Feedback in Online Course for Non-Native English-Speaking Students

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By

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To my Father
Памяти дорогого отца Иванова Алексея Васильевича
(1936-1990)

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FOREWORD

This study examined the effect of asynchronous embedded audio feedback on nonnative-English-speaking students or so-called *English as a Foreign Language (EFL)* students' higher-order learning and perceptions of the audio feedback versus text-based feedback when the students participated in asynchronous online discussions. In this study, the term "EFL" was used to imply the use of English in a community where it is not the primary means of communication (Asher and Simpson 1994, 1120). The term "foreign language" refers to the language that is not a native language in a country (1120). However, this study also used the term English as a Second Language (ESL) to refer to a non-native language that is widely used as a medium of education, government, and business (1120).

In addition, this study examined how the impact and perceptions differed when the instructor providing the feedback was a nonnative English-speaking teacher (NNEST)[1] versus native English-speaking teacher (NEST) (Pasternak and Bailey 2004, 156). A quasi-experimental design was used with audio feedback and text-based feedback as a within-subject factor, instructors' language background (NNEST and NEST) and students' level of language proficiency (high and low) as the between-subjects main factors. The students were assigned to the levels of language proficiency (high and low) and two types of instructors (NNEST and NEST), but all of them experienced audio feedback and text-based feedback.

To accomplish this, an examination of the students' weekly online postings across the three time periods (pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2) and the perceptions of the technique were carried out. Two instruments were used to examine the effect of embedded audio feedback (a) the scoring rubric (Ertmer and Stepich 2004, under "Learning Outcomes"), and (b) the audio feedback survey to examine students' responses to audio and text-based feedback (Ice 2008). Specifically, for this study, the EFL students' weekly scores indicating the quality of online discussion posting

[1] NEST/NNEST terminology is consistent with the literature of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Inc. (TESOL), A Global Education Association.

for audio feedback and text-based feedback delivery methods and their perceptions on the survey were used as dependent variables. The three independent variables of this study were: (a) students' level of language proficiency; (b) embedded audio feedback versus text-based feedback; and (c) nonnative (NNEST) or native English-speaking (NEST) instructors who were providers of feedback. The quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, logistic regression analysis, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, an independent t-test, a mixed-effect ANOVA, and the two-way between-groups ANOVA. The results indicated the effectiveness of audio feedback and text-based feedback to promote EFL students' higher-order learning and to increase perceived effectiveness of both types of feedback. The results also indicated that there were no significant differences between the groups (NNEST and NEST) and the student's levels of language proficiency (high and low) on the increased quality of the students' online postings and their perceptions of audio feedback. However, the effect of audio feedback on the quality of online posting was different because it depends on the students' level of language proficiency. In this study, the students at the low level of language proficiency were more likely to drop the course and/or received the low scores on their online postings. However, the students at the low level of language proficiency perceived that the audio feedback helped them retain the course information more than the text-based feedback. Finally, the students in the NEST group perceived higher motivation and retention than the students in the NNEST group. The study has implications for instructors and designers in creating online learning environments as it relates to asynchronous online discussions that include EFL students.

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My journey to the doctoral program at Purdue University began in 1998 when I was a visiting scholar at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. At that time, I did not have any specific plans to complete a Ph.D. in the U.S. *However*, my life path changed dramatically in 2003 when I returned to The George Washington University as a Fulbright Scholar. I would like to start my acknowledgements by expressing my deep appreciation to all of my friends from The George Washington University and Georgetown University who guided, supported, and helped me find my true destiny in life: Dr. Christine Meloni, Dr. Donald Weasenforth, Prof. Margaret Kirkland, Dr. Susan Willens, Prof. Virginia Lezhnev, Dr. George Bozzini, and Dr. Stuart Umpleby. The love and support of my friends in Washington, D.C. encouraged me to begin a Ph.D. program in the U.S. In 2006, my dream of obtaining my Ph.D. became possible thanks to the initiative of Dr. Anatoli Rapoport, Dr. Lynn Nelson, and Dr. Andrew Gillespie from Purdue University. I am indebted to these individuals, whom I feel have changed my life for the better.

