

## Teachers' Written Feedback on Digital Answer Scripts during COVID-19: Views, Preferences, and Expectations of the EFL Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring Bangladeshi students' views, preferences and suggestions regarding teacher's feedback on the digital examination scripts during the COVID-19 pandemic. It followed the quantitative method of research to check the views, preferences and expectations of the students on feedback on the digital answer scripts provided by the teachers. Purposive sampling was used in the present study. The sample consisted of 115 undergraduate students at the Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh. The obtained data was quantified and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The findings revealed that students acknowledged the importance of feedback in the digital answer scripts and prefer both negative and positive feedback from the teacher. The findings also show that the students expect corrective feedback based on the grammar and language errors in the answer scripts. However, the results revealed that a portion of the students focuses only on the score they receive and not on the feedback. Based on the findings, the study implies that the teachers should explore the students' views regarding specific types of feedback and develop a method to provide comments that attract the students to go through all the comments and reflect for future improvements.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a deadly virus had begun to spread, first in Wuhan city of China, then gradually to the whole world (Aristovnik, et al., 2020). The virus was later named COVID-19. The deadly virus spread at a rapid pace and overwhelmed the whole world. Millions of people died because of the disease and hundreds of millions have been infected since December 2019. Bangladesh, a developing country, has been suffering from the same disease, forced to shut down its educational institutions in March 2020 (Islam, 2021). However, Policymakers and administrators started to consider the online teaching-learning method to keep education going. In May 2020, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and University Grants Commission (UGC) permitted the universities to start online teaching learning and assessment (Khan, et al., 2021). The teaching methods were modified in online classrooms and the traditional paper-based assessments were replaced by the dig methods.

The major aim of providing feedback to the students is to make sure that they know what went well in their answers and what treas they need to improve (Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018). Although the students receive scores along with the feedback in the examination script, students' future

improvement depends on the feedback provided by the teachers. Therefore, reflecting on the feedback is the most important objective for the students if they want to improve their academic competencies.

Present scenario in the students' attitude towards feedback on the written examinations scripts, provided by the teachers in Bangladeshi universities leave much to be desired (Biswas, 2020). For most of the students, feedback is mostly ignored and the emphasis is on scores/grades. This overemphasis on scores/grades harvests students who pass the courses but fail to improve further in their academic competencies. Consequently, if feedback provided by the teachers on the answer scripts is ignored and scores are given priorities by the students in the universities, then the assessments are achieving the less important objectives. Method of providing feedback demands the views of students, so that they can be incorporated in the future to get their adequate attention. The changed scenario of the teaching-learning process after COVID-19 in online platforms required a lot of innovative ideas from the teachers at the tertiary level of Education (Miah et al. 2020). For example, as mentioned earlier, the paper-based assessments (Mid-term, Class Tests, Final, etc.) had to be replaced with digital methods.

Although previous research (Biswas, 2020; Mahfoodh, 2007; Tri Adhi Kencana, 2020; Irwin, 2018) has been conducted on the students' views and preferences regarding the feedback in the paper-based examination scripts in the face-to-face classes, the perspective of students receiving feedback in the digital answer scripts during the COVID-19 pandemic has not been explored. The uniqueness of providing feedback in the digital answer scripts needs special attention during the age of online teaching-learning practices. Furthermore, students' views and suggestions about the feedback in digital examination scripts are important to take adequate actions that can be used to provide effective feedback in the future. Considering the unique situation mentioned above, this study aims at exploring features of digital feedback that impact the students of EFL classrooms in Bangladesh. This study intends to find out whether the current practices of providing feedback are helpful to the students, or whether it requires certain changes.

A number of studies have examined the students' concerns and perceptions regarding the written feedback in the examination scripts by the teachers. Notable studies were conducted by Lee and Cha (2012); Biswas (2020); Sarcona et al. (2020); Shorna and Suchona (2020); Singh (2016); Dowden et al. (2013); Mahfoodh (2007); Tri Adhi Kencana (2020); Irwin (2018); and Tom et al. (2013). The researchers mostly focused on the EFL university students' reactions toward the written feedback in the summative assessments. These studies, in relation to exploring best practices of providing written feedback, highlighted students' problems and preferences. For example, Lee & Cha (2021) examined the effects of digital written feedback on paper-based tests and explored whether digital feedback positively influences the learning experience of tertiary students. Hand-written feedback was provided using the smart pad and smart pencil on the scanned copies of the paper-based scripts. This study survey college students' satisfaction based on feedback and learning. The result of the study suggested that the benefits of digital written feedback rely on usability, psychological relief, accessibility, self-regulation, and acceptance.

