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Digital and Non-Digital Feedback Modes in Private Higher Institutions: Students' Perception

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ABSTRACT

The use of effective and high-quality instructional feedback has been identified as a key element of quality teaching and learning. There has been a major change in the provision of instructional feedback in higher education due to the rapid growth of internet strategy, resulting in different feedback modes provided by lecturers. Instructional feedback is generally provided in digital and non-digital modes through two different media: text-based feedback comments (electronic annotations, marking sheets or rubrics, handwritten) and verbal feedback comments (face-to-face and digitally recorded). These feedback modes are used to monitor student learning in response to instruction and to prompt students to confirm, refine, or clarify their understandings. Although there is recognition of the significant role and value of feedback in student learning, little is understood about how students perceive the feedback they receive on their work. So, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the uses of digital and non-digital feedback modes in Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar (KPTMAS). This study employed a quantitative approach through an online survey, and the survey items were adapted from Ryan, Henderson & and Phillips (2019). The population of the study consisted of Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar students. Hopefully, these findings enhance our understanding of the students' preferences in the use of feedback modes in higher education. Henderson & Phillips (2019). The population of the study consisted of Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar students. Hopefully, these findings enhance our understanding of the students' preferences in the use of feedback modes in higher education.

Keywords: *Feedback Modes, Digital and Non-Digital Modes, Text-Based Feedback, Verbal Feedback, Higher Education*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increased awareness of the use of feedback for student learning in higher education worldwide (Hernández, 2012; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015; Ahea, 2016; Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019). Feedback is considered a tricky issue in the higher education arena but has been acknowledged as a vital component of improving learners' learning (Ahea, 2016). Indeed, top scholars argue that effective feedback comprises learners receiving and making sense of information about their performance, and using that information to enhance their future performance (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Carless, 2015; Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019). Feedback processes involve information that usually comes from peers, teachers, or oneself (Carless, 2016). Furthermore, Constructivists believe that students have to construct their knowledge from learned experiences through their active role by taking ownership of learning, which can boost their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hsiao, 2017). Students perceive that feedback often comes too late to be useful; it frequently fails to connect; and there are usually insufficient opportunities to act on the feedback received, which leads to both teachers and students experiencing frustration with the limited positive impacts of how feedback processes are managed (Carless, 2016).

Despite the understanding of the importance of good feedback, there still appears to be a gap between what staff believe they are doing and what students feel they are receiving, a divide that leaves students and staff dissatisfied. While tutors think they are giving extensive feedback and may spend many hours producing written comments, the evidence is that the feedback is often not understood or is not communicated in a way that is helpful to the students (Chalmers, Mowat & Chapman, 2018). Students perceive that feedback often comes too late to be useful; it frequently fails to connect; and there are usually insufficient opportunities to act on the feedback received, which leads to both teachers and students experiencing frustration with the limited positive impacts of how feedback processes are managed (Carless, 2016). Therefore, scholars are eager to find ways to ensure the time spent providing feedback is not wasted and that students get what they want from their teachers (Martin & Valdivia, 2017; Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019; Young & Duncan, 2014). Additionally, many universities have large classes, which puts academicians under pressure to be efficient in providing rapid and anonymous feedback that is personalized for different learners (Chalmers, Mowat & Chapman, 2018). Hence, feedback is important not only for knowledge acquisition but also for students' motivation and satisfaction (Ahea, 2016; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016; Nielsen, 2015).

