

LOWER SIX STUDENTS' PREFERRED MODE OF FEEDBACK FOR ESSAY REVISION

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Abstract

ESL students value feedback to their essay drafts. Through feedback and by doing multiple revisions, they learn to develop and express complex ideas clearly and effectively. Accordingly, feedback is seen as a way to improve the communicative effectiveness of a given written piece by correcting and guiding students so that their ideas are effectively communicated to the reader. This study determined the students' preference towards feedback type during essay revision. The quasi-experimental study used the counter-balanced research design. For comparison, the students in this study were exposed to two different treatments, teacher-written feedback and online-automated feedback for twelve weeks. The results revealed that the students preferred teacher-written feedback to online-automated feedback although both the experimental groups showed improvement in their essay writing based on both modes of feedback.

KEYWORDS: Preference, Mode of feedback, Essay revision

Introduction

Writing can be difficult for ESL students due to their diverse background and knowledge that affect their ability to construct original texts to fulfil the expectations of the audience or teacher. Moreover, it is a skill that has not been accorded the attention it deserves in high school education. Often students are not been taught to make their ideas flow on paper (Cimcoz, 1999). In addition, because they are usually in the process of gaining proficiency in English, they often apply their native language principles and grammar rules in constructing sentences in the target language (Connor, 1997). Since they have to deal with opposing cultural and language beliefs, ESL students often face difficulty in identifying problems in their writing and resolving them. In view of that fact, ESL students value feedback (Ferris, 1995; Leki, 1991; Raimes, 1985) and through feedback to their drafts and by doing multiple revisions, they learn to develop and express complex ideas clearly and effectively. Accordingly, feedback is seen as a way to improve the communicative effectiveness of a given written piece by correcting and guiding students so that their ideas are effectively communicated to the reader (Ashwell, 2000). Studies on error correction in L2 writing classes have provided evidence that students who receive error feedback or corrective feedback from teachers improve in accuracy over time (Ferris & Roberts, 2001).

Feedback is a verbal or written reaction given to help students to write more and better by increasing the frequency in writing, and to determine if the writing objective has been achieved (Cole, 2006). Feedback includes all reactions to writing, written or oral, from teacher, peer, writing conferences or computer delivered, to drafts or final versions (Freedman, 1987). Therefore, feedback can come from different sources in differing modes and at different stages of the writing process to improve students' writing. Feedback is a vital and dynamic aspect in the composing process (Myles, 2002; 2004) and is valued and appreciated in the writing process as it assists students to gradually take control of their composing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Instead of receiving feedback at the end, feedback should be a crucial feature at every stage of the students' composing process to help shape the form and content of the drafts.

Writing instruction in ESL has changed considerably following the influence of technology into the classroom. The development in computer technology over the past 30 years has played a significant role in the L1 and L2 writing classrooms. Computer technology, more specifically modern information and communication technology (ICT) has been thought to hold great potential for improving second language learning (Chapelle, 2001; Egbert et al., 1999; Levy, 1997; Salaberry, 2001; Zhao, 2003a). Conventionally, computer technology used in second language acquisition tend to focus on individual language learning tools for example grammar, spelling, vocabulary, reading and writing software (Zhao, 2003). Specifically, computer-based software used for writing such as the grammar and spell checkers provided feedback to students' written drafts (Jacobs & Rodgers, 1999).

Studies on the effects of computers on student writing found that using computers has a significant positive effect on writing quantity, quality and revision (Bangert-Drowns, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Goldberg, Russell, & Cook, 2003).

Currently, sophisticated online systems that can generate immediate evaluative and substantive feedback on student writing are readily available. Related studies show that artificial intelligence (AI) with natural language processing (NLP) technologies have the power to analyze and provide automated feedback to students in ways that enhances the interactive process of writing and promotes better understanding of practices for writing (Attali, 2004). These systems generate feedback on written work through sophisticated computer-generated models which is thought to be a cost-effective way of replacing or enhancing direct human input (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The programs provide a range of feedback from individualized reports on grammatical errors for ESL students (Bolt, 1992; Dalgish, 1991; Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010; Liou, 1994; Warden & Chen, 1995) to holistic evaluation on content, organizational, and mechanical aspects of essay writing for both first and second language writers (Brock, 1990, 1993; Burston, 2001; Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010; Ferris, 1993; Leacock, 2004). The web-based automated system is developed to evaluate students writing and provide instantaneous score reporting and diagnostic feedback (Burstein, Chodrow, & Leacock, 2003).

