

## Digital Literacies and Generational Micro-Cultures: Email Feedback in Lebanon

Christina De Coursey<sup>1</sup> & Nadine Dandashly<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American University of Science and Technology, Beirut, Lebanon

Correspondence: Christina De Coursey, American University of Science and Technology, Beirut, Lebanon.  
E-mail: decourseyca@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

This study reports on the introduction of email feedback, in a private university in Lebanon with marked generational differences and a traditional instructor culture focused on grammar correction. The instructor profile showed insufficient ELT training and a disjuncture between those with low and those with long service. Instructors were trained, and an email form used during one semester. A survey elicited instructors' views. Appraisal analysis identified attitudes in personal responses written by students and instructors. Analysis of feedback quality was undertaken. Results showed students responded positively, instructors negatively to email feedback. Instructors perceived students' positive response, but reasserted traditional understandings of teacher roles, reflecting a lack of understanding of the role of emotion in acquiring form. Training in ELT and digital literacies, management oversight of accountability structures, and sufficient remuneration for part-timers' grading hours, are recommended. The study also implicates long years of service in resistance to needed change.

**Keywords:** grammar feedback, digital literacies, Lebanon, teaching culture, Arabic culture, appraisal analysis

### 1. Introduction

Research into grammar feedback has increasingly focused on what works for the learner. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, language instructors routinely use learners' daily digital literacies for feedback. But global contexts for English language teaching (ELT) differ, in teacher training and technical affordances. How ELT happens also reflects local teaching cultures. This study reports on the attempted introduction of email for grammar feedback, in a local context where the teaching culture had not yet embraced digital technologies, but student culture had. The 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war created micro-cultural differences between the instructor and student generations. This study explores differences in the subjective attitudes of Lebanese instructors and students, towards using email for feedback in tertiary composition courses.

Second-language (L2) learning research has found grammar feedback problematic (Chandler, 2003). Marking up scripts produces negative feelings in learners, leading them to ignore repeat errors (Paulus, 1999). Tertiary learners are often unclear whether feedback is form-focused, or addresses pragmatics or even subject-knowledge (Lyster, 1998). Analyses and meta-analyses show grammar feedback to be particularly ineffective in teaching writing (Truscott, 2007). While students expect it (Nunan, 1998), and not providing it can contribute to deficient interlanguages (Lightbown & Spada, 1999), error identification is a poor means of grammar feedback, as grammar learning interacts with rhetorical competency and culture performance (Fazio, 2001). Grammar feedback may be more effective if it is incidental, or accompanies attention to semantics (Loewen, 2005). The prevailing wisdom is that grammar feedback should reflect previously-announced, limited and focused criteria (Truscott, 2001). Good grammar feedback must also work for the learner (Ellis, 2001). As psychological and communicative dimensions of reception govern cognitive uptake, ensuring learners' positive emotional engagement in learning is crucial (Norris & Ortega, 2006). Correction of a large number of errors diminishes motivation and self confidence across all four skills, where feedback written as personal commentary and expressed in whole sentences leads to the greatest uptake because it feels comfortable and thus generates greatest positive affect in learners (Truscott, 1996). This is particularly marked in teaching L2 writing (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005). These insights about the central role of emotion in learning form structured this study.

Cognition cannot be separated from its social contexts (Abraham & Williams, 2009). Given 21<sup>st</sup> century ubiquitous computing, contemporary learners' normal communication involves social networking (Crystal, 2006). If good feedback keeps learners positively engaged, their daily literacies must be incorporated into feedback. L2 learning now takes place across multiple platforms and domains, within and outside educational contexts (Herrington & Herrington, 2000). Electronic media structure the tools, artefacts, and communities of discourse that support L2 learning (Magnan, 2008), making traditional emphases on grammar correction and on the instructor as authority appear neo-conservative (Boler, 2008), but digital literacies authentic (Kist, 2005). Not using digital literacies risks quarantining language learning from its usual contexts, where connecting English to them enhances learner engagement (Fitze, 2006). Using them helps learners build on comfortable daily habits, where traditional feedback requires learners to replace existing abilities with undesirable practices, known as "subtractive learning" (Coiro, Lankshear, Knobel & Leu, 2008). With L2 instructors often among the early adopters of new technologies, ELT studies have included the use of smart phones, email, podcasts, blogs, vlogs, chat, text messaging, gaming, bulletin boards, discussion forums and online platforms, in ELT (Chapelle, 2003). Email, long used for grammar feedback on L2 writing, is effective because tertiary learners are familiar with it (Warschauer, 2002). It combines the positive feelings gained from social interaction with time for reflection (Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999), motivating students to produce greater output (Kern & Warschauer, 2000), and improving lexical diversity (Sotillo, 2000) and culture performance (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). Students find it useful (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001), valuing the record of their metacognitive learning (Sengupta, 2001). They are more likely to follow detailed instructions, making word- and phrase-level changes, when receiving email feedback than traditional written (Ware & Warschauer, 2006) or oral feedback (Tuzi, 2005). These insights about the role of daily literacies in learning form also structured this study.