The study by Biswas (2020) aimed to find out students' expectations and problems with written feedback provided by the teachers. Data were collected from eighty-six participants of the Department of English from a Bangladeshi private university through h questionnaire and FGD. The findings of the study show that the students expected written feedback in their scripts but they were more interested in the obtained score from the examination. This study also infers that the students expected the corrected version of their mistake in written form from the teachers. The study recommended that the teachers should enquire about the preferences of the students to provide effective feedback. Similar research conducted by Shorna and Suchona (2020) on the Bangladeshi

students' attitudes toward teachers' written feedback on mid-term scripts found that the students receive oral, written, and explicit feedback and students preferred both oral and written feedback.

Sarcona et al. (2020) investigated how students perceive and utilize audio and written feedback using online questionnaires. This qualitative study of one hundred and sixteen participants showed that the students preferred the written feedback because the students could see their strengths and weaknesses visually to improve their work. The study concluded that the use of various forms of feedback and research on new technologies will guide future teaching practices in the classroom. Related research by Singh (2016) explored the graduate students' needs and preferences of twenty-one participants in Malaysia. The study found that the students preferred electronic methods to obtain feedback. The paper recommends that the student's needs and preferences are very important to increase the effectiveness of written feedback.

The research of Dowden et al. (2013) and Mahfoodh (2017) explored the perception and emotional responses of the students on written feedback. Dowden et al. (2013) study was conducted using online questionnaires to gather qualitative data from distance and on-campus students. The result of the study showed that strong emotional connections influence the perception of written feedback. The study recommends that written feedback should be given based on pedagogies that develop dialogue within the teaching-learning context. On the other hand, the study by Mahfoodh (2017) argues that the learners' emotional responses toward written feedback have not been given adequate attention. This study examined the EFL university students' emotional responses and their success in revisions to teachers' written feedback. The results of the study show that the students' emotions were attributed to acceptance, rejection, surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and satisfaction. Sometimes, the students characterized the feedback as harsh criticism, negative evaluation, and miscommunication. The study concludes that emotional responses can affect the true purpose of teachers' written feedback if not utilized properly.

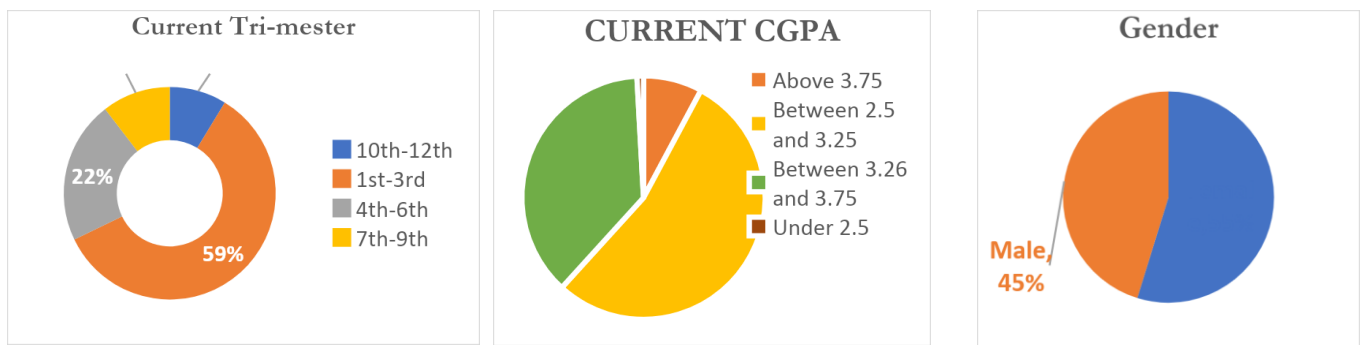
The studies of Tri Adhi Kencana (2020), Irwin (2018), and Tom et al. (2013) investigated the techniques and practices of providing corrective written feedback to improve the effectiveness of the method. They also explored the views and beliefs of the students regarding the written corrective feedback. Irwin (2018) explored EFL students' preferences for written feedback and actual feedback provided by the teacher in a Japanese university. This research followed the qualitative approach using questionnaires and samples of teachers' feedback. The result showed that many preferences of the students were being practiced by the teachers but the process is highly teacher centered. The study recommends that a wide range of feedback strategies should be followed by the teacher after receiving the preferences from the students.