As feedback can guide students in subsequent revisions of their essays, technology creates flexibility by providing on-going feedback that does not hinder the natural flow of language activity. It is felt that technology-enabled feedback systems could improve the efficiency of language education (Ebyary & Windeatt, 2010; Zhao & Lai, 2008). The potential of the e-feedback provided by automated online system for improving student writing is still at an experimental stage due to the lack of research that examines students' use of these programs or the outcomes (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Warschauer & Ware, 2006). An investigation to evaluate the effectiveness of the automated feedback and revision feature of an online feedback system was tested on thousands of students from the 6th through 12th grade. The findings revealed that based on the feedback received from the system, students were able to significantly lower their error rate to about 25% and increase the number of main points and supporting ideas elements at the paragraph level (Attali, 2004). Most studies on online feedback have been conducted on psychometric evaluation of its validity; however, studies on how effective it is in the writing classroom as a pedagogical tool are limited (Chen & Cheng, 2008).

As much as the earlier studies have focused on the effectiveness of teacher feedback and automated feedback, studies on the effect of online automated feedback on students' writing achievement are lacking. Hence, to further contribute empirical evidence in this area, this study aims to address the need for additional research on the effectiveness of feedback types by examining two different modes of feedback (teacher-written feedback versus automated online feedback), on the improvement of students' performance from the aspect of task fulfilment, language and organisation in their essay drafts. Further, it is an attempt to measure students' writing potentials and development of skill levels in a non-electronic and an electronic writing environment through the online and traditional instruction.

The online automated feedback system used in this research was MYACCESS. It is an innovative way in providing feedback to students. The system was piloted in two local universities and received positive responses from the students and

instructors. When the students submit their drafts, the system highlighted errors in the areas of form and content on the essay drafts. It also provided students with immediate information on errors in five specific traits in the written draft that included focus and meaning, content and development, mechanics and convention, organization and language use, voice and style. It further provided a summary of the number of errors in each trait in the submitted drafts in a table form. For example, errors in style included formatting, clause and style setting errors; in mechanics, errors such as spelling, capitalization and punctuation errors; in grammar, errors in subject-verb agreement; and errors in usage include missing articles, incorrect use of past tense and misused words. The errors were underlined and the type of error was specified (local specification with metalinguistic description). Students who did not understand the metalinguistic errors identified, can further click on an icon at the error and the system furnished detailed description of the error along with examples on how to rectify it. This study seeks to determine the students' preference toward feedback types during essay revision.

Problem statement

Surveys conducted on ESL students' essay writing show students' opinions vary greatly in their preference to the type of written feedback to their drafts. Some students wish to have their errors marked, and others welcome written clues from the instructor that enable them to correct the errors themselves. Students do read all the written comments to their essay drafts because they want to know why they were given the grade and how to improve their writing further. Teacher-written feedback continues to be an important aspect of the ESL essay writing classroom but what remains as a key question is which type of teacher-written feedback is the most effective (Ferris et al., 1997). Teacher-written feedback is now being supplemented with writing conferences, workshops, peer and computer based feedback.

In order to write essays, students must be able to think, read and write in the target language so that they are able to organize and present their ideas concisely and accurately. ESL students welcome feedback since it has a positive effect on essay writing (Ferris, 1995; 2006). It helps them to rectify the errors in language, organisation and content ideas in the essay drafts, and assists them to revise their essay drafts accordingly. However, the way feedback comments are conveyed has an effect on encouraging or discouraging revision (Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). In order to encourage successful revision, the feedback comments should be effective and the teacher must consider the students' proficiency level and the writing purpose. This study seeks to answer the following question: What is the students' preferred mode of feedback for essay revision after the feedback treatment, and why?

Research design

A quasi-experiment which used a counter-balanced research design was employed in this study. This design was suitable for this study since the research aim was to compare the effectiveness of two different treatments, teacher-written feedback and online-automated computer feedback, on the essay drafts (writing

performance) of Lower Six students in two intact classes. The purpose of employing the counter-balanced design is to cross out the practice effect. In this study, the two intact groups are the experimental groups that received the online-automated feedback and the teacher-written feedback treatment. Group A first received Treatment A (Online-automated feedback) followed by Treatment B (Teacher-written feedback), while Group B received Treatment B first followed by Treatment A. At the end of the experiment, both the experimental groups received both the treatments different orders (Mitchell & Jolley, 2009). Research findings were drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were based on the students' reflective journals while the quantitative data were collected from a questionnaire. The instruments were used to determine the lower six students' preference for a feedback mode during essay revision in the classroom.

Sample

The total number of participants in this study was 24 students, that is, 12 students from each of the two Lower-Six classes from a sub-urban secondary school situated in the Petaling District in Selangor. All the students in the two classes were participated in the study. The participants were of different ethnic origins, mainly Chinese (n=20) with only four Indians. There were equal number of males and females and they had average English language proficiency i.e. a credit pass with Grade B or C in their *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* exam. Grade B means that the students had scored 60-69 % in the exam, while Grade C means that they had attained 50-59 %. The participants were chosen from the Lower Six classes because they were required to do academic writing or writing essays with thesis statements and topic sentences as well as the supporting sentences as part of the requirement of their MUET English Syllabus. It was to prepare them for their academic writing at the tertiary level in future.

