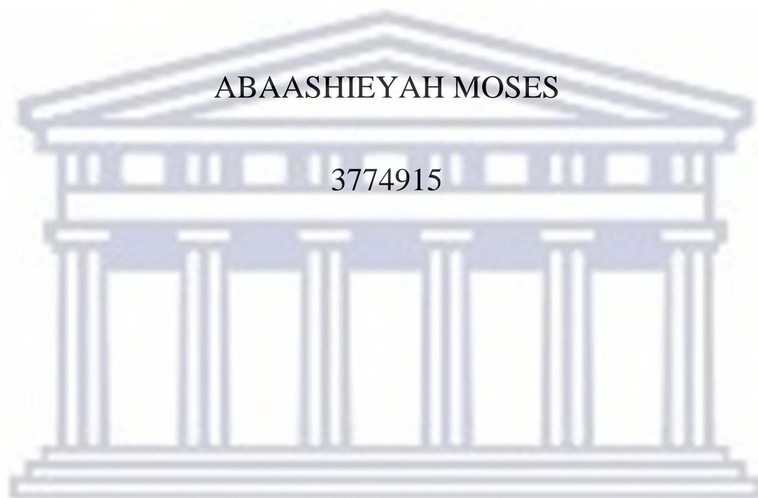
Out of sight, out of mind: **An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of lockdown, and the shift to distance learning in 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape**



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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English, University of the Western Cape

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Abstract

The statement “feedback plays an important role in students’ learning and development” has never been truer than in the present academic climate (Moses, 2020). The persistence of the global pandemic, COVID-19, prolonged mandatory online learning and teaching, which took place in isolation from the academic community, and restricted educational interaction with various online platforms. The isolation from the academic community and impaired interaction may have impacted students’ sense of belong in the university context and the essential academic relationships. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to determine the impact online learning had on academic relationships, and consequently, on students’ development of feedback literacy, using the theoretical lenses of academic literacies and Ubuntu. This research has been conducted in the form of a qualitative study, utilising a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with student doing their third year of English literature students in 2021 via Google Forms (questionnaire) and WhatsApp voice calls (interviews). Participation was voluntary and participants’ identities remain confidential. Using thematic analysis this study found that the shift in teaching methods, from face-to-face learning to online learning, has affected the student-tutor academic relationship both negatively and positively, and positively impacted students’ feedback literacy. The participants of this study showed a fair development of their feedback literacy, and in some cases even developed some feedback literacy characteristics because of the online learning mode. The findings of this study discuss the complexity of its participants’ learning needs which ultimately determined their learning mode preferences and their feedback literacy development.

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Declaration

I declare that "*Out of sight, out of mind:* An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of lockdown, and the shift to distance learning in 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape" is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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Chapter 1:
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Feedback literacy is defined as a students' ability to comprehend, engage with, implement, and learn from feedback; it is a skill tacitly acquired and best developed with strong academic relationships (Carless and Boud, 2018). The development of students' feedback literacies can be challenging to some even in 'traditional learning contexts', such as face-to-face learning. Thus, students' exposure to mandatory online learning due to COVID-19 has led to new concerns pertaining to students' engagement with and comprehension of feedback. Although online teaching and learning acts as an acceptable substitute for traditional teaching, it inherently underscores a possible disconnection between the individual (student and/or academic staff) and the shared academic space (such as the university campus and lecture halls.). It is here where this study's aim lies, namely, to explore how and to what extent the development of feedback literacies of English 3 students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) may have been impacted by lockdown and the shift to online learning in 2021.

This introduction chapter starts by providing the background of the study, followed by context for the study, thereafter a discussion of the research question, and finally, the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the study

This study was inspired by my own experience as a student learning in the mandatory online learning period of 2020, when it was abruptly introduced. My Honours cohort and I, at the time, felt isolated from one another and our lecturers, and we often shared how learning and understanding the course content, as well as general interactions would have 'just been easier in-class'. We felt as though we were not learning in the traditional sense, which is from course content followed by feedback. Instead, it felt like we were primarily learning through the feedback we received after submitting a lecture assessment. In other words, we knew we were on the right track if the feedback did not say we were wrong. Thus, during this period our feedback practices and feedback literacies were what we relied upon heavily. This is what

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brought about the questions - 'what if I have difficulty engaging with feedback?' and 'what effect does this have on my feedback literacy development?'. This led to the formation of this study which explores the development of students' feedback literacy and academic relationships during online learning. Additionally, this study, to some extent, serves as a continuation of my Honours thesis which focused on relational feedback, how students' engagement with and comprehension of feedback is impacted by academic relationships. My findings showed a positive correlation; the quality of academic relationships with the feedback 'giver' does indeed impact how students engage with and comprehend feedback (Moses, 2020). The findings of said study corroborate an experience I too, can attest to. During my undergraduate studies, specifically my first and second year, I had a very standard academic relationship with my English Studies tutors. I would only see and interact with them during tutorials and my grades remained average no matter how hard I tried. However, in my third year, I noticed a drastic improvement in my grades and confidence as an English Studies student, despite having had two tutors that year. This is because in my third year, I made a point to frequently go for consultations and as a result, formed strong academic relationships. This helped me to firstly receive feedback with a better attitude and secondly, better comprehend and implement the provided feedback, which improved my grades overall. Furthermore, the skills developed through these close relationships have served me well through my further studies. Therefore, drawing on my own experience, I was interested to see how academic relationships were formed and maintained during mandated online learning and teaching and the impact this might have on feedback literacy development.

1.3 Context of the study

In 2020, the global pandemic COVID-19 which started in late 2019 worsened and resulted in a global lockdown. As a result, all conventional modes of learning were disrupted because the mandatory lockdown required contact learning institutions to shift all face-to-face learning programmes online (Balta-Salvador, 2021; Mpungose, 2020). This then continued for three years, till the year 2022. Since then, the majority of academic society has returned to its traditional mode of face-to-face learning, but what was once considered a temporary measure (online learning) is now forever built into the fabric of higher education (Mpungose, 2020). Online learning has become a default measure when classes are interrupted, but also it is more embedded in classrooms than before. In other words, although the period of mandatory online learning has long passed, online learning post-COVID-19 at UWC continues to be an

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alternative method of learning and teaching in times of need, such as when there are taxi and/or bus strikes, bad weather and on-campus student protests (Mpungose, 2020). This will be discussed at length in chapter four.

The study focuses on mandatory distance learning that ran, broadly, from 2020 to 2022, and in particular on the impact it had on the English Studies Department at UWC. This meant that three groups of third year English students were also learning under these conditions. It is likely, then, that once UWC returned to face-to-face teaching, students' feedback literacy, which had been developed during online learning, may have a consequential effect on their later feedback literacy development. In other words, if there were issues hindering the development of students' feedback literacy because of online learning, it may have influenced the rest of their academic development. Therefore, this study's intentions are to provide a valuable understanding for the department regarding students' experiences during online learning. This may inform teaching practices going forward.

As online learning could be considered a suitable substitute for face-to-face teaching in times when face-to-face teaching cannot done, the findings of this study remain relevant in the present academic environment and may provide relevant insights for teaching and feedback practices. That is to say, the findings of this study are not restricted to just the mandatory online of the COVID-19 context, but many other contexts in which online learning is used.

1.4 Research questions

This study is situated within the theoretical frameworks of academic literacy and Ubuntu (see chapter 3) and aims to discuss the impact that mandatory distance learning had on the feedback literacy development of third year English Studies students at UWC.

Thus, the research question is:

> How and to what extent does online learning impact students' feedback literacy development?

Although the aforementioned question is the primary focus of this study, the questions below are guiding questions, developed to ensure that all aspects of the research topic are fully explored:

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- How did online learning affect academic relationships during Covid-19?
- How did online learning affect students' ability to interact with their tutors during Covid-19?
- Which feedback literacies did students develop during Covid-19 according to Molloy *et al*'s framework?
- Which mode of teaching did students prefer for developing feedback literacy during Covid-19?

1.5 Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters, the content of which is discussed below.

Table 1.1: Outline of chapters

Chapter Title	Overview of Chapter
1. Introduction	This chapter provides an overview of how the thesis will be structured and a brief background of the study.
2.Contextual Framework	This chapter provides a discussion of feedback and its role, the different kinds of feedback as well as the factors which influence feedback. This is then be followed by a discussion about online learning.
3.Theoretical Framework	Chapter three discusses the theoretical frameworks, the academic literacies approach, feedback literacies (including Molloy *et al*'s (2020) characteristics of a feedback literate student) and Ubuntu.
4. Methodology	This chapter focuses on the research design, how data was collected, organised, and analysed. In addition, the research context is discussed while commenting in more detail on the ethical issues.
5.Community and communication (Results)	This chapter presents the findings from the data and focuses specifically on academic relationships and the sense of community during online learning.

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6. Modes and Molloy *et al*	This chapter, building on the previous one, presents findings from the data, focusing specifically on feedback literacies development during online learning and teaching.
7. Conclusion and Recommendations	This chapter comments in detail on the findings of the study, the ways in which the research questions have been answered, and the significance of the findings in terms of the local academic context, as well as in terms of the broader academic context and the research field in which the study has been located.

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Chapter 2:
Contextual Framework

2.1 Introduction

Since the central focus of this thesis is on feedback, this chapter will start with a discussion on the definition(s) of feedback. Thereafter, the role, the different types, and modes of feedback in higher education broadly, and English Studies specifically, will be discussed.

2.2 The definitions of feedback

Feedback is an inherent and significant part of the academic cycle and has existed as a way for feedback-givers to communicate with students for a very long time (Henderson et al., 2019). These could be lecturers, supervisors, tutors or critical friends. As indicated in Chapter 1, the feedback-givers in this study will be referred to as tutors throughout. Yet, over time, the definition of feedback has evolved from an often routine and overlooked by-product 'of' learning to a more complex and essential component 'for' student learning (Boud, 2000; Malecka *et al*., 2020). This is due to the significant growth of feedback as a field of academic study over many decades (Boud, 2000; Winstone, 2021).

Traditionally, feedback was defined as any information given by tutors to students after an assessment to indicate the students level of learning (Esterhazy, 2018; Malecka *et al*., 2020; Race, 2001; Winstone *et al*., 2021). In other words, this definition posits that feedback is a consequence of students' learning, as it is given *after* learning and/or teaching has occurred. Feedback then is viewed as a product of assessment. Although this understanding is not invalid, it does not fully recognise that feedback can also be given by tutors outside of the framework of assessments. For example, feedback may be given year-round on various aspects related to learning and teaching and is therefore not just limited to assessment and/or assignments but also course work which does not necessarily contribute to students' continuous assessment mark . Additionally, this early definition of feedback implies that feedback primarily functions as a measure 'of' learning. Hence, in accordance with this definition, feedback evaluates what students know by their current academic performance and does not contribute to their learning for future assessments or disciplinary knowledge (Malecka *et al*., 2020; Race, 2001, Taras,

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2006;). Thus, as Taras (2006) and Malecka *et al*. (2020) have reported, feedback by this definition only serves as a manner of 'judging' how much students have learned from the content taught to them. Earlier definitions of feedback, therefore, over-simplified what feedback does and (unintentionally) failed to recognise its many functions in the learning and teaching process (Dawson *et al*., 2018).

