



Sound and vision: evaluating the student experience of audio-visual feedback in higher education

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Abstract

Technology enhanced feedback methods such as video feedback are increasingly employed with a notable shift towards embracing remote means of communication during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Greater use of distance and electronic learning can result in a lack of personalisation which students find challenging. Feedback which uses the spoken word has been found to be more personalised and supportive, helping to establish connection and engagement with students. Mixed methods were used to collate student views on written, audio, and audio-visual feedback with a focus on the evaluation of video feedback. Focus groups, questionnaires, and course evaluations across multiple cohorts of students showed a strong preference for video feedback as comparatively more detailed, personalised, and supportive than purely written or purely audio feedback. This study adds to insights into the impact of video feedback on learner confidence and its potential to enhance learning in higher education. Developing and deploying video feedback is proposed as a strategy to enrich student support, offer greater personalisation, improve feedback engagement, and optimise learning.

Keywords: audio-visual; video; assessment; feedback; strengths-based; higher education.

Background

Assessment serves multiple purposes in higher education and the importance of feedback for student learning is widely accepted (Nicol, 2009). However, Boud and Molloy suggest a fundamental 'rethinking of the place of assessment and feedback within the curriculum is needed' (2013, p.700). The National Student Survey (NSS) in the United Kingdom (UK) consistently shows students are relatively dissatisfied with assessment and feedback (NSS, 2010-24) even where most other aspects of their studies are highly rated. Deeley et al. (2019) found that student dissatisfaction with feedback stemmed from the belief it had little impact on their learning, or was inconsistent, while Marriott and Teoh, (2012) noted a lack of clarity and promptness. Deeley et al. (2019) present these negative attitudes to assessment and feedback as a significant challenge lacking an easy solution. Students have reported that written feedback is often too general, lacking in guidance, unrelated to assessment criteria and of poor quality (Crook et al., 2012). Winstone's (2022) examination of feedback strategies from 134 UK Universities noted that students were largely positioned as passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning.

Boud and Molloy (2013) believe part of the answer is to recognise feedback as not just a corrective one-way flow of information from assessor to learner, but also a means to foster student engagement and self-regulation. Multiple authors (Nicol, 2009; Boud and Molloy, 2013; Wisniewski, Zierer and Hattie, 2020; Boud and Dawson, 2021) assert that learning is dependent on students' ability to interact with the material. Despite this established pedagogical position and the acknowledged limitations of written feedback, it remains the predominant method used in higher education (Killoran, 2013; Cavaleri et al., 2019; Ryan, Henderson and Phillips, 2019; Carter et al., 2022).

Feedback is generally recognised as vital for students' learning and development and for those within the health professions, it can help to improve confidence, increase motivation and self-esteem or lead to improved clinical practice (Clynes and Raftery, 2008; Burgess et al., 2020). Conversely, critical feedback and negative written annotations have been associated with lowering motivation and undermining confidence (Ball et al., 2008).

Technology enhanced learning is being progressively embedded within academic settings; this was accelerated by the necessity of remote delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kovacs et al., 2023; Mottiar et al., 2022; Slack and Priestley, 2022; Cook et al., 2023). A shift to providing feedback remotely is potentially beneficial with Istenič (2021) suggesting personalised, interactive feedback that is also oriented to improvement can address individual needs and influence learning in a profound way. Feedback methods such as video or screencast have been increasingly used and studied, although research gaps are evident.

Older studies in the subject disciplines of Bioscience, English, and Education show students regard these forms of feedback as being more personal, easy to follow, and interesting than written feedback (Cann, 2007; Stannard, 2007; Abdous and Yoshimura, 2010). Killoran describes markers becoming frustrated by written feedback due to it being more time-consuming, while students 'found written comments to be illegible, incomprehensible, insensitive, or too terse to be helpful' (2013, p.43). More recently, Mahoney, Macfarlane and Ajjawi (2019) and Yiğit and Seferoğlu (2021) suggest the effectiveness or outcomes linked to video feedback are underexplored in studies. Mahoney, Macfarlane and Ajjawi point out that evidence is mainly derived from small-scale studies and 'self-reported data susceptible to the novelty effect' (2019, p.157).