Instrument

An investigator-administered questionnaire was used to ensure a higher response rate and monitoring during questionnaire administration (Mitchell & Jolley, 2007). This method of questionnaire administration had an advantage for the participants who were ESL students because the investigator was there to answer any queries from the participants regarding the questionnaire, to avoid any misinterpretation of questions and also put the participants at ease (Creswell, 2005). The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the study.

The questionnaire had four main sections and 27 questions. Some of the questions on students' attitude to written feedback, computer anxiety and experiences with computers that were found appropriate were adopted and adapted from various sources (see Anderson et al, 2001; Kirtley, 2005; Matsumura, & Hann, 2004). The questions were initially semi-structured questions and were adapted to structured questions with Likert Scale values for easy tabulation (see Appendix).

Part A of the questionnaire elicits the demographic information from the participants such as their age, gender, ethnicity, grades in English and their language competency level. Part B requires the students to assess and rate their

perceptions and experiences with computer technology such as their exposure in using a computer with internet facilities, the frequency of using the various online features and word processing software as well as their general feelings when using the computer to do their writing. In Part C, participants stated the types of error corrections they received and the revision strategies they used to correct the errors. The final part of the questionnaire investigates the participant's purpose and interest in composition writing. Prior to the actual administration of the questionnaire, it was piloted with a group of 30 Form Six students from a different batch to identify and rectify ambiguous or difficult questions. The questionnaire was revised based on the results of the pilot.

The other instrument used was a journal. The participants were required to write about their feeling, attitude and concerns when using and receiving online-automated feedback during their composing process in the computer lab. They also reflected and wrote in their journals regarding the teacher-written feedback received in the classroom. At the end of the study their journals were collected, analysed and coded based on emerging themes and later converted into numeric data for analysis to determine their preferred mode of feedback and the reasons for their choice.

Results from the pre-treatment questionnaire

A pre-treatment questionnaire (see Appendix A) was administered to elicit information about the students' responses to teacher feedback, their technological literacies and writing practices. The results yielded significant information about students' experience and preferences to feedback and revision. The data showed that ICT was part of these Net-Gen students. The questionnaire comprises four sections. For the purpose of answering the research question on students' preference to feedback, the responses from Section B and C were analysed.

In order to establish students' frequency of technology use, opinions and experience with computer and online websites, their responses to Items 1 and 3 in Section B were tabulated. The results indicate that all the students were familiar with computer technology and online websites (Table 1). The most frequently visited website was Facebook (mean = 3.04) with students using it every day or very often. The second most frequently used was Messenger (mean = 3.00), followed by Chat Room (mean = 2.75), and e-mail (mean = 2.67). The least visited website or used software were Friendster (mean = 1.58), Blogs (mean = 1.71), Word Processing Software (mean = 2.00) and Computer Games (mean = 2.21). According to the students, they visited these social websites to make friends and for entertainment purposes. Furthermore, 50% (n=12) of the students claim that using the word processing software gave them the required information regarding essay organization, content idea and language use. Based on Item 10 in Section A, it can be concluded that almost all the students did not use English online. They preferred to use Mandarin or Malay language when communicating online with their friends.

Table 1. Experience with computer and online websites (n=24)

Types of technology	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)	Mean
E-mail	3	7	9	5	2.67
Computer Games	6	8	9	1	2.21
Word Processing	6	13	4	1	2.00
Chat rooms	4	5	8	7	2.75
Blogs	13	6	4	1	1.71
Friendster	13	9	1	1	1.58
Face book	4	1	9	10	3.04
Messenger	4	1	10	9	3.00

Further confirmation of students' preference in using computers to write essays is drawn from Item 3 in Section B. The results show that the students looked forward to using computer for writing and learning in general (Table 2). Even though they looked forward to using computer for writing (mean= 2.79), the mean score indicates differently. Students preferred to write their essays rather than using a computer to type it (mean=3.00). Further, they felt comfortable in using the computer (mean= 3.17). They had no fear of making mistakes when using the computer (mean=2.79), and they thought that generally anyone who was patient and motivated could learn to use a computer (mean= 3.25). The mean score shows that students did not have computer anxiety although they rarely used the computer to write in English.

Table 2. Experience with computer (n = 24)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Mean
I am comfortable when I use the computer.	-	2	16	6	3.17
I have no fear of making mistakes whenever I use computers.	-	7	15	2	2.79
I think anyone can learn to use a computer if they are patient and motivated.	-	1	16	7	3.25
I always look forward to using a computer for writing and learning.	2	6	11	5	2.79
I prefer to write my essay rather than use a computer to type it.	1	6	12	7	3.00

Items 2 and 4 in Section C of the questionnaire established the information about students' preferred mode of feedback comment, and the benefits of these comments to their essay draft revision. When students were asked about the type of feedback, 50% (12) of them liked to receive oral and written feedback from their teacher, and 38% (9) of them preferred oral, written and in-class discussion, and about 12% (3) of them preferred written feedback from the teacher (Table 3).

