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Screencast Feedback Practice on Students’ Writing

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Abstract

This study was carried out in order to identify students’ perception and reaction towards receiving screencast video feedback to their writings. A total of 22 second-year tertiary level students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) were chosen to participate in this qualitative study. Students were asked to engage in writing the first two chapters of a research report. Upon submission, teacher-researcher produced a screencast video feedback. Students were requested to work with the video during revision process. At the same time, they kept a learner diary and six students were randomly selected to participate in a focus group interview to record their perception and reaction towards the video feedback. The overall findings of the study signify that students perceived screencast video feedback to their writing positively. Although facing with difficulties such as slow loading time and poor quality of sound, the values of the practice such as the multimodality trait, replay option, and spoken-like quality of communication compensate for them. It can be safely said that the idea of receiving a quality feedback to their writing is when they received the screencast video feedback from the teacher and then followed by discussion with peers.

Keyword: second language writing, feedback, screencast video feedback, university students

1. Introduction

Writing at tertiary level is an important and challenging skill to be acquired. According to Saran Kaur Gill (2004), graduates who have excellent command of English would be more favourably hired. Ability to write clearly and concisely in English is deemed as a fundamental employment requirement. This is also mentioned by Norshima Zainal Shah (2008) in her study. The findings gathered show that writing skills is one of the ten most important skills deemed by employers. UNESCO (2012) also cited the lack of communication skills, particularly writing skills, as one of the reasons for unemployment among graduates within 12 months after graduation.

Universities in Malaysia are taking necessary steps to ensure students have adept writing skills by making it as the primary outcome from each graduate. One effort to ensure the achievement of the goal is by offering English courses as compulsory subjects to all registered students. At Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), writing skills is being upheld significant in all courses offered by being addressed within their programme outcomes. By the time students graduate, all faculty wants them to be able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing. Besides that, to ensure UTM is able to produce competent graduates, the university introduces a list of generic skills students should develop by the time they graduate. The skills are well-embedded in all courses offered in each faculty. This includes writing skills.
Therefore, it is crucial for students to be trained to write as accurately as possible to convey a clear message to readers. One element in the training process is feedback giving process. The value of the process is it encourages feed-forward (Bruno & Santos, 2010) given that students are provided a chance to rewrite. With the help from the feedback given, it is hoped that students will be able to develop their linguistic skills and subsequently improve their writing skills. Meaningful feedback on content and form from the teacher encourages learning if given explicitly (Turbill & Bean, 2006). It is because feedback provides opportunity for scaffolding to take place and at the same time enhance students’ confidence to write. Besides that, Ellis (2009) is in the agreement that feedback to student writing could be part of the cause of language learning which later will boost students’ motivation to develop their language skills. With this fundamental information at hand, subsequently, teachers should think of the best way to deliver feedback. According to Warnock (2008), the most preferred way of giving feedback is written feedback. With the current practice, giving written feedback has been observed to invite more problems. Among them are illegible handwriting of teachers and limited space for comments.

As students of the 21st century are more familiar and comfortable with computer technology, writing teachers should manipulate this fact and incorporate some of the innovative and developing technology, such as the use of screencast software, in giving feedback.

The purpose of this study is to discover the possibility of integrating technology in giving feedback to student writings. The opportunity of integrating audio and visual feedback should not be easily dismissed. It is in fact the next best thing to face-to-face feedback. Previous research has reviewed that it will definitely help students review their works and at the same time be actively engaged in the process. Therefore the feasibility of giving screencast feedback to student essays should be investigated further.