In recent years, as feedback has gained a more explicit focus in research, feedback has also increasingly been seen as a tool used 'for' learning in student learning (Dawson *et al*., 2018; Sutton, 2012; Winstone and Carless, 2019; Van Heerden, 2021; Winstone *et al*., 2021). Feedback 'for' learning refers to feedback which contains information that contributes to a student's learning and can be used to improve future tasks (Sutton, 2012). Hence, feedback is understood to have the ability to 'feed *forward*'; that is, to look beyond the context of the current assessment task and focus on broadening students' knowledge and improving current and future assessment tasks (Carless, 2006; Malecka, Boud and Carless 2020). Put differently, feedback is recognised as a process with the ability to measure, impart, and refine one's skills and knowledge. This is manifested in feedback that not only identifies errors but also corrects them and provides explanations and/or clarifications as to why they are errors. This means using phrases like 'incorrect in-text referencing format' and then providing the correct format for the reference, or commenting 'poor paragraph structure, please stick to the Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link format discussed in last week's class' as opposed to just pointing out these errors (Shute, 2008; Weaver, 2006). These kinds of comments better enable students to learn from their feedback,as feedback " is essential for learning and can play a significant role in students' development by providing knowledge required for [their academic] improvement" (Higgins, 2000: 1).

Additionally, researchers acknowledge that feedback does not 'merely support' learning, but that feedback is instead central to learning, stating that the effectiveness of feedback directly affects the quality of students' learning (Rowe *et al*., 2007; Shute, 2008). This means that simply providing feedback as part of the students' learning process is not enough if feedback is ineffective, lacking in its ability to teach and impart knowledge. When students receive effective feedback, the quality of their learning should improve as feedback becomes another source of information.

Notably, researchers like Dawson *et al* (2018), Winstone and Carless (2019), Malecka *et al*., (2020) and Winstone *et al*., (2021) have solidified the importance of feedback in the

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academic context today, having found its potential and advocating for the use of feedback as part of the students' teaching and learning experience. In so doing, they promote the effective use of feedback as a tool 'for' learning.

2.3 The role of feedback

It becomes clear then, that although feedback was once under-conceptualised and relegated to a by-product of learning, researchers and academics have come to recognise and appreciate its multiple roles and influence on student learning and value in the academic cycle (Boud, 2000; Dawson *et al*., 2018; Henderson *et al*., 2019; Malecka *et al*., 2020; Winstone and Carless 2019; Winstone *et al*., 2021). On an everyday level, feedback is now understood as a form of teaching through which students can learn norms and conventions, develop skills, and obtain disciplinary knowledge (Henderson *et al*., 2019). Feedback may convey messages about what is valued in a particular discipline (Van Heerden, 2020). Despite its multiplicity, only two specific roles of feedback will be focused on for this thesis. They are its ability to: build an academic community and enable (or constrain) academic success.

2.3.1 Feedback as a way to build academic relationships and community

Feedback is more than a form of teaching: it is a way of building the academic community through communication between individuals from the same and/or different cohorts, such as between and amongst students and tutors (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). This is because the feedback process is considered one of the most significant forms of student-tutor (or student-student) interaction, involving a complex and unique form of communication (Higgins, 2000). Because of its interactive nature, feedback is often considered a social practice as it is a form of communication which occurs between two or more individuals of the same context (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Lea and Street, 1998; Price *et al*., 2013). The feedback process is not only determined by the quality of the feedback but is also influenced by contextual factors like student-tutor relationships; that is, the relationship between students and tutors have been found to impact students' engagement with feedback (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Lea and Street, 1998; Price *et al*., 2013).

As a social practice, feedback has the ability to build relationships between students and tutors. These are referred to as academic relationships (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). It has been found that the quality of these academic relationships is affected by the quality of feedback the

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students receive (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Moses, 2020). The inverse is also true; the quality of feedback could also impact the quality of the academic relationship (Moses, 2020). Hence, if the feedback focuses on the students' academic improvement in a positive and welcoming manner, students are more likely to be open to forming and/or strengthening their academic relationship with their tutor. Conversely, feedback that focuses on a students' errors with a negative tone could result in a weak academic relationship or deter students from engaging with future feedback or wanting to form an academic relationship with their tutor. This is significant if one considers a tutors' complex positionality in the academic community.

Tutors are figures who fill the space in-between students and lecturers. Despite often being students themselves, they are entrusted by the teaching staff, because of their own academic experiences, to relay discipline-specific knowledge and wisdom (including academic literacies) to students in addition to lecturers (Abbot *et al*., 2018; Clarence, 2018; Underhill and McDonald, 2010). In other words, their role is to supplement the teachings of lecturers by 'translating' the academic literacies for students at a more intimate level in tutorials[1] (Abbot *et al*., 2018; Clarence, 2018; Underhill and McDonald, 2010). Thus, one of the capacities of a tutor is to possess knowledge and experience of practices of a particular discipline and transfer this to students by liaising with students through teaching and/or feedback (Abbot *et al*., 2018; Clarence, 2018). Tutors are therefore the connecting link between lecturers' teaching and expectations for students, and as a result, bind the academic community (Abbot *et al*., 2018). Hence, a strong academic relationship built through effective inter-cohort communication between individuals at the student and tutor level has the inherent ability to solidify the connection between students and the academic society (Moses, 2020). In other words, because feedback is a communal and communicative process, one of its secondary functions is to create and sustain an interactive, interconnected academic community between students and tutors. Therefore, feedback may foster togetherness within the academic community.

2.3.2 Feedback enables (or constrains) academic success

Feedback has the ability to enable (or constrain) students' academic success (Higgins, 2000).

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[1] Tutorials are a class format that is more intimate than lectures as they have fewer students, usually up to 20 students per class, and its purpose is a more student-centred environment which facilitates learning based on a weekly topic previously covered in lectures, but these sessions are more oriented according to students' concerns (Clarence, 2018).

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There are three important aspects to consider: the language, content and tone used in feedback comments (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless, 2006). A student's academic success, to some extent, is affected by the comprehensibility of the diction used, striking a balance between identifying students' strengths and weaknesses in the feedback content, and the overall 'perceived' tone of the comments being negative and/or positive (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Carless 2006). In addition, feedback affects student motivation, confidence, and level of academic engagement (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Hatziapostalou *et al*., 2010; Hyland, 2000; Rowe *et al*., 2007). Thus, if feedback can effectively incorporate all three aspects, it could lead to academic success (Buckley, 2020; Boud and Dawson, 2021; Dawson *et al* 2018; Henderson *et al* 2019; Sellbjer, 2018).

However, it should be noted that the inverse is also true, as not all feedback is 'good' feedback (Esterhazy, 2018; Shute, 2007). Feedback could also constrain students' academic success if the language used is too complex, if the tone of the comment is perceived as confrontational and demotivational, and especially if the content of feedback comments is primarily focused on a student's weaknesses without the necessary specific information they needed to improve (Buckley, 2020; Sellbjer, 2018; Shute, 2007). Thus, ineffective and/or poor feedback might negatively affect how students view their capabilities and may result in a poor performance in future (Buckley, 2020; Carless, 2006; Carless and Winstone, 2023; Kerr, 2017; Waver, 2006;). Therefore, even though students may want to and/or have engaged with the feedback they have received, they may be unable to productively engage with it because it is too difficult to comprehend or too intimidating. Hence, the manner in which feedback is provided plays a role in students' academic success beyond the immediate concern of an essay or assignment.

2.3.3 Role of feedback in English Studies

The aim of the English Studies department is to create a Literary Scholar with language proficiency, disciplinary insight, and skills such as close analysis through feedback (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.:19-21; Cromwell, 2005). Therefore, feedback is given to students to help them develop the necessary analytical mind set, as can be seen by the feedback framework outlined in the student handbook (Department of English Student Handbook, n.d.:19-21; Cromwell, 2005). A study conducted in UWC's English Studies department found that feedback is also often given on technical aspects such as language,

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referencing and structure, in effect telling students that those aspects are what they need to focus on in their writing, instead of developing their disciplinary knowledge and its associated tacit skills (van Heerden *et al*., 2016; Chick, 2009).

The ideal and common form of feedback practice in English Studies in discussed in the student handbook as well as why and when certain comments should be provided. This is evident when it states:

> Your marks and comments (especially for tutorial essays) are there to help you to develop your writing and analytical skills, they are not simply aimed at grading your work. Always read your marker's comments; they are far more important to your development than your actual mark (n.d: 21).

Evidently, the student handbook emphasises that the content of the feedback given throughout the course is meant to develop students' disciplinary, "analytical skills" and writing practices. Additionally, the latter part of the extract above highlights that the feedback in the discipline should be used for 'for' learning (Dawson *et al*., 2018; Sutton, 2012; Winstone and Carless, 2019; Winstone *et al*., 2021). It becomes clear then, that role of feedback in UWC's English Studies department aims to develop students.

In order to develop students, feedback needs to be effective, and an efficient feedback strategy should be in place (Hatziapostalou *et al*., 2010). This strategy should place equal importance on the content and type of feedback, as it does on focus the mode through which it is provided (Hatziapostalou *et al*., 2010). The next two sections will therefore focus on the types and modes of feedback, respectively.

2.4 Types of feedback

Within the academic context there are two main types of feedback which are often used and researched, namely corrective feedback and formative feedback. Each of these types of feedback has a different purpose and focuses on different content. In the section that follows each of these will be discussed in relation to these aspects.

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2.4.1 Corrective feedback

Corrective feedback focuses on the 'correctness' of a student's performance in learning and assessment (Heron, 2011; Malecka *et al*., 2020; Weaver, 2006; Winstone *et al*., 2021). It is referred to as a "halfway house", since it predominantly aims to (often vaguely) point out that students have done something wrong with the hopes of promoting active engagement in students, who are subsequently tasked with identifying the error and searching for the most appropriate solution (Rodwe *et al*., 2007; Sutton, 2012; Sellbjer, 2018). In other words, this type of feedback places the module criteria at the centre of its content, by assessing how much students have learnt, and enlisting them as agents of their own learning by means of identifying errors. An example of this for the English Studies department at UWC is the marking scale and/or standardised rubric in the student handbook. The rubric provides grade scales which comments on the overall correctness of the assignment in respect of its alignment with disciplinary knowledge and expectations (see Appendix A). Thus, the comments associated with the grade scale are vague, as they do not point out exactly where and how students went wrong or right, but that somewhere in the assignment a particular error (and/or correctness) took place.

The purpose of corrective feedback is, theoretically, to promote students' self-efficacy (Salerno *et al*., 2003). Corrective feedback works on the assumption that all students know how to engage with the feedback given with the necessary level of knowledge and ability to identify and correct their errors by means of non-specific guiding comments (Rodwe *et al*., 2007; Sutton, 2012). However, the reality is that often there are varying degrees of proficiency amongst students when it comes to their engagement with feedback (Sellbjer, 2017). Hence, assuming that all students have the ability to engage with and act on corrective feedback effectively may be problematic. In some instances, low proficiency students might engage, evaluate, and reconsider aspects of their assignment which might be correct (Sellbjer, 2018). As a result, their academic performance might remain the same or regress. This implies that students may not learn how to engage with corrective feedback through continuous trial and error. Thus, essentially, it is only in the absence or presence of a similar comment in their subsequent task that they would know if they have fixed their error by engaging with the feedback properly (Sellbjer, 2018). This means that corrective feedback may only foster academic success for students with high proficiency and those who are well aware of the module criteria.