Here at Purdue, I have been blessed by meeting and working with a very kind and supportive advisor, Dr. Jennifer Richardson. I am very grateful to Dr. Richardson for giving me an opportunity to find my research focus and for guiding me through all of the stages in the program. My life at Purdue has also been enlightened by having such a nice friend, Aggie Ward, who fills my days with joy and sunshine. I also feel deep appreciation for Dr. James Lehman and Dr. Timothy Newby for continuously supporting me during my study in the program. My life at Purdue has also awarded me with a great friend, Dr. Dazhi Yang, who is my role model and a life-long mentor.

I have been blessed by meeting Dr. Phil Ice in 2008 when he was the guest speaker in the online course taught by Dr. Richardson. I cannot stop appreciating the moment when Dr. Ice introduced his research on audio feedback. I was curiously thinking there was no difference between the types of feedback. But, Dr. Ice sent me a file with audio feedback where he recorded his voice! That unforgettable moment changed my view on feedback in an online environment! I am very grateful for Dr. Ice's introducing me to the research on audio feedback which eventually became the topic of my doctoral dissertation. Thanks to Dr. Richardson, I

have been fortunate to work with Dr. Luciana de Oliveira and Dr. Yukiko Maeda on my dissertation study. I greatly appreciate the patience, understanding, and support of Dr. Maeda during our work on the statistical analysis on the final results of the experiment. As I had never worked with quantitative data before, I will never forget how clearly and easily Dr. Maeda explained the most complicated statistical terminology to me. I have been amazed and I will be always amazed with Dr. de Oliveira's enthusiasm and motivation as a person and as a researcher. Thanks to Dr. de Oliveira I was able to focus on an appropriate scope of EFL in my dissertation study. My experiment for this dissertation study would have never been realized without Adrie Koehler who provided the native English speaker voice and who also helped with editing this dissertation. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Natalya Nickolayevna Alexeeva from Yakutsk (Russia) who helped with recruiting the participants and providing computer labs in Yakutsk for the pilot studies in 2009 and 2010 and, finally, for this dissertation study in 2011.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
NNEST	Nonnative English-speaking teacher
NEST	Native English-speaking teacher
TF	Text-based feedback
AF	Audio feedback
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
TOEFL	A standardized test for proficiency in English as a Foreign Language
PBT	Paper-based test

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

As online courses in U.S. higher education continue to gain popularity, students from different countries and cultures have the opportunity to study under the same virtual "roof" while remaining physically and socially within their own countries and cultures (Gunawardena and LaPointe 2007, 600; Wang 2006, 69). Specifically, globalization, internationalization, and the cultural diversity of students have influenced the issues of planning, designing, and implementing online courses across geographic boundaries (Gunawardena and McIsaac 2004, 384-85). Therefore, instructors are increasingly looking to new and more effective techniques to promote learning among their students. One technique, audio feedback has demonstrated that it can strengthen the instructor's ability to affect learning and more personalized communication with students (Ice et al. 2007, 3). This study investigated the effectiveness of audio feedback provided for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) by removing physical barriers, and by allowing students to create, exchange, and perceive information using the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW), facilitate collaborative learning and initiate meaningful conversation in cross-national settings (Gunawardena et al. 2001, 85).

From a constructivist perspective, CMC, based on asynchronous forms of communication (i.e., asynchronous online discussions), can support students' active learning and collaboration by engaging them in discussions to construct their own knowledge (Romiszowski and Mason 2004, 405). Asynchronous online discussions can enhance rich interactions and flexibility between students and teachers by removing transactional distance when teaching and learning occur in separate locations (Moore 2007, 89). In addition, asynchronous online discussions, by providing time to read and respond to a message, can support the possibility for greater student reflection and critical thinking (Romiszowski and Mason 2004, 424).

A number of studies have reported that asynchronous online discussions could become a beneficial way to promote critical thinking among EFL students (Biesenbach-Lucas 2003, 39; Warschauer 1997, 472). Findings have shown that EFL students have rated online interactions (i.e. sharing ideas and experiences) as a major benefit of participating in asynchronous online discussions (Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas, and Meloni 2002, 74). Similarly, Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004) have argued that EFL students prefer participating in asynchronous online discussion because they understand online postings more easily than verbal discussions in face-to-face classrooms (384). Studies have also found evidence that EFL students' asynchronous online postings could be more lexically and syntactically complex than their discussions in face-to-face classrooms because they have more time to read and reflect on asynchronous online postings (Warschauer 1997, 472; Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas, and Meloni 2002, 74).