The researcher moved forward with one central research question to understand the views and attitudes of the students about the feedback provided in the digital answer scripts during the COVID-19 pandemic and online classes. The following is the research question of this study is what are the views, preferences, and expectations of the students on feedback provided in the digital answer scripts in online assessments?

## 2. METHOD

This study is based on the exploratory research design. Exploratory research design is effective in situations where the knowledge is relatively limited about the issue and research problems are in a preliminary level of investigation (Saunders et al. 2007). Exploratory research promotes further research on the topic to have conclusive evidence. Since, feedback given on digital scripts are relatively new phenomena in the online EFL classrooms, this study was conducted to provide insights for future investigations.

Figure 1 Participants



The participants of this research were selected from the students of the Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh. The university is located in Dhaka which is the capital city of Bangladesh. This study is based on convenience and purposeful sampling of the participants. A diverse group of students were selected for the study. The research participants were all undergraduate students ranging from 2nd to 12th trimester from the English Department. The survey questionnaire (A Google Form) was sent to 146 participants using email and social media platforms. A total of 115 students responded to the survey questionnaire. Among the participants, 63 (54.8%) respondents were female and 52 (45.2%) were male.

A survey questionnaire was prepared using Google Form to collect data for this research. Since the classes are being held online, the only way to collect data from the active students was the digital method. The questionnaire had two sections; student's general profile (Current trimester, CGPA, and Gender) and the second part contained fifteen questions regarding the views, preferences and expectations of the students regarding written feedback on digital answer scripts. The survey questionnaire was developed following the similar kind of research conducted by the other researchers (Biswas, 2020 and Shorna & Suchona, 2020). However, the questionnaire was modified to serve the purpose of this research. A five point Likert Scale was used to understand the range of the responses and quantify the data. The range was set from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The point value of the responses were Strongly Agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, and Strongly Disagree=1. The questionnaire required close-ended answers from the participants, which helped to identify specific trends of the students' responses. The data were then quantified and analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that 95% students either strongly agree or agree that the written feedback provided in the answer scripts have great significance. While reflecting on the feedback provided in the digital answer scripts (Google Form), 93% students feel that the teachers should always provide feedback in the comment sections of the script. On the other hand, 68% of students agree that the teacher can use a separate document to provide the feedback regarding their answers. Moreover, 53% of students think that the teacher should clarify the feedback and comments in one-on-one sessions with the students in the virtual platform (Zoom). It is important to mention that 10% students disagreed and 27% students remained neutral regarding the one-on-session to clarify the comments.

Table 1: Students' views on Feedback provided in the Digital Answer Scripts

Question	Total Respondents	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Teachers' written feedback on Google Form Answer Scripts of Mid-term are of great importance.	115	43%	52%	5%	0%	0%	100%
Teachers should always provide written feedback in the comment section of Google Form.	115	45%	48%	6%	1%	0%	100%
Teacher should provide feedback in a separate document	115	23%	45%	20%	11%	1%	100%
Teachers should return the Google Form scripts in an individual Zoom session and clarify the comments to each students	115	19%	44%	27%	7%	3%	100%

Table 2 illustrates that 85% students agree that the teacher should mark the grammatical errors in the answer scripts and 83% students expect that the teacher should provide the corrected version of their grammatical errors. Around 81% students believe that the teacher should give feedback based on the language problems (e.g.: Sentence Structures). While sharing their expectations regarding positive and negative comments on the answer scripts, 60% students disagreed that they should receive only the positive comments from the teachers. On the other hand, 68% of students disagreed with the notion that the teacher should provide only the negative comments in their answer scripts. However, 90% of students reflected that their teacher should provide both the positive and negative comments in their assessment papers. 86% students believe that the negative feedback is helpful for their academic improvements.

