First-year students at an open distance and e-learning institution: Perceptions, expectations, and challenges associated with academic writing feedback

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine perceptions, expectations and challenges associated with the feedback that first-year English studies students receive in an Academic Writing module (ENG100) at an open distance and e-learning institution in South Africa. First-year students who speak English as an additional language experience difficulty in understanding the feedback they receive in their academic writing tasks.

While constructive feedback is known to be a valuable teaching tool in various teaching contexts, the findings revealed that the feedback students receive is below the standard that they expect, is confusing, and inadequate for addressing most of the sociocultural challenges they encounter.

The study followed a qualitative approach that obtained data from participants through online open-ended evaluation questions. Random sampling was utilised to select a sample size from a population of approximately 16 000 students.

This paper proposes that academic writing modules should view writing as a social skill and not as a subject.

Keywords: academic writing feedback, first-year students, EAL students, open distance learning, e-learning, sociocultural theory, ODeL

1. Introduction

Academic writing support in higher education (HE) is intended to prepare students to be able to write effective essays, scientific papers or academic books (Lea & Street, 2006). Additionally, academic writing support prepares students to adopt a formal style of writing and teaches them to apply subject-specific vocabulary in their writing. The formal structure of writing ensures that an academic argument is well-developed and supported. Lea and Street (2006) argue that for students to succeed in Academic Writing modules, it is essential for educators of academic writing to reflect on their own teaching practices because learning how to write academically is a different social discourse altogether, something many English as Additional Language (EAL) students, due to their disadvantaged educational backgrounds, are not familiar with. According to Gee (2012: 152, 2001a, 2001b, 1992, 1996, 1999), discourse refers to social relationships, social identities, meaningful language usage between individuals in a specific context. Thus, Gee, recognises discourse as a 'socially recognizable identity' or a "way of being" in the world. Therefore, for students to communicate in a critical way, analyse content and communicate it in a meaningful way to others who are in a similar context as them, they are required to master academic discourse as this would arguably help them appear and sound appropriate. It is therefore vital that ways which may assist students to successfully master academic discourse are explored in teaching praxis. The latter includes giving students constructive feedback.

Literature indicates that constructive feedback helps students to check their academic writing performance and to reflect on their writing. (Jones, 2011; Lillis, 2003). However, Mag (2019), showed in her study that teachers provided feedback that instilled a lack of confidence in students' abilities. A similar study by Al-Hattami, (2019:885) showed that "teachers tend to score students' work and award them marks, but constructive feedback is rarely provided to students to make sure the intended learning outcomes are met". Furthermore, Lee et al. (2017) suggest that lecturers' feedback practices are supposed to be shaped by the needs and capabilities of students, implying the lack of expected constructive feedback in the teaching praxis

2. Feedback in an open distance and e-learning institution

Given the physical separation between students and lecturers in an open distance and e-learning (ODeL) context, positive, consistent, and meaningful feedback can be a critical lever (Maphoto & Sevnarayan, 2021; Mullikin, 2020; Halawa et al., 2017). This idea is in line with those advanced in studies by Shackelford and Maxwell (2018) and Mills (2003), which highlight the significance of comprehending the 'learner at a distance' in any particular distance learning setting. Importantly, to understand how one can reduce the transactional distance between individuals and create an environment that promotes interaction and social presence (Moore,

2013). Similarly, a study by Chalmers et al. (2018) argues that the primary aim of providing a clear and constructive feedback is to preserve social interaction, which is significant in an online learning. Providing constructive feedback would be a way of devising "tremendous challenges students experience and express in ODeL institutions in terms of effective feedback delivery on assignments…." Uiseb (2017:185) and Halawa et al. (2017) state that feedback is importantly required in ODeL as there is limited contact between students and lecturers. In this context, constructive feedback is regarded a powerful tool to help students rethink and revisit the same concept repeatedly until the concept is well understood (Rowe, 2017).

Feedback is acknowledged by other scholars as one of powerful influences on students' performance as it guides them through the learning process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2003). However, research on whether the feedback students receive aligns with their expectations and addresses their challenges is inadequate, particularly in the ODeL environment. According to Uiseb (2017), ODeL settings should be used to develop metrics and strategies that would result in an effective transformation to address the issues with feedback provision and delivery in ODeL. The goals of the current study were motivated by numerous different recommendations, including the one mentioned above by Uiseb (2017).