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The content of corrective feedback rarely speaks about how and why students are correct and/or incorrect and subsequently, seldomly provide guidance to fix it; instead, they often merely cite students' errors (Ivanic *et al*., 2000). Therefore, the transmission of information that takes place is predominantly unilateral and relies heavily on students' self-teaching to make sense of corrective feedback comments (Ivanic *et al*., 2000). Another feature of corrective feedback is its dependence on active student participation in the teaching function of the feedback process (Gravett *et al*., 2020; Rodwe *et al*., 2007; Turner, 2021). In other words, it is expected of students to make sense of these comments, to evaluate them, and later to fix them. This may be problematic if students do not know how to correct their work and may end up not learning from this type of feedback.

Corrective feedback's framework is rooted in the deficit model, as content for these type of feedback comments focuses on students' 'wrongness' and has been critiqued for its effects on student learning (Salerno *et al*., 2003; Sellbjer, 2018). The use of the deficit model inherently places students in the position of the lesser knowing and could cause them to perceive themselves in that light as well. Thus, corrective feedback comments could weaken and/or diminish students' motivation and willingness to engage with coursework material and feedback, and as a result poorly affect how students learn (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Gravett *et al*., 2020; Salerno *et al*., 2003). As can be seen, the nature of corrective feedback does not necessarily encourage student success or explicitly contribute to student learning.

2.4.2 Formative feedback

Formative feedback is defined as information provided, often along the margins of assignment documents, to support learning which facilitates the improvement of students' knowledge, competency, skills, behaviour, and attitudes (Bader *et al*., 2019; Higgins, 2000; Salerno *et al*., 2003; Shute, 2008;). Additionally, it refers to feedback given 'for' learning, which guides students to the desired learning goal (Heron, 2011; Taras, 2006; Winstone *et al*., 2021). Essentially, formative feedback tells students what needs to be improved and/or developed, while also providing suggestions on how to do so. For instance: "This paragraph starts by providing evidence. Please stick to the recommended structure of a body paragraph - Point, Evidence and Explanation. Note that evidence ought to be provided in support of the point made".

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Furthermore, the effectiveness of formative feedback is influenced by time and student engagement (Gravett *et al*., 2020; Shute, 2008). Therefore, formative feedback should add to and/or refine existing capacities of knowledge and skill to ensure improvement on the aspects for which it is needed (Shute, 2008). Additionally, formative feedback needs to be provided in a timely manner to ensure that effective learning can take place (Buckley, 2020; Carless, 2019; Carless and Winstone, 2023; Henderson *et al*., 2019; Shute, 2008). As Bader *et al*. claimed, "feedback cannot be formative if students are not able to use it" (2019: 1080).Lastly, students need the opportunity to engage, read, comprehend, and act on these suggestions in subsequent tasks (Malecka *et al*., 2020). Therefore, in order for formative feedback to be considered effective in student learning, students need to be able to actively interact and learn from its content (Bader *et al*., 2019; Carless, 2016; Hatziapostalou *et al*., 2010; Henderson *et al*., 2019). Subsequently, if adequate engagement has occurred on the part of the student, the feedback would be proven effective through their academic development and/or progress.

The purpose of formative feedback focuses on the guidance, teaching, and gradual development of a student's disposition (Shute, 2008; Winstone *et al*., 2021). In order to achieve this, comments should be personalised (but not personal), motivational, manageable, relatable, supportive, and encouraging of student learning (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Bader *et al*., 2019; Hatziapostalou *et al*., 2010; Shute, 2008), as "feedback that has negative effects on [students'] learning is not formative" (Shute, 2008: 156).

2.5 Modes of feedback

Modes of feedback refers to the avenues used to interact with students about their learning and assessments. Broadly, there are two main modes: written feedback and verbal feedback. At this point, it is important to clarify that written feedback here refers to physically written feedback, as well as to electronic feedback shared through online interfaces like emails, Turnitin, or on Microsoft Word documents. Conversely, verbal feedback refers to in-person consultations and electronic consultations via Google Meets or WhatsApp (voice or video call). As established earlier, feedback is a communicative process which influences students' performance and could foster their academic success. The mode used when giving feedback may play an influential role in student engagement and comprehension, while also affecting the quality of the feedback received (Moses, 2020).

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The mode and type of feedback that the English Studies department conventionally uses are outlined in the University of the Western Cape's departmental student handbook. This document makes it clear to all students that feedback in the department which is in the form of written and verbal feedback are referred to as "comments" on tutorial essays and "consultations" respectively (English Department Student Handbook, n.d.: 20). Based on the diction and phrasing of the 'learning from comments and marks' section, it is implied that comments, i.e., written feedback on tutorial essays and assignments, are the most common and primary mode of feedback expected, while consultations are viewed as a supplementary mode of feedback. This is evident when it informs "[i]f you continue to receive the same critical comments on your essays, and are unclear about how to improve your work, consult your marker. Discuss your essays and progress with your tutor during his or her consultation times" (English Literature Student Handbook: 21). This suggests that consultations are an optional continuation of written feedback, which is the initial form of feedback. Additionally, through my "practice wisdom" (Bamber & Stefani, 2016:248) gained as a tutor in this department, I can confirm that written feedback is the most commonly provided form of feedback during online learning as well.

2.5.1 Written feedback

Written feedback is provided to students in writing. Traditionally, this type of feedback present as handwritten comments, most often found along the margins of or at the end of assignments. Depending on the type of feedback, it could contain comments on correctness and/or suggestions on how to meet disciplinary standards (Higgins, 2000; Winstone *et al*., 2021). Additionally, written feedback is considered to be personalised to each student, as these comments are written on the assignments of individual submissions and are patented to their performance (Higgins, 2000). However, written interactions have been found to be highly impersonal, as students are not in direct contact with the feedback giver when these comments are given (Higgins, 2000). As such, written feedback may often need to be supplemented with verbal feedback to iron out any misunderstandings or uncertainties (Kerr, 2017; Orrell, 2006).

Although written feedback is preferred by some students for its quality as a tangible point of reference when doing later assignments, some students have voiced their concerns about the error-coding systems and language used (Ferguson, 2011; Rowe *et al*., 2007). Error-coding systems refers to a generic set of short-hand symbols which are used by tutors when marking

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students' work. Many students have stated that the meaning of these symbols has not been explicitly disclosed to them (Ferguson, 2011), meaning that to them, these symbols do not contribute to the understanding of their mistakes (see common symbols used in feedback in Appendix B). Some tutors could also add to this confusion by using their own unclear error codes, such as the common use of just a question mark without making clear what is *actually* being called into question (Lea and Street, 1998).

Additionally, it has been found that the language or phrases used in some comments can often negatively affect students' comprehension and interpretation (Ferguson, 2011; Higgins, 2000). Comments like, 'be more critical', 'too broad', and 'too vague', are in themselves vague and lack the depth needed to fully explain its meaning to the feedback receiver (Higgins, 2000; Dawson *et al.,* 2018). In such circumstances, despite their willingness to engage with the feedback, students may not always be able to comprehend the content, which affects their ability to act on the feedback and subsequently, influences their academic success.

Despite the negative implications of written interactions discussed above, it remains the most dominant mode of feedback used in academia (Carless, 2006; Winstone *et al.,* 2022). This is because written interactions are time efficient, enabling tutors to give feedback to more students over a shorter period, and does not necessarily require students to make time during their academic day for this interaction, while still allowing them to have said feedback for later use (Carless, 2006). Moreover, some students might prefer written feedback because it does not require them to 'interact' with tutors, which could be an intimidating prospect to some students (Kerr, 2017; Robinson, 2012).

2.5.2 Verbal feedback

Verbal feedback refers to any information exchanged between tutors and students verbally, on the premise that they are in close proximity; this can be done before, during, or after an assignment (Kerr, 2017). Significantly, there are two kinds of verbal feedback: personal consultations, and collective tutor-group interactions (Higgins, 2000; Kerr, 2017). Personal consultations refer to dialogue that takes place between one student and one tutor; these interactions are personal, as they focus on a particular student's performance and concerns (Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008). Although it has been found that students who receive personal consultations often perform better academically, it has also been found that as noted

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above, for some students, these interactions are too ‘personal’ (Carless, 2006; Dawson *et al*., 2018; Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008; Young, 2000). This is because some students are too shy or intimidated by the presence of the tutor. This indicates that students’ openness to this mode of interaction is influenced by their emotions. Additionally, several authors have found that despite personal consultation taking place in real time and allowing students to communicate with tutors directly about their misunderstandings as they arise, it is time consuming for both the tutor and students involved (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Carless, 2006; Moses, 2020), as both students and tutors need to find a time which best suits them, and the interaction itself is time consuming. As a result, many students are deterred from seeking out this form of feedback (Henderson *et al*., 2019).

Collective interaction, on the other hand, refers to tutor-group interactions, which take place between one tutor and two or more students at the same time. These interactions summarise common points of progress and errors which are brought to the attention of all the students present (Kerr, 2017; Higgins, 2000). This mode of communication is less time consuming and allows students to feel less isolated and defensive, since they are now aware that they are not making these mistakes alone (Ferguson, 2011). As a result of collective interactions being less confrontational, it lessens the risk for students to feel isolated, defensive, and unmotivated, and further, requires little to no proactive engagement of students when receiving feedback (Kerr, 2017). Notably, the findings pertaining to this mode of interaction are contradictory. Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) have found that students are less satisfied with collective verbal interactions, while Burke (2009) found students prefer this mode of interaction.

Despite the conflicting nature of researchers' findings, most students agree that verbal interaction, both individually and collectively, is beneficial, as it fosters a two-way dialogue between tutors and students which is more effective for student engagement, comprehension, and interpretation. (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017; Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008; Young, 2000). For the most part, research on feedback tends to focus on it in an in-person context. However, as previously noted, the online teaching and learning environment is also increasingly playing a role. As such, I will briefly examine online learning and its advantages and disadvantages in the following section.

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2.6 Online learning

Online learning refers to a mode of learning that occurs outside of the academic context – that is, university property - and can occur in a different place and/or time as the tutor via online platforms or forums (Mpungose, 2020). Online learning can occur synchronously via video conferences on platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, as well as through a universities' in-house online learning platforms. It can also occur asynchronously via shared Microsoft Word documents, Google documents, (pre)recorded lecture slides, and discussion forums like WhatsApp chat groups or Discord (Aristanik *et al*, 2020). Notably, online learning is highly dependent on a student's access to technological devices that are well suited for online education, such as laptops and smart phones, as well as a strong and reliable internet connection.

Online learning is seen as a universal and equalising mode of teaching (Fouche and Andrew, 2021). This is because learning and teaching can occur at any time and place the student decides, thereby removing the boundaries of time. Additionally, online learning's appeal to synchronous and asynchronous interaction (learning and teaching) is said to bridges the physical distance (Barker, 2010). This is from the global perspective, which operates on the assumption that all students have access to the same quality of devices and internet connectivity, theoretically ensuring academic progress (Aristanik *et al*, 2020; Fouche and Andrews, 2021).

However, Fouche and Andrews (2021) argue that during online learning, student development and progress are influenced by socio-demographic and geographical factors, and that the "exacerbate[d] inequalities" amongst students as possibly hindering and/or limiting their access and/or engagement (133). Consequently, online learning and teaching may be ineffective in the South African context, as many students lack access to the necessary technological devices and/or reliable internet provision (Fouche and Andrew, 2021). This would not only negatively affect how they engage with course content and assessments, but also with feedback.