Yet English teaching is characterised by heterogeneity, a global enterprise shaped by local circumstances (Pennycook, 2001). Scholarship often focuses on best practice in wealthy contexts – part of the value of this study lies in illuminating the ways such tensions are negotiated in a middle-eastern context. The Lebanese context is especially complex. Multilinguality is normal, with ancient Arabic- and Armenian-, and recent Amhari-, Sinhalese-, Hindi- and Pakistani-speaking communities, alongside the legacy of the French Protectorate (Yazigi, 1994). French, Arabic and English L2 secondary education are widespread. Lebanese universities enjoy a "supportive management culture" for language education (Nauffal & Nasser 2007, 59). The education sector is well-developed, literacy rates are among the highest in the middle-east, and English-language tertiary education is common (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997). Still, Arabic culture is traditional and collectivist, with conformity valued over innovation, and leadership taking an authoritarian character (Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2002). Instructor self-image is as "an authoritative figure (instructor) who assumingly knows 'everything' and provides 'correct' information". Student roles are understood as passively "listening and tak[ing] notes" (Dirani, 2009, 203). These roles have remained static: "the ideas of ongoing education and growth within the work context are not familiar in the Lebanese context" (Dirani, 2009, 203). The 1994 National Curriculum attempted reform (NCERD, 1994, requiring teachers to use interactive teaching methods and student-centred learning (Itani, 1999). Two decades later, these remain "quite challenging for those who have been following the traditional methods...Adapting to the new curriculum has been difficult for those teachers who prefer their old ways, claiming through the latter better results are obtained" (Bacha & Bahous, 2011, 1322). At the institution where this study occurred, language learning received strong administrative support. However, department reviews over several years had identified instructor training, teacher-centred classroom practices, and learning outcomes as problematic. Leadership had been drawn from commercial language-school personnel without recent or academic qualifications, who relied on extensive institutional connections to maintain the traditional teaching culture. Central among the traditional, teacher-centred practices was an excessive focus on grammar correction. As email is fairly common in Lebanese daily life, it was selected as a viable medium for moving traditional towards more contemporary feedback practices.

Lebanese students inhabit a very different, media-saturated communicative universe. They experience global identities, interacting digitally with the international diasporas created by the civil war and the 2006 Israeli invasion (Abdelhady, 2008). They are individualist, with their behaviour regulated more by their own likes and tastes than traditional social norms (Pulford, Johnson, & Awaida, 2005). Growing up with returning prosperity, retail culture and service encounters have attuned them to their own expectations of satisfaction (Raven & Welsh, 2003). Already liberal among Arab societies, Lebanese youth use media to sample various identities (Sreberny, 2001). Internet addiction is low (Hawi, 2012), but participation in internet discourse high, reducing Lebanese

youth's conformity to authority (Kraidy, 2007). Media shapes Lebanese university students' expectations for education. They see digital immediacy and creativity as "characteristic features for knowledge acquisition" (Gülbahar, 2013). They connect a permissive, exploratory approach with learning English (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007) and feel English offers more freedom than French or Arabic, including less emphasis on grammar accuracy (Diab, 2004). Lebanese students are well-informed about quality issues in Lebanese universities (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2002; Al-Khourry, Kotob, Fares, Eido, & Ghandour 2014).

Research questions for this study include: What were teachers' and students' subjective attitudes towards using email for grammar feedback? How did these change, over the semester in which this practice was introduced? Can using a familiar medium such as email move a traditional teaching culture to embrace authentic digital practices? Can it narrow the gap between instructors' and students' cultures? How does using email impact instructors' views of feedback, and self?

## 2. Method

Instructors needed preparation for using email feedback, as can be seen from the instructor profile.

### 2.1 Instructor Profile

Of 36 instructors included in this study, few held degrees relevant to ELT (MA TEFL/TESOL 4=11.11%, Linguistics 3=8.33%). A further 9=25% held local degrees in "English", which combine literature, traditional grammar and introductory linguistics. Literature takes pride of place, being used to sensitise students to cultural diversity and civic responsibility, important objectives in the post-civil war context (Ghosn, 2004). These degrees include no TEFL/TESOL coursework. Lebanese translation programs focus on Arabic and French, only recently including English (1=2.78%). Of the 6(=16.67%) education degrees, most did not address language pedagogy, with two in management, one in leadership, and one in international education. Other degrees included political science (5=13.89%), management (2=5.56%), and 1(=2.78%) each from art history, chemistry, communication, marketing, middle-eastern languages, psychology and public administration, as in Figure 1.

