Graduate Students' Needs and Preferences for Written Feedback on Academic Writing

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine graduate students' needs and preferences for written feedback on academic writing from their lecturers and thesis supervisors. Quantitative method via survey questionnaire was used to collect data from 21 respondents. The data collection involved Master and Doctorate students at a tertiary level institution in Malaysia. The data was analyzed and tabulated using descriptive analysis. Results indicate that graduate students regularly need written feedback on their academic writing and they preferred electronic method to obtain feedback from their supervisors. Findings also indicate that graduate students appreciated feedback which was straightforward, provided clear instructions, directed them to other related resources, and feedback which was detailed or specific. This research filled the gap in literature by providing awareness among thesis supervisors and lecturers on the students' needs and preference for written feedback on their academic writing. Apart from that, greater understanding of students' perceived needs for feedback and preferences of feedback is also vital for lectures and thesis supervisors to increase the effectiveness of providing constructive written feedback.

Keywords: academic writing, feedback preference, graduate students, written feedback

1. Introduction

Feedback is interactive and it is a continuous two-way communication that encourages teaching and learning among educators and students. Feedback also serves the function of error correction and grammar correction (Wang & Jiang, 2015) and it may influence the end product that is student's written work. In addition, feedback assists graduate students to determine the parts of writing that is correct, and the parts that need correction for improved writing as well as alerting students of their strengths and weaknesses in academic writing. According to Rowe and Wood (2009), in order to achieve quality teaching and supervising, effective and quality feedback should be provided. Concurrently, feedback helps in stimulating critical thinking among students to ensure the development of constructive ideas for writing. Therefore, written feedback by the graduate students' supervisors and lecturers is a fundamental source of input for academic writing such as thesis writing (Bitchener, Basturkmen, & East, 2010). Contrarily, Lack of constructive feedback or unavailability of it may lead students to evaluate themselves inappropriately.

In the context of thesis writing, it can be a challenge for graduate students when writing their initial draft. Thus, instruction should be usually given either in written or oral feedback, or both by supervisor when students are writing a thesis (Bitchener et al., 2010) at an early draft stage, advanced first draft stage, and near final draft stage (Bitchener, Basturkmen, East, & Meyer, 2011). In general, feedback provides students with insights of what is expected by the academic community. Previous research (Bitchener et al., 2011; Gulfidan, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007) indicated that supervisors' focus of feedback has mainly been on content. The feedback may be delivered either formally or informally by the lecturers or supervisor through their judgment or opinions. However, supervisors may face challenges related to feedback delivery such as time constraint (Bailey, 2009; Rowe & Wood, 2008), less opportunity for tutorial interaction with students (Bailey, 2009), and also miscommunication and emotional barriers (Carless, 2006).

Subsequently, Rowe and Wood (2008) emphasized that the availability of studies focusing on students' perceptions or preferences of feedback is low compared to the studies that focused on teachers' feedback. Furthermore, studies on students' perceptions or preferences of feedback if available have given priority to the

undergraduate students' perspective (Bitchener et al., 2011; Carless, 2006). Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining master and doctorate students' perceived needs and preferences towards written feedback by employing quantitative methodology research design.

1.1 Related Literature

1.1.1 Definition of Feedback

Gagné et al. (1992 as cited in Gulfidan 2009) described feedback as providing the learners with information about performances and sets in motion the process of reinforcement" (p. 189). According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback is a consequence of performance. It is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. In the context of written feedback, Gulfidan (2009) indicated written feedback as one or a group(s) of comments, edits, marks, and so forth, written (handwritten or electronic) by someone who reviewed an academic paper. Feedback in instruction may serve a different of purposes to ensure learning in different learning environments become easier and facilitates its examination in different learning paradigms (Mory, 2004 as cited in Gulfidan, 2009).

1.1.2 Role of Feedback

Various functions of feedback have been proposed in the literature. According to Carless (2006) feedback acts by providing advice for improvement of the current assignment; advice for improvement of future assignments; explaining or justifying a grade; an act by which the tutor demonstrates characteristics, such as expertise, diligence or authority; and the feedback function can also be little more than the fulfilment of a ritual which is part of academic life.

Apart from that, according to Kumar and Stracke (2007), there are several theoretical perspectives on the role of written corrective feedback in second language acquisition. Feedback serves few functions such as referential function, directive function and expressive function. According to them, referential function of the feedback addresses editorial, organization, and content of students' academic writing; directive feedback includes suggestions, questions and instructions; and expressive function of feedback comprises praise, criticism, and supervisor's opinion. In summary, they stressed that overall feedback gave the supervisees a sense of accomplishment, suggesting the usefulness of the overall feedback, in addition to in-text comments.