2.6.1 The impact of online learning on feedback literacy development

Students' overall academic literacy and feedback literacy development could be impacted by online learning (Aristovnik *et al.*, 2020; Baltà-Salvador *et al.*, 2021). One of the key determinants of student development while engaging in online learning was the quality of

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teaching and how it directly influences students' academic development (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Barker, 2010). It was found by Baltà-Salvador *et al*. (2021) that the quality of teaching often worsened during online learning and teaching, which poorly impacted students' academic development. and discusses a face-to-face curriculum that

Additionally, communication could influence students' feedback literacy development during online learning (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Barker, 2010; Fouche and Andrews, 2021). It has been found that students' academic experience and development is related to the "social contact and communication mechanisms in online education" (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021: 7424). In other words, the platforms and manner in which communication students are communicated with during online learning could impact how they learn as well as their experience of the mode of learning. The more often tutors and students communicate during online learning, the more connected and familiar students might feel; the inverse is also true (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Moses, 2021). However, the quality and content of said communication plays a significant role in the development of students' feedback literacy (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Barker, 2010). Therefore, if the content of communication is effective, that is, it is clear, frequent, and offers information 'for learning', then students are more likely to better develop academically (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021).

However, one of the drawbacks of online learning is that some forms of communication are less immediate and do not allow for effective bi-directional communication (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Barker, 2010). This is especially true for asynchronous modes of communication like emails, a more heavily relied on method of communication during online learning, about questions or feedback. As they do not allow students to engage with tutors in real time, there is an inherent pause in communication awaiting a response from tutors, the email could get lost in tutors inbox or worse, they could choose to ignore the email altogether (Barker, 2010; Mpungose, 2020). This (unintentional) delay or absence in communication could deter students from reaching out to tutors. Above all else, there is a power imbalance at play here because tutors, as the 'knower' has the power to delay or withhold their knowledge which leaves students, the 'novice' and seeker of knowledge, at the mercy of tutors. Thus, during communication on an asynchronous platform like email, tutors hold more power in students' feedback literacy development which hegemonically frames these interactions in favour of the tutors.

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Moreover, if one considers that students' academic development is, in part, dependent on their relationship with their tutor and academic community, there are implications of the literal physical distance between students and tutors during online learning (Baltà-Salvador *et al*., 2021; Moses, 2020). The inherent distance of online learning could foster a psychological distance (Barker, 2010), in which the lack of interpersonal physical and/or verbal interaction could further incubate and reinforce the asymmetrical power dynamic (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Scott, 2007). For instance, because of the power dynamic in the traditional learning context which makes some students view themselves as lesser than their tutors, the distance that comes with online learning between them could worsen students view of this academic relationship. Conversely, the distance between tutors and students could improve the issues surrounding the power dynamic and intimidation, as during online learning tutors would no longer be a (metaphorical) towering figure in the students' presence, but distant figures whose presence is watered-down by technological interface. Ironically, this would mean that one of the possible positives of online learning is that unfamiliarity with tutors enables students to communicate and connect with tutors and engage with the academic community. In other words, some students would be keener to interact with tutors online and in turn it would mean that their feedback literacies may be developed better. Therefore, although academic familiarity is crucial for successful feedback literacy development, it is also the students' view of the power dynamic within academic relationships which could, to some extent, determine their feedback literacy development.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how feedback is understood and enacted in higher education broadly, and English Studies specifically. As can be seen from the literature, feedback is a complex part of student learning and development and plays many roles beyond merely identifying errors. Yet, the effectiveness of it may depend on the mode, the type, and the content, as well as the feedback giver and feedback receiver.

What has emerged in the literature over the last few years, therefore, is the idea of feedback as a literacy practice (Sutton, 2012), and that students need to become feedback literate. This will be discussed in the next chapter, as part of the theoretical framework.

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Chapter 3:
Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I defined feedback and discussed its role in student learning and development. This chapter builds on that by providing the theoretical frameworks through which feedback is viewed, namely the Academic Literacies Framework (broadly), Feedback Literacies (more specifically) and Ubuntu. These frameworks provide a way to understand feedback as a relational literacy within broader social contexts.

3.2 Academic literacies approach

The academic literacies framework evaluates students' literacy practices within and according to the standards of the academic context (Lea and Street, 1998; Lea and Street, 2006; Roald *et al*, 2021). Literacy commonly refers to the generic ability to read and write; and academic literacy implies an advanced or evolved proficiency favourited by the academic society (Lea and Street, 1998; Goodfellow, 2011). As such, the boundaries of academic literacies expand beyond the basic skills of reading and writing, and include the faculties of comprehension, thinking, language and synthesis, and in the context of this thesis, feedback (Goodfellow, 2011; Leas and Street, 1998; Peterson and Caverly, 2005).

Lea and Street (1998) propose that there are three main approaches to literacy development. These three build on one another sequentially. The first approach, the study skills approach, "assume[s] that literacy is a set of atomised skills which students have to learn, and which are then transferable to other contexts" (Lea and Street, 1998: 158). This approach presumes that literacy development is merely the learning of generic skills on the part of the students. Within this approach, literacy is seen as a superficial and/or technical skill that primarily determines the students' academic performance. Hence, if students are able to read and write with the correct grammar and spelling, they should pass. This approach, therefore, operates on the premise that academic success is based on the acquisition of these generic skills (Lea and Street, 1998).

The second approach, academic socialisation, does not negate the skills aspect of literacy, but it additionally posits, that literacy development is a social process (Lea and Street, 1998).

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This approach implies that literacy is homogenous across all academic contexts and argues that in the academic culture of knowledge, literacies and practices are embodied by experienced members of the context, namely tutors and lecturers, whose role it is to induct students into the university's literacy practices. Therefore, for students to assimilate to this 'new' context, they should interact or socialise with tutors. The approach highlights that a students' development and academic success are dependent on their academic relationships and interactions.

The third approach, the academic literacies model, which is a subsequent lens for student learning and development, does not disregard the fundamentals of the aforementioned models or approaches, but expands on them (Lea and Street, 1998). Academic literacies are more than just learning technical study skills and being inducted into the university's literacy conventions, it also "involves ways of being and knowing through acts of participation and communication" (Dunham, 2012: 682). This approach, therefore, speaks of students' literacies development as also being epistemologically influenced, especially in multifaceted academic context(s) (Lea and Street, 1998). Lea and Street argue that although the academic institution is a single space, it is made up of many contexts; the boundaries of which are defined by faculty, discipline, department, module, and genre, and each has its privileged forms of knowledge (1998). Thus, in addition to employing the basic literacies, such as reading and writing in discipline specific ways, each of these contexts has preferred practices which come in the form of knowledge transferred from tutor to student (Preto-Bay, 2004). Hence, students' academic literacies development is also considered a "knowledge-making and knowledge-transmitting process" (Preto-Bay, 2004:88), as through discipline-specific literacy development, students also become part of the discipline.

This approach, therefore, acknowledges that literacy may take many forms and that there may be various literacies that students need to develop. For example, a UWC student in the Arts and Humanities Faculty is required to read and write differently than a student from the same institution in the Science Faculty. Additionally, within each faculty there may be different ways of reading and writing; that is, a student in the English Studies Department may be required to read and write differently than a student in the History Department or Linguistics Department. This is because each faculty and each discipline have different ways of constructing knowledge which is reflected in their literacy practices. Therefore, students' academic literacies development is also considered to be epistemologically influenced, because the forms of knowledge embedded in the disciplinary context, they find themselves in would determine which faculties of literacies needs to be developed and to what extent. Accordingly, for students

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to successfully develop their academic literacies, they need to adapt to multiple contexts and its preferences of skills and knowledge.

The academic literacies approach, therefore, enables us to consider multiple literacies that students need to develop at university; one of these is feedback literacy.

3.3 Feedback literacy

As noted in previous chapters, in recent years, feedback has increasingly been recognised as a literacy in its own right; a literacy that needs to be consciously developed, for both students and tutors[2] (Boud and Dawson, 2021). Feedback literacy is an important component of the academic cycle, as it speaks to students' understanding of, and engagement with, feedback, as given to them by tutors, to ensure their academic progress and improvement on subsequent tasks (Carless and Boud, 2018). It is defined as students' "understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (Carless and Boud, 2018: 1316). Put differently, feedback literacy is a skill or standard which students are required to possess to meet the intellectual faculties for comprehension that enables them to make sense of the information received in feedback. Additionally, this comprehension of feedback should be applied in a manner that is appropriate for the context or the module. Therefore, making it a crucial part of students' academic success.

Researchers, such as Carless and Boud (2018) and Sutton (2012), posit that acquiring feedback literacy is a complex process which is influenced by factors of identity and power on both the social and individual level. The understanding of feedback literacy is centred around students' role, since it deals with how students should use and engage with feedback to be considered feedback literate. Therefore, although lecturers and tutors play an important part in feedback discourse, it is the students who hold the agency to make meaning of said feedback through their engagement and application (Molloy *et al*., 2020).

Various researchers (see Carless and Boud (2018), Molloy *et al*. (2020), and Sutton

[2] Although the focus of this section (and thesis) is students' feedback literacy, it is important to note that feedback literacy also speaks of the giver's (educator's) feedback literacy impacting students' feedback literacy development (Boud and Dawson, 2021). Thus, on the part of the educator, knowing how to give effective feedback is something that should be developed, and not assumed (Boud and Dawson, 2021).

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(2012)) have formulated frameworks which discuss the characteristics of, and the process of becoming, a feedback literate student. Notably, Molloy *et al*.'s (2020) framework provides a holistic perspective of what is required to be a feedback literate student. This framework is derived from earlier theoretical frameworks and is informed by empirical data from the students' perspective. It will be used to frame feedback literacy in this study specifically.

3.3.1 The characteristics of feedback literate students

Molloy *et al*. (2020) propose seven interlinking characteristics of a feedback-literate student. It should be noted that students do not have to have all seven of these characteristics to be considered feedback literate, as even Molloy *et al*. admit that in their findings, some of these characteristics remained aspirational (2020). In other words, the presence of feedback literacy is not categorical, but rather, measured on a spectrum, marked by how close students are to being the ideal feedback literate student. These seven characteristics are discussed below.

3.3.1.1 Commits to feedback as improvement

The first characteristic discusses how students should understand and value the purpose of feedback as a process required for student improvement (Molloy *et al*., 2020). Students who are feedback literate display a commitment to using feedback as a means for academic improvement (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In doing so, they recognise that to improve their academic performance, they need to engage in a continuous feedback exchange which requires multiple loops of feedback. Put differently, students who are feedback literate know that they need to constantly seek and engage with feedback to keep up with the continuously changing task requirements (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In doing so, they understand that feedback is not just 'feed*back*' on what they did incorrectly, or what they could have done differently. Instead, they view the information in a manner that 'feeds *forward*'. Thus, feedback literate students also understand that feedback, to an extent, can be generalised, built on and applied to future tasks (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020). As a result, they constantly engage and apply 'old' and 'new' feedback, broadening their epistemological resources of the discipline or context as they progress (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Sutton, 2012).

3.3.1.2 Appreciates feedback as an active process

In order to become feedback literate, students should play an active role in the feedback process (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020). Feedback literate students are aware that they,

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to an extent, have the agency to determine how they learn from feedback; they practice such agency by actively engaging with the feedback information (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020). To do this, students leave their traditional positions as passive participants in the academic context and initiate feedback discourse by reaching out to feedback 'givers' about their individual academic concerns (Molloy *et al*., 2020; Robinson, 2012). By continuously interacting with tutors, students become acquainted with and understand the academic criteria of the discipline for which they write. As a result, they are able to make their own informed judgements on their work (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020).