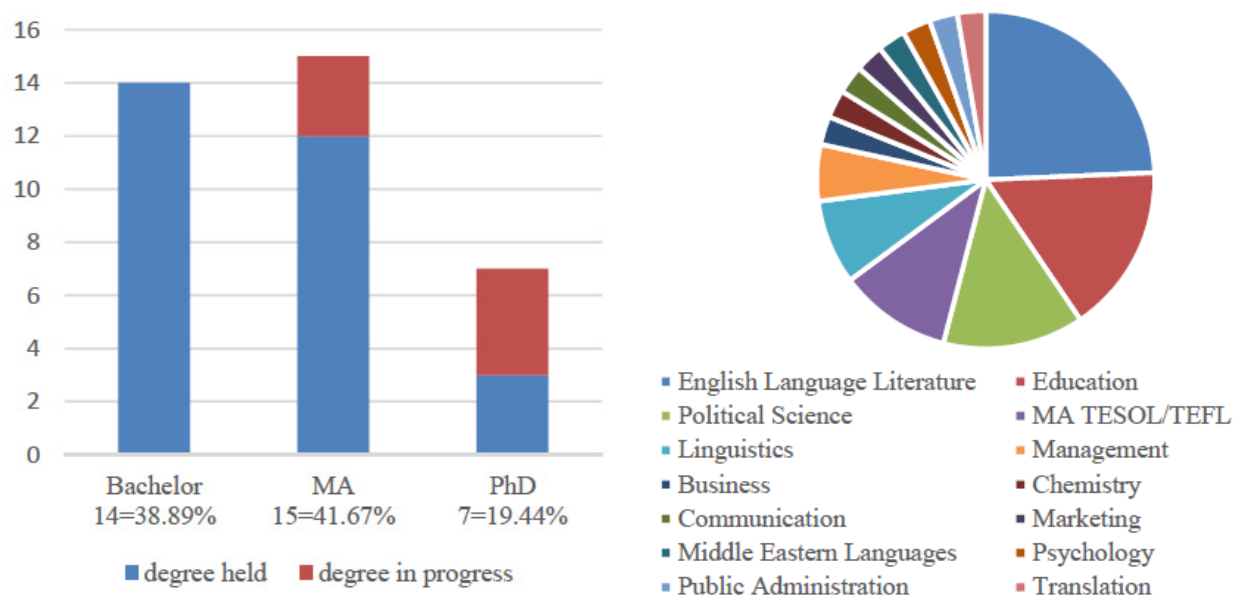


Figure 1. English Language Instructors' Highest Degrees and Fields

Few degrees (4=11.11%) were regional or international. Two international degrees came from institutions ranked in the global top 200, two from collegiate-level institutions. Two (=5.56%) instructors were research-active, from globally-ranked institutions, and native speakers. Several, who had been with the institution longest, held undergraduate degrees only, of which three remained unverified. Most degrees (28=77.77%) had been obtained within Lebanon. Most instructors (33=91.67%) worked part-time. Anecdotal evidence suggested they often

skipped office hours, and students found it difficult to match their own schedules to instructor availability, contributing to the selection of email as a useful feedback mechanism. A few instructors were excluded from this study as they did not teach required courses, did not complete the semester, or taught mainly in other departments.

Hiring and course allocation reflected years of service and personal connections (wasta, واسطة). Of 7 PhDs, 4 departed after the semester in which the study occurred, citing frustrations with the traditional teaching culture and the authoritative role of long-term employees. The average number of years since instructors graduated with their highest degree was 13.47, but instructors fell into two subgroups; those who had graduated within 8 years (23=63.89%), and those who had graduated 20-40 years previously (13=36.11%), acquiring their language pedagogy prior to the emergence of digital literacies, the 1994 curriculum, and the emergence of student-centred teaching approaches. Interactions among instructors reflected traditional cultural norms: those with long years of service dominated discussions of syllabus and classroom practices. Only 6=16.67% had attended a professional development event since graduating. Digital literacy was limited: all had smart-phones but only 5=13.89% had played games on their phones, 3=8.33% had created an avatar, played MMORPGs, and used online learning platforms, and 2=5.56% had visited a virtual environment, and used a sound-editor in teaching phonology - the same few individuals in all cases. Several had never before used email, some had never used word-processing before, one brought hand-written exams to support staff to "type". Anecdotal information suggested existing feedback practices were various, including cases where the only feedback given was alpha-numeric exam grades. Requirements for graded work had been introduced, but oversight had been absent. Thus, instructors needed preparation before they could provide effective email feedback.

### *2.2 Instructor Preparation and Email Feedback Form*

Instructors were given 42 hours' training, including 2 day-long pre-semester workshops including lecture-format input on contemporary feedback research and workshops on using the email feedback form, plus 26 hours of seminars and small-group support sessions in-semester. The feedback form was introduced pre-semester, with course teams working on it in breakout groups. It had an initial space for instructors' personal comments, ensuring engagement with the student. This was followed by three columns. Column 1 "These things were well done" ensured positive emotional engagement. Column 2 "Suggestions" reframed negative as positive feedback. Recommended options connected grammar feedback at the level of word, clause and sentence to semantic feedback at the level of paragraph and text. Instructors could individualise these, with a maximum of five items being sent to the student at any one time. The third column was "Grammar". Given instructors' tenacious focus on grammar correction, the form limited the number of items that could be listed to ten. Course teams selected items to include in column 3, based on their experience. When classes commenced, students submitted scripts by email. Instructors pasted the form into a reply, wrote comments, added/deleted items from the three columns, and returned it to students, copying their feedback emails to an email address used to collect feedback for analysis. This practice was undertaken in 73 writing classes on three campuses, where the average class-size was 34.

