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Special Issue on

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND DISSERTATIONS IN DISTANCE LEARNING WITHIN THE TESOL CONTEXT

Section Two:

Feedback on academic assignments

**Guest Editors: Christine Calfoglou, Anastasia Georgountzou,
and Alexia Giannakopoulou**

Introduction

The 10th issue of RPLTL deals with the evergreen topic of feedback in education, with a Distance Education (DE) written assignment feedback focus. Feedback is a key component of education, as it involves gauging the effectiveness of the learning process while also seeing that this process is continued and providing for its increased effectiveness in the future. In Biology, in which we can trace the origins of the term, feedback is defined as “a response within a system that influences the continued activity or productivity of that system”¹ and, even though we have largely outgrown behaviourism in education, the idea of response and its significance are still very relevant in feedback-related discussion. What has been gaining momentum, however, is a modified perception of feedback, involving its contribution to future improvement (forward-looking feedback) as well as its polyphony, namely the synergy of several forces other than the teacher or tutor in the feedback provision process. Research is thus being carried out on both teacher/tutor feedback and self-and peer assessment.

The importance of feedback, mostly in the form of written comments on students’ written assignments, is further underlined in DE, where it may be seen as compensating for the lack of face-to-face contact either with the tutor or with one’s fellow-students. It is thus evident

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/science/feedback-biology>.

that this feedback has to be carefully composed so as to alleviate fears, heighten problem awareness, provide improvement pointers and spur distance learning students to fight on. Experience at the M.Ed. in TESOL programme of the Hellenic Open University has been most rewarding in terms of written assignment feedback provision and has yielded precious insight into the variables involved in distance learning feedback provision. It is essentially this insight that is being recorded in the present issue.

More specifically, Dana Ferris, in her interview, refers to the great progress made in the area of feedback provision generally and the need for individualised feedback while also pointing to the increased significance of selective correction. Dina Tsagari provides a global and comprehensive discussion of the state of the art in feedback and assessment and of related taxonomies and underlines, among other things, the importance of the feed-forward function of feedback.

Focusing on the distance learning mode and the Hellenic Open University M.Ed. in TESOL experience, Evangelia Karagianni underscores the importance of empathising in the feedback provision process. Drawing on feedback data obtained from the programme's tutors' assignment correction, Karagianni discusses the emphasis on the cognitive and the neglect of the affective factor in tutor feedback. Based on a rich data base, Ifigenia Kofou discusses a specific set of conditions under which feedback and assessment may affect learning and draws particular attention to the need for detailed, timely and effective feedback as encouraging further action on the part of the learner while also underlining the metacognitive and critical thinking element involved in responding to feedback.

Working on the specific type of feedback required in the distance learning mode, Georgia Kreonidou and Vassilia Kazamia point to the need for Distance Learning feedback to be adjusted to learners' individual needs as well as for learners to develop the strategies required for feedback decoding. This, they suggest, forms part of the need for further training of distance learners in feedback reception and analysis. It is this need for individualized feedback, set within the framework of self-regulated learning, that Valentina Peroukidou and Ifigenia Kofou also talk about in their joint article. Peroukidou and Kofou also focus on the style of the feedback provided on written assignments, while also stressing the need for concrete, explicit comments as well as the idea of using written feedback as the basis of discussion.

Eleni Trigonaki discusses the strengths and weaknesses of distance learning feedback as perceived by learners themselves and focuses on the amendments proposed. In doing so, she raises the interesting issue of distance learners contributing to the formulation of the evaluation criteria used by tutors in the feedback provision process. On the other hand, Despoina Malliotaki analyses the feelings of isolation experienced by distance learners within a specific theoretical framework and proposes adopting a dialogic type of feedback which will help combat these feelings.

Finally, in their discussion of the feedback giver and receiver experience in Distance Education, Anastasia Georgountzou and Christine Calfoglou explore differences between giver and receiver perceptions of the peer feedback provision process as well as the mode of peer correction. Their findings point in the direction of the dialogue involved being particularly welcome and of the broader social components of the peer feedback provision process being overlooked while power forces are also found to be at work.

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