This study investigates the perennial issue of feedback and proposes an approach that uses an Essay Feedback Checklist as a vehicle for self-assessment and increased student engagement with feedback received.


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Abstract

Owing to the increasing diversity of assessments in higher education, feedback should be provided to students in a format that can assist future and alternative work. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the Essay Feedback Checklist on future alternative assessments. Participants were assigned to one of two groups, one of which completed the checklist prior to assessment 1 (essay) and received feedback using this method. Attainment on assessment 1 and assessment 2 (examination) were taken as pre- and post-test scores. Results revealed increased assessment scores for the checklist group, compared to those who received conventional feedback. Focus group data indicated that students particularly liked elements of the checklist as a feedback method, but potential drawbacks were also highlighted. Implications and future use of the checklist is then discussed.

Keywords: feedback; assessment; summative

Introduction

The introduction discusses a range of relevant literature:

- the powerful role of feedback in enhancing learning
- student dissatisfaction with much of the feedback they receive
- the ineffectiveness of providing delayed feedback at the end of the academic period
- the benefits of considering feedback as a process that assist students become self-regulated learners rather than as a product provided by teachers
- the difference in feedback processing behaviors between high and low achieving students as summarised below (based on Orsmond and Merry 2009) and the consequent need for students to engage with feedback for it to influence future work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High achieving students</th>
<th>Non-high achieving students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tried to understand the essence of the feedback</td>
<td>Accepted judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not accept all feedback</td>
<td>Believed judgement was crucial to success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believed that they could get by without tutor feedback</td>
<td>Focused on that specific learning episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related feedback to their own learning and career goals</td>
<td>Used feedback in order to produce work that the tutor is looking for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ineffectiveness of providing large blocks of feedback on tasks such as essays. The aim of the study described in the paper was to investigate whether use of a feedback instrument, the Essay Feedback Checklist (EFC) would have a positive influence on future but different assessment types such as examinations in order to examine transfer potential.

Method

Participants included 104 second-year students who were provided with feedback on a 2500 word essay and four students who volunteered to take part in a focus group (the voluntary nature of the focus group having a possible impact on the perspectives expressed).

Students were randomly divided into two groups one of which received essay feedback using a tick box system against criteria listed in a standardised marking sheet along with 'block text' written feedback.

Prior to submission of the essays the second group of students indicated on an Essay Feedback Checklist (EFC) their level of confidence (complete, partial, not all) in how their essay met each of a list of preset criteria. Where there was a discrepancy between student and tutor judgements, additional feedback comments were provided to target the criteria displaying the greatest discrepancy. (In order to avoid potential disadvantage the second student group were also provided with the standardised marking sheet.)

The procedure for determining the transfer effectiveness of the essay EFC approach was a comparison of marks for a subsequent examination for both groups. Quantitative data were analysed using a repeated measures analysis of variance with ‘assessment’ as the dependent variable. Qualitative data from the focus group were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

On a subsequent examination assessment task the EFC group received higher marks while the standardised essay marking group received lower marks.

Four themes emerged from the focus group transcript analysis

- students liked being able to request specific and therefore receive individualised feedback
- students felt the terminology used on the checklist had the potential to lower morale for those with an unrealistically high perspective of their ability and also to influence students to rate their confidence level lower than it actually was in order that any discrepancies would be in a positive direction
- students reported that the self-assessment required to complete the EFC encouraged high-level engagement with assessment criteria
- students believed the EFC would have a positive impact on future work though their comments focused on works of the same kind rather than on alternative forms of assessment.

Discussion

The study indicated that the EFC method promoted transfer of feedback to subsequent tasks but did not lead to significantly different marks between the two groups for the initial essay task. This suggests that the significant factor was student engagement with feedback received, and that this engagement was a consequence of the requirement to self-assess before essay submission.

Areas suggested for an extension of this research include the possible incorporation of a peer assessment step and the investigation of the strength of transfer effects across a range of different types of assessment.
References

The paper has 21 references.


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