### *2.3 Data Collection Instruments*

Data was collected during one 15-week semester. Three instruments were used: a survey, personal responses from instructors and students, and completed feedback emails. To enhance reliability of results, three consistent instruments were used. The Week 7 survey elicited instructor views about email feedback via 16 questions in 4 sections; (a) getting used to the process, (b) comparing traditional with email feedback, (c) the efficacy of email feedback, and (d) student reception, using a 5-point Likert scale where 1=not at all, 2=only a little, 3=somewhat, 4=quite, and 5=a lot.

Qualitative data was collected from 36 instructors and 160 students. Both groups were invited to write a personal response giving their views on email feedback, mid-semester. Personal responses elicit more subjective lexicogrammar than formal business genres such as letters, or educational genres such as essays (Morrison, 1996). People express their views by selecting specific words and phrases from options available in the language (Hunston & Thompson, 2001). These choices can be aggregated, and patterns and regularities identified (Martin & Rose, 2008). Derived from systemic functional linguistics, appraisal analysis taxonomises emotions, judgments and appreciations as lexicogrammatical systems articulated into sets, categories and subcategories of increasing delicacy (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), as in Figure 2. Affect realises emotion, and underlies judgment and appreciation, which rework feelings as propositions about persons, events and objects (Martin & White, 2005). System networks "are not arbitrarily posited" (Bednarek 2009, 150), but reflect the convergence of

psychological and linguistic paradigms of emotion, which “have gained widespread acceptance in the field of emotion research” (Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, De Boeck, & Ceulemans, 2007, 689). Subjective realisations of attitude may be negative or positive: “It’s good to get feedback by email” is positive, “I don’t like it when my teacher writes red corrections on my paper” negative. Concordancing data into hierarchical classes is an efficient means of analysing attitude (Polanyi & Zaenen, 2006). Software is routinely used for this (Taboada, Brooke, Tofiloski, Voll, & Stede, 2011). This study used CorpusTool (CT), which includes appraisal networks and generates a polarity metric (O’Donnell, 2008).

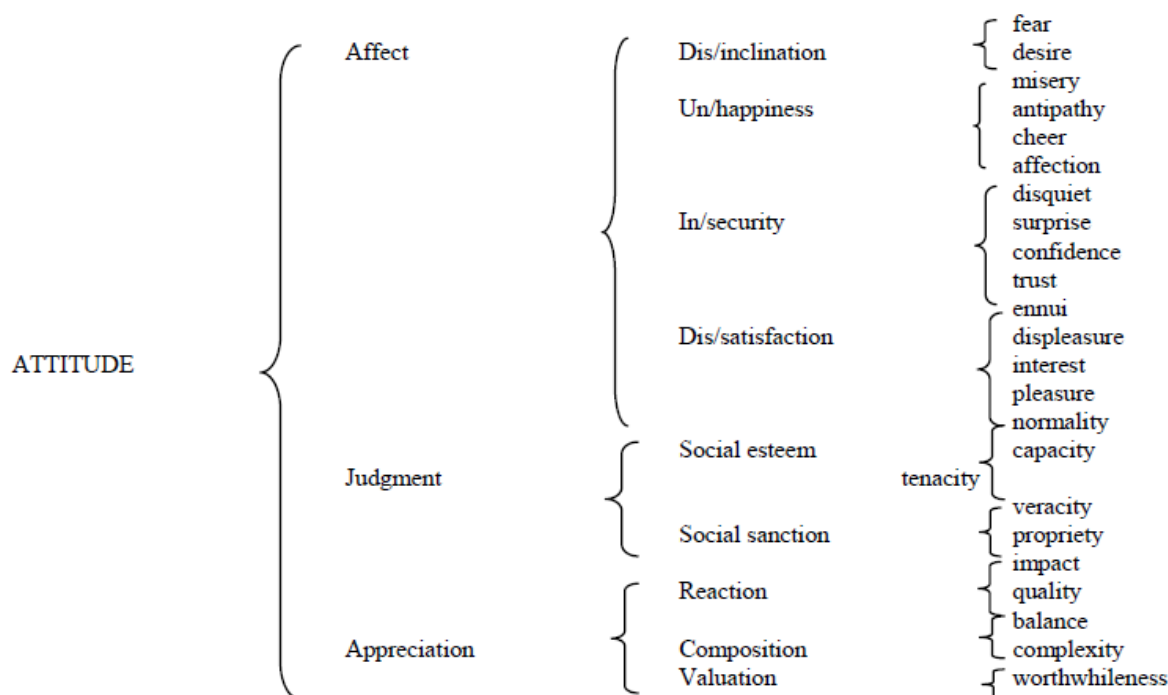


Figure 2. The attitude system

Appraisal analysis yields a nuanced attitudinal profile. This could not be achieved using simple thematic analysis, which would merely, and predictably identify lack of time, skills and interest, personal belief, and connectivity as the reasons instructors preferred traditional to email feedback, responses which have been extensively critiqued (Lee 2000, Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2002). Similarly content analysis would produce content-element frequency scores (Carley, 1990). Teachers’ feelings are at the heart of feedback issues (Kay 2007, Kozma 2003). Appraisal analysis aggregates lexicogrammatical cues identifying what teachers *feel about* the topic they are writing about. It is more useful than conventional analyses because it can reveal teachers’ stance towards their own feedback practices, and also how students respond to these.

