



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Students' Perceptions of Oral and Written Feedback in the Department of English at Parwan University

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ABSTRACT

Feedback is an essential part of the learning process, as it helps the learners understand their strengths and weaknesses and improve their performance in the learning process. This study aims to examine the students' perceptions of oral and written feedback in the Department of English at Parwan University. A quantitative research approach was considered to descriptively analyze the data of the study. Due to barriers that limited female students' participation in this study, 52 male students were randomly selected to participate from the third and fourth years of English department at Parwan University. Data for the present study were collected using a questionnaire administered through Google Forms to facilitate participants' responses and analyzed through in SPSS²⁷. The findings reveal generally positive perceptions of both forms of feedback in terms of written feedback, 90.4% of the students felt that it enabled them to know their strengths and weaknesses, while 84.7% shows that it aids improvement for future assignments. In terms of the negative influence on written feedback, moreover, 50% of the participants said that delays made it less effective. As far as oral feedback is concerned, 61.5% of the students felt that it enables them to know their strengths and weaknesses, 67.3% showed that it will aid future performances, and 73.1% showed that they use it actively.

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Introduction

Feedback is a critical component of good teaching and learning since it helps learners assess what they have done well, the areas that need improvement, and what to do in order to do better next time (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In English language learning, feedback is vital in the acquisition of accuracy, academic writing skills, communication skills, and learner autonomy. Good feedback in this context is thus not a judgment of work done but information that the learner interprets and uses to enhance future learning and performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Oral and written feedback are among the most common types of instructional feedback. Oral feedback has its own unique advantage and so does written feedback. Oral feedback helps to establish immediate interaction and clarity,

whereas written feedback gives the students a record to consult while revising and learning (Brookhart, 2017; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). However, the effectiveness of any of the two types of feedback depends on factors such as clarity, timeliness, relevance, and the ability of the students to comprehend and act upon the feedback.

While a substantial amount of research has been conducted internationally on the topic of feedback, not enough empirical studies have been carried out about perceptions of oral and written feedback from the perspective of university students within the Afghan context. This is especially true when it comes to the perception of clarity, timeliness, usefulness of feedback for future performance, and use of these two forms of feedback among university students in learning the English language. It is for this reason that this study will examine

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perceptions of oral and written feedback rather than the effect of feedback on academic performance of university students. It is also important to note that the English Department of Parwan University serves as an appropriate case study for this purpose. The current research study seeks to answer the following questions: 1. How do the students perceive the written feedback in terms of its clarity, timeliness, usefulness in future performances, and actual use? 2. How do the students perceive the oral feedback in terms of its clarity, timeliness, usefulness in future performances, and actual use? 3. How do the students perceive the strengths and weaknesses of both written and oral feedback in the Department of English at Parwan University? Consequently, the current study intends to: explore the perception of students regarding written feedback in terms of clarity, timeliness, usefulness in future performances, and actual use; 4. To explore the perception of students regarding oral feedback in terms of clarity, timeliness, usefulness in future performances, and actual use; and 5. To compare the strengths and weaknesses of written and oral feedback in English language learning at Parwan University.

Feedback has been recognized as an essential element of high-quality teaching and learning. [Hattie & Timperley \(2007\)](#) define successful feedback as revolving around three major questions: Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next? Their literature review indicated that feedback had great potential to make a difference to learning. In a similar vein, [Sadler \(1989\)](#) asserted that feedback was more effective when learners were able to know the standards against which their performance was being assessed, monitor their performance against such standards and understand how improvement could be made. Feedback can facilitate accuracy and self-regulated learning if learners comprehend and take action on the information provided ([Bitchener & Ferris, 2012](#); [Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006](#)).

Written and oral feedback are two different types of instructional feedback. Written feedback is particularly helpful if it is explicit, understandable, timely and actionable ([Ferris, 2014](#); [Walker, 2009](#)). However, vague or delayed comments can limit the degree to which learners are able to apply feedback for formative purposes ([Carless, 2006](#); [Gibbs & Simpson, 2004](#)). Oral feedback affords the opportunity of immediate response, clarification and interaction. It can be improved by making it specific, supportive and geared towards improvement ([Brookhart, 2017](#); [Gamlem & Smith, 2013](#)).