3.3.1.3 Elicits information to improve learning

Feedback literate students actively seek feedback by eliciting information from various sources to help with their learning (Molloy *et al*., 2020). These students use various strategies to gain more feedback to further their understanding, such as seeking feedback early on in the drafting stages of assignments and looking for different sources of feedback (like different tutors, peers, and writing centres) (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In doing so, these students recognize that many feedback 'givers' have different perspectives, and that by engaging with these givers post the feedback exchange, they take the sense-making process one step further. In doing this, they are acknowledging that feedback is rich with information (Molloy *et al*., 2020). Thus, literate students continue feedback cycles, actively respond to, and seek responses on the feedback they receive, in order to gain information which may improve their learning (Molloy *et al*., 2020).

3.3.1.4 Processes feedback information

Students who are feedback literate use the information and knowledge that they have been collecting to use as a guide for subsequent tasks (Molloy et al., 2020). They use the discipline's criteria and standards to navigate and interpret language in order to make judgements on which 'valid knowledge' should be applied to tasks (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In this manner, students act upon and refer to knowledge which exists inside and outside their own feedback 'database' in a strategic manner to ensure academic success and improvement (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Sutton, 2012).

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3.3.1.5 Acknowledges and works with emotions

Students' feedback literacy is highly affected by emotions as the students' emotional response to corrective, negative, or even overwhelming amounts of feedback can overshadow its rational message (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020). Students who are feedback literate have the ability to regulate their emotions, as they note that judgements made on tasks are not personal comments but instead meant to bring about academic awareness and encourage improvement (Carless and Boud, 2018). Therefore, even though students may receive unfavourable feedback, they engage with these comments and continue with the feedback cycle (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In this way, they remain open to future exchanges with a negative comment 'giver' in order to building a trusting academic relationship in which their own performance, good or bad, can be openly discussed (Molloy *et al*., 2020).

3.3.1.6 Acknowledges feedback as a reciprocal process

Of particular importance to the current study is the ability to 'acknowledge feedback as a reciprocal process' (Molloy *et al*., 2020). This is based in the notion that agents in the feedback process, namely students and tutors, are not merely the receivers and providers of feedback respectively (Molloy, 2020). Additionally, feedback interactions are not unidirectional processes, but rather two-way dialogues which could be initiated by either agent in the process (Carless, 2016; Molloy *et al*., 2020). Notably, students who are aware of this dialogic aspect of feedback are more comfortable with the feedback process, as they feel that they are equally as valuable as their counterpart, removing the traditionally asymmetrical power dynamic between students and academic staff (Ferguson, 2011; Molloy *et al*., 2020). Since these students will know that they are not only receivers of feedback, but that they also have a hand in its production, is best affirmed during consultations, when students ask prompting questions that guide the direction of the dialogue (Molloy *et al*., 2020). If students do not have the opportunity or necessary academic relationship with their feedback giver to do so, they may not adequately develop their feedback literacy.

3.3.1.7 Enacts outcomes of processing of feedback information

This aspect of feedback literacy is known as the practical or action stage of students' feedback literacy development (Carless and Boud, 2018; Sutton, 2018). It speaks about how feedback literate students use feedback and the feedback literacy process to their advantage, utilising suggestions and comments in subsequent tasks (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020).

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This is because as students seek new feedback, they do not necessarily undermine or neglect the older feedback; hence, they create a theoretical database from the accumulated information for future reference and use (Molloy *et al*., 2020). This 'database' also becomes a way of monitoring their academic progress (Molloy *et al*., 2020).

3.3.2 The ideal feedback literate English Studies student

To understand the ideal feedback literate English Studies student, one should primarily draw on all Molloy *et al*.'s (2020) characteristics of a feedback literate student. Thus, the ideal feedback literate student in English literature understands that feedback can help them improve their abilities and practices for future tasks and they are an active player in the feedback cycle and their learning, meaning that they seek out the information needed to further their learning. This could be achieved by seeking feedback from various sources for one task, and in the process of doing so, they become more familiar with the academic literacies' expectations of the English Studies discipline. Consequently, they become more comfortable when it comes to engaging with academic staff in discourse, which could encourage further feedback dialogue. Once they receive feedback, despite their possible emotive response, they are methodical in the processing of this feedback information. Hence, they analyse and compare feedback information to form an ever-evolving generalised approach or idea of the English Studies academic criteria, which could serve them in the future. Finally, the student would approach the next assignment using all the feedback information they have curated.

3.3.3 Academic relationships, power dynamics, and feedback literacy development

Becoming feedback literate is a process which in its simplest form, requires two components: a feedback 'giver' - the 'expert', who is more knowledgeable (the tutor or lecturer) - and a feedback 'receiver' - the 'novice', in need of guidance (the student) (Ferguson, 2011). It is then evident that the development of feedback literacy is a social process which takes place between two or more agents of the academic context, and as posited power is an inherent factor of social interaction (Ferguson, 2011; Layder 1997). In the case of feedback literacy, power is measured in terms of one's knowledge and position within the hierarchy of the academic community. Hence, tutors could be seen as being more 'powerful' as they are perceived to possess more discipline aligned knowledge. Additionally, tutors occupy a position in which they are trusted by senior academic staff and lecturers to share this knowledge with students, who are, in this

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context, seen as less ‘powerful’. Traditionally, the power dynamic at play within the academic community is imbalanced, as students are perceived as less knowledgeable and/or experienced than tutors, since they are the ones who are seeking help (Ferguson, 2011; Hinett and Weeden, 2000). Students’ awareness of this dynamic leads many to take on a role as passive engagers within the academic society (Robinson, 2012). However, to develop their feedback literacy, students are required to be active players who seek out, initiate, and engage with feedback discourse (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Sutton, 2012). As can be seen, there is a discrepancy in the role that students are required to undertake to develop feedback literacy successfully, and the role students commonly play in their learning and feedback process. This discrepancy may be one of the primary barriers to students’ feedback literacy development. It is necessary to acknowledge there is an inherent contradiction: academic relationships are key to feedback literacy development, but academic relationships are ‘fraught’ because of the perceived power imbalance. It is against this already unequal academic relationship back drop - in a new potentially challenging context – that students’ feedback literacy needs to be developed during mandatory online learning.

3.4 Ubuntu

Ubuntu, derived from an Afrocentric worldview in which the culture of togetherness, both spiritually and physically, is the foundation of community, implies that all people who share a common physical space across and at different intersections of time are interconnected (Lefa, 2015). This is because they co-inhibit and interact amongst one another within the same social space. It is through these interactions that citizens of a community often share and adopt the practices that unify them. This then creates a collective understanding of how they live, and how tasks are carried out, while simultaneously setting the collective expectation and identity from which the phrase “I am because you are” stems from (Lefa, 2015). In a previous study, I have established that the traditional academic community, which fosters face-to-face learning and teaching, shares similar values of Ubuntu (Moses, 2020). This is because within the academic community, there is a sharing between members of the context, values which are embedded in community. Some of these practices are academic literacies and feedback literacies by extension (Moses, 2020). For instance, as in the principles of Ubuntu, the academic society has a culture of practice and knowledge which students can only assimilate into through social induction, this is complicated during online learning (See chapter 2) (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Such induction is, in part, the responsibility of tutors, who are seen as the medium

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between the academic context and students (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Put differently, tutors are seen as the gatekeepers of their academic literacies and are the embodiment of these privileged conventions and practices of skills and knowledge. Therefore, students' academic literacies development is dependent on effective and continuous communication with tutors (Preto-Bay, 2004).

However, as previously noted, the global pandemic made the traditional model of teaching physically difficult because academic communities were no longer permitted to share educational spaces such as lecture halls, tutorial rooms, and offices. As a result, at the beginning of the global pandemic, the academic society was forced to reconsider its methods of educating students. The biggest concern for academic institutions around the world was how they would remain connected to fulfil their roles and obligations as lecturers, tutors and/or students while maintaining (or in some cases establishing) academic relationships. As noted in section 2.7, online communities are difficult to foster and maintain, but the practice of teaching may be easier to sustain in the case of mandatory distance learning. Hence, during online learning and teaching may continue but creating and sustaining a sense of community with and amongst students may be difficult.

Ubuntu was selected as part of the theoretical framework of this study because it addresses the importance of a relationship between individuals from the same context for individual development and the conservation of community practices, i.e., academic literacies and feedback literacy (Lefa, 2015). It also mirrors how knowledge and practices are effectively embedded in and shared within a context through a kind of symbiotic relationship between tutors and students. Thus, there are parallels between how academics such as Carless and Boud (2018), Molloy *et al*. (2020) and Sutton (2012), view the development of feedback literacy as ideally an interpersonal process in which the 'power' of all parties are equal and its effective sharing and continuation. Hence, the development of literacy, is not something an individual can do on their own. Instead, it is shaped by and shared between citizens of a context. Therefore, the notion of Ubuntu is applicable to this study since parallels can be drawn between the importance of equal interpersonal relationships and academic relationships when developing feedback literacy. The above, is contrary to the power imbalance associated with the roles of 'knower' and 'novice'.

As noted, one of the chief premises of Ubuntu is that people physically share a social space in which knowledge and norms are transferred, but online learning makes the possibility

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of sharing an academic space difficult (Lefa, 2015). Thus, this study aims to investigate how the lack of physical interaction with academic agents in the academic environment affects the transfer of tacit knowledge and skills that are important to feedback literacy development.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed one integrated framework, created out of two theories, namely, academic literacies (and its ties with feedback literacies), and Ubuntu. These two theories were discussed in relation to one another focusing specifically on the aspects of each that relate to the development of academic and feedback literacies practices, and the development of academic relationships. Molloy *et al.*'s (2020) framework provides a useful to conceptualise feedback literacy and a framework to identify feedback literate students, while Ubuntu enables me to examine the impact of community, relationships and connectedness has in the process of feedback literacies development.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the methods used in this qualitative examination of the development of feedback literacies under the context of lockdown and the shift to online learning in a third-year English course at the University of the Western Cape.

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Chapter 4:
Methods

4.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter begins by restating the research question(s) in order to reiterate the aim of this study. Thereafter, the research design used (a qualitative case study), is examined, as well as the motivations for selecting this design. This is followed by a discussion of the social and academic contexts in which the research takes place, namely, a global pandemic, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and English Studies. The research process is then discussed, including the research participants, and the data collection analysis process. Finally, the ethical considerations are reviewed.

4.2 Restated research question(s)

This study is situated within the theoretical frameworks of academic literacy and Ubuntu (see chapter 3) and aims to discuss the impact that mandatory distance learning had on the feedback literacy development of third year English Studies students at UWC.

Thus, the research question is:

> How and to what extent does online learning impact students' feedback literacy development?

Although the aforementioned question is the primary focus of this study, the questions below are guiding questions, developed to ensure that all aspects of the research topic are fully explored:

- How did online learning affect academic relationships during COVID-19?
- How did online learning affect students' ability to interact with their tutors during COVID-19?
- Drawing on Molloy *et al.*'s framework, which feedback literacies did students develop during COVID-19?
- Which mode of teaching did students prefer for developing feedback literacy during COVID-19?

