

Comparative Analysis of Feedback Practices and Perspectives in Online Academic Writing Assessments at Two Regional Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

This study addresses the gap in comparative analyses of feedback strategies in online writing assessments at higher education institutions in the Gulf region. Although previous research has examined different facets of online feedback, direct institutional comparisons have been overlooked. This research provides new insights into effective feedback techniques through a comparative study of feedback approaches at the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) in Oman and Qassim University (QU) in Saudi Arabia. The primary aim is to investigate faculty practices and perceptions regarding online feedback, evaluating its effectiveness and impact on student success. By examining how faculty members provide online feedback and its effects on students' achievements, the study seeks to enhance students' academic writing skills and mastery of disciplinary knowledge. The findings contribute to the conversation on effective feedback strategies in contemporary education, offering valuable insights for improving feedback practices, informing faculty development, guiding institutional policies, and enriching the broader literature on online teaching and assessment. The study's conclusions were based on data gathered from 41 respondents and analyzed through quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of online feedback practices and their impact on enhancing EFL students' writing skills.

Keywords: Higher Education, Qassim University, MCBS, Writing Assessment, Online Feedback

1. Introduction

In the dynamic realm of higher education, particularly in the Gulf region, the importance of feedback in academic writing is becoming increasingly recognized. Effective feedback is essential for helping students navigate the challenges of understanding complex texts, which often involve various languages and cognitive processes (Alawad, 2024). This study, focusing on formative online academic writing assessments, explores faculty members' online feedback practices and perspectives at the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) in Oman and Qassim University (QU) in Saudi Arabia. It highlights the key role of feedback in helping Arab EFL students enhance their writing skills through constructive feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) conceptualize feedback as a convergence of information from diverse sources, including educators, peers, literature, personal experiences, family, or self-reflection. This multifaceted feedback sheds light on the strengths and weaknesses of one's work, offering a roadmap for progress and development. It is an essential component of formative assessment that enriches the educational experience. Yusuf (2019) emphasizes feedback as a tool for improving students' writing skills, specifically as a form of assessment. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a significant shift in teaching practices, moving from face-to-face learning to online education. Evidence of this trend is reflected in the fact that just over one-third of all college students in the United States are enrolled in at least one online course, surpassing the overall increase in higher education enrollments. Moreover, the International Council for Open and Distance Education has endorsed this educational demand due to the improved possibilities of open and distance learning, highlighting the necessity for faculty to adjust their feedback techniques. The swift transition to online learning challenges teachers: It is no longer simply transferring traditional classroom teaching methods into a virtual space. On the contrary, the crucial questions revolve around how feedback mechanisms can be effectively utilized in online academic writing assessments. The research conducted across two regional higher education institutions, (MCBS) and (QU), will address this gap by comparing feedback mechanisms to enhance effective student learning in a rapidly evolving online education environment.

2. Literature Review

According to Allen and Seaman (2010), it has been established that online teaching has gained significant popularity in higher education, as many students enroll in these courses. Indeed, this has transformed the entire educational landscape. This global trend is particularly evident in the U.S., where over 30% of higher education students are enrolled in at least one online course. The International Council for Open and Distance Education, as Walsh (2009) notes, predicts that open and distance learning formats will be the mainstay of future transnational higher education.

In academic writing, the efficacy of online courses is increasingly recognized. Kourbani (2017) asserts their importance in enhancing writing skills and fostering student independence. Narciss (2008) highlights the critical role of online feedback in educational settings, revealing students' actual learning and performance levels. Hyland and Hyland (2019) further emphasize assessing ESL/EFL writing through online feedback from various sources.

Recent studies continue to support the effectiveness of online education. For example, their research indicates that self-belief and the ability to foster positive learning experiences are essential components for a student to be involved in online classes, which is vital for their achievement (Alrashidi & Alshammari, 2024). Furthermore, alongside instructional design, Castro and Tumibay (2021) discovered through meta-analysis of online instructions that have been well-prepared come to be of equal value to face-to-face teaching.

Writing instructors at colleges are increasingly adopting digital technology, which aligns with the feedback trends identified by Elola and Oskoz (2017), such as electronic files, chats, wikis, and blogs. This trend illustrates teachers' various goals within the same texts and their assignments to students, including drafts and editing stages (Bates et al., 1993). Online feedback interactions have also benefited from enhanced theoretical frameworks. Picciano (2017) proposed an integrated multimodal online education model that combines behavioral, cognitive, and social constructivist theories to meet the needs of diverse online learners. According to Lipnevich and Panadero (2021), who explored other feedback models, assessment should be formative, and feedback must be provided to facilitate effective learning.

These recent studies and theoretical advancements offer a clearer understanding of online courses concerning feedback in academic writing. They suggest that online education is evolving and can provide valuable learning experiences.

The review of existing literature also examines the challenges that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of resilience and the ability to give timely feedback in education. The use of virtual tools like email, Google Drive, and Dropbox has significantly transformed interactions between students and the learning experience, increasing the relevance of findings by Guasch et al. (2013), Strobl (2015), and Zheng et al. (2015).

Samir and Tabatabaee-Yazdi (2020) indicate that student writing improves significantly with feedback aligned with curriculum goals. Such feedback is reported to enhance learning and raise students' standards. Both Kearns (2012), Baleni (2015), and Gaytan and McEwen (2007) support this perspective.

However, transitioning to online assessment presents challenges. Educators face difficulties meeting deadlines while balancing their various roles of administering assessments and analyzing multiple data sources for feedback (Kearns, 2012). The online writing assessment by Dwiyantri and Suwastini (2021) underscores several of these issues.

Masa'deh et al. (2013) and Tarhini et al. (2013) cite Kanaan et al. (2013) and Holmes & Gardner (2006), who explore the challenges associated with online assessments and feedback compared to face-to-face classes. Durga and Rao (2018) point out that writing is a complex task, mainly when done in a nonnative language, while Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Dolin and Evans (2018) address the accessibility of different types of feedback.

The literature has identified key factors that affect feedback practices in academic writing related to online formats, primarily focusing on feedback from two regional higher education entities. Additionally, the role of online feedback and its implications for enhancing one's academic writing skills have been addressed. As we examine the subsequent relevant literature, it becomes clear that this area needs further Academic research to refine the specific feedback methodologies required for adapting to the demands of digital transformation in education.

