PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL AND TRADITIONAL FEEDBACK IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Feedback is an essential part of teaching academic writing because it helps students improve the accuracy, coherence and clarity of their work. There are now concerns about the relative efficacy of digital and traditional feedback techniques in higher education, given the increasing use of digital tools. At the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, this study examined pre-service teachers' opinions on traditional and digital feedback for academic writing. A random selection of 100 English language pre-service teachers was used as a comparative descriptive survey design. With a reliability coefficient of 0.78, the Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Feedback in Academic Writing (PTPFAW) structured questionnaire was used to gather data. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test. The results showed a significant difference between the two (t(99) = 15.55, p <.001), with pre-service teachers favouring traditional feedback (M = 4.29, SD = 0.47) over digital feedback (M = 3.31, SD = 0.52). While digital feedback received high marks primarily for its efficiency and convenience, traditional input was thought to be more personal, clearer, and more effective in improving writing accuracy and recall. According to the study's findings, pre-service instructors still believe that traditional feedback is a more effective way to encourage academic writing, despite the potential of digital technologies. It is recommended that teacher educators employ a combination of methods, utilizing the advantages of both feedback formats, and teaching instructors and students should learn how to utilize digital platforms effectively.

Keywords: Feedback, Academic Writing, Pre-service Teachers, Digital Learning

Background to the study

Writing is essential for accomplishing the goals of education. It aids in the development of communication skills that students can apply in various professions and professional settings. In today's knowledge-driven environment, having the ability to articulate ideas, make compelling

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arguments, and engage with an audience is crucial. In the field of education development, writing has always been a key learning skill and is frequently used in assessing students.

One way of assessing learners is through academic writing. Academic writing, according to Apata and Oyenuga (2025), is to present theories, arguments, and research findings using guidelines like logic and evidence-based support. The fact remains that academic writing is a cornerstone of higher education, shaping critical thinking, professional communication, and scholarly development. Academic writing is the method by which researchers present their thoughts, arguments, and supporting evidence. It is audience-aware, structured, and formal. Instead of impressing with flowery language, the objective is to make assertions, back them up with facts, and demonstrate your logic so that others can assess, replicate, or expand upon your work. Academic writing has a structured format, specialised vocabulary, and elaborate sentences. It also necessitates the development of arguments that make sense to the target audience.

For pre-service teachers, writing proficiency is not only an academic requirement but also a professional competency they are expected to model for future learners. According to Apata and Oyenuga (2025), academic writing helps students share their expertise, participate in conversations, and enhance academic understanding in their subjects. By participating in this discussion, preservice teachers contribute to the collection of information that shapes their fields of study and enhances their endeavors. To achieve this, expertise is required in various aspects of language development, including writing structure, coherence, grammar, and vocabulary (Campbell, 2019). In this aspect, the academic writing process for students often requires constant monitoring and insightful remarks as feedback from teachers, demanding significant time, effort, and consideration of subjectivity (Yu and Lee, 2015).

In the Federal College of Education, Special Oyo, Academic writing is an essential part of teacher preparation programmes at Nigerian colleges of education, especially at institutions like the Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. Academic writing is a tool used to assess students. Students are expected to conduct research in their respective course of study.

Students should be able to articulate their ideas critically, citing credible sources to back them up and organising them so that people outside of the academic community can debate, evaluate, or build upon them. Adebayo and Jagun (2025) stated that in academic writing, students are required to demonstrate strong communication skills when articulating ideas and presenting findings in what is called project writing.

A critical component of writing development is feedback, which bridges the gap between performance and learning outcomes. Teachers give students actionable feedback to guide their learning. It is the collective responsibility of the teacher and students to ensure that no feedback opportunity is wasted. Pre-service teachers must be aware of their own errors, and to teach effectively, these areas of error must be carefully addressed during instruction through targeted feedback. Feedback has proven to improve students' writing skills. In the works of Ohia and Ayegboyin (2020) and Adebayo and Fakeye (2024), regular feedback from teachers was found to improve students' writing skills. Feedback plays a critical role in the development of academic writing skills, as it provides learners with guidance to revise, refine, and enhance their work. In teacher education programmes, where pre-service teachers are expected to demonstrate strong academic writing skills, feedback becomes especially important not only for improving their writing but also for shaping their future pedagogical practices.

The word feedback is a powerful tool in communication. It is a crucial aspect of academic writing instruction, as it guides students toward improved accuracy, clarity, and coherence. Tapp (2015) defines feedback as any written or spoken exchange between a student and a teacher or peer that

provides information to help plan their learning. Peer or student responses to a question or puzzle, or a teacher's voice response, can all be considered forms of feedback. Feedback is like a mirror to a language instructor from which he assesses himself. It is pivotal to the learning and assessment process.