However, asynchronous online discussion with its flexibility, interaction, and open communication at any time and at any place may present other drawbacks such as the lack of non-verbal cues in text-based communication (Cifuente and Shih 2001, 463). It is known that text-based online communication can cause difficulties in students' understanding of each other, difficulties in interpreting words correctly, or in understanding culture-specific references (Gunawardena and McIsaac 2004, 385). For example, Zhao and McDougall (2008) found that EFL students perceived text-based online communication as very restrictive; they could not use body gestures or other non-verbal means for communication (69). Quinton and Smallbone (2010) have found evidence that students might have difficulties in understanding or in interpreting messages correctly (128). The researchers revealed that students need clarity of meaning to overcome misunderstanding, especially when it is associated with asynchronous text-based communication. Therefore, to summarize the above studies it can be assumed that clear meaning has become one of the crucial elements for successful online communication; it has become more crucial and vital for EFL students participating in asynchronous online discussions.

Gunawardena and McIsaac (2004), in their extensive review of distance education in a cultural context, have argued that EFL students might have disadvantages participating in online discussions with those for whom English is the first language because of "linguistic difference" and "cultural otherness" (384). Similarly, Zhang and Kenny (2010) found evidence that EFL students experienced language difficulties as non-native speakers; the language barrier may lead to difficulties in understanding

native speakers of English (29). Likewise, Shih and Cifuentes (2003) found that the delivery of text-based information for EFL students in the online setting could cause misunderstanding, especially when they communicated with their instructor who is *a native English speaker* (86).

To overcome the limitations of text-based communication, research has shown the importance of the instructor's role in facilitating online discussions for successful online learning (Anderson et al. 2001, 5; Swan 2003, 25). Indeed, the instructor's role to provide guided instruction, encourage critical reflection, and give constructive feedback may enable students to overcome difficulties of text-based online communication (Biesenbach-Lucas 2003, 38). Yet, to increase both the verbal and nonverbal cues of asynchronous interactions, studies have proposed using asynchronous audio, specifically, instructional audio feedback (Ice et al. 2007, 18; Ice et al. 2008, under "Analysis and Conclusions"). Audio feedback, defined as a recorded message in online instruction, has been viewed as a means to overcome the lack of clarity in text-based communication. Audio feedback, when *embedded* in a student's written documents, has demonstrated that it can strengthen the instructor's ability to affect learning and to generate more personalized communication with students (Ice et al. 2007, 3).

Studies on audio feedback for EFL students in face-to-face environments have examined the effect of the technique on EFL students' writing performance to determine whether the technique could help EFL students understand their native English-speaking teacher's comments correctly. The studies found that audio feedback might help EFL students understand instructional feedback better than written comments in order to improve writing (Boswood and Dwyer 1995, 54; Huang 2000, 228). The research has found that audio feedback is more personal; it may help EFL students understand feedback easily because the teacher speaks directly to each student on tape, adapting tone, inflection, and explanation to the particular student. In addition, Johanson (1999) found that audio feedback complemented both the social-constructivist philosophy and the process approach; audio feedback helped EFL students make the necessary cultural adjustments to understand the academic relationships in the U.S. universities (32).

Some empirical studies on the effectiveness of audio feedback in a traditional EFL writing class have examined the effects of audio feedback on students' writing when it was provided by an instructor who is *a nonnative speaker of English*. The studies found that audio feedback in EFL writing courses could help students understand their writing gaps from audio feedback better than from written instructional comments

(Huang 2000, 228; Morra and Asís 2009, 77). Studies for EFL learners found that audio feedback allowed the teachers to provide suggestions that help the student to clarify the intended meaning for extended explanations of writing problems since EFL students might face problems in understanding teachers' written comments correctly for further improvements of their drafts (Huang 2000, 209; Syncox 2003, 75).