2.1 Previous Related Studies

This section of the study examines prior relevant research on feedback in academic writing practices, particularly in online writing tasks. Meihuizen, E. (2019) conducted significant research on formative assessment in academic writing, specifically focusing on online feedback in a teaching-learning environment. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the feedback given to students on writing activities at a university in South Africa. The investigation found that traditional instructor-written comments were still prevalent, but the consideration of computer writing assistance was also noted. The overarching goal was to enhance the learning experience while writing using internet resources. This study was vital as it examined the use of Schrijfhelp Nederland's online writing assistance system. The research conveyed that further development was necessary for Schrijfhelp, particularly in resource creation for Academic Literacy development within the South African context. This formative assessment concept, typically an open system responding to teachers and learners in the writing context, can be a helpful design principle in academic literacy courses and applied linguistics pedagogy. Integrating online feedback support into routine practices is expected to boost the positives while minimizing the negatives. In contrast to the first study, Dhwan's (2020) investigation centered on assessing students' writing skills at a Senior High School (SMA) in Denpasar during the global pandemic. The instructor employed rubric feedback, using formative, summative, and authentic assessments, yet encountered consistent evaluations regarding discourse, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and organization. To address the plagiarism issue, the instructor utilized an online detector, scheduled time for the teaching session, and listed time for lesson preparation and assessment. Further research should consider online examinations for reading, speaking, and listening skills, with particular attention to teacher training in administering such assessments. In their study, 'The Effects of Online Feedback on ESL/EFL Writing,' Dzongkha T., Ren, and Xie (2021) explored the impact of online feedback on writing tasks for individuals learning English as a second or foreign language. Synthesizing findings from 17 primary studies involving 1,568 students, the study indicated that written feedback was effective, demonstrating a positive effect with a Hedges' g

The value was 0.753. Notably, online feedback from teachers and instructors demonstrated a more significant impact, with an effect size of $g = 2.248$, compared to peer feedback online ($g = 0.777$) and automated online feedback ($g = 0.696$). Assignment type and educational achievement also influenced the effect of virtual feedback on the quality of written work. These findings enhance our understanding of the significance of virtual feedback on writing proficiency in English as a second or foreign language and offer valuable insights for virtual writing instruction. The study also identifies areas for further investigation, including considering biographical data and L2 proficiency levels in future research on online feedback in L2 writing. Finally, Delante (2017) examined the effect of written feedback on students' academic writing skills and overall learning. Using Schon's reflection-on-action methodology, the author analyzed written comments on eighty student papers and forty-four feedback responses. The feedback was categorized into two types: form-focused and meaning-focused. Instructive feedback, probing questions, and corrective feedback were more prevalent than affirmation/negation, suggestive feedback, or personal statements. Moreover, form evaluation was emphasized over meaning evaluation. The study underscores the importance of instructors recognizing students' performance when they succeed and providing constructive feedback that identifies areas for improvement. Investigating students' perceptions of praise as feedback and understanding their writing experiences could yield further insights for faculty.

2.2 Literature Gap

This study identifies a gap in the literature by conducting a comparative analysis of feedback strategies and practices in online writing assessments at two higher education institutions in the Gulf region. While ample research on academic feedback exists, direct comparisons between institutions in this context are uncommon. The relevant literature reviewed has addressed broader themes but has not examined this aspect of feedback in higher education institutions across different regions, leaving an unexplored area of research. This study aims to fill that gap. By performing a comparative analysis of feedback management in academic writing assignments at the tertiary level, this research provides new insights into effective types of feedback.

2.3 Contribution to Existing Literature

This study addresses the gap in comparative analyses of feedback strategies used during online writing assessments at higher education institutions in the Gulf region. While much research has focused on online feedback tools, studies on strategies tailored to specific institutions are lacking. This research compares the feedback techniques at the Modern College of Business and Science in Oman and Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. It examines the limitations of online feedback, faculty practices, perceptions, and effectiveness in supporting student success. The investigation emphasizes new feedback strategies that enhance academic writing and bridge learning gaps. Students can deepen their understanding of their disciplines by exploring the impact of various online feedback types. This study also considers faculty views on their feedback strategies and roles in online assessments, contributing to practical feedback discussions in education. The findings can improve feedback practices, staff training, institutional policies, and online learning environments.

2.4 Research Questions

Guided by this framework, the study is driven by the following specific research questions:

1. What feedback practices do faculty members use for academic writing in online assessments at MCBS and QU?
2. How do faculty members at MCBS and QU perceive the role of academic writing feedback in online assessments?

In addressing these research questions, this study aims to identify the characteristics of student feedback practices and investigate their influence on the development of student writing skills. This inquiry goes beyond academic interest; it responds to the growing need to equip students with the essential skills necessary for academic success and their future careers.

The outlined objectives aim to evaluate and enhance current feedback techniques and better prepare students with vital academic writing guidance. They analyze existing practices and develop strategies to improve student retention and proficiency in academic writing.

2.5 Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the feedback practices used by faculty members for academic writing in online assessments at MCBS and QU.
2. To explore and understand the perceptions of faculty members at MCBS and QU about academic writing feedback within online assessments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Respondents

Fifty respondents from the General Education and Foundation departments at MCBS and the English Language and Literature Department at QU were selected using expert sampling methods for the study sample. Most respondents engaged in online academic writing instruction from 2019 to 2022, becoming familiar with the necessary tools.

3.2 Instruments

The primary instrument for this research was a carefully designed questionnaire consisting of 23 items. This questionnaire was organized into three sections. The first section gathered data on the respondents' demographic and professional backgrounds, such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, and current teaching roles. The second section identified and analyzed feedback practices in online writing assessments, focusing on the types of feedback provided, their frequency, and perceived effectiveness. The final section aimed to explore

and understand the respondents' perceptions of feedback, including their attitudes toward feedback, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire included open-ended and Likert scale items, enabling qualitative and quantitative data collection.

3.3 Data Collection

The selected respondents filled out online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. Results indicate that 41 out of 50 questionnaires were completed, yielding an 82% response rate. This adjusts the total number of valid samples for this study to 41. The quantitative data gathered from these 41 online respondents were used to compare both institutions' academic writing feedback practices and perspectives. After collecting the data, it was sorted, coded, and analyzed using analytical and statistical software. The various Likert scales used for data collection were streamlined for clarity, with responses ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The open-ended responses were prepared for qualitative thematic analysis by identifying common themes and trends. This combination provided a more comprehensive view of the collected numerical trends and qualitative insights.

