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Monologue or Dialogue? Oral Feedback Experiences of Students and Supervisors During Undergraduate Research

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Abstract

Effective feedback provides information to both students and educators about the goals they need to achieve, students' current performance and understanding in relation to the goals, and the next activities or goals to be achieved to make better progress. Despite its significance as a catalyst to enhance learning, feedback may not always fulfill its true potential. Specifically, feedback as telling where the educator takes a central role in the feedback process has been identified as problematic and insufficient to promote students' self-regulation. Following a qualitative case study design, this paper explores oral feedback experiences of undergraduate students and their supervisors during students' undergraduate research projects. Data were collected using audio-recorded attended observations of supervision meetings of four student-supervisor dyads. Findings from the present study revealed that students and supervisors had a limited view of feedback and therefore unable to harness the potential of feedback for students' self-regulation. The uniqueness of this study lies in its representations of authentic student-supervisor verbal exchanges. It also demonstrates that although there are always opportunities for students and educators to engage in verbal interactions, these do not necessarily lead to dialogic exchanges between the two parties.

Keywords: Dialogic Feedback, Feedback, Higher Education, Undergraduate Students, Qualitative Case Study

Introduction

Feedback is embedded in and lies at the core of supervision – it can be argued that much of the communication between students and supervisors involves feedback aimed to support and further their learning. Indeed, feedback can have a powerful impact on students' learning and this impact can either be positive or negative (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). While there has been a considerable amount of literature on feedback, it is not until recently that the focus has shifted from seeing feedback as a one-way transmission of information transferred from educator to student to a more interactive, dialogic process (Ajjawi & Boud, 2018). This shift is consistent with current approaches that learning is situated and the construction of

understanding is a social phenomenon that involves collaboration between students and others (Winstone et al., 2017).

Arguably, the impact of feedback on students' learning lies in the way it is utilized, and not so much on how much feedback is given and the way it is provided (Boud & Molloy, 2013a; Hattie & Gan, 2011). However, Boud and Molloy (2013b) have suggested that a great deal of literature in higher and professional education places emphasis on improving educators' 'telling' techniques of feedback while studies that take into account how feedback is received, responded and acted upon are to date, scarce (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Steen-Utheim & Wittek, 2017).

With reference to the educational landscape in Malaysia, studies focusing on feedback within higher education are limited and dated. In the main, Malaysian researchers such as Maarof, Yamat, and Li (2011); Razali and Jupri (2014); Soh and Hong-Fa (2014) have investigated how educators' and peer feedback can be used to improve university students' English writing skills. Correspondingly, Perera et al (2008) have highlighted a need for Malaysian university educators to have formal training sessions to improve their feedback literacy.

Literature Review

Feedback as a Dialogic Process

In recent years, there have been calls for a dialogic approach to feedback (Ajjawi & Boud, 2018). Dialogic feedback involves a two-way information exchange between students and educators where both parties build on the topic of the exchange to bridge the gap between students' current and expected performance or understanding. It occurs when an exchange stimulates students' engagement (McArthur & Huxham, 2013). Feedback engagement can be conceptualized as a measure that reflects the quantity and quality of students' participation in the feedback process. It occurs simultaneously on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural levels. Students who are engaged in feedback are active, eager to contribute, willing to expend their effort, motivated, and inspired in feedback as well as in the teaching and learning processes. Engagement between students and educators should lead to a reconsideration of the piece of work or learning. If there is limited or no engagement and reconsideration from students, then the exchange cannot be considered dialogic (McArthur & Huxham, 2013).

Dialogic Approaches to Feedback

While contemporary definitions of feedback are still evolving, the characterization that is gaining traction in the literature is that of Carless (2016) who has described feedback as a "dialogic process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work and learning strategies" (p. 1). Dialogic feedback addresses issues associated with the one-way, teacher-led transfer of information espoused in the traditional notions of feedback.

Feedback is no longer considered a one-off, unilateral transmission of information; rather it is a recursive process with a focus on students and their interactions with information (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). Educators are no longer seen as the knowledgeable experts who dictate students' learning and the correction of work. In dialogic feedback, educators work in tandem with students as partners. To this end, a key role of educators is to provide opportunities that

encourage dialogue around learning (Winstone et al., 2017). Dialogic feedback situates students as active constructors of information about their learning (Carless, 2016); that is, students are seen as generators as well as contributors to feedback through their interaction with multiple sources including their educators (Molloy & Boud, 2014).