Today, due to the development of distance education and an increased number of online courses, researchers' and practitioners' interest in using audio feedback in asynchronous online environment has raised. In the field of distance education, research results have shown that students receiving instructional audio feedback described their experience as personal, enjoyable, complete, and clear (Kirschner, van den Brink, and Meester 1991, 185). The use of asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback in online courses increases retention of content and it enhances learning community interactions, and it is associated with the perception that the instructor cared more about the student (Ice et al. 2007, 13; Oomen-Early et al. 2008, 273). Conveying nuance is very important in asynchronous online discussions, as Swan (2003) explains, because real-time negotiation of meaning is impossible among instructors and students separated by space and time, making clarity of meaning even more imperative in online classes (19).

Research on the effectiveness of audio feedback for EFL students in asynchronous online environments has found evidence that audio feedback helped EFL students improve their speaking and listening skills (Hsu, Wang, and Comac 2008, 192). Overall, the majority of studies have examined the effectiveness of audio feedback in asynchronous online environments when it was provided by NESTs (Hsu, Wang, and Comac 2008, 192; Ice et al. 2007, 15; Oomen-Early et al. 2008). Yet, limited research has been done to examine whether audio feedback can become an effective technique when it is provided by NNESTs in asynchronous online environments (Olesova et al. 2011a, 30). There is still limited empirical evidence whether the technique can be effective for EFL students' learning when they are enrolled in asynchronous online courses (Ice et al. 2010, 115).

Rationale

Hyland and Hyland (2006) argued that, although providing feedback for EFL students is one of the core principles for successful instruction and learning, the research literature has not been unequivocally positive about

its role in writing development, and teachers often have a sense that they are not making use of its full potential (83).

This may be true because EFL students still struggle to produce accurate writing in the target language, which might restrict their participation and contributions both in traditional and online discussions. Although there has been much interest in examining EFL students' performance in asynchronous online courses in the U.S. universities, limited research thus far has been conducted on the effectiveness of audio feedback for EFL students' learning in asynchronous online courses (Ice et al. 2010, 115). Taking into consideration that asynchronous online courses and asynchronous online discussions specifically could become an effective way to promote critical thinking skills among EFL students, it is important to note that the studies on audio feedback both in traditional and online courses have not investigated the effect of audio feedback on EFL students' higher-order learning. Furthermore, no studies have examined the degree of asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback impact on EFL students' higher-order learning when it is provided by NNEST versus NEST. The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of *embedded* audio feedback in asynchronous online discussions and to shed light on the possible impact of *embedded* audio feedback versus text-based feedback on EFL students' higher-order learning along with students' perceptions of the technique. Finally, the study also examined the impact and perceptions differ by the instructors' language background, NNEST versus NEST, among EFL students because previous studies have revealed that EFL students face problems interpreting written communication with native speakers of English which might further lead to miscommunication and can negatively impact EFL students' online learning performance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the effect of asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback on EFL students' higher-order learning. In addition, this study examined EFL students' perceptions of the technique versus text-based feedback when students participated in asynchronous online discussions. Moreover, this study examined how the impact and perceptions differed when the instructor providing the feedback was NNEST versus NEST. To accomplish this, an examination of EFL students' weekly online postings and the perceptions of the technique were carried out according to the level of English language proficiency. Specifically for this study, EFL students' weekly scores indicating the quality of online discussion posting and their responses on

the audio feedback survey were used as dependent variables to measure the effectiveness of asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback among EFL students (Ice 2008).

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in scores on the quality of weekly discussion posting by types of feedback delivery methods, instructor's language background, and/or student's level of language proficiency?

RQ2: Is there any interaction effect between the types of feedback delivery methods, instructor's language background, and/or student's level of language proficiency on the scores on the quality of weekly discussion posting?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in scores on perceptions of the type of feedback delivery method by instructor's language background and/or student's level of language proficiency?

RQ4: Is there any interaction effect between instructor's language background and student's level of language proficiency scores on perceptions of the type of feedback delivery method?

