

Supporting ESL writing in open and distance learning through video-based feedback: a Humanistic Learning Presence approach

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines how video-based feedback supports narrative writing development and emotional engagement amongst adult English as a second language (ESL) learners in open and distance learning (ODL) environments. It also introduces the Humanistic Learning Presence (HLP) framework as an emerging conceptual lens for understanding the cognitive, emotional and relational dimensions of feedback in online learning contexts.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative case study was conducted with eight adult ESL learners enrolled in a fully online creative writing course at a Malaysian open university. The study implemented a two-cycle feedback intervention combining synchronous video conferencing (via Microsoft Teams) and asynchronous screencast feedback (via ScreenPal). Data were collected through narrative writing tasks, semi-structured interviews and reflective journals and were analysed using thematic analysis and comparative cross-draft textual analysis.

Findings – Video-based feedback supported improvements in narrative coherence, reflective depth and linguistic expression. Participants also reported enhanced perceptions of instructor presence, increased affective trust and sustained engagement in revision activities. Overall, feedback in ODL contexts functioned as a multimodal and relational process in which tone, interaction and delivery shaped how feedback was interpreted, internalised and enacted.

Originality/value – This study contributes to research on multimodal feedback in ESL ODL contexts by demonstrating how video-based feedback supports both writing development and emotional engagement. The HLP framework conceptualises feedback as an integrated process involving emotional attunement, cognitive scaffolding and relational dialogue. As a small-scale exploratory study, the framework is proposed as a provisional model requiring further empirical validation.

Keywords Video-based feedback, Humanistic Learning Presence, Open and distance learning, ESL writing, Multimodal feedback, Emotional engagement

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Open and distance learning (ODL) has become an increasingly important mode of higher education delivery, supported by learning management systems, video conferencing platforms and asynchronous learning technologies. These developments have expanded access and flexibility by enabling learners to participate in higher education across diverse locations,

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schedules and personal circumstances (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2020; Camilleri and Camilleri, 2022). However, the effectiveness of ODL depends not only on technological access but also on the quality of pedagogical interaction, instructional design, teacher presence and learner support in digitally mediated environments (Koh and Kan, 2021; Rapanta *et al.*, 2020). This is particularly important for learners who rely on online interaction and feedback as their primary source of academic guidance.

In Malaysian higher education, ODL has become a key pathway for flexible access to tertiary education, particularly for learners balancing work, family and location-related constraints (Anandan *et al.*, 2025; Bhandigadi *et al.*, 2021). In online English as a second language (ESL) writing contexts, these demands are often intensified as learners typically require sustained support to develop linguistic accuracy, rhetorical organisation, confidence and revision skills. Narrative writing presents an additional challenge as learners must express personal experience, emotion, memory and voice in a second language (Din Eak and Annamalai, 2025b; Hanauer, 2012). Feedback in ESL ODL writing contexts, therefore, must support not only textual improvement but also learner confidence, engagement and willingness to revise.

Research on second language writing feedback has traditionally focussed on written corrective feedback and grammatical accuracy, reflecting a long-standing emphasis on error correction in language learning (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2012). Whilst corrective feedback remains important, recent scholarship increasingly conceptualises feedback as a dialogic, learner-centred and participatory process rather than a unidirectional transmission of corrective information (Ajawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Boud, 2018; Carless and Winstone, 2023). From this perspective, feedback is most effective when learners are able to interpret, internalise and act upon it during revision. In online learning environments, this interpretive process is shaped by the relational and emotional quality of feedback interaction, particularly where physical separation reduces opportunities for immediacy, clarification and interpersonal connection (Moore, 1993; Rapanta *et al.*, 2020).

Video-based feedback has emerged as a promising approach to addressing these pedagogical demands. Unlike conventional written comments, video-based and screencast feedback integrate verbal explanation, visual demonstration, tone of voice, pacing, screen annotation and, where applicable, facial expression and gesture. Drawing on Mayer's (2021) cognitive theory of multimedia learning, such feedback may support learners by integrating verbal and visual information, thereby enhancing clarity during revision. Empirical studies suggest that video-based and screencast feedback can improve feedback clarity, personalisation, learner engagement, revision processes and perceptions of instructor support in online learning and writing contexts (Ari and Arslan-Ari, 2022; Ebadi and Dadgar, 2024; Gould and Day, 2025; Henderson and Phillips, 2015). However, the value of video feedback should not be understood solely in terms of delivery mode or technological affordance as its pedagogical effectiveness also depends on the extent to which learners experience feedback as supportive, interpretable and relationally meaningful.

