

Teachers' e-feedback (e-mails) for EFL students' academic writing development

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Résumé

Le but de cet article est de se concentrer sur l'effet de la rétroaction électronique des enseignants (e-mails) pour améliorer les compétences d'écriture des étudiants de deuxième année LMD à l'université de Batna 2. Les données ont été recueillies par une recherche qualitative semi-expérimentale. Basé sur les conclusions, le chercheur a constaté qu'il y avait un effet positif d'utiliser la rétroaction électronique (les e-mails) en amélioration de l'écriture académique des étudiants. En général, la rétroaction électronique comme une pratique pédagogique fraîche et moderne était efficace de beaucoup de façons comme l'établissement de l'environnement d'apprentissage positif différent de l'environnement traditionnel et classique, qui a augmenté la participation d'étudiants. Ainsi, la présente étude recommande que les enseignants doivent se concentrer plus sur l'utilisation de rétroaction électronique particulièrement l'e-mail dans le fait de répondre sur les écritures d'étudiants. De plus, le chercheur recommande aux décideurs d'organiser des ateliers pour entraîner des enseignants dans ce nouvel instrument éducatif.

Mots Clés : Rétroaction électronique. E -mail, Compétences d'écriture, Etudiants de deuxième année LMD, La recherche qualitative semi-expérimentale.

Abstract

The aim of the current study is to shed light on the potential of e-feedback in a form of e-mails for improving second year LMD students' academic writing at Batna 2 University. Data were collected through a semi-experimental qualitative research. Based on the findings, the researcher found that there was a positive effect of using e-feedback (e-mails) on improving students' academic writing. In general, e-feedback as a fresh and modern pedagogic practice was effective in many ways as providing positive learning environment various from the physical rigid classroom environment, which increased students' participation. Thus, the present study recommends that teachers should focus more on the use of e-feedback particularly e-mail in responding on students' writings. Moreover, the researcher recommends decision makers to arrange workshops for training teachers in this new educational tool.

Keywords: Electronic Feedback, E-mails, Second year LMD students, Academic writing skills, Semi-experimental qualitative research,

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى التركيز على مدى تأثير ردود فعل وتعليقات الأساتذة في شكل رسائل البريد الإلكتروني على تحسين مهارات طلاب السنة الثانية نظام) ال ام دي (بجامعة باتنة في كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية. وقد تم جمع البيانات من خلال دراسة شبه تجريبية. واستنادا إلى النتائج ، وجد الباحث أن هناك تأثير إيجابي لاستخدام هذه الوسيلة على تحسين الكتابة الانجليزية الأكاديمية لدى الطلاب. وبالتالي ، توصي الدراسة الأساتذة بالتركيز أكثر على استخدام هذه الوسيلة لتصحيح ومراجعة ما يكتبه الطلاب. علاوة على ذلك ، توصي الدراسة. صناع القرار بتنظيم ورش عمل لتدريب الاساتذة في هذه الأداة التعليمية الجديدة التي تعتبر الآن كوسيلة تحد للطريقة القديمة المعتمد عليها سابقا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ملاحظات الإلكترونية ، البريد الإلكتروني ، طلاب السنة الثانية نظام ال ام دي ، مهارات الكتابة ، دراسة

شبه تجريبية..

Introduction

In the field of teaching and learning the foreign language, some issues are pivotal from the learning process. One of them is improving students' academic writing. As far as academic writing is the matter of debate, responding to students' writing should be the focus. The reason is that responding on students' writing is the way in which they can recognize their errors and then revise them.

Feedback is the most important aspect in teaching writing skill because it helps students to improve, refine and shape their writing ability. Thus, the use of technology in education has removed educational limits, both students and teachers can collaborate in real time using advanced educational technologies so that e-feedback seems to be an effective way of responding *to* students' writing. Exchanging e-mails can be an enjoyable and useful strategy for both teachers and students in terms of improving academic writing skills. The present study deals with e-feedback in a form of e-mails of the essay-writing course for second year students of English at Batna 2 University.

