

Teachers' written feedback in postgraduate online learning: students' perspectives

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examined students' perspectives on teachers' written formative feedback on their writing assignments in an online learning setting.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach was used to gain insights into the effect of individual written formative feedback on writing assignments from teachers in an online setting. Eight matriculated doctoral students participated, and data collection was conducted using a set of open-ended questions distributed at the end of their program.

Findings – The findings indicated that feedback helped students improve their writing competencies. Meaningful feedback also played a role in communication between students and the teacher, ultimately promoting effective learning and strengthening the students' motivation and self-esteem. Feedback provided beneficial guidance for students with limited experience in writing academic papers.

Practical implications – This study emphasizes the value of feedback during the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students. In a distance learning context where students and teachers are separated, feedback is essential in students' communication with the institution and the teacher.

Social implications – The findings emphasize the importance of teacher feedback. Instead of generic praise, students value feedback that addresses specific issues in their assignments. Giving feedback is time-consuming; however, this work reveals that individual formative written feedback is an effective solution to help distance learning students improve their academic writing skills.

Originality/value – Meaningful feedback enables students to enhance their critical thinking skills, which in turn improves their academic writing abilities. Further work is required to determine the information that should be included in the feedback to enhance learning outcomes.

Keywords Academic assignment, Online learning, Postgraduate program, Written formative feedback, Writing competencies

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This study aims to examine students' perspectives on teachers' written formative feedback on their writing assignments in an online learning setting. A large and growing body of literature has investigated the relationship between the provision of feedback to students and their achievement or outcomes. Theobald and Bellhäuser (2022), for example, reported that feedback is essential to promote students' academic performance. Furthermore, feedback also plays an important role in the learning process. However, in an online and distance learning (ODL) environment, the importance of feedback, particularly from teachers, is often underestimated. Various factors, such as having a large number of students in one class, lead to the situation in which teachers may avoid giving individual formative feedback to students. Notably, Morris *et al.* (2021) argued that formative feedback is a fundamental aspect of learning, as this feedback type offers students valuable benefits that ultimately guide them in making substantial improvements. Overall, feedback is complex and multifaceted in nature, involving treatment, consultation, coaching and assistance (Jensen *et al.*, 2021).



While a growing body of literature recognizes the importance of teachers' feedback in ODL settings, research on feedback in Indonesian postgraduate online learning settings is relatively limited, particularly in terms of students' perspectives. It is worth noting that online learning in Indonesia is being increasingly adopted by universities, particularly in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite this, the small number of universities that initially implemented distance education, including online learning, have not considered teachers' feedback to be a serious matter. Therefore, there is a need to understand the diverse perceptions of teachers' feedback held by postgraduate students in online settings. In this context, exploring the value of feedback as a medium of interaction between students and teachers should generate valuable insights into how postgraduate students perceive and utilize feedback to enhance their writing competence and, thus, improve their learning process ([Attigbe et al., 2023](#)).

Postgraduate students are required to submit written assignments to meet course requirements, and teachers' feedback plays a significant role in this process. In ODL settings where face-to-face interactions are limited or less available, teachers' feedback also functions as a means of communication and interaction between the students and teachers. This is in accordance with the model of student-teacher interaction in a distance learning context proposed by [Moore \(1994\)](#). Providing whole-class feedback has the potential to be less time-consuming and effortful for teachers; yet, this may lead to students being unwilling to engage with feedback. A single-feedback design is unlikely to be effective for all students ([Henderson et al., 2019a, b](#)). As a result, teachers' feedback must be provided individually to address the specific types of issues relevant to each student. Currently, further research on feedback in the context of online learning is necessary to understand its integral role in the learning process. Additionally, research on feedback would uncover new issues that previous studies have not fully identified. This study addresses an under-researched area, particularly in the Indonesian context, and makes a significant contribution to the understanding of feedback in ODL postgraduate programs and its implications for achieving meaningful learning.

