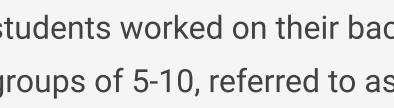
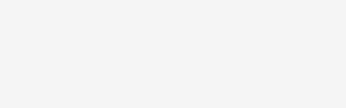
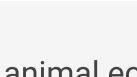


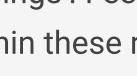
Enabling higher-quality peer feedback in thesis project groups



Learner workload



Instructor workload



Class size

70

CONTEXT

Situated within the domain of marine animal ecology, students worked on their bachelor's and master's theses in groups of 5-10, referred to as 'thesis rings'. Feedback and group meetings would take place within these rings. The theses themselves were generally six month projects, whereupon students undertook independent research and constructed a written report.

The main motivation for the instructor to start using Automated Feedback was to allow students to give each other better feedback on their thesis drafts. Oftentimes, peer feedback ends up focussing primarily on textual components rather than higher-level content. Using this tool, the instructor addressed this issue and provided students with a means of avoiding lower-level mistakes in their written work before continuing to ask for feedback from peers.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Learning objectives

Learning objectives for this thesis project were not directly related to the use of Automated Feedback

Learning activities

Over the course of six months, 4 thesis rings of 5-10 students each worked on their theses which related to a chosen topic in the domain of marine animal ecology. Within these thesis rings, students were encouraged to share their work-in-progress writings with each other for feedback on particular sections. Using the Automated Feedback tool, students were given the option to be able to check their submissions according to a few criteria before handing the work to peers for their review. These criteria were referencing (both in-text citations and reference list), sentence length, figure and table captions, and grammar and punctuation. Students who uploaded their documents to Automated Feedback would receive suggestions on their work if any of these criteria were not met satisfactorily. They then revised their writing as necessary, before continuing to ask for feedback from peers within their thesis-ring.

Learning activities, according to Bloom's Taxonomy, were mainly at the level of:

Understanding

academic writing skills required for the construction of a research thesis

Applying

feedback and suggestions both from peers and Automated Feedback

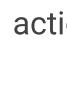
Analyzing

own and peers' work for adherence to a rubric

Assessment of learning outcomes

The Automated Feedback check was a voluntary, formative exercise and did not count toward the final thesis grade. The tool did however provide students with a means to improve the quality of their work before final submission.

Quote from the instructor

 I really enjoyed [Automated Feedback] because it does exactly what I hoped it

would - it takes out the minor issues and lets the peers look at the text at a

higher level.

Notable outcomes

- As a voluntary exercise, the amount of students who opted to make use of the tool was relatively low, but students who did, generally remarked that they liked the speed of the process.
- With larger student cohorts, providing high quality feedback becomes increasingly time-consuming. Using this tool, every student had the opportunity to receive instantaneous feedback at any point during their writing process.
- When reviewing peer's written work, one of the primary things many students focus on are grammatical and syntactical aspects, rather than the content or argumentation itself. After addressing those former aspects with the tool, students had more space to attend to higher-level aspects of feedback on their peers' work.

The role of the instructor

- The instructor mentioned the tool to the thesis rings as an additional optional exercise they could do to generate extra feedback. Apart from this, no extra mention of the tool was made.

Added value of technology

When reviewing peers work, the cognitive load of the feedback exercise is lowered when the text reads smoothly, with as few grammatical or stylistic errors as possible. When these errors can be automatically checked and remedied before peer/instructor review takes place, the subsequent feedback is more likely to be more constructive and actionable. This helps both the reviewee and the reviewer in evaluating the quality of work.

Possible Variation

In order to maximise the benefit to students and increase accessibility, it can be useful to signpost to students that this tool is available. This can take the form of a mention within the course syllabus, an announcement in the LMS, or a dedicated introduction around the start of the course, whereby students are told that the option is available. If the instructor wishes this exercise to be done by all students, they may choose to make the activity graded as a larger incentive.