Oral feedback is not necessarily better than written feedback or vice versa. For instance, [Lerchenfeldt](#)

[et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed that no statistically significant differences were detected in skill development among students in oral and written feedback in the case under consideration, although the learners indicated higher satisfaction with oral feedback. However, other scholars indicate that written feedback may be helpful in providing detailed corrections, while oral feedback may help in clarification and motivation ([He & Shi, 2018](#); [Voerman et al., 2012](#)). The effectiveness of feedback is also connected with the way the learners respond to the information. Thus, according to [Winstone et al. \(2017\)](#), it is important to discuss the agentic engagement of learners in feedback process and their ability to ask for, understand, and use feedback. Likewise, [Carless and Boud \(2018\)](#) define feedback literacy in terms of the learners' ability to evaluate their work and use feedback. In other words, the way students use feedback is also one of the dimensions of feedback effectiveness, even though this use is not connected with improvement in academic performance. Despite numerous studies conducted on feedback across the globe, there is limited empirical work carried out on how Afghan university students perceive oral and written feedback in their English language learning process. The current study seeks to fill the above gap by investigating the two feedback types among the undergraduate students of the English department at Parwan University.

Materials and Method

The current study employed a quantitative descriptive-analytical method to explore the perceptions of students regarding oral and written feedback in the context of English language learning at Parwan University. Due to barriers that limited female students' participation of female, 52 male students were randomly selected to participate from the third and fourth years of English department at Parwan University in this study. Therefore, all the participants were male with average age of 20 to 30 with different years of experiences.

Instrument

A Five-Likert scale questionnaire and was considered as main instrument of the current study. The questionnaire consists of 10 items with a closed-ended options from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", and the participants needed to answer the statement on a five-point Likert scale. In addition, the questionnaire was included 5 statements to explore the participants' ideas regarding the oral feedback while 5 other statements explore the written feedback in relation to clarity, timeliness, utility for future performance, and usage. to ensure that the questionnaire items were clear, understandable, and unambiguous, the

instrument was piloted with a group of English language experts at Parwan University before being distributed to the participants. Furthermore, the questionnaire's internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.76. This value indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the present study were collected using a questionnaire administered through Google Forms to facilitate participants' responses. After data collection, the responses were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS27). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were

Demographic Data of the Participants

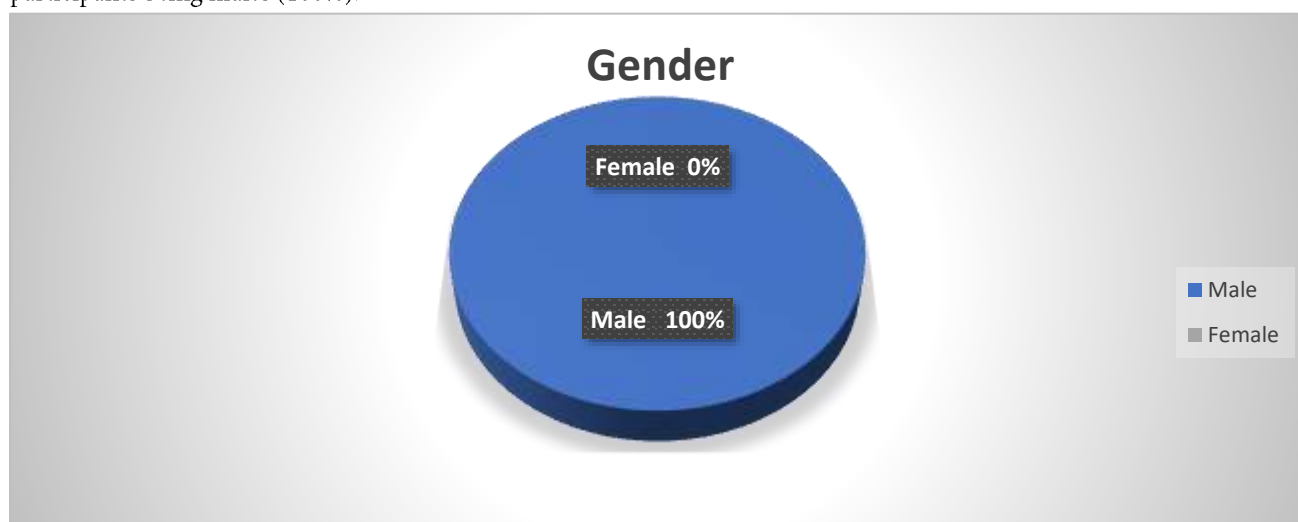
calculated to determine the distribution of responses to each questionnaire item. The findings were then presented using statistical charts to facilitate the interpretation and comparison of participants' perceptions of oral and written feedback.

Results (Findings)

The research focused on the students' perception of the clarity, timeliness, usefulness, and usage of written and oral feedback. As the study did not measure the objective academic achievements, but just the students' perceptions, the findings of the research cannot be viewed as evidence that either written or oral feedback led to improvement in academic achievements.