Significance of the Study

No study has been done to examine the effects of asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback for EFL students when they enroll in asynchronous online courses and specifically when asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback is provided by a NNEST versus NEST. The significance of this study is that the majority of previous studies explained the effects of audio feedback for EFL students in a traditional face-to-face classroom and limited research has been done in asynchronous online courses. This study intended to reveal the effect of the asynchronous *embedded* audio feedback versus text-based feedback on the quality of weekly online discussion postings among EFL students when audio feedback was provided by a NNEST versus a NEST. In addition, this study provides evidence for the perceptions of this technique to compare with text-based feedback for EFL students when they participated in asynchronous online discussions, and if the perceptions were different when the asynchronous embedded audio feedback was provided by a NNEST versus a NEST.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Feedback as one of the core principles of teaching practice plays a crucial role in encouraging and consolidating the learning process (Arbaugh and Hornik 2006, 4; Chickering and Gamson 1987, under "Seven Principles of Good Practice," Hyland and Hyland 2006, 83). Feedback is defined as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding and as information presented that allows comparison between an actual outcome and a desired outcome (Hattie and Timperley 2007, 81; Mory 2004, 745).

Literature Review Methodology

The search of the literature was conducted during the past two years in 2008-2010 via ProQuest Research Library, ERIC, Purdue Library Catalog, Google Scholar, Wiley Online Library, EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier, Wilson OmniFile FT Mega Edition, and EBSCOhost Professional Development Collection to collect and organize studies which focused on the effective use of instructional audio or recorded feedback in different educational institutions and for different educational levels. The first exploratory search was conducted under the guidance of the study by Ice et al. (2007) in December 2008 and January 2009. The search resulted in the identification of the time frame for the studies completed between 1962 and 2009. The time frame was determined when the research on audio feedback became available in the field due to the introduction of the first dictating machines into teaching, both for native speakers of English and nonnative speakers of English. The second additional search was completed between spring 2009 and fall 2009 but with the focus on the effect of the audio feedback on students' learning outcomes in different fields. The results of the two searches resulted in a total of 96 articles both practical (n=66) and empirical (n=30) between 1962 and 2009.

Both searches were conducted by using keywords such as the following: feedback OR audio feedback OR native and nonnative OR EFL

and ESL feedback OR online feedback OR computer-based feedback. The results of the last search in summer-fall 2010 were similar to the two previous searches and resulted in a total of two empirical studies between 2009 and 2010; the studies focused on students' perceptions as well as the impact of the technique on students' writing improvements. The studies for the literature review were selected based on their focus on the definition of audio feedback similar to this study's understanding of the technique, i.e., recorded instructional comments on students' work due to the limited number of studies on audio feedback. In addition, the search for studies on the nature of feedback in second language instruction that was conducted in spring 2010 resulted in the selection of a total of 70 peer-reviewed studies according to the criteria of using empirical research designs. Finally, the search for studies that focused on EFL students and asynchronous online environments was conducted in fall 2010 and resulted in the selection of a total of 33 peer-reviewed studies.

Nonnative and Native English-Speaking Teachers

The issues relating to Nonnative and Native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs and NESTs) have been particularly important for research over the past several years (Braine 1999, 15; Medgyes 1992, 340). It should be noted here that *native speaker* has many contradictory definitions in the literature (Moussu and Llurda 2008, 315). In this study, the definition of *a native speaker* was based on someone's native language status as the core linguistic meaning of the definition. Therefore, this study defined the first language that an individual learned to speak as the native language and the native speaker is someone for whom the first language was acquired naturally in childhood (Cook 1999, 185; Crystal 2003, 69). Similarly to the complexity of the definition *native speaker* in literature, the term *nonnative speaker* also has controversial issues (Moussu and Llurda 2008, 315). Having defined *native speaker* based on a person's native language or the first language learned in childhood, this study defined *nonnative speaker* as someone who, in addition to the first language, uses a second language or someone judged by his/her linguistic competence. According to the linguistic proficiency continuum, it is believed that only people who were born and brought up in English-speaking environments can be considered as people having native competence (Cook 1999; 185, Crystal 2003, 69; Medgyes 1992, 340). Studies have stated that even the most advanced nonnative speakers can never reach a native competence or native-like proficiency despite all learning factors (i.e., motivation, aptitude, experience, education) and efforts (Medgyes 1992, 340). Despite

continuing debates on the definitions of *native and nonnative speakers* in the field, this study used the terms *"nonnative" (NNESTs)* and *"native" (NESTs)* in a general sense since both definitions have been widely accepted by most of the literature.