Arguably, dialogic feedback has the potential to enhance students' feedback uptake (Carless & Boud, 2018). One of the reasons why students' feedback uptake is impeded is their lack of understanding of the information conveyed by educators. Students have reported they do not understand educators' feedback as it lacks clarity (Austen & Malone, 2018). Having said that, engagement between students and educators through dialogue opens opportunities for students to seek clarification and discuss misunderstandings or difficulties they face in carrying out tasks and in interpreting educators' feedback (Schillings et al., 2018). In turn, educators are able to coordinate the input needed to facilitate students to move forward such as clarifying the goal of the tasks and developing students' understanding of the feedback (Molloy & Boud, 2014).

Conceptual Framework and Model

The conceptual framework and model underpinning the present study are based on (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Hattie and Timperley's (2007) conceptual framework outlines "a conceptual analysis of feedback and reviews the evidence related to its impact on learning and achievement" (p. 81). It identifies feedback as part of the instructional process; that is feedback occurs as a consequence of students' response to instruction. It can be provided by external agents such as educators, peers, and books and/or sought by students. Feedback per se does not however automatically enhance students' learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) have argued that students may accept, modify or reject feedback. Moreover, the effectiveness of feedback is contingent on the level it addresses. As part of their framework, Hattie and Timperley present a model of feedback (see Figure 1).

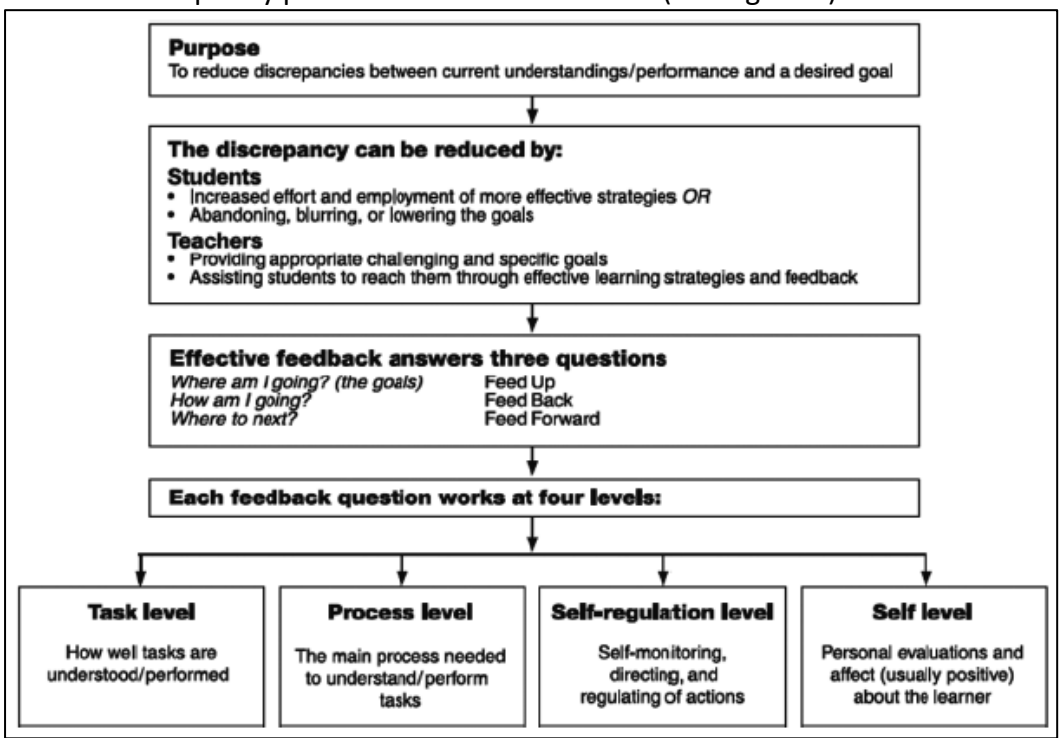

Figure 1: A model of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

feedback is to reduce or bridge the gap between students' current understanding or performance and the desired level of understanding or performance (the goal). The model recognizes the actions that students and educators may take together to reduce or bridge the gap. Hattie and Timperley (2007) proposed that effective feedback should contain sufficient information for students and educators to answer three feedback questions: Where am I/are you going? (What are the goals that I/you desire to achieve); How am I/are you going? (What progress am I/are you making towards the goals); and Where to next? (What activities do I/you need to undertake to make better progress). The first question highlights the importance of having clear goals when undertaking a learning task. Students and educators need to have a clear understanding of the standard of performance that is required. The relationship between goals and feedback is reciprocal – feedback is more effective when it is closely linked to goals.