3.4 Research Procedure

After the data was collected and organized, it underwent further processing scrutiny. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range, were calculated for each question to determine the central tendency, dispersion, and shape of the dataset's distribution. A comparative analysis was conducted between the perspectives of the two university respondents for each question to establish patterns, similarities, and differences. Variations in responses were graphically illustrated using bar graphs for more straightforward data analysis. The data provided insights into the open-ended questions and was analyzed thematically. This involved categorizing responses according to their main ideas and assessing their relevance to the study. After this, correlations were performed to explore potential relationships among variables in the dataset, such as teaching experience and views on the feedback provided. Ultimately, the results were contextualized within each section of the analysis framework, facilitating a better understanding of these institutions' bidirectional academic writing feedback practices and scholarly perspectives. These results hold value partly due to the diversity of teachers included. However, given the smaller sample size, one should be cautious in assuming that all teachers in the two institutions will reflect these findings. Nevertheless, they offer a thorough and detailed understanding of the practices and viewpoints of those deeply engaged in online teaching and assessment. This method helped the researcher broaden the scope and depth of the investigation into academic writing feedback practices and perspectives across institutional and departmental boundaries.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents demographic data in Table 1 regarding respondents from the Modern College of Business and Sciences in Oman and Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. It also details feedback practices in online writing assessments in Tables 2 and 3. Then, the faculty's views on academic writing feedback are analyzed through Tables 4 and 5, illustrating the practices and perspectives of respondents in online teaching and assessment. Finally, a thematic analysis is included.

4.1 Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondents

Demographic Information		Qassim University	Modern College of Business & Science
Gender	Male	14	8
	Female	9	10
Academic Rank	Lecturer	7	10
	Assistant Prof.	14	8
	Associate Prof.	2	0
Teaching Experience	1-5 Years	4	4
	6-10 Years	9	6
	11-15 Years	7	3
	More than 15 Years	3	5
Teaching Level	Undergraduate	14	13
	Graduate	3	0
	Both	6	5
Online Teaching Experience	Very Experienced	7	7
	Experienced	11	5
	Neutral	5	5
	Inexperienced	0	1
	Very Inexperienced	0	0

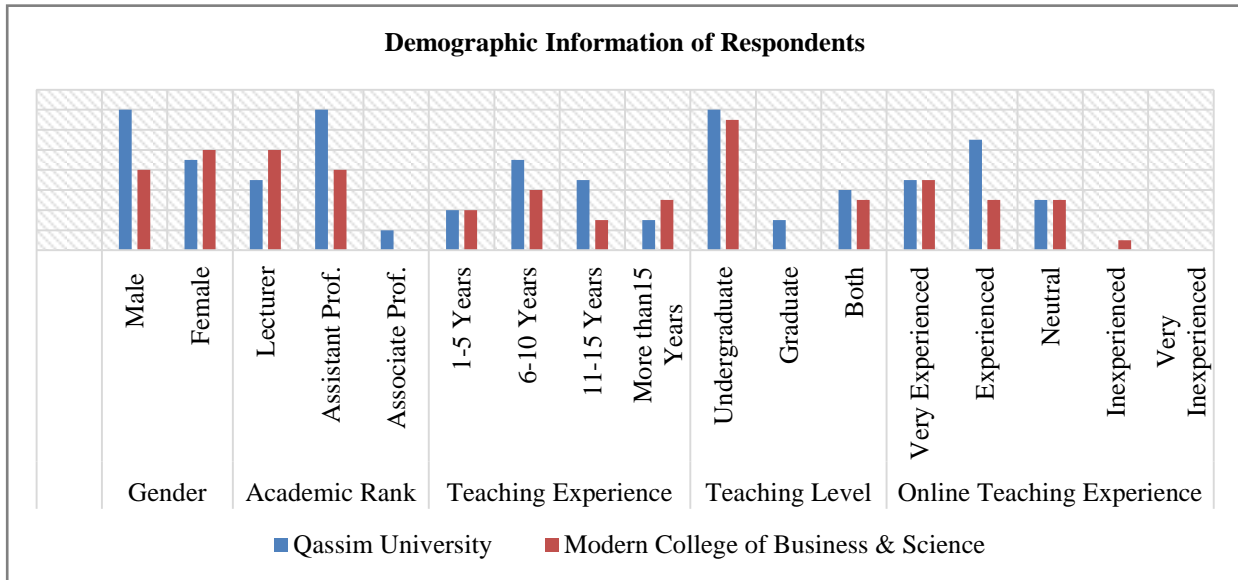


Figure 1. Demographic Information of Respondents

4.1.1 Key Findings Discussion

As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, the gender distribution among respondents from Qassim University and the Modern College of Business & Science shows a relatively balanced representation, featuring a slight male predominance at Qassim University and a slight female predominance at the Modern College of Business & Science. This balance is essential as it ensures diverse perspectives in the feedback process, potentially leading to more comprehensive and inclusive online feedback practices. Most respondents from both institutions are Assistant Professors, followed by Lecturers. The presence of Associate Professors is minimal, with none reported at the Modern College of Business & Science. Discrepancies at the post-level across institutions are often influenced by each institution's priorities and resource allocation (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2012). This suggests that both institutions can promote and enhance the integration of e-learning by leveraging their existing faculty strengths. Respondents have varied teaching experience, with many possessing 6-10 years in the field. This range of experience is beneficial for online feedback as it combines the enthusiasm and innovative approaches of less experienced faculty with the insights and established methods of more seasoned faculty. The presence of faculty with over 15 years of experience, particularly at the Modern College of Business & Science, may contribute to more seasoned and reflective feedback practices. Most respondents teach at the undergraduate level, with a smaller number involved in graduate teaching or both levels. This focus on undergraduate teaching implies that online feedback practices are likely tailored to the needs of undergraduate students, who require more foundational support and guidance in their academic writing. The data indicates that many respondents are either very experienced or moderately experienced in online teaching. According to the International Association of Universities (IAU, 2020), educational institutions worldwide have bolstered their capacity for online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This high level of online teaching experience is essential for effective online feedback, as it suggests familiarity with digital tools and platforms and an understanding of online education's unique challenges and opportunities. The presence of neutral and inexperienced respondents highlights the need for ongoing professional development to ensure all faculty can provide effective online feedback. The demographic data indicates a diverse and experienced group of faculty members well-prepared to offer effective online feedback. The gender balance, the predominance of Assistant Professors, the varied teaching experience, and the substantial online teaching experience all contribute to a robust feedback environment. However, the data also uncovers areas for improvement, such as increasing the representation of Associate Professors and offering additional support for less experienced online instructors. These demographic insights are valuable for understanding and enhancing online feedback practices in higher education.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis of Likert Scale Responses

This section provides a statistical analysis of the Likert scale data collected from the questionnaire. By employing statistical methods, we seek to identify patterns and trends within the data, aiming to understand the respondents' practices and perceptions regarding feedback.