The studies have paid great attention to the dichotomy between native/nonnative speakers (Liu 2009, 1; Moussu and Llurda 2008, 315). From a linguistic point of view, in the past NESTs were considered as the only reliable source of linguistic data (Chomsky 1965, 25). In 1961, a tenet was created identifying a native speaker as an ideal language teacher at the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language (Phillipson 1992, 195). However, Phillipson (1992) called this assumption a "native speaker fallacy" claiming that NNESTs can be prepared to gain abilities that are, according to the tenet, associated with NESTs (i.e., fluency, correct usage of idiomatic expressions, and knowledge about the cultural connotations of English, 195). Similarly, Medgyes (1992) also challenged the issues of NNESTs and NESTs arguing that both stand quite close to each other and both serve equally useful purposes in their own professional terms (349). Then, in 1996, George Braine initiated the beginning of the NNESTs movement at the colloquium at TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.) to address issues, concerns and experiences with the audience. Finally, the Nonnative English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) in TESOL Caucus was established in 1998 thanks to George Braine, Jun Liu and Lía Kahmi-Stein, which allowed more research to be conducted in the area on NNEST. Accordingly, TIRF (The International Research Foundation for English Language Education) and *TESOL Quarterly* made the subject of NNSs a priority research topic. NNESTs have been a major research area from the establishment of the Caucus in 1999 until today (de Oliveira 2011, 229).

Despite the existence of the dichotomy NNESTs and NESTs, the majority of studies have accepted this widely used term for separation of both teachers and researchers. Moussu and Llurda (2008) in their extensive review of research on NNESTs have pointed out the following issues that have been investigated in the field: 1) teacher education in EFL and ESL setting; 2) perceived advantages regarding NNESTs and NESTs in the EFL/ESL classroom; and, finally, perceptions and attitude of EFL/ ESL students and intensive English program administrators (319). However, still little is known about the relationship between EFL/ESL students' perceptions and attitudes regarding NNESTs and NESTs pedagogical skills and students' performance. There is the urgent need for

more data-driven quantitative empirical studies on NNESTs (Moussu and Llurda 2008, 332).

As this study was aimed at examining the effect of audio feedback provided by NNESTs and NESTs for EFL participants, it is necessary to briefly review the results of recent studies investigating students' attitude towards NNESTs and NESTs in relation to instructors' skills. The results have shown that students paid more attention to teachers' professional skills than on the language background (Butler 2007, 749; Ling and Braine 2007, 265). Similarly, other studies have found that NNESTs were perceived positively for their literacy skills, capability to motivate, function as role models and understanding of learners' difficulties while NESTs were appreciated for speaking/listening skills and cultural knowledge (de Oliveira 2011, 229; Mahboob 2003, 144). Therefore, studies have shown that experience and professional skills are important than teacher's language background (Butler 2007, 749; Cargile 1997, 440; Pasternak and Bailey 2004, l60-61).

Feedback

Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05) reviewed a wide range of studies on feedback to elaborate seven conditions under which feedback may influence students' learning and increase academic success (3). Gibbs and Simpson's seven conditions of feedback are: 1) sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough and in enough detail; 2) the feedback focuses on students' performance, on their learning and on actions under the students' control, rather than on the students themselves and on their characteristics; 3) the feedback is timely in that it is received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning or receive further assistance; 4) the feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success; 5) the feedback is appropriate in relation to students' understanding of what they are supposed to be doing; 6) the feedback is received and attended to; and 7) the feedback is acted upon by the students (16-25).

The seven conditions for providing feedback identified by Gibbs and Simpson were based on the principles of effective feedback by Chickering and Gamson (1987). The principles are that students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses; students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves (Chickering and Gamson 1987).