Understanding the three questions increases students' engagement with goals, develops their appreciation of the discrepancy between current performance and goals and stimulates actions to reduce the discrepancy. Feedback can be directed to students as a person (FS), the task (FT), the cognitive processing related to the task (FP), and students' self-regulatory skills and behaviour (FR). These four levels of feedback however are not equally effective. Among these four, FR is the most powerful as it enhances students' understanding and processes beyond a particular learning task. FR allows students to understand how their understanding or performance compares to the goal and standard required, to utilize more effective strategies and processes to bring their task or performance closer to the goals, and to develop competency in seeking, receiving, and assessing feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) iterate that feedback is only effective when it builds on instruction. Without an instructional context, the effect of feedback in enhancing learning is limited.

Central to the present study is the argument that when feedback is a process that involves telling students what needs correcting and how to do this, it results in students being little more than passive recipients of information. This approach contradicts a key goal of education, which is to produce students who take ownership over and responsibility for their learning. To do this, students need to be engaged in and with the feedback process – they need to know where they are going, what quality work looks like, and how to bring their performance or work closer to the required or desired standard. The present study addresses the following question:

- How do undergraduate students and supervisors experience oral feedback within the context of undergraduate research projects?

Therefore, its main objective is
to explore how students and supervisors experienced oral feedback within the context of supervision of undergraduate research projects. It

Methodology

Context of the Study

This paper reports on the oral feedback experiences of undergraduate students and supervisors in one public university in Malaysia. All final-year undergraduate students at the university are required to produce an independent research project under the supervision of an academic in their respective programmes of study. The participant recruitment process

was started by sending invitations to academics who were supervising undergraduate research projects. Those who were willing to participate were asked to provide the names of the students they were supervising so these students could be contacted by the researcher to seek their agreement to participate in the study. The researcher managed to secure four supervisor-student dyads. After both parties had agreed to participate, they were provided a Participant Information Sheet that contains detailed information about the purpose of the study and their involvement in the study. Formal consent was sought through the signing of a Consent Form. To protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The supervisor-student dyads involved in the study were Arif-Sup and Irham-Stu (chemistry); Wina-Sup and Atie-Stu (mathematics); Sara-Sup and Hanan-Stu (marketing); and Munira-Sup and Nana-Stu (culinary arts).

Data Collection

The present study employed a qualitative case study research. Data were collected through attended, audio-recoded observations of supervision meetings. This enabled the researcher to observe the participants in their natural settings during the supervisory discussion or meeting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). Observations also allowed the researcher to witness and experience first-hand, the non-verbal aspects of communication and the authentic, real-life verbal exchanges between students and supervisors that occurred during supervision meetings. First-hand observations during supervisory meetings helped shed light on the nature of the relationship between student and supervisor and if and how oral feedback was generated during the meetings. With permission from the participants, all observations were audio-recoded for retrieval, transcription and analysis purposes. In addition, the audio recording enabled the researcher to capture and preserve student-supervisor verbal exchanges that occurred during the meetings.

Data Analysis

First of all, all student-supervisor verbal interchanges from the attended observations were transcribed verbatim. After that, each line in the transcripts was read thoroughly to identify the context and the nature of the tasks discussed in the meetings. Because the researcher observed and recorded notes of the meetings, she already had some ideas about the topics discussed in the meetings. Since students and supervisors naturally talked about different issues in each meeting, the verbal exchanges were then divided into smaller episodes (excerpts). As episode was identified as an initiation-response between students and supervisors that might lead to further responses (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). Organizing the exchanges in smaller episodes allowed the researcher to present the verbal exchanges in a way that would be easily comprehensible by the readers and at the same time preserving the context in which the exchanges occurred. Moreover, this helped the researcher to identify the level of which feedback was addressed. After this process, the exchanges were read once again, this time to identify whether they contained feedback or just pure instructions from supervisors. The episodes that did not contain feedback were then put aside.

Aspects in the episodes with feedback were then coded deductively and inductively in terms of what was said and how they were said. In terms of what was said, the researcher used descriptions and key ideas from the four levels of feedback from Hattie and Timperley's (2007) feedback model to identify the focus of the oral feedback. The three feedback questions were used to determine how information was sought or provided between the two

parties. This also enabled the researcher to identify which party – either the students or supervisors took the leading role in initiating and generating feedback. The analysis process involved rigorous iterations and interrogations between the data and the researcher.

