

Bangladeshi Undergraduates' Attitudes towards Teachers' Feedback on Midterm Scripts

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Abstract

This paper explores different kinds of feedback that teachers give on the midterm scripts and the students' attitudes towards these kinds of feedback. The total number of participants of this study was eighty-one. The participants were randomly chosen from the Departments of English of three private universities in Bangladesh. To collect the data a questionnaire with twenty-three items was used. The findings show that the students received three types of feedback more frequently (oral, written, and explicit) and the students preferred both oral and written feedback at times.

Keywords: Feedback, Attitudes, Midterm Scripts, Preferences, Problems

Introduction

Once, writing in a second language was typically deemed as a “product” that was assessed by a language teacher just to see if the produced write-up matched with the given sample (Karim & Ivy, 2011). However, this notion has changed, and now writing in a second language is viewed as a complex procedure, which involves two significant phrases like “revision and rewriting” (Bayat, 2014). Hence the concept of “feedback” has become pivotal in second language acquisition (SLA). Feedback can be provided in several formats (Ellis, 2008). However, most teachers usually give extensive written comments on students' writing activities in order to help the students improve their writing skills (Chalmers, Mowat, & Chapman, 2018; Higgins, Hartley, & Shelton, 2002; Hyland, 2003).

According to the previous studies, feedback has been proven effective if it is given properly. With constructive feedback, students can understand how to identify the problems and what they need to do next in their learning phase. A study by Rowe & Wood (2008) shows that the learners know and realize the necessity of feedback and they tend to use it for the improvement of their writings. Nonetheless, there is still a problem with teacher feedback. The problem is that a large number of teachers do not understand what specific type of feedback the students require.



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In the Departments of English (in selected private universities of Dhaka, Bangladesh), the undergraduates must sit for a midterm examination every semester (in both six month-long semesters of Spring and Fall) to be evaluated. Each student is given individual feedback on his/her handwritten exam scripts. In the scripts, all the examiners are required to mark the errors and give feedback where needed. The midterm scripts are always shown to the students to let them know how to overcome the errors. However, the effectiveness of feedback depends on how the teachers deliver them and what the learners' attitudes are towards teacher feedback. Hence, it is necessary to assess the major type of feedback, and the learners' perceptions toward teacher feedback.

Considering the above circumstances, this paper aims to examine undergraduate students' attitudes and expectations towards the feedback they receive on midterm scripts from their teachers in the English Departments of the selected private universities in Dhaka.

Literature Review

Several research studies have confirmed that written feedback is a powerful tool to develop students' writing abilities (Khan, 2013), and in tertiary level education, it plays a decisive role (Agricola, Prins, & Sluijsmans, 2020). However, giving feedback is not always an easy task. Giving written comments on the written tasks of every student is a very time-consuming and complicated process (Sadler, 2010) and for some reason, that feedback may prove ineffective. Its efficiency can be enhanced if the teachers ask their students about their feedback preferences beforehand (Agricola, Prins, & Sluijsmans, 2020). Once the teachers know about their students' expectations, they can easily adapt their feedback techniques accordingly (Ouahid & Lamkhanter, 2020).

Studies have shown that the most common type of teacher feedback is giving written comments, and identifying and correcting the errors in the script. Giving grades or marks is also part of the feedback process. Additionally, based on previous reports, there have been two types of feedback and they are formative (feedback is given throughout any course) and summative (feedback given at the end of a course). However, it is essential to mention here that the two major constituents of feedback, assessment and correction, are different from each other. Assessment is where the learner is just told about the performance (good or bad), and on the other hand, correction is where the learners are provided with information, often in-depth explanation (Ur, 2003, p. 242, cited in Karim & Ivy, 2011). Bangladeshi teachers at tertiary levels use both the components of feedback while grading a student. According to Hadzic (2016), teacher feedback mostly means the use of oral and written comments. Hadjic's (2016) paper, "Oral and Written Teacher Feedback in English as a Foreign Language Classroom in Sweden," focused on teacher feedback both in verbal and written form. The total number of participants was 67 and they

were from secondary school. The findings showed that teachers did not correct the learners all the time. They frequently used written feedback for giving both explicit and implicit feedback. Furthermore, teachers motivated the learners by providing oral comments.

