

Hearing Your Feedback Loud and Clear: Students' Voices of Audio Feedback in Virtual Writing Class

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Received:
20 September 2021

Revised:
22 November 2021

Accepted:
3 February 2022

Published:
30 April 2022

Abstract

There are many growing types of research about technology-supported feedback in English language teaching. Meanwhile, the study investigating audio feedback in virtual writing class during emergency remote teaching is still underexplored. In order to fill the gap, this research aims at investigating students' perceptions towards audio feedback in virtual writing class. It employs a qualitative research design. Six students were voluntarily interviewed in this study. Furthermore, their writing was also observed. The findings of this study revealed that students view audio feedback positively. They admit that audio feedback is clear, personal, and detailed. Furthermore, students can feel the teaching presence because of the audio feedback. The further implications are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Technology in ELT, audio feedback, virtual writing class, students' voices, higher education

Introduction

Teachers in higher education are aware of the importance of giving feedback on students' writing to enhance the learning process. Feedback aims to help the students know what they have achieved in their writing related to the learning goals and to help students become aware of their weaknesses and the gaps in their writing (Lee, 2014). Therefore, it is pivotal to consider that the feedback given was useful for the students' future development. In addition to that, effective feedback can affect the students' engagement and the quality of learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In order to improve learning, feedback must include informative and elaborative components which highlight how to improve the performance (Narciss & Huth, 2002). The feedback which is given personally, such as *you are a brilliant student* or *you did a great writing* without any comment to improve their writing, is considered ineffective to enhance students' learning process (Hattie & Clarke, 2018; Walker, 2009; Weaver, 2006).

In addition to that, there is still a misconception about feedback that it is the only information given by the teacher to students after the submission of the writing. The misconception is focused more on what the teacher does rather than what the students do in their own learning (Carless & Boud, 2018; Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010). Feedback should not be considered as something given by the teacher after



the writing submission, but it is something given between – or connects – performances (Boud & Molloy, 2012). The most widely used feedback method is written feedback (McCarthy, 2015). Meanwhile, students highlighted some various notions they do not understand from teacher's written feedback, including the use of complex academic language (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2017), not being able to discover messy handwritten feedback (Ryan & Henderson, 2018), and written feedback which is vague and unconstructive (Henderson, Ryan, & Phillips, 2019).

The closure of higher education due to the Covid-19 pandemic must switch the teaching and learning process from face-to-face to online teaching. It also changes the pedagogical approaches of how teachers provide feedback in the virtual learning environment (VLE). In this emergency remote teaching situation, the depth of online teaching and learning relates to social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Law, Geng, & Li, 2019). One of the keys to teaching presence is providing feedback (Wilson & Stacey, 2004). In VLE, teachers can implement technology to provide feedback, henceforth e-feedback. There are many forms of e-feedback that teachers can apply: feedback using word-processing software such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs (Kim, 2010), feedback using audio (Lunt & Curran, 2010), and feedback using screen capture software (Stannard, 2017).

In response to the current condition, audio feedback can be an innovative way that is worth implementing in virtual writing class. Audio feedback is a commentary of students' writing that allows teachers to provide unique and tailored feedback (FitzPatrick & McKeown, 2020). Audio recordings have become easier because of the advancement of technology. The technology could impact the way teachers provide feedback (Stapleton & Radia, 2009). Furthermore, it can provide ways beyond written feedback which is usually conducted in the face-to-face classroom. One of the audio recording platforms that can be used is Vocaroo. Vocaroo is a free online recording website. We can access it without installing or downloading. The audio files we created on Vocaroo can be shared on different social networking sites as a link. In addition to that, we can download the audio files in different formats, such as mp3, Wav, Ogg, and flag.