An earlier study by the authors (Gould and Day, 2012) examined the use of audio-only feedback with one cohort of qualified nurses undertaking a degree or master's level professional programme at a Higher Education Institute (HEI). Audio feedback was perceived by students as more supportive and personalised than written feedback. However, a minority of students reported that audio feedback did not help them at all as it did not suit their learning styles. Some lecturers felt uncomfortable in delivering audio feedback either due to lack of confidence in using audio, or negative views of it as a learning tool (Gould and Day, 2012). To address the noted limitations of audio-only feedback and improve confidence, lecturers on the programme team undertook training to deliver audio-visual and video feedback methods.

Students' views of these feedback techniques were needed to evaluate their impact and if appropriate, provide a case for further dissemination. A systematised literature review was undertaken to collate recent findings on audio-visual and video feedback and contextualise

the data gathered within this small-scale study. The literature review, which is published separately, noted variations in researchers' definitions and interpretations of feedback types. Table 1 provides definitions of feedback examined in this research, along with some further detail regarding the applied tools.

Table 1. Definitions of feedback types used for this study.

Name	Definition/detail	Notes/other terminology
Written feedback	In-text annotations and comments using a university-standard assignment tool (Turnitin). Supplemented by a standardised rubric and a text-based feedback summary which includes: 1. Areas for commendation. 2. Areas for improvement. 3. Overall feedback.	Other research may be referring to a text-based summary with or without in-text annotations/comments.
Audio feedback	Audio recorded commentary to create a MPEG file. No in-text annotations or comments. Page numbers of the student work are referred to throughout the recording. The same standardised marking rubric is used.	Research literature may be referring to audio comments on work that has also received text-based comments.
Audio-visual feedback	The student's work is submitted or converted to PDF file format. Written or visual annotations (e.g. icons, emojis) and short audio clips are added to the PDF file using Adobe Acrobat software. The university-standard marking rubric is used.	Other research may use variations of this 'asynchronous' audio-visual feedback. Most research involves the 'synchronous' recording of video using screencast technology.
Video feedback	The university-standard assignment tool (Turnitin) is used. A video is made using screencast software (Panopto) to	Other research may use variations of screencast, different software/tools or

<p>record lecturer comments as they mark the work. An occasional text-based annotation may be inserted to illustrate a point being verbalised. The summary is verbal, not written. The screen capture includes the lecturer going through the university-standard marking rubric and arriving at a score.</p>	<p>omit providing written annotations or rubrics.</p>
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Aims

A primary aim of this study was to evaluate various feedback methods, focussing on audio-visual or video feedback for students in the higher education environment. As the cohorts of students were studying a professional post-registration community nursing qualification, the overarching research question was: what are the views of community nursing students on video feedback?

Research methods

This paper reports on a comparative evaluation of written, audio, audio-visual, and video feedback with data collected over three years and contextualised in relation to recent research and the post-pandemic higher education setting. The research design was mixed methods, using quantitative (through a survey) and qualitative (through focus groups) methods of data collection. Mixed methods offer opportunity for triangulation in educational research (Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao, 2006) and can convey the diversity of data more effectively than single method studies (Yin, 2006). Questionnaires mainly gained quantitative data around student feedback preferences.

Sample

Two cohorts of students were included in the sample. Cohort 1 included 42 students who completed questionnaires with some of these also attending a focus group. Cohort 2 consisted of 36 students who participated across four focus groups. As per Table 3, the students were all undertaking a post-registration nursing programme which results in a

change to their professional status. As such, the types and number of assessments adhered to the professional regulator's standards for these programmes (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), 2022a; 2022b).