3. Students' perceptions and expectations of constructive feedback in ODeL

Although many scholars have questioned the purpose of written feedback in an ODeL context, it is evident that English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in ODeL find feedback useful in facilitating their language learning through self-evaluation and reflection (Maphoto, 2021; Al Marwani, 2020; Brooks et al., 2019; Chalmers et al., 2017; Ahea et al., 2016; Price et al., 2015; Brown, 2007; Case, 2007). However, for Ferguson (2011), Holmes and Papageorgiou (2009), students often express dissatisfaction with the feedback they receive as they expect meaningful and constructive comments. Most students expect feedback to be clear, precise, sufficient and "provided in a timely manner" (Blair et al., 2013:70; Can & Walker, 2011). The literature in general indicates that most students usually have a strong sense that feedback is plentiful, but not necessarily helpful as it is not timely (Glover & Brown, 2006). Although most studies report timely feedback to be useful, Fluckiger et al. (2010) argue that both immediate and delayed feedback can be useful depending on the task. For Butlers et al. (2007), a delayed feedback can be much useful than immediate feedback for retention of knowledge and improving performance considering the amount of effort and time that lecturers expend on it. These discussions are an indication that feedback is a "troublesome issue" in institutions of higher learning, perhaps more in the ODeL context. However, it remains a core component of teaching in any teaching context according to Uiseb (2017:186).

Recent studies show that students have been "willing to take control of the feedback process"; they require more self-assessment opportunities (Wei et al., 2021:1092). The results in Fithriani (2019:63) indicate that students appreciate written feedback as it encourages "critical reasoning and promotes learner autonomy". In line with Fithriani (2019), Uiseb's (2017) study, a study that was conducted in a ODeL context, posits that students expect helpful comments that guide them to not repeat the same mistakes; they insist that comments should not be too short and difficult to communicate what the marker want. Providing feedback involves engaging with students, instead of telling them what to do. As lecturers engage with students, to a certain extent, the sense of isolation in ODeL is reduced as the study by Martin & Bolliger, (2018) suggests. From these studies one may surmise that it is inevitable that distant learning evokes perceptions of isolation and neglect in ODeL spaces causing frustration in many students.

As suggested in Lim et al. (2021) many ODeL students perceive that feedback triggers negative and positive attitudes, and can make them sad or happy. Students then believe that emotions influence how they view and process feedback (Lim et al., 2021). Other studies have suggested that students could not comprehend the feedback they received and that also influenced how they viewed and responded to it (Carless & Boud, 2018; Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Furthermore, Hattie and Timperley (2007). observe that students usually have difficulties when they process feedback from lecturers because it is usually not clear However, according to Walker, Oliver, & Mackenzie's (2020), feedback should be clear, individualised and should often relate to the task and learning objectives.

4. Students' academic writing challenges

Academic writing challenges that students face can be institutional or even language related (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). For instance, a problem with the institution that can impede students' learning is typically the large number of students and inadequate academic personnel. Therefore, teaching, grading and giving feedback automatically becomes a challenge (Carpenter et al., 2020; Kroukamp & De Vries, 2014). In addition, Sibomama (2016:23) states that individuals from non-English backgrounds are at a disadvantage as they must adhere to academic literacy conventions in the English language which most EAL students are not proficient in. To add, challenges related to academic writing are usually as a result of students' frail linguistic or literacy backgrounds with negative attitudes towards academic writing (Pineteh, 2014). However, it is common knowledge, as attested by Langum and Sullivan (2017), that academic writing is a difficult process for EAL students as English is not their home language and they are expected to adhere to English language rules.

Although there are challenges related to academic writing, Pineteh (2013:12) argues that "academic writing plays a critical role in socialising students into the discourse of subjects and disciplines in universities". Academic writing is arguably the leading medium that students and lecturers use to communicate in their academic space. Therefore, it is problematic if individuals

are unable to meet the required academic writing standards as that may affect their academic performance in their studies (Jones, 2011). In Academic Writing modules, students are expected to write academic texts that are planned showing evidence of research resulting in coherent and well-argued discourse. These are some of the academic writing standards in the module under study and are expected to be followed by all first-year students. In light of that, this paper argues that students' 'ways of being' plays a critical in the way they learn academic writing and assessed (Gee, 2012). Thus, students' 'ways of being' have important implications for how their perceptions, expectations and challenges are re-imaged within the Academic Writing module under study.

