

# Analyzing Students' Preference for Audio Feedback from the Perspective of Social Cognitive Theory

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## Abstract

This article makes an attempt to analyze students' preference for audio feedback from the perspective of social cognitive theory based on secondary research studies. Some researchers have shown students' preference for audio feedback over written feedback while several researchers have discovered students' preference for written feedback. However, these preferences for audio feedback have not been analyzed from the perspective of social cognitive theory. Analysis shows that students prefer audio feedback to written feedback when they are familiar with the technology of receiving audio feedback. Finally, this article presents an opportunity to conduct research in the field of audio feedback with multilingual students in countries like Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Audio feedback, preference, social cognitive theory

## Introduction

The development and mass proliferation of audio recording technologies in the twentieth century led to experiments audio feedback practices. Experiential indication shows that instructors' usage of audio feedback has advanced as audio recording technologies have developed and enhanced in their functionality over time (Anson, 1999). Researchers are divided in their opinions regarding the preference and impact of audio feedback on students' writings. For example, some researchers (e.g. Bless, 2017, Cavanaugh and Song, 2014, 2015) have shown students' preference for audio feedback over written feedback as well as positive impact of audio feedback on students' writings. On the other hand, several researchers (e.g. Chalmers, MacCullem, Mowatt, and Fulton 2014; Morris and Chikwa 2016) have discovered students' preference for written feedback over audio feedback. Remarkably, none of the previous researchers have analyzed these preferences and non-preferences of audio feedback from the perspective of Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory which allows us to better understand these contradictions that human perceptions of preferences are co-constructed by both external and internal factors. Therefore, this paper presents an analysis of students' preference for audio feedback on their writing from the perspective of social cognitive theory based on secondary sources.

## Social Cognitive Theory

This theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1991. A key principle of social cognitive theory is that the perception of human preferences is affected by their external surroundings and the conditions under which they occur as well as their own power of understanding or self-efficacy. Bandura (2012) has further illustrated that "personal,

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behavioral and environmental” are the three determinants which influence how learners will react to new exposures or new knowledge (p. 10). Personal determinant refers to whether a learner possesses “high or low self-efficacy” towards the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). Behavioral determinant refers to the “response” a learner exhibits after receiving the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). Environmental determinant refers to “external setting” that affects a learner’s response to the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). Citing Bandura’s (1991) social cognitive theory, Hattie and Timperley (2007) proclaimed that “feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative” (p. 81).

### **Students’ Preference for Audio Feedback**

Several researchers have discovered students’ preference for audio feedback on their writing over the written feedback. Based on the review of the literature on audio feedback, it is found that students reported that audio feedback is more motivating, more thorough, more personal than written feedback, and it helped their revision process. From the instructors’ viewpoint, delivering audio feedback permitted them to afford more to students as well as it saved their time of giving feedback. For example, Cavanaugh and Song (2014, 2015) investigated the use of audio feedback in online learning environments. In the both studies, they have discovered that students preferred audio feedback over written feedback. Cavanaugh and Song (2014) examined “students’ and instructors’ perceptions of audio feedback and written feedback for student papers in online composition classes” (p. 122). They have found that “teachers tended to give more global commentary when using audio comments and more local commentary when using written comments” (p. 122). Again, Cavanaugh and Song (2015) explored “students’ and instructors’ approaches and preferences to audio and written feedback in an online writing course” (p. 248) and discovered that “instructors also preferred audio feedback because providing it took less time than providing written feedback in an online course” (p. 255). Analogously, Bless (2017) investigated, “how high school teachers believed Kaizena, a digital audio feedback technology, influenced their writing instruction and self-efficacy” (p. 3). She has found that audio feedback was greatly preferred by the teachers. Like Cavanaugh and Song (2014, 2015), Bless (2017) has found that audio feedback is “promising method for improving the feedback process in teaching and learning” (p. 200). She has found that it took less time for the teachers “to produce audio feedback” (p. 159).

Similarly, McCarthy (2015) evaluated “various feedback models utilized for summative assessment tasks” (p. 153). Interestingly, most of the teachers reported that “providing audio feedback proved to be the quickest and easiest model” (p. 165). In a related research, Knauf (2015) wanted “to be able to make more nuanced statements about the strengths and the weakness of audio feedback” (p. 442). In her study, all the students stated that they felt the audio feedback was “more personal and appreciative than the written feedback” (p. 442). Likewise, in another related study, McKeown, Kimball, and Ledford (2015) have found the positive impact of audio feedback on students’ revision process. Like, Cavanaugh and Song (2015), McKeown et al. recognized the use of audio feedback as “an efficient and effective way to provide rich, detailed feedback” (p. 558)

on students' writings. In other research, James-Reynolds and Currie (2015) accomplished three case studies to investigate undergraduate students' insights of "human-voice audio feedback and . . . to understand the implications of the use of virtual audio feedback" (p. 1). They have found that "the provision of audio feedback using the tutor's voice seems to be valued by students for its timelines and for its clarity in terms of meaning" (p. 6).

Similarly, Parkes and Fletcher (2016) reported on the "findings of a three-year longitudinal study investigating the experiences of postgraduate level students who were provided audio feedback for their assessment" (p. 1). They have found that "students indicated a preference for audio feedback over written feedback" (p. 10). In another most recent study, Woodcock (2017) evaluated on assignments through the case study of a politics course. He has argued that "audio feedback provides a more personal feel to feedback" and "students are digital natives and they enjoy audio feedback" (p. 201). In another related study, Elola and Oskoz (2016) examined L2 students' perceptions of written and audio feedback. That study has revealed that audio feedback had positive impact on the "quantity and quality" of the instructors' feedback and that students greatly preferred oral feedback "for global aspects, such as content, structure, and organization" (p. 58). Elola and Oskoz (2016) have discovered that teachers preferred audio feedback because they could give global commentary and students found audio feedback more motivating than written feedback.