While linguistic data can be formally codified using criterion-based functional-semantic analysis, classifications can occasionally be unclear, and boundary cases exist. This study used two trained human taggers with related graduate coursework and 200+ hours’ experience. Example texts were discussed during a norming session, after which each independently tagged both corpora. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen’s  $\kappa$  (percent-overall and free-margin) (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Finally, 532 emailed forms containing instructor feedback were analysed by two research assistants, in Lebanon on a one-month post-graduate work experience. Both were native speakers of English, also fluent in Arabic, who had 10 to 12 years’ experience in the middle-east, held recent MA-TESOL degrees from a globally-ranked institution in the U.K., and were not members of the teaching unit. A 3-stage process was used. First, each email feedback was rated using a 5-point scale where 4=excellent, 3=good, 2=satisfactory, 1=basic and 0=absent.

Second, emails were rated, applying the same scale to 4 communicative qualities of effective email feedback (Huett, 2004), producing a second value out of 4. Qualities were: “timeliness” (rating feedback sent 7-28 days from reception), “length” (rating sufficiency of feedback in the 3 columns), “clarity” (rating instructors’ language use), and “engagement” (rating the personal, sentence-length comments). Two averages were calculated for each instructor. Third, the two values were averaged, producing a final metric used to explore relationships between feedback quality and elements of the instructor profile.

### 3. Data

Quantitative data were collected from instructors using a 16-item survey, as in Table 1. Only 21=58.33% of instructors completed the survey. Averages for four items representing the instructor’s learning process were lowest at “somewhat”. Averages comparing email with written feedback were between “somewhat” and “quite”. Averages for efficacy were stronger, and for instructor perceptions of student reception of email feedback the strongest of all 16 items. The value for instructors’ assessment of student language acquisition was second-weakest, and that for instructors’ liking for email feedback weakest of all.

Table 1. Instructor survey data

SURVEY SECTION	QUESTIONS	AVG
INSTRUCTOR LEARNING PROCESS	difficult to get used to	3.42
	takes time to get used to	3.52
	I am used to it now	3.05
	I like it now	2.86
		<b>3.24</b>
COMPARISON WITH WRITTEN FEEDBACK	easier than written feedback	3.24
	faster than written feedback	2.95
	more organised than written feedback	3.76
	more convenient for record keeping	3.95
		<b>3.45</b>
PERCEIVED EFFICACY	for giving personal comments	3.81
	for identifying what is well done	3.86
	for identifying what needs to improve	3.71
	for identifying grammar items	3.14
		<b>3.63</b>
STUDENT RECEPTION	students like it	3.90
	students replied to my emails	3.87
	students discussed email feedback with me	3.82
	students’ work has improved	2.95
		<b>3.64</b>

Qualitative data came from personal responses written by students and instructors. Student responses formed a corpus of 21 376 words in 1,442 sentences, with 708 attitudes realised, 581=82.06% positive and 127=17.94% negative. Attitudinal density was 33.12 per thousand words. Instructor responses formed a corpus of 11,062 words in 921 sentences, with 655 attitudes realised, most negative (445=67.94%), 210=31.58% positive. Attitudinal density was 59.21 per thousand words. For both, most attitudes were realised in six subcategories, as in Table 2. Inter-rater reliability indicated strong agreement not attributable to chance ( $\kappa$  p-o=0.855,  $\kappa$

f-m=0.802).

Table 2. Ranked frequently-realised attitude subcategories by students and instructors

STUDENT CORPUS					INSTRUCTOR CORPUS						
SYSTEM	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	N	%+VE	SYSTEM	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	N	%+VE		
1	Affect	Un/happiness	Cheer	103	18.93	1	Appreciation	Social esteem	normality	37	17.62
2	Appreciation	Reaction	Quality	82	14.11	2	Judgment	Reaction	quality	33	15.71
3	Judgment	Social esteem	Capacity	74	12.74	3	Judgment	Social esteem	tenacity	29	13.81
4	Affect	Dis/satisfaction	Pleasure	65	11.19	4	Appreciation	Reaction	impact	15	7.14
5	Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	43	7.40	5	Affect	Un/happiness	cheer	13	6.19
6	Appreciation	Valuation	Worth	27	4.65	6	Judgment	Social esteem	propriety	11	5.24
				394	67.81					138	65.71
SYSTEM	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY		%-VE	SYSTEM	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY		%-VE		
1	Affect	Un/Happiness	Affection	21	16.54	1	Judgment	Social esteem	normality	69	15.51
2	Judgment	Social sanction	Capacity	18	14.17	2	Affect	In/security	confidence	60	13.48
3	Appreciation	Reaction	Impact	14	11.02	3	Appreciation	Composition	complexity	57	12.81
4	Appreciation	Composition	Complexity	11	8.66	4	Appreciation	Valuation	worth	48	10.79
5	Judgment	Social esteem	Propriety	6	4.72	5	Judgment	Social Esteem	capacity	46	10.34
6	Affect	Dis/satisfaction	Pleasure	4	3.15	6	Affect	In/security	disquiet	22	4.94
				74	58.27					302	67.87