Data collection

Student cohort 1 (n=42) experienced written, audio-only, and audio-visual feedback (see Table 2). All students in this group completed a survey gauging their preferences and engagement with the feedback. An invitation was sent to all students in this cohort to participate in the focus group. One focus group of eight self-selected students was conducted until data saturation was achieved. One of the authors, along with other teaching staff, participated in marking, while the survey and focus group facilitation were undertaken by a researcher independent of the teaching team and unknown to students. The questionnaire consisted of statements rated on a Likert scale (Table 3) and the sentence stems were trialled in previous research (Gould and Day, 2012).

Table 2. Types of feedback and assignments.

Cohort 1: n=42 (Health Visitor, School Nurse, and District Nurse students)		
Written feedback	Audio feedback	Audio-visual feedback
3 Essays (50% weighting) 1 Health Needs Assessment Report	1 Essay	1 Essay (Prescribing) 1 Practice Report (Leadership)
Cohort 2: n=36 (Health Visitor, School Nurse, and District Nurse students)		
Written feedback	Audio feedback	Video feedback
4 Essays (50% weighting) 1 Health Needs Assessment Report	None	1 Practice Report (formative feedback) (Leadership)

*All assignments 100% module weighting except where indicated; exams and practice competencies not noted.

Table 3. Statements for 3-point Likert Scale (cohort 1).

This type of feedback helped my learning
I have found this type of feedback to be supportive
I have found this type of feedback to be detailed

Cohort 2 (n=36) experienced video feedback where a screencast was recorded by the markers which included brief in-text notes using the standard university marking tool (Turnitin) and a bespoke feedback rubric. Students in this cohort received video feedback on one formative assessment for one module in their year-long programme of study and written feedback for the remainder of their assessments. A total of 36 students across four focus groups participated as part of their professional programme's reflection day. The focus group facilitator was not associated with the programme and unknown to the students. Students also completed a standardised university-wide module evaluation.

The focus groups aimed to help capture more in-depth views of individuals in a naturalistic setting (Creswell, 2013). In addition to gaining a diversity of perspectives, being in a group also enabled individuals to clarify their own responses through discussion and interaction with other participants. Focus groups took the form of semi-structured interviews led by an experienced research lecturer. Questions were a mixture of open and closed questions with reflective comments to summarise and confirm understanding. The free-flowing discussion was based on an iterative approach, where responses evoked further questions. Themes were explored until saturation occurred.

Ethics

All participants signed a consent form and were informed of their right to withdraw or refuse to answer any of the questions. An interview guide was constructed by the researchers based on the aims of the research. Data were anonymised and the recording deleted within an agreed time frame. Approval was sought and granted by the university's ethics committee.