According to published evidence, audio feedback is highly acceptable. Morris and Chikwa (2016) focused specifically on students' preferences of audio and written feedback and the type of feedback that could impact students' learning outcomes. Students were broadly positive about audio feedback, but they showed a strong preference for the use of written feedback in the future task. Ice et al. (2007) reported from their case study that students had positive responses with asynchronous audio feedback compared with asynchronous text feedback. The findings revealed that audio feedback could build students' engagement. In a similar vein, Brearley and Rod Cullen (2012) attempted to explore students' perceptions and engagements with formative audio feedback. The study revealed that audio feedback is clear, helpful, and engaging but how the teachers adopt the feedback delivery technique must be considered so the students can implement the feedback given. Another study conducted by Kirschner et al. (1991) also revealed that students described their experiences in receiving audio feedback as personal, complete, clear, and pleasant. In their study, they also reported that the amount of feedback comments communicated with students was greater than written



feedback. It resonates with a study carried out by Merry and Orsmond (2008). They investigated that the students responded positively to audio feedback because it was easier for them to understand. In addition to that, the students felt that audio feedback was more personal and it had more depth.

Although there are many growing types of research related to audio feedback revealed positive responses, the use of audio feedback is still underexplored in virtual writing class. In this emergency remote teaching, when teaching and learning are conducted fully online, teachers had to switch the pedagogical approaches by integrating technology. Previous research has shown that students may feel isolated in an online setting, so the teachers should adapt their teaching strategies by using more interactive teaching methodologies, encouraging more student participation, and providing more communication channels to students (Volery & Lord, 2000). It is important for the students to feel that the feedback comment is bespoke to them (R. Lefroy, 2020). There must be a positive relationship between teacher and students as a fundamental factor to successful audio feedback. A positive relationship can be built by providing well-informed feedback (Lefroy et al., 2015). Positive student-teacher relationships promote a feeling of connectedness, which leads to positive student attitudes regarding academic success expectations, as well as academic motivation and engagement (Newcomer, 2017).

Feedback comments should provide an appropriate quantity of personalized material in a way that is sensitive to each students' context and needs to maximize their potential impact. Text-based comments, which are generally limited to the margins of essays or a comment box on a rubric, make this difficult to implement. As a result, students may find written feedback or text-based comments unclear and lack in detail (Borup, West, & Thomas, 2015). Oral feedback or face-to-face feedback, on the other hand, may provide rich, personalized and detail, but it might be impeded by performance anxiety and is dependent on student memory (Henderson & Phillips, 2015). Audio feedback allows teachers to include an adequate amount of detail in a short recording, and the audio recording can be listened to as many times as the students want. Research focusing on audio feedback has shown that it is detailed, individualized, clear, and supportive (Henderson & Phillips, 2014).

One of the least satisfying aspects of feedback is about students' engagement and responsiveness to feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2012). Students are more likely to interact with and act on the feedback they understand rather than feedback they do not understand (West & Turner, 2015). It means when the audio feedback given is not clear and understandable, it can be difficult for the students to engage with the feedback. According to the evidence, audio feedback can help students engage more with feedback and, as a result, perform better in future assessments (Lunt & Curran, 2010). Audio feedback in virtual writing class is relatively novel, and its usage as a feedback vehicle is still in its infancy. As a result, there is not a lot of research conducted on this subject. Given the importance of feedback in learning, this study contributes to the developing body of research focused on students' perceptions of audio feedback in virtual writing class.



Method

This research employed qualitative research with a case study design because it provides for a more in-depth and contextualized investigation of a phenomenon informed by the participants' perspectives (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This method is relevant to the aim of this study which is to explore students' perspectives of audio feedback in virtual writing class. This current study investigated qualitatively EFL students' perceptions about audio feedback they received with the purpose of providing a useful suggestion for feedback practice in virtual writing class.

The study was conducted at the English Language Education Department in one of the private universities in Indonesia. In this department, there were two classes for the first semester students. They had a writing course, namely Simple Text Writing, which was conducted fully online in this pandemic. In this present study, the writing topic they wrote was "My Last Holiday". The lecturer provided audio feedback using Vocaroo. The students were required to write in Google Docs so the link of audio feedback using Vocaroo can be given directly in the comment section. Document observation and semi-structured interviews were the primary sources of data for this study. The document observation was conducted before the students received audio feedback and after the students did revision in their writing. The participants of this study were chosen purposively according to a set of criteria. First, they receive audio feedback in virtual writing class. Second, they revise their writing after the feedback given. Third, they agree to be involved in this research by signing the consent form provided.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted for each participant to obtain rich and detailed qualitative information about students' perspectives on audio feedback in virtual writing class. An interview protocol was designed to ensure that all participants received the same main questions and to help the interviewer maintain the flow of the discussion. The individual interviews were conducted for 30 minutes using Zoom. To avoid misunderstanding, the individual interviews were conducted using Bahasa Indonesia. It was fully recorded, transcribed, translated into English, interpreted, and concluded to answer the research questions.