Based on previous research by Manjet (2015), it was found that the notion of academic writing practices graduate students bring from their prior academic learning background differs from the expectations in their current graduate programs. As their writing is much affected by previous learning patterns, the lecturers and thesis supervisors play an important role in ensuring they provide constructive written feedback for the students to develop academic writing according to the rules and academic writing culture of their host tertiary level institution.

Subsequently, Wang and Jiang (2015) stated that written corrective feedback which is also known as error correction or grammar correction has long been a common instructional practice in second language writing. As a common instructional practice in second language writing, written corrective feedback acts as noticing facilitator to help learners' bridge the gap between their inter language and the target language. The role of written corrective feedback as output monitor is to raise the chance of learners' correct output and thereafter, promote their second language writing. Lastly, as an interactive output, oral feedback helps learners acquire the target forms.

1.1.3 Feedback Preferences

In terms of the medium of delivering feedback, research has indicated that formative feedback can reach students through various channels such as traditional delivery (handwritten comments and print-out comments) and electronic delivery (Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis, 2010; Race, 2001). Race (2001) stated that both handwritten and electronic feedback have their distinctive advantages and disadvantages. The usage of electronic method by supervisors in delivering feedback is on rise as this method promotes feedback production, delivery and communication (Race, 2001). Due to advancement in the use of technology in transmitting information, more electronic tools are available and consequently maximizing the effectiveness of formative feedback.

Apart from that, Gulfidan's (2009) research investigated students' perceived needs and attitude towards written feedback. Preferences for methods of receiving feedback were also examined. More students rated high preference for receiving feedback electronically than hand-written comments, while some of the students in the study showed no preference for both ways. However, past literature such as Budge (2011) indicated that students view electronic feedback differently. For example, opinion from the Students' Perceptions of Electronic

Feedback survey 2010 as cited in Budge (2011) indicated that electronic feedback is very distant as there is less opportunity for clarification.

While giving feedback, feedback presentation in terms of tone and quality requires careful attention as it has strong influence on the students' use of feedback. Students need balanced positive and negative feedback (Bitchener et al., 2011), and criticism that is conveyed in positive way (Ferguson, 2009). Positive feedback has been found to improve mood and satisfaction ratings (Stake, 1982 as cited in Rowe & Wood, 2008) and students were motivated to improve their written output when they receive constructive feedback (Weaver, 2006). On the other hand, negative tone of feedback contributes to students' dissatifaction (Price, Handley, Millar, & O'Donovan, 2010). Apart from that, students also responded well to written feedback based on supportive, encouraging, and polite tone elements (Eyres, Hatch, Turner, & West, 2001; Ferguson, 2009) compared to the negative written feedback. The rationality behind this is that the students prefer recognition for their work (Ferguson, 2009; Stracke & Kumar, 2010)

Other findings also showed that students wish to obtain more direct feedback (Bitchener et al. 2011), detailed, specific, and extensive feedback especially on central issue of their paper (Crossouard & Pryor, 2009, Eyres et al., 2001, Ferguson, 2009). In Gulfidan's study (2009), regarding the positive statements on how feedback should be provided, the students preferred "straightforward written feedback', 'feedback that gives me clear instructions for how to revise my paper' and 'detailed, specific comments more than overall, general comments'. Among negative statements for preferences were 'suggestions that are hard to use while revising my paper', 'marks without text (such as, underlined sentences and question marks)' and feedback that 'tries to change my writing style'.

In a recent research regarding students' perceptions of feedback on academic essays, Chokwe (2015) argued that participants indicated they valued feedback as the feedback helped them to avoid repeating mistakes in future writing tasks. The participants also expressed the importance of feedback on content rather than on language. At the same time, some students were not satisfied with the supervisors' feedback as the received a low grade for their academic work. Their dissatisfaction was due to their grade did not resonate the hard work and effort they put in. Some participants revealed that they did not receive good feedback from their supervisors regarding their writing, thus they did not benefit from the comments. However, some participants found that the feedback is useful to them as error correction is important when marking.

In general, evaluating feedback's quality needs careful consideration on a few aspects: the purpose of feedback, the individual who makes the evaluative judgement and the extent to which staff and students agree on the purpose of the feedback (Price et al., 2010). Students' perceptions on feedback may get affected by their conceptualizations of feedback and their understanding of teaching and learning concepts and processes.