Students realised more positive (“in my opinion using email evolution is something very nice and new”), instructors more negative (“I don’t think it is worthwhile”) attitudes towards email feedback. Students realised more positive and negative appreciations, or affect reworked as propositions about events outside the self (“It not only saves time in communication but also helps us overcome many limitations like time and distance”), instructors more positive and negative judgments, which realise normative values in a given context (“Our students are nonchalant. They do not care to read these feedback forms”). Student responses realised many qualities and impacts of email feedback (“Yes I do prefer online evaluation because the hints or the points that the instructor wants me to focus on would be accessible for me at any time, so I can take them in consideration and more seriously”, “It helped me see what were my weaknesses like the introduction, and strong points like giving examples”), and a sense of enhanced ability (“It helps me because I can fix my mistakes on the draft, before I hand in and get the grade”). Instructor responses realised abnormality and under-confidence (“I haven’t used email for feedback before”, “I am not at all used to email”), challenges and complexities (“I have spent most of the weekend correcting”, “I am losing track of emails due to the sheer quantity of them”, “My laptop is old and slow”, “Every time there is a storm or power cut or my internet needs topping up, I cannot do any corrections”), and negative worth (“Most students don’t bother to look at the content of their feedback”). Examples are explored below.

The quality of email feedback was evaluated in relation to instructor’s level and relevance of training, and years of service, as in Table 3.

Table 3. Quality of instructor feedback by degree, subject and years of service (N=36)

	BY HIGHEST DEGREE			BY SUBJECT (HIGHEST DEGREE)				BY YEARS OF SERVICE	
	PhD n=7	MA n=15	BA n=14	Ling+TEFL n=7	ELL n=9	Educ n=6	Other n=14	<8 n=23	>20 n=13
TIMELINESS	3.75	3.11	0.58	2.92	2.61	2.63	1.12	3.23	1.17
LENGTH	3.57	2.93	0.74	3.16	2.77	3.39	1.34	2.95	1.34
CLARITY	3.89	2.26	0.62	3.15	3.05	2.84	1.22	3.30	0.85
ENGAGEMENT	3.67	2.75	0.37	2.97	2.40	2.13	1.39	2.69	0.66
AVG	3.72	2.76	0.58	3.01	2.71	2.75	1.27	3.04	1.01

Feedback quality was good-to-excellent from PhDs, satisfactory-to-good from MAs, and less than basic from those with BAs only. It was good from instructors with degrees in linguistics and TEFL, satisfactory-to-good from instructors with degrees in English and Education, and basic from instructors with other degrees. It was good from newer, and basic from long-service instructors (most of whom rarely or never sent email feedback). High values for clarity in the PhD and Ling+TEFL categories reflect these instructors' native-speaker status and greater digital literacy. In most cases, higher values were found for length, which assessed content in the three columns, than for engagement which assessed the personal comments in sentence format at the beginning of the email. Values less than or close to 1 reflected instructor subgroups who rarely or never sent email feedback, particularly those with BAs only, and those with long service.

#### 4. Discussion

Low instructor participation in the survey reflected the fact that many had ceased sending email feedback by mid-semester, consonant with low responsiveness to institutional email more generally. Instructors perceived email feedback as somewhat challenging to learn, but better than written feedback. They understood that students liked it, and acknowledged it as effective. The average for instructor learning process, lowest of the four sections, probably reflects the "techno-reluctance" adult learners feel when learning new digital skills (Kimber 2002, 155). That they found emailing the feedback form easier, more organised and better for record-keeping than paper-based methods, but not as fast, reflects the fact that many qualified more than 20 years previously, few had updated their skills, and most were part-timers not paid for the grading hours required. The lower value for "identifying grammar items" contradicts research on the learning impact of positive student reception. The contradiction between high values given for students replying to and discussing emails, and the low value for learner improvement which proxied for grammar learning, highlights the importance of hiring instructors with ELT training, and a current understanding of relationships between language acquisition and positive emotional engagement. Overall, the survey revealed that 7 weeks' practice was insufficient to establish digital feedback practices among culturally-traditional instructors, especially groups comprising the majority of the teaching unit, part-timers, those with long-service, and those lacking relevant qualifications.

Attitude data showed students had a more positive view of email feedback than instructors. Their most frequently-realised positive attitudes were happiness-cheer ("I love the aspect of suggestions very much", "I like this way of correction, it gives me more information") and satisfaction-pleasure ("This way is more rewarding to the student", "I'm satisfied about the new way of correction and about how my English are improving"). Positive affect was most frequently realised as a disposition, or ongoing emotional state ("the Well Done list make the student feel that he is really learning and doing well, where it encourages him/her", "by the feedback form I come to know my mistakes and I can fix them. Now I feel more assured about how I write essays"). Most negative affect was realised as a behavioural surge, indicating emotion felt strongly and suddenly ("if you are wrong your paper will be filled in red with ex's and student hate this type of correction because it will make them feel so bad"). Such congruent realisations of affect are reliable attitudinal indicators because they place the subject in an unambiguous relationship to the attitude expressed (Halliday, 1985). Also common were positive reactions to the quality ("The new feedback form is better and more efficient", "The feedback forms have been very effective in helping me realized areas that I went wrong") and impact of email feedback ("Getting the email feedback from my teacher is more interesting", "It helps me in my daily life by facing obstacles easily without being



embarrassed”). Realisations in these subcategories are closest to affect, attributing elicitation of emotion to a powerful object (Eggins, 1994). Appreciations of valuation connect subjective views to normative community values (Painter, 2003). Students’ positive valuations specifically notice language learning (“Sending a feedback is very useful in the learning process because it allows the students to figure out where they went wrong”, “It will help to find in what I am weak and how to develop it”).