Question 1: *What feedback practices do faculty members use for academic writing in online assessments at the targeted institutions?*

Tables 2 and 3 present and analyze the findings from this study. These results emphasize the various types and nature of feedback strategies employed by faculty members at the two targeted institutions.

Table 2. Feedback Practices: Qassim University Faculty Members' Responses

Questionnaire Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1. I provide detailed feedback on each student's assignment.	3.956522	4	4	1.065076
2. I use a standard rubric to provide feedback.	4.173913	4	4	0.886883
3. I give feedback on the written task's content and structure.	4.434783	4.5	5	0.662371
4. I provide suggestions for improvement in my feedback.	4.304348	4	4	0.76484
5. I provide positive reinforcement in my feedback.	4.347826	4.5	5	0.71406
6. I provide feedback promptly.	4.173913	4	4	0.716822
7. I use technology (e.g., track changes and comment features) to provide feedback.	4.173913	4	4	0.777652
8. I encourage students to seek clarification on the feedback provided.	4.304348	4.5	5	0.926125
9. I revisit and discuss the feedback in subsequent classes.	4.217391	4	4	0.902347

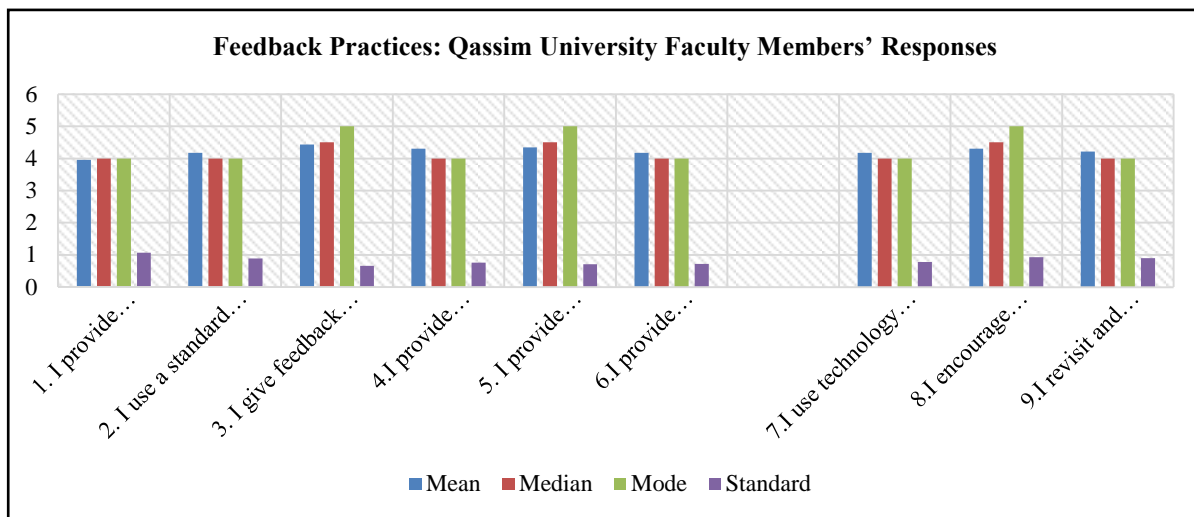


Figure 2. Feedback Practices: Qassim University Faculty Members' Responses

4.2.1 Key Findings Discussion

Analysis of Table 2 and Figure 2 reveals valuable insights into the feedback methods used by Qassim University (QU) faculty in online assessments of academic writing. These findings can be aligned with current literature to deepen our understanding of their implications. The mean rating of $M=3.96$ and a standard deviation ($SD=1.07$) for Item 1 indicate a range of practices among (QU) faculty regarding the detail provided in writing feedback. This variation suggests that while some faculty members deliver thorough feedback, others may not. Effective feedback is essential for enhancing student learning and performance, as comprehensive comments help students identify their strengths and areas needing improvement (Williams, 2024). For Item 2, an average score of $M=4.2$ with $SD=0.89$ points to the common use of standardized rubrics for feedback at (QU). Rubrics are vital in ensuring consistency and transparency in the feedback process. The data suggest that (QU) respondents favor delivering constructive feedback on writing structure and content, reflected in an item mean of $M=4.43$ and $SD=0.66$ for Item 3. As Stanley Williams notes, effective feedback is crucial for enabling further learning activities by offering suitable input on the content and organization of student work (Williams, 2024). For Item 4, the lower mean of $M=4.30$ compared to Item 2, with a standard deviation of $SD=0.76$, indicates that (QU) teachers tend to provide feedback incorporating recommendations or suggestions for improvement. Constructive feedback serves as targeted guidance to facilitate more effective learning; Shrestha (2020) further elaborates on this within the framework of formative feedback. Item 5 presents an average of $M=4.35$ and $SD=0.71$, which leans towards the range indicating 75%-100% positive feedback, whereby corrections or selections are anticipated. Positive feedback is vital for promoting deep learning and aiding students in receiving guidance. For Item 6, the mean of $M=4.18$ and $SD=0.72$ suggests that (QU) promotes a culture of timely feedback. Prompt commentaries are central to improving students' academic performance, as feedback should be timely to allow students to reflect on their work while the material is still relevant (Poulos & Mahony, 2008). Item 7 indicates that (QU) faculty average $M=4.2$ with $SD=0.78$, which implies a more frequent use of technology to provide comments. In Item 8, an average value of $M=4.30$ and $SD=0.93$ suggests that QU respondents encourage students to engage with the feedback provided. Finally, Item 9 shows an average mean of $M=4.22$ with $SD=0.90$, indicating that interaction with feedback from other classes is more common at (QU). This reflects a crucial area for enhancement, as it enables students to leverage feedback received. The data illustrate that faculty at (QU) utilize a variety of feedback mechanisms in the online essay context, including clarifications, technology use, timely responses, standardized rubrics, and constructive insights on both content and structure coupled with suggestions

for improvement and positive reinforcement. The mean scores and standard deviations for each item further highlight how these practices are administered at (QU).