Table 3. Types of teacher feedback preferred by students before treatment (n=24)

Feedback Types	Frequency	%
Oral feedback only	0	-
Written feedback only	3	12
Class discussion only	0	-
Oral and written feedback	12	50
Written feedback and class discussion	-	-
Oral, written and class discussion	9	38

Students' responses to the benefits from teacher-written feedback yielded a mixed reply. About 54% (13) of them found teacher feedback useful because it helped them identify mistakes, improve writing skills and essay formats, avoid repeating the same mistakes, and improve grammar. Another 38% (9) of the students agreed that only sometimes teacher feedback helped them because their teacher's writing was messy, the comments were not clear, and the symbols used were confusing so they could not understand. Further, students said that the teacher did not discuss their essays in class, and this contributed to them neglecting the revision. Some students even ignored the feedback altogether because they did not pay attention when written or oral feedback was given. The final 8% (2) of the students claimed that they did not improve after receiving their teacher's feedback because they are lazy and they do not like to revise. They actually stated that it is not their teachers' fault that they did not correct their work after receiving the feedback.

Results from the students' reflective journal entries

Students wrote reflections regarding the effectiveness of using teacher-written feedback and online automated feedback during essay revision in their journals for twelve weeks, i.e. six weeks for each treatment. The students were required to write their experiences during the period they received the teacher-written feedback and online automated feedback for their essay drafts. They wrote their experiences based on a list of questions provided by the teacher as a guideline when writing their journals, i.e. students were encouraged to state the advantages and disadvantages of each mode of feedback during the writing process. They were reminded to update their journals after each writing session during the treatment period. At the end of the treatment period, their journal entries were grouped according to themes and tabulated. Students' opinions can be divided into three main themes: effectiveness of teacher-written feedback, and their opinions on revision, and writing essays with pen and paper.

According to 75% (18) of the students, teacher-written feedback was easy to understand because the language used was simple. Another 54% (13) of the students stated that they corrected and elaborated the points on content and organization which helped them to organize their essays. Teacher-written feedback had helped 50% (12) of the students to rectify their grammatical errors. Another 33% (8) of the students said that teacher-written feedback emphasized the mistakes and weaknesses in the essay drafts which helped them to do the correction during revision because the errors were underlined and explained. Twenty-five % (6) of students favoured teacher-written feedback because they

found it convenient to ask the teacher if they did not understand the feedback comments (Table 4).

However, there were also a few disadvantages on teacher-written feedback. The teacher provided delayed feedback, and 46% (11) of the students disliked waiting for a few days to get feedback to their essay drafts. About 29% (7) of the students failed to correct the grammatical errors because the grammar comments were unclear due to the abbreviations. The failure to understand some of the feedback comments were the concern of 33% (8) of the students and 21% (5) of the students were sad when they saw the comments were written in red pen.

Table 4. Effectiveness of teacher-written feedback (n = 24)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Positive		
Teacher's written feedback was in simple language	18	75%
Can correct and elaborate points on content and organisation that helps to organise essay	13	54%
Comments help to rectify grammatical errors	12	50%
Mistakes and weakness are emphasized, so easy to rewrite	8	33%
Able to ask teacher if do not understand comments	6	25%
Negative		
Dislike waiting for a few days to get feedback	11	46%
Comments on grammar not clear because of abbreviation so could not revise	7	29%
Cannot understand some comments	8	33%
Teacher's comments in red pen makes me sad	5	21%

With reference to the task of writing multiple drafts, the negative opinions outweighed the positive. About 50% (12) of the students felt bored to write the same essay repeatedly, 42% (10) of the students stated that writing drafts were like photocopying and 33% (8) of students said that writing multiple drafts were time consuming. Around 25% (6) of the students felt that they only wrote once for their MUET exam so they suggested that all the errors must be indicated by the teacher in the same draft. As for 29% (7) of the students, they disliked writing essay or doing revision because time was wasted on constructing sentences and frequently translating words from their L1 to L2. Moreover, due to the poor command in the target language, they were unable to use the correct words to express themselves and had to depend on a dictionary to locate suitable words to be used in the writing.

On a positive note, 29% (7) of the students said that revision enabled them to improve their drafts by correcting the errors, 25% (6) of the students' claimed that revision helped them to improve their essay writing skills. Further, 50% (12) of

the students felt that one or two drafts was sufficient for an essay and 13% (3) of the students felt that three drafts were enough for an essay because the third draft had fewer comments from the teacher (Table 5).

