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Enhancing Student Assessment Through Veedback

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ENHANCING STUDENT ASSESSMENT THROUGH VEEDBACK

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Providing audio-visual feedback through screencast technology has been shown to reinforce learning after submission. However, these video feedbacks are often limited by the annotation tools afforded by the word processing software, making them difficult to follow. The combination of a tablet and stylus along with screencast technology offers more freedom and can enhance student experience. This presentation reports the results of an investigation into whether these new enriched feedbacks for assignments, called veedbacks, boost student experience. The qualitative and quantitative findings reveal that students are very positive about veedbacks.

Keywords: Higher education; assessment; technology

INTRODUCTION

The recent shift towards a student-centred approach in higher education has prompted attention to the shortcomings of the long-standing summative measure of student learning. The shift has also highlighted the significant role feedback has in the learning process. Most instructors who employ a student-centred approach now believe learning should not stop when an assignment is submitted. Effective feedback assists students to engage with knowledge at a deeper level (Hatzipanagos & Warburton, 2009) and provides students with the skills to monitor and sustain continuous learning (Boud, 2007).

Although I have observed many of my colleagues designing real-word tasks – a hallmark of the student-centred approach – I have also noticed that they provide summative feedback that focuses on letter grades, highlights errors, or underlines limitations. Comments such as "good work," "well-structured and written," and "APA format observed," are not sufficient to increase understanding and there remains a need "for students to develop the capabilities to operate and judges of their own learning" (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 68). Clearly, feedback methods that aim to engage students at a deep level are required.

FEEDBACK AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Research has highlighted the lack of student engagement and responsiveness to feedback. Boud and Molloy (2013) identified lack of student engagement as a weakness in undergraduate curriculum and design and one of the least satisfying aspects of the student experience. Other research has suggested that the feedback provided in academia is authoritative, ambiguous, and cryptic (Chanock, 2000; Thompson & Lee, 2012)

Research about the efficacy of feedback has suggested that students attend to feedback that is explanatory and which develops learning (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Feedback which explains gaps in knowledge and understanding also increases the sustainability of learning beyond the immediate task (Glover & Brown, 2006) and promotes student confidence and self-esteem (Boud, 2007). In contrast, generic comments can block further learning as they omit the specific information required for the students to build their knowledge and capabilities (Chanock, 2000; Thompson & Lee, 2012).

The assumption that students implicitly know how to engage with feedback has also been challenged (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Even when finally students learn to understand their instructor's feedback, it may be too late to be of real benefit to students. According to Boud (2007),

"Feedback should be provided quickly enough to be useful to students and should be given both often enough and in enough detail" (p. 97). For students to make sense of and engage with feedback they should understand the process and criteria of assessment (Glover & Brown, 2006; Thompson & Lee, 2012). Students may also require direction about assessment expectations (Evans, 2013).

Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon (2011) argue that feedback should be a continuous dialogue within a cyclical assessment process. Directed and illustrative feedback is required if students are to be actively engaged in learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013). To do this, a discourse must be established between instructors and students (Chanock, 2000) consisting of "high quality feedback exchanges" (Evans, 2013, p. 106) that enable students to make sense of the feedback offered and which stimulate informed learning (Boud, 2007; Crook et al., 2012; Thompson & Lee, 2012).

Providing Feedback with Technology

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that using technology to provide feedback may be one means of making feedback more meaningful for students (Campbell, 2005; Crook et al., 2012; Evans, 2013). Specifically, the use of video as the medium of providing feedback, called *veedback*, (coined by Thompson & Lee, 2012) has received much attention. For instance, Thompson and Lee (2012) explored using video accompanied by written comments. Turner and West (2013) provide evidence for the benefit of using video for individualized assessment.

Research comparing student perceptions of both written and veedback shows that, for a significant number of students, veedback increased their understanding of marked comments (Crook et al., 2012; Thompson & Lee, 2012) and students were able to better engage with the feedback to revise and advance their work (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Video also allows students to watch veedbacks at their own pace and use it to inform their academic practice as well as evaluate their assessed submissions (Brick & Holmes, 2008).

It is evident that the use of video may have several potential advantages as a means of providing assessment feedback. Crook et al. (2012) suggested that the use of online video feedback encourages instructors to "reflect on their current feedback practices so that they can provide more detailed, comprehensible and engaging feedback" (p. 387). Using veedbacks may also stimulate recall and trigger the noticing of aspects of writing that the instructor does not specifically point out but the student discerns nonetheless (Sabbaghan, 2013). In this study, students were provided with veedbacks in the form of individualized video screencasts with accompanying annotations and narration. The combination of a tablet and stylus was used to further enhance the visualization aspect of veedbacks.