Feedback is also viewed as a socially constructed process (Lea and Street 1998, 162). In a constructivist context, feedback is provided in the

form of discussion to help students improve learning, academic performance, and reflection (Mory 2004, 772; Quinton and Smallbone 2010, 125). Students' reflection is at "the heart" of formative feedback; students use the feedback message to modify their own work and improve their own performance (Nicol 2006, 592). There are seven principles of feedback in relation to learner self-regulation: 1) helps clarify what good performance is (goal, criteria, and standards); 2) facilitates the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning; 3) delivers high quality information to students about their learning; 4) encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning; 5) encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; 6) provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance; and 7) provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006, 205).

Similarly, Quinton and Smallbone (2010) stated that students need formative feedback that helps them make connections between the characteristics of their work and the way to improve their work in the future (127). Feedback in a constructivist context provides intellectual tools and serves as an aid to help learners construct their internal reality (Mory 2004, 772). Finally, further research is needed to examine how feedback functions within higher-order learning and examine how feedback functions within constructivist learning environments (Mory 2004, 777).

Feedback in Asynchronous Online Environments

The role of instructional feedback in asynchronous online environments and specifically in asynchronous online discussions is the most important strategy because students participating in asynchronous online discussions feel stressed, disconnected, or left behind when they do not receive any feedback on their posting (Ertmer et al. 2007, 414). Feedback in asynchronous online discussions supports students' success to complete the online course, i.e., the lack of feedback is viewed as one of the reasons why students drop the courses (Ertmer et al. 2007, 414).

Schwartz and White (2000) specified the qualities of online feedback, such as multidimensional, nonevaluative, supportive, student controlled, timely, and specific (168-69). Further, Mory (2004) outlined the following qualities for online feedback: 1) prompt, timely, and thorough on-line feedback; 2) ongoing formative feedback about on-line group discussions; 3) ongoing summative feedback about grades; 4) constructive, supportive, and substantive on-line feedback; 5) specific, objective, and individual on-

line feedback; and 6) consistent on-line feedback (776). In addition, Vasilyeva et al. classified the following functions of web-based feedback: 1) *confirming* getting the user's response; 2) *informing* the user about his or her performance (how many tasks were performed, number and ratio of correct answers, time of test processing, etc.); 3) *correcting* the user (in the case she or he has not given a correct answer); 4) *explaining* (the feedback could include an explanation about the reasons the user's answer was considered correct or guidance to the correct answers in the case of a wrong answer); 5) *evaluating* (for example, in the case of an answer until correct feedback); 6) *motivating* the user; 7) *rewarding the user;* and 8) *attracting* his or her attention (2007, 347).

However, there are several problems with delivering feedback in asynchronous online discussions. The most common problem is that students are unable to understand feedback comments and to interpret them correctly (Higgins 2000, under "Discourse"; Quinton and Smallbone 2010, 128). By adapting Higgins's framework for interpreting, Carless (2006) argued that students encounter challenges in interpreting the comments; there is an emotional process that students face while receiving feedback (220). The impact of feedback can negatively threaten students' learning engagement (Carless 2006, 221). To understand students' perception of the effectiveness of feedback, Poulos and Mahony (2008) in their qualitative analysis elaborated the key themes related to the effectiveness of feedback: 1) students' perceptions of feedback were related to the individual meaning attributed to the feedback, the accessibility of lectures to provide feedback, types of feedback, feedback related to criteria and marks and comments; 2) the impact of feedback was related to timeliness, significance and first-year experience. Timeliness related to the need for feedback as early as possible; and 3) credibility of feedback was related to the students' perceptions of the lecturers themselves. The lecturers' ability generally and also their biases influenced the credibility of the feedback they provided (145). Indeed, to interpret feedback comments correctly, students need meaningful and frequent instructional feedback (Rossman 1999, 94); they may greatly benefit from teacher presence (Anderson et al. 2001, 13) and clear instructional comments (Biesenbach-Lucas 2003, 29).

Understanding instructional feedback has become crucial in times when asynchronous online environments allow students to enroll who are geographically dispersed and who come from different cultures and countries (Shih and Cifuentes 2003, 82; Zhang and Kenny 2010, 17). It is becoming a common practice that university online courses enroll international and transnational or *nonnative* students; such online courses