Findings

Students and supervisors engaged in oral feedback during formal face-to-face supervision meetings. These meetings were generally conducted in the supervisor's office where students had the opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion with their supervisor. The exception was Irham-Stu who had occasional formal meetings with Arif-Sup in the laboratory which sometimes occurred with the presence of other students under Arif-Sup's supervision. Feedback within the formal face-to-face supervision meetings occurred within a respectful relationship. Students typically addressed their supervisors with honorifics such as *"madam"* (Nana-Stu, Excerpt 4, line 37) and *"doctor"* (Irham-Stu, Excerpt 2, line 1). During these meetings, students and supervisors usually talked about work submitted prior to the meeting and other issues pertinent to students' progress. Sometimes students prepared questions to ask their supervisors.

It appeared that the overarching purpose of feedback in the undergraduate research project was to improve students' written work and/or aspects of the actual study as the experiment and questionnaire. To this end, oral feedback was experienced as a means to address students' errors/mistakes, omissions, tasks to complete as well as thinking and reflection about their work. In most instances, supervisors identified the mistakes or aspects that needed further clarification. However, there were a few instances where students were aware of the nature of the issue. In such instances, students initiated the exchange to seek information from their supervisors about the nature of the issue and how they might address it. This section illustrates the nature of oral feedback experienced during face-to-face meetings, drawing on typical student-supervisor exchanges observed by the researcher.

Feedback to identify errors/mistakes

A key aspect focused on by supervisors in their oral feedback was the correctness and accuracy in students' written work i.e., proposal draft and drafts of chapters. In the main, this feedback addressed how students went about presenting ideas in their writing. The following excerpts are typical examples of how students' inaccuracies and insufficiencies in expressing their ideas in research writing were addressed through oral feedback.

Excerpt 1 shows how a question from the supervisor at the beginning of an episode led to a negotiation between the two parties. Here oral feedback was used to address the inclusion of a map that the supervisor thought was necessary.

Excerpt 1: The Introduction Chapter (Proposal)

Wina-Sup	:	*Why did you include a map here?* [referring to a section in the student's work]	(1) (2)
Atie-Stu	:	*Um, about the map—because I want to introduce Malaysia so I thought maybe—okay—*	(3) (4)
Wina-Sup	:	*I want to know, what is the significance of the map to your research topic?*	(5) (6)
Atie-Stu	:	*Like I said, I wanted to introduce Malaysia, something like the location of Malaysia. Something like that.*	(7) (8)
Wina-Sup	:	*Um, I am asking because I cannot see the significance of the map in this section.*	(9) (10)
Atie-Stu	:	*I just added it because I felt like including a figure in that section.*	(11)
Wina-Sup	:	*Okay, let's say you want to include a figure—for instance, in my study on the distribution of rainfall in Malaysia, I included the map of Malaysia as one of the figures. But—I also included a legend with the map, explaining the distribution of rainfall in each state in Malaysia.*	(12) (13) (14) (15) (16)
Atie-Stu	:	*I see.*	(17)
Wina-Sup	:	*If you want to include a map, what kind of information do you want to convey? By the way, I included the map in the results chapter in my dissertation then I explained about the map in the results—about the rainfall distribution in the different states in Malaysia. You need to know what kind of information you want to convey or explain when you include a figure. So, what it is that you want to explain in this section?*	(18) (19) (20) (21) (22) (23) (24)
Atie-Stu	:	*Something about Malaysia—I thought I can add something to make the introduction chapter more comprehensive but I did not know what else to include.*	(25) (26) (27)
Wina-Sup	:	*I think the map is not significant here.*	(28)
Atie-Stu	:	*Yeah, maybe it is out of place.*	(29)

This excerpt opened with Wina-Sup hinting about an issue with the map in Atie-Stu's introductory chapter. Instead of telling Atie-Stu directly what the issue was, Wina-Sup gave Atie-Stu an opportunity to defend her work. After Wina-Sup realized that Atie-Stu was not able to provide a satisfactory answer, she prompted Atie-Stu by referring to the use of figures and by relating and elaborating on an example from her experience. As Atie-Stu was still not able to come out with a solution to rectify the issue at hand, she finally agreed with her supervisor to remove the map from the chapter.

Excerpt 2 was opened by the student, Irham-Stu who was aware of an issue in his experiment result. Oral feedback in this situation was used to address the need to check the result of the experiment.