METHOD

Veedbacks

Students enrolled in two online graduate courses at the University of Calgary in 2016 received assessment feedback in the form of individualized video screencasts. Each video was approximately four minutes in length. Students submitted a 400-word response to weekly tasks in Microsoft Word format. The files were opened on the iPad Pro using the MS Word application because the application offers the most versatile set of annotation tools this researcher is aware of. The instructor would first read the submission once and then proceed to annotate the submission using the Apple pencil while the screencast of the iPad was being recorded. This type of screen casting is possible with the iPad when it is directly connected to a laptop. The instructor provided a commentary of the assessment process while the annotations were made.

The researcher speculated that the combination of the commentary and the live annotations would increase comprehensibility of the feedback and trigger the student to notice what the instructor was drawing attention to. At the end of each video, the instructor used the split screen option and

provided a live assessment using the rubric previously given to students. The live assessment included marking the submission against the rubric with a commentary of why a level was selected.

The recorded videos were attached to the score given to the submission and uploaded via the University's leaning management system (D2L). This provided a timely and paperless means of providing feedback that can be accessed using a variety of mobile devices. Students were also provided with written feedback in the form of a digital copy of the completed assessment rubric.

Online Survey

Students were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire at the end of the term; however, from 32 students, only 18 participated. The questionnaire was developed using an online form accessed via D2L. The online form sought information regarding the perceived quantity and quality of the veedbacks, the degree to which students understood them, and the amount of time they spent reviewing their veedback. Students were asked to rate each item of the 15-item survey on a five-point Likert scale. Finally, students were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments on their experience with veedbacks.

RESULTS

The first six questions of the survey focused on the quality of annotated veedback compared to non-video feedback students had received in previous courses. A summary of the responses obtained for these items is presented in Figure 1.
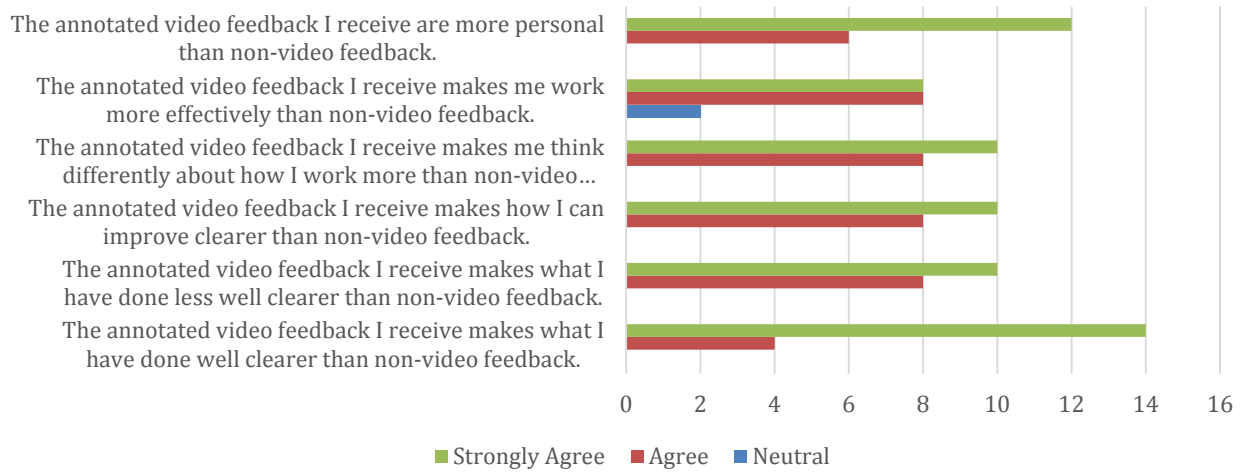
Figure 1: Summary of results comparing veedbacks to non-video feedback

As can be seen, most respondents believe that annotated veedbacks makes both what they have done well and less well clearer than non-video feedback. Additionally, most of the respondents believe that annotated veedbacks provokes them to think differently about their submissions. However, fewer respondents felt that veedbacks will inspire more effective future submissions. Finally, many respondents felt that veedbacks are more personal than non-video feedbacks.