5. Feedback from a sociocultural theoretical perspective

Sociocultural theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky (1978) underpins this article as this theory holds a view that every culture is different. As a point of departure, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) does not believe that intellectual development is universal as the theorist Piaget believes (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Instead, Vygotsky (1978) holds the view that, learning manifests when one constantly interacts with the natives of a specific social context. Hence his SCT's perspective on feedback is that it is vital for encouraging constant interaction between the 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO) and a novice. Therefore, to investigate perceptions, expectations and challenges related to feedback given to students in an ODeL environment, this study utilises sociocultural theory and its concepts. The following overarching research questions are responded to:

1) How do students view the current feedback they receive from markers and lecturers?
2) What are students' expectations of feedback in the Academic Literacy module (ENG100)?
3) What challenges of feedback do students experience in ENG100?

Interestingly, SCT concepts, such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), MKO, scaffolding and mediation, are aligned with the questions to ensure that the aim of this paper is accurately achieved. The SCT concepts in this article are explained as follows below.

Zone of Proximal Development

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is regarded as the main component of SCT and applies to a child who is developing cognitively in a second language context (Vygotsky, 1962). This concept supports the first research question asking how students view current feedback, the question seeks to explore gathered data from students who are expected to discuss how the current feedback addresses their ZPDs (Jingxin and Razali, 2020; Falhasiri & Hasiri, 2020).

More Knowledgeable Other

Abtahi (2017) states that the Vygotskian perspective on More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) is that we learn in the presence of those who have a better understanding and knowledge than us. Therefore, the second research question relating to the nature and quality of feedback students expect seeks to investigate students' views to discover if their expectations from markers and lecturers as far as feedback is concerned are met. Markers and lecturers as mediators in HE and are expected to meet the expectations of students when it comes to providing functional learning tools (Vygotsky, 1978) of which constructive feedback is a pivotal part as it was indicated in the literature review academic writing and related demands may overwhelm EAL students due to students' low English language proficiency. Therefore, markers and lecturers have the responsibility to find proper tools that can help students engage with the content they are absorbing.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding aligns with the third research question as it refers to the learning support system which a student receives so that cognitive potential goals can be met. This support should be given to students to ensure that they can work independently and experience less learning challenges, if not at all. It is inevitable to mention scaffolding in a study that investigates feedback as feedback on its own forms part of scaffolding processes (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018). Therefore, the third research question played a strong role in this article as it sought to understand challenges that students encounter as far as feedback is concerned. If there are challenges, and it is agreed that feedback improves performance, then suggestions of how feedback should be handled can be made to teachers and markers ensure that feedback is improved to make it a better scaffolding practice. Scaffolding is crucial in this study as it explains how lecturers can create a conducive supportive learning environment for students (Azi, 2020)**.**

6. Methodology

Research approach

This article adopted a qualitative approach to obtain data. According to Zohrabi (2013), a qualitative research commonly uses open-ended questions to obtain qualitative data, which should be analysed and interpreted in order to understand what other individuals experience in their 'world'. The qualitative approach allowed an exploration and examination of opinions, beliefs and emotions of students related to the feedback they receive that the questions of this paper sought to answer.

Research design

The case study approach was considered to be appropriate for this study as it is naturally intensive and can systematically investigate a single individual, group, community or some other unit in which the researcher examines in-depth data (Heale & Twycross, 2018; Khaldi, 2017; Creswell, 2003). Thus, through the case study, this paper responded to the following research questions through online open-ended evaluation questions from a single group:

 a) How do students view the feedback they receive from markers and lecturers in the Academic Writing module?
 b) What are students' expectations of feedback in this module?
 c) What challenges do students experience with feedback in the module?

Population

This paper targeted the ENG100 module in which first year students registered. ENG100 is a semester module in the department of English at UXY (a pseudonym for an ODeL university in South Africa) and comprises approximately 16 000 students per semester. ENG100 offers academic literacy skills to various colleges within the university.