Excerpt 2: The Experiment Result

Irham-Stu	:	*I understand, doctor. I think my results were not satisfactory for the effect of the light source.*	(1) (2)
Arif-Sup	:	*Okay, can you explain why do you think the result of the experiment is different from what we expected? How are you going to improve it?*	(3) (4) (5)
Irham-Stu	:	*Maybe I need to test the cell again under sunlight and also the spotlight.*	(6) (7)
Arif-Sup	:	*Yes, do it once more and see whether this time there are any improvements. Also, take note that different times of the day may affect the quality of sunlight that the cell receives. So that is one of the factors that may affect your result.*	(8) (9) (10) (11)
Irham-Stu	:	*Yes, you are right. Okay, I will repeat the experiment.*	(12)

Rather than giving a direct solution to Irham-Stu, Arif-Sup prompted him to think of a plan to rectify this issue (lines 3-5). Arif-Sup supported Irham-Stu to solve the issue by providing hints that could help him evaluate his work (lines 8-11). The episode ended with Irham-Stu agreeing to repeat the experiment.

Feedback to Identify Omission

This type of feedback was used to address relevant information that students left out of their work. In most instances, students were not aware of the issue in their work therefore supervisors led the exchanges by telling them the nature of the issue and what they needed to do to rectify the issues.

Excerpt 3 depicts an episode that occurred while Sara-Sup was reading the results chapter of Hanan-Stu's dissertation draft. Here Sara-Sup was indicating Hanan-Stu that further explanation was needed in a section of his result chapter.

Excerpt 3: The Results Chapter (Dissertation)

Sara-Sup	:	*In this section, you have to explain the model.*	(1)
Hanan-Stu	:	*The model?*	(2)
Sara-Sup	:	*I mean, you have to explain about this table. You haven't done that.*	(3)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Okay.*	(4)
Sara-Sup	:	[Referring to Hanan's analysis] *Oh, I thought that the previous one was a descriptive result.*	(5) (6)
Hanan-Stu	:	*No. That's just the ANOVA results. I don't have to include the ANOVA results in the report, right?*	(7) (8)
Sara-Sup	:	*Yes, no need.* [After reading Hanan's analysis] *I think everything is fine. You just have to explain the model that I mentioned just now.*	(9) (10)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Okay. Are there other tables that I need to include in my report?*	(11)
Sara-Sup	:	*Let me see. You already have the tables for the frequency, descriptive—*	(12) (13)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Coefficient. I have to include that and it is already in my report.*	(14)
Sara-Sup	:	*You can combine the information in the elaboration.*	(15)
Hanan-Stu	:	*For which one?*	(16)

Sara-Sup	:	*Look at this example* [referring to a previous student's work]*. This student combined the elaboration about the table.*	(17) (18)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Which one?*	(19)
Sara-Sup	:	*The one about regression analysis.*	(20)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Oh. I have created two different tables in my report.*	(21)
Sara-Sup	:	*Yes. Also, you have to explain the figures that you have included in the report.*	(22) (23)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Can I see the example* [the exemplar]*?* [After reading the exemplar for some time] *So I need to have some kind of summary.*	(24) (25)
Sara-Sup	:	*Yes, it should come after each figure. For example, here you have to explain the adjusted R squared.*	(26) (27)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Okay.*	(28)

This excerpt illustrates how the study and supervisor sustained a conversation around the need for an explanation of a table in the results section of Hanan-Stu's work. Hanan-Stu's question at the beginning of the episode (line 2) indicated that he was not aware that his work was problematic. As the interaction progressed, Hanan-Stu and Sara-Sup engaged in a series of questions and answers. This enabled Hanan-Stu to request specific information from Sara-Sup about the clarity and inadequacies in the way he wrote his findings. While Sara-Sup provided direct and specific feedback about the correctness or inaccuracies following Hanan-Stu's query (for example, lines 9-10 and line 12), she also provided the opportunity for Hanan-Stu to compare and reflect on his current work against the standard that he needed to achieve through the use of an exemplar.

Feedback to Identify Task to Complete

Supervisors also helped students identify the next tasks through oral feedback. In passing, some supervisors provided feedback to sustain momentum and effort within interchanges about the substantial aspects of students' work and progress. Based on the observations of meetings, supervisors typically gave this feedback before concluding a meeting.

The following excerpt in is an exchange between Munira-Sup and Nana-Stu about the tasks that Nana-Stu had yet to complete for her findings chapter and how to do them.