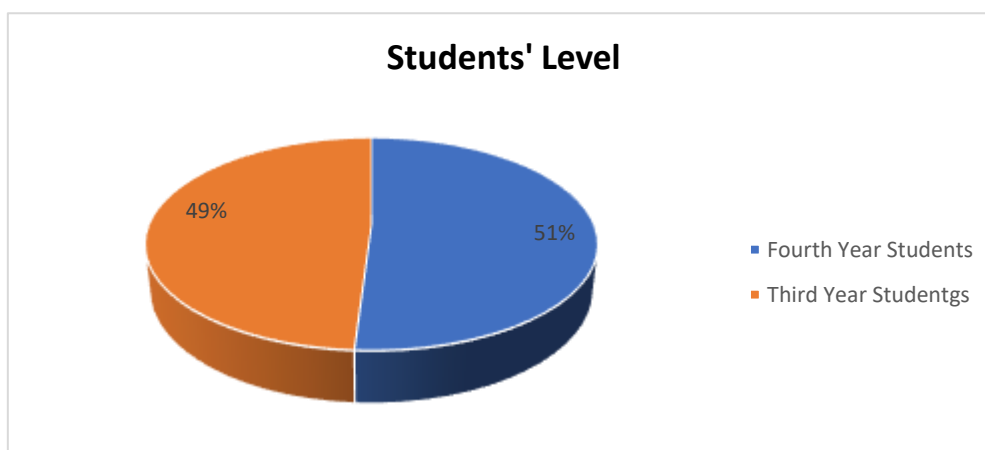
Chart 1: Gender of the Participants

A total number of 52 students from the Department of English, Parwan University, took part in the present study, with all participants being males (100%).



In relation to academic level, the sample consisted of third year and fourth year students, whereby 51% were third year students, and 49% were fourth year students. This can be shown in Figure 2 below.

Chart 2: Level of the Participants



Student Perception Regarding Written Feedback

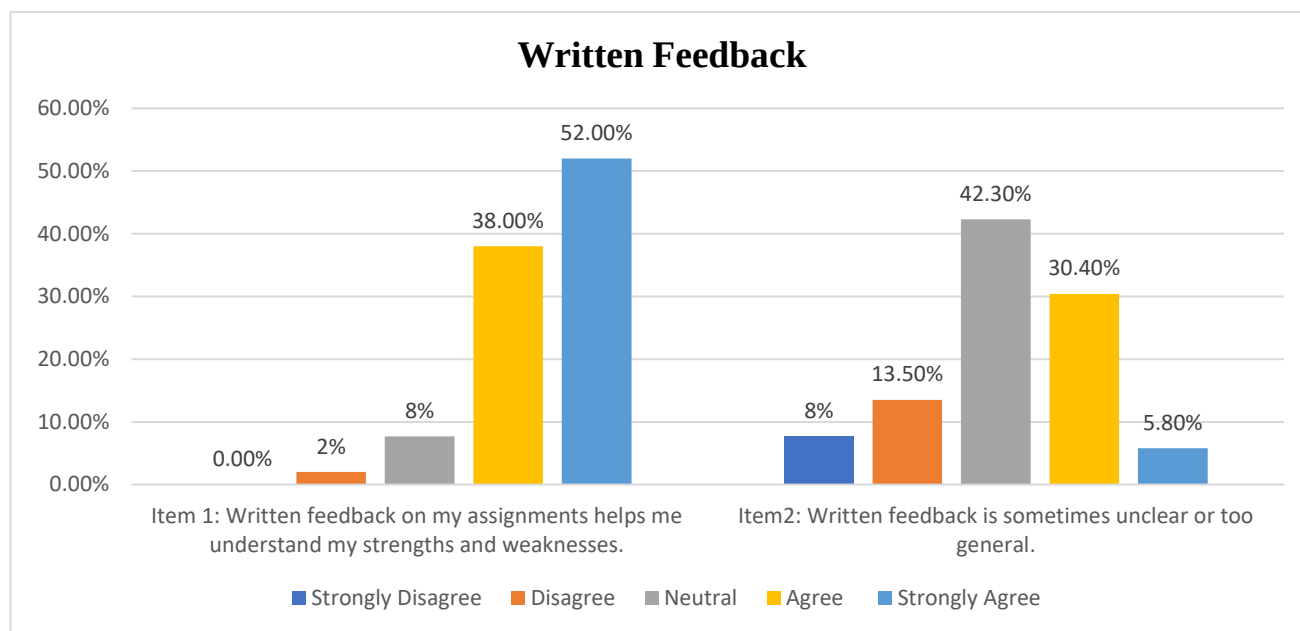


Chart 3. Students' Responses on Item 1 & Item 2 of Written Feedback

The purpose of the first item was to find out students' perception about the ability of written feedback in understanding their strengths and weaknesses. The results indicate that 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In contrast, 8% of students were neutral, while 2% disagreed with the statement. Additionally, the second item on written feedback was about its clarity. The results indicated that 36.2% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that sometimes written feedback was unclear or too general. On the contrary, 21.5% disagreed, whereas 42.3% were neutral. Hence, the results indicate that written feedback is very important for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Moreover, written feedback could contribute to improving students' English language skills.