An essential part of the teaching-learning process is feedback, especially when it comes to academic writing. It provides students with a better understanding of their areas of strength, weakness, and areas for growth. Good criticism helps pupils develop their writing skills, encourages self-control, and advances their academic careers. The kind and quality of feedback pre-service teachers receive during their training are particularly important because they are expected not only to develop excellent writing abilities but also to eventually provide feedback to their learners. According to Algburi and Razali (2022), feedback is essential in the process approach to writing instruction, which focuses on editing, revising, and rewriting through several drafts in order to write well.

Traditionally, feedback has been provided in handwritten comments on essays or delivered orally in class. In a traditional setting, feedback in academic writing can be delivered through handwritten comments on assignments or face-to-face conferences between instructor and student. Traditional feedback is valued because it is familiar and straightforward. Learners may readily connect corrections to their writing and gain a concrete understanding of areas that require improvement. Traditional feedback, however, has come under criticism for being time-consuming, sometimes unclear due to handwriting, limited detail, or lack of follow-up. It may not fully engage students or foster effective teacher-student communication. This traditional mode has the advantage of promoting personal connection and immediate clarification.

With the integration of technology in higher education, digital feedback has gained prominence. Using tools such as Microsoft Word's "track changes," Google Docs comments, or online learning management systems, instructors can provide detailed, timely, and often more legible feedback. Some digital platforms also allow audio or video feedback, which may enhance clarity and engagement. Despite these advantages, digital feedback can feel impersonal to some learners and may require digital literacy skills that not all students possess. Additionally, the rise of learning management systems, online editing tools, and cloud-based collaboration platforms has increased the prevalence of digital feedback. Educators increasingly rely on platforms such as Microsoft Word Track Changes, Google Docs, and learning management systems (LMS) to provide feedback. These shifts raise important questions, such as how pre-service teachers perceive digital versus traditional feedback. For pre-service teachers, the mode of feedback may influence not only their own academic writing development but also how they perceive feedback practices they might adopt in their future classrooms. However, research on pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital versus traditional feedback, particularly in the context of academic writing, remains limited. Understanding their views on the comparative effectiveness of these feedback modes can inform teacher educators and contribute to the design of effective feedback strategies in teacher training programs.

This study contributes to the discussion by synthesising existing research and presenting a comparative framework of pre-service teachers' perceptions of feedback effectiveness across digital and traditional modes.

Statement of the Problem
Although both digital and traditional feedbacks are widely used in higher education, little is known about how pre-service teachers perceive the effectiveness of these methods in improving their academic writing. Much of the existing research has examined general student populations,

with limited focus on pre-service teachers who represent a unique group: they are learners of academic writing but also future educators who will need to provide feedback themselves.

Without a clear understanding of how pre-service teachers perceive and respond to digital and traditional feedback, teacher education programmes may fail to equip them with practical feedback literacy skills. This gap risks producing teachers who are not fully prepared to make informed decisions about feedback practices in their own classrooms. Therefore, a comparative study of preservice teachers' perceptions of digital and traditional feedback is needed to provide insights into the advantages, limitations, and perceived effectiveness of each mode.

Objectives of the Study

1) To explore pre-service teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of digital feedback in academic writing.
2) To examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of traditional feedback in academic writing.
3) To compare pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital and traditional feedback in terms of clarity, usefulness, accessibility, and impact on revision practices.

Research Questions

1) How do pre-service teachers perceive the effectiveness of digital feedback in academic writing?
2) How do pre-service teachers perceive the effectiveness of traditional feedback in academic writing?
3) What differences exist in pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital and traditional feedback in terms of clarity, usefulness, accessibility, and impact on revision practices?

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a comparative descriptive survey design. This design was suitable since it aimed to collect and examine information regarding pre-
service teachers' opinions of two different feedback methods: digital and traditional,
and compare how effective they believe each to be for academic writing.

The population of the study consisted of all 300-level English language students in the School of Languages and pre-service teachers in the Federal College of Education, Special. This was intentional because project writing is a compulsory course for all. A simple random sampling method was used to select 100 preservice teachers. The study employed a structured questionnaire titled Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions of Feedback in Academic Writing (PTPFAW), with a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), sectioned into three: Demographic Information (age and gender), Perceptions of Traditional Feedback and Perceptions of Digital Feedback. The instrument, after undergoing face validity by the experts, was administered to 20 preservice teachers who were not part of the original study, and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained.

The questionnaire was distributed both digitally (via Google Forms) and physically to guarantee widespread participation. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and informed consent was acquired. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to assess the data and summarise pre-service teachers' opinions. A t-test was used to examine how pre-service teachers perceived digital compared to traditional feedback.

Findings

Research question one: How do pre-service teachers perceive the effectiveness of digital feedback in academic writing?