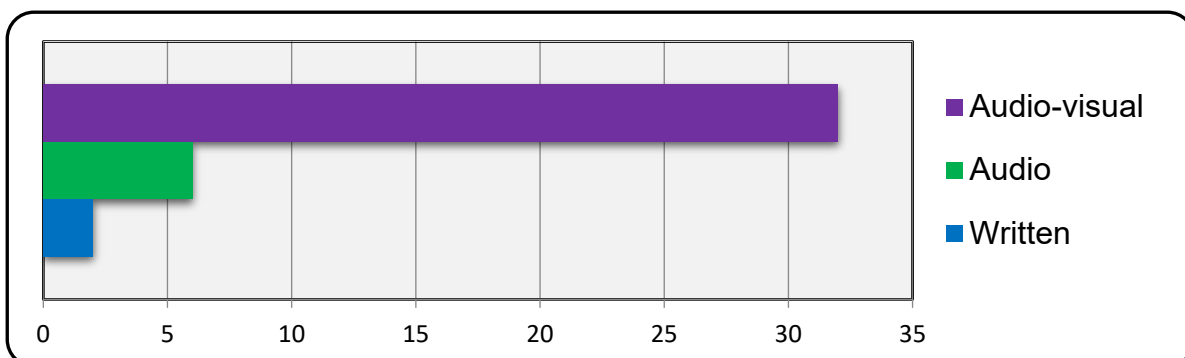
Data/results

Data from the questionnaires completed by cohort 1 was tabulated as illustrated in Figures 1-4. The focus group discussions for both cohorts were fully transcribed and analysed using an updated version of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bryant and Charmaz, 2019) to enable a developmental approach to be taken. Thematic analyses were applied to the focus group transcripts. The authors reviewed the transcripts and identified themes independently. A validated coding method was used for analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019) to help ensure the analysis avoided unconscious bias of the authors. Data extraction and synthesis included thematic grouping, comparison, interpretation, and generalisation. These recognised methods of qualitative data analyses (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005) aim to improve the validity of the findings.

Questionnaire results (cohort 1)

A total of 42 students completed questionnaires. All students had received feedback in all three formats from the same lecturers: written, audio and audio-visual as outlined in Table 3. The written feedback was in the standard university format of a summary highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the work, with annotations, but no tracked changes, within the student work. Participants were asked to identify which one of the three types of feedback they preferred overall. The type of feedback overwhelmingly identified by participants as their preferred option was Audio-visual (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cohort 1: preferred type of feedback.



Participants favoured Audio-visual for all areas explored, whether it was perceived as helping their learning, was supportive and detailed. Those three key aspects were rated on a 3-point Likert scale of either 'Not at all', 'Moderately', or 'Substantially'. As per Figures 2,

3 and 4, the results showed Audio-visual ranked highest by a considerable margin for 'Substantially' on all three aspects.

Figure 2. Cohort 1: statement 1.

'This type of feedback has helped my learning'

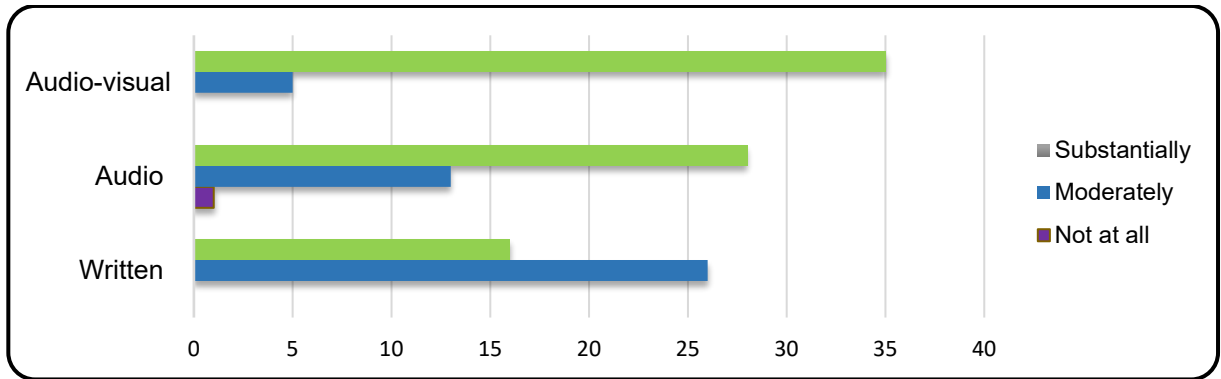


Figure 3. Cohort 1: statement 2.

'I have found this type of feedback to be supportive'