Excerpt 4: The Findings Chapter (Dissertation)

Munira-Sup	:	*Translate the findings. Keep writing even if you don't have the ideas. Just keep on writing. See my example and try to write something like that. Once you are able to get into the mood of writing, you can start writing in your style. You need to start something. So, your task for today is to start writing Chapter 4 for your Part 1 and Part 2. I will study the tests for Part 3 and also for the open-ended questions.*	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7)
Nana-Stu	:	*Okay, so for tomorrow I have to complete the descriptions for Part 1 and Part 2.*	(8) (9)
Munira-Sup	:	*Yes, but I think you have a lot to do.*	(10)
Nana-Stu	:	*It is okay. I'll try my best.*	(11)
Munira-Sup	:	*I will study the suitable tests for Part 3. The data gained from questions about their weight before and after applying Atkins*	(12) (13)

		are called comparisons. These are called variances because we want to compare the two. What you need to do after this is just translate it in statistics numbering like what I showed you just now.	(14) (15) (16)
Nana-Stu	:	*Like how many respondents answered those questions—*	(17)
Munira-Sup	:	*Yes, but the explanation about how we played around with those questions, and how we analyzed them will be in Chapter 5.*	(18) (19)
Nana-Stu	:	*That is where we will explain everything in detail, right?*	(20)
Munira-Sup	:	*Yes.*	(21)
Nana-Stu	:	*That means I need to explain each question in detail in Chapter 5?*	(22)
Munira-Sup	:	*What's most important in Chapter 5 is we need to answer the research questions. So, we have to focus on answering the research questions. On top of that, if we find some interesting findings, significant findings, something similar to what you've read in the literature before, or maybe something contradicting to what you've read before so there is where we explain those things.*	(23) (24) (25) (26) (27) (28)
Nana-Stu	:	*Okay.*	(29)
Munira-Sup	:	*In my opinion, you already have a lot of items, more than what we planned to find as stated in the objectives and research questions so I think you will have no problems answering the research questions. However, if we have more time, we can play around with the results. What I mean is we can add new research questions and objectives but in order to do that, we have to be clear about how to process the data.*	(30) (31) (32) (33) (34) (35) (36)
Nana-Stu	:	*Okay, madam.*	(37)
Munira-Sup	:	*Is everything clear?*	(38)
Nana-Stu	:	*Yes, thank you, madam.*	(39)

While the main issue was about the tasks that Nana-Stu needed to carry out prior to the next meeting, along the way, Munira-Sup was encouraging Nana-Stu to maintain her momentum with her work and progress (lines 1 – 5). Further evidence of her support was by providing an exemplar to help Nana-Stu get started with her writing (lines 2 – 3). As the interaction progressed, Nana-Stu sought information from Munira-Sup about future tasks or goals that needed to be accomplished (lines 18 and 20). In the exchange, Munira-Sup also mentioned Nana-Stu's positive progress by highlighting her attainment in relation to the accomplishment of a previous learning task and at the same time indicated further goals they could be able to achieve. The exchange ended with Munira-Sup seeking Nana-Stu's feedback about whether she was clear about the tasks to be completed.

Feedback to Stimulate Thinking and Reflection

Oral feedback was also used to as a platform for supervisors to enhance students' understanding about their work. In other words, oral feedback provided the opportunity for supervisors and students to exchange information that enabled the development of students' understanding and thinking about disciplinary-related concepts as well as the processes

involved in research in relation to their work. The following is a typical example of exchanges where students' thinking and reflection were addressed in oral feedback.

Excerpt 5 shows how Sara-Sup led Hanan-Stu towards realizing what was missing from his report – a table and description of a set of results.

Excerpt 5: The Results Chapter (Dissertation)

Sara-Sup	:	*Can you tell me about the relationship between your IV* [independent variables] *and DV* [dependent variables]? *What is the correlation?*	(1) (2)
Hanan-Stu	:	*I don't understand what you mean. I have already written about that in my report. Correlation is an analysis to show the relationship between the IV and DV.*	(4) (5) (6)
Sara-Sup	:	*I know that but I want you to explain to me the correlation between the IV and DV in relation to your study.*	(7) (8)
Hanan-Stu	:	*So, in my study, I used correlation analysis to identify whether the relationship between the variables is strong or weak. For example, if the correlation is from 0.00 to 0.19, it is interpreted as very weak, and so on. I have that in my report.*	(9) (10) (11) (12)
Sara-Sup	:	*But what does that mean in terms of your study?*	(13)
Hanan-Stu	:	*I see. In my study, the correlation between the variables indicated a moderate correlation.*	(14) (15)
Sara-Sup	:	*Yes, that is what I meant. That's what missing in your report. Make sure you describe that in your report. Include the table of the correlations analysis and explain the definition of correlation and its meaning in relation to the results of your study.*	(16) (17) (18) (19)
Hanan-Stu	:	*Okay, madam.*	(20)