Despite growing interest in video-based and multimodal feedback, existing studies have tended to focus on learner perceptions, feedback preferences, feedback quality and writing performance outcomes (Bahula and Kay, 2021; Din Eak and Annamalai, 2025a; Ebadi and Dadgar, 2024). Less attention has been given to how adult ESL learners in ODL contexts experience video-based feedback as a relational, dialogic and emotionally supportive process during narrative writing revision. This gap is significant because narrative writing requires learners to negotiate accuracy, coherence, personal meaning, emotion and voice, while ODL environments require feedback practices that sustain guidance and connection at a distance.

To address this gap, the present study examines how video-based feedback supports the development of narrative writing and emotional engagement amongst adult ESL learners in a Malaysian ODL environment. The study is guided by the Humanistic Learning Presence (HLP) framework, an emerging conceptual lens that conceptualises feedback as a multidimensional process involving cognitive scaffolding, emotional attunement and

relational dialogue in online learning contexts. In this study, emotional attunement refers to the instructor's sensitivity to learners' affective needs through a supportive tone, empathetic communication, affirming feedback and responsiveness during feedback interactions.

This study contributes to ESL writing feedback and ODL research in three inter-related ways. First, it extends feedback scholarship beyond correction and textual revision by examining learners' emotional and relational experiences of feedback. Second, it contributes to online learning research by demonstrating how video-based feedback can support instructor presence, learner engagement and sustained guidance in physically separated learning environments. Third, it introduces the HLP framework as a provisional conceptual lens for understanding feedback as a humanistic learning encounter that integrates cognitive, emotional and relational dimensions.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How does video-based feedback support adult ESL learners' narrative writing development in an ODL context?
- (2) How do adult ESL learners perceive the role of video-based feedback in shaping emotional engagement and relational presence during the writing process?

2. Literature review

2.1 Feedback in ESL writing development in ODL contexts

Feedback is widely recognised as a central driver of ESL writing development, supporting learners in identifying linguistic and rhetorical gaps, refining meaning and improving textual control. Early second language writing research largely conceptualised feedback as written corrective input focussed on error identification and grammatical accuracy (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2012). While this perspective remains pedagogically valuable, it has been increasingly critiqued for positioning learners as passive recipients of correction rather than active constructors of meaning.

Contemporary scholarship reframes feedback as a dialogic and socially situated process in which effectiveness depends on learner interpretation, engagement and uptake (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Boud, 2018; Carless and Winstone, 2023). Feedback in second language writing is also shaped by interpersonal and affective dimensions, where tone, stance and relational positioning influence how feedback is interpreted and acted upon. Hyland and Hyland (2019) emphasise that feedback is not merely informational but also socially and emotionally situated, highlighting the role of teacher–student interaction in shaping learner uptake and engagement. From this perspective, the central challenge in feedback is no longer the provision of information but its transformation into meaningful revision.

In ODL contexts, this challenge is intensified due to reduced real-time interaction and increased reliance on asynchronous feedback. Empirical studies indicate that while detailed feedback may enhance understanding, it can also lead to cognitive overload if not carefully structured and prioritised (Pachuashvili, 2024; Vellanki, 2024). This highlights a pedagogical tension in ODL writing instruction: Feedback must be sufficiently detailed to support learning yet sufficiently focussed to remain useable.

A further limitation in the literature is the fragmented treatment of feedback functions. Cognitive support (accuracy and structure) and affective support (motivation and encouragement) are often treated separately, despite evidence that these dimensions are interdependent in online writing development. In addition, genre-based scaffolding has been shown to significantly support English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' writing development by providing structured guidance in organising ideas and enhancing textual coherence. Nguyen and Truong (2024) found that scaffolded genre instruction improves learners' writing performance by systematically supporting both content development and

rhetoical organisation. This fragmentation limits a holistic understanding of feedback in ODL environments, where learners require simultaneous linguistic guidance and emotional support.

2.2 Video-based and multimodal feedback in ODL writing instruction

The expansion of digital learning environments has increased interest in video-based and multimodal feedback as alternatives to text-only commentary. Unlike traditional written feedback, video-based feedback integrates verbal explanation, visual highlighting and prosodic features such as tone and pacing, enabling more contextualised and personalised communication of writing issues.

The effectiveness of this approach can be explained through [Mayer's \(2021\)](#) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which posits that learning is enhanced when verbal and visual channels are integrated in a coherent and non-overloading manner. In writing instruction, this enables instructors to map feedback directly onto textual features, thereby reducing ambiguity and improving interpretive clarity.