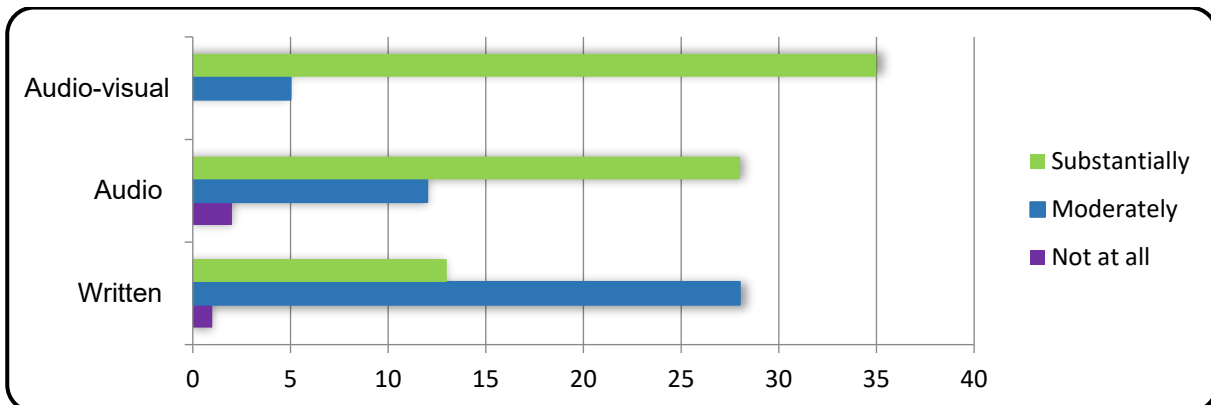
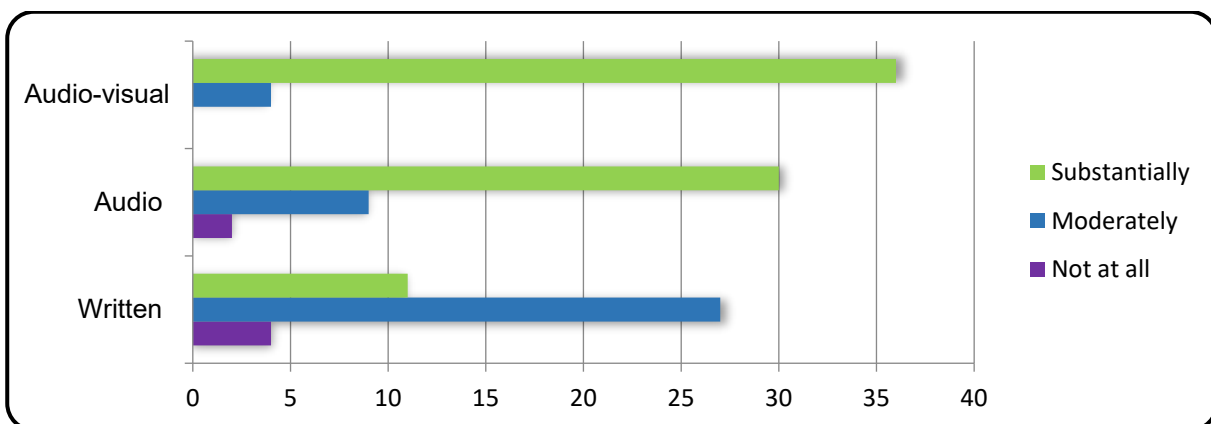


Figure 4. Cohort 1: statement 3.

'I have found this type of feedback to be detailed'



Module evaluation: cohort 2

As per the university's policy, all students are invited to complete a standardised module evaluation. In the years where video feedback was provided (3 out of 4), there was a notable improvement in the rating for 'I feel the feedback I have received has helped/will help me to improve my future performance'. Prior to using video feedback, only 27.5% of cohort survey respondents 'Strongly agreed' with the statement, whereas after video feedback was introduced in 2017, 82.4% 'Strongly agreed' and the remaining 14.6% 'Agreed'. Strong results for that question have continued along with separate positive comments referring to video feedback.

Focus group findings: cohort 1 and cohort 2

Themes such as the quantity, usefulness, and personalised nature of the feedback were observed in both student cohorts and align with numerous previous studies. Additional points were spontaneously debated within some of the focus groups, such as the positioning of the formative feedback as a potential substitute for synchronous tutorials and expressions of concern for the marker and appreciation of the time taken to construct the feedback. This was discussed as a positive theme (for example, it implied the marker cared about student performance), but also as potentially negative if the extra time taken was to result in delayed release of feedback.

Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrated a clear preference for audio-visual or video feedback over the other two methods of feedback (written and audio) on a variety of high-stake assessments. When considering specific qualities of feedback such as supportiveness, contribution to learning, or detail, both audio and audio-visual consistently rated more highly than written feedback. Written feedback was ranked as a distant third although a small minority of students favoured it. Key themes include the permanency of written feedback, quality of audio, and video feedback, the combined visual and auditory benefits of video feedback, and the personalisation and supportiveness of video feedback. Additional themes discussed are the context of higher-level thinking, engagement, and potential for feed-forward activities.

Discussion themes

The permanency of written feedback (cohort 1)

Two questionnaire respondents (n=2) noted the immediate availability and permanency of written feedback as advantageous. Cohort 1's focus group comments suggested that without prompting, learners may not think to prepare for taking notes when listening to or watching the feedback. For example: 'I find written feedback better for me, because it is there in front of me when editing my work' and 'written feedback is clearly set out; general, concise, it's there and you can keep it forever'. One student suggested even though they found the spoken feedback to be 'more personalised and very encouraging, it was more helpful to have written feedback: easier to view, "mull over" and to pick out particular points'. However, written feedback can be highly directive with Cavaleri et al. finding that video feedback is more likely to embed 'explanations, suggestions, and praise' (2019, p.12). Two participants recognised that a preference for written was likely more to do with their learning style, with one student stating: 'written feedback suits my learning requirements more and I can keep referring to it quickly'.

Quality and detail: audio-only feedback (cohort 1)

Most students completing the questionnaire noted audio feedback as more detailed (n=27) and supportive (n=30) than written. Cohort 1's focus group comments included: 'I have found audio feedback to be more supportive in my learning'. 'Written feedback doesn't have the detail of audio' and with 'audio feedback you get the extra bits that you would not get in just written'. The detailed quality of audio feedback was given as a reason that students preferred it to written feedback. It was also seen as more personalised with some students noting 'the written feedback appears... very similar to the feedback my colleagues have received.' However, some students found audio feedback to be confusing or too personal at times: 'I feel audio is more detailed but seems unclear. Also, it feels personal; I can accept criticism better when it's written'; '...there was no emotion in her voice at all... I found that really difficult'. Students noted they could be feeling 'a bit vulnerable', so the nuance of oral expression is an important consideration for markers.

Quality and detail: combined benefits of audio-visual feedback (cohort 1)

Students in cohort 1, via the questionnaire, overwhelmingly rated audio-visual feedback most highly in all categories and were very positive about its benefits across several themes. This finding is extensively supported by previous research (Vincelette and Bostic, 2013; Henderson and Phillip, 2015; Cunningham, 2019a, Froehlich and Guias, 2021, Li et al., 2021; Ari and Arslan-Ari, 2022). Cohort 1's focus group comments included: 'audio visual is excellent and highlights areas for improvement and strengths. And you don't get lost with it', and: 'it was helpful to have the actual assignment and marking criteria all in one place when listening and looking at feedback'. This contrasts with a noted disadvantage of audio-only feedback (or talking heads) whereby listeners may find it hard to follow along (Gould and Day, 2012). The combination was seen as beneficial, with comments such as: 'audio visual was much easier to digest and refer back to when making alterations and amendments to my work'. It provided the 'best of both worlds'; 'audio-visual most beneficial as incorporated best aspects of both written and audio'; 'the audio-visual feedback was colourful and easy to use'; '... and you get like a eureka moment straight away ... it (was) really good. I found it very positive'.