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4.3 Research design

4.3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research seeks "to understand phenomena in context-specific settings" (Golafshani, 2000: 600). Since this study is situated within a specific social context – English Studies (micro level), at UWC (meso level), and during the Covid-19 pandemic (macro level) – a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate. Especially since, according to Mack, qualitative research aims "to interpret and better understand the complex reality [for participants] of a given situation" (2005: 2). In this instance, the pandemic-necessitated lockdown facilitated a new academic context for students, outside of traditionally shared academic spaces like the university campus, lecture halls, and offices, and away from the academic community such as other students and tutors. Consequently, the domestic environment formed the 'new' academic context, which could affect learning and teaching in varying ways.

Moreover, this study examines the subjective lived experiences of its participants, which is not easily measured numerically, and for which the qualitative approach is best suited. A qualitative approach ensures that participants' opinions and experiences are authentically and holistically captured, as it enables participants to express a "spectrum of feelings, emotions, insights, views, beliefs, and values with which participants live in and interact with the real world" (Cibangu, 2012: 113). This approach is said to ensure that "researchers deal with the real word in its fullness" (Cibangu, 2012: 96). It is this analysis of the 'real word' (the lived experiences) of participants that enables me to explore students' experiences during the pandemic, as well as the influence it had on their feedback literacy development (Cresswell and Miller, 2000; Golafshani, 2003).

Lastly, the qualitative research methodology was selected because of this study's explorative nature. This study seeks out "if" distance learning impacts students' feedback literacy development. Thus, this study's intended purpose is not to support or refute a hypothesis or findings of a similar study, but to explore if a relationship exists and if so, gather an understanding of its influence. This study is also explorative because to my knowledge, there is no existing research that has explored the impact of online learning and COVID-19 on feedback literacy directly. As such, this study focused on an under-studied area of student feedback literacy development in an online context, for which the use of the qualitative approach is recommended (Creswell, 2014). This study could potentially contribute to the

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research field by deepening and/or broadening the understanding of feedback literacy development in online contexts.

The qualitative approach has historically been critiqued for not providing generalisable findings (Terre Blanche *et al*, 2006; Cibangu, 2012; Myers 2009). However, the aim of this study is not to be generalisable, but to examine how participants' feedback literacy development in English Studies at UWC may have been affected by the move to distance learning. This body of research and the conclusions I draw from this study "does not seek global/universal or local/particular certainties as an end product but, instead, for the purposes of deep-rooted understanding", an understanding which might serve other contexts (Cibangu, 2012: 106). Therefore, although situated in a specific context, the understanding of the study is not limited to only that context.

4.3.2 Case study

Case study is a commonly in qualitative research. It examines a phenomenon from the subjective perspective(s) of the local population, the local population being the people from the context in which it occurs (Flyvberg, 2006; Mack et al., 2005; Yin, 1981). A case study therefore is appropriate for this study, since it examines the experiences of third year English Studies students during a specific context – namely, the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this qualitative study uses the case study approach as it appeals to the contextual factors that its participants experienced during a phenomenon (Mack et al., 2005; Yin, 1981).

Furthermore, case studies are said to be best suited for research questions which seek an explanation (Yin, 1981). This is applicable to this study, since it aims to understand students' learning and feedback literacy development from their experiences, to grasp their perspectives in order to 'answer' these questions, as well as to put forward the findings as a basis for improvement, if needed.

Many critics of the case study technique are of the opinion that it is weak because it is too 'particular', in the sense that a case study is deeply rooted in the context in which it is conducted, and the findings thereof are subsequently only applicable to said context (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 1981). However, many proponents of case studies - like myself - appreciate this distinguished characteristic, as it provides an "intimate knowledge" of the reality of "human affairs" (Flybjerg, 2005: 221-222). This is because this "context-dependent" framework provides the opportunity to gather participant-centred data that uncovers the deeper

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meaning of participant experiences (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 223). This study therefore enables me to understand how the online context impacted academic relationships broadly, and feedback literacy specifically.

Although situated in one multifaceted context, the findings of this study are not limited to that context, as case studies produce 'exemplary knowledge' and 'practical knowledge' (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Thomas, 2011). By practical knowledge, Flyvbjerg (2006) means the lived experiences of one's own or another's context to substantiate one's understanding of a phenomenon. Similarly, exemplary knowledge is an "example viewed and heard in the context of another's experience (another's horizon) but used in the context of one's own (where the horizon changes)" (Thomas, 2011: 31). As can be seen, case studies are not used to produce generalised findings, but rather findings derived from lived experiences that could be used to provide understanding in similar contexts. So, the findings of this study may not be directly transferable to other modules, cohorts, and universities, but its exploration of students' experience of online feedback literacy development might inspire similar studies or add to the understanding of online learning and teaching in other academic contexts. Therefore, the use of case study does not hinder the prospect of this study's usefulness outside of its particular context.

4.4 Research context

This study aims to understand the development of students' feedback literacy via online learning during COVID-19. It is therefore imperative that these contextual settings are taken into consideration, and the possible implications are discussed in order to frame the possible effects on students' academic progress and feedback literacy development. As such, the sections that follow will discuss this study's research contexts; online learning and COVID-19, the University of the Western Cape, and the English Studies department (depicted in Figure 4.1).

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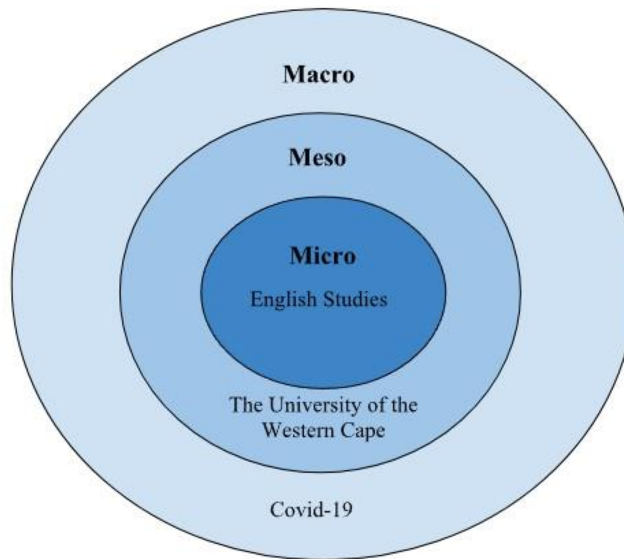

Figure 4.1: Research context

4.4.1 Online learning and COVID-19

To curb the highly infectious nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries instituted a lockdown of sorts, which meant that individuals were not allowed to come into physical contact with anyone besides their household members for an extended period of time. For universities, this necessitated an almost immediate shift to online learning and teaching (Balta-Salvador, 2021; Mpungose, 2020). Yet, as Mpungose (2020) states, most universities in South Africa employ face-to-face learning and teaching methods. This means that, until 2020, teaching methods and curricula have largely been centred around synchronousity and the physical closeness of student-tutor interactions (with the exception of online universities like the University of South Africa (UNISA)). The abrupt, mandatory shift to online learning led to many challenges around students' academic experiences, their learning environment, emotional response, motivation and engagement (Aristanik *et al*, 2020; Balta-Salvador, 2021; Fouche and Andrews, 2021; Mpungose, 2020). Concurrently, there was also concern about students' academic progress and the delivery of traditionally face-to-face content in an online environment, which was accentuated by practical concerns surrounding internet connectivity and access to technology (Aristanik *et al*, 2020; Balta-Salvador, 2021; Fouche and Andrews, 2021; Mpungose, 2020).

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South Africa, where this study is located, has a history of broad socio-economic inequalities, meaning that a large portion of the population is disadvantaged. This by extension implies that large numbers of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are not financially able to afford the much-needed equipment to engage with online learning (Fouche and Andrews, 2021; Liebowitz, 2012; Mpungose, 2020). Therefore, the move to online learning may have had a detrimental effect on disadvantaged South African students' academic progress, development, and feedback literacy development.

4.4.2 The University of the Western Cape (UWC)

This study was conducted in the national context of South Africa, a country with a rich and recent history of social, racial, and economic inequalities, the aftermath of which still affects the South African population and institutions today (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012). As a result, certain Higher Education Institutions were designated for non-white students, referred to as Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs); UWC is one of them (Bozlek and Boughey, 2012; Lillis and Scott, 2007). UWC is considered to have "one of the lowest tuition fee structures in South Africa", and in doing so, allows "access for deserving students who otherwise would not afford a tertiary education" (*UWC*, no date). In other words, UWC is still a higher education institution of choice for students of all socio-economic backgrounds, but especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Keeping this in mind, many UWC students may not readily have access to required academic equipment and materials even during on campus, face-to-face learning (*UWC*, no date).

Thus, with the onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent distance learning, the underprivileged students' lack of technological access was exacerbated. This was because learning now occurred online and "30% of the student body did not have access to educational devices like laptops and data" (*UWC*, no date). Many shared laptops with other family members, or did not have access to devices, thereby limiting their access to online education, whether it was by engaging with provided course materials, or with feedback. This would have detrimentally affected the students' academic development and feedback literacy development. Solutions to this problem were devised at UWC, such as the #NoStudentLeftBehind movement, which started in April 2020. This movement aimed to provide laptops and data to students in need, in hopes of easing their worries during the period of transition by the second term (*UWC*, no date). However, the delivery of services and equipment was delayed, resulting in these items being received by the majority of the students only by the beginning to the middle of the second

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semester of 2020 (UWC Email Communication, 2020). It can be assumed that this would have negatively affected students' learning and engagement.

4.4.3 English Studies

At UWC, the English Studies department is divided into two components: 1) English for Educational Development (EED) and 2) English Literature. For the purpose of this study, we will be focusing on English Literature, which will be referred to as English Studies. EED was not chosen as focus of this study because it is not a continuous module or discipline for students. Rather it is mandatory for (Law, Science, Community Health Science etc) students enrol and pass one semester of this module in their first year and never engage with the discipline again. Thus, measuring their feedback literacies development within the discipline during online learning would be futile as there is no experience of a complete year of face-to-face learning and feedback exchange and development to compare it to.

English Studies is a literature focused discipline whose fundamental objective is to engage with and understand literary works from varying time periods (Handbook, 2017). It is a module that focuses on literature analysis, and while doing so, 'in class' teaching practices principally aim to develop discipline-specific skills such as close analysis, as well as teach theoretical concepts with the goal of developing students' "literature mind-set" (Cromwell, 2005: 80; Third Year Course Reader, 2019). Thus, the discipline is designed to teach, develop, and shape students' capacities and dispositions to align with its valued standards of knowledge and skills; hence, the discipline's academic literacy requirements (Chick, 2009; Lea and Street, 1998).

Success in English Studies depends on how well students are enculturated into the ways of knowing and being of the discipline (Chick, 2009; Cromwell, 2005; Lea and Street, 1998). This process of enculturation is facilitated by tutors as they are assigned to guide students throughout their teaching (Fouche and Andrew, 2021; Moses, 2020). In other words, the relationship between students and tutor is a key part of assimilation into the academic literacies and feedback literacy of the English Studies discipline.

It is important to mention at this point that the value of students' feedback literacy in English Studies, as discussed above, is on the account of traditional face-to-face learning and teaching. Feedback discourse during face-to-face learning is but one part of the discipline's teaching methods, and in which the much-needed feedback literacy to make use of this

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discourse was traditionally developed. With the onset of online learning and the subsequent elimination of physical interaction in the academic community, there was a disruption in the traditional teaching methods of the discipline. This is especially so for the guided practice which relies heavily on the student-tutor interaction that guides students to learn and adopt skills and knowledge (Jacobs, 2007). During online learning, feedback needs to function in the same manner as guided teaching and development in face-to-face learning. At the same time, students' feedback literacy needs to be developed well enough to grasp comments and further develop their academic literacy and feedback literacy capacities.

