# Teachers' Perception on Giving Feedback to Students' Online Writing Assignment During Movement Control Order (MCO)

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## ABSTRACT

As the nation is moving towards highly intellectual civilization, teaching and learning (T&L) process has shifted towards applying more modern and high technology appliances. The spread of Covid-19 pandemic has fuelled the transformation of the teaching and learning process. Face-to-face classes have been shifted to online classes during the recent academic semester due to the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO). This online learning and teaching process have brought new challenges to not only the students but also to the teachers themselves. This study investigates teachers' perceptions towards giving feedback to online writing assignments, teaching writing online as well as teachers' view on the difficulties and opportunities faced while teaching writing skills online. An online survey form containing 11 open-ended questions was answered by 5 language instructors from English Language Learning Centre, UMT. It was found that the writing classes were conducted synchronous and asynchronous on various online platforms such as Google Classroom, and Padlet. Teachers also gave feedback to students' online writing assignments using various mediums such as WhatsApp, and Telegram. The variety of online platforms and mediums used were due to the constraints of online learning like poor internet connection, and lack of technology devices; to name a few. In contrast, online learning provided room for teachers to display information faster to the students apart from saving time. The results of this study have implications for future online writing skills class in ensuring the teachers to master online teaching for the students to get optimum benefits even when learning is done online. This will later contribute to the building of civilization with high intellectual and moral values.

*Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, giving feedback, digital learning, lifelong learning, MCO*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of this virus has forced many countries all over the world to enforce lockdown or movement control order among their citizens. These orders are targeted to contain the spread of the virus which have infected more than a million people worldwide and killed at least one hundred thousand lives. As schools and universities have been instructed to be closed, the teaching and learning method has been changed to online mode.

Online teaching and learning are not a foreign aspect to the university community. Lecturers and students integrate online learning to the present curriculum. However, the online method is frequently used as a supplementary rather than primary aspect in the higher learning environment. Thus, when all teaching and learning were to be fully implemented online, both parties namely lecturers and students were in a shock.

The sudden instruction to conduct all classes online was a shock as many lecturers were not fully prepared to do so. Although they have joined many online teaching workshop seminars, they were not yet prepared to brace the impact of online teaching given the condition of various factors. A number of language teachers teaching an academic writing course in Universiti Malaysia Terengganu were among hundreds or thousands of lecturers or teachers facing the dilemma of online teaching during the previous MCO. Academic writing is one of the writing skills that is taught traditionally via face-to-face physical classroom setting. The implementation of online teaching and learning had brought the teachers to a new avenue of teaching writing especially in the aspect of giving feedback to students' writing.

Thus, this study would like to find answers for the following research questions:

1. what are the instructors' perceptions towards the feedback given to students on different features (grammar, vocabulary, content, and organisation) of their written work?
2. what are the teachers' perceptions on teaching writing skills online?
3. what are the difficulties faced by the teachers while teaching writing skills online?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Feedback in Teaching Writing

Feedback is essential in teaching language skills including writing. In teaching writing, teachers play three specific roles namely; motivator, resource, and feedback provider [1]. Feedback is essential to assist students to achieve their actual level of development with the guidance from the resource or facilitators [2]. In addition, writing teachers give feedback to the students with the aim to see the students to become independent and critical learners [3]. Students are found to have preference of explicit feedback over implicit feedback [4].

### 2.2. Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Online Learning

The introduction and implementation of online learning brings about the mode of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning refers to a mode of learning that is supported by the usage of video conference platforms such as the then televideo conferencing and present Skype, Webex, and Zoom which allows the teacher and students to interact at the same time [5]. Synchronous online learning is said to promote a sense of presence and democracy to both teacher and students [3].

### 2.3. Online Learning Platforms

The Internet which has played a major role in introducing online learning and teaching offers vast digital learning platforms such as Google Classroom, Padlet, and more. These which previously acted as supplementary platforms of the availability of the Learning management System (LMS) provided by the institutions [6] have expanded to be primary online learning platforms used worldwide. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Tiktok are also being used as online learning platforms. WhatsApp provides better quick interaction between students and teachers at a lower cost and higher accessibility to teaching materials [7].

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using Google Form closed-ended and open-ended survey. The study was answered by five language teachers from English Language Learning Centre (ELC), Pusat Pendidikan Asas dan Lanjutan (PPAL). The teachers had at least 6 years of teaching writing experience. The survey contained two closed-ended and ten open-ended questions.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Research Question 1

What are the teachers' perceptions towards the feedback given to students on different features (grammar, vocabulary, content, and organisation) of their written work?