Here Sara-Sup initiated Hanan-Stu to the issue in his work by first exploring his understanding about a methodological concept – correlation and how he applied the particular concept in his research. Sara-Sup then used Hanan-Stu's understanding of the concept to prompt him to recognize the connection between his knowledge and its relevance to the area that was insufficient in his work. In this episode, Sara-Sup guided Hanan-Stu to think and reflect so he would then be able to write up the results correctly.

To conclude, oral feedback provided a platform for substantial issues in the work to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner. Through oral feedback, both parties were able to address issues in students' work in terms of the nature of the issue i.e., what is the issue about, why it needed improvements/corrections and how to improve/correct it.

Discussion

The Enactment of a Traditional Feedback Discourse

The oral feedback-related experiences of students and supervisors in the present study reflected the traditional views of feedback (Carless, 2015). Supervisors were regarded as the principal and the most significant source of feedback in terms of the research process, the development of students' thinking, understanding and the quality of their work. Essentially,

oral feedback was experienced as a uni-directional process – a one-way transfer of information from supervisors to students.

It was apparent that most of the oral feedback throughout the undergraduate research project took the form of directives from supervisors. Such practice contradicts contemporary views of feedback that promote the active involvement of students in the feedback process (Carless & Boud, 2018). Both parties seemed to believe that the onus for initiating and interpreting feedback in terms of where the students were going, how they were going and where to next (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) lay with the supervisors. As observed, supervisors contributed most of the ideas and suggestions to students, in the main to help the latter correct misunderstandings in their work and thinking and to help them move forward. In addition, supervisors' oral feedback provided only a few opportunities to engage in genuine dialogical exchanges. It is concerning that feedback during the research project was experienced as telling, given one of the objectives of research projects is to produce independent students who are analytical and critical in their thinking.

Indeed, feedback as telling has been identified as problematic for 21st century teaching and learning as it suppresses students' active engagement in the process (Carless, 2015; Carless & Boud, 2018). As has been argued by others, learning is not a mechanistic process and students should be monitoring their performance and understanding when completing a learning activity (Molloy & Boud, 2014). When feedback involves dialogical exchanges between students and supervisors, it facilitates the development of students' self-regulation (Carless, 2015). This is because dialogical feedback provides opportunities for students to play an active role in generating and negotiating information alongside their supervisors (Carless, 2015). In contrast, feedback as telling limits the development of students' self-regulation as it only encourages students to be dependent on supervisors to provide feedback about their work, understanding and progress rather than generating it themselves (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). As evident in the present study, while students knew where they were going, how they were going and where to next (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), this information was not a result of their self-generated feedback or engagement in dialogue with supervisors. They were able to make the improvements and move on to the next step essentially because supervisors made judgments about their work and understanding in relation to where they were going, how they were going, and where to next. In other words, feedback in the present study was akin to a stimulus-response process (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

It is interesting to note that students in the present study also appeared to quietly resist taking on the role as generators of ideas. In general, students only spoke where invited to do so or when they wanted to ask a specific question of their supervisors. In some instances where there were invitations for students to engage in a dialogue (for example, see Excerpt 1), students contributed in a minimal manner. In addition, most of the students' talk was of an "explicitly appeasing quality" (Grant, 2008, p. 19); that is, their talk sought affirmation from supervisors about the correctness of their work and ideas and took the form of questions about the next activities they needed to undertake for the research project. The students' passive behaviour is not however surprising. Research studies show that undergraduate students lack the skills to take on an independent role at the tertiary level as they are used to being directed by teachers during their school years (Beaumont et al., 2011). Due to this, such students tend to believe they will be able to improve when feedback consists of judgement

from educators and instructions from them about how well a task has been carried out (Beaumont et al., 2011).