**Screencast Video Feedback**

With the advancement of Web 2.0, students are now expected to submit their work electronically, teachers have to also consider providing feedback the same way. Therefore, teachers should not be afraid to experiment with novel ways of giving feedback to student writings. Much research has been conducted to explore the possibility of integrating technology in feedback process. The most recent one is giving screencast video feedback. It has been utilised in many disciplines. Among them are biology, statistics, business, second language writing, and learning in general (Cann, 2007; Crook et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Silva, 2012; Stannard, 2008a). All the research shows that the technology-enhanced feedback is more effective and preferable compared to written feedback even though it is the most used type of feedback at tertiary level (Alexeeva, 2012; Ball, 2010; Brick & Holmes, 2008; Gould & Day, 2012; Mcfarlane & Wakeman, 2011; Merry & Orsmond, 2008; Moore & Filling, 2012; Silva, 2012; Stannard, 2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2006, 2007; Yeh & Lo, 2009).

Many of previous research implies that students are in favour of this idea because of its multimodal effect (Crook et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Kerr & Mclaughlin, 2008; Stannard, 2007, 2008a, 2012). Stannard (2012), Jones, Georgiades, and Gunson (2012), Mathisen (2012), Moore and Michelle (2012), emphasised that the efficacy of response to students’ writing can be improved yet at the same time making the process more straightforward.
Warnock (2008) added that video feedback is helpful because it is easy to follow and more directed. Thompson and Lee (2012) added that “talking to students about their writing provides them with more information than written comments” (p. 2). The fact that teachers can elaborate their comments (Stannard, 2012) is what makes the video feedback more preferable by the students and teachers.

In addition to that, students thought that by listening to video feedback from their teacher, they could improve their listening skills at the same time (Stannard, 2007). This advantage of video feedback is only mentioned once here. Having to engage both students’ aural and visual processing channels in their brains (Mayer, 2005), such benefit is expected. Hoyer (2004) and Kerr and Mclaughlin (2008) highlighted another interesting angle which is from the psychologist point of view. A variety of learning styles can be attended to with the corporation of aural and visual elements in the process of giving feedback.

Video feedback can not only benefit feedback giving process between teacher and students. Peer feedback can benefit from it as much (Hynson, 2012). According to him, regardless of who is taking control of the process, students showed improvement in their writing especially because they actively participated in rewriting. Research also shows that screencast feedback can reduce time spent on giving feedback (Hynson, 2012). Warnock (2008) shares his experience that he could assess six or more drafts per hour compared to only four through pen-paper feedback. By reducing 30 percent of teacher’s work assessing student writings, while giving better quality feedback, this method of giving screencast feedback is worth the investigation.

Jones, Georghiades, and Gunson (2012) and Stannard (2007, 2008) are among the strong believers of video feedback. They assert that reviewing an essay is best done through audio/visual element because it is the next best thing to a live meeting with the teacher. Besides that, video feedback is a useful tool for teachers to give feedback on a more global issue in writing (Silva, 2012). Another reason why video feedback is favoured by students as reported in Silva (2012) is because of its conversational quality. Tone recorded when giving feedback could soften criticism.

The tool can also be used in a distance learning context or to provide general feedback to a class of students (Stannard, 2012) and online classroom (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Dyslexic students (Stannard, 2012) will also benefit from it because they are not depending on text to comprehend the feedback. Besides that, special needs students would benefit from the combination of oral and aural input in feedback provided by the teachers as well (Stannard, 2007).

2. Methodology

2.1 Respondents
Twenty-two participants from an intact class, who belong to the same section registered for English for Advanced Academic Communication (ULAB2112) course, participated in this research. They are of mixed gender, second year students at UTM. Their proficiency levels differ from each other, but they undergo the same research procedures. However, they were given a choice whether to join in the research. This is to make sure students who participated could fully commit in the research to maximise the quality of the findings.
2.2 Instrument
This research utilised three instruments. They are the writing task, learner diary, and interview questions. The multiple data collection instruments used in this study are to triangulate and validate information gathered as well as to get deeper and wider understanding of the students’ preferences and responses towards this screencast video feedback. The nature of the study is more of an exploratory style in an inductive manner.