2. Earlier studies on written feedback

Feedback has received considerable attention due to its nature and relevance to the teaching and learning process. [Wisniewski et al. \(2020\)](#) argued that the focus of feedback is on the results and the process, and this represents both an interesting and thought-provoking statement. It could be argued that teachers should enhance their knowledge and understanding of feedback to promote student engagement ([Zheng et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, teachers are also required to have the knowledge, skills and power to promote feedback as a tool for the teaching and learning process. In other words, teachers must have a sufficient level of feedback literacy ([Carless and Winstone, 2020](#)). Indeed, with useful feedback, students will be actively engaged in the process, which in turn will contribute to their competency development. Furthermore, students themselves must have a thorough understanding of feedback and its role in learning. As noted by [Carless and Winstone \(2020\)](#), both teachers and students are responsible for utilizing feedback to promote effective learning.

However, one issue with feedback is that providing thorough feedback is time-consuming for teachers ([Henderson et al., 2019b](#); [Jensen et al., 2021](#); [Jurs and Špehte, 2021](#)). As reported by [Mohammad and Kamran \(2023\)](#), providing timely feedback for students at distance teaching universities is especially challenging, and this issue could be related to three factors. Firstly, the class sizes are usually large in distance learning contexts. Secondly, students in these contexts often have different skill levels, meaning teachers must spend more time providing feedback. Finally, overwhelming teacher workloads make it challenging for them to provide individualized feedback. Concurrently, [Tanis \(2020\)](#) reported that a lack of feedback in an online learning setting had a negative impact on students' learning experiences, and prior to this, [Han and Hyland \(2019\)](#) demonstrated that written feedback from teachers could affect students' feelings and emotions. Isolation is a significant challenge faced by distance learning students, as students may be unable to find immediate assistance when encountering a

problem. Moreover, [Molin et al. \(2020\)](#) found that feedback promoted students' metacognition and motivation, which are skills that have long been associated with student learning success. A recent study conducted by [Attigbo et al. \(2023\)](#) also confirmed that feedback was positively correlated with students' academic achievement. Therefore, overall, feedback requires considerable attention from all parties in order for students to achieve effective learning outcomes.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated feedback and its role in promoting effective learning. Studies over the past three years, especially those after the COVID-19 outbreak, have provided important information on feedback in online learning settings. However, research on feedback in online learning settings has predominantly focused on learning foreign languages as part of undergraduate and high school programs. Conversely, research regarding feedback for thesis writing in doctoral degree programs is limited. Therefore, this study makes several contributions to the current literature.

Unlike traditional university students, learners have limited time and opportunities to meet their teachers. Therefore, feedback becomes the only means of interaction between the teacher and students. Indeed, feedback is a valuable method for enabling teachers and students to communicate and interact with each other ([Nyathi and Sibanda, 2023](#); [Obilor, 2019](#)). The absence of physical contact between teachers and students in online learning environments might lead to poor academic outcomes. Indeed, [Tanis \(2020\)](#) highlighted that personal interaction enhances the effectiveness of online learning, and another study highlighted that the presence of a teacher in an online learning context is vital to establishing meaningful learning ([Nyathi and Sibanda, 2023](#)). Furthermore, being separated from the teacher and other students in online learning settings may lead students to drop out of their courses ([Phirangee and Malec, 2019](#)). Therefore, the presence of feedback from teachers becomes ever more urgent in online learning settings. [Wani et al. \(2023\)](#) maintained that teacher feedback is a pedagogic practice that promotes a supportive learning environment, but to create meaningful feedback, both teachers and students must be actively engaged ([Espasa et al., 2022](#)).