Table 5. Draft revision with teacher-written feedback (n = 24)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Positive		
Enables students to know the mistakes and improve the draft.	7	29%
Writing multiple drafts helps improve essay writing skills.	6	25%
Writing one or two drafts for an essay is enough.	12	50%
Writing three drafts is enough because it has fewer comments.	3	13%
Negative		
Boring to write same essay repeatedly.	12	50%
Writing drafts are like photocopying.	10	42%
Writing multiple drafts are time consuming.	8	33%
Must write only once due to MUET requirement. (All the errors must be shown in one draft.)	6	25%
Dislike writing essay because:	7	29%
-thinking on how to construct sentences is a waste of time.		
-weak in English, so unable to use the correct words.		
-frequently use dictionary to find words in English.		
-frequently translate words from mother tongue to English		

As for the students' reaction on writing and revising with pen and paper, 21% (5) of the students felt that their ideas flowed better and they could really concentrate when they wrote with a pen and paper. Besides that, 13% (3) of the students felt their drafts looked neat when written with pen and paper. In contrast, 75% (18) of the students felt that revising with pen and paper was very tiring and time consuming and further the drafts looked messy and untidy to 25% (6) of the students.

The comments on online-automated feedback were divided into three main themes. The themes were the effectiveness of online automated feedback, students experience on writing and revising using MYACCESS and the technical setbacks. Based on the comments from the students, 54% (13) of the students said that MYACCESS was easy to use. They further stated that *My Editor* identified and showed the mistakes in the essay drafts immediately. About 33% (8) of the students improved their knowledge on the topic and language because they surfed the Net to prepare for the topic. The *My Grammar* function was helpful to 46% (11) of the students because it helped to rectify grammatical errors easily. They agreed that *My Grammar* provided examples and explained the errors. Another advantage of using MYACCESS for 63% (15) of the students was it gave a holistic score that showed the improvement for each essay draft. MYACCESS also gave scores for each of the five writing traits that showed the students' strengths and weaknesses. About 50% (12) of the students liked to use MYACCESS because it gave immediate feedback to their drafts which enabled them to attend to the corrections immediately (Table 6).

The disadvantages of using MYACCESS based on 29% (7) of the students were that the comments generated by MYACCESS were not clear and were difficult to understand, i.e. clause error. Suggestions were not given by MYACCESS on how to rectify the clause errors. Another 63% (15) of the students stated that proper

nouns were not shown as errors. About 25% (6) of the students said that they were weak in writing essay due to their weakness in grammar. The students agreed that they are unable to revise effectively because they could not understand the comments.

Table 6. Effectiveness of online automated feedback (n = 24)

Comments	Frequency	Percentage
Positive		
Easy to use MYACCESS.	13	54%
<i>My Editor</i> identifies mistakes in drafts and shows mistakes immediately when drafts are submitted.	13	54%
Able to prepare for topic by surfing the Internet. (Helps improve knowledge, language and essay.)	8	33%
<i>My Grammar</i> helps to rectify grammatical errors easily. (Provides examples to correct errors; Comments directly focus on my errors)	11	46%
Shows achievements by giving holistic scores. (Scores for five traits of writing is given for every submission; Scores show strengths and weaknesses in the drafts.)	15	63%
The system gives immediate feedback enabling me to do timely correction.	12	50%
Negative		
Some comments are not clear and difficult to understand- clause error. (Suggestion not given on how to correct clause error.)	7	29%
Proper nouns are shown as errors	15	63%
Cannot revise effectively because cannot understand the feedback comments. (Weak in writing essay because weak in grammar)	6	25%
Suggestion is not given for spelling errors	5	20%
MYACCESS marks the words spelt in British English as errors	4	17%

Accordingly, 20% (5) of the students stated that MYACCESS did not give suggestions for spelling errors. MYACCESS marked some of the words spelt in British English as errors and this concerned 17% (4) of the students. In the aspect of revising using the computers, the students stated some positive and negative points. The positive comments on revision from 33% (8) of the students were one revision was sufficient if all the errors were shown in the same draft. Another point was MYACCESS motivated revision for 33% (8) of the students and 58% (14) of the students stated that multiple drafts improved their essay writing. Further, 33% (8) of the students stated that it was boring to write the same essay repeatedly.

On the point of how the students felt writing with computers, many students preferred using computers to do their writing tasks. A higher number of them, 63% (15) stated that MYACCESS saved time during multiple redrafting in comparison to a pen and paper method. The process of revision can be done quickly and easily. Another 42% (10) of the students said that their essays looked neat and tidy. Some 33% (8) of the students found that writing essay in the computer lab was comfortable because it is air-conditioned and 8% (2) of the students felt that the paperless writing was environmentally friendly. The negative point in using computer to do essay writing was that the students had no time for error correction because they were slow in typing the essay. This was the comment given by 25% (6) of the students. Another 25% (6) of the students said

that they would not multitask because they were unable to construct sentences and type at the same time (Table 7).