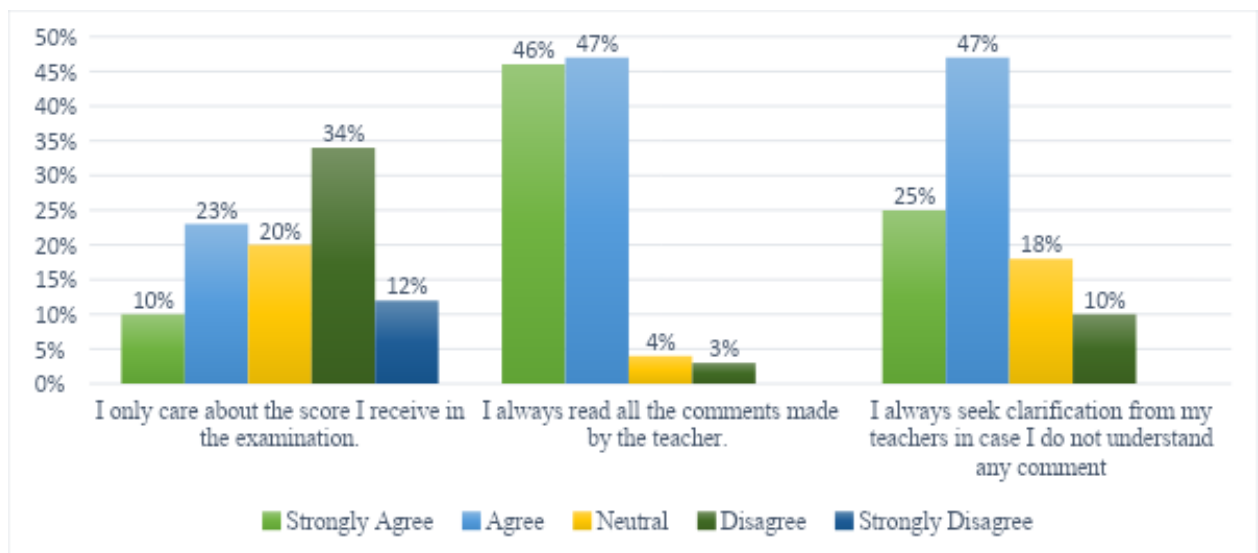
Table 2: Students' Expectations on Specific Feedback

Question	Total Respondents	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Teacher should give feedback based on my grammatical errors	115	29%	56%	13%	3%	0%	100%
Teacher should provide the correction to my grammatical errors	115	38%	55%	5%	2%	0%	100%
Teacher should provide detailed comments on the language errors (e.g: Sentence Structure)	115	32%	49%	16%	3%	0%	100%
I expect only positive comments from the teachers about my writing	115	9%	17%	14%	40%	20%	100%
I expect only negative comments from the teachers about my writing	115	3%	14%	16%	46%	22%	100%
I expect both positive and negative comments from the teachers about my writing	115	57%	37%	5%	1%	0%	100%
Negative feedbacks are good for my improvement	115	43%	43%	9%	5%	0%	100%

Figure 2 illustrates the response of the students regarding their views on feedback given by the teachers in their examination script. Although 33% of students strongly agreed or agreed to the fact that they only care about the score received in the exam scripts, 20% of students remained neutral

and 48% of students either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement. The figure also illustrates that 46% of students strongly agreed and 47% agreed with the statement that they read all the comments provided as feedback by the teachers. While responding to the statement of seeking clarification in case of not understanding feedback in the examination script, 72% of students said that they seek clarifications from the teachers. 18% of students remained neutral and 10% of students disagreed with the statement.

Figure 2: Students' views on the importance of Feedback Provided in the Answer Scripts



This study tried to recognize the students' views, perceptions, and expectations regarding the feedback provided by the teachers in the digital answer scripts during the online teaching-learning. While previous studies in this field tried to focus mostly on paper-based feedback, this investigation gives a new dimension of acquiring the students' perspectives on feedback provided on the digital answer scripts.