Empirical studies generally support these theoretical claims while also highlighting important nuances. For instance, [Pachuashvili \(2024\)](#) and [Vellanki \(2024\)](#) report that screencast feedback enhances learners' comprehension, writing accuracy and engagement. However, they also emphasise that its effectiveness is not inherent in the medium itself but depends on how feedback is structured, sequenced and cognitively managed.

Similarly, [Yiğit and Seferoğlu \(2023\)](#) found that video-based feedback improves learners' understanding of feedback content and strengthens their ability to apply it in subsequent revisions, indicating enhanced feedback uptake in online learning environments.

Beyond cognitive gains, recent research increasingly highlights the socio-emotional and relational dimensions of video-based feedback. Learners frequently report that it enhances perceived instructor presence and emotional support, particularly in asynchronous ODL contexts where opportunities for interaction are limited ([Din Eak and Annamalai, 2025b](#)). However, despite these emerging insights, the literature remains underdeveloped in explaining how emotional engagement is generated through multimodal feedback. This gap is addressed in the present study through the HLP framework.

2.3 Narrative writing, emotional engagement and Humanistic Learning Presence

Narrative writing represents a complex ESL genre as it requires the integration of linguistic accuracy, rhetorical coherence, personal meaning and emotional expression. Unlike expository writing, narrative production is closely tied to identity construction, lived experience and subjective voice. [Hanauer's \(2012\)](#) meaningful literacy framework positions writing as a form of identity expression rather than purely linguistic performance.

Recent research confirms that ESL narrative writing development is not solely a linguistic process but also an affective and interpretive one. [Din Eak and Annamalai \(2025b\)](#) demonstrate that multimodal feedback enhances not only structural coherence but also learners' ability to express personal voice and emotional depth. However, these findings also indicate variability in learner responses, suggesting that emotional engagement is not automatically produced by feedback modality but is shaped by how feedback is perceived and internalised.

In ODL contexts, these challenges are intensified due to limited interpersonal interaction and reduced opportunities for clarification. As a result, feedback becomes a critical site for both cognitive development and emotional validation. However, existing literature tends to under-theorise the interaction between emotion and writing development, often treating emotional engagement as an outcome rather than a mechanism of learning.

The HLP framework adopted in this study addresses this gap by integrating cognitive scaffolding, emotional attunement and relational dialogue into a unified explanatory model. This integration is grounded in sociocultural theory ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)), humanistic education ([Rogers, 1969](#)), emotional presence research ([Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012](#)) and the

Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison *et al.*, 2000). Together, these perspectives position feedback as a multidimensional pedagogical process that simultaneously shapes cognition, emotion and relational trust.

The HLP framework underpinning this study conceptualises feedback in ODL writing contexts as an integrated system of cognitive, emotional and relational dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 1.

2.4 Research gap and conceptual positioning

The literature demonstrates significant advancement in ESL writing feedback research, particularly in the shift from corrective paradigms to dialogic, learner-centred and multimodal feedback approaches. Recent studies consistently show that video-based feedback enhances clarity, engagement and writing development (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Winstone, 2023; Pachuashvili, 2024; Vellanki, 2024).

However, three inter-related gaps remain evident. First, existing research continues to prioritise feedback effectiveness and learner satisfaction while offering limited theorisation of the emotional and relational processes that mediate feedback uptake. As a result, how learners *interpret*, *negotiate* and *act upon* feedback remains under-theorised in multimodal feedback research.

Second, although multimodal feedback has been widely examined, its role in supporting narrative voice, identity construction and emotional expression remains underexplored. This is particularly significant in ESL narrative writing, where meaning-making is closely linked to affective and identity-related dimensions of language use.