Another emerging theme found in the journal entries was dissatisfaction caused by technical setbacks that students experienced while using the computer during the writing process. About 91% (22) of the students expressed the concern that without the Internet they would not be able to use MYACCESS. Another 58% (14) of the students said they lost motivation to write because the Internet speed in the school lab was slow, and it took quite a long time to log into MYACCESS. Further, some of the PCs in the lab could not support the MYACCESS software.

Table.7. Opinions on writing using the computer (n = 24)

Comment	Frequency	Percentage
Positive		
MYACCESS saves time when we do multiple revisions in comparison to pen and paper.	15	63%
Revision can be done quickly and easily. (Essays look neat and tidy when typed.)	10	42%
Writing essay in the lab is comfortable because it is air conditioned.	8	33%
Writing using computer is environmental friendly. (Paperless activity)	2	8%
Negative		
Slow in typing so do not have time to correct errors.	6	25%
I cannot type the essay and construct the sentence.	6	25%

In order to determine if the students' preference towards online automated feedback could be attributed to their experience (frequency of using and familiarity) with computer and the Internet, a Pearson Chi Square test was administered on Items 1 and 3 of the questionnaire and results from the journal entries. The results are discussed below.

Based on the analysis of computer use frequency and comment type preference, the Chi-Square indicates the value of 0.439 with $p = 0.803$, which is more than the significant $p = 0.05$ (Table 8). This clearly shows that the preference for online automated feedback is not dependent on their frequency and familiarity of computer and Internet use.

Table 8. Cross tabulation between online-automated feedback preference and frequency of computer use

Frequency of computer use	Preference		Total
	Yes	No	
Low	5	4	9
Moderate	7	3	10
High	3	2	5
Total	15	9	24

Based on the analysis for the influence from their previous experience with technology towards preference, the Chi Square indicates the value of 0.800 with $p = 0.670$ which is more than the significant $p = 0.05$ (Table 9). This undoubtedly indicates that the preference towards using online automated feedback to write essays is not dependent on the students' familiarity in using computer.

Table 9. Cross tabulation between online-automated feedback preference and familiarity with computer use

Familiarity of computer use	Preference		Total
	Yes	No	
Low	1	1	2
Moderate	11	5	16
High	3	3	6
Total	15	9	24

It can be concluded that students' preference or dislike towards online-automated feedback was neither influenced by their frequency nor experience with computer technology.

Discussion

Based on the results for the preference to feedback during revision, the students chose teacher-written feedback to revise the content and form in their essay drafts. According to the information retrieved from the students' journal, 75% of the students vouched that teacher-written feedback was beneficial because it helped them identify their content and organization errors in general and the grammatical errors in specific, as well as improved their writing skills. Research shows that students value, respect and take their teachers' feedback more seriously and prefer that the response to their writing come from the teacher and not peers (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine & Huang, 1998). During the teacher-written feedback treatment the students were given oral feedback to clarify their doubts on the written feedback that they had received.

Another reason for students' preference for teacher-written feedback was because it was easy to understand. The feedback comments were in simple English and students agreed that the feedback comments helped them during revision. Feedback comments on content and form enabled the students to revise and elaborate the content points and rectify grammatical errors. However, some students who were weak in grammar found some of the feedback comments difficult to understand because the teacher used abbreviations. Students were unable to understand some of the grammatical abbreviations probably due to the minimal exposure and practice on grammar during the limited instructional time in the classroom. This finding shows that besides not understanding the codes that their teachers use, students sometimes do not understand the formal grammatical terms used in feedback. Due to the inability to apply grammar rules in practice and to understand the specific grammatical terms, students were unable to correct all the errors during revision.

Even though teacher-written feedback was preferred by students, they did not completely reject the feedback comments from the computer. Students claimed

that online automated feedback provided by MYACCESS did have its benefits. Students liked online automated feedback because it delivered immediate feedback to their essay drafts. Immediate feedback motivated them to revise their essay immediately. Immediate feedback also enabled the students to attend to their drafts revision immediately and effectively (Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Attali, 2004). Sixty-three per cent of the students found the holistic scores and the individual scores for each of their writing traits beneficial because the scores showed their progress from one draft to the subsequent draft. Another reason for the preference towards online-automated feedback was that typing of their essay drafts by a computer simplified the act of doing multiple revisions because they needed to only rectify the specific errors and did not need to rewrite the entire draft again. This convenience encouraged them to revise the drafts more often.