Sample

25 students (a small percentage from the whole ENG100 student group) were randomly selected from the student population for this article. The sample consisted of 10 males and 15 females. The table below summarises the sample:

Table 1: Sampled students used in the study

Research instrument	Pseudonyms	Gender
Online open-ended evaluation questions (Random sampling)	Bles	Female
	Phela	Female
	Kersh	Female
	Kolbe	Male
	Thabo	Male
	Chloe	Female
	Colane	Female
	Shook	Female
	Fan	Male
	Katty	Male
	Paris	Male

Table1above lists the pseudonyms of only those students who answered all five open-ended evaluation questions online, excluding those who were unable to do so. This indicates that out

of 25 students, only 11 students successfully completed the questions. These questions were accessed on myUxy (student learning system at UXY). Consent forms were also posted on myUxy, which indicated that students were not forced to participate in the study. The researcher prioritised the dignity of research participants by issuing the consent form before collecting data and explained the topic and objectives of the study to the participants. She then allowed the participants to go through the questions. Male and female participants were selected to capture views on feedback from both genders. Nonetheless, gender difference did not play a major role in this study. Most students returned their responses within a day as the four questions on online open-ended questions schedule were concise and were not overly demanding.

Research instrument

The online open-ended evaluation questions schedule that was posted on mix for students to complete is shown in the Figure 2 below:

Online open-ended evaluation questions schedule

1. Is the feedback provided by the marker on your assignment 1 or 2 useful in improving your writing? Discuss fully.

2. Has the feedback you have been given in assignment 1 guided you to improve your results in assignment 2?

3. Does the current feedback meet all your expectations? Explain.

4. What are some academic writing challenges in ODeL? Is feedback helpful in addressing such challenges? Explain.

5. What do you think can be done by your markers or lecturers to improve the quality of feedback given to you?

Figure 2: Online open-ended evaluation questions schedule

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was carried out after organising the themes according to the research questions. Sub-themes were identified by scrutinising data that arose from online open-ended questions. The researcher opted for a thematic analysis approach when analysing and discussing data as it is an easy and flexible approach that enables one to generate new understanding from data. However, the disadvantage may be that there could be many interpretations that can derive from the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). However, qualitative research must be genuine, justifiable and trustworthy. To enhance trustworthiness in this research, the researcher considered following elements:

Ethical considerations

The researcher developed trust between herself and the participants from the onset by mentioning in the consent form that participation in the study was voluntarily. The researcher also mentioned that no participant would be harmed, both psychologically and physically, if they decided to withdraw their participation.

Permission to collect data was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at UXY and the ethical clearance number is Ref: 2020_RPSC_033. The name of the university, the module and students have all been given pseudonyms to protect the identities of all participants and the institution.

Discussion of the results

The researcher organised this section according to the research questions and the analysis and discussion of the themes, which emerged from the research instrument. The following themes emerged from the collected data:

a) Students' perceptions of the feedback they receive from markers and lecturers.
b) Students' expectations of feedback.
c) Students' challenges of feedback in academic writing.

a) Students' perceptions of the feedback they receive from markers and lecturers

In response to the question, "Is the feedback provided by the marker on your assignment 1 or 2 useful in improving your writing? Discuss fully?" Many students disagreed by mentioning that the feedback that they receive is not useful in improving their academic writing. However, other students noted that as EAL students, they generally struggled to read and write academically, even though feedback was provided. It was noted that, "we receive feedback sometimes; even so, we still struggle to write as we generally struggle to follow strict academic writing conventions" (Kersh, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). In response to the question where students were asked if the feedback they received in assignment 1 improved their results in assignment 2, another student protested,

> *"Assignment 1 and assignment 2 assess different things. Assignment 1 focuses on paragraph writing while assignment 2 focuses on [an essay] writing. We can say feedback from assignment 1 and 2 are useful for exam writing because in exam we have paragraph writing section and we also have essay writing section, but they are not useful to improve one another. We try to use feedback in both assignments to make our exam performance look good. I wish we had an opportunity to write drafts, send to lecturers, [get] feedback and send [them] back for final [marking] (Thabo, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions).*