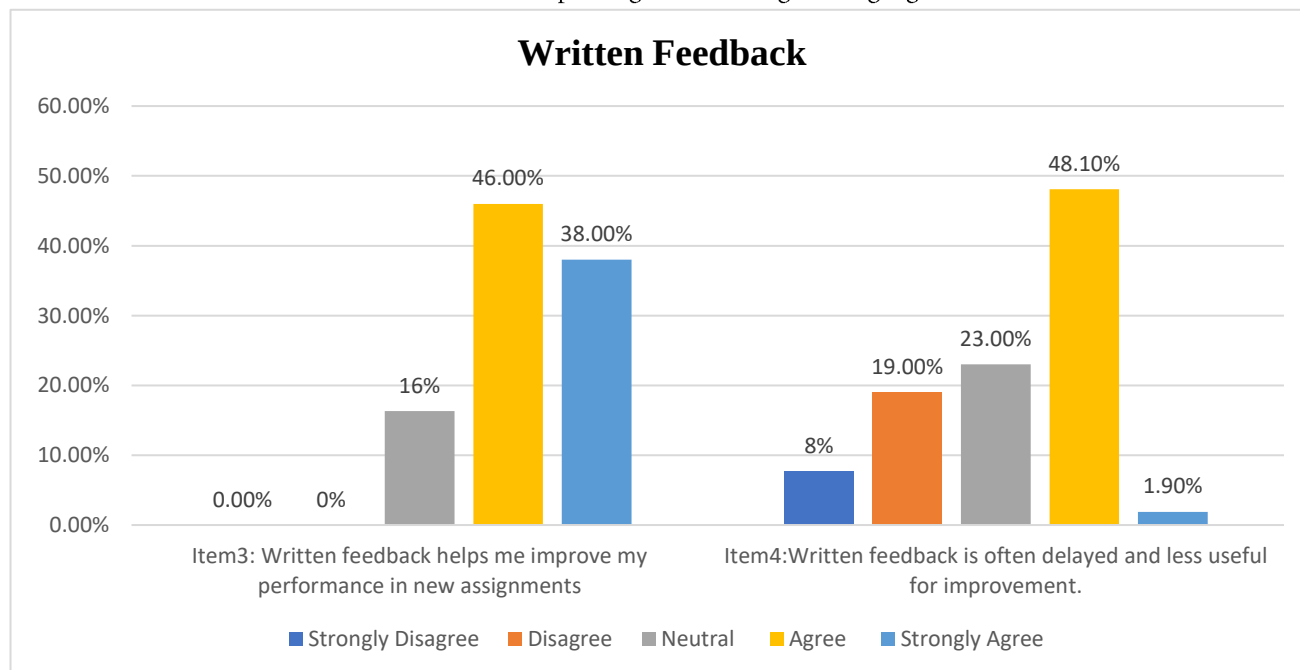


Chart 4. Students' Responses on Item 3 & Item 4 of Written Feedback

Item 3 was explored to understand the perceptions of the students about the importance of written feedback for enhancing their performance in future tasks. It was found out that a large percentage of 84% of the participants appreciated this

statement while only 16% of the participants remained unsure of this statement. On the other hand, item 4 was used to explore the perception of the participants regarding the notion of written feedback being frequently delayed and less useful. It was found out that a large percentage of 50% of the participants positively appreciated this statement while 27% of the participants disagreed on this statement while 23.1% were unsure about this statement.