In comparison to writing essay drafts with teacher-written feedback treatment, most of the students were not in favour of doing multiple revisions to the same essay because it was boring and time consuming, and further they had to rewrite the drafts again with pen and paper. The mode used by students to write their drafts discouraged them, and it could be one of the main reasons contributing to the dislike. Studies showed that editing features in the computer software allows writers to make frequent revisions without the necessity of tedious recopying which prompted frequent revisions (MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991).

Therefore, it can be deduced that many students are willing to do multiple revisions to their essay drafts with the assistance of online automated feedback. However, the students would like to receive verbal and written feedback from the teacher to further improve their essay drafts. The findings show that there is an increased level of motivation and a positive attitude towards essay draft revisions among the ESL students in this study if they receive both verbal and written feedback from the teacher and are able to use MYACCESS in order to overcome the problem of delayed feedback and to minimize the tedious task of writing and revising with pen and paper. Teachers need to work on delivering timely feedback to promote learning because delayed feedback is a waste of time (Rowe & Wood, 2008; Rami, 2012), and the most effective feedback is given soon after a task is completed with clear identification on the strengths and weaknesses along with suggestions for improvements (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study are consistent with previous research (e.g. Paulus, 1999; Hyland, 2000; Weaver, 2006) showing that most students preferred teacher-written feedback, compared to online-automated feedback (Chen & Cheng, 2008; Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). Before both the treatments, the students claimed that they had only received teacher-written feedback to their essay drafts. Students preferred both oral and written feedback from the teacher which helped them identify their errors and improved their writing skills. This was proven true during the teacher-written feedback treatment when students approached the teacher for oral feedback to clarify their doubts on the written feedback received. Face-to-face conferencing between the students and teacher was found to delimit the one-way written feedback by providing the opportunity

for the teacher and student to negotiate the meaning of the comments through dialogue. Studies have shown that students are able to ask questions, clarify meaning and discuss their papers actively with their teachers rather than passively accepting advice (Hyland, 2003; Pattey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997).

Further, the preference to oral feedback might stem from the familiarity of oral feedback as a classroom practice, or from students' beliefs that there was a substantial difference between oral and written feedback (Tuzi, 2004). Students preferred teacher-written feedback because it was easy to understand. The feedback comments were in simple English and students agreed that the feedback comments helped them during revision. Feedback comments on content and form enabled the students to revise and elaborate the content points and rectify grammatical errors. Research findings have shown that students value, respect and take their teachers' feedback more seriously and prefer that the response to their writing comes from the teacher and not peers (Jacobs, Curtis, Braine & Huang; 1998).

Even though the students stated that teacher-written feedback was their preferred choice during revision, they did not completely reject the feedback comments from the computer. They claimed that online automated feedback provided by MYACCESS did have its advantages and disadvantages. They disliked the idea of receiving delayed feedback with teacher-written feedback but liked online automated feedback because it delivered immediate feedback to their essay drafts. The immediate feedback motivated them to revise their essays before they forgot. Research has shown that students used the computer as a tutor, guide or motivator that provided multiple opportunities, practice and individualized feedback to their essay drafts. This enabled students to attend to their drafts revision immediately and effectively (Attali, 2004; Kern & Warschauer, 2000). Studies have shown that teachers need to work on delivering timely feedback to promote learning because delayed feedback was a waste of time (Mustafa, 2012; Rowe & Wood, 2008) and the most effective feedback was given soon after a task was completed with clear identification on the strengths and weaknesses along with suggestions for improvements (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

It can be deduced that many students were willing to do multiple revisions to their essay drafts with the assistance of online automated feedback. However, they liked to receive verbal and written feedback from the teacher to further improve their essay drafts. The findings showed that there is an increased level of motivation and a positive attitude towards essay draft revisions among the ESL students in this study if they received both verbal and written feedback from the teacher. Further, MYACCESS helped to overcome the problem of delayed feedback and minimized the tedious task of writing and revising the essay drafts with pen and paper. Thus, in view of the present Malaysian secondary school context where the students still wrote using pen-and-paper, the teacher should use an integrated approach of combining both modes of feedback for essay revision in the language classroom.

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APPENDIX A
PRE-TREATMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of this questionnaire is to obtain data on students' previous experience with writing feedback and computer literacy. Your responses and information will be held in confidence and will only be used for the purpose of this research. Please answer each question as accurately as possible.