Table 3. Feedback Practices: Modern College of Business & Science Faculty Members' Responses

Questionnaire Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1. I provide detailed feedback on each student's assignment.	4.055556	4	4	0.9983647
2. I use a standard rubric to provide feedback.	3.722222	4	4	0.8947925
3. I give feedback on the written task's content and structure.	4.055556	4	5	1.1099667
4. I provide suggestions for improvement in my feedback.	4.111111	4	5	1.0786096
5. I provide positive reinforcement in my feedback.	3.722222	4	4	0.95828005
6. I provide feedback on time.	3.8333333	4	4	0.85749293
7. I use technology (e.g., track changes and comment features) to provide feedback.	3.666667	4	4	1.0846523
8. I encourage students to seek clarification on the feedback provided.	4.277778	4	5	0.7519039
9. I revisit and discuss the feedback in subsequent classes.	3.666667	4	4	0.9701425

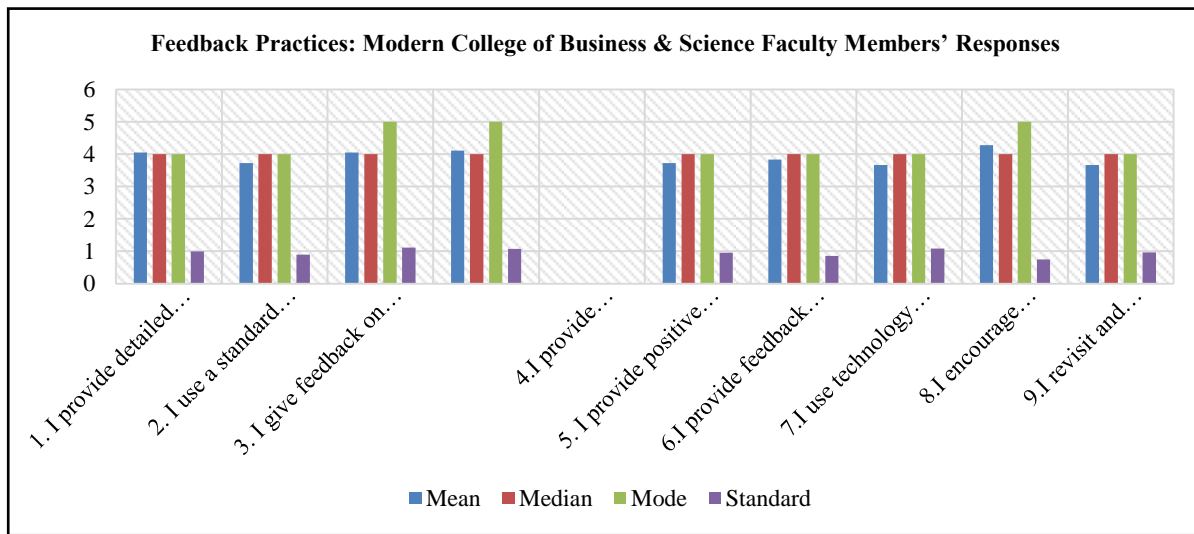


Figure 3. Feedback Practices: Modern College of Business & Science Faculty Members' Responses

4.2.2 Key Findings Discussion

The data presented in Table 3 and Figure 3 reveals essential insights into the online feedback methods that students at the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) employed in academic writing. Regarding Item 1, an average score of approximately M=4.06, with a standard deviation (SD=1.00), suggests that the faculty at MCBS may provide slightly more feedback than their counterparts at Qassim University (QU). This indicates a thoughtful approach to delivering feedback that is crucial for enhancing students' learning and performance. For Item 2, the average socioemotional quotient estimate of M=3.72 combined with an SD=0.89 signifies a limited use of standardized feedback rubrics at MCBS compared to QU. Implementing feedback rubrics is essential for fostering consistency and accountability in feedback, as highlighted by the University of Michigan's best practices for effective online feedback. Concerning Item 3, an average rating of M=4.06 and an SD=1.11 illustrate that the faculty at MCBS also prioritize content and structure in their feedback, though there is marked variability in responses compared to QU. For Item 4, an average rating of M=4.11 and an SD=1.08 indicate that the lecturers at MCBS, similar to those at QU, also provide suggestions for improvement within their feedback. Offering constructive suggestions is a crucial component of formative feedback that enhances students' learning processes. For Item 5, an average rating of M=3.72 and an SD=0.96 reveal that affirmative feedback seems less common at MCBS than at QU. Positive reinforcement is vital for motivating students and increasing their engagement in the feedback process. Regarding Item 6, an average rating of M=3.83, accompanied by an SD=0.86, indicates that prompt feedback is less frequently given at MCBS than at QU. Timely feedback is essential for student learning, facilitating improvement while the material is still relevant (Poulos & Mahony, 2008). For Item 7, an average rating of M=3.67 and an SD=1.08 suggest that MCBS utilizes less technology to provide feedback than QU. In Item 8, the average rating of M=4.28 and an SD=0.75 imply that faculty at MCBS encourage students to seek clarification regarding feedback, showing less variability in responses than QU. Promoting dialogue about feedback significantly enhances students' understanding and application of it. Lastly, for Item 9, an average rating of M=3.67 and an SD=0.97 indicate that revisiting and discussing feedback in subsequent classes is less frequently practiced at MCBS than at QU. This practice is instrumental in supporting continuous learning and improvement, allowing students to reflect on and act upon the feedback received. The data suggest that the faculty at MCBS employ various feedback techniques

for online academic writing assessments; however, these techniques may not be as diverse or comprehensive as those observed at QU. The mean scores and standard deviations for each item provide a thorough perspective on these feedback methodologies at MCBS.

Based on the statistics provided above, which focus on feedback practices, the descriptive analysis of the collected responses indicates that respondents from both (QU) and MCBS regard feedback as essential for EFL students' learning and believe in its effectiveness in online writing assessments. However, notable differences emerge. Respondents from (QU) exhibit higher mean scores for most practices, suggesting these practices may be more common at (QU). For instance, the teachers from (QU) who responded highlighted the use of a standard rubric (with a mean score of M=4.17) and the provision of feedback on content and structure (with a mean score of M=4.43). Timely feedback is also more prevalent at (QU), as shown by a higher mean score of M=4.17. Similarly, utilizing technology in feedback is more widespread, with a mean score of M=4.17. In contrast, the respondents' average rating at MCBS is slightly higher at M=4.06 for providing detailed feedback on online writing assignments. However, the average for using standard rubrics and offering timely feedback is lower at MCBS (M=3.72 and M=3.83, respectively) than (QU). Respondents from both institutions encourage students to seek clarification on feedback, but (QU) faculty members have a slightly higher mean score of M=4.30, indicating a stronger emphasis on this practice. These differences, highlighted by the mean scores, reflect each institution's unique contexts and practices, providing valuable insights into the research objective of identifying and analyzing the feedback practices employed by faculty members for academic writing in online assessments at the targeted tertiary institutions.