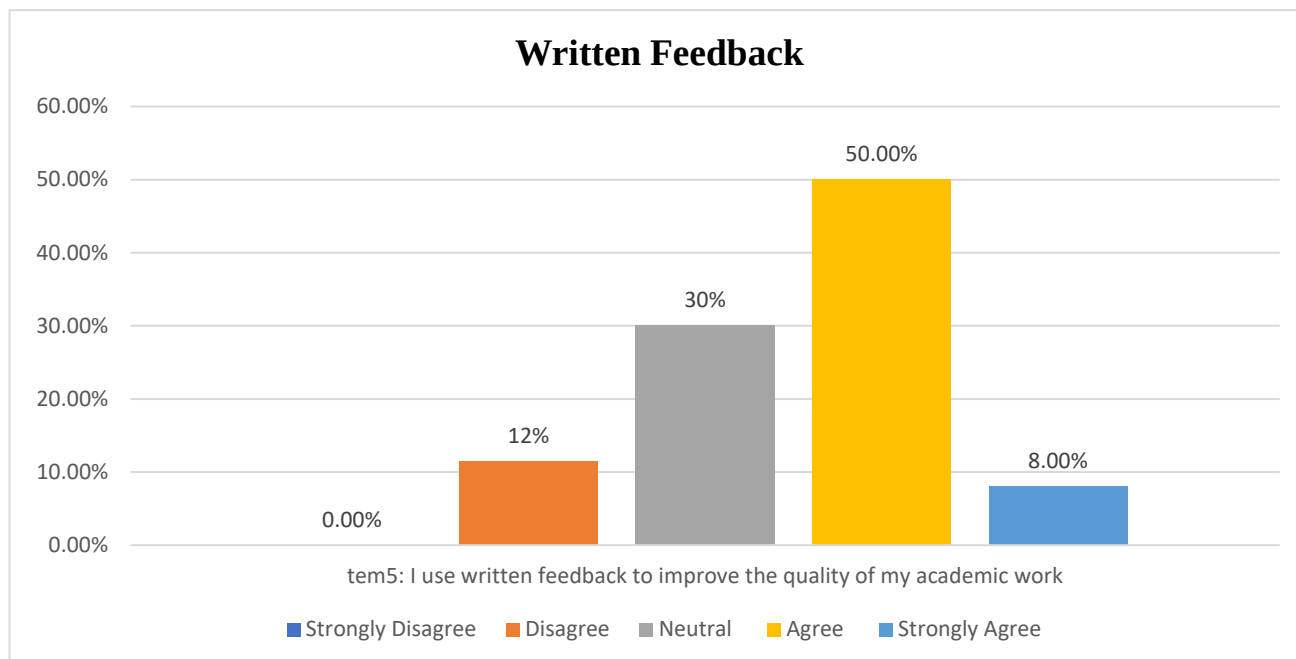


Chart 5. Students' Responses on Item 5 of Written Feedback

In Item 5, the perceptions of students regarding the importance of written feedback in enhancing their academic performance were examined. More than half of the participants (58%) were found to agree and strongly agree, 12% disagreed, while 30% of the respondents were neutral. This implies that most of the students considered the importance of written feedback but may have faced some challenges in using it for improvement. Unlike Item 1 (90% positive), the low level of agreement implies that valuing feedback is not enough in improving one's assignments.