The writing task assigned to the students is a draft of chapter one and two of a research report namely Introduction and Literature Review. The revised version of them will later be assessed as Research Proposal that carries ten percent of their coursework marks. Upon receiving screencast feedback from the teacher, each student was asked to start a diary entry to note their experiences working with this type of feedback. This diary has specific objectives. It aims to record learners’ perceptions and reactions for being the recipients of screencast video feedback. The guideline prepared is an adaptation of one from Crook et al. (2012), Houcha (2005), and Silva (2012). Six people from the participating intact class in the study were chosen to take part in the focus group interview. They were chosen randomly from the group to ensure variety in the answers given to the questions posed. The interview sessions will be conducted to explore students’ preferences and responses towards receiving screencast video feedback in detail. It seeks to further find elaborations to the trends and patterns that are unclearly brought up in the learning diary. Besides that, the interview helped students extend their explanation on their feelings and thoughts and permit the researcher to enter their perspectives (Patton, 2002).

2.3 Data Analysis
The screencast video feedback was recorded using a freely available screencast software called Jing. This software programme is developed by TechSmith Corporation, which is also a developer for Camtasia and Snaggit, another paid screencast softwares. Screencast software is an application usually employed for computer training instructions and tutorials. Jing is cited as the mostly used screencast software in educational setting as reported on the Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies website based on its sixth annual survey as compiled by Hart (2012).

Learning diary entries were written in word processor because electronically-kept data will greatly help analysis process later on (Curtis & Bailey, 2009). The entries were submitted to the researcher by uploading it to the e-learning site. They will be analysed qualitatively by conducting thematic analysis, a method also applied in Gould and Day (2012). The analysis process, when done by someone other than the writer of the diary, is called “secondary”, or “indirect”, or “non-introspective” (Curtis & Bailey, 2009, p.69). The analysis took place when the entries were read to identify significant themes and then coded. This process went on for a few rounds of reading. The elements were selected because data from the diary is a free-flow text and the purpose of analysis is exploratory (Guest, Macqueen, & Namey, 2012).

Focus group interview session was recorded and transcribed. The transcription was analysed by conducting thematic analysis or content analysis, the term used by Patton (2002). The process of analysis was exactly the same as analysis process for learning diary entries. It also followed thematic analysis framework suggested by Whittmore and Knafl (2005, p.551). The transcript was read for a few rounds to find recurring themes.
This inductive analysis was continued by assessing those themes for their practicality and their place in the research questions. After that is done, the themes were clustered together according to their similarities.

They were then be compared to and contrasted with one another to further sort them. Through this stage, common patterns and unusual findings were identified.

3. Results

Respondents feel that the video feedback is helpful in revising their writing because of the nature of the replay feature of the video that allows it to be watched at any parts anytime. At the same time the portability of the video is also highlighted. The multimodality trait of the screencast video feedback is also highlighted by the respondents. The voice of the teacher explaining accompanied by the written comment on the students’ writing helped revision. Students also highlighted that they can be efficient in using their time especially when they do not have to meet the lecturer face-to-face. This means that they do not have to make an appointment with their lecturer to get feedback for their work. Instead, they can just watch the lecturer’s comment on their work anywhere convenient to them.

Besides that, students gave the qualities of coherence and linearity to the video feedback. This is because of the feature of screencast video feedback that allows for the on-screen movement on the window to be captured. The activity of the cursor highlighting and pointing to parts of the writing allows for systematic activities in giving feedback. The fact that on-screen movement progress from top to bottom allows for gradual revelation of feedback to their writing. As highlighted in Warnock (2008), video feedback is helpful because it is easy to follow and more directed.

During the interview session, there are remarks from the respondents that were not found in any of the journal entries. These remarks were of an advice notes that students should not ignore misunderstandings from the screencast video feedback. Basically, they suggested that students should take note of the source of the misunderstanding and bring it to class to be discussed with the lecturer. What was mentioned by the respondents is so valuable that it resonates with the new learning model, flipped learning. Flipped learning, a model of blended learning, “dedicates more class time to hands-on learning, replacing lectures with supplemental materials, such as screencasts and videos, that students can view outside of class” (Bull, Ferster, & Kjellstrom, 2012, p.10). When in classroom, students will be engaged in inquiry-based and collaborative activities (Brunsell & Horejsi, 2013). Respondents in this study appreciate the fact that they can watch the video feedback prepared by the teacher at their own time and pace, and later still able to engage in enquiry activities directly with the teacher in class with the opportunity of having preparation time.