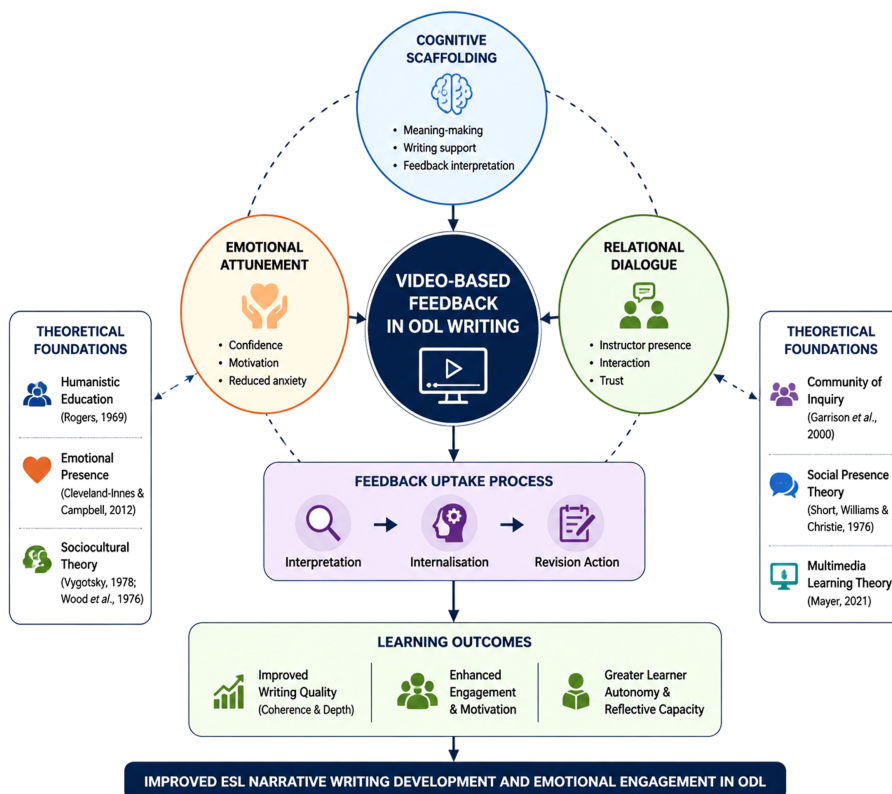


Figure 1. Humanistic Learning Presence (HLP) framework for video-based feedback in ODL writing contexts

Third, existing frameworks tend to treat cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of feedback as separate constructs rather than examining their interaction in shaping learner experiences in ODL contexts. This fragmentation limits a holistic understanding of feedback as an integrated pedagogical process.

Recent studies increasingly call for more integrated explanatory models that capture these interdependencies; however, such integration remains conceptually underdeveloped in ESL writing research. In response, this study positions the HLP framework as a unifying lens through which video-based feedback can be understood as a multidimensional process. The framework enables examination of how cognitive scaffolding, emotional attunement and relational dialogue interact to support ESL learners' narrative writing development and emotional engagement in ODL environments.

Overall, this positioning reframes feedback not only as a pedagogical tool for improving writing performance but also as a relational and emotionally mediated process that shapes how learners experience, interpret and act upon feedback in digitally mediated learning contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine how video-based feedback shapes adult ESL learners' narrative writing development and emotional engagement within an ODL context. A case study approach is appropriate for generating in-depth, context-sensitive insights into complex educational practices situated within real-life learning environments (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018).

The study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which conceptualises learning as socially mediated and shaped through interaction, dialogue and affect (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, feedback is understood not as a unidirectional transmission of corrective information but as a relational and dialogic process through which learners interpret, negotiate and construct meaning. This paradigm aligns with the study's focus on emotional engagement, relational interaction and learner participation within digitally mediated writing environments.

3.2 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Given the researcher's dual role as a course instructor, reflexivity formed an essential component of the research design. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study to document instructional decisions, emerging interpretations and potential biases (Finlay, 2002), thereby enhancing transparency in the analytic process.

Several measures were implemented to minimise power imbalances and reduce social desirability bias. Participation was voluntary and not linked to course grading, and interviews were conducted only after course completion. Participants were informed that their responses would not influence academic evaluation. In addition, analysis of writing samples focussed on observable textual changes rather than evaluative judgement, while interpretations were triangulated with reflective journals and interview data. These strategies helped preserve the integrity of participant perspectives while reducing potential researcher influence.

3.3 Participants

Eight adult ESL learners were purposively sampled from a fully online Creative Writing course offered at a Malaysian open university. Participants represented diverse professional and educational backgrounds characteristic of ODL contexts.

Inclusion criteria included (1) intermediate English proficiency (CEFR B1–B2), (2) prior experience with online writing tasks and (3) willingness to participate in video-based feedback activities. Although the sample size was relatively small, it aligns with qualitative case study research that prioritises contextual depth, experiential richness and information power over statistical generalisability (Malterud *et al.*, 2016). The selected participants

were therefore considered sufficient to generate meaningful insights into learners' experiences of video-based feedback within ESL ODL environments.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee prior to data collection. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Pseudonyms were used in all reporting, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. All research data were securely stored in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

3.5 Feedback intervention

The intervention operationalised the HLP framework through a two-cycle feedback design conducted over eight weeks. It was designed to capture both immediate interactional processes and sustained learner engagement with feedback over time.