Question 2: How do faculty members at the targeted institutions perceive academic writing feedback in the context of online assessments?

The findings of this question are presented and analyzed in Tables 4 and 5. These findings highlight the diverse views and understandings of feedback practices from different viewpoints among the respondents at the targeted institutions.

Table 4. Feedback Perceptions: Qassim University Faculty Members' Responses

Questionnaire Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1. I believe that feedback is essential for student learning.	4.6956522	5	5	0.470472
2. I think that online assessments allow for effective feedback.	4.391304	4.5	5	0.656376
3. I feel that students understand and learn from the feedback provided.	4.478261	5	5	0.730477
4. I believe that feedback on academic writing helps improve students' future assignments.	4.347826	4.5	5	0.647281
5. I think providing feedback online is as effective as in person.	3.652174	4	4	0.884652
6. I believe that students use feedback to improve their work	4.26087	4	4	0.6887
7. I believe that the feedback process is a two-way communication.	4.217391	4	4	0.735868
8. the time and effort spent on providing feedback are worthwhile.	4.304348	4	4	0.76484
9. I believe that my feedback helps students think critically and independently.	4.217391	4	4	0.735868

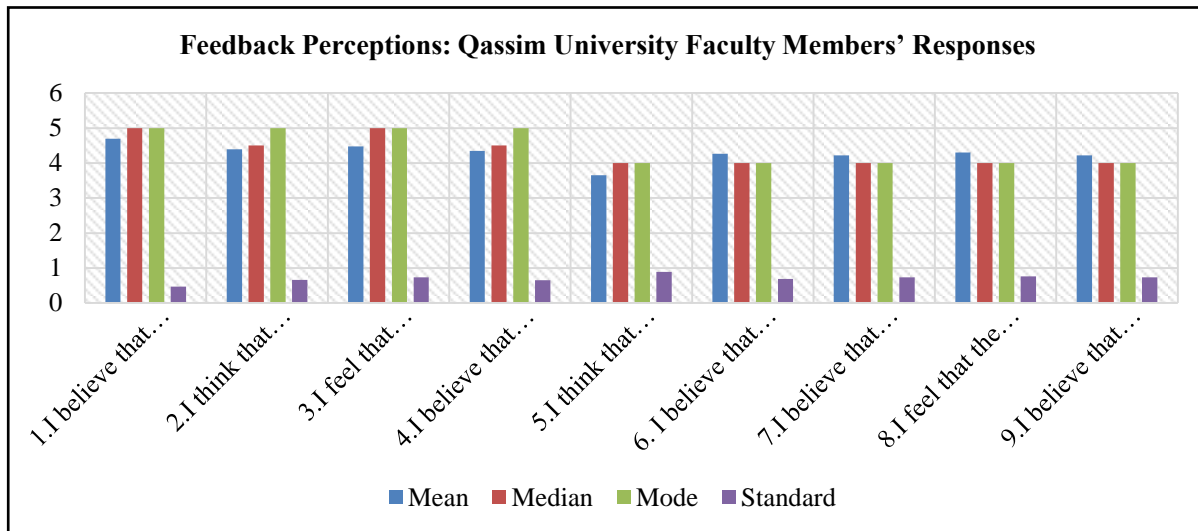


Figure 4. Feedback Perceptions: Qassim University Faculty Members' Responses

4.2.3 Key Findings Discussion

Referring to Table 4 and Figure 4, insights from the faculty at Qassim University (QU) highlight their perceptions of providing feedback on academic writing in online assessments. For Item 1, an average score of M=4.70 and a standard deviation (SD=0.47) reflect a unified stance among QU faculty on the importance of feedback for student learning. This consensus underscores feedback's critical role in enhancing student performance and learning outcomes, as supported by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). For Item 2, an average score of M=4.39 and SD=0.66 shows that QU lecturers consider online assessments conducive to effective feedback. These results align with

the broader literature supporting online platforms, as they facilitate timely student feedback. For Item 3, a mean score of $M=4.48$ and $SD=0.73$ suggests that QU staff members believe their students will master the concepts presented in lectures and can effectively apply the feedback provided. This assumption is vital since student opinions and actions significantly impact the success of feedback. Regarding Item 4, a mean of $M=4.35$ and $SD=0.65$ indicates that QU teachers view feedback on students' academic writing as helpful in enhancing the quality of subsequent work. This aligns with findings from Shrestha (2020), which argue that students' academic writing skills improve through assessment feedback. For Item 5, a mean of $M=3.65$ and $SD=0.88$ reveals that QU lecturers perceive little distinction between the effects of online and face-to-face feedback, indicating trust in the effectiveness of online feedback systems. Concerning Item 6, a mean of $M=4.26$ and $SD=0.69$ suggests that QU respondents believe that students actively utilize teacher feedback rather than merely waiting for it, which is essential for fostering a culture of refinement and aligns with self-regulated learning principles. Item 7 shows a mean score of $M=4.22$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.74$, indicating that QU faculty view the feedback process as discussion oriented. This interactivity is crucial in cultivating a dialogic feedback culture, which research suggests enhances student engagement and learning. Turning to Item 8, with a mean score of $M=4.30$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.76$, the QU faculty feel that the time dedicated to making comments is reasonable. This belief is crucial to maintain appropriate standards regarding feedback quality. Lastly, for Item 9, an average score of $M=4.22$ and an $SD=0.74$ indicates that QU faculty members are confident that their feedback promotes critical and independent thinking among students. The literature supports this confidence, highlighting feedback's role in developing higher-order thinking skills.

Table 5. Feedback Perceptions: Modern College of Business & Science Faculty Members' Responses

Questionnaire Items	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
1. I believe that feedback is essential for student learning.	4.111111	4	5	1.0786096
2. I think that online assessments allow for effective feedback.	3.555556	4	4	0.9217772
3. I feel that students understand and learn from the feedback provided.	3.555556	4	4	0.9835245
4. I believe that feedback on academic writing helps improve students' future assignments.	3.833333	4	4	1.0981268
5. I think providing feedback online is as effective as in person.	3.555556	3.5	3	0.6156988
6. I believe that students use feedback to improve their work	3.611111	4	4	1.0369009
7. I believe that the feedback process is a two-way communication.	3.888889	4	4	0.900254
8. the time and effort spent on providing feedback are worthwhile.	4.111111	4	4	0.8323524
9. I believe that my feedback helps students think critically and independently.	3.777778	4	4	1.1143743