Audio-visual/video feedback as a tutorial (cohort 1 and cohort 2 focus groups)

Audio-visual feedback was seen as enhancing learning and this was reflected in views expressed around its potential as a replacement for tutorials. For example: 'I felt like it was a very good tutorial'; 'the audio visual provided clear direction. Comments were supportive and highlighted strong points and weaker areas'; 'it gave a more structured approach in order to enhance learning'; 'audio visual as close as possible to a one-to-one tutorial and felt more personalised'. In Cunningham's (2019b) study, students reported they required a tutorial to help with interpreting text-based comments, whereas this was not needed with video feedback. Video feedback as a tutorial was lengthily explored with students broadly concurring they found the formative video feedback more useful than previous tutorials they had experienced. Reasons given included being able to listen back and the extent or time-efficiency of the feedback. For example, one commented that much of their tutorial time was spent by the tutor reading the draft essay... 'whereas I felt that this (video feedback) was crammed full of ten minutes of information, so I didn't feel like I needed to go and see (them)'. There was consensus that retaining the option of a synchronous

tutorial was preferred even when they had never previously sought one. For example, ‘... if you’ve got other problems, then you don’t have that two-way conversation... you can’t completely replace the tutorial as they aren’t the same thing’.

Positivity and supportiveness of audio-visual/video (cohort 1 and cohort 2 focus groups)

The audio-visual and video feedback methods were seen to be supportive of student self-efficacy: ‘it gave me confidence; confidence in my ability... all the “well-dones” and the little bits where you think, oh you could just do that... It’s just such a positive experience it really increases your confidence in your writing skills’. Video feedback was noted in the literature review and reflected in student comments as more positive and affirmative. This fits well with a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit model (Gibbs and Simpson, 2005) to support learner self-efficacy and promote their independent self-assessment as their confidence grows. Participants noted positivity even when the content implied improvements were needed, stating ‘the lecturer’s tone in feedback was a really jolly tone in her voice ... so even when there were negatives, it was still quite positive’. In Kotera, Mills and Taynton’s study, counselling students found video feedback to be ‘more positive than text-based feedback, as the presence of the tutor in the video feedback made them feel safe’ (2022, p.3).

Like much of the published research, students found it difficult to articulate any disadvantages of audio-visual feedback: ‘struggle to think of any (drawbacks) ... might take longer for the lecturers to do? ... it’s not easy to identify how it could be improved’. This echoes the findings by Bush (2021), where the most common response was that video feedback posed no drawbacks, but one disadvantage may be around the perceived difficulty it presents for markers. Hall, Tracy and Lamey’s (2016) respondents similarly noted how video feedback showcases marker effort, which can be perceived as signifying a level of involvement not matched in written feedback.

Depth, higher-order thinking, and context (cohort 1 and cohort 2 focus groups)

Participants in the focus groups were on community nursing programmes with a strong professional and ethical imperative to apply theory to practice. Although implications for

this context were not explicitly discussed by participants, the extent and depth of the feedback was noted: 'it was very comprehensive and in depth' and 'you could put it into context better'. Research by Hall, Tracy and Lamey into subjects requiring 'higher order thinking' suggests a need for depth and concluded there is potential for video feedback to be used for effectively 'supporting and motivating students as they face difficult learning tasks' (2016, p.26). While Hall, Tracy and Lamey's (2016) research is related to students of philosophy, the need for interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of complex information is also pertinent to clinical practice. Moreover, markers for health-related studies can also be subject to professional codes adding a moral dimension to providing sufficient feedback for students who use it to guide safe and effective practice. With potential for greater detail and nuance through video methods, messages to help address the complexities of practice are more easily communicated. Written feedback on work discussing clinical decisions may be inadequate for multifaceted issues, such as safeguarding vulnerable populations, where a more analytical or supportive response is required.

Engagement and potential for improving the impact of feedback (cohort 1 and cohort 2 focus groups)

Comments by focus group participants indicated they engaged with and appreciated the feedback: 'I really enjoyed it. It ... made you feel like she spent that time for you and it was very individual and it was really nice. I appreciated it'. Turnbull found that video feedback promoted connection with the markers and further, some of the students 'described enhanced feelings of care *on the part of their tutors*' (2022, p.113). This links to beliefs around the purpose of feedback, and student engagement with it. A lack of engagement with feedback implies a need to clearly identify the purpose of feedback and its position as a teaching strategy. Video feedback is more conducive to student engagement (West and Turner, 2016) but Ketchum et al. advise that without 'training students about the value or means of using feedback, the assumed benefits may not be achieved' (2022, p.297). This need to educate students on using feedback to best effect is seen to be irrespective of feedback method, and links to the purpose of feedback as a feed-forward or education strategy.