Some previous studies have shown that written feedback is difficult to understand by the learners because of unclear written instructions. Zacharias's (2007) study indicates that learners have some trouble in reading written feedback provided by the instructors. In this study, 130 participants (100 students and 30 teachers) participated to respond to the questionnaire while 21 students and 10 teachers participated in the interview. The objective of the study was to figure out the major problems students have when they read teacher feedback. The results revealed three major problems. First, the general feedback was noted as the main problem in student understanding. For instance, if the teacher just wrote "many mistakes in grammar," the feedback would be too general to understand. The second difficulty was that students did not know how to correct the error while the third was the usage of complex words in the feedback.

Regardless, teacher feedback is very important for learners if they wish to progress in learning a target language successfully. Wu's (2003) study had a total of 94 participants including 60 male and 34 female learners who were 3rd year students of a High School. They were examined with two types of instruments including questionnaires and two sets of an individual semi-structured interview. The major finding showed that nearly 60% of the participants considered feedback to be powerful and beneficial for them in the correction of their errors. A similar finding was obtained by Cohen and Cavancanti which indicated that students accept teacher feedback eagerly because it is very helpful for them in understanding their errors and mistakes. Nonetheless, it has been observed that students' preference for written feedback is not usually taken into consideration while providing feedback in higher education (Agricola, Prins, & Sluijsmans, 2020). The literature recommends that written comments will be useful for students if their preferences and problems are not contemplated (Biswas, 2020). There will always be a rift between teachers and students if the teachers do not understand exactly where and why the students need thorough feedback (Sadler, 2010). Hence, this paper asks the following questions:

1. What major types of feedback do teachers provide on students' writing in midterm scripts?
2. How do students react towards teachers' feedback given on their writing in midterm scripts?

Methodology

Participants

This study was conducted on the 2nd and 3rd year students of the Departments of English of three Bangladeshi private universities located in Dhaka city. Eighty-one

participants responded to the questionnaire. Participants were selected from only among 2nd and 3rd year students based on convenience and purposeful sampling. They are taken as our subjects because, although students in the first year of studies in a university start to get feedback, many of them do not know how to respond to it properly. Only from the second year do students gradually understand what feedback means and how to respond to it. The third-year students have a very good idea about feedback and how to utilize it effectively. The fourth (final) year students are not included because, by that time, they fully understand the meaning and the use of feedback to improve their work.

Instrument

This is quantitative survey research. To study the major types of feedback and the learners' attitudes towards teacher feedback on midterm scripts, the researchers developed a questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale (1932) ranging from *always* to *never* and *from strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* was given after each statement. The responses were rated as *always/strongly agree* = 5, *usually/agree* = 4, *sometimes/neutral* = 3, *occasionally/disagree* = 2, and *never/strongly disagree* = 1. The researchers have expanded a technique from Lee's (2008) instrument to investigate the students' attitudes towards teacher feedback on their midterm scripts. This survey did not follow Lee's (2008) instrument completely but rather a modified questionnaire was employed to make it more appropriate to the context. This questionnaire has closed-ended items under 3 groups:

- A) SECTION A: Instruction
- B) SECTION B: Types of Feedback
 - Sub-section 1: Oral Feedback
 - Sub-section 2: Written Feedback
 - Sub-section 3: Explicit Feedback
- C) SECTION C: Attitudes
 - Sub-section 1: Effectiveness
 - Sub-section 2: Preference

The questionnaire has been provided in the appendix section (Appendix 1).