Positive judgments of social esteem-capacity showed that students felt empowered by receiving email feedback. “Can”, and related expressions realise modalities of ability and potentiality. For example, “I can use the list to correct my mistakes” expresses an experience, identifies skills acquired, and imagines their probable future enactment (Stack, 2012). Their meaning is best understood pragmatically rather than epistemically. That is, “He can keep the note that the instructor sent it so later he can check out his old mistakes in order to not repeat it” indicates something the student did, and feels motivated to do again in future, setting them within a continuum of capacity-based action (Panther & Thornburg, 1999). Realisations often attributed capacity to the feedback form, indicating students found it powerful (“the feedback can help you to know your best ideas and your best things you do which can encourage you in the future”, “it can also contribute to a student having confidence in getting a higher grades”). In “suggestions can be very helpful when I’m lost and can’t think of a better way to write”, ability is attributed to column 2 of the feedback form, (“can”) as compared to the student who realises himself as less-able (“can’t”).

Instructors realised more negative than positive attitudes, particularly under-confidence and disquiet (“I am not so familiar with this method”, “the teacher feels worried because she cannot know if the student understands their errors”), negative judgments of normality and capacity (“We have not used email before, “I am not skilled at the email form”), and negative appreciations of complexity and worth (“I found it difficult because I am not good at IT”, “I think that this is not valuable for students”). They also realised many negative attitudes about students as learners (“Most students have the tendency to cheat, or ask for somebody else’s help. Thus, I’ll never be sure if the work is theirs or somebody else’s”). Several re-asserted the merits of traditional feedback:

It seems they do not learn from email feedback. The students do not know the grammar rules, so how can they learn them from my putting ‘pronoun reference’ or ‘singular-plural agreement’ into the list? Most students do not even read the email, but they care only for the grade. This is why the normal method of circling the errors and handing it back is better.

These comments highlight the need for instructors with recent and relevant qualifications. Instructors’ positive Appreciations of reaction and impact addressed the quality of their own (“writing email feedback is okay”), and attributed student experiences (“using email makes students feel that they are in a more professional environment”, “It is a more engaging way for them to receive our comments, because they already do everything on email”). Frequently-realised positive judgments of normality, tenacity and propriety realised instructors’ views of their progress with email feedback (“Email is an exceptional way to give feedback, only now starting to be used in universities”, “I have persevered in sending all these emails”, “we have to move on and benefit from this progression in the communication sector”). The only frequently-realised Affect category was Happiness-cheer (“Knowing how the students read my comments was rewarding”, “It is encouraging when they try to improve the specific items listed”). That is, instructors perceived positively the same benefits that ELT research into email feedback has revealed. But lacking ELT training, having undergraduate qualifications only, and not updating qualifications taken many years ago meant that most remained unaware of the cognitive import of positive emotional engagement in L2 learning generally, and acquiring form specifically.

Three issues were raised by both students and instructors; a negative perception of student use of feedback, and concerns about electricity and internet access. In the student corpus, 16=76.19% of negative unhappiness-affection evaluated other students as unlikely to make use of feedback (“Some students don’t like it. They just get sad if the teacher gives them feedback and it shows their strengths and weaknesses. They don’t even read it”). These comments may reflect instructors’ in-class remarks, or student perceptions of their more individualist values. Instructors realised 21=58.33% negative judgments of capacity and propriety (“Some apathetic students do not give importance to this kind of corrections and do not review their mistakes”, “students use the excuse of using their computer not for doing their homework or assignment but to enjoy their time or play games”). These negative views are not supported by student responses or by the high values instructors gave for students replying to and discussing emails. Research shows most students are engaged with online feedback (Heift, 2001; Pujola, 2001). Again, the need to hire instructors with ELT training and contemporary

understandings of the place of emotion in learning is apparent.

Both students and instructors realised concerns about internet access and power problems (“Sometimes the connectivity isn’t good or available for all students which may delay the feedback process”, “Some students do not have electricity in the full 24 hours, so they may not be successful in knowing what they did wrong”). These comments reflect the Lebanese social preference for working in the city and living in the mountains, desirable for climate, but less so for infrastructure. This indicates a limitation on the use of email in this context. Feedback could be made accessible via smartphone, as telephony is excellent throughout the country.

The feedback quality analysis showed a correspondence between effective feedback and instructors with higher and more relevant degrees, and overcodes findings for relevantly-qualified, digitally skilled native-speakers. Lower values for instructors without ELT training or with BAs only were expected, mirroring low values for instructors serving more than 20 years, most with irrelevant or minimal qualifications as required for commercial language schools who had risen to tertiary teaching through personal connections developed over their years of service rather than relevant training in the field. This indicates that *wasta*, connections, can undermine academic standards in the traditional and collectivist Lebanese context.

