

## **Building Critical Academic Writing Skills: The Impact of Instructor Feedback on Turkish ELT Graduate Students**

November 2020 – Volume 24, Number 3

**Servet Çelik**

Trabzon University, Turkey

[servet61@trabzon.edu.tr](mailto:servet61@trabzon.edu.tr)

### **Abstract**

*Academic writing is a critical aspect of any doctoral program; yet the majority of graduate-level students do not possess adequate writing skills. This issue is especially problematic for non-native English-speaking (NNES) Ph.D. candidates who are required to present their dissertations in the English language. This study was designed as an action research project to investigate the effects of a process-based approach on the attitudes of Turkish Ph.D. students toward academic writing. The results demonstrate that the participants found the experience to have a positive impact on the development of their academic writing skills. Some specific suggestions are offered for supporting graduate students in terms of organizing, self-regulation, academic writing standards and evaluation of their own work.*

**Keywords:** *Academic writing support; Developing academic writing skills; Dissertation writing support; Feedback; Process writing; Research writing*

### **Introduction**

Among the many challenges faced by doctoral level students, academic writing is widely regarded as one of the most problematic. The ability to present ideas and arguments in a clear, concise, and logical manner is a critical skill for academics in all disciplines, as their careers often hinge on the ability to publish their research in internationally recognized academic journals. However, relatively few scholars possess adequate competence in this area, regardless of their knowledge in other aspects of their fields (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2011, Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007). Alter and Adkins (2006) draw attention to this issue in their assessment of graduate students in the social sciences, noting that the majority of their participants experienced serious problems in producing effective scholarly writings.

### **Factors That Affect Competence in Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a demanding process that involves a number of specialized skills. In addition to linguistic knowledge and a basic understanding of composition (Matoti & Shumba, 2011), as well awareness of the purpose of the writing and of the target audience, Trzeciak and

Mackay (1994) stress that effective academic writing encompasses the following: (1) the ability to scan research texts efficiently in order to locate relevant material; (2) note-taking and summarizing skills; (3) the ability to synthesize material from a variety of sources; (4) an understanding of ethics in writing and the avoidance of plagiarism; (5) competence in citation and referencing standards; and (6) aptitude in organizing and laying out written text, tables, figures and other elements of a manuscript.

Given its complex nature, researchers have reported a number of issues that may affect the ability to produce quality academic writing (Beck, 2009). Among these, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation stand out as playing significant roles (Hammann, 2005; Larcombe, McCosker, & O'Loughlin, 2007; Matoti & Shumba, 2011; Ruegg, 2014; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). For instance, Hammann (2005) and Matoti & Shumba (2005) underscore the significance of self-efficacy, or students' beliefs about their own ability to write effectively. They argue that, while students' level of confidence in this regard does not have a direct impact on their skill, it does affect the effort they are willing to give to a writing task. These views are supported by Ruegg (2014), who found that instructor feedback on writing assignments increased the self-efficacy of university-level EFL students, as well as their writing achievement. Furthermore, self-awareness and the ability to objectively evaluate one's own progress (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994) contribute in large part to the outcome of a written assignment; and as Hammann (2005) argues, knowledge of writing strategies, as well as self-regulation (e.g., choosing to begin and carry through the writing process, goal setting, etc.), can be determining factors in "how [students] plan their writing, including content generation, use of library sources, and even choosing to plan at all" (p. 17). Rowe (2011) points out that lack of feedback on written assignments and feeling that instructors are not interested in their development can contribute significantly to writing anxiety in students, resulting in a lack of motivation for engaging in a given writing assignment.

### **The Challenges of Academic Writing in the Non-Native English-Speaking Context**

While academic writing can present a significant challenge under any circumstances, the issue is compounded for Ph.D. students attending the growing number of graduate programs in universities in non-native English speaking (NNES) countries that require doctoral dissertations to be written in English (Buckingham, 2008; Jenkins, Jordan, & O'Weiland, 1993; Johns & Swales, 2002; Paltridge, 1997). Furthermore, academics at the graduate level and beyond are typically under significant pressure to publish their research in internationally indexed journals, which have shown an increasing tendency to adopt English-only publishing policies (Mišak, Marušić, & Marušić, 2005).

Many of the problems faced by students when attempting to communicate complex ideas in a language other than their mother tongue are predictable. For instance, as Flowerdew (1999) points out, NNES students often express considerable difficulties with respect to academic writing in English. Having a limited vocabulary, needing a longer time to write, and being restricted to a simplistic writing style can impair students' ability to express themselves adequately and may have a negative effect on their self-efficacy. Likewise, Matoti and Shumba's (2011) survey of a group of NNES graduate students revealed that they lacked confidence in their academic writing ability due to limited familiarity with terminology, referencing, and understanding how to organize ideas according to the formalized structure that

is typically required by English-language academic journals. Focusing on these issues, Connor (2002) stresses that, while writing requirements for journals typically lean heavily toward English norms in terms of clarity, linearity, and straightforward language, NNES writers are often accustomed to substantially different patterns of rhetoric. For instance, in contrast to Kaplan's (1966) diagram of the linear argument in English-language texts, Arabic writing has been described as demonstrating a tendency to address a single point from several different angles (Hatim, 1997). Additionally, the Arabic rhetorical style holds that the manner of presenting an argument is at the basis of its validity, and repetition and paraphrasing may be considered as a means of establishing legitimacy (Koch, 1983), as opposed to the English approach of using concrete evidence and the work of other scholars to support a claim. Furthermore, Kong (1998) found that Japanese and Chinese writing tends to exhibit a variety of politeness and face-saving moves, and thus may have the appearance of lacking directness when viewed through a lens of English-based writing standards. As such, students who are non-native speakers of English may be faced with considerable conceptual barriers to overcome due to the nature of academic writing, separate from problems concerning the mechanics of writing and difficulties related to developing a complex text in a foreign language.