Findings and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire are presented in the tables and figure below:

B. Sub-section 1: Oral Feedback

Table 1: Teachers' oral feedback on midterm scripts (Percentages)

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
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1. Teachers tell me about my grammatical problems in the script.	18.00%	47.00%	39.26%	34.82%	54.06%
2. Teachers tell me about my content problems in the script.	24.00%	59.33%	41.67%	33.33%	64.22%
3. Teachers tell me about my organizational problems in writing.	74.75%	31.27%	50.22%	38.91%	31.40%
4. Teachers appreciate my creativity shown in the exam scripts.	58.00%	54.57%	37.00%	38.75%	39.73%
5. Teachers hold individual discussions with all of us to identify the errors thoroughly.	57.37%	42.87%	14.06%	33.78%	17.67%

Table 1 shows that 54.04% of students receive oral feedback in their midterm scripts. With regards to the content problem, 64.22% of students' responses show that they get oral feedback on the content of their writing. However, 74.75% of students opine that they do not receive oral feedback on the organization of answers. On the question of creativity shown in the exam scripts, 58% of students and 54.05% of students opine that they do not receive feedback in detail. 57.37% of students' responses indicate that they do not usually receive feedback through individual discussions. The analysis of this table also shows that most of the students receive oral feedback on grammar and content problems but not on the organization of their writing.

B. Sub-section 2: Students' attitudes on written feedback

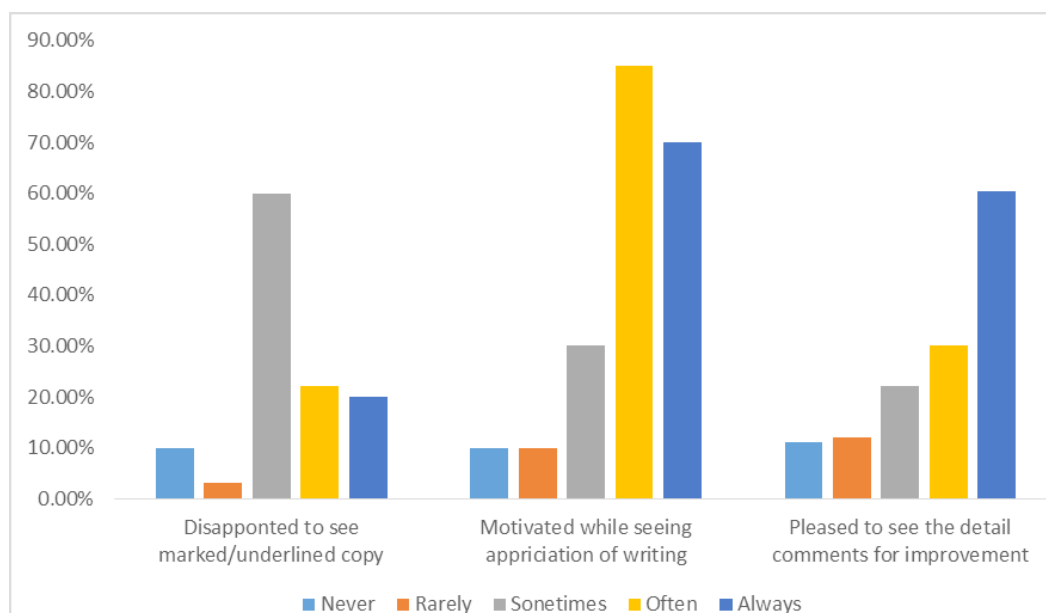


Figure 1: Students' attitudes on written feedback (Statements 6, 7, and 8 are illustrated in this figure)

In response to subsection 2, the analysis shows 60% of the students opine that

they feel quite disappointed to see the red-marked and underlined scripts from the teachers. The result also displays that 80% of the students feel motivated when the teacher appreciates their writing. Figure 1 illustrates that 60% of the students like it when teachers include detailed comments on how to improve their writing.

B. Sub-section 3: Explicit feedback (Students preferences)

Table 2: Explicit Feedback

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
9. I want the teacher to give detailed feedback on all the errors.	5%	25.75%	15.53%	42.15%	67.74%
10. I do not understand if the teacher gives feedback using signs (e.g., sp, gm, X or \surd) only.	10%	0%	12.35%	37.48%	70.81%
11. I understand better when the teacher categorizes the mistakes and explains them to me.	0%	0%	59.05%	30.38%	76.90%

Table 2 (three items included) lists the explicit feedback that the students get in their midterm scripts. The analysis shows that 67.74% of the students prefer detailed feedback from the teacher for each error. Furthermore, with regards to teachers' feedback using signs and symbols, 70.81% of the students noted difficulty in comprehension while 76.90% of students prefer teachers to categorize the mistakes and explain them to them while showing the answer papers.