Video feedback itself can provide openings for engagement. For example, by markers expressing they are unsure of the meaning, rather than highlighting an 'inherent deficiency

in the student writing' (Cunningham, 2019a, p.96). This invites students to reflect on and potentially exchange ideas, creating the conditions to explore their work and potentially engage in discussion. Making the student role in the process more explicit from the outset while providing channels for ongoing communication will better enable a closer relationship and empower students to participate in discussion or debate.

Recommendations

The recommendations arise from the data analysis by the authors of the survey results and the focus groups. Interpreting these findings in the context of the post-pandemic higher education environment, recommendations are focused on improving learning opportunities offered by video feedback. Man et al. (2022) and Kaplan-Rakowski (2021) suggest video feedback allows flexibility which can help as a sustainable way of providing emotional support for students. Proposals include encouraging academics to use video feedback with an awareness of the impact of tone of voice and importance of affirmation. Markers who are new to video feedback should be offered supervision and technical support. To optimise the feedback, it is proposed learners are prepared beforehand for receiving, interpreting, and using feedback.

McGinness et al.'s (2020) study involving medical students showed the delivery of a feedback workshop prior to clinical placement led to more requests for feedback and improved student satisfaction with it. A workshop at the start of courses to familiarise students with feedback methods and purpose would be followed by a group tutorial to explore and discuss common themes once the video feedback has been received. This would provide an opening for engagement and peer support. There is also potential to position video feedback for formative work as an alternative to synchronous face to face or remote tutorials. The advantage over 'live' tutorials is the ability of students to revisit the video. For educators who have continued to work remotely, it enables a break from the demands of synchronous screen time. While this and previous research have shown potential benefits of video feedback, further research is recommended to evaluate the impact of strategies to improve engagement. Other areas for future enquiry include student satisfaction with video feedback as a replacement for tutorials and to what extent it has influenced the students' work, both academically and in relation to its practical application.

Limitations

Limitations include the relatively small sample sizes. While larger numbers generally increase the validity of the findings, this would need to be weighed with the risks linked with overly large samples where the amount, type, or context of the feedback may affect the findings. The researchers were also involved in the marking and delivered some of the feedback for participants. Cunningham (2019b) noted that this is common in technology related feedback studies (for example, Batt and Wilson, 2008; Ducate and Arnold, 2012; Eckhouse and Carroll, 2013). While the researcher as marker has potential for bias, it also enables insight 'into the feedback creation process' (Cunningham, 2019b, p.227).

Conclusion

This mixed methods research showed a convincing preference for audio-visual and video feedback, confirming findings of previous research and aligning with the increased use of technology and remote means of delivering education and feedback. The findings reinforced the positive impact of alternatives to written feedback and highlighted these as commendable for further dissemination and evaluation. Participants noted and appreciated the greater personalisation offered by these while the findings suggest audio-visual and video feedback also hold potential to enrich student support and promote engagement. Further research is suggested to measure student engagement with, and learning from, video feedback methods. The impact was evaluated in relation to student views providing a case for further dissemination, while recognising it would be advantageous to explore the impact in relation to student achievement, and potentially, confidence in relation to their professional practice.

As feedback is seen as having a major impact on student learning, motivation, and confidence, educators need to give equal attention to this facet of the student experience. Employing video techniques to help students engage with feedback widens scope for a meaningful teaching and learning opportunity. In the current education environment, video feedback can bridge the distance between theory and practice and allow students to experience connection with educators. Adopting supportive assessment and feedback methods which reflect student preference, embed personalisation, and incorporate innovative technology can make a significant contribution to student learning.

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