1.2 Research Questions

This research will therefore, address the following research questions:

1) What are the perceived needs and preferences for written feedback among graduate students on their academic writing?

2) What is the preferred method for written feedback among graduate students on their academic writing?

3) What is the frequency of written feedback required by graduate students for their academic writing?

2. Method

The research design of this study is quantitative in nature. Purposive sampling was used for this survey by administering survey questionnaire in order to obtain data from 21 Master and Doctorate (PhD) students at a tertiary level institution in Malaysia. The respondents were 21 graduate students who were either full time or part time Master or Doctoral student registered at a particular faculty in one of the tertiary level institutions in Malaysia where the researcher was attached.

2.1 Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used for this survey by administering survey questionnaire in order to obtain data from 21 Master and Doctoral students at a tertiary level institution in Malaysia. The questionnaire was distributed via email attachment to all registered Master and Doctoral students. There are about 80 registered Master and Doctoral students at the faculty. The graduate students were invited to participate in this research by completing the questionnaire voluntarily. Response rate was only 26.3%.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was thoroughly adopted from Can and Walker's (2014) study that investigated social science doctoral students' preferences and needs with regard to written feedback on academic writing. The questionnaire consists of five sections involving the demographic section, Feedback Delivery Preference, General Feedback Preferences, Specific Feedback Preferences, and Perceived Needs for Written Feedback. As such, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire has been determined through the previous study and pilot study was not conducted. The questionnaire consists of "Yes" or "No" questions and also four-point Likert scale items.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic section in the survey was used to obtain data about the respondents, which included their gender, first language, age and current academic program. There were a total of 21 respondents for this survey, 7 male (33.3%) and 14 female (66.7%), ranging from the age of 24 to 51 years old. English is the first language for 2 (9.5%) of the respondents; 19 (90.5%) of them are non-English native speakers which consists of 11 (52.4%) respondents. Four (19%) respondents indicated Arabic as their first language, four (19%) indicated Malay language as their first language, one (4.8%) indicated Azeri Turkish, one (4.8%) indicated Farsi, one (4.8%) indicated Mandarin, and one (4.8%) indicated Persian language. Among the 21 participants, two (9.5%) of them were in the Master program, while 19 participants (90.5%) were doctoral students.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

3.2.1 Results of Delivery Preference

Based on Table 1, which is about students' preference of delivery, the students preferred giving or sending paper to supervisors through electronic medium (71.4%) rather than handwritten copy (33.3%). Similarly, the students rated high preference for electronical method (66.7%) more than handwritten (57.1%) method when receiving feedback from supervisors. None of the respondents indicated that they do not like electronic method both in giving/sending paper to supervisors and receiving feedback from supervisors.

Table 1. Delivery preference

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Method of giving/sending paper to your supervisors		
Electronically	71.4	0.0
Handwritten	33.3	19.0
No Preference	9.5	9.5
Method of receiving feedback from your supervisors		
Electronically	66.7	0.0
Handwritten	57.1	9.5
No Preference	9.5	9.5

3.2.2 Results of General Feedback Preference

In General Feedback Preferences section (see Table 2), all participants valued straightforward written feedback, written feedback that gave them clear instructions to revise their paper, written feedback that directed them to other related resources, and detailed/ specific comments more than overall/ general comments. Four items among 16 items were agreed upon by every respondent, highlighting that the students strongly agree with the statements. In addition, almost all the participants rated that they appreciated written feedback about grammar (95.2%), written feedback that was conveyed in a more positive way (95.2%), balanced positive and critical/negative written feedback (90.5%) and written feedback that revised or edited paper for them (90.5%). Majority (80.9%) of the respondents agreed that they did not appreciate written feedback that was given because of personal preference, while 71.4% of them rated that they appreciated written feedback which was given based on only what was on the paper, not based on their previous paper. A statement that received the very least rating in this section is "I don't appreciate written feedback that tries to change my writing style.", where only 23.8% of the respondents agreed upon.