Looking at current trends over the past two decades in educational settings, the teaching and learning process could benefit from the explosion of technology. To overcome learners' difficulties in teaching and learning due to insufficient time and overload in teaching, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could be utilized as an additional tool in the teaching and learning process (Ayuni Akhiar & Kasuma, 2017; Cahyono, Widiati & Dwihandayani, 2018). Electronic feedback through tools such as PDF documents and audio and video feedback seems popular among students, enhancing students' positive perception of teacher concern for their progress and strengthening the relationship between teacher and students as well (Carless, 2016). Furthermore, the use of technology has great potential for facilitating more innovative educational methods, as students require a learning space that can fulfill their flexible learning and multitasking needs (Handal, MacNish & Petocz, 2013). Informal learning that uses online platforms should be included in classroom learning, as it is proven to be more effective and can indirectly motivate students compared to traditional styles (Cole & Vanderplank, 2016). Many experts in the educational field have seen the importance of using technology in learning inside and outside the classroom for teaching and learning activities (Shaikh & Khoja, 2014; Pavlik, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is growing evidence that feedback is best supported when the comments are detailed, personalized, and usable (Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019). This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the uses of digital and non-digital feedback modes in Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar (KPTMAS). Previous studies indicated that a diversity of preferences (written, verbal, face-to-face, digital, group, individual) in providing feedback would be effective in meeting individual needs (Morris & Chikwa, 2016; Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019; Singh, 2016; Van der Kleij, 2019). So, this study's overall aim is to gain a deeper understanding of what students think about the use of digital and non-digital feedback modes as a mechanism in the teaching and learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over recent years, the language of feedback has gained greater prominence, and the idea of feedback has grown from the Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky (Van de Pol, Mercer & Volman, 2018). The sociocultural theory contains six constructs known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Internalization, Mediation Theory, Activity Theory, Scaffolding and ZPD, and Inner speech (Fahim & Haghani, 2012). Scaffolding is instructional support that helps individuals to accomplish tasks beyond the ability to complete alone; scaffolds help learners move from their actual development level to their potential development level, the gap known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Wang, Bruce, & Hughes, 2011). Actual development refers to the knowledge and skills an individual can obtain without support; potential development refers to knowledge and skills that a learner can achieve with support. Sociocultural theory is based on the assumption that learning emerges through interaction (Ellis, 2000, as cited in Fahim & Haghani, 2012). Therefore, teachers' feedback is a powerful tool promoting interaction between teachers and students; it also has a clear impact on students' learning performance and self-regulated learning (Carvalho, Martin, Santana & Feliciano, 2014).

Feedback is commonly used to refer to information provided by a competent person, including a teacher or peer, to the learners about their work (Van der Kleij, 2019). Feedback processes must be seen as a central part of the curriculum and certainly not just something that comes at its end (Carless, 2016). Previous studies suggest that feedback is most effective when delivered soon after task performance, presented sensitively to suit students' learning styles, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, suggesting improvements, and being constructive and motivating (Chalmers, Mowat, & Chapman, 2018). However, some pedagogic perspectives on feedback change the role of a teacher in the classroom from teacher-centered toward more student-centered, as the constructivist view of teaching suggests a more active student role in feedback processes (Carless, 2018). Feedback consists of three crucial components: transparent ways for both teacher and students, evidence of the judgment of the student's task needs to be given, and, lastly, feedback should decrease the gap between students' actual and potential level (Carless, 2016). According to Rowe & Wood (2008), several constructs are involved in the feedback process: the source of feedback (teacher and students); the mode of feedback (how it is presented); the content (information conveyed); and the occasion (when it is presented). Hence, the tone of feedback is as crucial as the content of the feedback because balancing feedback using positive and negative feedback can enhance students' motivation in learning (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015).