[Jurs and Špehte \(2021\)](#) highlighted that feedback plays different roles for traditional and distance-learning university students. Specifically, in traditional learning contexts, in addition to feedback from teachers, students benefit from feedback from peers, since they have opportunities to engage in active learning and social interaction ([Alharbi and Alqefari, 2022](#)). In contrast, providing meaningful feedback in distance learning contexts is challenging, as students may be unable to understand the written feedback from the teachers clearly, and their access to peers is considerably limited. Therefore, since it would be challenging to ask for confirmation and clarification on feedback from teachers and peers, the feedback students receive in online learning contexts may be misleading and result in further confusion ([Zheng et al., 2020](#)). [Yeung and Yau \(2022\)](#) reported that distance learning students expect to have timely and direct access to the teachers in order to receive meaningful feedback. It is worth noting that for feedback to be meaningful, it should be unambiguous, encouraging, timely and constructive ([Jurs and Špehte, 2021](#)). [Hounsell \(2021\)](#) emphasized that feedback should also enable students to engage with the comments given. In a recent article, [Carless and Winstone \(2020\)](#) emphasized that feedback processes are challenging, and consequently, feedback should concern all parties involved in the learning process.

3. Objectives

The specific objective of this study was to examine the value of written formative feedback given by a teacher to students in an online learning setting from the students' perspectives. The following research questions were designed to gain specific descriptions of meaningful feedback from students' perspectives.

- (1) How do the students learn from the feedback they receive?
- (2) What are the students' affective dispositions toward the feedback they receive?

(3) How does the feedback given meet the students' expectations?

(4) What are the types of feedback that students prefer?

4. Method

The research setting was an Indonesian distance teaching university, and the participants were doctoral degree program students who had taken the advanced reading and writing course. For the purposes of reporting, information related to the institution and participants was anonymized (Lune and Berg, 2017). The course was delivered through four synchronous online sessions, each lasting for four hours held on Sundays. It is important to note that the course was a prerequisite for studying for a doctoral degree program. Therefore, students were required to pass the course, as otherwise, they would be excluded from the program. At the end of the online sessions, they had to submit an academic paper in Indonesian or English. Of the eight papers submitted, only one was written in English. As a part of the learning process, the teacher gave individual formative feedback and added review comments on the papers submitted by the students using the comments tracking function in Microsoft Word. The comments were given in Indonesian, except for the assignments written in English. In addition, the teacher provided a descriptive commentary at the end of the papers or in the comments box in the online tutorial application. These comments were used to provide more detailed information on the strengths and weaknesses of the work so that students could improve their planning, writing and reviewing skills.

The students had the opportunity to edit their papers based on the feedback given and resubmit two times before the assignment's due date. In cases where students failed to understand the feedback, they could send messages to the teacher using the chat facility in the online tutorial application, email or WhatsApp. Furthermore, the students could also send their papers to the teacher through email or WhatsApp if they wanted to have the papers reviewed before the second submission. This initiative aimed to reduce errors and ensure that the submitted papers fulfilled the requirements, as the students were only allowed to submit assignments twice. Accordingly, students had easy access to their teacher for meaningful two-way communication. This communication method was beneficial because the individuals differed in their ability to understand the feedback, which could lead to misunderstandings.

Importantly, the feedback given was not generic. Instead, it was based on the specific academic assignment the students submitted, and each student received an individualized written one. The feedback provided was in the form of corrections, directions and confirmation. Specifically, corrective feedback is aimed at addressing errors, directive feedback aims to provide advice on addressing the errors and confirmatory feedback involves asking for clarification. The students could respond to this confirmatory feedback when resubmitting the assignments or they could communicate with their teacher by email. Moreover, the students also benefited from some guidance provided in the form of summative comments given on the last page of the assignments. These comments provided insights into the strengths of the work and areas for improvement, and they also aimed to encourage the students to adjust their approach, develop self-regulated learning skills and build help-seeking behavior.

The following example illustrates the feedback provided to a student who made errors on the assignment. The corrective feedback highlights the mistakes and underlines the citation errors. The confirmatory feedback aims to confirm whether the student used a reference management tool. Finally, the directive feedback instructs the student to use a reference management tool in the future. The comment also directs the student to look at the manual available in the provided link in order to understand how to use the referencing manager. These comments were originally written in Indonesian and translated into English for publication purposes.

Corrective feedback:

The way you wrote in-text citations is incorrect.

Confirmatory feedback:

It seemed that you did not use a referencing tool or referencing manager. This tool helps you organize and format references in your writing. Additionally, it minimizes mistakes and errors while also speeding up your writing.