In the case of Turkey, which served as a setting for the present study, Buckingham (2008) underscores many of the problems described here with respect to academic writing, particularly in the case of doctoral students, who are bound by an "increasing imperative" (p. 1) to demonstrate proficiency in English in addition to producing innovative work in their fields. In this respect, Alagözlü (2007) associates the writing difficulties experienced by many Turkish students with a cultural tendency to rely on course materials, including course books, reference books, teacher input, and the Internet. She contends that Turkish learners have not developed the ability to judge and question, as the national educational system does little to promote these skills, and Turkish values such as authority, social harmony, and respect for teachers tend to discourage students at all levels from expressing individuality and independent thinking in their writing. Similarly, Şaraplı (2013) explains that discomfort with critical thinking, lack of basic research skills, low levels of English language proficiency, and lack of familiarity with academic writing norms seriously impair the ability of Turkish students at the higher education level to produce quality research texts. Geçikli (2013) and Çandarlı (2012) likewise contend that Turkish Ph.D. students exhibit difficulties adapting to the academic writing genre. In this respect, Geçikli (2013) raises the concern that Turkish academics may be at a substantial disadvantage when it comes to publishing their research; and they may thus be less likely to reach a desired level of success in their academic careers.

### **Academic Writing Support for Graduate Students**

A variety of measures may be employed to assist graduate students in developing the skills they need to become effective writers. Writing clinics, specialized courses focused on academic writing, peer writing groups, and teacher-student writing conferences (Maliborska & You, 2016) have all been implemented in a wide range of academic contexts. As Can and Walker (2011) note, the majority of these writing support systems emphasize providing students with feedback on their writing. Various types of instructor feedback may be offered, ranging from written comments and corrections to teacher-student conferencing (Hyland, 2003; Keh, 1990). Feedback typically comprises the efforts of the instructor in adding comments to a text in the form of written suggestions or corrections; cover sheets or rubrics; tape-recorded comments; and electronic feedback (Hyland, 2003). In addition, teacher-student conferencing involves a

one-on-one interaction in which the student and instructor may engage in a detailed discussion of a text produced by the student (Hyland, 2003). This communicative context facilitates clarification of meaning and the avoidance of misunderstandings, as well as enabling the teacher to reach students with different cultural, educational, and writing needs. With these issues in mind, Rowe (2011) enumerates seven aspects of teacher feedback that are viewed as important by learners:

1. Feedback as a guide – teacher feedback serves to guide students in their development, informing them about what they are doing well and what they need to improve.
2. Feedback as a learning tool – teacher feedback assists students in comprehending the teaching material.
3. Feedback as a means of academic interaction –students view feedback as a bridge between themselves and the teacher, facilitating interaction and ultimately increasing students’ participation and learning.
4. Feedback as a form of encouragement – students feel that instructor responses increase their motivation and encourage them to do better, particularly when their strengths are emphasized.
5. Feedback as an emotional regulator – students indicate that teacher feedback tends to increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as reducing negative feelings such as anxiety, confusion, fear, and uncertainty.
6. Feedback as an expression of respect – students perceive the responses of their teachers as an indication of respect for their work.
7. Feedback as an expression of caring – students view the responses of their teachers as a sign of caring about their progress. (p. 349)

An overall analysis of these characteristics reveals that academic development is fostered by the encouragement, guidance, reduction of anxiety, and intellectual interaction afforded by instructor feedback, which, when successfully applied, enhances both the cognitive and social development of learners (Rowe, 2011) and contributes to their self-efficacy and positive attitudes toward academic writing. These factors are indicated by Van de Poel and Gasiorek (2012) as substantially affecting students’ views of themselves as competent writers, and improving the quality of their written production.

### **The Process-based Approach to Feedback in Academic Writing**

The use of a process-oriented approach to providing feedback has been frequently upheld as an important tool for developing advanced writing skills in an academic context. For instance, Karatay’s (2011) experimental study demonstrated a positive causal relationship between process writing and improved writing skills, as well as more positive attitudes toward writing. He concluded that writing is an improvable skill, rather than an innate ability, and that the process-oriented writing model’s emphasis on feedback and step-by-step development enhances students’ cognitive awareness throughout the writing process. These results were supported by Çakır (2003), as well as Lam (2015), who found that a process writing assignment carried out over a 15-week period with second-year university students contributed to their self-regulation in terms of planning, organization, and problem-solving ability.