There are two types of feedback modes: Non-digital feedback modes are mostly conveyed through face-to-face feedback, marking sheets, or handwritten feedback; meanwhile Digital feedback is conveyed through digitally recorded audio and electronic text-based comments (Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019). Non-digital feedback is usually given by teachers to learners directly after they have completed their task in the classroom, when learners approach the teachers (Yang & Carless, 2013). However, non-digital feedback requires extensive consultation hours, as the teacher needs to adjust their comments to numerous individual learners, and it is criticized as lacking both detail and personalization (Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019). Meanwhile, digital feedback is delivered to learners through technology-enabled approaches such as computerized feedback, web-based feedback, and audio and visual files (Schindler, Burkholder, Morad, & Marsh, 2017). Students appreciate digital feedback as more personalized and engaging, which particularly benefits students and educators, as it is regarded as more efficient to produce, as the digital files for audio- or text-based comments can be easily shared with students via email (Morris & Chikwa, 2016; Orlando, 2016). Effective feedback, either digital or non-digital, should be detailed, personalized, and usable (Ryan, Henderson & Philip, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive research design. The purpose of descriptive research is to observe, describe, and document findings without manipulating independent or dependent variables, as in experimental research. The descriptive research method is appropriate as this study focuses on investigating students' perceptions of the uses of digital and non-digital feedback modes in Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar (KPTMAS). So, this study employed a quantitative approach through an online survey, and the survey items were adapted from Ryan, Henderson & Phillips (2019) to gain numerical results. The survey items were closed-ended questions that were adapted to suit the context and target respondents in this study. The online survey consisted of three parts: Part A on demographic details, Part B responses on the types of feedback comment modes received by students from their lecturers, and Part C regarding students' perception of the feedback received from lecturers. The online survey was distributed through the Google Form platform and answered by 108 students.

The sampling design that is used by the researcher in this study is convenience sampling. According to Creswell (2016), convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling; by selecting a target population that meets certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate in the study (Creswell, 2016). For this study, the group of participants represented the population of current students in Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar during the November 2019 session. With this sample, the researchers would utilize little time and resources as the students showed a willingness to be involved as participants in the online survey distributed by the researchers in this study. Therefore, the sample size consisted of 108 students from Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar and was conducted in January 2020. Data were collected through online survey analyses using descriptive analysis to present the frequency and percentage of students' perception of the uses of digital and non-digital feedback modes in Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar (KPTMAS).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Part A: Demographic Details.

By the end of the survey period, data had been collected from 108 students, 40 of whom were male and 68 were female. The data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Details

Item		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	40	37.03
	Female	68	62.96
Semester	1	4	3.70
	2	23	21.30
	3	13	12.04
	4	1	0.93
	5	55	50.93
	6	12	11.11
Program	Accounting	18	16.67
	Business Management	31	28.70
	Computer & System Networking	33	30.56
	Information Technology	13	12.04
	Office Management	13	12.04

Part B: Types of Feedback Comment Modes Received by Students from Their Lecturers for Any Given Subject or Task.

This section of the questionnaire required respondents to give information on the types of feedback modes received from their lecturers. Respondents were asked three questions in this section. The results are summarized in the following table.

Table 2: Types of feedback modes received

Item		Frequency	%
Feedback mode	Digital	33	30.56
	Non-digital	4	3.70
	Digital & non-digital	70	64.81
	Not related	1	0.93
Types of text-based comment	Electronic	48	44.44
	Marking sheet	54	50
	Handwritten	43	39.81
	Not related	3	2.7
Types of verbal comments	Face to face	97	89.81
	Digital recorded	26	24.07
	Not related	3	2.78

In response to the question: 'Feedback modes received from lecturers', most of those surveyed (64.8%) indicated that they received both digital and non-digital feedback from the lecturers. 30.6% reported that they received digital feedback. Some respondents stated that they received non-digital feedback for any given subject or task. Out of the 108 students who responded to the question, 'Types of text-based comments', 54 reported that the type of text-based comment received from lecturers is a marking sheet or rubric. Almost half of those who answered the question mentioned they received electronic annotations from lecturers. Other responses to this question included that 43 respondents received handwritten comments. The majority of those who responded to the third item on types of verbal comments indicated that they had face-to-face interviews for the verbal comments received from lecturers. Only a small number of students reported receiving digital records of the verbal comments.

Part C: Perception of the Feedback/Comment Received from Lecturers.

In this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their perception of the comments received from lecturers.