Directive feedback:

Have you ever tried Mendeley Referencing Manager? If you have not, you can download it through the following link:

www.mendeley.com

To use it, please watch the video linked below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzFHGFnAM2Q&t=15s>

Directive feedback:

In the next submission, make sure you have used a referencing manager. Ask your friends or you can watch the video for further information about Mendeley Referencing Manager.

By employing a qualitative mode of inquiry, this study aimed to examine the value of written formative feedback in improving students' writing skills. A set of open-ended questions was distributed to the students at the end of the session, and these were designed to allow the students to summarize their experiences, thoughts and perspectives on the written feedback received from the teacher. Adopting the research method from Neuman (2006), the current study employed a qualitative method with open-ended questions for three main reasons. Firstly, open-ended questions enabled gathering detailed information on the students' experiences, preferences and perceptions of teachers' feedback without a predetermined set of answer choices. Secondly, open-ended questions enabled the participants to share their experiences and opinions about teachers' feedback in their own words. Thirdly, open-ended questions allowed the participants to recall their experiences and feelings when answering the questionnaire, making the data more comprehensive and accurate.

4.1 Research participants

About 12 matriculated online doctoral students enrolled in an advanced reading and writing course were invited to participate. Participation in the study was elective, and overall, eight students (five males and three females) completed the survey. In terms of student characteristics, two of them were aged between 25 and 35 years old, two were between 36 and 46 years old and four were over 46 years old. All participants were employed in different types of occupations in which academic reading and writing skills were not essential. In addition, all the participants had a gap greater than five years between their master's and doctoral degrees.

4.2 Data collection procedures

Prior to the study, the students were provided with information related to confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation. The study was conducted using a survey with open-ended questions. The link to the survey was distributed at the end of the session using Microsoft Forms. The survey comprised nine open-ended questions, including an additional question to gather essential information beyond the existing questions. Before starting the data collection process, the survey was piloted with three non-participating students. The results showed that, on average, they needed 10 min to complete the survey, and the students reported that the questions were clear and understandable. When the survey was implemented for the actual data collection, the average time participants spent completing the survey was 9.5 min.

4.3 Data analysis

The collected data was examined closely to extract important information. Three main procedures were used to analyze the data, including describing, classifying and interpreting the data (Guthrie, 2010). Specifically, keywords, phrases, clauses and sentences the participants

wrote were highlighted for analysis, coded, pooled under certain criteria, and labeled “Theme 1, Theme 2, etc.” Afterward, the themes were analyzed. As suggested by [Creswell and Clark \(2011\)](#), intercoder reliability was also conducted to ensure the validity of the analysis. The selected comments from the students have been translated into English for reporting purposes.

5. Findings and discussion

The aim of this study was to explore students’ perspectives on the feedback they receive from teachers in an online learning setting. In general, the current study suggests that feedback should be beneficial if it is meaningful, specific and motivating. In addition, this study agrees with the results of [Kamal and Illiyan \(2021\)](#), suggesting that feedback must be provided promptly. The following subsections present the study’s findings based on the research questions.

5.1 Impact of feedback on student learning

All the students expressed that the feedback helped them improve their writing skills and enabled them to improve their understanding of grammar, registers and punctuation, as well as their academic writing styles. As previously mentioned, the students’ occupations did not require them to possess academic writing skills, meaning writing an academic paper was a serious challenge for them. The given feedback enabled the students to locate their mistakes, and the comments provided stimulated them to seek more information, which in turn was likely to have led to improvements. The students acknowledged that the feedback helped them improve their critical writing skills and made them aware of their weaknesses. Therefore, it appears that feedback indeed serves as a channel of communication between students and the teacher ([Wani et al., 2023](#)), and it could be argued that feedback is an essential component of learning that contributes to making improvements ([Alharbi and Alqefari, 2022](#); [Attigbe et al., 2023](#)). This finding suggests that meaningful teacher feedback gives students a chance to build metacognitive awareness. It is encouraging to compare this finding with that found by [Molin et al. \(2020\)](#), who found that metacognition was positively correlated with student metacognition. An example of a student’s comment related to the impact of feedback on student learning is as follows:

The feedback provided helped me identify the errors and inappropriateness of the submitted paper and make some improvements. (Female)

Recurring issues for the students that emerged from this study were related to a lack of understanding of how to construct an academic paper (grouped under the academic writing competence theme) and use academic language (grouped under the academic language proficiency theme). These themes were mainly related to the students’ occupations, which did not require them to write academic papers. Additionally, there was a significant time gap between the students completing their master’s degrees and undertaking the present doctoral program, so they could not recall what they had learned in their master’s programs.

5.1.1 Academic writing competency. Of the eight students, one was a doctoral degree graduate and had published books and journal articles. Consequently, this student was more experienced and knowledgeable about academic writing. In contrast, seven students stated that they had no experience with academic writing except when they were in their master’s degree programs. The analysis revealed that the students faced two significant issues in terms of completing academic writing assignments. Firstly, seven students mentioned that they lacked knowledge about academic writing styles, including the format and organization of academic pieces. Knowledge of academic writing and awareness of academic writing conventions and norms were relatively limited. For instance, the students were unable to use in-text citations correctly or construct a bibliography. Secondly, the students found it challenging to formulate a research topic, making it difficult to develop a purposeful direction and focus for their

research. As a result, the students valued the teacher's feedback, which helped them build a better understanding of the research topic.

Specifically, individual written feedback that addressed mistakes and inappropriateness in their writing was favored by the students. In addition, supplementary comments that trigger critical thinking skills benefit students. It is important to remember that feedback is not only merely a means to highlight mistakes but also to challenge students' ideas. Simultaneously, in the feedback received, reading resources were provided to help the students improve their understanding of the highlighted issues. This finding is consistent with that of [Henderson et al. \(2019a\)](#), who suggested that feedback should be practical, offering students guidance on how to enhance their performance effectively. All students considered that feedback tailored to the two significant issues above was meaningful. The following two comments from the students illustrate their views about the impact of feedback on improving their academic writing competency:

I got a lot of benefits from the feedback given. It helped me identify my weaknesses in my assignments because I don't know how to write an academic paper, including how to conduct research and select the research methodology. (Male)

The feedback provided developed my critical thinking. (Female)

These findings are consistent with those of [Ion et al. \(2019\)](#), who argued that feedback should be to guide and provide suggestions to students for improvement. In summary, feedback is most meaningful when it addresses specific issues faced by the students. Meaningful feedback must focus on helping students to achieve their academic potential and provide direction to allow them to improve their knowledge and critical thinking. Overall, the main goal of feedback should be to promote improvements.

5.1.2 Academic language proficiency. The data in this work suggest a connection between academic writing skills and academic language proficiency. Indeed, the seven students not accustomed to writing academic papers found it challenging to complete the assignments due to three fundamental issues. Firstly, most students were unfamiliar with the registers, phrases and terminologies for academic writing, and some colloquial language was found in their assignments. Secondly, the students also experienced grammar, punctuation and capitalization issues. However, they did not consider these issues a significant problem. This may have happened due to the students not understanding the rules in academic writing and lacking academic vocabulary and diction knowledge. Thirdly, the students were unable to connect their ideas between paragraphs and their lack of use of cohesive devices prevented the paragraphs from being concise and clear. Specifically, there were no clear idea continuities between paragraphs, which led to the writing being made incoherent and illogical.

As responses to the issues above, feedback was provided directly in the texts, allowing the students to identify the issues more easily. To encourage and motivate students, further reading resources were provided so that the students could find more information about the highlighted issues and, thus, refine and elaborate their writing and critical thinking skills. This practice shows that feedback plays an essential pedagogical strategy that, in this case, encourages the creation of two-way communication between students and the teacher ([Wani et al., 2023](#)). Student comments confirm that feedback is generally viewed as essential information that helps enhance performance on a given task ([Wisniewski et al., 2020](#)). One student commented as follows:

The feedback pointed out the mistakes so that I could easily correct them. I am happy with the feedback provided. (Female)

This study suggests that effective academic writing training is an essential first step in a doctoral degree program. Equally important, the training materials should cover the development of language proficiency and critical thinking skills. Finally, the training method should be designed to consider the nature of distance learning. For example, the training should be delivered

remotely but, concurrently, should maintain positive and constructive engagement between the students and the teacher.