It is therefore important to explore and understand how students' feedback literacy developed during online learning in a discipline which predominantly relied on feedback in tutor-student interactions to fulfil the disciplines' inherent use of a guided practice for teaching and development.

4.5 Research Participants

Since this study focused on a specific group of people's experiences, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling means that the research population was selected on the grounds that it met the contextual and phenomenological requirements of the study (Rai and Thapa, 2015). In this study, the contextual requirements were to be an English Studies student studying at UWC, and the phenomenological requirements were to have experienced face-to-face learning and mandatory online learning during COVID-19. Hence, this study collected data from third year English Studies students in 2021. The decision to select this class of third year English literature students was influenced by the fact that this study aimed to investigate the development of feedback literacy and how it affected by the context of online learning versus the traditional, face-to-face academic context. The third-year students of 2021 were the only class of English Studies students who, at the time, were equally familiar with both modes of learning. Consequently, this made them an appropriate research population.

The decision to select third year English Studies students as the research population was further motivated by the fact that the English Studies module is a continuous program, meaning that students must have done the previous English Studies modules like ENG 1 and ENG 2. This means that at third year level, the students - the research population - are relatively familiar with the feedback process and have developed their understanding of how feedback works in the discipline. In addition, as an English Studies student myself, my third year was the first

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year I ‘knew’ what was expected from me, a statement echoed by many of my peers. Hence, selecting third year students was an attempt at ensuring that the data was gathered at the students’ highest point of feedback literacy in their careers as undergraduate English Studies students.

Additionally, this study used convenience sampling (Obilor, 2023). To elaborate, although an invitation to partake in this study was sent to the entire third year English Studies class on their learning management system (iKamva), participation was voluntary. Only nine of the 300+ third year English Studies students completed the questionnaire and of those nine only three participated in the interviews. To ensure anonymity, each participant provided a pseudonym. Participants of the questionnaire pseudonyms are Sunny, Ceecee, Phoodie, Dee, Zaaids, Thato, Naidoo, Angel and Mary. Additionally, the pseudonyms of the interviewees are Jade, Diana and Ama.

4.6 Data Collection and Management

To ensure that students’ opinions and experiences were captured as authentically and holistically as possible (Halcomb and David, 2006). Data were generated using both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Both methods enabled participants to share their experiences in their own words, further ensuring that the findings would be an authentic representation of their perspectives and experiences.

The data collection process was sequential; participants first had to complete the questionnaire before agreeing to the interview. Having the participants complete the questionnaire before the interviews acted as an icebreaker for the participants, allowing them to familiarise themselves broadly with the topic of feedback and feedback literacy (Adamson *et al*, 2004). This sequence also aided in ensuring that data collected during the questionnaire could be initially analysed, which would enable me to ask more meaningful questions during the semi-structured interviews. The distribution and administration of both the questionnaire and interview will be discussed below.

4.6.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix C) was the first method used to collect data. The first few questions asked for participants' biographical information, such as which modules they were

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registered for in the English Studies program, so as to understand the context of each participant.

The questionnaire predominantly made use of open-ended questions which enabled participants to share their experiences and opinions at length. Additionally, although there were some scale-based questions asking participants to share their experiences or views with a rating between 1-5, most of these questions were followed by questions where they were asked to "please elaborate [and/or motivate]" (see Appendix C). This enabled participants to contextualise their rating (Adamson *et al*., 2004). The structure of the questionnaire was intentionally designed to prompt participants to discuss questions and share their own subjective and authentic views, experiences, and understandings of feedback and their feedback literacy during online learning. This elicited rich and in-depth data required for the purpose of this study.

The questionnaire was created on Google Forms, a secure platform that administers surveys to a group of people selected by the survey creator. A secure link to said questionnaire was sent via an announcement on iKamva by the English Studies third year coordinator.

Between November 2021 to December 2021, the questionnaire was sent out to the entire third-year English Literature class seven times via high priority iKamva announcements with a built-in email generated notification. when the questionnaire was closed to responses at the end of December 2021, there were only nine respondents out of 300+ students enrolled in the course[3]. The low response rate could have been due to the fact that many students were focused on their final exams during this period and later wished to relax after the trying examination period. Although the response rate is low, the fact that the questionnaires were standardised was advantageous, as its structure allows for direct comparison between participants' responses for a specific question. Therefore, despite the fact that the data received was not necessarily representative of the entire research population's experiences of the phenomenon, it still provides a useful understanding of the participants' experiences.

Following this, the questionnaire responses were analysed, categorised, and earmarked for later use. To ensure confidentiality the questionnaires were stored on my Google Drive, which is password protected. Google Drive is a secure storage platform that enables the account

[3] My research focused specifically on 2021 students and since I was not sure at the time whether these students would continue and/or whether online learning would continue, I decided to not send the questionnaire out again the following year.

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holder to grant limited access to specific documents. Access can be withdrawn at a later stage. The questionnaire responses are only accessible to myself and my supervisors, upon request.

4.6.2 Interview

This study used a semi-structured interview format as its second phase of data collection. This design choice enabled participants' responses to the drafted questions (see Appendix D) to shape the questions that followed. As a result, the data collected was a reflection of interviewees' experiences through collaboration and dialogue (Blommaert and Jie, 2010; De Hoyos and Barens, 2012). The interviews helped to explain and understand the relationship between feedback literacy and online learning through the lens of the participant (De Hoyos and Barens, 2012).

Of the nine who filled out the questionnaire, three students participated in an interview. Interview participants were able to indicate which online platform best suited them for this process. All the interviewees chose WhatsApp. Interviews were conducted via a one-on-one session between the individual participants and me via a WhatsApp voice call to ensure privacy. The length of interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour 30 minutes. With the permission of interviewees, interviews were recorded for transcription purposes on a secondary device, since WhatsApp calls cannot be recorded directly on the app. These recordings and transcriptions were stored securely on Google Drive along with the questionnaires.

4.7 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed by the author to ensure the quality of transcription. This is because having personally conducted each of the interviews provided unique first-hand knowledge that is beneficial to the transcription process (Bird, 2005; Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). Additionally, the transcription process increased my familiarity with the data, and in doing so, allowed a more nuanced form of analysis (Bird, 2005; Halcomb and Davidson, 2006).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a multi-phased process (Table 4.2) to ensure the accuracy of each transcription was conducted (De Hoyos and Barnes, 2012; Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). This was done in an attempt to remove any of my own interpretive and representational bias as well as to include all the information for analysis, such as anecdotes (Blommaert and Jie, 2010; Bucholtz, 2000; Halcom and Davidson, 2006)

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Table 4.2: Description of transcription process

Phase	Name	Description
1	Familiarisation	The audiotape was listened to while taking some summative notes about tone (Braun and Clark, 2006; Halcom and Davidson, 2006).
2	Transcription (writing and listening)	The audiotapes were then listened to a second time while the audio was being transcribed. I used the play-pause method while transcribing which despite being time consuming, doing so ensured exactness (Bucholtz, 2000).
3	Correction process	When the draft of each transcription was completed, a final listen was done while comparing the transcription to the audiotape to ensure quality and precision, and to eliminate any omissions (Halcom and Davidson, 2006).
4	Preliminary content analysis	After each interview was transcribed, a set of summary notes were written about the themes and categories according to the theoretical framework present in the interview (Braun and Clark, 2006; Halcom and Davidson, 2006). This produced themes and categories like feedback, online context, face-to-face context, academic relationships, and academic material access.

The responses to the questionnaires were downloaded from Google Forms, organised in an Excel spreadsheet automatically created by Google Forms. The spreadsheet enabled me to view all participants' responses to the various all questions at the same time. Therefore, I was able to first compare individual respondents' responses throughout their questionnaire for any (in)consistencies, then cross-compare the responses of all participants of specific question. In this way, I was also able to familiarise myself with the questionnaire data, since this process involved me reading and re-reading the data while constructing themes across participants and questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As themes were constructed, they were recorded in a separate Microsoft Word document which was stored alongside the Excel spreadsheet of responses on Google Drive. The transcripts of the interviews were also uploaded to this secure Google Drive.

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4.7.1 Thematic analysis and coding development

A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used in the analysis. I started with a broad inductive approach. As demonstrated above, the fourth phase of the transcription process was an initial form of analysis used, which was a broad and preliminary coding and categorisation of the interview transcripts according to the themes constructed from the data as aligned with the theoretical frameworks and research focus of this study (Braun and Clark, 2006). This process of constructing themes was also replicated for the questionnaires.

However, this method was too broad. I then decided to use the sub-research questions as a guide when analysing the data. By this, I mean that I considered which questions in the questionnaire and the interviews would best help answer the relevant sub-research questions. While doing so, I grouped responses together that broadly spoke to the sub-research questions and the two broad themes of (a) Ubuntu and academic community and (b) feedback literacy. This then became the basis of chapter 5 and 6 respectively. For chapter 5 (the Ubuntu section), I primarily used inductive coding, observing and constructed themes that aligned with the theorised notion of Ubuntu used in this study (see Chapter 3). For example, I looked for indications of power, relationship-building and so on. Alternatively, for Chapter 6 (the feedback literacy section), I mostly used deductive coding, guided by the Molloy *et al* (2020) framework. The framework was used to guide the analysis of interview and questionnaire data to identify the feedback literacy characteristics of the participants, overall. To increase the study's validity and reliability, this process was iterated multiple times in discussion with my supervisor.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee (HS21/2/20) at UWC (see Appendix E). Since this study deals with participants' subjective experiences within a specific academic context and department, there were three main ethical concerns for participants, namely, anonymity, autonomy, and informed consent. I also had to consider my position as an insider researcher. The passage below discusses how these ethical considerations were addressed.

4.8.1 Anonymity

The first ethical concern of this study was how to maintain anonymity when collecting data from participants, considering that the data collection method elicits subjective experiences.

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This was addressed by asking participants to provide a pseudonym when completing the questionnaire. In addition to ensuring anonymity, having participants provide a pseudonym of their choice could possibly make them more comfortable about sharing their experiences without fear of possible prejudice (Pring, 2001). It should be noted though, that although the questionnaire respondents and interviewees are the same students, when conducting the interviews, the interviewees had different pseudonyms to ensure further anonymity. Participant identities were further protected during the interviews as they took place via private calls, i.e. one-on-one calls on WhatsApp. As mentioned above, all recordings of these interviews were stored on a password protected Google Drive to which only I, the principal researcher, had access to. These acts "remov[ed] the ethical dilemma of [participant] identifiability" and ensured the confidentiality of participants' identities (Williams, 2009).

4.8.2 Autonomy

The second ethical concern was participants' autonomy, which was both addressed and encouraged throughout this study. Firstly, through an information sheet, participants were made aware of participation being voluntary when the participation invites went out on iKamva. The voluntary nature of the study was also discussed in the consent form provided to the participant prior to completing the questionnaire and interview (see Appendix F and Appendix G). Furthermore, autonomy was also encouraged with participants providing their own pseudonym, as well as by choosing a platform and time which is most convenient for them. This may have inspired participants to view themselves as co-contributors of the study and encouraged openness (Pring, 2001; Williams 2009).