1. Literature Review

With the development of technology and the use of it in education, teachers now can respond to their students' writing, electronically, through either e-mail or text editing programs. E-mailing comments to students is an appropriate way for students as they work at their computers, they can incorporate the comments that their teacher is providing, or reply questions that are being asked. "These new channels of written feedback offer teachers greater flexibility in their responding practices, but ultimately convenience is likely to be the deciding factor in which are used" (Harmer, 2001, p. 183). In a clearer way, this new way that follows the use of technology in classrooms can help teachers in the process of responding on students' papers.

It is essential for teachers to recognize the nature of feedback in order to reach the appropriate use of e-feedback in assessing students' writing. Assessment is a very important aspect in knowing

what teachers can expect students to achieve and the type of assessment has its effects on students' learning too (Brown et al 1997). Moreover, if teachers did not assess a certain lesson' element, students will probably not learn it (Ashcroft & Palacio, 1996). So that assessment is a core for measuring students' achievement, but the feedback of the assessment is more important. Probst (1989) stated that feedback deemed as a way for in building the importance of students' responses in shaping new meanings.

Many qualities of using e-feedback on developing students' writing have mentioned. Thus, many researchers as (Braine, 1997; MacLeod, 1999; Hewett, 2000; DiGiovanni&Nagaswami, 2001; Tuzi, 2004; Guardado& Shi, 2007; Beauvois, 1992; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995) have stated the importance of using computers in encouraging foreign language learning and developing student-to-student interaction. In the same respect, researchers as (Chun, 1994; Florez-Estrada, 1995; Ittzes, 1997; Van Handle & Corl, 1998) were as consciously aware of the advantages of e-feedback *on* developing students' performance in academic writing.

E-mail is a pivotal means of social interaction. It belongs to what social constructivism theory calls for as creating an enjoyable way of learning. Social constructivism followed Vygotsky's (1978) work stated that knowledge is first constructed in a social context and is then transmitted to individuals. E-mail is an essential means of motivation and interest, and it supports students to create what we call collaborative work in which they share their thoughts with their teachers particularly in their academic writing skill.

With e-feedback, students takes an active role in their learning. It is a collection of oral and written feedback which is featured by the informality and immediacy of oral communication, the permanency of written communication, the availability at any time, and being a means for encouraging group knowledge and student participation (Warschauer& Ware, 2006). Moreover, it is a kind of feedback that makes students rely on themselves in correcting their errors. It also provides students with more democratic

power structures, and reduces risk environment and transparency (Selfe, 1992), thus e-feedback creates audience awareness (Ware, 2004)

2. Background of the study

The present section discusses and provides a general background to the three key concepts around which the present article revolves: writing, e-feedback and e-mails.

2.1 Writing skill: The definition of the term "writing" as a concept, as an act and as a skill has changed in relation to the changes writing has known. Different definitions describe writing from a distinct perspective; they vary from broad assumptions to narrow descriptions.

It is not easy to take one single view of what is writing; however, the following statement can be considered as a general definition that is valid in any situation: writing is "an act that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience" (Weigle 2002, p. 19). This means that writing is a means of communication per se in which writers go through such a complex process to achieve a number of purposes.

2.2 Electronic feedback: According to Tuzi (2004), Electronic feedback (E-feedback), is a feedback on numeric, written form and transferred through the web: transfers the concepts of oral response in the electronic arena. It is a form of on-line Conferencing, which helps students to be an active in the process of learning thus, e-feedback is a hybrid of oral and written feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).its main concern is interactive textual exchange and greater student participation (Guardada & Shi 2007)

2.3 what is e-mail? E-mail was founded by VA Shiva Ayyadurai- an Indian-born American scientist. Email, short for "electronic mail," is one of the most widely used elements of the Internet, along with the web. It permits its users to send and receive messages to and from anyone with an email address. E-mail now allows any users to become registered users of the site. When you configure an email

account, you must write your email address, password, and the mail servers used to send and receive messages. Fortunately, most webmail services show your account automatically, so you just write your email address and password.

3. The study

3.1 Problem of the Study

Casual observation and analysis of students' papers showed that most students face problems in their writing. Moreover, those students did not consider their teachers' comments in fixing their writing as a result, the present study is an attempt to look for means to improve the students' revision of their writing as they lack writing perfectly as mentioned above and improving the way teachers respond to students' paper . Thus, the problem of the current study is to examine the effectiveness of using teachers' e-feedback in a form of e-mails as a new educational tool in responding to students' academic writing.