In comparison to face-to-face feedback, students do not have to physically meet the lecturer for consultation. Besides that, according to the respondents, when meeting face-to-face, comments from the lecturer cannot be repeated. When compared to written feedback, there were mixed responses given. Students highlighted that screencast video can aid their understanding and it is more effective. On the other hand, there are respondents who feel that working with feedback from the screencast video is difficult to deal with. The difficulty seems to stem from the fact
that the students have to load the video first in order to access the related part of the video when compared to accessing written feedback where students will be able to go directly to the related parts of the writing. Besides that, students think that the screencast video feedback is very much the same as written feedback. It still does not solve the problem of not being able to ask the lecturer directly. Therefore, the ideal way of receiving feedback from the teacher on their writing is through face-to-face discussion.

During the interview, respondents highlighted that watching the screencast video feedback encourages discussion with peers which most of the time led to a better understanding of the comment. This is said by one of the respondents, “What happened is after I watch the video, I go to my friends to discuss. Because after watching, I don’t understand some comments. When I discuss, I can understand better”.

Based on the respondents’ diary entries, there is a pattern in the process of revising their writings after retrieving the screencast feedback. Firstly, students would watch the video. There are students who do this while checking their word document, but there are students do it without checking the word document. During the process, students would sometimes have to pause the video to allow it to finish loading. In the meantime, some said in the entry that they would do other businesses and then came back to the video to continue watching. This is to make sure the video runs smoothly. Afterwards, the respondents mentioned that they replayed the video up until three times to listen closely to the feedback. While replaying the video, the students make revision straight to the word document. The following comments illustrate the process stated above:

According to Stannard (2007), it is expected that students will work with multiple workspaces – the screencast video and the word document of their writing. They will have to watch the video and at the same time correct their essays. Going back and forth between the video and the essay, according to Thompson and Lee (2012), lets students demonstrate active listening behaviour. Upon playing the screencast video feedback, students should make notes on their essay – hard or digital copy. This shows that responding to screencast video feedback lets students to be actively engaged in revision process. They also suggest that students take down time-stamp on their essays when meeting with difficult part of the feedback. This can make revisiting and replaying processes easier where students could straightaway go to the related part of the video to re-watch the challenging part.

Finally, respondents highlighted that this way of giving feedback does not suit students with weak listening skills. Another limitation of this way of giving feedback is of the Internet connection. To retrieve the video, students need a good Internet connection. Otherwise, it will take a long time to load the video. Another technical aspect that respondents complained of is about the quality of sound. It is mentioned repeatedly in the learner diary entries and during the interview session.

4. Conclusion
This study aims to find out the efficacy of the idea of incorporating an innovative and developing technology, screencast software, in giving feedback to students’ writing in English classroom from students’ perspectives. Students were involved in a writing activity where they were
expected to submit an introduction and literature review chapters of a research report. Upon submission, the teacher prepared screencast video feedback using Jing. The completed videos were then automatically uploaded to screencast.com. Finally, the teacher shared the link with the students to allow them to retrieve the video. After students retrieved and watched the video, and revised the essay, they started writing entries in the student journal describing their experiences working with screencast video feedback. Following that six students were randomly chosen to participate in a group interview.

The following conclusion can be drawn based on the findings of the study: (1) Students perceived screencast video feedback to their writings positively and realise its potential. They were engaged in this practice as they do not mind replaying the video; (2) Video feedback that is accompanied by written feedback and followed by discussions with peers and face-to-face meeting with the teacher is found to be more preferable to students; and (3) In retrieving the video, students were not faced with many difficulties except for slow loading time. When revising, the replay option of the video becomes the key feature in helping students ease the process.

5. References