Student Perception Regarding Oral Feedback

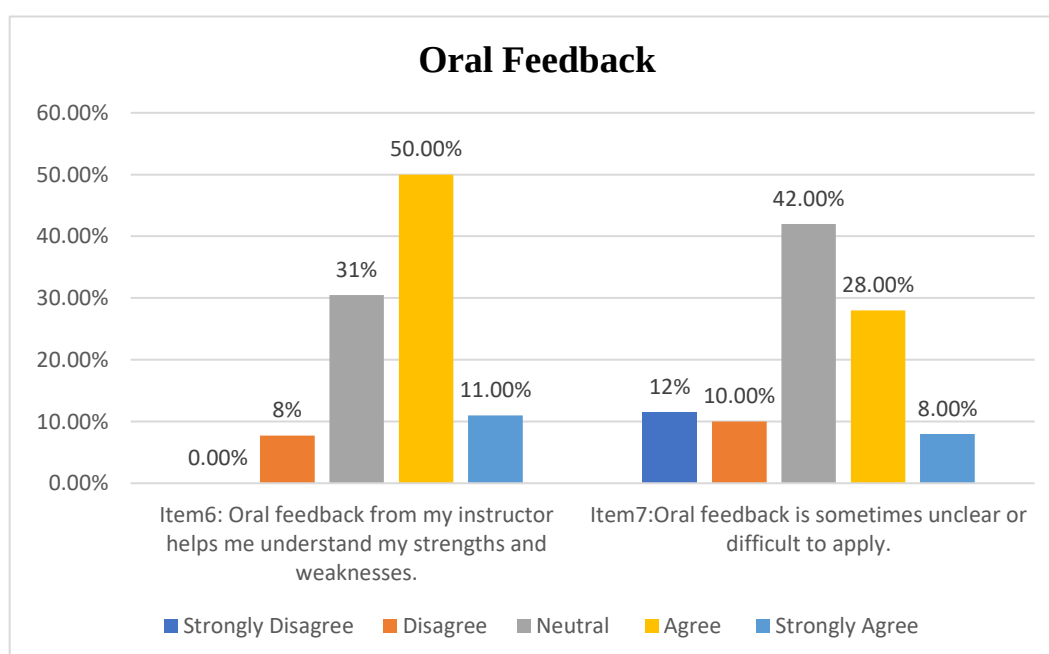


Chart 6. Students' Responses on Item 6 & 7 of Oral Feedback

The aim of Item 6 was to find out students' perceptions about the effectiveness of oral feedback in finding their strengths and weaknesses. It was found that 61% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. On the other hand, 31% of the respondents were neutral, while 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thus, it can be stated that most of the students perceived oral feedback as helpful in finding their strengths and weaknesses. Another interesting result that can be discussed is related to Item 7. This item was designed to find out students' perceptions about the clarity of oral feedback and its applicability. It was found that 36% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that oral feedback was sometimes unclear and impractical. On the other hand, 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 42% of the respondents were neutral. Thus, it can be concluded that although students perceive the value of oral feedback, there are some difficulties in understanding and applying it.

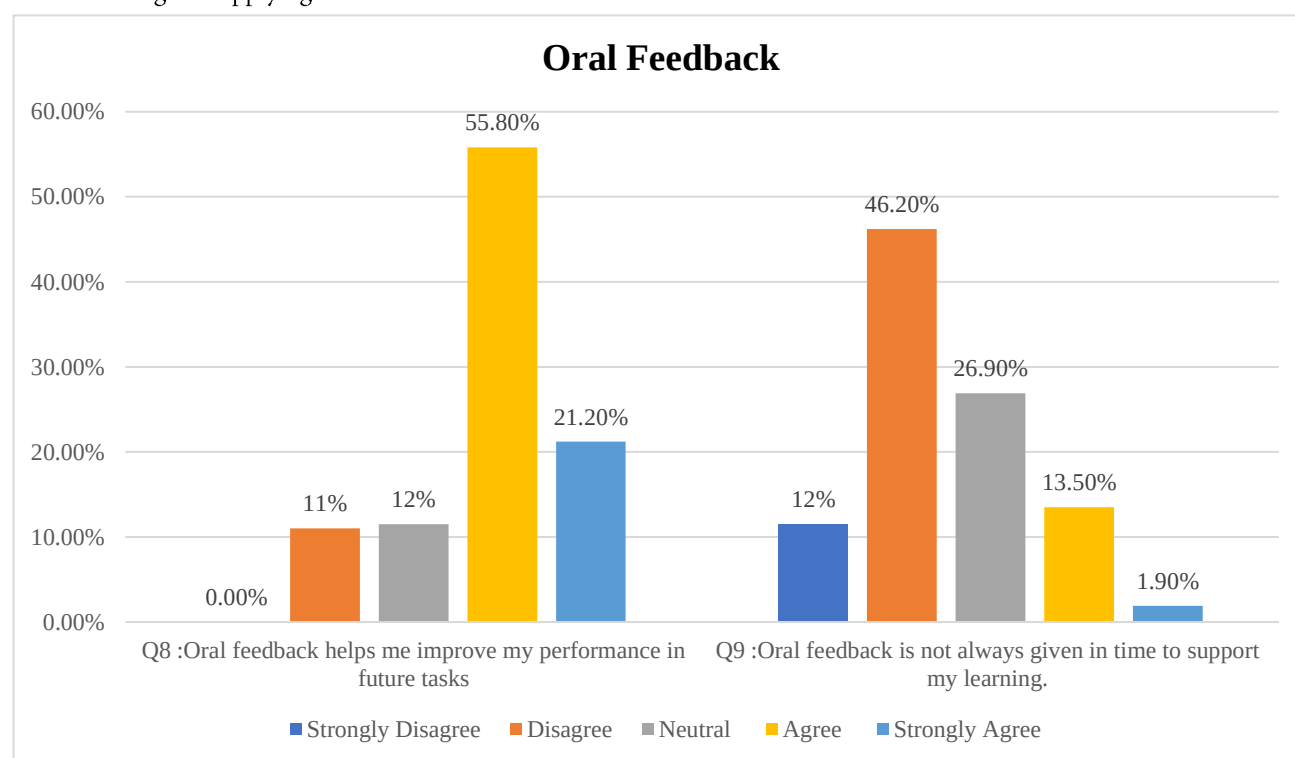


Chart 7. Students' Responses on Item 8 & 9 of Oral Feedback

The aim of Item 8 was to evaluate students' opinions concerning the effectiveness of oral feedback in improving their performance in future tasks. From the results, it was found that 77% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that oral feedback improved their performance in future tasks. On the other hand, 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 12% were neutral. This implies that the majority of the students considered oral feedback as effective in enhancing their performance in future tasks. Item 9 sought to evaluate students' opinions regarding the timely nature of oral feedback. According to the findings, 58.2% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that oral feedback was not delivered in good time, while 26.9% were neutral and 14.9% agreed or strongly agreed. It is clear from the results that the majority of the students were satisfied with the timely nature of oral feedback delivery. Thus, timely oral feedback can be used to help students overcome their learning challenges in future tasks.