The results of this study indicate that the students are very eager to get feedback from the teachers as they agreed that the given feedback as comments in the Google Form has great importance. The statement is important to understand the perspective of the students towards feedback given in the digital answer scripts. Although the mood of feedback delivery has changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers must take into account that the students still look forward to the comments provided to them as the feedback in the answer scripts. Additionally, the students also preferred to have the feedback in separate documents when necessary. Comments in the Google Form is a separate section of the document, which sometimes may not give a clear picture of the feedback to the students. In such cases, a separate document to provide constructive and detailed feedback can be effective for the students. The demand of the students to have a separate one-on-one session with the teacher received mixed responses from the participants of this research, which indicates that the teacher should voluntarily identify the students who need a separate session to discuss the comments. The main objective of the feedback will only be achieved once the students get a clear understanding of all the comments or corrections made by the teachers.

A significant aspect of the feedback in the examination scripts is the corrections or recommendations made by the teachers. The survey results show that the students showed a strong interest in having corrective feedback based on grammar and language issues. The EFL learners often struggle with the grammatical rules and the corrective feedback can be effective for the students to internalize the rules of grammar. However, the paper-based examination had the option to mark the

incorrect areas and provide feedback on the margin of the paper. In a digital answer script, the task needs to be done with care as the corrections are provided in a separate section. Moreover, the language problems (e.g.: Sentence Structure) in the examination scripts require detailed feedback from the teacher. A student should be able to understand the inconsistency in their sentence constructions through the comments provided by the teacher.

Another significant finding regarding the comments provided by the teacher shows that the students showed diverse preferences. They neither expect the 'positive only' or 'negative only' comments from the teachers in their answer scripts. The results reflect that the majority of the students prefer both negative and positive feedback from the teachers. Hence, the teacher must find a way to blend both types of comments as feedback in the answer scripts. Students, however, emphasized that negative comments are good for their academic improvement. The teachers cannot rely only on the good aspects of the answers, rather, they should mark the mistakes in the scripts.

The common concern regarding the feedback provided in the examination is that the students often focus on the score attached to the feedback. This study tried to gain insight regarding the issue and found that, although many students disagreed that they focus only on the comment, a large number of students either agreed or remained neutral. It indicates that many students are not taking the feedback seriously which is a big concern. Biswas (2020) argues that the tendency of overlooking the feedback can be changed if a follow-up activity is set by the teacher. It can be expected that the follow-up activity will ensure that all the students are going through the comments and reflecting on them. The result shows that the majority of the students responded positively regarding reading all the comments and seeking clarification.

This study has implications for the teachers and policymakers to design and provide effective feedback in the digital answer scripts of the students in the online teaching-learning process. Moreover, the current study has implications for future researchers. Firstly, the EFL teachers can understand the views and preferences of the students regarding the feedback provided by them in the examination scripts and take necessary steps to incorporate detailed feedback in the new methods of assessing students in digital platforms. The teacher needs to create a plan to make sure that the students are going through all the comments and reflecting on them. Secondly, the findings of the study motivate policymakers to approach online assessments in a different way than paper-based examinations. A strategy should be developed by the syllabus designers to find the best possible way to provide effective feedback in the examination scripts. Additionally, future researchers can use the findings of the current study to design more research to explore the best practices of providing effective feedback in digital examination scripts.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The online assessment using the digital methods are relatively new in the field of education which gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research was conducted to explore the views, expectations and preferences of the students about the feedback provided in the digital examination scripts. The results show that the students want detailed feedback based on their grammar and language problems in the answers. The students are eager to receive both the negative and positive feedback as they think that the positive feedback inspires them and negative feedback helps them improve in the future. One of the major concerns that was identified in this research was some students' indifferent attitude toward feedback provided to them by the teachers. A section of students was only interested in knowing the scores they receive in the examination which does not serve the purpose of providing feedback. Hence, this research recommends that future researchers work to identify a method to encourage all the students to reflect on the feedback provided by the teachers. To recapitulate the research question of this study, the students have a positive view

towards the feedback provided in the digital answer scripts. The students prefer a blended mode of feedback: both positive and negative. Additionally, the students expect that the teachers will provide corrections and detailed feedback in the comment section of the scripts.

There are some gaps in the study to be explored by the future researchers. Firstly, the sample size of the study was small. A future study with a larger sample size will provide a more accurate picture on this research topic. Secondly, the study did not include any interview or focus group discussion to get detailed perception of the students regarding feedback in the digital answer scripts. Lastly, future researchers can identify the reasons behind the students' negligence in reflecting on the feedback provided by the teachers which was not explored in this research.

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