C. Sub-section 1: Students' attitudes after reading the teacher feedback

Table 3: Attitudes (Effectiveness)

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
12. I feel like I knew how to correct the errors.	36.00%	63.50%	37.64%	36.25%	44.83%
13. I understand the feedback properly.	0%	12.00%	34.78%	32.34%	49.00%
14. I find the teachers' verbal feedback useful.	0%	42.18%	29.86%	38.73%	58.00%
15. I find the teachers' written feedback effective.	0%	36.5%	14.60%	38.10%	71.13%
16. I find the teacher's detailed feedback useful.	0%	8.00%	17.75%	55.31%	51.97%
17. I like it when teacher gives feedback individually.	0%	0%	35.00%	11.00%	42.12%
18. I feel quite embarrassed to discuss my own mistakes.	43.32%	39.89%	55.13%	39.33%	44.17%

Table 3 and its results measure whether the students feel positively or negatively about the effectiveness of the teachers' feedback. It demonstrates that 63.50% of the students rarely know how to correct their errors based on feedback. 49% of the

respondents assured that they understand teachers' feedback properly. It also shows that students prefer written comments over oral feedback. The results demonstrate that 55.31% of them often want detailed and individual feedback. However, some of the students are not hesitant about receiving feedback, but sometimes 55.13% of the learners feel embarrassed to discuss their mistakes in front of the other students.

C. Sub-section 2: Students' preference for better understanding

Table 4: Attitudes (Preference for better understanding)

Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
19. Teachers should grade the scripts only.	55.26 %	42.13 %	37.74%	46.40%	31.17%
20. Teachers should verbally point out the errors and tell the ways to correct them.	0%	20.00%	45.56%	38.60%	57.77%
21. Teachers should give written comments on every question answered.	0%	15.60%	42.60%	47.94%	56.88%
22. Teachers should use detailed feedback on the midterm scripts.	10%	41.50%	34.50%	50.69%	39.67%
23. Teachers should use both oral and written feedback on the midterm scripts.	11.00%	8%	32.70%	57.27%	58.75%

In this section, 55.26% of the students show a negative attitude if the teacher only grades their scripts. Interestingly, 57.77% of the students want their errors to be verbally pointed out and corrected by the teacher. When it comes to the question of written comments, 56.88% of the students responded that they always prefer written comments on every answer. In fact, 50.69% of the respondents want explicit feedback on their midterm scripts. Chen, Nassaji, & Liu (2016) showed similar results among Chinese ESL students and their preference for detailed feedback from teachers.

In the present study, 57.27% of the students often and 58.75% of the students always prefer teachers' oral and written feedback on their midterm scripts. The question divided the participants into two groups, which shows some students prefer only grades and some expect detailed comments on their scripts. The above analysis demonstrates that the students expect detailed feedback in oral and written forms from their teachers.

Discussion and Implications

The data analysis from the above tables reveals that in the Bangladeshi context, students of the selected private universities receive oral, written, and explicit feedback on their midterm scripts, although the difference lies in the way and to what extent students receive the feedback. These findings can help us to figure out a response to the first research question of this paper.

This study reveals that most of the students do not receive feedback on the organizational problems in their writing. They also do not obtain appreciative comments on their creativity and well-written answers. They also demonstrate they do not comprehend the signs and symbols given in written feedback. The students often feel disappointed to see too many corrections on their scripts, and even when they receive oral feedback in front of the class, they often feel embarrassed.

In the Bangladeshi context, students are not usually familiar with the signs and symbols given on their written scripts. They also expect detailed comments on their writings regarding content and grammar. In fact, the result shows that they prefer both oral and written feedback through one-on-one interaction. Another study revealed that verbal feedback has a considerably greater influence on learners (Agricola, Prins, & Sluijsmans, 2020).