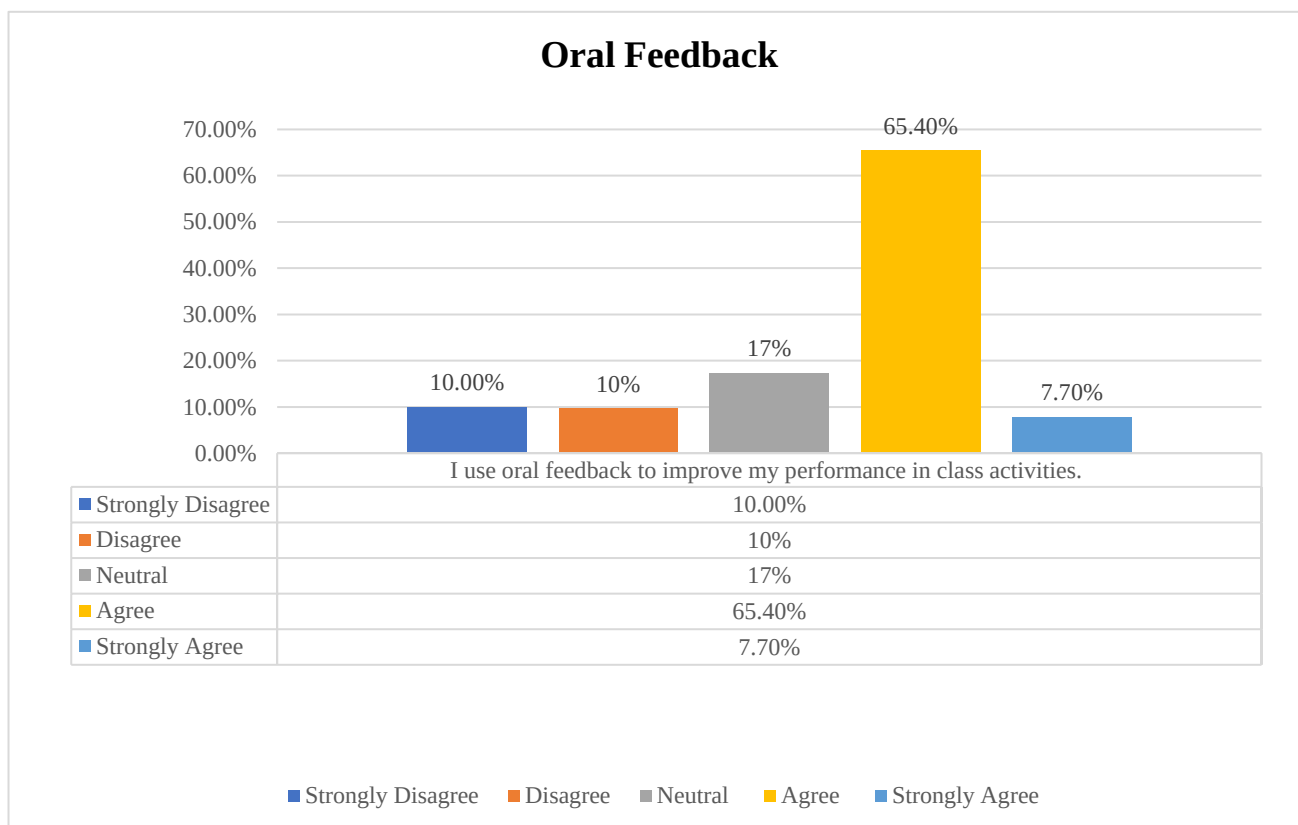


Chart 8. Students' Responses on Item 10 of Oral Feedback

Item 10 was designed to determine the perceptions of the respondents regarding the use of oral feedback in improving their classroom performance. It was found that 73.1% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the fact that they made use of oral feedback for this reason. On the other hand, 9.6% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this notion, while 17.3% of the participants were neutral on this issue. It can be stated from these results that the majority of the participants used oral feedback to improve their classroom performance. Nevertheless, the neutral and negative answers show that not all the participants used oral feedback to the same level.

Discussion

The results show that students view the two types of feedback positively but there is a difference in terms of practical effectiveness of both forms rather than the dominance of one form of feedback. It is clear that the main advantages of written feedback are related to understanding of strengths and weaknesses and further work on new assignments while oral feedback is considered timely and usable during classes. Among the key results is the discrepancy between the awareness of the usefulness of written feedback and the actual usage of it by the students. While 90.4% of respondents stated that written feedback made it possible for them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, only 57.7% of the students used it to enhance their academic performance. This disparity indicates that even if a student receives and appreciates some feedback, it does not imply that he or she will automatically make use of it. This result is connected with the notion of feedback literacy that includes a person's

ability to analyze and utilize feedback. The findings also suggest that timeliness represents an important contextual challenge for written feedback.