The next nine questions focus on the effectiveness, quality, and quantity of the annotated veedbacks. Figure 2 offers a summary of the results.
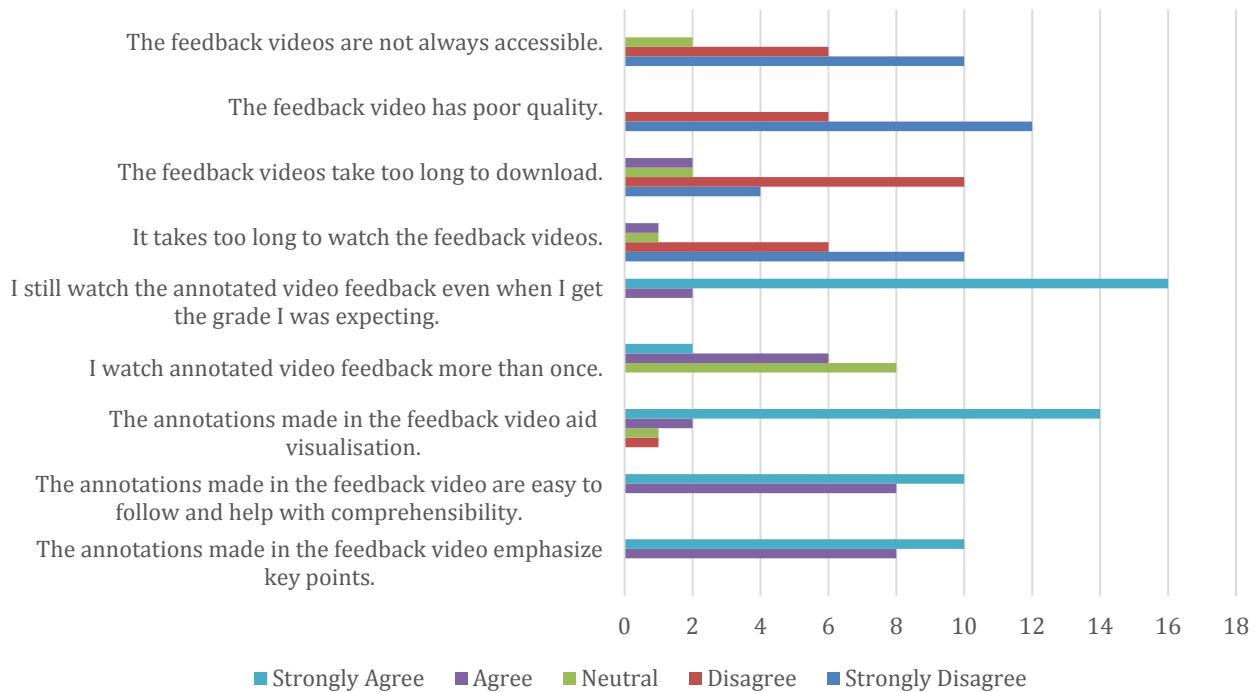
Figure 2: Summary of results on effectiveness, quality, and quantity of veedbacks

As indicated in the chart, although most the respondents did not have issues regarding the accessibility of the videos, some students flagged accessibility as a problem. There were no significant issues with the quality of the video feedbacks, however, due to high quality of the videos, some files were rather large and resulted in longer download times, as reflected in the responses. The length of the videos was also an issue for some students. About 22% of the respondents indicated that the videos were too long. An overwhelming majority of the respondents suggested that they watched the videos regardless of the score they had received. However, many students indicated that they watched the veedbacks only once, although a minority (22%) indicated that they watched the veedbacks more than once. Although about 88% of students felt that the annotations in veedbacks aided visualisation, one student disagreed that annotations were an enhancement and another student rated this question as neutral. Finally, all the respondents had strong opinions favouring veedbacks as adding to comprehensibility and emphasizing key points.

Feedback From Students

Students also provided comments in the survey, each focusing on a different theme. For instance, on the theme of personal connection a student stated:

> I very much like the feedback videos because they are quite personal and give me a sense of connection to the instructor. The intonation and expression in the instructor's voice gives me a clearer cue of whether I have done well or not and being able to see and hear the feedback at the same time makes it much easier to understand the good and bad points.

On the theme of improving the effectiveness of future practice, a student said "When I received full marks, it meant I had met the assignment requirements but having a video allowed me to get feedback on other aspects of my assignment which helped improve my teaching practice." Another student wrote: "…my classroom practices have changed as a result of the video feedback I have received."

Finally, on the theme of accessibility, a respondent indicated '…Easy to follow with the audio and visual annotations. I sometimes re-watch these feedback videos, especially those that are positive (as a confidence booster), but will never find myself re-reading feedback that is written.'

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has described how students perceive veedback as a method for providing annotated individualized feedback. Most students favoured veedbacks. However, since most of the students had received this form of feedback for the first time, their strong preference may be due to the novelty factor. Nevertheless, other studies (Turner & West, 2013; West & Turner, 2016) reveal a strong preference for veedback among university students. Student responses, as well as comments provided on the combination of auditory and visual modalities, support Thompson and Lee's (2012)

claim that veedbacks serve as a better vehicle for in-depth explanation than other mono-modal feedback. The live annotations, coupled with spoken commentary and harmonized with the explanation of where and why marks were allocated, likely provided the greater depth of explanatory feedback that may be required to engage students (Crook et al., 2012; Evans, 2013; Thompson & Lee, 2012). Veedbacks may therefore be an effective means of increasing student engagement and exposing students to more detailed explanations than they would normally receive with only written commentary.

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