Teachers used various methods to give feedback to the students' process essays. The methods were by using email, WhatsApp and Telegram text, and the comments section in Google Classroom and Padlet. The feedback was given personally to the students as well as in general in the main class communication.

Respondents gave feedback to students because they wanted the students to write better, and develop as better learners. The feedback was given to them to avoid them from repeating the same writing mistakes to produce better paragraphs and later essays. It was also the teachers' ultimate goal for the students to develop themselves as better learners.

Teachers provided feedback in all aspects related to the academic writing skills namely; sentence structure, essay

structure, vocabulary, spelling, and content. In addition, feedback was also given regarding the assignment requirements.

Teachers reported that students responded positively to the feedback given. They found that students improved their writings based on the given feedback. They also said that students also promised to be better (in their writing).

### 4.2. Research Question 2

What are the teachers' perceptions on teaching writing skills online?

Four teachers used a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching while one teacher used asynchronous online teaching during the MCO. When asked regarding platforms used to conduct online teaching and learning processes, all the five respondents mentioned that they used Google Classroom. Each teacher also used additional different platforms; Google Form, WhatsApp, Webex, Padlet and Telegram.

The teachers also listed advantages of online learning as saving time, providing more freedom for them and their students. The teachers were also able to display important notes related to the writing process and pleased that the platform was not limited to classroom setting.

The teachers also planned to improve their teaching writing online by planning to provide better teaching and learning materials, prepare organized lessons, get ready with more interactive writing, vocabulary and grammar activities. They were also looking forward to incorporating visual interaction which was lacking due to the internet connection. M

### 4.3. Research Question 3

Respondents were asked what were some challenges of teaching writing online and the comments given were based on their experience during the online teaching.

Table 1 Challenges of teaching writing online

| No | Comments |
|----|----------|
| 1 | "Internet connection impedes students' understanding" |
| 2 | "Students' participation and clarity of teaching" |
| 3 | "Getting the message across since they're ESL learners" |
| 4 | "Lack of face to face interaction" |

The respondents were also asked whether they prefer teaching writing in face to face or online class. This preference is for writing classes that are conducted during MCO.

Table 2 Instructors' preference for writing classes

| No | Comments |
|----|----------|
| 1 | "70% face to face and 30% online because both approaches play their own effective roles in delivering the lessons" |
| 2 | "F2f more. It's better to really guide them face to face and to tackle any problems right then and there rather than making assumptions 'online'" |
| 3 | "Face-to-face" |

## 5. DISCUSSION

Study has found that teachers provide feedback to the students with the hope for the students to improve on their paragraph and essay writing skills as well as to guide them to develop the potential as online learners. This is in line with a study on teacher electronic feedback conducted by Ene and Upton [3]. They found that writing teachers provided feedback for the students with the aim to see the students to become independent and critical. Writing teachers also gave individual feedback to the students in order to cater for the different needs of the students.

In addition, study has also found that teachers found that online teaching offered various interactive and effective learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Padlet which saved time and space. This is in line with a study that suggests online learning platforms offer great educational resources for the students when they need to stay at home [8]. Teachers also found that online teaching provided opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous teaching by the usage of social media applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram. These are the proof that the Internet provides an effective medium of interaction to higher education students [9].

Study has found that teachers commented on absence of students' participation and lack of interaction to be among the challenges of online teaching as opposed to the traditional learning method that provides instant engagement with the lecturer and peers [10]. The teachers were also concerned that online lessons might not be effective for the ESL students. This is in line with a study conducted by Saunders and Klemming [11] which found that students valued the live discussion in the classroom as electronic materials could never replace the materials discussed in the lecture sessions.

To improve online teaching, respondents have suggested for the teachers to provide better and more organized materials. This is in line with Daxiang and Gaofeng [12] who proposed teachers to plan and prepare the online lessons according to the students' various abilities in order to ensure every student can learn on their own at home. The teachers have also planned to be more prepared with interactive writing, vocabulary and grammar activities. They have also considered the aspects to incorporate visual interaction which are lacking due to internet connection.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present study has found that teaching writing online is challenging yet manageable, and promising with interactive and interesting features available in various online learning platforms. The usage of social media applications has also assisted the online teaching and learning during the MCO. The availability of both online learning platforms and social media applications have facilitated the teachers in giving feedback to the students which is one of the crucial aspects in teaching language skills. It is suggested for the future researchers to conduct the survey to a bigger number of language teachers from different universities. In addition, interviews can be conducted to gain more information from the respondents. Therefore, teachers can be more prepared to give effective and constructive feedback while conducting online teaching.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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