In Arab contexts, “comprehensive reform of the higher education system” is needed to “put the region on a better footing for advancement and competition in a technologically driven, knowledge-based world” (Masri & Wilkins, 2011, ii). Arab youth have “heightened expectations”, but are “enrolled in institutions that lack key human...resources” (ibid., iii). This study confirms the gap between Lebanese teachers’ traditional and Lebanese youths’ media-saturated cultures. Key problems identified in Arab-world contexts include “the quality of teachers and the incentives to reward, train, and retain top educational professionals...Teacher training, recruitment, and reimbursement are at the core of the quality dilemma” (ibid., 3-6). In Lebanon, the reforms envisioned by the 1994 National Curriculum, particularly moving from teacher- to learner-centred pedagogies and using of interactive methods, are being held back by Lebanese teachers. This study foregrounds the link between teachers with current, relevant teaching qualifications and the ability to provide effective feedback to media-savvy youth. While “technology-enabled learning is at odds with teacher comfort zones” (Kimber, 2002, 155), and digital skills become more challenging with age (Kotrlik & Redmann, 2007), Lebanese tertiary institutions should support such training. Without it, traditional attitudes “can manifest practices that challenge the facilitation of democratic and participative learning in classrooms” (Akar, 2012, 474). In this case, instructors realised underconfidence, disquiet, abnormality, incapacity, difficulty and lack of value to justify rejecting authentic digital methods and re-assert entrenched norms, “rote learning and memorization, and dependence on high-stakes testing...outdated curricula and methodologies” (Syed, 2003, 337). While quality assurance has reshaped Arab higher education (Abouammoh, 2010), this study highlights the retrograde impact of using a majority of part-timers on that progress. English is a critical factor in Lebanese students’ subjective well-being (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007). But the learning benefit of positive emotional engagement is offset by part-timers poorly-paid for feedback, and by older teachers with long years of service and institutional connections rather than relevant training and contemporary digital skills.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has two limitations. Survey data may over-represent positive instructor views, as only 21=58.33% completed it. However, 26=72.22% of instructors wrote a response, and this corpus data is more reliable. The study occurred over a single semester, where a longer-term study could better track impacts on teaching culture and feedback practices.

This study has reached five conclusions. First, positive student and negative instructor responses map Lebanese generational digital and cultural divides. Research shows the critical role of emotion in learning. This study reveals the connection between negative emotion in feedback and the contextual problem of “not enough qualified teachers” (Syed, 2003, 337), highlighting the role of relevant training in reforming the traditional focus on form with positive learner-centred approaches.

Second, while instructors perceived students’ positive response to email feedback, this did not alter their views or practices, indicating the entrenched nature of the teaching culture, including techno-reluctance and low part-timer engagement with feedback. “There is a pressing need to invest in teacher education programs for nationals...The notion of standards, or quality, has been missing—or at least lagging. Expertise and a knowledge base are necessary ingredients in developing standards, but ...qualifications and relevant expertise” are lacking (ibid., 39-40). These challenges to ELT are found in many global contexts, and best practice may not be quickly

achieved. This reveals the urgency of hiring TEFL/TESOL-trained instructors, prioritizing them over long-service teachers in structuring syllabi, as well as in devising accountability measures for instructor evaluation.

Third, this study shows a need for extensive instructor training in digital literacies. Instructional hours equivalent to one tertiary course were insufficient to establish email feedback, contrary to other studies in Lebanon (Saleh, 2008). Training may reduce negative attitudes, as learning new digital skills positively motivates adult learners. In global contexts:

[e]mployees need to be rewarded for engaging in learning activities, taking the initiative, acquiring new skills...HRD practitioners need to motivate and encourage employees not only to think toward learning, but also to work together toward learning. They need to encourage employees to collaborate with supervisors and leaders to have a shared vision toward integrating their learning toward the organisational level. To succeed, HRD practitioners should pay attention to establishing systems and structures that encourage learning. (Dirani, 2013).

Supporting teachers to use digital literacies in the classroom depends initially on “a conducive attitude on the part of management to the integration of new technologies” (O’Dowd, 2013).

Fourth, this study has drawn attention to the need for explicit guidance and oversight in giving feedback in contexts where teaching qualifications are mixed. “To be most effective, professors need to be truly engaged in teaching and research. A significant proportion of profession members must have full-time academic appointments and devote attention exclusively to academic responsibilities” (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009, 90-91). In global contexts, dependence on part-timers is likely to remain. Remunerating and supervising feedback can help ensure desired language outcomes with teachers lacking relevant or recent qualifications.

Finally, this study frames elements of local culture, particularly *wasta*, as sites of resistance to change in teacher self-concepts. Longer years of service correlated with age, and with a traditionally authoritative self-understanding. Yet “teacher training requires a concentration on teacher’s attitudes and skills” (Frayha, 2003, 86). This tension occurs in ELT contexts worldwide. Feedback design and oversight by ELT-trained, digitally-skilled, full-time members of faculty offers a cost-effective means of countering the negative impacts of deeply-entrenched traditional norms.

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