5.2 Students' attitude toward feedback

The findings show that all students had profoundly positive attitudes toward the feedback they received. The students reported that the individual written feedback enabled them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, triggered them to learn, and ultimately promoted help-seeking, problem-solving and self-efficacy. In addition, a student commented that the feedback enhanced their learning management skills, similar to the findings reported by [Molin et al. \(2020\)](#). The findings also showed that feedback had a significant impact on learning progress. Examples of comments related to students' disposition toward the feedback are as follows:

It made me realize that the assignment I sent was an incomplete draft and not the final one. (Male).

At first, I was unhappy because the score was low. There were so many mistakes and critical comments. Thankfully, the feedback helped me and guided me to make the necessary revisions. The compliments on my efforts were relieving. (Female).

This study confirms that feedback is an essential element of successful learning. Superficial feedback and vague or indefinite advice may not support students' learning and development. Therefore, feedback must be meaningful. Indeed, this study found that meaningful feedback established a beneficial dialogue between the teacher and students, which subsequently promoted learning ([Nyathi and Sibanda, 2023](#)). This finding emphasizes that feedback is an essential component of the learning process. In addition, the findings reported here suggest that feedback triggered students to learn and strive for potential improvements, in line with the results of a study conducted by [Voelkel et al. \(2020\)](#). Although good-quality and individualized feedback has the potential to have a significant impact on learning, providing this feedback is time-consuming. However, students expect to capitalize on receiving good-quality feedback from their teachers, and thus, teachers should develop the ability to deliver effective feedback in order to promote effective learning. In addition to this, students should attempt to cultivate quality feedback in order to enhance their learning and achievement. Overall, both teachers and students must understand the importance of feedback and fulfill their respective roles in this context ([Han and Hyland, 2019](#)).

The current study agrees with the results of a previous study by [Ion et al. \(2019\)](#), which showed that feedback promoted active learning, enhanced students' responsibility and commitment to the assignment and developed assertiveness skills. Yet, their work found that in-text correction feedback was not useful, as it solely focused on mistakes and errors.

5.3 Students' expectations for feedback

The majority of the students agreed that the feedback they received matched their expectations. Although the feedback followed corrective, directive and confirmatory principles, one student wrote that feedback should directly provide corrections and examples rather than asking students to read further explanations in certain resources. This finding was also reported by [Alharbi and Alqefari \(2022\)](#). The student's comment was as follows:

The feedback should focus on the mistakes I made and give corrections. (Female).

Interestingly, the student with experience in writing academic papers expected to receive detailed feedback, even though their assignments had fulfilled the criteria. Providing feedback for students with diverse competencies and backgrounds is practically challenging ([Carless and Winstone, 2020](#)). A student made the following comment:

(The feedback was) less appropriate because I did not receive feedback for my second submission. The result of the first submission was good (passed). I resubmitted the assignment because I made some revisions based on the feedback, but I did not receive further feedback. (Male).

This finding indicates that students reasonably expect to receive feedback regardless of the level of their assignments. This finding reaffirms that feedback is an important element of learning that encourages dialogue between a teacher and their students and, thus, enables the students to engage in effective learning (Jurs and Špehte, 2021).

5.4 Students' preference for feedback

In addition to favoring feedback that highlighted mistakes and made recommendations, the students also expressed that feedback should motivate their interest in studying and show appreciation for their work. This finding is consistent with that of Wisniewski *et al.* (2020), who found that corrective feedback was an effective tool to promote effective learning, and Henderson *et al.* (2019b), who found that teachers' positive comments increased student motivation to pay attention to the given feedback. Interestingly, feedback influences students' perceptions, feelings and emotions (Han and Hyland, 2019), and students highly value positive and constructive feedback. In contrast, negative and superficial feedback may demotivate students (Wisniewski *et al.*, 2020). In this context, three different students gave the following comments:

I liked the feedback if it complimented my assignment, although there were many mistakes. (Male).

