STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON DIFFERENT FORMS OF ONLINE CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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ABSTRACT

Giving feedback is an integral activity of teaching and learning in any English language courses, especially English writing courses. Due to the effect of Covid-19 pandemic, teachers in educational institutes in Vietnam have used online corrective feedback instead of face-to-face one in their online writing classes. This fact motivated the writers to conduct this study which explored the use of certain types of online corrective feedback in an academic writing class taken by 66 second-year undergraduates in the Faculty of English, Hanoi National University of Education. The aim of this study is to have a better insight into these students' perspectives including their attitude towards different forms of online corrective feedback (CF), their preferences for these forms as well as their difficulties in perceiving those feedbacks and their expectations when receiving online CFs for their writing. To collect data for this study, a survey questionnaire has been employed and interviews with the students have been conducted. The result from the questionnaire analysis revealed that when learning online the students preferred both following their instructor's direct delivery feedback via Zoom (a video conferencing platform) and receiving individual feedback on their own writing via Google Doc. However, they found their instructor's feedback on their individual writings helped to improve their writing skill better compared the two others. The interview revealed one of the biggest challenges encountered by students is interpreting their instructor's feedback rightly.

The findings of the study could have significant pedagogical and practical implications for the teaching and learning. Firstly, teachers can decide whether they should combine online and face-to-face corrective feedback in face-to-face writing classes when the pandemic is over.   Secondly, the findings of the study could provide teachers necessary suggestions so that they could have some appropriate adjustment in using online corrective feedback in the next online writing classes especially when the pandemic has not been under control.

Keywords: corrective feedback; online corrective feedback; academic writing; text-based corrective feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

Giving feedback plays an important role in teaching languages in general and in teaching writing English in particular. Feedback is a source of useful information about

learners' performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving their writing performance (Ur, 1996: 242). Coffin et al (2003) also considered giving feedback on students' writing as the central pedagogical practice in higher education. Besides, according to Brown, feedback improves students' writing quality, so it is important to give feedback in the process of writing (2001: 335). Through feedback, students can find their own strengths as well as weaknesses in order to improve their writing.

Due to the effect of Covid-19 pandemic, in the Faculty of English, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam, like in many other educational institutes in the world, conventional face-to-face writing classes have been converted into online ones in which online corrective feedback has been used instead of conventional handwriting corrective feedback.

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the effects of giving conventional corrective feedback on students' writing in face-to-face writing classes, including both teacher corrective feedback and peer corrective feedback. However, not much research has been carried out so far to study the delivery of online corrective feedback which was the only choice in English writing classes when the Covid-19 broke out and has been spreading in the world. Thus, it is really necessary to carry out this study which is related to different forms of online corrective feedback in writing courses from learners' perspectives.

This study was carried out to have a better insight into the students' perspectives of their teachers' online corrective feedback. The main objectives are to find out students' attitudes toward different forms of online corrective feedback, their difficulties in acquiring and expectations for online corrective feedback.

To achieve the these aims, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the students' attitudes toward different forms of online corrective feedback?

2. What are the students' preferences among three different forms of online corrective feedback?

3. What are their difficulties in acquiring online corrective feedback?

4. What are their expectations for online corrective feedback?

The results of this study are expected to be employed as a reference for teachers to decide whether to combine traditional corrective feedback and online corrective feedback in face-to-face writing classes. Some suggestions as well as appropriate adjustments in using online corrective feedback in other online writing classes could also be presented in this paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Corrective Feedback and Online Corrective Feedback

2.1.1. Corrective feedback

Corrective feedback is an indication to the students that their use of the target language is incorrect (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999: 171).

Corrective feedback in writing classes consists of various ways the teacher can respond to their students by indicating that some usage in the writing does not conform to the norm of the target language. Corrective feedback can be divided into direct and indirect feedback. Direct feedback, or explicit feedback, is provided when the teacher identifies the types of the errors and corrects them on the students' writing, while indirect feedback is provided when the teacher identifies the errors by underlining and giving them codes, such as *gr* for grammatical errors, or *sp* for spelling errors without providing the correction (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

In traditional writing classes, written corrective feedback is provided by the teacher or by the peer. However, the students' writing could be improved when written corrective feedback and student-researcher five-minute individual conferences are combined (Bitchener, 2005).

In writing classes, especially in academic writing classes, corrective feedback is provided during the writing process, and it is believed to be more effective and meaningful than feedback provided afterwards (Ivanic et al., 2000).