Section A: Personal Information

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender: (Please tick) :
 a. Male
 b. Female
4. Race/Ethnicity (Please tick) :
 a. Malay
 b. Chinese
 c. Indian
 d. Others (please specify)_____
5. Grade scored in English for SPM examination (Please tick) :
 a. A1 d. B4 g. D7
 b. A2 e. C5 h. D8
 c. B3 f. C6 i. E9
6. Languages spoken at home (Please tick) :

Fluency Language	Very fluent	Fluent	Average fluency	Weak
a.English				
b.Bahasa Malaysia				
c.Others (please specify) _____				

7. Competency in written language (Please tick) :

Fluency Language	Very fluent	Fluent	Average fluency	Weak
a.English				
b.Bahasa Malaysia				
c.Others (please specify) _____				

8. Do you have a computer in your house? (Please tick) :
 a. Yes
 b. No

9. Do you have internet access in your house? (Please tick) :
- () a. Yes
 - () b. No

10. Please state the language that you always use online? _____

Section B: Experience with computer technology and Internet.

(Please tick the relevant box)

1. Have you used the technologies stated below? Please indicate the frequency of use by ticking in the column provided.

Score	Meaning
1	Never
2	Sometimes (Once a month)
3	Often (Every week)
4	Always (Everyday)

Type of technology	1	2	3	4
a. E-mail				
b. Computer games				
c. Word processing software				
d. Chat rooms				
e. Blogs				
f. Friendster				
g. Facebook				
j. Messenger				
k. Others (Please specify)				
1. _____				
2. _____				
3. _____				

2. Why do you like the specific technologies mentioned below? (Please tick)

Score	Option
1	fun / enjoyable/ interesting
2	informative
3	entertaining
4	occupies time
5	making friends on line

Reason \ Types of technology	1	2	3	4	5
a. E-mail					
b. Computer games					
c. Word processing software					
d. Chat rooms					
e. Blogs					
f. Friendster					
g. Face Book					
j. Messenger					
k. Others (Please specify)					
1. _____					

2. _____					
3. _____					

3. Students have different opinions and experience with computers and the Internet. Please indicate each statement that applies to you by placing a tick in the appropriate column.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Strongly Agree

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
a. I am comfortable when I use the computer.				
b. I have no fear of making mistakes whenever I use the computer.				
c. I think anyone can learn to use a computer if they are patient and motivated.				
d. I look forward to using a computer for writing and learning.				
e. I think writing with a computer will influences one's writing process.				
f. I prefer to write my essay rather than use a computer to type it.				

4. Do you use a computer to type your English essays? (Please tick)

- () a. Yes
 () b. No
 () c. Sometimes

Reasons: _____

Section C: Previous experience with teacher feedback

When your teacher reads your essay, does she give you comments about your essay?

1. What type of feedback do you always get from your teacher? (Please tick)

- a. () Oral feedback only
- b. () Written feedback only
- c. () Class discussion only
- d. () Oral and written feedback
- e. () Oral, written and class discussion

2. What type of feedback would you like from your teacher? (Please tick)

- a. () Oral feedback only
- b. () Written feedback only
- c. () Class discussion only
- d. () Oral and written feedback
- e. () Written feedback and class discussion
- f. () Oral, written and class discussion

3. Do you like to receive feedback from your classmates or peers? (Please give your reasons)

- () a. Yes
 () b. No

Reasons: _____

4. Does the feedback from your teacher help to improve your writing?
 - () a. Yes
Reasons: _____
 - () b. No
Reasons: _____
 - () c. Sometimes
Reasons: _____

5. Do you make revisions to your drafts based on the feedback given by the teacher?
 - () a. Yes
 - () b. No
 - () c. Sometimes

6. How many revisions do you make to the essay before you submit your final draft?
 - () a. No revisions
 - () b. Once
 - () c. Twice
 - () d. Thrice
 - () e. Four times or more

7. When your teacher corrects your essay drafts, she always

Statement	Yes	No
a. Uses a set of correction symbols		
b. Corrects all the errors and writes the correct word or structure and you copy them		
c. Underlines the errors		
d. Makes comments on the organization		
e. Makes comments on the ideas expressed		

8. If you make an error in writing, what helps you most to understand what you did wrong?
 - () a. Having your teacher explain the problem.
 - () b. Having your friend explain the problem.
 - () c. Looking in a grammar book
 - () d. Having your teacher and friend explain the problem.
 - () e. All the above
 - () f. Others (please specify) _____

9. If you make an error in writing you don't know how to correct, where do you usually go for help?
 - () a. To your teacher
 - () b. To your friend
 - () c. Refer to a grammar book
 - () d. Others (please specify) _____

Section D: Purposes for Writing

1. Do you like to write essays? (Please give your reasons)
 - () a. Yes
 - () b. No
 - Reasons: _____

2. How many essays do you write in a month?
 - () a. One
 - () b. Two
 - () c. Three
 - () d. Four and more

3. When you write your essay, do you like to
 a. write it in classroom
 b. write it outside classroom
 c. copy from your friend
 d. copy from sample essays
 e. others (please specify): _____

4. Do you write letters to your pen-friends?
 a. Yes
 b. No
Reason: _____

5. Do you write articles for your school magazine?
 a. Yes
 b. No
Reasons: _____