A set of interview data obtained from six participants was treated equally. It was transcribed and translated into English. When there was a phrase or statement in the data that was linked to the research question, it was highlighted and labeled as initial coding. The codes were classified into axial coding in order to identify primary groups that are closely related to the research question. The categories are the relationship between students and lecturer, detailed and clarity of audio feedback and students' emotional responses to audio feedback. In addition, the data were depicted and elaborated in narrative form. Students' perceptions of audio feedback in virtual writing class were evaluated from the data gathered, and it was supported with certain relevant theories and previous literature.

Findings and Discussion

To address the research questions, the findings from the open-ended interview are organized into three main lenses: 1) students-lecturer relationship, 2) detailed and clarity of audio feedback, and 3) students' emotional responses to audio feedback.



In the beginning, we explored students' perceptions of audio feedback in virtual writing class. Students' perceptions of audio feedback here mean how the students value audio feedback in their learning process. In general, the participants have positive perceptions towards audio feedback in virtual writing class. They share their opinion about their relationship with the lecturer, the detailed and clarity of the feedback, and their emotional responses to audio feedback.

The first perception towards audio feedback from the students was the relationship between students and lecturer. The students highlighted the personal effect of the audio feedback provided by the lecturer. From their perspective, the lecturer who provided audio feedback is considered as a caring lecturer. During this emergency remote teaching, when the teaching and learning process is conducted fully online, it is important for the students to feel the teacher's presence in their learning process. Students mentioned that the audio feedback given feels like the lecturer is talking to them directly.

"In my opinion, the lecturer's attention to students is shown through personal audio feedback."

"... because I feel the lecturer is talking to me directly. I felt it was like personal tutoring."

"I haven't met my lecturer directly because I am the first-semester student. I started my university life in this pandemic situation. It is nice to hear her voice through the feedback on my assignment. It was my first-time receiving audio feedback."

The second lens from the students' perspective is the detailed and clarity of audio feedback. Students found it easier to understand audio feedback because it was clear and detailed. Moreover, the students could listen to audio feedback repeatedly. They liked to pause and rewind the audio. In this case, the students also mentioned that audio feedback led to clearer feedback than written feedback. Meanwhile, they also highlighted that it was difficult for them to listen and revise at the same time.

"Audio feedback is clearer and easier to understand. It was hard to understand written feedback because of the lecturer's writing. Sometimes the lecturer only provided very short comment on written feedback."

"Lecturer is very detailed giving feedback on each component of my writing so that the audio feedback given is easy to understand and I can listen to it repeatedly."

"... I had difficulty in revising my writing while listening"

Another interesting theme of the category relates to students' emotional responses when they listen to audio feedback. All of the students' interviewed explained that it was their first-time receiving audio feedback in writing class. The students attributed positive responses about content and intonation used by the lecturer in providing the feedback even though they were nervous in listening to the



audio feedback. The students expressed that the audio feedback was not intimidating because lecturer's tone was friendly and not judgmental. Some of the students were nervous because they experienced unconstructive feedback from their high school English teachers in the past. Their high school teachers only highlighted their mistakes in writing. Students also perceived positively in responding lecturer's audio feedback. They were motivated to revise their writing because they had to submit their writing again after receiving the audio feedback.

"At first, I was nervous when I heard the feedback, but it turns out that the intonation used by the lecturer makes me feel appreciated."

"When I was in high school, the feedback given by my teacher was more focused on the mistakes in my writing. After listening to audio feedback given by my lecturer in college, I was told what was lacking in my writing and what I needed to improve. I am very happy".

"....when I got email notification that my writing assignment has been given feedback, I directly listened to the audio feedback and revised it because I had to submit my writing again".

"I checked my writing when I got the email notification. After I listened to the audio feedback, I revised my writing because it must be submitted on time".