I made a lot of mistakes, and there were many comments. I felt down. (Male)

I like constructive criticism, and at the same time, it encourages me to make improvements. (Male).

These results reflect those of Voelkel *et al.* (2020), who also found that students valued honest and constructive feedback. The current study would agree with Wisniewski *et al.* (2020), who emphasized that effective feedback consisted of comprehensive information. In addition, feedback must be meaningful and contribute to effective improvement (Henderson *et al.*, 2019b) as well as be applicable (Henderson *et al.*, 2019a, b). Further analysis found that students were satisfied when the teacher examined the assignments thoroughly and marked the mistakes when necessary. However, it must be acknowledged that providing individual formative feedback is challenging (Carless and Winstone, 2020). For example, one student made the following comment:

The teacher read the assignments thoroughly and examined them sentence-by-sentence critically and carefully. He marked the mistakes and commented on them. (Male). Carless and Winstone (2020)

6. Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the value of written formative feedback given by a teacher to students in an online learning setting from the students' perspectives. The current study confirms and highlights the strategic function of feedback in promoting successful learning, particularly in an online learning context. Indeed, feedback plays a significant role in the dialogue between students and teachers and stimulates the development of self-evaluation and help-seeking. The current study also reaffirms the findings of previous research suggesting that feedback is an essential learning tool in the learning process.

The study identified that students have varied attitudes toward feedback from their teacher. However, the majority of the comments on the feedback were positive. Although a few students valued feedback that addressed mistakes directly and offered revisions, the majority of students preferred feedback that not only addressed the mistakes but also provided further explanations. These findings suggest that there is no single feedback approach that meets the needs of all students. Instead, feedback must be unique and individualized and is most meaningful when it is clear, comprehensive and focused on the specific issues in the work.

Notably, this study identified that meaningful feedback has three key outcomes. Firstly, meaningful feedback creates an opportunity for improvement, and consequently, it allows for

useful interactions between the teacher and students. In this case, the interactions were conducted as a written dialogue. Secondly, feedback helps students develop critical self-evaluation skills, thus facilitating them to identify mistakes and analyze, interpret and evaluate the issues. Thirdly, meaningful feedback promotes motivation and self-esteem. Meaningful feedback is the most useful in giving support and guidance and helping students to make some potential improvements.

The current study has potential limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the students knew that the answers they provided on the online form were for research purposes. The students seemed reluctant to provide much information about their experiences and viewpoints regarding the feedback they received. Although the students were informed that their comments would be confidential, they may have been uncomfortable providing genuine information. Secondly, some students provided normative information, whereas initially, it was expected that all of the students would provide more contextual information and critical reflection. Although it must be acknowledged that this study has some limitations, the current study offers valuable insights into the most effective strategies for providing individual written feedback.

Further efforts are required to explore the provision of feedback in online settings rigorously. This study confirms Jensen *et al.*'s (2021) suggestion that students' improvements should be examined in relation to feedback. For instance, a future study could focus on students' responses to feedback from one draft to the next. Additionally, students and teachers could develop a progression improvement plan, which could then be used for further analysis. Finally, to develop a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of how feedback plays a crucial role in the learning process, future work should also focus on exploring teacher feedback literacy (Lee, 2021).

An implication of the findings of this study is the possibility that students take an academic writing course to support postgraduate-level academic writing skills. The course may be provided as an online self-study pack that enables students to learn at their own pace and focus on the topics that interest them most. Teacher presence in this self-study pack is almost certainly required to build a supportive learning environment. Equally important, both teacher and students should have the same perception of feedback (Henderson *et al.*, 2019b). Therefore, the teacher and students should have feedback literacy so that they focus on their roles and responsibilities to promote effective learning (Carless and Winstone, 2020).

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