Although there is no standardized model for the process-oriented approach, four basic stages can generally be identified, namely:

1. **Prewriting**, in which students conceptualize their topics, take notes and collect data,
2. **Drafting**, which involves structuring their ideas and creating an initial composition,
3. **Revising**, or re-working the content and organization based on feedback from peers or instructors, and
4. **Editing**, or making final corrections concerning the form, layout and mechanics of the writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hyland, 2003).

As Hyland (2003) points out, this model is non-linear, as the writer may revisit any of these phases to make revisions and reinforce the text. Ferris (2003) draws attention to the role of feedback in process writing, noting that while other approaches to writing typically treat feedback as a one-time evaluation performed by the instructor at the conclusion of a writing task, the process-based approach is characterized by ongoing feedback and support, which is seen as meeting both the instructional and affective needs of learners (Rowe, 2011).

**Students' views concerning process writing.** In exploring the efficacy of process writing in higher education, numerous researchers have focused on the experiences of learners, taking their views on instructor feedback into consideration (Beaumont, O'Doherty, & Shannon, 2011; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Can & Walker, 2011; Rowe, 2011). For instance, in a study conducted with graduate students in an educational leadership program, Caffarella and Barnett (2000) found that receiving feedback resulted in improved performance on academic writing tasks. In particular, personalized, face-to-face, and iterative or ongoing feedback and guidance played a key role in helping participants to feel more confident about their scholarly efforts. The importance given to one-on-one feedback sessions was echoed by Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon (2011), who found that university undergraduates valued feedback that was timely, detailed, open to discussion, and allowed for interaction with teachers. They also tended to see quality feedback as a continuous dialogue, rather than as a single event, as with Nicol (2010).

Flowerdew (1999) further reinforced this perception, noting that Chinese undergraduates at a Hong Kong university “preferred one-on-one supervision, where advice could be sought on specific problems related to a given research paper” (p. 259), when reporting their research in English. Can and Walker (2011) demonstrated that doctoral students generally valued feedback that was suggestive, rather than directive, and they preferred clear, direct, and elaborative feedback regarding the content and arguments, organization, and mechanical aspect of their papers. Their participants also attached importance to both positive and negative comments, although they favored the former. In sum, feedback was viewed by their respondents “as a preliminary step in achieving their goal of academic recognition through publication” (p. 527).

In the application of feedback, Hyland (2003) and Hyland and Hyland (2001) recommend that teachers combine praise, criticism, and suggestion, as praise serves to increase learners' motivation, while criticism and suggestions provide direction for improvement. Dweck (2007) supports this idea, noting that praise may prompt learners to want to perform better, while constructive criticism may stimulate them to learn. However, Hyland (2003) calls attention to the interpersonal aspect of written feedback, noting that criticism that is provided in negatively may undermine learners' confidence and become a demotivating factor. Therefore, using

mitigation strategies to soften criticism is advised (Treglia, 2008). In addition, Hyland and Hyland (2001) caution that teachers should be critical of their own responses and ensure that their comments are clear enough to be accurately understood; while Bitchener and Knoch (2009) stress that teachers should be clear about which aspects of students' writing will be emphasized in the feedback process, how often feedback will be given, and what is expected of students in responding to the feedback.

As the existing research indicates, the process writing approach has been well-supported as leading not only to improved quality of academic writing but also to more positive attitudes toward writing and greater self-efficacy. However, in the Turkish context, there is little evidence in the literature that this approach is widely applied. A small number of studies (e.g., Çakır, 2003; Karatay, 2011) have been carried out in Turkey in this respect; however, these researchers focused on undergraduate students enrolled in EFL classes, rather than advanced students who are required to produce scholarly writing in English. As such, given the clear need for graduate-level students to develop advanced writing skills, more attention is needed in the Turkish context on the impact of instructor feedback on NNES masters or doctoral level students' experiences with academic writing. The current study attempts to address this gap in the research by examining the attitudes of doctoral students engaged in a research writing project toward a process-writing approach.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In Turkey, as previously noted, there is enormous pressure for academics to publish their research in English-speaking journals, and those who underperform in this respect find themselves at a great disadvantage in their careers. Masters and Ph.D students are likewise expected to conduct research and report on their findings in English, and in many instances, they are also required to present their masters theses and doctoral dissertations in the English language. On the other hand, English language education in Turkey has long been criticized as failing to prepare learners with an adequate level of proficiency, especially when it comes to producing complex written texts (Geçikli, 2013). This study involved a doctoral-level course at a Turkish university that required students to carry out a research project and to prepare a research report in English that was to be submitted to an academic journal for peer review and publication. Taking the previously discussed issues into account, the author, as the course instructor, recognized that the students enrolled in the course might not be fully prepared for this undertaking, undermining their chances of performing well on the assignment. Therefore, as a means to support them in terms of the course itself, and with the idea in mind that their future academic careers would depend on them being well-prepared in terms of the skills and knowledge involved in academic research and writing; to feel confident in their English-language writing ability; and to have a positive attitude toward the writing aspect of an academic career; the researcher decided to adopt a process-oriented approach to the research and writing project. Furthermore, in order to determine whether the students found this approach to be effective, he designed the current study as an action research project as a means to answer the following questions:

1. What were the views of the native Turkish-speaking Ph.D. students of the feedback they received on their writing?
2. Did the students perceive the instructive process of receiving feedback and revising their work as impacting their writing ability? And if so, how?