Generally, feedback provides students with a sense of what they know and do not know about a subject. However, if done well, feedback indicates to students how to improve their next performance (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Thabo's (2020, online open-ended evaluation questions) response is similar to findings reported in Rowe's (2017) study, which argues that feedback can be a powerful tool if it helps students to reflect, rethink and improve performance in the next task. In addition, Vygotsky (1978:86) uses ZPD to emphasize "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers". The ZPD point is that learning can be negotiated through social interactions, mutual understanding, collaboration and dialogic feedback between students and lecturers (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, lecturers, as the MKOs, have a responsibility to understand the needs of the students, to know the group of students they have and find ways to practice what works for this specific group of students. There are many ways of addressing students' ZPDs, but in ODeL, students deserve an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarity and suggest the kind of feedback they think can reduce the transactional distance between lecturers and them (Glazzard & stones, 2019; Maphoto & Sevnarayan, 2021; Moore, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). From students' responses, it can be assumed that students were not content with the feedback they received from markers and lecturers as it was below their expectations.

b) Students' expectations of feedback

When students were asked if the current feedback meets their expectations, all seven of them disagreed: "no, the current feedback is not what I expected. I'm a distance learning student who does not speak English as my [first/second] language. Honestly, the current feedback is not addressing my problems of language and [academic] writing" (Bles, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). From this response, it can be assumed that the student's ZPD is not addressed. For addressing students' ZPDs, Gonulal and Loewen (2018) suggest scaffolding. For Gonulal and Loewen (2018:2), scaffolding represents the interventions that lecturers and students make within the "students' ZPDs to facilitate their learning and improve their current knowledge and skills". Proper scaffolding should be put in place to ensure that there is learning support that can help students achieve their potential cognitive goals. It is worth mentioning scaffolding in this section as another student commented that,

> *"there's no academic support for second language speakers currently. E.g., the current feedback is addressing something else, not what I expect it to address. I receive comments like "read your study guide" or you find the whole [sentence] is underlined - what do I do? What to fix? I have since waited for the e-tutor to unpack that feedback for me" (Phela, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions).*

Similarly, results in Carless and Boud (2018) and Ryan and Henderson (2018) revealed that students could not comprehend the feedback they had received and that also influenced how they viewed and responded to it. This is reiterated what another student said "well, I hardly understand feedback. i don't think feedback is usually spot on as expected. e.g., i got 50% for assignment [1] and then 45% for assignment 2. If feedback worked, i could have gotten a higher mark for assignment no. 2" (Chloe, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). Hattie and Timperley (2007) claim that feedback is expected to reduce discrepancies between current performance and the desired performance.

c) Students' challenges in academic writing: Is feedback beneficial?

In response to the question, "what are some academic writing challenges in ODeL? Is feedback helpful in addressing such challenges? Explain", One student noted that lecturers and markers' feedback is not beneficial as it "doesn't solves major issues we have in academic writing. I receive my script with no mention of where I went wrong in my writing" (Paris, 2020 online open-ended questions). Another student added that "academic writing is a stressful aspect, even worse, if [you] don't know why you [are] getting it wrong (Colane, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). In the words of Deeley et al. (2019:385), "students' dissatisfaction is a 'wicked' problem . . . that requires a complex approach with multiple interventions". Similarly, Carpenter et al. (2020) and Uiseb (2017) note the challenges that ODeL markers face such as stress as the marking proceeds due to large number of students, is the root of all problems in feedback. In addition, findings in Kroukamp and De Vries (2014:160) reveal that high student enrolments may be problematic when feedback is to be provided by an inadequate number of lecturers and markers. In ODeL, large number of students have a negative influence on "assessment feedback" (Uiseb, 2017: 72). Besides the challenges of dissatisfaction about feedback, Kolbe revealed that,

> *"...for me, feedback is enough on other areas, but the challenge is that it rarely addresses the area of academic writing. For example, the focus is on grammar and organisation, yet they don't carry more [marks] like content" (Kolbe, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions).*

In support of Kolbe's (2020) response, Gee (1992; 1996; 1999; 2001a; 2001b) adds that discourse is a social practice and can be learned through structured practices that support socialisation and apprenticeship. Most students who responded to the same question noted challenges in organising ideas, content, using the correct vocabulary, arguing a point of view, ensuring there is coherence and cohesion between sentences and paragraphs (Shook, Fan & Kitty, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). For instance, Shook argued, "my challenge is 'argue your point of view' that is in assignments and exam question[s], feedback hasn't showed me how to do that". In line with Sthoko's response, Pineteh (2014:16) argues that "applying the highly complex cognitive skills in academic writing is very challenging to

students who are from rural and peri-urban backgrounds". What Pineteh (2014:16) claims is shown in a response by Colane as he/she states that, "we are from disadvantaged schools, every subject was pretty much taught in IsiXhosa". In line with this response, Bradbury (2012) argues that black students experience challenges in HE mostly because they speak English as their additional language.