Each cycle integrated synchronous and asynchronous feedback modalities to create a layered and complementary feedback experience.

3.5.1 Synchronous feedback (Microsoft Teams). Synchronous feedback sessions were conducted in small groups of approximately four learners per session, lasting about 30 min each. Sessions incorporated Socratic questioning techniques (Paul and Elder, 2019) to encourage reflective engagement and deeper consideration of narrative structure and meaning-making. Live screen-sharing enabled collaborative text review, while verbal and non-verbal interaction supported immediacy, emotional attunement and relational presence. Genre-based scaffolding strategies were also used to guide learners' understanding of narrative organisation and development.

3.5.2 Asynchronous feedback (ScreenPal). Asynchronous feedback was delivered through personalised screencast videos created using ScreenPal. These videos combined visual annotations with voice-over explanations to support revision and interpretive understanding. Feedback focussed on narrative coherence, reflective depth and language use and also incorporated affirming and motivational language intended to support learner confidence and engagement. Revision prompts were aligned with synchronous sessions, enabling learners to revisit feedback asynchronously and engage in iterative revision processes.

Together, these feedback components created an integrated feedback experience combining immediacy, personalisation and sustained engagement, consistent with the relational and emotional dimensions of the HLP framework.

3.6 Data collection

Data were collected from three primary sources to support methodological triangulation and provide a comprehensive understanding of both learning processes and writing development.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after course completion to minimise social desirability bias and encourage reflective responses. Interviews explored learners' cognitive, emotional and relational experiences of video-based feedback within the writing process. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.6.2 Reflective journals. Participants completed reflective journals following each feedback cycle. These journals documented learners' interpretations of feedback, emotional responses, revision strategies and perceptions of instructor interaction throughout the writing process.

3.6.3 Narrative writing tasks. Narrative writing tasks were collected longitudinally across two feedback cycles, including both initial and revised drafts. This enabled a systematic cross-draft comparison and analysis of writing development over time.

To enhance trustworthiness, methodological triangulation was achieved through the integration of interviews, reflective journals and writing samples. Member checking was

conducted by inviting participants to review selected thematic interpretations, while reflexive journaling documented analytic decisions throughout the study.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis combined thematic analysis with comparative textual analysis to provide both interpretive depth and evidence of writing development.

3.7.1 Thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and reflective journals were analysed using [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six-phase thematic analysis framework: familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, definition and refinement. Coding was primarily inductive, allowing themes to emerge from the data while remaining informed by sensitising concepts derived from the HLP framework.

To enhance analytic credibility, a second independent coder reviewed approximately 30% of the data set. Coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, resulting in refined thematic categories.

3.7.2 Comparative textual analysis. Comparative textual analysis examined changes across narrative drafts using three analytic dimensions adapted from [Vaezi and Rezaei \(2019\)](#):

- (1) Narrative coherence.
- (2) Reflective depth and authorial voice.
- (3) Linguistic accuracy and lexical expression.

A structured analytic rubric ([Appendix A](#)) was used to identify directional changes across drafts, including substantial improvement, moderate improvement, minimal improvement or no observable change. To enhance analytic consistency, a second reviewer independently examined a subset of writing samples using the rubric. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved through consensus.

Findings from the textual analysis were cross-checked against interview and reflective journal data to strengthen interpretive credibility and contextual understanding. Thick description was used throughout the analysis and reporting process to support transferability.

4. Findings

4.1 Research question 1: How does video-based feedback support adult ESL learners' narrative writing development in an ODL context?

To address research question 1, a cross-case comparative analysis was conducted on participants' narrative drafts across two feedback cycles, supported by triangulated data from interviews and reflective journals. Writing development was examined through systematic comparison of initial and revised drafts, focussing on observable changes in textual quality.

Across the data set, all eight participants demonstrated development in at least two analytic dimensions, while seven participants showed development across all three dimensions. Writing development was analysed across three inter-related dimensions: (1) narrative coherence, (2) reflective depth and authorial voice and (3) linguistic accuracy and lexical expression.

As shown in [Table 1](#), improvements in narrative coherence were the most consistently observed across participants, followed by reflective depth and authorial voice. Development in linguistic accuracy and lexical expression was comparatively more incremental and variable across cases.

