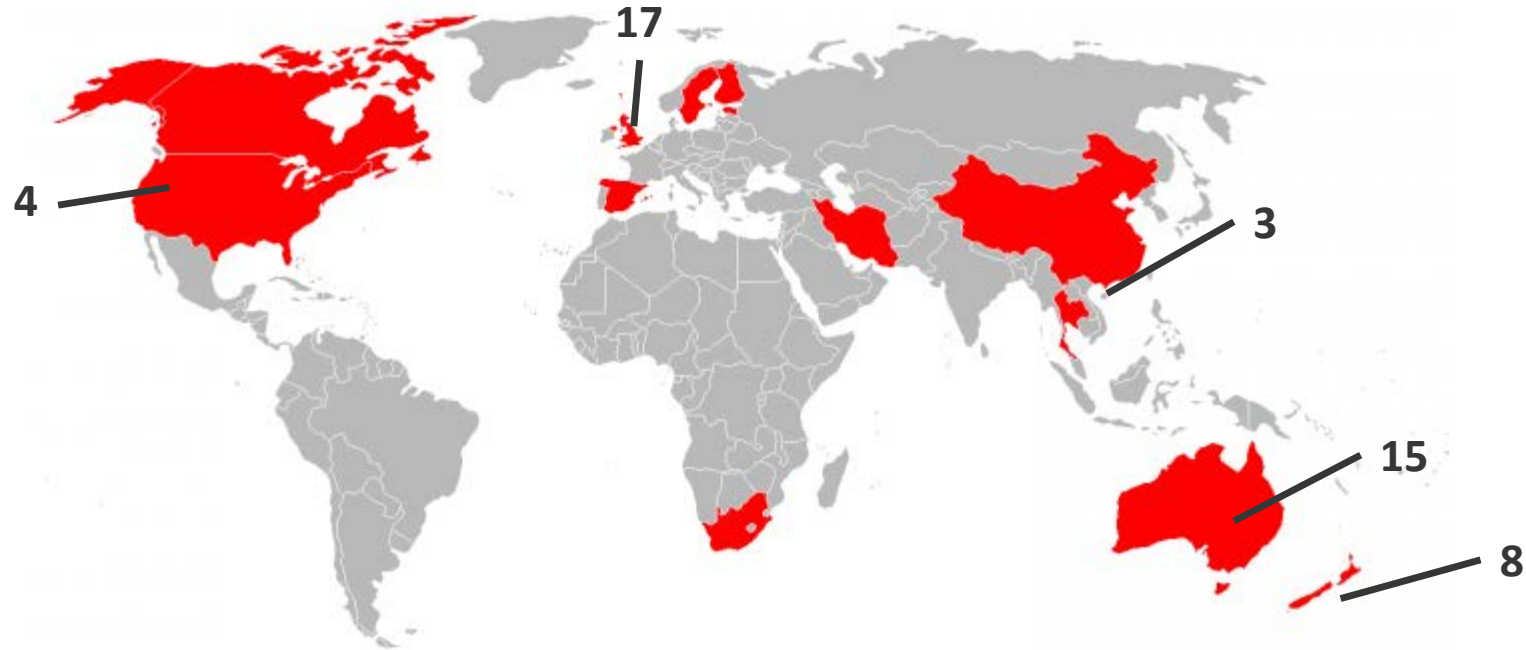
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Paper characteristics



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