Table 2. General feedback preference (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree, 4- Strongly agree)

	M (SD)	% Agreed
Positive statements		
I appreciate written feedback that gives me clear instructions for how to revise my paper.	3.90 (0.30)	100.0
I appreciate written feedback that directs me to other related resources.	3.76 (0.44)	100.0
I appreciate detailed/specific comments more than overall/general comments.	3.76 (0.44)	100.0
I appreciate written feedback about grammar.	3.24 (0.54)	95.2
I appreciate balanced positive and critical/negative written feedback.	3.52 (0.68)	90.5
I appreciate written feedback in which negative things are said in a more positive way.	3.62 (0.59)	95.2
I appreciate written feedback which is given based on only what is on the paper, not based on my previous papers.	2.86 (0.79)	71.4
I appreciate critical/negative written feedback more than positive written feedback.	2.57 (0.75)	52.4
Negative statements		
I don't appreciate written feedback that is given because of a personal preference.	3.14 (1.06)	80.9
I don't appreciate marks without text in feedback (such as underlined sentences, circle around a word, question mark, etc.)	2.90 (1.04)	61.9
I don't appreciate suggestions in written feedback that are hard for me to use while revising my paper.	2.86 (0.85)	66.7
I don't appreciate written feedback that tries to change the direction of my paper.	2.57 (0.87)	52.4
I don't appreciate written feedback that tries to change my writing style.	2.14 (0.73)	23.8

3.2.3 Results of Specific Feedback Preferences

Data in Table 3 shows that most of the respondents agreed on the feedback comments listed in the Specific Feedback Preferences section. Among the 16 statements, all the respondents were satisfied with seven items. All of them strongly appreciated written feedback which was similar to "I think this sentence should be said much earlier. It is important.", "This section is really strong.", "This argument is unsupported. You need to cite more references.", "You're on the right track, this is a well-organized paper.", "Break this into smaller, more focused paragraphs.", "Explain why you're focusing on these dimensions. Not clear to the reader." and "A bit of wavering focus from this paragraph to this paragraph. Check for consistency throughout." Besides that, majority (95.2%) of respondents agreed on comments which were "Here is an article that supports what you're saying here…", "Maybe you need a table here, listing X with each column showing Y. Just an idea.", "Have you thought about adding one more section to your paper about X literature?", "This section is a bit dense, with lots of details. Are they all necessary?" and "Check the APA manual for this citation." The responses given by the respondents indicate that they prefer to receive positive comment that will help them improve their work. The

respondents also indicated dissatisfaction with receiving comments that negatively criticizes their work. Only 61.9% of the participants valued statement like "I have a hard time following this section." which was the least agreed statement.

Table 3. Specific feedback preferences (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Agree, 4- Strongly agree)

I appreciate written feedback comments similar to this: …	M (SD)	% Agreed
Here is an article that supports what you're saying here…	3.62 (0.74)	95.2
I think this sentence should be said much earlier. It is important.	3.62 (0.50)	100.0
Maybe you need a table here, listing X with each column showing Y. Just an idea.	3.57 (0.60)	95.2
This section is really strong.	3.76 (0.44)	100.0
This argument is unsupported. You need to cite more references.	3.52 (0.51)	100.0
Have you thought about adding one more section to your paper about X literature?	3.33 (0.58)	95.2
You're on the right track, this is a well-organized paper.	3.62 (0.50)	100.0
It is not clear how this paragraph addresses your research question. You need to show links to the research question.	3.45 (0.60)	90.4
Break this into smaller, more focused paragraphs.	3.43 (0.51)	100.0
Explain why you're focusing on these dimensions. Not clear to the reader.	3.48 (0.51)	100.0
This section is a bit dense, with lots of details. Are they all necessary?	3.38 (0.59)	95.2
Check the APA manual for this citation.	3.43 (0.60)	95.2
A bit of wavering focus from this paragraph to this paragraph. Check for consistency throughout.	3.43 (0.51)	100.0
I have a hard time following this section.	2.81 (0.87)	61.9
I don't agree with this paragraph. I think, …	3.00 (0.63)	81.0
I'd like you to go in a little different direction, like this…	3.19 (0.68)	85.7

3.2.4 Results of Perceived Needs for Written Feedback

Next, as seen from Table 4, the students frequently required feedback on elements of academic writing. For each of the element, the mean score is above 3.0, which showed the students' regular needs of feedback. Based on the mean, the most needed element is on the arguments and justifications of the students' academic writing (M = 3.62), followed by elements of introduction, purpose and significance of the paper (M = 3.52), and feedback about consistency of the overall paper (M = 3.52). Feedback on clarity and comprehension of the statements (M = 3.48), transition and flow between sentences, paragraphs, or sections (M = 3.48), and formatting (tables, figures, page design, fitting APA style, giving citations, etc.) (M = 3.48) are also the students' concern. In the context of perceived needs for written feedback, constructive feedback on the content is very much emphasized by the respondents. Additionally, feedback on referencing, ensuring their work is prepared according to APA's (American Psychological Association) style and formatting are not emphasized to improve their academic work.