Discussion

In the higher education context, feedback is used to inform learning, justify grades, and meet institutional requirements (Bailey & Garner, 2010). Student engagement and high quality of learning are the impacts of effective feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2018). In addition to that, it influences students' motivation in learning (Ball, 2010). Technology also brings a new dimension to the way teachers provide feedback. In this emergency remote teaching, teachers also migrate their way of providing feedback. Using audio feedback can be one of the ways teachers provide feedback in VLE. Thus, this study aims to explore students' perceptions towards audio feedback in virtual writing class.

The first lens discussed is the relationship between lecturer and students. According to the results of the interview, students perceive their relationship with the lecturer positively. From their perspective, the lecturer who provided audio feedback personally during this emergency remote teaching is considered a caring lecturer. It also has a similar vein with Dixon (2015), audio feedback can foster a sense of care between students and teacher. Research conducted by Lefroy et al. (2015) revealed that students must perceive feedback as reliable, well-informed, and from a trustworthy source if they will take it seriously. Therefore, a positive relationship between teacher and students is essential for successful audio feedback.

Students also consider that there is a teaching presence during their virtual writing class. Teachers' visibility in the learning environment is called teaching presence (Savvidou, 2013). In VLE, teaching presence is associated positively with student motivation in learning. Thus, when students feel there is a teaching presence through the feedback, it can also affect their motivation to learn. Audio feedback



can bring a unique relational approach between students and lecturer. Students feel that the teacher is talking to them through the audio feedback. In addition, students feel a sense of appreciation for their work (Hennessy & Forrester, 2014). Providing a great sense of the relationship between students and lecturer could impact the quality of the audio feedback experience. Pokorny and Pickford (2010) also supported this by explaining that the lecturers who were more flexible and showed empathy were significant factors in guiding the students to access feedback. In addition to that, providing teaching presence is pivotal to avoid the feeling of loneliness from the students because of the emergency remote teaching and learning.

The students also mentioned that audio feedback led to clearer feedback than written feedback. Some research revealed that feedback in digital recording format is easier to understand compared with written comments (Henderson & Phillips, 2015). Sometimes the students got difficulty in reading lecturer's feedback in their writing, and the feedback given in written format was quite short. So, it makes them hard to understand the feedback. In general, research also found that students expressed that audio feedback is more pleasant, complete, personal, and clear (Kirschner et al., 1991). Audio feedback can provide more detailed feedback, leading to a better understanding (King, 2008). There are two significant features of effective feedback. First, the students can comprehend and make sense of the information they get from the feedback, and second, students can act upon the feedback given to improve their learning (Carless & Boud, 2018). If the students cannot understand the feedback given, it will be difficult for them to implement the feedback in future task.

In the audio feedback given, the students were told the good things and what they need to improve in their writing. So, students can engage with the feedback given. The most common affective response is the students feel that the teachers treat them like an individual (Fernández-Toro & Furnborough, 2014). Written feedback can appear to be harsh because it cannot convey the tone of voice in handwritten format. Meanwhile, audio feedback can convey the tone of voice, emotion, and engagement (Dowden, Pittaway, Yost, & McCarthy, 2013). Students also perceived positively in responding lecturer's audio feedback. They were motivated to revise their writing because they had to submit their writing again after receiving the audio feedback. Feedback must be usable for the students. It means the feedback given must lead the students to what they can do to improve their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Thus, the feedback given must be relevant to the future task or assignment. Audio feedback is like an artifact that students can revisit as many times as they want. Students could implement audio feedback in more meaningful ways than written feedback (Merry & Orsmond, 2008). This type of feedback mode can provide detailed and rich comments (Denton, 2014). Previous studies revealed that students respond to feedback not only cognitively and behaviorally but also emotionally. The emotional response from the students towards the feedback given is usually long-term (Ende et al., 1995; Sulaeman, 2021).



Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that students' have positive perceptions through audio feedback in virtual writing class. Some exploration on the way they engage with the feedback given should be taken into consideration. In addition to that, the impact of audio feedback in their writing can be investigated further. This study only involved a limited number of participants. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct it on a larger scale.

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