3. How did the students respond to the instructor's approach to giving instructive feedback on their writing?

In doing so, the instructor aimed to develop a better understanding of the impact of process writing on NNES graduate students in terms of their perception of themselves as writers and their confidence in their writing ability. In addition, he hoped to better understand the aspects of the feedback that were helpful, as well as those that were not well-received by the students, as a means to tailor his approach to working with students in future courses involving a writing component.

## **Research Methods**

### **Design**

As the focus of this study concerned the manner in which a group of Turkish graduate students perceived the various aspects of process writing, a qualitative approach was adopted in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their views (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Within this framework, the researcher opted to employ an action research model, as academic inquiry conducted within the context of an authentic instructional environment may provide critical information concerning practical and pedagogical issues that are related to teaching and learning (Stremmel, 2007).

### **Participants and Context of the Study**

The participants were five doctoral-level students enrolled in a course entitled "Current Issues in Foreign Language Education," which was offered through the Ph.D. program in English Language and Literature at a prominent university in northeastern Turkey. The course was designed to allow doctoral students to explore some of the most significant current issues in language education, as well as to offer them the opportunity to identify questions that were of particular interest to them within the field and to investigate them in detail. Therefore, in addition to weekly classroom and online discussions of the course topics, the participants were required to research a current issue pertaining to language education and to write a research paper in English, presenting an introduction to the problem, a discussion of the related literature, a description of the methodology they used to investigate the problem, a discussion of the results, and a well-reasoned conclusion based on their findings. The students were then required to present their findings to the class and to submit a completed research paper to an academic journal. All the participants' names were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity and to ensure anonymity.

As with Mišak, Marušić, and Marušić (2005), the instructor drew from the understanding that students learn most effectively when they actively participate in their own construction of knowledge, with the teacher serving as a facilitator and guide. Furthermore, although the students had already been exposed to academic writing in the course of their undergraduate and graduate work, the researcher was aware of the difficulties the students might face in the research and writing process. Accordingly, the project was framed as a process writing assignment designed to scaffold the development of the participants' writing skills. The writing was carried out in stages, with students submitting each completed section to the course instructor by a specified due date. The instructor reviewed the drafts and provided detailed

feedback throughout each phase of the process, offering suggestions and comments concerning the rationale and content of the papers, as well as the quality and style of the writing and any grammatical and syntactical issues that needed to be addressed. The students then revised their work based on the feedback, submitting the revisions to be reviewed along with the new material they added as they moved forward with the research. In addition to the written feedback, the students met with the instructor periodically for one-on-one meetings concerning the progress of their research, as suggested by Hyland (2003).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Researchers such as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Hatch (2002) point to interviews as one of the most useful data collection tools in qualitative research, as they permit the investigator to interrogate the experiences of the participants in detail. On the other hand, because the researcher, in this case, was also the course instructor, it was conceivable that the participants might feel constrained to modify their responses in favor of the instructor during a face-to-face interview. Therefore, the researcher felt that open-ended surveys, in which the participants could formulate their responses without addressing the course instructor in person, might result in more straightforward answers, yet still provide a holistic, in-depth view of their perspectives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Accordingly, the respondents were given a series of open-ended survey questions (see [Appendix A](#)) that were designed to elicit their views concerning the impact of process writing on their self-efficacy, self-awareness, and writing skills. The questions were designed by the researcher and reviewed for content by a colleague who was experienced in qualitative research and who was not directly involved with the study.

To ensure the integrity of the data, the surveys were conducted at the end of the semester, after the grades for the course had been finalized and submitted. The students were informed of the purpose of the study and asked to complete the surveys on a voluntary basis. They were assured that participation was strictly optional and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, as the students belonged to a different academic department than the instructor, and the course was taught as a one-time offering, there was no expectation that their participation or responses could impact their academic standing. Of the six students enrolled in the class, five agreed to participate. Their written consent was obtained for use of the interview data within the scope of the project. The participants audio- or video-recorded their answers in English, as this was assumed to create less of a burden than providing written responses, and then transmitted them to the course instructor upon completion.

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, and content analysis was carried out on the data. An initial reading of the transcripts was conducted to establish familiarity with the data and to identify the emergent themes, and the researcher established a coding scheme to classify the data based on these themes. The researcher then coded the students' responses, and a colleague with experience in qualitative research was asked to evaluate the responses independently according to the same coding scheme (Stemler, 2001). Inter-rater agreement was calculated at 96%. An inventory of the response types, along with statements from the interviews which exemplify them, is provided in [Appendix B](#).



## Results and Discussion

The results of the content analysis are presented in narrative form in order to provide a characterization of the participants' reflections on the instructor's feedback.

### Perceptions Concerning the Development of Writing Skills

The interview results revealed that the participants believed that the process of drafting, reviewing feedback from the instructor, and revising their work had contributed significantly to their writing ability, reinforcing the assertions of researchers such as Caffarella and Barnett (2000), Karatay (2011) and Çakır (2003) that process writing positively affected students' cognitive development and writing skills.