Table 1: Questionnaire Items and Responses of Preservice Teachers (N)

Statement	SA(5%)	A(4%)	N(3%)	D(2%)	SD(1%)	Mean	SD
Written comments from lectures on hard copy of my project improve my writing.	55	35	7	3	0	4.42	0.68
Traditional feedback is usually clear and easy to understand.	48	42	8	2	0	4.36	0.64
I prefer handwritten corrections on my project.	44	40	10	6	0	4.22	0.79
Traditional feedback is more personal to me than digital feedback.	50	38	9	3	0	4.35	0.70
Receiving feedback on paper from my supervisor helps me remember corrections better	52	40	6	2	0	4.42	0.66
Digital feedback hastens my project writing	15	32	25	20	8	3.26	1.04
Digital feedback is usually more detailed than traditional feedback	18	35	28	12	7	3.45	0.97
I prefer receiving corrections through digital feedback	12	28	22	26	12	3.02	1.17
Digital feedback saves time for both me and my lecturer	20	30	28	15	7	3.4	1.06
Digital feedback makes it easier to correct errors in my project	18	29	25	18	10	3.27	1.11

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Preservice Teachers' Perception

Feedback Type	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Traditional Feedback	100	4.29	0.47
Digital Feedback	100	3.31	0.52

According to Table 2, the average score for digital feedback was 3.31 on a 5-point scale (SD = 0.52). Preservice teachers' views of digital feedback for students were only moderately positive.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution (Traditional and Digital)

Scale Response	Traditional Feedback (%)	Digital Feedback (%)
Strongly Agree (5)	42%	18%
Agree (4)	46%	32%
Non (3)	9%	25%
Disagree (2)	3%	18%
Strongly Disagree (1)	0%	7%

Table 3 shows that although 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that digital feedback was useful, a significant 25% opposed or strongly disagreed, and another 25% were neutral.

Research question 2: How do pre-service teachers perceive the effectiveness of traditional feedback in academic writing?

Table 2 shows that traditional feedback had a mean score of 4.29 (SD = 0.47), which was significantly higher than that of digital feedback.

Table 3 shows that only 3% of students disagreed with the overwhelming 88% of students who agreed or strongly agreed that traditional feedback was useful. This implies that, compared to digital alternatives, traditional feedback is generally regarded as clearer, more specific, and more helpful in enhancing writing.

Research question 3: What differences exist in pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital and traditional feedback in terms of clarity, usefulness, accessibility, and impact on revision practices?

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test Comparing Perceptions of Traditional and Digital Feedback

Feedback Type	N	M	SD	t (99)	p	MD
Traditional	100	4. 29	0.47			
Digital	100	3.31	0.52	15.55	<.001	0.98

Table 4's t-test results indicate a significant difference in how traditional and digital feedback are perceived (t(99) = 15.55, p < .001). The average difference of 0.98 points suggests that traditional feedback is highly preferred.

Clarity: Traditional feedback was considered clearer (Q2, M = 4.36) compared to digital feedback (Q7, M = 3.45).

Usefulness: Traditional feedback was strongly perceived as improving writing (Q1, M = 4.42), while digital scores were lower (Q6, M = 3.26).

Accessibility: Students still preferred traditional feedback even if digital feedback is known to save time and be easier to access (Q9, M = 3.41).

Impact on Revision Practices: Traditional feedback was helpful for recall and corrections (Q5, M = 4.42), but digital tools for recording revisions scored lower (Q10, M = 3.27).

Discussions of Findings

The findings revealed that pre-service teachers significantly preferred the traditional feedback when it comes to academic writing. Digital feedback was recognized for its time-saving and convenient features, but it was not considered clear, intimate, or effective in enhancing writing correctness. According to this, digital feedback is still not considered as valuable as handwritten, in-person, or paper-based adjustments, despite its convenience and efficiency. This is consistent with Reed (2018), who states that learners are more engaged and remember errors when they receive feedback that is handwritten or given in person because it feels more real and intimate. Also, Tasksiran and Goksel (2022) found that traditional feedback was more significant to students' understanding of errors than automated and online feedback. Preservice teachers in FCES Oyo are more familiar with traditional feedback and are comfortable for many students. However, the study negates the findings of Farshi and Safa (2014) that students preferred digital feedback, as it was more effective in writing. The study's overall findings indicate that, although digital feedback has potential, particularly in terms of efficiency, pre-service teachers still believe that traditional feedback is more effective. Rather, combining the two approaches might work better, utilising their own advantages.

Recommendations

1. Lecturers should use both digital and conventional feedback techniques. While digital tools might improve speed, accessibility, and record-keeping, handwritten comments can offer clarity and personalisation.

2. Lecturers ought to receive training on how to use digital platforms to offer well-organised, thorough, and customised remarks. Techniques such as highlighting critical mistakes, providing relevant examples, and using a clear layout can enhance the readability and perceived value of digital feedback.

3. Training courses on the proper interpretation and use of digital feedback should be provided to pre-service teachers. This could improve comfort with digital formats and lessen resistance.

4. Guidelines for feedback should be created by teacher education programmes that weigh the benefits of both forms of feedback.

5. More research should examine the impact of digital feedback on higher-order writing abilities. Focusing on comparative research across cultural contexts and organisations may also help explain why study preferences vary.

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