2.1.2. Online corrective feedback

Online corrective feedback is defined as computer-mediated corrective feedback or computer-mediated text-based corrective feedback with the use of the Internet, which is different from the conventional corrective feedback using pen and paper in face-to-face classes (Razagifard & Razzaghifard, 2011; Yoke et al., 2013; Bailey, 2016; Liu & Zhou, 2018; Rassaei, 2019; Liu et al., 2021).

No	Types of online corrective feedback	Description	Author(s)
1	text-based feedback	Teacher gives feedback through *email* in an academic writing course	Yoke et al. 2013
2	text-based feedback	write their assignments on the forum download the papers and used the *Microsoft Word review tool* to provide corrective feedback *received a PDF version* of their corrective feedback and were instructed to revise the original post	Bailey, 2016
3	-online teacher feedback -online peer feedback	with the use of the Internet	Liu & Zhou, 2018
4	computer-mediated text-based		Rassaei, 2019

5	-online teacher feedback -online peer feedback -online automated feedback	with the use of the Internet	Liu et al., 2021

From what has been mentioned above, it can be pointed out that in the previous studies, online corrective feedback is text-based feedback with the use of computers and the Internet.

In this study, three forms of online corrective feedback used in an online writing class are in the following table:

No	Forms	Description
1	PowerPoint + online class	Students wrote and submitted their essays individually. Teacher selected **2 essays** and provided corrective feedback using **PowerPoint** Teacher **showed these two essays** and **explained all** the errors to the whole class using certain types of **video meeting apps / conference platforms** such as Zoom, the Microsoft Teams or Google Meet.
2	Text-based corrective feedback Google Docs (tools of editing, making and reviewing comments)	- Students submitted the essays individually in Google Classroom - Teacher provided the corrective feedback on **all these individual papers.**
3	Text-based corrective feedback Word (summary of main errors with examples) + email	Students wrote and submitted their essays individually. Teacher summarized the most **common errors** made by the majority of students in the class**,** then **corrects** these errors on certain papers. Teacher **sent this summary to the whole class via email.**

2.2. Effective Online Corrective Feedback

To create the best results, feedback needs four conditions. Firstly, it should be objective, reliable, measurable and specific. Second, feedback provides information about what was done well, what needs improvement and how to improve. It also needs to be delivered frequently and immediately following performance. And finally, it is about performance rather than personal characteristics. (Guinness et al., 2020)

2.3. Background of Relevant Studies

Many researchers have carried out research on online corrective feedback; however, they have reported some contradictory results.

Yoke et al (2013) investigated online corrective feedback in academic writing. In their study, they selected two academic writing classes. The first group was provided conventional corrective feedback, and the second group was provided online corrective feedback. They found that the students preferred online corrective feedback via email rather than conventional one (written comments through pen and paper), and students improved in their writing better than those receiving conventional corrective feedback.

Bailey (2016) studied written corrective feedback with the assistance of a forum. In his study, teachers downloaded the students' papers and used the Microsoft Word review tool to provide corrective feedback. Then students received a PDF version of their corrective feedback and were instructed to revise the first draft and write the second one. The result is that students enjoyed their writing assignments more and feared them less after completing the writing course with online corrective feedback in the forum.

Liu & Zhou (2018) reported that the students in their study had positive attitudes toward online feedback and that both online teacher feedback and online peer feedback had the effectiveness on foreign language writing. Also, they suggested that online feedback should be used in writing classes.

In another study carried by Liu et al. (2021) revealed that online feedback from teachers is more effective than online peer feedback and online automated feedback.

By contrast, in the study carried out on the students of ESP classes by Ferdian and Purnawan (2020), the results revealed that students favored their teachers using face-to-face corrective feedback rather than online corrective feedback. This study also provided some conclusions related to students' preferences on face-to-face corrective feedback.

The reviews thus indicate that there are controversial views on the effectiveness of online corrective feedback, and no research has been carried on students' perspectives on different forms of online corrective feedback, their difficulties in acquiring and their expectations for online corrective feedback.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 60 third-year students majoring in English, Faculty of English, HNUE. They have completed five semesters learning how to write sentences, paragraphs and some types of short essays such as comparison-contrast essay and cause-effect essay. In this semester, they studied the two other types of academic essays namely discursive essay and argumentative essay.

The participants were enrolled in an academic writing class and participating in a 15-week face-to-face writing course. However, due to Covid-19 pandemic, the face-to-face writing course must be changed to the online one. Then, all the corrective feedback was provided in another way with the use of computers and the Internet, or online corrective feedback.