Table 4. Perceived needs for written feedback (1- Never, 2- Seldom, 3- Sometimes, 4- Often)

Aspects of academic writing	M(SD)	Never f (P)	Seldom f (P)	Sometimes f (P)	Often f (P)
Arguments and justifications in my paper	3.62 (0.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (38.1%)	13 (61.9%)
Conclusion	3.45 (0.76)	0 (0%)	3 (14.3%)	5 (23.8%)	12 (57.1%)
Clarity and comprehension of the statements	3.48 (0.68)	0 (0%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (33.3%)	12 (57.1%)
Inclusion or exclusion of information	3.24 (0.77)	0 (0%)	4 (19.0%)	8 (38.1%)	9 (42.9%)
Introduction, purpose and significance of the paper	3.57 (0.60)	0 (0%)	1 (4.8%)	7 (33.3%)	13 (61.9%)
Consistency in the overall paper	3.57 (0.75)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	6 (28.6%)	14 (66.7%)
Logical order and organization of information and ideas	3.43 (0.81)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	7 (33.3%)	12 (57.1%)
Transition and flow between sentences, paragraphs, or sections	3.48 (0.81)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	6 (28.6%)	13 (61.9%)
Grammar and sentence structure	3.52 (0.87)	1 (4.8%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	15 (71.4%)
Formatting (tables, figures, page design, fitting APA style, giving citations, etc.)	3.48 (0.87)	1 (4.8%)	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)	14 (66.7%)
References and literature decisions	3.33 (0.86)	1 (4.8%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (33.3%)	11 (52.4%)

4. Discussion

4.1 Delivery Preference

From the results above, the respondents preferred electronical method rather than handwritten method in feedback communication. All the respondents were positively responsive towards the use of electronic method for the transmission of written feedback. A few respondents indicated they did not like handwritten method. Some of the possible reasons for this preference may be electronic method is concise and direct; the ease of future reference of written feedback transmitted via electronic method, convenience and efficiency of electronic feedback, and lastly, ease of reading compared to handwritten feedback (Budge, 2011). Another factor may be the handwritten method is less effective due to its limitation and shortcoming in reaching the student. Previous study by (Gulfidan, 2009) also reported the same trend as this study. In Gulfidan's study, 45% of doctoral students preferred receiving feedback electronically, while 17% favored handwritten comments, and 37% showed no preference. Nevertheless, students' attitudes on electronic feedback were not consistent across studies.

4.2 General Feedback Preference

All the respondents rated that they appreciated straightforward feedback. Students need straightforward feedback because "Many students are simply unable to understand feedback comments and interpret them correctly" (Higgins, 2000 as cited in Carless, 2006), suggesting that feedback given to them are complex to interpret (Price et al., 2010). According to Price et al. (2010), straightforward feedback is able to provide a clear future action.

Hence, the students will not face ambiguity reading the comments given if the feedback provided was straightforward.

Next, strong agreement with "written feedback that gives me clear instructions for how to revise my paper" and "written feedback that directs me to other related resources" was indicated by the graduate students as they wish to achieve targeted learning goal and help them revise their paper. The following excerpts: *("I try to understand it, but I seldom understand the written feedback on the marked assignments. Sometimes I get frustrated if I can't read their writing or understand what they are saying feedback that direct them to other related resources so that they have approved reference to refer to.")* by a respondent from Carless's (2006) study further supported the reason of students' need of feedback with clear instructions and feedback that links them to related resources.

Besides, specificity in the feedback is also the graduate students' utmost concern. They wanted specific feedback that gives suggestions in an area of their concern. Feedback has appeared to be more effective when feedback is specific and its complexity is low. In support of this, Wiggins (1998) describes the best feedback as being highly specific and descriptive. Yet, there is an opposite argument. Knight and Yorke (2003) as cited in Carless (2006) indicate "although many teachers give a lot of feedback on specifics, it is general feedback that has the greater power to stimulate learning" (p.33). Such feedback has the potential to 'feed forward' into future tasks rather than back to completed assignments. Overall, the arguments of providing students with specific feedback remain in dispute.