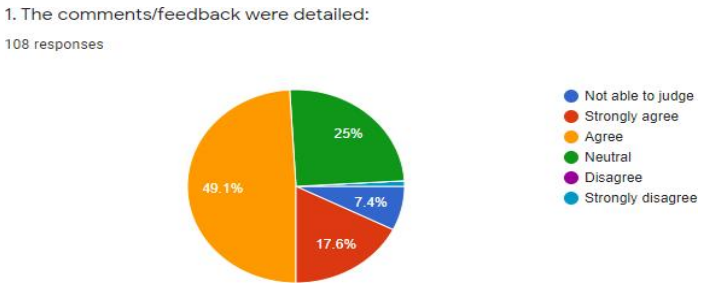

Figure 1. Perception toward feedback received from lecturers

Approximately half of those (49.1%) who answered this question agreed that they received detailed feedback from the lecturers. 25% of those who responded to this question had a neutral response. A small number of participants reported they strongly agreed that the feedback received from the lecturer was detailed.

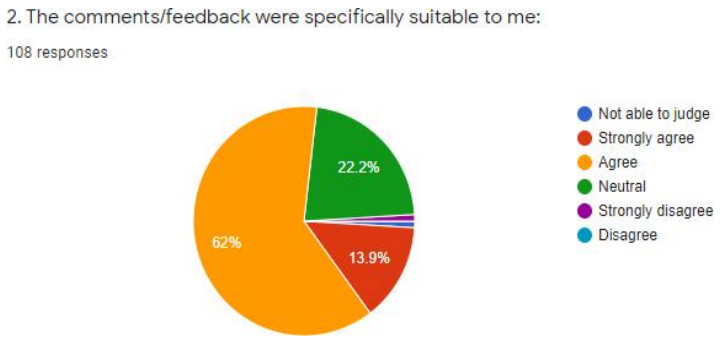

Figure 2. The suitability of feedback received from lecturers.

62% of those who were surveyed commented that they agreed the feedback received was suitable for them. A minority of students (13.9%) said they strongly agreed with this question. Another 22.2% had neutral responses when they were asked this question. Some of the respondents strongly disagreed that the feedback was suitable for them.

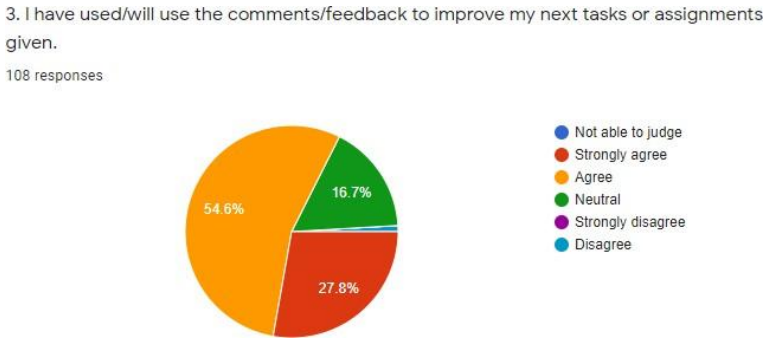

Figure 3. Use of feedback received for improvement on other tasks.

In response to this question, one individual stated that they disagreed with using the feedback received to improve the other tasks. Just over half of respondents (54.6%) agreed they will use the comments received to improve the next tasks. 27.8% of those who responded said that they strongly agreed with this question. A minority of students (16.7%) said that they have used/will use the feedback received for improvement.

CONCLUSION

This paper adds to the growing body of evidence supporting the student's perception of the feedback modes received from lecturers in higher education institutions. Based on the findings presented, the majority of students showed a positive perception of feedback received from their lecturers, which is graded as detailed, personalized, and usable, whether in digital or non-digital modes. This finding showed that students are mostly sensitive to feedback received from lecturers and prefer private feedback according to their learning needs.

The findings also showed lecturers from Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar consistently provide feedback to their students after completing the given task. In terms of the feedback modes used by the lecturers, the findings showed the majority preferred to use both digital and non-digital feedback toward their students instead of choosing a single mode of feedback. Further research therefore needs to explore the relationships between students' gender, program, and feedback modes for a better understanding.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in the paper.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and writing of the original draft.
Author 2 was responsible for data collection, analysis, and validation of the results.
Author 3 provided supervision, critical review, and editing of the final manuscript.
All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of KPTM Alor Setar and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

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