Fifty percent of participants agreed that the delay of written feedback lessened its effectiveness. This further reinforces the idea that feedback can only be effective as a formative tool when it is delivered on time such that it is possible for learners to utilize it in future learning processes ([Gibbs & Simpson, 2004](#)). By contrast, oral feedback was perceived as more timely. Only 15.4% of students identified delay as a concern, while 73.1% reported using oral feedback to improve their classroom performance. The relatively high usage of oral feedback could be attributed to the interactive process involved where students are able to get their feedback, clarify it, and even react. This explanation is in tandem with research that highlights the significance of feedback immediacy and interaction ([Brookhart, 2017](#); [Van der Kleij et al., 2015](#)).

However, the findings are not an indication that oral feedback is necessarily superior to written feedback. The former received more positive feedback regarding aiding students to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses and enhancing their future assignments. The findings, therefore, reveal that a complementary interpretation of the two feedback types is much more appropriate than a competitive one. While written feedback may offer a more lasting resource for students, oral feedback can be much more immediate and clarifying. Issues of clarity were noted by the participants in both feedback forms. About 36.6% of the participants indicated that written feedback may sometimes lack clarity or be too generic, and about 36.5% of them stated that oral feedback may also lack clarity or be hard to use. These figures being virtually identical to each other indicate that the effectiveness of feedback may not be determined by the means of communication used, but rather be determined by qualities such as clarity, specificity, relevance, and applicability. This assumption is supported by the relevant research stating that good feedback transmits information that can be understood and applied ([Brookhart, 2017](#); [Gamlem & Smith, 2013](#)).

Taking into consideration the higher education system of Afghanistan, there are certain applications of these results for English language teachers. Teachers should not limit themselves to either written or oral feedback; rather, it might be useful to combine both forms of feedback. While written feedback is useful due to its specificity and repeatability, oral feedback may help explain difficult points of written material, as well as implement it immediately during classwork. Finally, the feedback should be given in such a time period that it could be used during further tasks. However, the results must be viewed in light of the methodological limitations of the research design. First, the experiment did not objectively measure academic achievements of the students but only used their perceptions of their own feedback. As a consequence, no conclusion can be made about whether it is written or oral feedback that has an effect on academic achievements. Second, the sample involved 52 students from a single faculty and all the students were male. It limits the generalizability of the findings, making further research essential.

Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations have to be taken into account while evaluating the results. First, the sample was small ($n = 52$) and consisted of students from one department of Parwan University who were selected using convenience

sampling method, so that the findings cannot be generalized for all university students or English language learners in Afghanistan. Second, all participants were men, which means that the findings cannot be generalized for women or compared across gender. Third, perceptions of feedback use and effectiveness were self-reported and were not measured by any objective criteria like academic performance, examination scores, etc. Thus, the study does not prove any effect of oral or written feedback on the academic success of students. Fourth, the questionnaire used in the study was developed by the author and was not subjected to pilot testing and assessment of reliability, including Cronbach's alpha. Fifth, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, so that the difference between oral and written feedback has to be considered as descriptive but not statistically significant.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current research was to explore the perceptions of the undergraduates of the English Department at Parwan University regarding oral and written feedback concerning clarity, timeliness, usefulness in the future performance, and actual use of feedback. It has been found out that both types of feedback are highly appreciated by the students but have their own peculiarities. In particular, written feedback was perceived as more helpful in understanding the strong and weak points of the students and as a factor contributing to the improvement in future assignments. The main shortcoming of the written feedback is its low timeliness since 50% of the students admitted that written feedback provided after some delay was not useful enough. Oral feedback was considered more timely and more often used by the students to improve their performance in class. This study also showed a large gap between the value that the students place on written feedback and its use. It is important to note that providing feedback does not mean that the students have used it, and they may need help in using and understanding the feedback given.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the use of oral and written feedback does not contradict each other, but rather, supplement each other. Oral feedback gives immediate answers and helps in interaction within the class, while written feedback gives concrete and revisit-able advice on future assignments. Nevertheless, these observations pertain to the perceptions and behaviors of the students rather than any tangible improvements in their learning performance. It is necessary to note that the results are based on a small number of subjects, an entirely male population from one department, and are without

any objective measures of learning performance. Future research needs to incorporate a greater number of participants and include female students if possible. This directly answers Research Question 3 rather than answering it only indirectly.

Acknowledgment

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Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that appear to have influenced the work described in this paper.

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