The results imply that the students generally have a preference for written corrective feedback on their writings.

Limitation

This study only focused on students' perceptions of teacher feedback. However, it did not take into account the external and internal influences that can affect teacher feedback. Hence, further research on the effects of external and internal factors on teacher feedback can be conducted. Additionally, the researchers designed a questionnaire to find out the students' expectations on the teacher feedback in midterm written scripts. No viva voce was included. Hence, the study could not include the learners' attitude on the teacher feedback regarding the development of the spoken language.

Moreover, according to Wenden (1991), open or semi-structured interviews along with a questionnaire to evaluate attitude make a survey design more appropriate. As the research was conducted on only 81 participants from three selected private universities, those instruments could not be utilized within the schedule. Furthermore, due to time constraints, interviews of the teachers could not be conducted either.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This research tried to focus on the categories of feedback from the teachers on midterm scripts and the students' viewpoints towards it. From the results, it is comprehensible that Bangladeshi undergraduates receive three major types of feedback: oral, written, and explicit. This study also points out that many teachers do not provide all the subtypes of oral, written, and explicit feedback. However, the researchers' experience tells that it may not always be possible to give both oral and written detailed feedback individually. The students should also understand that teachers cannot always provide thorough feedback due to issues like large classrooms, time constraints, and marks-oriented culture. Hence, cooperation between the teachers and the students is required to improve students' writing skills.

It is to be noted that many Bangladeshi language teachers are not well trained in providing feedback to the students, particularly on the examination scripts. Moreover, this study did not investigate whether the teachers arranged any follow-up activities with the students to discuss the feedback in detail. Hence, these limitations of this paper are suggested for further investigation.

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Appendix 1

Scale: Likert Scale:

- 1 - Never
- 2 - Rarely
- 3 - Sometimes
- 4 - Often
- 5 - Always

Questionnaire

Dear students,

The purpose of this survey is to examine what type of feedback the teachers use in the mid-term script in the Department of English, and what approaches the students have towards these feedbacks. All of your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Thank you.

Section: A

Instruction: The following statements are about the feedback the teachers give you in your midterm scripts and how you actually feel about them. Please tick the box below for each statement which you think is most appropriate for you. There is no right or wrong answer. Answer according to your actual attitude about the statements.

Section B: Types of Feedback

Sub-section 1: Oral Feedback from Teachers					
Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. Teachers tell me about my grammatical problems in the script.					
2. Teachers tell me about my content problems in script.					

3. Teachers tell about my organizational problems in writing.					
4. Teachers appreciate my creativity shown in the exam scripts.					
5. The teachers hold individual discussion with all of us to identify the errors thoroughly.					

Sub-section 2: Students attitude on Written Feedback					
Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
6. I feel disappointed when the teachers underline/circle many parts of the written script.					
7. I feel motivated when the teacher gives thorough comments to praise my own point of view.					
8. I like when the teacher gives detailed comments to improve in my writing.					

Sub-section 3: Explicit Feedback (Student's Preferences)					
Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
9. I want the teacher to give feedback to detailed feedback to all the errors					
10. I do not understand if the teacher gives feedback using signs (e.g., sp, gm, X or ✓) only					
11. I understand better the teacher categorizes the mistakes and explains them to me.					

Section C: Attitudes

Sub-section 1: Students' attitudes after reading the teacher feedback					
Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
12. I feel like I knew how to correct them					
13. I understand the feedback properly.					
14. I find the teachers' verbal feedback useful.					
15. I find the teachers' written feedback effective.					
16. I find the teacher's detailed feedback useful.					
17. I like when teacher gives feedback individually.					
18. I feel quite embarrassed to discuss my own mistakes.					

Sub-section 2: Students' preferences for a better understanding					
Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
19. Teachers should grade the scripts only.					
20. Teachers should verbally point out the error and tell the ways to correct them.					
21. Teachers should give written comments on every question answered					
22. Teachers should use detailed feedback on the midterm scripts.					
23. Teachers should use both oral and written feedback on the midterm scripts.					

Questionnaire adapted and modified from the instrument prepared by Icy Lee (2008)