4.1.1 Narrative coherence: development of structured narrative organisation. The most consistent pattern of development was observed in narrative coherence. Initial drafts were predominantly characterised by linear sequencing of events, with limited evidence of structured progression, causal relationships or narrative resolution.

Following engagement with video-based feedback, seven participants demonstrated substantial or moderate reorganisation of their narratives. Revisions included clearer structuring of narrative stages, more explicit articulation of turning points and improved

Table 1. Directional changes across narrative writing dimensions

Participant	Narrative coherence	Reflective depth and authorial voice	Linguistic accuracy and lexical expression
P1	Substantial improvement	Moderate improvement	Moderate improvement
P2	Substantial improvement	Substantial improvement	Minimal improvement
P3	Moderate improvement	Moderate improvement	Moderate improvement
P4	Substantial improvement	Minimal improvement	Minimal improvement
P5	Moderate improvement	Substantial improvement	Moderate improvement
P6	Substantial improvement	Moderate improvement	Substantial improvement
P7	Moderate improvement	Moderate improvement	Minimal improvement
P8	Minimal improvement	Moderate improvement	Moderate improvement

temporal and causal cohesion. Across cases, participants moved from descriptive recounting towards more purposeful narrative organisation.

One participant revised:

My friend called, and then my phone dropped . . .

→ The turning point came when I saw thirty missed calls . . .

This revision illustrates a shift from simple event sequencing towards more intentional narrative progression. Similar patterns were evident across participants, indicating sustained engagement with higher-order organisational aspects of writing.

Beyond structural organisation, several participants also demonstrated increased awareness of pacing and narrative emphasis during revision. Reflective journal entries indicated that video-based explanations and screen demonstrations helped participants visualise how ideas could be reorganised more coherently within narrative structure.

4.1.2 Authorial voice: increased reflective and evaluative positioning. Beyond organisational development, participants also demonstrated changes in reflective positioning and narrative voice. Initial drafts were generally descriptive, with limited evaluative commentary or reflective interpretation.

Following feedback engagement, six participants demonstrated increased reflective depth, particularly in the resolution and meaning-making stages of their narratives. Revisions showed greater articulation of emotional nuance, personal interpretation and evaluative stance.

One participant revised:

That was the end of our story . . .

→ That night changed something in me . . .

This revision reflects a shift from simple narrative closure towards more interpretive and emotionally expressive writing. Similar developments were identified across multiple participants, particularly in sections involving personal reflection and emotional meaning-making.

Interview and reflective journal data further indicated that participants perceived the personalised nature of video-based feedback as encouraging deeper reflection during revision. Several participants reported becoming more aware of how emotional tone and personal interpretation contributed to narrative effectiveness.

4.1.3 Linguistic accuracy and lexical expression: incremental development. Participants also demonstrated incremental development in linguistic accuracy and lexical expression. All participants showed some degree of lexical refinement, while five participants demonstrated noticeable improvements in grammatical control.

Observed revisions included greater lexical precision, increased sentence variation and improved grammatical accuracy. One participant revised:

The time is very happy . . .

→ It was a joyful moment . . .

Although these revisions were comparatively smaller than developments in narrative coherence and reflective depth, similar patterns recurred across the data set. These findings align with corrective feedback perspectives, suggesting that linguistic development occurs gradually through iterative revision and sustained engagement with feedback over time (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2012).

Participants also reported revisiting video feedback multiple times to clarify vocabulary choices and sentence construction. Reflective journals suggested that replayability supported closer attention to language use during revision.

4.1.4 Synthesis of writing development. Overall, the findings indicate that participants' writing development was multidimensional and interconnected. Improvements in narrative organisation were frequently accompanied by greater reflective engagement and more purposeful lexical expression.

Across cases, writing development appeared cumulative rather than discrete, with participants demonstrating increasing attention to both structural and interpretive aspects of writing throughout the feedback cycles. While development in narrative coherence was most consistently observed, reflective depth and linguistic refinement also showed observable progression across most participants.

These patterns suggest that engagement with video-based feedback supported writing development beyond surface-level correction, encouraging participants to engage more actively with narrative organisation, expressive meaning-making and revision processes. However, given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, these findings should be interpreted as analytically transferable rather than statistically generalisable.

4.2 How do adult ESL learners perceive and experience video-based feedback in relation to emotional engagement and relational presence?

To address research question 2, thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts and reflective journals to examine learners' perceptions of emotional engagement and relational interaction during feedback processes.

Three inter-related themes emerged consistently across the data set: (1) perceived instructor presence as relational interaction, (2) affective trust and supportive feedback engagement and (3) sustained motivational engagement. Although the depth of articulation varied across participants, they all referenced emotional or relational dimensions of feedback interaction.