**Development of learners' ability to evaluate their own work.** The respondents overwhelmingly expressed that the iterative process of writing, receiving feedback, and responding to teacher comments and suggestions was a powerful formative tool that allowed them to view their own writing from a critical perspective and to make substantial improvements to their work. Dilek explained her experience concerning the written feedback provided by the course instructor:

*In our case, the viewpoint of the instructor helped me a lot, because his feedback served as a framework for me. According to his detailed feedback, I corrected my mistakes, I tried to strengthen my papers, and the process was really beneficial for me ... to be honest, I do not think that I would have been as successful if I had drafted and edited my papers on my own, because if I had to do so, I think instead of strengthening my paper, I would have tried to justify my writing.*

The other students mainly echoed this perception. For instance, Ender expressed that while he occasionally felt intimidated about having the instructor read his work, "the feedback I was given assisted my academic writing ... So, although it seems demotivating, I mean being corrected all the time, the feedback with corrections and explanations is the best way to create a path for learners," a response that echoes the findings of Ruegg (2014).

Furthermore, in addition to the written feedback, Kemal noted that he found the face-to-face sessions with the instructor to be particularly useful to the development of his writing. As he explained, "it is difficult for students to check whether they are on the right track unless there is such negotiation of ideas with somebody who is in a superior position." This perspective is echoed by Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon (2009), who point to the opportunity for in-depth discussion between instructors and students as being especially beneficial to the development of sound writing skills. Because self-regulation is viewed as having a significant impact in academic writing (Hammann, 2005; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994); it can be argued that, in this instance, process writing was an effective means for developing students' writing ability.

**Development of specific writing skills.** Aside from developing their self-awareness concerning their writing, the participants revealed that process writing had contributed to specific aspects of their understanding concerning grammar, standards for academic writing, and use of language, which are frequently seen as detracting from the ability of NNES learners to write effectively (Hammann, 2005; Matoti & Shumba, 2011; Şaraplı, 2013; Trzeciak & Mackay, 1994). In this respect, their perceptions agreed with the assertion of Can and Walker

(2011) that doctoral students generally appreciate feedback that is direct and formative. Kemal, for instance, became more cognizant of grammatical errors in his writing, noting that “I learnt that I make simple grammar mistakes when I remember the missing 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s and articles such as a/an/the. Therefore, after writing, I should check for each point one by one.” Furthermore, according to Dilek:

*I can say that this process definitely promoted not only my writing, but also my learning. I mean, today I know better that I should use clear language as much as possible, [and] ... it should be appropriate for the target audience. Also, I should be careful about the APA style, and I should be careful about the ethics of research.*

On the other hand, in support of Bitchener and Knoch’s (2009) emphasis on the importance of making expectations clear to students at the beginning of the writing process, Hakan expressed a degree of frustration about the nature of the feedback, noting that he often did not understand what he was being asked to do:

*Sometimes, I did not know how to do what I was required to in the feedback, and it took me a long time to understand what I was supposed to do. For example, you [the instructor] asked me to write transition statements between citations, but I didn’t know how to write them. We could have been instructed on academic writing before the process writing during the class in order to make the feedback more constructive.*

In this instance, the student referred to the literature review portion of his paper, in which he had presented a series of studies related to his topic in the form of a list, without analysis of the research in question or discussion of how it informed his own work. The instructor had responded to this issue by suggesting that he add some discussion of the implications of the existing research, using transitional language to create a logical flow of ideas. Furthermore, as Hakan also noted, “I didn’t know anything about rationale of a study, citation, methodology, and theoretical background.” As such, his lack of familiarity with the basic expectations for academic writing impaired not only his ability to formulate his ideas effectively (Matoti & Shumba, 2011) but also his understanding of the instructor’s comments.

### **The Impact of Feedback on Time Management**

Aside from the issues relating directly to their writing ability, several of the participants pointed to the effects of receiving and responding to feedback on their ability to manage their time, revealing that they saw the feedback as impacting their self-regulatory ability (Hammann, 2005; Matoti and Shumba, 2011; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). In this case, their attitudes were somewhat divided; on the one hand, Taner explained that:

*If someone gives you feedback on a regular basis ... it gives you a pace to achieve something. Otherwise, for example, if the teacher had assigned us an issue paper, and at the end of the semester he had asked us to deliver our papers, I would definitely think that they would absolutely be different ... because we would always think that “ohh, we have time, we’ll do this tomorrow, the day after tomorrow or next week.”*

Dilek also indicated that in terms of written feedback, “the process helped me to manage my time. If there had not been an external authority, then I would have postponed my writing.” On the other hand, in her view, the necessity of meeting with the instructor outside of the scheduled class period was an unwelcome drain on her time, as supported by Keh’s (1990) assertion that

students sometimes find conferencing to be overly time-consuming. As she explained, “actually, I did not like the conferencing in our situation, not because of the instructor, but because of the physical conditions [the meetings were sometimes held in another instructor’s classroom] and the time constraints.” Hakan agreed with this view, noting that “the main disadvantage of face to face meetings is that they require more time. Instead of wasting time ... that time could be used more effectively with written feedback.”