In addition, another student wrote that, "academic writing is the language we are encouraged to use in the higher learning environment, but the challenge could be that they don't teach us how-to master it" (Fan, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). Similarly, Gee (2001a) protests that secondary discourses such as academic writing need to be taken seriously as they involve socialising one into the new ways of doing and introducing a completely new culture to an individual. Hence one student commented that, "writing an essay was not this intense in high school. There were no unnecessary demands, meaning academic writing is challenging for me. Feedback that can tell me what to write would be helpful" (Kitty, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). In closing, the findings in the current study did not cover every aspect of feedback in ODeL. However, in short, the results provided an "innovative step towards an understanding of the dimensions" of students' perceptions, expectations and challenges related to feedback (Rowe & Wood, 2008:83).

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This study was conducted to explore students' perceptions, expectations and challenges related to feedback in an academic writing module in an open distance and e-learning institution. Based on this and other studies reviewed, it can be concluded that students have high expectations when it comes to the feedback they receive in the Academic Writing modules (Deeley et al., 2019; Uiseb, 2017; Pineteh, 2014; Hattie &Timperley, 2007). So far, none of the studies reviewed in this article proved that feedback is not required or questioned its effectiveness. The results in this study resonate with the assertions that feedback is expected to reduce discrepancies between current performance and the desired goal as emphasized by Hattie and Timperley's (2007) study.

Lecturers who teach academic writing can note the urgency of providing a clear and timely feedback. They should also consider students' learning experiences, sociocultural backgrounds and their current needs. It is important that students understand the level of student autonomy that is expected from them in a distance institution by making full use of resources available for them to learn the academic discourse they are expected to master (Wingate, 2007). Additionally, Academic Writing modules should be allocated enough time. The module under study is a semester module. This means that it is allocated approximately twenty weeks of teaching and in between, assignments are expected to be completed. One student recommended,

> *"there's a need for more time coz we at times submit the second assignment before getting result for assignment 1 or we write examination before getting feedback from both assignments. So, time is too small maybe (Phela, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions).*

Briefly, the above recommendation suggests that the module changes from a semester module to a year module. An underlying challenge with semester modules is that their time can be shorter than expected, particularly if registrations are extended or get finalised late. It becomes a challenge when assignments are to be completed, be graded and given feedback in few weeks considering the small number of lecturers and markers in the module (Maphoto, 2021). One student recommended that other ways of providing feedback should be considered if writing comments is a challenge for lecturers and markers (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015). The recommendation reads, "lecturers and markers should consider innovative ways of doing things - a recorded feedback won't be bad" (Paris, 2020 online open-ended evaluation questions). Considering the large number of students in ODeL contexts, traditional feedback mechanisms in the post pandemic world may not benefit students (Igbal & Campbell, 2021b). For Iqbal, Campbell and Mangina (2021a), hands-on 'kinaesthetic' learning in resource-constrained environments, artificial intelligence and machine learning can be used to generate feedback in English modules. Future studies could explore the use of artificial intelligence machines in providing feedback in Academic Writing modules that have large student numbers. Considering all the recommendations given, academic writing should be viewed as a social skill and not a subject. That way, feedback practices will be designed according to students' educational and social needs.

Limitations of the study

The researcher had to make sure that the study's data was gathered online in order to comply with COVID-19 shutdown restrictions. Initially, the researcher planned to perform in-person semi-structured interviews so that further inquiries could be made to advance the data gathering. That was impossible because the country was on lockdown when the data was collected. Therefore, the researcher and the volunteers could not have any direct physical contact. The researcher decided to employ an online schedule of open-ended evaluation questions in order to gather data. Nevertheless, the data collection procedure went without challenges and met the researcher's expectations.

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