4.2.1 Perceived instructor presence: feedback as relational interaction. Participants consistently described video-based feedback as more personal, immediate and relationally engaging than conventional written feedback, which several participants characterised as impersonal or difficult to interpret.

One participant explained:

I felt like the teacher was speaking with me, not at me.

All eight participants described a heightened sense of instructor presence during feedback interactions. Participants frequently referred to the tone of voice, facial expression, pacing and verbal explanation as factors that made feedback feel more conversational and interactive.

Participants also described synchronous and asynchronous feedback modalities as serving complementary functions. Synchronous sessions enabled immediate clarification and interaction, while asynchronous video feedback supported repeated engagement and reflection over time. Several participants noted that revisiting recorded feedback reinforced understanding and helped sustain a sense of connection beyond the live session.

4.2.2 Affective trust: feedback as supportive guidance. In addition to perceptions of instructor presence, participants frequently discussed the emotional tone of feedback interactions. Six participants described reduced anxiety and increased confidence when engaging with video-based feedback.

One participant stated:

Even when I made mistakes, her tone never sounded angry . . . I could revise without fear.

Participants consistently referred to tone, pacing and delivery as influencing how feedback was emotionally interpreted. Feedback was frequently experienced as supportive guidance rather than evaluative judgement.

Several participants also contrasted video feedback with previous experiences of written corrective comments, which they perceived as abrupt or emotionally distant. In comparison, personalised verbal explanation appeared to reduce defensiveness and encourage greater openness to revision.

4.2.3 Motivational engagement: sustained and self-regulated interaction. Participants further reported that video-based feedback supported sustained engagement with revision processes. All participants indicated that they replayed feedback multiple times to clarify meaning, revisit explanations and support revision decisions.

One participant explained:

I can pause and listen many times . . . I don't feel rushed.

Participants described replayability as enabling self-paced engagement with feedback, particularly when revising narrative organisation and language use. Several participants also reported greater willingness to revise extensively because feedback felt more interactive and supportive.

At the same time, four participants noted that engaging with video feedback required greater time and concentration than written comments. While these responses were generally framed positively, they suggest that multimodal feedback may increase cognitive and temporal demands during revision.

4.2.4 Synthesis of learner experience. Overall, participants experienced video-based feedback as a multimodal and relational process that integrated instructional guidance with emotional support. Three interconnected patterns emerged consistently across the data set: (1) Feedback was experienced as relational rather than purely informational, (2) emotional tone influenced confidence and openness to revision and (3) replayability supported sustained engagement with revision processes.

These dimensions appeared mutually reinforcing across cases. Participants who reported stronger perceptions of instructor presence also tended to express greater confidence and sustained engagement during revision. Collectively, the findings indicate that emotional and relational dimensions shaped how feedback was interpreted and enacted within the ODL writing environment.

Given the exploratory nature and qualitative design of the study, these findings should be interpreted within their contextual setting rather than generalised beyond similar ESL ODL environments.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretive and affective feedback in ODL writing

The findings demonstrate that video-based feedback supports ESL narrative writing development not as direct instructional transmission but as an interpretive process mediated by cognitive engagement and affective experience. Improvements in narrative coherence and reflective depth indicate that learners prioritised meaning-making and narrative organisation over immediate linguistic accuracy, which developed more gradually.

This challenges traditional corrective feedback perspectives that position grammatical accuracy as the primary indicator of writing development (Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2012). Instead, the findings align with dialogic feedback theory (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless and Winstone, 2023), extending it by showing that feedback uptake in ODL contexts is also emotionally contingent.

However, these patterns should be interpreted cautiously due to the qualitative and small-scale design. Rather than suggesting a fixed developmental hierarchy, the findings highlight the contextual and differentiated responsiveness of writing dimensions to multimodal feedback.

5.2 Video feedback as relational amplification

While previous studies emphasise the benefits of video-based feedback for clarity and engagement (Henderson and Phillips, 2015; Ebadi and Dadgar, 2024), the present study suggests that its effectiveness is not inherent in the medium. Instead, video feedback operates as relational amplification, intensifying tone, pacing and personal address, which shape how feedback is interpreted.

This supports critiques of technological determinism in educational technology research (Selwyn, 2021), suggesting that perceived improvements are better explained by enhanced instructor presence and relational visibility than by the medium itself.