### **Plans to Use Process Writing in Their Own Teaching Practices**

While the majority of the participants’ remarks pertained to the academic and affective issues related to process writing and instructor feedback, all of the students also commented on their plans to apply it in their own practice; in fact, some of them had already begun using the technique in their teaching. Hakan, for instance, reported that:

*To be honest, I have never given such feedback to my students in my courses [before now]. What I did was to underline their errors on their papers and then give them back to the students to correct their own mistakes. But since it is faster and more effective, from now on I will use it [process writing] in my courses.*

Ender agreed, stating that “I will try to implement this kind of process writing in the future if I have enough time to cope with it,” while Kemal expressed the belief that “this process might be applicable for all learners, if the instructors can structure the process well.” Dilek also expressed her intention to continue using process writing in her own teaching, as she had done in two courses already, because:

*You can easily see the development in the writing abilities of your students, and this makes you happy. In addition, it also makes the students happy, because when they look at their first draft, and then they look at their final draft, they can see the huge difference between them, and they smile and say “Wow, I have developed a lot.”*

In this respect, the participants revealed that they had typically used a more traditional approach with their own students, pointing out errors and expecting students to correct them, rather than providing guidance or room for dialog – an issue that Nicol (2010) points out as diminishing learners’ motivation for a writing task. However, once the participants attempted the process writing approach in their teaching, they saw positive results in the quality of writing, as well as in their students’ awareness of their progress. As such, they reported that they planned to continue using process writing in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The practice of process writing — providing detailed written and/or face-to-face feedback throughout the stages of planning, drafting, and editing a text — is not new. However, this technique is underutilized in the Turkish higher education system, and little research has been conducted in this regard. Thus, an exploration of the issues related to its application in Turkey, as well as in similar educational contexts, is still relevant. In the present study, the results are limited in terms of the small sample size and the narrow context. There is a degree of possibility that the participants’ responses were impacted by the subject discourse – i.e., they were reflecting what they had been taught about process writing, rather than relating their own impressions, in formulating some of their answers or the instructor-student relationship –

wherein the participants may have preferred to show favor for the instructor in the interviews, rather than to offer criticism or dissatisfaction.

However, based on the ideas expressed by the participants, it is possible to conclude that process writing was generally perceived as beneficial in this case, and that it had a positive effect on their view of academic writing. Overall, they expressed that they found the experience to be positive and that their knowledge of academic writing had been improved. In addition, they were able to observe progress in their own skills and reported being more satisfied with the outcome of their papers than they believe they would have been if they had completed them without ongoing instructor feedback. Furthermore, several of the participants valued the process writing technique to the extent that they were planning to use it with their own students in the future.

While the results of this study reinforce the current understanding of the subject to a great degree, they also uphold the ongoing concern that even experienced graduate students in Turkey lack the writing skills that will be critical to their advancement in their academic careers. With this in mind, looking at the aspects of the process writing approach that the participants found to be more or less useful, the researcher can offer the following suggestions for instructors in contexts where students do not have a strong background in the standards of academic writing:

1. In terms of students' ability to evaluate their own work, provide a framework for developing this skill by not only pointing out errors or weaknesses but also giving clear guidance for revision. Face-to-face meetings may be especially beneficial to supplement written feedback by offering room for dialog and clarification.
2. Concerning time management, support students in self-organization by setting goals, and deadlines and holding scheduled in-person meetings to keep them accountable.
3. Regarding writing skills, recognize that graduate-level students may require support in the mechanics of English-language writing, such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, word choice, transitional language and so on. In this sense, specific corrections may be included, rather than simply pointing out errors or offering loose suggestions (e.g., "Explain how these two ideas are connected," rather than "use transitional language."). Students may also require instruction in the basic elements of an academic paper (introduction, literature review, methodology, and so on), as well as citing the work of others and ethical standards in writing.

As a final note, although individual projects involving process writing, such as the assignment featured in this study, may be of some benefit, many students likely need more support than can be provided within a single course. Therefore, ongoing work is needed to identify areas where graduate students are underserved in terms of course offerings and additional writing resources that are available in their programs. Moreover, while the current study focused on the participants' reactions in terms of the skills-based aspects of process writing, students' affective responses regarding dialog between instructors and students, their level of motivation, and other emotional factors are also important; as such, further research is needed to focus on such considerations.

## About the Author

**Servet Çelik** is an associate professor and head of the Department of Foreign Language Education at Trabzon University, Turkey. He holds a bachelor's degree in ELT from Gazi University, Turkey; a master of education degree in TESOL from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, and a doctoral degree in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education from Indiana University-Bloomington, USA. Some of his research interests include teaching for diversity, intercultural awareness, the issues surrounding multilingualism and multiculturalism in pluralistic societies, and professional development for language teachers.