3.2 Research question/Hypothesis

In attempting to investigate the effectiveness of teachers' e-feedback on students' writing development, it is necessary to answer the following question:

- How effective was electronic feedback in a form of e-mails as a new pedagogic practice on students' writing development?

Based on the assumption that e-feedback is an effective tool in improving students' academic writing, we hypothesized that if teachers provide e-feedback on students' writing, their academic writing is likely to improve.

3.3 Aims of the Study

The present study aims at achieving a number of purposes; first, it aims at incorporating technology in providing feedback on students' writing. Second, it seeks to examine students' attitudes towards using e-feedback in developing their quality of writing. Third, it looks for discovering the effect of using e-mails on students' writing development. Finally, it aims at finding out if there are any remarkable differences in

students' development in writing because of using e-feedback particularly e-mails on their achievement in writing.

3.4 Research design

The present study is in the form of semi-experimental qualitative research. The aim is to examine the effects of providing teachers' e-feedback on improving students' achievement in academic writing in second year LMD students at Batna 2 University during the first semester of the academic year 2016/2017. To achieve the current goal, and in an attempt to answer the research question mentioned above, a semi-experimental research design was held. The independent variable of the study was providing e-feedback (e-mails) versus no e-feedback. The researcher collected data through analyzing and evaluating students' writing performance that was classified into four domains, each of which dealt with sub writing skill (Grammar, vocabulary, mechanics and content) which was transformed into numbers of scale.

The study employs experimental and control groups together with a pre-test/post-test design to focus on differences in learning (writing performance) rather than differences in understanding or investigating attitudes. Thus, to test if e-feedback (e-mails) would have a significant effect on developing students' academic writing production.

3.5 The sample

Because the researcher could not work with the whole population, the sample was from a large population consisting of fifteen groups. It was randomly selected because this would enable the research to give all students an equal chance to be chosen.

Second-year LMD students at the department of English language at Batna 2 University are fifteen groups of about 59 students each. Two groups were taken at random with no specific criteria, and the choice of these two groups was also random since the administration chooses which groups a given teacher would teach. Forty students from those groups: twenty from one group and the other half from

another group were taken as a sample of the present study.

3.6 Instrument

The researcher used a writing test, which classified into a pre-test and post- test. The pre- test was applied before using e-feedback and the post- test was applied after using e-feedback. The students received intensive training for correcting their mistakes and giving some suggestions to improve writing in terms of different aspects through a group on an e-mail page, containing twenty students as an experimental group. The researcher's task was to administrate the whole work, including correcting, commenting and giving suggestions for writing in a better way.

3.7 Procedures of the Study

The researcher used a diagnostic pre-test for evaluating the level of the students and a post- test for looking out the difference in the students' writing development. The post- test was applied to both groups, the experimental group and the control group. The study was conducted according to the following procedures:

- Identifying the study sample.
- Applying the pre-test to the students before using e-mail group and providing e-feedback.
- The same text was used for the pre-test and the post-test. The researcher kept the same test for the following reasons: First, to ensure the objectivity of the results obtained in the two tests. Second, to confirm that the students' results in the post-test would not be effected by external factors related to the test itself like the level of difficulty of the topic, and finally, to see whether the participants were interested enough to check the answers and learn from their mistakes.
- Preparing the study tool, which was creating an email group of twenty students, who were the experimental group exposing them to extensive training on correcting their writing. The researcher created the e-mail group and decided with the students in the experimental group to meet each Thursday for an hour on the created e-mail group to responding to their writing.

- Applying the post-test to the students' writing skills after using e-feedback (e-mail).
- Student of the experimental group were asked to participate in the study by exchanging e-mails. This e-mail exchange process was based on student teachers writing of several e-mails that contain various written essays of teachers' choice. These e-mails were then sent to their teachers to obtain e-feedback on them. The e-mail exchange process lasted for a whole semester.

3.8 Data Analysis and discussion

The aim of the experiment is to see whether the electronic feedback that teachers provide before final drafts were taken into consideration by the students or not. Thus, students' consideration of such feedback is directed in the present study, by the number of times the comments occur in final drafts as opposed to first drafts. As have previously mentioned, feedback integration in the present study is determined by the proportion of comments on the final piece of writing compared to first one. However, the comparison of the students' first and final piece of writing detected some interesting observations that are worth mentioning.