4.3 Specific Feedback Preference

Students gave high ratings on the statements shown in this section, except one statement "I have a hard time following this section", which was agreed by 61% of the respondents. Questioning style of feedback which is highly preferred in this study was also preferred by respondents in other researches. To an interviewee in East, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2012) study, the most helpful feedback for the student was indirect in nature. The student explained that, "[my] supervisors use a lot of 'you may want to…' [or] 'Would you like to?' … they are so supportive, they just use indirect questions all the time." The student observed that this type of feedback was "absolutely helpful for me because … I like to think, spend a lot of time thinking about my own writing."

4.4 Perceived Needs for Written Feedback

Among the elements of academic writing, the students needed feedback mostly on arguments and justifications in their paper. The feedback on these aspects may help students to foster their argumentation skills in writing. Earlier literature on writing difficulties has also reported that as coherence and cohesion in argument creation present difficulties for some thesis-writing students (Bitchner et al., 2011), the students require more constructive feedback about these aspects. Accordingly, Manjet (2015; 2016) have emphasized graduate students face challenges in their academic writing practices in the context of expressing ideas, linking ideas, sequencing their assignment and ensuring clarity in their writing. As such, constructive written feedback from their lecturers is utmost important to develop their academic writing skills.

Next, students need feedback about consistency in the overall paper as well. There has been a challenge for students to achieve consistency in their paper because they are under tremendous pressure to meet deadline for their work. Developing a consistent style of writing, the format of writing or the organization in academic writing contributes to better writing product (Saito, 1994). Switching of the style, format and organization can distract the reader and diminish the believability of the paper's argument (Saito, 1994).

Other aspects that students frequently need feedback were logical order and organization of information and ideas, and transition and flow between sentences, paragraphs, or sections. Issue about editorial and organization were perceived by both supervisors and students as the mistakes that should not be found in a PhD thesis (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). Hence, the students were very concerned about this aspect and had the need in getting feedback about this. Additionally, the respondents were also having difficulties in maintaining transition and flow of content. The respondents in Gulfidan's (2009) study were aware of these difficulties and tended to expect receiving feedback on how they can improve transitions between sentences, paragraphs and section.

Through the results obtained from the present study, it is proven that students preferred electronic way of receiving feedback from supervisors, provided that the feedback given is straightforward, detailed with clear instructions, links students to other useful resources, and specific or precise to certain aspects. This is parallel with Race (2001) that stated the usage of electronic method by supervisors in delivering feedback was on rise. Due to advancement in the use of technology, most of the students preferred electronic way as their medium of feedback production, delivery and communication.

Besides that, students also indicated that comments on arguments and justifications, introduction, purpose and

significance of the paper, and feedback about consistency in the overall paper are crucial and important. Thus, extra attention on these aspects should be given by the supervisors during work or assignments' evaluation. Supervisors too should take into consideration the tone of feedback. It is preferable if the feedback given is positive and gentle as such feedback helps in building students' confidence to improve their writing. Strategy of having balanced positive and negative feedback, or criticism that is conveyed in positive way can be applied while commenting on students' work.

However, Wojtas (1998 as cited in Weaver, 2006) highlighted that extra effort should also be taken by the students in order to improve their academic writings as some students are only concerned about the marks rather than feedback of the works given by the supervisors. This was also supported by Fritz et al., (2000 as cited in Weaver, 2006) that feedback given by the supervisors does not help in improving students' learning. Instead, feedback is a part of the students' learning process. Therefore, in order for the students to achieve desired learning outcome, students should respond to the feedback given by the supervisors and improve their academic writing based on the advices and comments received. The lecturers and thesis supervisors also to ensure their feedback matches the students' expectations for written feedback. As indicated by Tom, Morni, Metom and Joe (2013) teachers need to think about their comments more thoroughly before putting them on students' paper. Lecturers and thesis supervisors should also complement feedback with lecturer student conferences to ensure the clarity and future improvement in academic writing in line with the feedback provided.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided insights into the crucial need of proper feedback as desired by graduate student. Overall, the findings indicate that the students prefer feedback provided electronically, positive and constructive feedback that provides guideline and advice on improving their academic work further. Feedback that directly tackles the problems with students' work is much preferred. Furthermore, graduate students preferred emphasize of feedback to be on the content of their academic work and not merely focusing on language and formatting issues. Feedback in general helps students to identify the parts of writing that are correct, and the parts that need improvement for better writing. An on-going effort must be taken to instil the realization and understanding of students' need and preferences of academic writing. The findings from this study can be a reference for supervisors' when giving out feedback to students. Besides that, this present research would also help in creating awareness among academic staff so that extra attention can be given in the process of providing feedback for Master and Doctorate students as it is one of the crucial aspects that contributes to the success of the graduate students' learning progress.

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