So, many researchers have discovered students' preferences for audio feedback over the written feedback as well as positive impact of audio feedback on their writings. Students stated that audio feedback is more personal, more detailed, and more inspiring than written feedback. Instructors have reported that through audio feedback, they can give more feedback in less time.

### **Students' Preference for Written Feedback**

Although many researchers have proved and highlighted students' preference for audio feedback over written feedback, several researchers have discovered students' preference for written feedback over audio feedback. For example, in a recent study, Morris and Chikwa (2016) explored "students' preference in the use of audio and written feedback and how each type of feedback received by students impacts their academic performance in subsequent assignments" (p. 125). They have found that "the type of feedback received did not impact students' grades in the subsequent assignments" (p. 125). Interestingly, in contrast to the findings of Cavanaugh and Song (2014, 2015), Morris and Chikwa (2016) have found that students "indicated a strong preference for written feedback in future assignments" (p. 125) because "it was harder to link the comments to the relevant sections of the essay" (p. 134). However, they have reported that students were "broadly positive" (p. 125) about the audio feedback because "a lot can be said in a short" (p. 134) in an audio clip.

Similarly, Chalmers, MacCullem, Mowatt, and Fulton (2014) have reported that though the audio feedback offered "richer language" than the written feedback, there was no noteworthy variance in the accomplishment scores of students who got audio feedback (p. 64). Likewise, Johnson and Cooke (2014) directed a study to examine the connection between students' "self-regulated learning and their preference for audio feedback" (p.

1). They have discovered a connection between students' metacognitive strategies and inherent enthusiasm and their inclination to listen to the audio feedback. Johnson and Cooke (2014) have reported that "it may be that students who enjoy a challenge are motivated to embrace new" (p. 9) feedback technologies. In a related study, Knauf (2015) has remarked that "audio feedback cannot be considered a comprehensive solution to the different problems associated with feedback" (442). Knauf has revealed students' preference for written feedback over audio feedback.

So, some researchers have discovered students' preference for written feedback and exposed the disadvantages of audio feedback compared to written feedback. The next sub-section presents an analysis from the perspective of social cognitive theory.

### **Analysis from the Perspective of Social Cognitive Theory**

It is found that some researchers have discovered that audio feedback is preferred by the students and instructors. On the other hand, some studies have shown students' preference for written feedback over audio feedback. Now, these preferences can be analyzed from the perspective of Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory where it is clearly articulated that the perceptions of human preferences are affected by both external and internal factors. Here the internal factor refers to the internal cognition of the writers and external factor refers to the external settings of giving and receiving the feedback. Bandura (2012) has further illustrated that "personal, behavioral and environmental" are the three determinants how learners will react to new exposures or new knowledge (p. 10). Personal determinant refers to whether a learner possesses "high or low self-efficacy" towards the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). Behavioral determinant refers to the "response" a learner exhibits after receiving the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). Environmental determinant refers to "external setting" that affects a learner's response to the feedback (Bandura, 2012, p. 12). So, when the students show preferences for audio feedback, these three determinants are positively correlated that means both the internal and external factors are supporting the exposure to the feedback. More to the point, the students have high self-efficacy and the external setting is good.

On the other hand, when the students are showing non-preferences, somehow these three factors are not working positively. For example, maybe the writers have low self-efficacy or the external setting is not at the optimal level. In the study of Cavanaugh and Song (2015), the writers have expressed preferences for audio feedback over the written feedback. On the other hand, in the study of Morris and Chikwa (2016), the writers have expressed their preferences for written feedback over the audio feedback. Now, the participants of Cavanaugh and Song (2015) were recruited from an entry-level undergraduate course, and the study took place in a U.S. university. Contrarily, the participants of Morris and Chikwa (2016) "were 68 first-year students studying a science laboratory-based core module" (p. 127), and the study took place in a U.K university. So, it can be argued that for the participants of the Cavanaugh and Song's (2015) study, three determinants (personal, behavioral and environmental) are positively correlated. On the other hand, for the participants of the Morris and Chikwa's (2016) study, three determinants (personal, behavioral and environmental) are not working positively. It is interesting to notice that the studies conducted in the U.S.A (e.g. (Bless, 2017;

Cavanaugh and Song, 2015) have come up with more positive experiences and preferences for audio feedback than those of conducted in the U.K (e.g. Chalmers, MacCullem, Mowatt, and Fulton 2014; Morris and Chikwa, 2016; Voelkel and Mello 2014). Therefore, it also depends on the context in which the feedback is provided.

### Conclusion

Based on the review of the literature on audio feedback, it is found that students reported that audio feedback is more motivating, more thorough, and more personal than written feedback. From the instructors' viewpoint, delivering audio feedback permits them to afford more to students. There are some contradictions regarding the time spent in providing audio feedback. There are also some conflicts among the researchers regarding the positive impact of audio feedback on students' revision process. However, the analysis from the perspective of social cognitive theory allows us to better understand these contradictions that human perceptions of preferences are co-constructed by both external and internal factors.

In the entire existing empirical studies on audio feedback, few studies particularly targeted multilingual students as the participants, and therefore little is known about multilingual students' preference between audio and written feedback and the impact of the feedback format on their revision process. So, there is an opportunity to explore multilingual students' preference between audio and written feedback and the impact of feedback format on their revision process. Similarly, this opportunity for research in the field of audio feedback can extensively be extended in the developing countries like Bangladesh where technology is not yet adequately advanced to be integrated in giving feedback on students' writing.

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