After correcting students' piece of writing in the pre-test, the researcher found that the results of them were so identical, and the comparison of those findings has shown that it was a close test in the sense that differences in students' results was not significant. The variation of degrees of proficiency of the participants has also proved that the students of the sample are at the same level. Moreover, the control group was randomly chosen and the remaining group was designated as the experimental group.

Concerning the effects of using e-feedback in a form of e-mails on improving the students' academic writing, the table 1 below showed that the total average of the post-test of the experimental group is higher than the total average of the post-test of the control group. Moreover, the total average of both pre- test and post-test of the experimental group was higher than the total average of the control group, which signifies that the students in the experimental

group are affected and influenced more than the students in the control group influence influence influence.

Table 1: The total average of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test Grades Distributed by the Experimental Group and the Control Group

Control Group			Serial	Experimental group			Serial
avarege	posttest	Pretest		average	Posttest	Pretest	
10	10	10	21	14	15	13	1
11,5	12	11	22	14	15	13	2
09,5	10	09	23	11,5	13	10	3
09,5	10	09	24	15	16	14	4
09	10	08	25	10,5	12	09	5
10,5	11	10	26	10	11	09	6
08,5	10	07	27	09	10	08	7
13	13	13	28	12,5	14	11	8
14	14	14	29	13	14	12	9
12	12	12	30	09,5	12	07	10
09	11	07	31	09	11	07	11
08	09	07	32	14	15	13	12
08,5	10	07	33	14	15	13	13
08	08	08	34	10,5	12	09	14
12	11	13	35	14,5	15	14	15
13,5	14	13	36	10	13	07	16
14	14	14	37	09,5	11	08	17
08	07	09	38	09,5	12	07	18
13	13	13	39	11	13	09	19
10,5	12	09	40	12	14	10	20
10,60	11,05	10,15	average	11,65	13,05	10,15	average

Results revealed that there was a positive effect of using e-feedback on improving the students' academic writing. The total average of the pre-test for the experimental group was (10,15) and the total average of the pre-test for the control group was (10,15) which ensured the balance in performance between the two groups before receiving a teachers' e-feedback. Furthermore, the total average of the post-test for the experimental group was (13,05) while, the total average of the post- test for the control group was (11,05) which means that the students of experimental group outperformed the students in the control group, and they did a remarkable development in their writing.

As far as the first drafts are concerned, all of the students showed approximately the same path towards writing their first paper. They all made errors in vocabulary (especially, word choice and spelling); mechanics (many errors in punctuation) and grammar (subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and article use). Content. However, when writing the final drafts that are, after teachers' e-feedback in a form of e-mails for

the experimental group and traditional teachers' written feedback for the control group, fewer errors were identified in the experimental group hence, less written comments were provided compared to first drafts. Concerning the degree of students' writing development, it was higher in the experimental group than the control one.

Comments types	First drafts (Experimental and control group)	final drafts Experimental group
Grammar	I feltthat can be deeled with..... friendship have many benefit Childhood is the emotional social and physical development of the human holds will found weather As	I fell aspect that can be dealt with... Friendship has many benefits. Childhood is the emotional, social, and physical development of the human. held willl find whether us
Vocabulary	I advice her ... So they have to give carenes firstable to those who ... Immigration is unexpectedly to happen unless with poor conditions ...	I advise her... So, they must first of all pay attention to those who..... Immigration is unlikely to happen without poor conditions.
Mechanics	leave their country for good	Leave their country for better condition.
Content	Poor argumentation Poor sentence /paragraph linking	Better content. Using various types of conjunctions.

The aforementioned observations are clarified using extracts from the participants' first and final piece of writing in the following table.