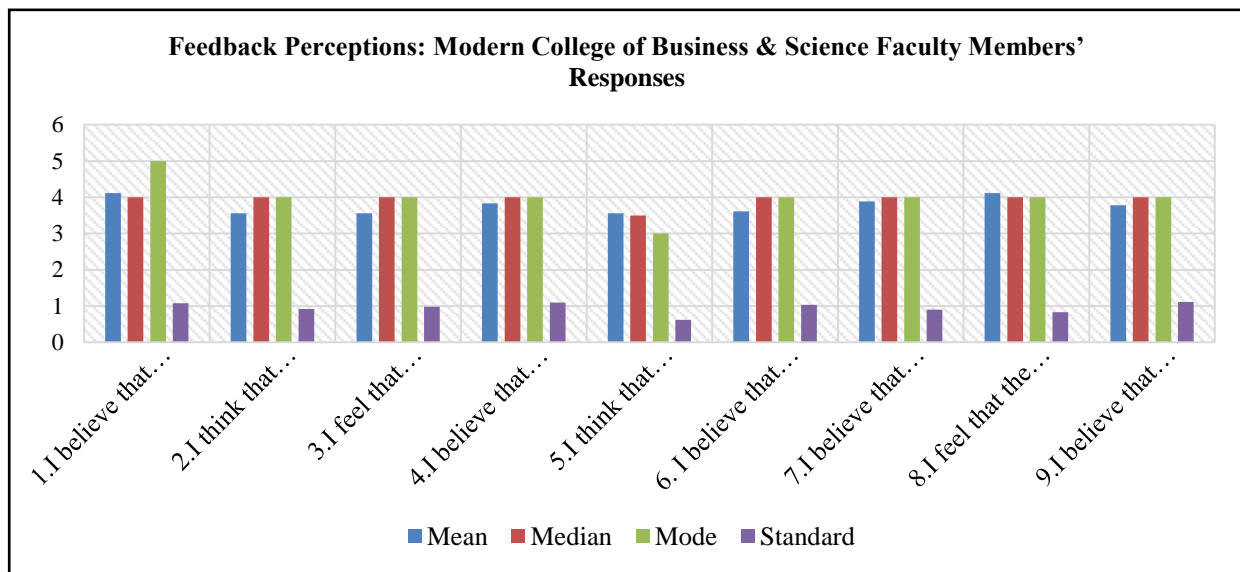


Figure 5. Feedback Perceptions: Modern College of Business & Science Faculty Members' Responses

4.2.4 Key Findings Discussion

In the context of feedback perceptions, Table 5 and Figure 5 illustrate the views of the faculty at MCBS regarding feedback on academic writing in online assessment scenarios. For Item 1, an average score of $M=4.11$ and a standard deviation ($SD=1.08$) indicate consensus among MCBS faculty on the crucial role of feedback in the educational process, though with greater response variability than (QU). Item 2, with a mean value of $M=3.56$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.92$, reveals that MCBS respondents recognize the effectiveness of online assessments for feedback purposes but display a wider range of opinions than (QU). For Item 3, the mean value of $M=3.56$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.98$ suggest that MCBS faculty members believe students learn from feedback, reflecting a broader diversity of views than at Qassim University. Regarding Item 4, a mean value of $M=3.83$ and a standard deviation of $SD=1.10$ imply that MCBS

educators see feedback on academic writing as a catalyst for improving students' subsequent assignments, with more varied responses than (QU). For Item 5, a mean score of $M=3.56$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.62$ indicate the belief among MCBS faculty that online feedback rivals the effectiveness of in-person feedback, despite a broader array of responses compared to (QU). Item 6 suggests that MCBS respondents believe students use feedback to enhance their work, illustrated by a mean score of $M=3.61$ and a standard deviation of $SD=1.04$, signifying a wider variety of responses than those from Qassim University. For Item 7, a mean value of $M=3.89$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.90$ show that MCBS lecturers view the feedback process as dialogic, with greater response variability than (QU). In the case of Item 8, a mean value of $M=4.11$ and a standard deviation of $SD=0.83$ suggest that MCBS faculty members consider the time and effort spent on providing feedback as worthwhile, alongside a broader spectrum of responses compared to Qassim. Finally, Item 9's mean value of $M=3.78$ and a standard deviation of $SD=1.11$ suggest that MCBS educators believe their feedback fosters critical and independent thinking among students, though with a more diverse range of responses than at Qassim University. Analyzing the responses concerning academic writing feedback in online assessments at the two targeted institutions reveals significant contrasts and commonalities. At (QU), respondents unanimously agreed on the essential role of feedback in student learning, reflected in a mean score of $M=4.70$ for Item 1. Furthermore, they concur that online assessments are suitable for providing effective feedback, as shown by a mean score of $M=4.39$ for Item 2. They also believe that students understand and learn from the feedback (Item 3 mean score: $M=4.48$) and that feedback on academic writing aids in improving students' future assignments (Item 4 mean score: $M=4.35$). However, they are somewhat less convinced that providing online feedback is as effective as giving it in person (Item 5 mean score: $M=3.65$). In contrast, respondents at MCBS also recognize that feedback is crucial for student learning (Item 1 mean score: $M=4.11$), but their responses show greater variation compared to (QU). They believe online assessments facilitate effective feedback (Item 2 mean score: $M=3.56$), yet their responses exhibit more significant variability. Items 3 to 9 reveal a similar alignment, with mean scores ranging from $M=3.56$ to $M=4.11$, suggesting that their overall perspective on feedback regarding (QU) differs from that of feedback provided in online assessments. In conclusion, while (QU) and MCBS lecturers value feedback from online assessments, (QU) respondents demonstrate greater agreement. The MCBS respondents, while positive, show a relatively wider spread in their responses. Insights from this comparative analysis contribute to understanding the perspectives of lecturers at these two institutions regarding feedback on academic writing delivered during online assessments.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis of Open-Ended Questionnaire Responses

This section conducts a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the questionnaire responses to items 24 and 25.

Item 24: Unique or Specific Strategies for Providing Feedback

Item 24 probes respondents with a loaded question, "Can you give an example of your particular approach to giving feedback on academic papers in an online assessment?"