In the academic writing course, two types of essays were introduced to students,

namely Discursive essays and Argumentative essays. The essays were given feedback and scored according to 4 criteria including (1) Task Response, (2) Coherence and Cohesion, (3) Lexical Resource and (4) Grammatical Range and Accuracy.

3.2. Data collection instruments

Survey questionnaire

Survey questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data for this study. It is designed to collect students' information on online corrective feedback. The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from some scholars including Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) and Kirovska-Simjanoska (2016) and then developed by the writers to meet the purposes of this paper.

The initial part focused on clarifying the research purposes, the role of participants and three forms of feedback used in this research. Section 1 was designed to get information of the students' attitudes toward different forms of online corrective feedback. Section 2 aimed to get information of the students' expectations for their teachers' online corrective feedback

Interview

To gather more information for the study, interviews were also employed. This instrument helped authors gain in-depth understanding of students' obstacles in perceiving online corrective feedback and their suggestions. To make the result of the interviews objective, four interviews were conducted with four students from the two classes at four points of time via mobile phone.

The interviews were designed with the same questions related to the following issues:

- Difficulties in acquiring online corrective feedback
- Suggestions for more effective online corrective feedback

3.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was uploaded on Google Form and sent to 60 students. They had about 15 minutes to answer the questions in the form. After all the questionnaires were collected, the data was analyzed and the results were then interpreted.

In addition to questionnaires, four interviews were carried out with 10 out of 66 students via mobile phones. The researcher raised the same questions to each student and collected all the answers. Then, all the answers were presented.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Students' attitudes toward three different forms of online corrective feedback

Table 1 indicates that the majority of students took three forms of online corrective feedback from their teacher rather seriously. Among the three forms of feedback, the participants give closer attention when they receive individual feedback (95%) and when their instructor delivers feedback directly via the Zoom platform (86.6%). The summary of common mistakes delivered via emails got least attention from them.

Table 2 reveals that most of the learners believed in the importance of three forms of corrective feedback but their beliefs varied in degrees. They tended to value feedback on individuals' writing most positively (more than 93%). Direct feedback on 2 sample papers via Zoom ranked the 2nd in importance (25%) and the 3rd form stood at the last place (13.3%).

Table 3 presents the participants' frequency of rereading the feedback they received in different procedures. More than half of learners (38 out of 60) admitted that they always read the two sample feedbacks. Nearly all of them (53 out of 60) confirmed to go over the feedback on their individual writing while only 25 out of 60 participants said that they always reviewed the summarized feedback when receiving them.

These data could lead to the conclusion that the learners in this study tend to more appreciate their instructor's detailed feedback on particular essays and her/his evaluation on the individual s' writing rather than the general feedback. They also concentrate more on direct delivery of feedback than the indirect text-based ones.

Table 1: Students' degree of attention to different forms corrective of feedback

Type	Very carefully	Carefully	Not very carefully	Not carefully at all
1. detailed feedback on TWO sample essays, delivered directly by the instructor via Zoom	52/ 60= 86.6%	8/60 = 13.4%	0	0
1. detailed feedback on individual's writing, delivered via Google Doc	57/60=95%	3/60=5%	0	0
2. A summary of common mistakes of the whole class, delivered via email	24/60=40%	29/60=48.3%	4/60=6.6%	2/60=3.4%

Table 2. Students' beliefs on the importance of different forms of online corrective feedback

Type	Students' Responses			
	Very important	Important	Not very important	Not important at all
1. Feedback on TWO sample essays delivered directly by the instructor via Zoom	15/60=25%	31/60 = 51.6%	7/60=11.6%	7/60=11.6%
2. Feedback on individual's writing, delivered via Google Doc	56/60 = 93.3%	4/60=6.75%	0	0
3. A summary of common mistakes of the whole class, delivered via email	11/60 = 13.3%	21/60 = 35%	15/60= 25.5%	13/60=21.6%

Table 3: The students' frequency of rereading their writing after receiving feedback

Types of feedback	Students' Responses									
	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Feedback on TWO sample essays delivered directly by the instructor via Zoom	38	63.3	11	18.3	5	8.3	0	0	6	10
2. Feedback on individual's writing, delivered via Google Doc	57	95	2	3.4	0	0	1	1.6	0	0
3. A summary of common mistakes of the whole class, delivered via email	25	41.6	12	20	3	5	9	15	11	18.4

4.2. Students' preferences for online corrective feedback

It can be seen from table 4 and table 5 that the majority of the participants (58.3%) consider reading individual feedback via emails as their most advantageous form. After receiving this form of feedback, 36 out of 60 were able to revise above 80% of their essay themselves. 38.3% of the participants preferred following directly their instructor's detailed explanations on two sample essays. This kind of feedback helped 21 out of 60 to improve about half of their own writings. Only two participants believed revising their writing based on general feedback on common mistakes to be the best option. Nearly half of participants (28 out of 60) stated that this kind of feedback did not work effectively since they could only revise one third of their essays by reading this general feedback.