Table 2: Students' Response to Teachers' e-feedback and written feedback

Statistically speaking, in the total of first drafts of the experimental group (20 essays); there were a total of 410 comments. On average, there were 20.5 comments per essay. However, there were 412 comments of the control group. On average, there were 20.6 comments per essay. The proportion of the comments in the students' first attempt writing is shown in the table below.

groups	Number of comments in the first drafts	Proportion of comments per essay
Experimental group	410	20.5
Control Group	412	20.6

Table 3: Proportion of Written Feedback in First Drafts Distributed by the Experimental Group and the Control Group

However, after the teacher indicated the errors, send suggestions for improving the pieces of writing, and gave the students a time to deal with the e-feedback (emails) they had received, the previous statistics changed remarkably. The total number of comments on the final drafts, reduced to 145. On average, there were 7.25 comments per essay. While the total number of comments on the final drafts in the control group decreased to 299. On average, there were 14.95 comments per essay as table 4 below mentioned so that, as was hypothesized by the researcher, a considerable proportion of the e-feedback comments that had been received on first drafts were taken into account by the students of the experimental group. Only about 35% of the written comments were overlooked and 65% were dealt by

the participants resulting in writing development in the subsequent drafts.

groups	Number of comments in the final drafts	Proportion of comments per essay
Experimental group	145	7.25
Control Group	299	14.95

Table 4: Proportion of Written and e-feedback in Final Drafts Distributed by the Experimental Group and the Control Group

3.9 Summary

The findings of the semi-experimental research showed that there are not remarkable differences between the writing developments of both participants from both groups before applying the treatment. It detects the homogeneity of the groups. The process is that given the same environment and treatment, they performed at the same level.

The findings proved that using technology, particularly e-feedback in a form of e-mails considered as a passionate technique that had a positive effect on developing the students' academic writing skills more than traditional teachers' feedback. This development also *represents* that students in such kind of feedback take the active role than the passive one. Through using e-mails, they achieved a better results and being enthusiastic in the process of correcting and revising their errors and producing a new piece of writing which being indicated by their teachers' e-feedback.

According to Tuzi (2004), students who get training will improve quality responses, which contain more specific suggestions for improving a text. Sometimes students face problems in dealing with teachers' e-feedback in terms of knowing how to revise a text after receiving feedback. Tuzi (2004) stated that the use of e-feedback had a greater impact on students' writing-level units. Thus, he added that e-feedback has an enthusiastic effect for both teachers and students for responding and receiving feedback that can students use it in their papers' revision. However, some of the disadvantages of e-feedback belongs to students' misuse the computer system and technical problems might occur.

Liu & Sadler (2003) stated that when students use computers, they would receive too many comments on both the local and global levels compared to those in the traditional group. Moreover, responding to students' academic writing through e-feedback helps students to edit focused responses. These responses influenced the revision in students' development later in their writing drafts (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the e-feedback in a form of e-mails proved to be as an effective way in teaching and learning academic writing skills for second year LMD students of English language at Batna 2 University. Students revealed an improvement in their writing skills as they used a new technological tool in writing, which made them more motivated and active than the traditional one. *Besides*, teachers' e-feedback proved successful and useful as they managed to respond to students' academic writing via email.

The current study adds to previous research in investigating some of the features that distinguish teachers' e-feedback via email from that produced in traditional in-classrooms. These are: (1) a greater students' acceptance for the idea; (2) higher level in students' writing development; (3) students' active role in the process and their enthusiasm towards their teachers' comments through e-mails; (4) more student-initiated interactions

Limitations of the study

The present study is limited in three noteworthy ways. Firstly, it was carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2016-2017. Secondly, the sample of the study consisted of only forty students from both groups experimental and control group because of the reason that mentioned above. Thirdly, the study covered the second year LMD students of English language in one University in Algeria, which is Batna 2 University.

Recommendations of the study

Based on the findings of the study, the following points are proposed and recommended to all members of the teaching learning process:

- Teachers should provide their students with the way they are going to assess their academic writing.
- Teachers should consider the significance of using e-mails in teaching learning process particularly students' writing improvement.
- Teachers should create new and enthusiastic methods of correcting students writing so that e-feedback (e-mails) can be the suitable method.
- Teachers should reward their students by showing the progress in their writing to their classmates on the e-mail group account.
- Students should appreciate the use of technology as emails for enhancing their academic writing.

- Computer anxiety can be one of the aspects that impede the use of electronic feedback (Liu & Sadler, 2003; Matsumura & Hann, 2004; Tuzi, 2001). Therefore, decision makers should arrange trainings to practice teachers how to teach writing perfectly through e-mails.

Suggestions for Further Research

As any study, different issues for further research have been suggested as developing activities for teaching academic writing through e-mails as writing research papers, curriculum vitae...etc. In addition, investigating the effect of using e-feedback in a form of emails on improving students' reading comprehension skills.

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