Several overlapping themes and approaches emerge when analyzing the responses from both institutions. Emphasis is placed on the feedback process and correcting errors; respondents report identifying errors and providing students with guidance on fixing them. Applying rubrics is another strategy, as some instructors use standard rubrics for feedback, which helps students understand what is expected of them. The timeliness of feedback is also reported as crucial since faculty members engage students with their feedback. At the same time, the material is still fresh in their minds, enabling them to defend their thesis more effectively. Technology is becoming more prevalent, such as employing WhatsApp for ongoing chats with students or marking errors in different colors. Analyzing the stakeholders reveals that peer discussions and peer education can also serve as feedback strategies, encouraging students to share knowledge and allowing peers to comprehend the feedback provided better. Faculty members motivate students to ask questions about the essence of the feedback to ensure thorough understanding. Regarding feedback, positive reinforcement is noted, with students receiving praise for their efforts and specific outcomes achieved. Students are encouraged to incorporate more transitions in their writing, and feedback includes comments on topics, the organization of the written task, and suggestions for using more transitions. Some teachers implement formative assessments to provide feedback that helps students adjust before receiving their final evaluation. Another emerging strategy focuses on specific criteria, where feedback is given based on established criteria rather than language and fluency. These strategies demonstrate how teachers aim to empower students through feedback. However, the strategies of the two institutions may differ due to their unique local contexts and practices. This type of analysis illustrates how students navigate the challenges posed by information technology concerning lecturer feedback practices related to academic writing in online assessments.

Item 25: Challenges and Benefits of Providing Feedback

Item 25 also explores the challenges and benefits of responding to academic writing requests in an online assessment environment: "Can you describe some challenges or advantages you experienced while providing feedback on academic writing?"

The analysis of the responses to this question reveals a range of common challenges and benefits, which are noteworthy regarding the practical experiences of the faculty members from the two institutions under consideration. The inability to communicate with students face-to-face presents a significant problem because it complicates identifying and correcting their errors. Occasionally, technical failures or unintentional delays in responding to students' questions may arise, hindering suggestions. Additionally, the syllabus constraints limit the time for feedback to various students. Student engagement represents another obstacle; faculty members have noted that students sometimes do not fully embrace the feedback offered. Furthermore, the issue of students struggling to understand vague feedback can generate numerous inquiries and hinder a student's ability to progress. However, several advantages of the feedback given to students

during the academic writing process in an online environment also become apparent. Providing immediate corrections is invaluable, as this feedback is straightforward and recorded, making it unlikely to be overlooked. Additionally, feedback allows teachers to monitor students' progress. Moreover, providing feedback on students' writing assessments is crucial for enhancing their writing skills. It helps learners identify both their strengths and areas for improvement. With effective implementation, this feedback can significantly enhance students' writing abilities. These responses offer insights into lecturers' practical experiences when delivering academic feedback on students' writing skills in an online assessment format. They underscore the importance of communication, timing, and setting expectations to optimize student learning through feedback. The current study employs qualitative analysis to explore teaching staff's perspectives regarding the challenges and benefits they encounter while providing feedback on academic writing in the context of online assessments.

5. Conclusions

The online feedback practices in academic writing were examined across institutions, with feedback actively sought and implemented in practice, significantly contributing to student learning. The importance of feedback is recognized in helping EFL learners improve, especially concerning online writing assessments at both institutions. Qualitatively, Item 1 mean scores indicate a closer agreement among the faculty at Qassim University (QU) ($\bar{x}=4.70$) compared to the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) ($\bar{x}=4.11$). The analysis shows that QU generally reports higher mean scores across most feedback practices, suggesting widespread implementation. In contrast, MCBS displays a slightly higher mean score for providing detailed feedback on online writing assignments, highlighting a focused commitment to this method. Respondents from both QU and MCBS endorse the effectiveness of feedback in online assessments. QU faculty demonstrate a stronger conviction, as indicated by the mean scores for Item 2 (QU: $M=4.39$; MCBS: $M=3.56$). QU faculty agree that students understand and benefit from feedback ($\bar{x}=4.48$), while MCBS lecturers show more varied opinions. The belief that feedback on academic writing improves future student assignments is stronger among QU faculty ($\bar{x}=4.35$). Additional insights emerge from the qualitative analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses. Common strategies and themes identified at both institutions include detailed feedback, rubric usage, prompt feedback, technological integration, peer interaction, encouragement for clarification, positive reinforcement, feedback on content and structure, formative assessments, and adherence to established criteria. The study also uncovers a range of challenges and benefits experienced by faculty, such as the lack of in-person interaction, technical difficulties, syllabus-driven time constraints, issues with student engagement, misunderstandings due to unclear feedback, the advantage of immediate corrections, facilitating the tracking of student progress, and the contribution of feedback to writing skill development. In summary, the questionnaire results demonstrate that respondents from QU and MCBS consistently value the feedback provided in online assessments. While positive, QU faculty members display a more uniform and clear perspective, while MCBS faculty exhibit a broader range of opinions. These insights are invaluable for understanding faculty perspectives at these Gulf institutions regarding feedback on academic writing in online assessments. Although the study's insights are valuable, they do have limitations. Forty-one respondents represent a relatively small sample size and may not indicate larger institutions or virtual faculties; however, this sample size is sufficient for preliminary research. Potential biases affecting participant data, such as memory and self-serving biases, should be considered. These limitations must not be overlooked when interpreting self-report-based outcomes. While the study's quantitative findings are commendable, analyzing qualitative measures could provide a deeper understanding of faculty practices and attitudes.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, several suggestions can be made regarding future research. In upcoming studies, including more participants will help solidify research findings. Integrating statistical and categorical data will provide a more thorough understanding of feedback practices and perspectives. Cross-sectional analysis could evaluate when practices and domain perspectives change in response to technological and pedagogical shifts. Additionally, future scholars should examine the mid-level feedback-giving processes from the student's perspective, creating a more complete picture of the feedback-giving process during online assessments. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore how different types of feedback—such as performance, motivation, sentiment, and even self-determination—affect students. Understanding how institutional policies and resources influence feedback practices is also crucial for offering comprehensive insights into the context of the feedback process. One pertinent question is: How does an institution's support for professional development affect its lecturers' feedback practices? These recommendations for further research encourage suitable studies that develop a holistic understanding of academic feedback in the context of online assessments among regional universities. Finally, they highlight a gap in the need for an in-depth study to accommodate the dynamic nature of educational tools and teaching models. The insights gained from this cross-regional analysis have significant positive implications. They provide a comparative view of effective feedback and offer guidance for further research. Moreover, exam-oriented assessments take on new meaning as they add a fresh dimension to the feedback culture. This feedback helps enhance academic writing techniques and strategies. Such insights aid qualitative analyses and strengthen conclusions when included in a study.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Emad Ali Alawad and Dr. Fatima Abdulahi Hamid were responsible for the study design, data collection, drafting of the manuscript,

and revisions. Both authors contributed equally to every aspect of the study. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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