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Using screencasts to create personalized formative feedback in academic writing courses

Bio data

Bradley Irwin earned his M. Ed. in Second Language Education from OISE at the University of Toronto. At present, he is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Liberal Arts at Nihon University. His research interests include innovative approaches to feedback, language learner identity and autonomy, CALL, and MALL.

Abstract

This presentation explores the effectiveness of using screencast feedback to improve essay composition in an academic writing course. Participants (*N* = 20) were asked to complete two 1500-word argumentative essays and revise their essays based on two types of formative feedback provided by their instructor. In one group (*N* = 12), participants were given written feedback while the other group (*N* = 8) received screencast feedback for their revisions. The essays were analyzed to compare whether the type of feedback influenced the quality of revision and whether students engaged in self-correction. The results showed that participants who received screencast feedback evaluated it more positively than written feedback, completed a higher percentage of revisions, and engaged in more instances of self-correction.

Conference paper

Researchers have highlighted several beneficial aspects of using screencast feedback in lieu of written feedback. For the purpose of this paper, screencast feedback is defined as a desktop video recording of a student's digitally submitted essay, accompanied by audio narration explaining the feedback points. One appealing aspect of using this approach is the ease with which instructors can improve the quality and depth of detail of their comments. Stannard (2012) notes that teachers can more easily elaborate on their feedback by using screencasts. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2014) state that teachers tend to increase the amount of information they provide when screencasting feedback. This is true of the present study as well. On student compositions of approximately 1500 words, the screencasts were generally six to seven minutes in length which ranged from 750 to 825 words. When providing written feedback on essays of the same length, which included notes or short comments in the margins of the page, feedback amounted to between 150-200 words.

Personalization is another benefit of using screencast feedback. There is an emotive element of hearing someone's voice that is difficult to convey through written words. We can hear someone's joy or exasperation by the way that something is said or through one's tone of voice that allows listeners to infer meaning. Hearing an instructor's voice also seems to deepen the bond between instructors and students. Edwards et al. (2012) found that students in an online learning environment preferred screencast feedback to written feedback and were more likely to develop a sense of community belonging through contextual socialization. Other studies have established that using screencast

feedback helps create a rapport between instructors and students which increases motivation and task engagement (Crews & Wilkinson, 2010; Parton et al., 2010). Henderson and Phillips (2015) found that because students viewed screencast feedback as real, honest, and authentic, this personal and individualized nature of the feedback prompted constructive self-reflection. They also found that students described the feedback as supportive and caring, terms that are not often associated with written feedback.

From a teacher's perspective, the ability to save time and reduce workload is another often cited benefit of using screencast feedback (Ali, 2016; Hynson, 2012; Warnock, 2008). However, as Brereton (2018) points out, the benefit of a reduced workload depends on the feedback context. Rather than saving time, the ability to provide more suggestions and examples of solutions to problematic aspects of students' compositions within the same timeframe is also very appealing.

The purpose of this study was to explore the most fundamental aspect of the feedback process. Is student revision influenced by the type of feedback provided? In order to better understand the relationship between feedback type and revision, two research questions were addressed:

1. How do students perceive screencast feedback?
2. To what degree are students incorporating the feedback from their teacher when revising their essays?

The participants of the study were 20 second year B2-C1 (CEFR scale) English language learners enrolled in an academic writing course at a Japanese university. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups. 12 students were in a control group which received written feedback while 8 students were assigned to the experimental group which received screencast feedback. While it would have been ideal to separate participants into two groups of equal size, this was not possible because of scheduling conflicts. The academic writing course was conducted weekly for 90 minutes during a 15-week semester. The students submitted two 1500-word essays and received formative feedback on the first draft of their essays (once during week 7 and once during week 14). Students then used the feedback to revise their compositions before submitting a final draft. The drafts were then compared, and revisions analyzed, to determine whether the feedback type influenced the revisions.

Based on surveys conducted examining student perceptions of screencast feedback, it was found that students in the control group were significantly more likely to view the academic writing class as too challenging (M = 4.67, SD = 0.65), while students in the experimental group were more likely to view the course level as appropriate to their level (M = 4.00, SD = 1.07), $t(18) = 1.74$, $p = .04$). Students in the control group were also significantly more likely to view the course content as too difficult compared to the experimental group (control group: M = 2.83, SD = 0.58, and experimental group: M = 2.25, SD = 0.46, $t(18) = 2.39$, $p = .01$). Furthermore, students in the experimental group were significantly more likely to report that they felt a close connection with the teacher because of the feedback style (control group: M = 4.58, SD = 0.67, and experimental group: M = 5.00, SD = 0.00, $t(18) = 1.75$, $p = 0.05$) and that they felt more encouragement to revise their essays (control group: M = 4.67, SD = 0.49, and experimental group: M = 5.00, SD = 0.00), $t(18) = 1.90$, $p = 0.04$). The experimental group were also more likely to respond that they preferred screencast feedback to traditional written feedback (control group: M = 3.34, SD = 1.07, and experimental group: M = 4.50, SD = 1.07, $t(18) = 2.39$, $p = 0.01$).
Regarding the degree to which students incorporated the feedback into the final drafts, it was found that feedback type had no insignificant influence. However, students in the experimental group were more likely to engage in self-corrections. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare self-corrections in the control and experimental

conditions. There was a significant difference in self-corrections in the control group (M = 0.58, SD = 0.79, and experimental group: M = 2.88, SD = 1.73), $t(18) = 4.04$, p = 0.01. Therefore, these results suggest that while feedback type may not influence the likelihood of student feedback uptake, screencast feedback does increase the incidences of self-corrections.

In summary, screencast feedback had a positive impact on how students viewed the difficulty level of the course content, the rapport with the teacher, and the level of encouragement to complete the revisions. They also preferred screencast feedback to traditional written feedback. Furthermore, students who received screencast feedback were significantly more likely to revise sections of their essays that were not specifically mentioned during the feedback process.

To conclude, while it was outside of the scope of this research to determine exactly why screencast feedback encouraged students to revise sections of their essays that were not mentioned in the feedback they were provided with, it is encouraging that this behavior increased. Future research could explore the relationship between screencast feedback and self-revision.

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