One interesting fact is that many of the participants (26 out of 60) loved to listen to their teacher's oral explanations for the sample essays but not many of them were able to employ the sample feedback in revising their own compositions. The explanation for this has been clarified in the interview. The participants claimed that it was rather challenging for them to associate the sample feedback with their compositions for self-correction.

Table 4: Students' ranking their favorable forms of CF

Forms of feedback	Your ranking		
	1	2	3
Type 1: the direct delivery of the detailed feedback on TWO samples via Zoom.	23/60=38.3%	35/60=58.3%	2/60=3.4%
Type 2: the detailed feedback for each individual's essay via Google Doc.	35/60= 58.3%	25/60=41.6%	0
Type 3: the summaries of the most common mistakes made by the whole class via email.	2/60=3.4%	0	58/60=96.6%

Table 5: Students' beliefs on the effectiveness of 3 forms of CF in revising their own writing.

Type	above 80%	about 70%	about 50%	about 30%	nothing
1. Feedback on TWO sample essays delivered directly by the instructor via Zoom	6/60=10%	9/60=15%	21/60=35%	24/60=40%	
2. Feedback on individual's writing, delivered via Google Doc	36/60=60%	17/60=28.3%	7/60=11.7%	0	0
3. A summary of common mistakes of the whole class, delivered via email	0	5/60=8.3%	25/60=41%	28/60=46.6%	12/60=20%

4.3. Students' problems in acquiring online corrective feedback

Table 6 clarifies some common challenges in acquiring different forms of feedback encountered by the participants.

Direct delivery of detailed feedback via Zoom is claimed to be one of their favorable forms of feedback but in some cases technological problems or the instructor's fast delivery pace could be the distractions. In addition, collating the sample essays and their own composition for self-correction is the strength of only a few participants.

Even though it was considered as the most helpful, the second form of feedback lacks the direct interaction between the learners and the instructors. This leads to some learner's misinterpretation of feedback, then they go off the track.

Table 6. Students' problems in acquiring different forms of online CF

Type	Students' Problems
1. Feedback on TWO sample essays delivered directly by the instructor via Zoom	*Sometimes I could not hear their teacher clearly due to poor internet connection, especially in bad weather.* *Sometimes the teacher speaks too fast.* *I cannot identify my own errors based on the sample detailed feedback.*
2. Feedback on individual's writing, delivered via Google Doc	*Teacher uses many symbols to indicate errors.* *I misinterpreted some of the feedback by the teacher and then went off the track.* *I have no interaction with the instructor so I am unable to clarify the confusing feedback.*
3. A summary of common mistakes of the whole class, delivered via email	*Teacher's feedback is not detailed enough.* *Teacher comments are too general and not text-specified.* *I could not identify and correct all their errors myself.* *I was unable to collate the general feedback for self-correction.*

4.4. Students' expectation for different forms of online corrective feedback

For the first form, most of the students would like their teacher to speak more slowly so that they could follow her explanations and the corrections shared on the screen at the same time. It was more difficult to hear in an online class than in face-to-face class. Additionally, if possible, the teacher could give feedback on more sample essays. Moreover, the teacher should divide the class into groups for practicing identifying errors before showing errors and correcting them.

Mentioning the second form, the students showed their expectation for an online meeting so that the teacher could answer all the questions related to feedback on each essay. Also, the students expected their teacher to provide this type of online feedback more frequently.

Finally, the teacher should have an online meeting to explain more clearly and specifically about the general feedback and comments. This is the chance for students to ask for more information about what they do not understand when they read the error summary of all the students at home.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the present study indicates that learners were well aware of the importance of different forms of online corrective feedback in improving their writing. In addition, the results also show that although learners enjoy benefits of these different computer mediated corrective feedback, they prefer receiving their personal text-based feedback via google doc to having some of their paper shown to the whole class or getting the summary of common mistakes via email. The results of the current research provide evidence that teachers should combine different media in delivering online corrective feedback.

Having presented the significance of the present study, there are a couple of limitations that should be acknowledged. One of them is that the researchers have not considered how learners' learning styles affect their choice on their favourite form of online corrective feedback. If this feature was closely examined, teachers could be more flexible in adopting different media in delivering online corrective feedback that match learners' learning styles. This could be the suggestion for a further study.

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