## References

- Alagözlü, N. (2007). Critical thinking and voice in EFL writing. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(3), 118-136.
- Alter, C., & Adkins, C. (2006). Assessing student writing proficiency in graduate schools of social work. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 42(2), 337-354. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2006.200404109>
- Beaumont, C., O'Doherty, M., & Shannon, L. (2011). Reconceptualising assessment feedback: A key to improving student learning? *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(6), 671-687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075071003731135>
- Beck, S. (2009). Composition across secondary and post-secondary contexts: Cognitive, textual and social dimensions. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(3), 311-327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640903103710>
- Bitchener, J., & Knoch, U. (2009). The value of a focused approach to written corrective feedback. *ELT Journal*, 63(3), 204-211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn043>
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Buckingham, L. (2008). Development of English academic writing competence by Turkish scholars. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 3, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.28945/47>
- Caffarella, R. S., & Barnett, B. G. (2000). Teaching doctoral students to become scholarly writers: The importance of giving and receiving critiques. *Studies in Higher Education*, 25(1), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/030750700116000>
- Can, G., & Walker, A. (2011). A model for doctoral students' perceptions and attitudes toward written feedback for academic writing. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(5), 508-536. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9204-1>
- Connor, U. (2002). New directions in contrastive rhetoric. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(4), 493-510. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588238>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). SAGE.
- Çakır, Ö. (2003). Yazma öğretiminde süreç yaklaşımına dayalı programın yazılı anlatım becerisini geliştirmedeki rolü: Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi örneği [The role of the

- process approach in teaching writing in developing the written expression skill: The case of the Mersin University Faculty of Education]. *TÖMER Language Journal*, 122, 31-51. <http://www.tomer.ankara.edu.tr/dildergileri/122/31-51.pdf>
- Çandarlı, D. (2012). A cross-cultural investigation of English and Turkish research article abstracts in educational sciences. *Studies about Languages*, 20(2), 12-17. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.20.1770>
- Dweck, C. (2007). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Enginarlar, H. (1993). Student response to teacher feedback in EFL writing. *System*, 21(2), 193-204. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X\(93\)90041-E](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(93)90041-E)
- Ferris, R. D. (2003). *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication* 32(4), 365-387. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/356600>
- Flowerdew, J. (1999). Problems in writing for scholarly publication in English: The case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(3), 243-264. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(99\)80116-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80116-7)
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed). McGraw-Hill.
- Geçikli, M. (2013). A genre-analysis study on the rhetorical organization of English and Turkish PhD theses in the field of English language teaching. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 3(6), 50-58.
- Hammann, L. (2005). Self-regulation in academic writing tasks. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 17(1), 15-26. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c4f3/f310444b5fc18530652ed0d305f958a166b8.pdf>
- Hansen, J. G., & Liu, J. (2005). Guiding principles for effective peer response. *ELT Journal*, 59(1), 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cci004>
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. SUNY Press.
- Hatim, B. (1997). *Communication across cultures: Translation theory and contrastive text linguistics*. Exeter University Press.
- Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10(3), 185-212. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(01\)00038-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(01)00038-8)
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K., & Hyland, F. (2006). Feedback on second language students writing. *Language Teaching*, 39(2), 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003399>
- Jenkins, S., Jordan, M. K., & O'Weiland, P. (1993). The role of writing in graduate engineering education: A survey of faculty beliefs and practices. *English for Specific Purposes*, 12(1), 51-67. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906\(93\)90027-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0889-4906(93)90027-L)

- Johns, A. M., & Swales, J. M. (2002). Literacy and disciplinary practices: Opening and closing perspectives. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 1(1), 13-28. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1475-1585\(02\)00003-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1475-1585(02)00003-6)
- Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16(1-2), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1966.tb00804.x>
- Kahraman, A. (2013). Affective and cognitive effects of coded teacher feedback on FL writing students. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 28(1), 189-201. <http://www.efdergi.hacettepe.edu.tr/yonetim/icerik/makaleler/139-published.pdf>
- Kahraman, A., & Yalvaç, F. (2015). EFL Turkish university students' preferences about teacher feedback and its importance. *Procedia – Behavioral and Social Sciences*, 199, 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.489>
- Karatay, H. (2011). 4+1 planlı yazma ve değerlendirme modelinin öğretmen adaylarının yazılı anlatım tutumlarını ve yazma becerilerini geliştirmeye etkisi [The effect of 4+1 planned writing and evaluation model to develop the attitudes of preservice teachers as to written expression and their writing skills]. *Turkish Studies*, 6(3), 1029-1047. <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423934029.pdf>
- Keh, C. L. (1990). Feedback in the writing process: A model and methods for implementation. *ELT Journal*, 44(4), 294-304. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/44.4.294>
- Koch, B. (1983). Presentation as proof: The language of Arabic rhetoric. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 25(1), 47-60. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30027656>
- Kong, K. C. C. (1998). Are simple business request letters really simple? A comparison of Chinese and English business request letters. *Text*, 18(1), 103-141. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1998.18.1.103>
- Lam, R. (2015). Understanding EFL students' development of self-regulated learning in a process-oriented writing course. *TESOL Journal*, 6(3), 527-553. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.179>
- Larcombe, W., McCosker, A., & O'Loughlin, K. (2007). Supporting education PhD and DED students to become confident academic writers: An evaluation of thesis writers' circles. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 4(1). <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol4/iss1/6>
- Lavelle, E., & Bushrow, K. (2007). Writing approaches of graduate students. *Educational Psychology*, 27(6), 807-822. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410701366001>
- Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007). An array of qualitative analysis tools: A call for data analysis triangulation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4), 557-584. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.22.4.557>
- Maliborska, V., & You, Y. (2016). Writing conferences in a second language writing classroom: Instructor and student perspectives. *TESOL Journal*, 7(4), 874-897. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.249>
- Matoti, S., & Shumba, A. (2011). Assessing the post-writing efficacy of post-graduate students at a university of technology in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 29(2), 109-