A further problematic aspect of feedback practice that occurred during the students' research project was that the majority of feedback was focused at the task level (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The experiences of participants demonstrated that feedback was primarily used to indicate errors and mistakes in research-related tasks, in particular drafts of the final report. The high usage of task-related feedback is not unexpected since it is acknowledged that feedback about the task is commonplace in teaching-learning settings (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Similar findings have been drawn from previous studies where it was found that educators assumed the role of editors when it came to providing feedback on students' written work. That is, educator feedback has been mostly focused on task-related issues such as indicating the correctness of tasks, linguistic accuracy and information to help students improve the clarity of content (Basturkmen et al., 2014) – this was clearly the case in the present study.

The focus on task-related feedback as found in the present study is indeed an area of concern. One of the reasons is that such feedback is specific to certain tasks thus limiting its usability across other tasks or assignments (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). More importantly, feedback at the task level can cause students to put more focus on securing surface level goals such as getting an immediate task done until correct (Hattie & Gan, 2011). In other words, an abundance of feedback at the task level works against the development of independent, self-regulated learners as it detracts from the development of strategies associated with deep learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) posited that feedback that is most powerful for the enhancement of learning is information that is focused at students' cognitive processing and understanding as well as self-regulation. Feedback that is directed at these two levels has the power to enhance students' comprehension, engagement and development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies for enhanced learning. Unfortunately, the present study showed that there were very few instances of feedback that focused on students' understanding. Further, there was an absence of feedback that would encourage students' self-regulation. The lack of and/or absence of these two levels of feedback suggests students and supervisors have failed to recognize and utilize the undergraduate research project as a medium to develop students' deep understanding of the research process, related content and their self-regulatory behaviours, skills and attitudes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Conclusion and Contributions of the Present Study

Overall, the present study shows that students and supervisors had a narrow view of feedback. While it was experienced as a tool for the improvement of work and understanding, feedback was most likely insufficient to enhance students' critical and analytical thinking skills, self-evaluation and self-regulation. This is due to the fact that feedback in the undergraduate research project was mainly used to correct mistakes and improve their written work. Feedback needs to be addressed at students' cognitive processing and self-regulation levels in order to develop independent learners who are capable of monitoring their work and learning. Furthermore, in order to be powerful in the enhancement of learning, there needs to be a shared commitment and dialogical engagement between students and supervisors where together they generate feedback about students' work, performance and understanding in relation to where the students are going, how they are going and where to

next (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). As demonstrated in the present study, both students and supervisors had little recognition in terms of the actions and behaviours needed if feedback is to be effective as per Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model.

If students are to take an active role in generating feedback, they need to be involved in a teaching and learning environment that enables them to develop evaluative expertise (Henderson et al., 2019). This includes providing students opportunities to debate the quality of their works-in-progress or performance with other sources (Hawe & Dixon, 2017; Henderson et al., 2019). For instance, allowing students to engage in discussions with peers about their works-in-progress in relation to exemplars can help develop their understanding about quality (Hawe & Dixon, 2017). Educators can also scaffold students to generate feedback about their works-in-progress through the use of questions prompts (Hattie & Gan, 2011).

One of the major contributions of the present study is the detailed and robust exploration of feedback which is an under-research area in Malaysia. In addition, it is one of the few current studies that provided evidence of feedback exchanges between students and educators in a non-Western learning setting. Furthermore, another contribution of the study is the exploration of authentic, real-life feedback exchanges between students and supervisors. Through this, the present study managed to capture and present student-supervisor talks in the most natural way hence preserving the context of their occurrence (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). It provides evidence that although there are opportunities in the teaching and learning process that can be utilized by students and educators to engage in feedback as a dialogic process, this might be difficult to achieve when the understandings and practices of one or both parties are still deeply rooted within the traditional discourse of feedback.

The present study suggests that a lack of supervisor and student feedback literacy was a contributing factor to the failure of both parties to engage in feedback practice that promotes student engagement and self-monitoring. Therefore, future studies should pay attention to the feedback literacy of students and educators as this can enhance students' feedback uptake and agentic role in the process. This calls for more qualitative and quantitative research to inform us about how student and educator feedback literacy is acquired and enacted in the teaching and learning context. Such studies may be of a longitudinal design with a combination of interventions to promote feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018). In addition, considering that feedback in higher education is a relatively poorly developed area in Malaysia, more local studies are needed to investigate students' and educators' feedback understandings and practices. A good start could be a large-scale survey focused on educators and students in Malaysian universities similar to that developed by Dawson et al. (2018). Such studies with a large number of participants across different universities have the potential to generate insights and make generalisations about current feedback understandings and perceptions within higher learning institutions in Malaysia.

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