However, this amplification also introduces constraints. Learners reported increased cognitive and temporal demands due to multimodal processing and repeated viewing. This indicates that the effectiveness of video-based feedback depends not only on design quality but also on learners' capacity for self-regulation and sustained attention.

5.3 Uneven writing development and feedback responsiveness

The uneven development across writing dimensions, particularly stronger gains in narrative coherence and reflective depth compared to linguistic accuracy, suggests that feedback operates selectively rather than uniformly across linguistic domains.

This aligns with sociocultural perspectives on scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), where higher-order meaning-making often develops before form-focussed accuracy stabilises. At the same time, it complicates assumptions in corrective feedback literature that linguistic accuracy and meaning development progress in parallel.

Overall, video-based feedback appears especially effective in supporting discursive and interpretive aspects of writing, while grammatical development remains more gradual and less responsive within short intervention cycles. This suggests limitations when multimodal feedback is used as the primary mechanism for form-focussed instruction.

5.4 Emotional engagement and feedback uptake

A key finding is that emotional engagement is not a peripheral outcome but a central mechanism of feedback uptake. Reduced anxiety, increased confidence and perceived relational safety directly influenced learners' willingness to engage in revision.

This extends prior research on affect in feedback (Ryan and Henderson, 2018; Carless and Winstone, 2023) by demonstrating that emotion functions as a mediating filter between feedback reception and cognitive action. In ODL contexts, where physical interaction is limited, emotional attunement becomes critical in shaping engagement and persistence in revision.

However, emotional support alone does not directly produce writing development. Rather, emotional, cognitive and relational dimensions interact dynamically to shape how feedback is interpreted and enacted.

5.5 Theoretical contribution: extending HLP

The findings provide empirical support for the HLP framework while refining its conceptual boundaries. Rather than functioning as separate components, cognitive scaffolding, emotional attunement and relational dialogue operated as interdependent mechanisms influencing feedback uptake.

Writing development emerged when these dimensions co-occurred, suggesting that feedback effectiveness is emergent rather than additive. This extends the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison *et al.*, 2000) by positioning emotional attunement as an explicit pedagogical mechanism rather than an implicit aspect of social presence.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that HLP offers a more precise explanatory lens for understanding feedback processes in ODL writing contexts, where sustained engagement depends heavily on relational continuity.

5.6 Reframing feedback in ODL writing

Collectively, the findings reposition feedback in ODL writing as a humanistic and interpretive process rather than a purely corrective instructional tool. Video-based feedback should therefore not be understood as a superior technological solution but as a pedagogical condition that shapes how learners interpret, negotiate and act upon feedback.

However, its effectiveness is not uniform. It varies across writing dimensions and is influenced by learners' affective readiness and cognitive load. This suggests that effective feedback design in ODL contexts must balance informational richness with interpretive manageability to avoid cognitive overload while sustaining engagement.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how video-based feedback supports ESL learners' narrative writing development and emotional engagement in an ODL context through the HLP framework. The findings show that feedback in digitally mediated writing environments functions not as a transmission of corrective information but as an interpretive process shaped by cognitive engagement, emotional experience and relational presence.

A key finding is the uneven development of writing across different dimensions. Learners demonstrated stronger gains in narrative coherence and reflective depth than in linguistic accuracy. This suggests that video-based feedback is particularly effective in supporting higher-order writing processes such as meaning-making, narrative structuring and identity expression, while grammatical development requires more sustained and focussed practice over time.

Emotional engagement emerged as central to feedback uptake. Increased confidence, reduced anxiety and perceptions of supportive instructor presence influenced how feedback was interpreted and enacted. In ODL environments, where physical interaction is absent, emotional attunement and relational presence are essential for sustaining engagement and enabling meaningful revision.

The study contributes to feedback research by extending dialogic and sociocultural perspectives through the HLP framework. The HLP framework conceptualises feedback as an integrated process in which cognitive scaffolding, emotional attunement and relational dialogue operate interdependently. This positions emotion as a core mechanism of learning rather than a peripheral outcome of feedback processes.

Practically, the findings suggest that effective video-based feedback should balance clarity of explanation with relational tone and opportunities for repeated engagement. Its effectiveness lies less in the technology itself and more in its capacity to foster trust, reflection and iterative revision. Combining synchronous and asynchronous feedback may further enhance learner engagement and understanding.

As a small-scale qualitative study, the findings are context-specific and analytically transferable rather than generalisable. Future research should examine the HLP framework across broader populations and explore how emotional and relational dimensions of feedback can be more systematically integrated into digital learning design.

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