118. <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSS/JSS-29-0-000-11-Web/JSS-29-2-000-11-Abst-Pdf/JSS-29-2-109-11-1233-Matoti-S/JSS-29-2-109-11-1233-Matoti-S-Ab.pdf>

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mišak, A., Marušić, M., & Marušić, A. (2005). Manuscript editing as a way of teaching academic writing: Experience from a small scientific journal. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 14*(2), 122-131. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.05.001>

Nicol, D. (2010). From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback processes in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35*(5), 501-517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602931003786559>

Paltridge, B. (1997). Thesis and dissertation writing: Preparing ESL students for research. *English for Specific Purposes, 16*(1), 61-70. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(96\)00028-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(96)00028-2)

Rowe, A. (2011). The personal dimension in teaching: Why students value feedback. *International Journal of Educational Management, 25*(4), 343-360. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541111136630>

Ruegg, R. (2014). The effect of peer and teacher feedback on changes in EFL students' writing self-efficacy. *The Language Learning Journal, 46*(2), 87-102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2014.958190>

Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7*(17), 1-6. <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>

Stremmel, A. J. (2007). The value of teacher research: Nurturing personal and professional growth through inquiry. *Voices of Practitioners, 2*(3), 1-9. <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/Value%20of%20Teacher%20Research.pdf>

Şaraplı, O. (2013). Academic essay writing in Turkish higher education system: Critical thinking or ready-made structure? *International Journal on New Trends in Education and Their Implications, 4*(2), 143-150. <http://www.ijonte.org/FileUpload/ks63207/File/14.sarapli.pdf>

Treglia, M. O. (2008). Feedback on feedback: Exploring student responses to teachers' written commentary. *Journal of Basic Writing, 27*(1), 105-137. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43443857>

Trzeciak, J., & Mackay, S. E. (1994). *Study skills for academic writing*. Prentice Hall.

Van de Poel, K., & Gasiorek, J. (2012). Effects of an efficacy-focused approach to academic writing on students' perceptions of themselves as writers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 11*(4), 294-303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JEAP.2012.07.003>

Zimmerman, B. J., & Bandura, A. (1994). Impact of self-regulatory influences on development of writing proficiency. *American Educational Research Journal, 31*, 845-862. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/00028312031004845>



## Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Do you think that receiving and responding to feedback on a regular basis helped you to develop your writing effectively, or would you have been more successful if you had drafted and edited your paper on your own? Please explain your answer.
2. Concerning the written feedback you received on your paper, what did you find to be most helpful? What was least helpful to you? What do you think could have been done to make the feedback more constructive?
3. Describe your views about conferencing – meeting with the instructor to discuss your paper directly:
4. What do you feel were the advantages/disadvantages of face-to-face meetings with the instructor concerning your issues paper? Please be specific.
5. Did you find this aspect of the process to be more or less productive than receiving written comments on your paper? How so?
6. What did you learn about academic writing as a result of this process? Have you developed any skills that you feel will be useful in your future writing? If so, please describe them.
7. Overall, how did you feel about the process writing approach? How would you describe its impact on your learning experience in this course? Would you choose to implement process writing in your own classroom? Please elaborate on your answers.

[Return to text](#)

---

## Appendix B: Inventory of Response Types

| Response Types                      | No. of comments | Examples  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Awareness of errors/problem areas   | 4               | “I made lots of grammatical mistakes that I had never expected to. Thanks to the feedback, I improved my grammar skill in writing.” (Hakan)       |
| Collaborative nature of the process | 5               | “It is always advantageous to negotiate ideas as it provides us a chance to test our opinions and writing as well.” (Kemal)                       |
| Developing genre Knowledge          | 4               | “When I compare my old writings with the current ones I see that there is a great progress in academic writing as well as APA knowledge.” (Ender) |

|  |           |  |
|--|-----------|--|
| Improved writing skills  | 2         | “I also realized that I was straying off the topic in some paragraphs. So as the professor gave me feedback and I got back to the root again, that was really helpful for me.” (Taner) |
| Instructive nature of the feedback                               | 9         | “Receiving feedback regularly was useful for me. I can say that I have learnt a lot of things which I could not learn myself.” (Hakan)   |
| Intent to use process writing in future instruction              | 3         | “Since it is faster and more effective, from now on I will use it in my courses.” (Hakan)  |
| Relating the assignment to educational / professional experience | 1         | “Based on my early experience, an overall evaluation of papers means little, if any, to the learners.” (Kemal)   |
| Self-monitoring  | 2         | “Since a step by step approach was taken, I had the chance to monitor my work each time with a different perspective.” (Kemal)   |
| Technical knowledge of Microsoft Word tools                      | 4         | “I didn’t know how the word processor’s comment section was working, so it’s really helpful.” (Taner)  |
| Time constraints related to feedback                             | 2         | “One more point, actually; I did not like this conferencing in our situation, not because of the instructor, but because of the physical conditions and the time constraints.” (Dilek) |
| Time management  | 5         | “The process also helped me to manage my time. If there had not been an external authority, then I would have postponed my writing.” (Dilek)   |
| <b>Total:</b>  | <b>41</b> |  |

[Return to text](#)

Copyright rests with authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.