4.8.3 Informed consent

The third ethical consideration was informed consent. This consideration was resolved by providing information sheets and informed consent forms for both the questionnaire and the interview (see Appendix H). The information sheet detailed the purpose and intention of the study, as well as participants' role in the study. The informed consent form served as confirmation that participants understood the information and willingly agreed to partaking in the study. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, before confirming their willingness to participate, I read the information sheet once more and explained participants role in the research project, while reminding them that participation is voluntary. Thus, the participants of

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this study were well informed about their role in this study, the fact that it was voluntary, and how their participation contributed to the study's formulation.

4.8.4 Positionality

In addition to the three ethical considerations for the participations outlined above, I also had to consider my position as an insider researcher, since I am a student and tutor in the English Studies department. It is important to note, though, that I am in a different cohort than the research population as a master's student and have only been tutoring first year English Studies students. I thus had no academic or professional contact with the research population prior to this study. Although this insider position is conventionally frowned upon because it does not allow for objectivity, it is also praised, as researchers in this position have a pre-existing understanding and access to subjective tacit knowledge of the social culture of a discipline (Bronnick and Coghlon, 2007; Trowler 2011). Being part of the English Studies department gives me, as a researcher, a privileged understanding of the tacit knowledge and skills being taught to students (Bronnick and Coghlon, 2007).Moreover, my being an English Studies student and tutor could "better the chances of [the conclusions of this study] having an impact" and inspiring positive and beneficial change in the department (Trowler, 2011: 2). The insider position I held was surely beneficial in gaining the trust and acceptance of participants, as I was not viewed as a distant superior figure, but instead, one of their own who may have experienced similar challenges (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Thus, my position encouraged authentic and open dialogue which elicited a rich depth of data. Additionally, being an insider researcher granted me easy access to the research population. I was granted limited access to the research population through a letter requesting permission from the English Studies Head of Department and third year coordinator (see Appendix I).

My position as an insider researcher also makes me the keeper of privileged information and views (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). However, to refrain from any unethical behaviour, I have not discussed the content of the questionnaires with any of my peers. The results have also only been discussed with my supervisors, if and when necessary.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter examined my choice of using a qualitative case study to examine how online learning affected students feedback literacy development. The main data collection methods

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(questionnaires and interviews), data analysis process, and ethical considerations were also discussed. In the next two chapters, the findings are presented.

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Chapter 5:
Communication and Community

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, communication and community are considered cornerstones of the development of feedback literacies (Preto-Bay, 2004; Higgins, 2000). Feedback literacies are best developed through social induction in which the cultures of practice and disciplinary knowledge are shared by tutors to students; this resonates with the values of sharing and togetherness as demonstrated by Ubuntu (Lefa, 2015; Lills and Scott, 2007). As such, this chapter discusses a series of responses that helps the reader understand how students' openness to communication and sense of community were impacted by online learning during COVID-19.

5.2 Impact of online learning on student-tutor interaction

The impact of online learning on student-tutor interaction was explored through a series of responses around communication. This section discusses and analyses if and how respondents' openness to communication with tutors and other students changed during online learning, and whether their ability to interact with tutors (and/or students) was affected during the same period.

When considering openness to communicative interaction in either mode, (online or face-to-face learning), two respondents, Diana and Jade, demonstrated stark contrasting responses, both these respondents' experiences were gathered via the interviews.

Diana, on the one hand, had an outspoken personality and demonstrated proactive behaviour when searching for and engaging with feedback. Conversely, Jade suffered from social anxiety, which they reported impeded their ability to communicate and interact within the traditional academic context (see, for example, Ifenthaler *et al*., 2023). However, during online learning, Jade's ability to communicate in the academic community had improved, while Diana's communication during online learning was not as effective as the communication or collective interaction of face-to-face learning. Their experiences will be discussed in more detail below.

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5.2.1 Diana: Negative experience of online learning

Diana stated that although they were able to work well on their own, there was still a longing to have learnt with their peers. This is because they, prior to online learning, were interactive within their cohort and with teaching staff. Thus, the absence and/or filtered interaction due to online learning took away from the collaborative learning experience which they valued. This was evident when Diana reported[4]:

> I think, **a lack of that sort of class interaction, where we maybe more engaged with the lecturer face-to-face and fellow students and stuff**, there is something to that that is really, that I don't think that, it almost like in hindsight 'that would have been **so nice to just be able to interact and listen to other students what their thinking is of this' and also to share the difficulty of** 'I am having a tough time with this now'. You know, **it's as if you are relating to that person in real time**, you don't have that opportunity to online. (*Interview*)

They later added:

> When I was sort of stuck on a thing [during online learning], the concepts especially **in the tutorials, you could hear from other students** like 'ah so that's what that could have meant' like sort of a penny drops and then you can build on that **because you can hear from other students that they thinking** and whether its right or whether, not that it's right or wrong but if that idea is fully considering everything or is it just maybe a little bit of something and can you add to that or can you see what direction they are going in. **so, that sort of one-on-one or interaction in tutorials was very helpful, I think, and that was lacking at home. You feel isolated, you like you left by yourself and there is no-one else,** you don't have a standing board like 'what do you think about this' or to hear from others 'what's going on here', you know, if you're lost.

As is evident, according to Diana, communication during face-to-face learning was more advantageous to their learning process. This is because it facilitated a collaborative environment amongst students which allowed them to interact in a way where they may have unintentionally been teaching one another. To Diana, online learning lacks collaborative interaction. This could imply that although they are still learning, the lack of in-person and in-

[4] Certain parts of some responses are emboldened throughout this thesis as they highlight parts of the response which most align with the point of the paragraph.

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tutorial communication may have hampered their learning process. It should also be noted that Diana did not say that their understanding and/or grasp or academic material relies solely on the input of others, but instead they underscored that the social aspect of learning i.e the relational aspect of Ubuntu, in their opinion, is a means of sourcing numerous understandings to frame a holistic understanding of the course content. Thus, calling attention to the idea that learning and developing for students is in part an interactive process (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Sutton, 2012).

Moreover, another drawback of online learning for Diana was the non-immediate interaction it fostered. This was clear when they reported:

> **You don't really get that immediate interaction with your lecturer,** you have to wait a while for them to respond to you, and that also build[s] anxiety in that sense, so I think that online thing is a little bit more anxiety laden, I think, than face-to-face classes. (*Interview*)

It is clear that for Diana's learning process, there needed to be an immediacy in their academic interactions for learning to be considered effective communication (Barker, 2010). However, online learning may mean a delay in communication. This delay may be deliberate, such as in the case of an asynchronous design, but it may also be the unintended consequence of aspects like bad internet connectivity (Barker, 2010; Mpungose, 2020). Additionally, although communication was still part of the online learning experience, Diana marks a distinct decrease in the quality of communication because it took place online:

> O**ften times it was recorded messages** even though there was an attempt to make it like 'yeah, we normal people and you can ask us anything'. **It was still that distance because you [are] not engaged face-to-face with an actual person you talking to a camera** so it came through when you watched the video and you see them recording their tutorials and stuff and **the ... it is almost very impersonal**, there was no real, it was really a recorded message if you understand what I'm saying, **no real personal touch to it** I think. (*Interview*)

Therefore, even though there was interaction during online learning, it was washed down and filtered because of the online interface and the implicit distance. To Diana, this made it seem as though online learning lacked the human aspect which they valued most in their learning. In other words, Diana highly valued communication in their learning process, but the online interfaces tainted their learning experience and lessened the human connection they value when

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learning. This is similar to the findings of Barker (2010), who found that students who felt like they had experienced lower levels of instructor immediacy had issues with their learning and motivation.

Interestingly, although Diana reported having had a bad experience with communicating online, there seemed to be little to no negative implications for their feedback literacy development[5]. This is noted when they report:

> For me particularly, **retracted tutor name** was our tutor and her feedback was very clear. I don't think I ever needed to ask her anything about what she meant by that or like how to apply what she's saying or what and that you know. She's very very clear in her message. (*Interview*)

As mentioned in chapter three (Theoretical Framework), effective communication with tutors is important for developing students' feedback literacy and other skills. Additionally, as previously discussed, during online learning, academic societies' reliance on feedback to teach was exacerbated (Higgins, 2000; Preto-Bay, 2004). Therefore, in theory, Diana reporting that the quality of communication weakened during online learning should have had negative implications on their feedback literacies and academic development. This is because communication with tutors through feedback is a tool of learning the academic culture's practices and knowledge, and if it is unsatisfactory, it would imply that part of the students' learning process is not fulfilled (Lillis and Scott, 2007). In other words, poor communication could result in poor feedback literacies development and academic progress. Noticeably, it seems as though their feedback literacy may have improved because of the precise feedback from their tutor, which speaks to the tutor's feedback literacy.

Therefore, to students like Diana who thrive academically with the help of in-person inter-personal communication, online learning and communication may have been a suitable substitute, but not absolute replacement for face-to-face learning and its accompanying interactions. Hence, for Diana, from a communicative point of view online learning, it did not provide a positive change to their learning process (and experience). Yet, it does not seem to have negatively impacted their academic development and by extension, feedback literacies development.

[5] The next chapter will discuss feedback literacy development in more detail

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5.2.2 Jade: Positive experience of online learning

Contrastingly, for Jade, the impersonal nature of online learning positively changed their pattern and openness to communication. This is evident when their unwillingness to communicate during face-to-face learning is compared to their keenness to interact during online learning strengthening their sense of Ubuntu. Jade reported that when they found themselves within the physical academic community, they would isolate themselves from said community. For instance, Jade described their usual interaction with tutors, revealing how much their social anxiety had impacted their feedback engagement during face-to-face learning specifically:

> Yeah, I think that **even in person, I struggled with really, not connecting with the tutor but just approaching them** like I mentioned the social anxiety. It's so weird, like **when I would speak to them, it's like I'm tearing up because I can't handle the emotional turmoil and what's going on in my mind**. Okay they aren't heartless or anything, like they do try to help but **it's just like I try to stay away from that and just anything that's gonna make me feel anxious** I'm just like 'nah I'm not gonna do that' **I think that's the reason why I don't go to consultation or engage with tutors.** (*Interview*)

Notably, Jade's difficulty with communication during face-to-face interactions seemed to be rooted in the perceived hierarchy between students and tutors (Dunham, 2012; Lea and Street, 1998; Preto-Bay, 2004). It is important to note that the type of interaction(s) Jade was referring to here is specifically verbal communication with tutors and lecturers, which has been found to be confrontational and intimidating in nature, even having an impact on students' emotions and willingness to initiate or engage with feedback (Carless, 2006; Dawson *et al.*, 2018; Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008; Young, 2000). This is evident in Jade's response that they avoided initiating verbal communication or feedback sessions with academic agents in order to conserve their emotional state. By not seeking the needed feedback in verbal form, they may have influenced their academic and feedback literacies development and/or progress (Preto-Bay, 2004). Thus, in the case of Jade, verbal communication in the face-to-face learning environment may have resulted in poor outcomes for their feedback literacy development.

When Jade was asked if their reaction was a general response or related to the position of the tutor and/or lecturer, they said:

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> **It [is] my general response but I feel like I would easily consult with a friend** who has like the same module then like they would maybe ask their tutor instead of me asking like my own tutor or asking the lecturer, **I feel like the lecturer is kind of like intimidating to me, so yes it's probably linked to their position. So I wouldn't really go to a tutor but I would choose to go to a tutor instead of the lecturer.** (*Interview*)

Thus, it is clear that for Jade, the position of the person who they interact with is significant. Their openness to communication or interaction in the academic environment seemed to revolve around the academic hierarchy. This is made evident since they stated that going to a friend, a person with whom they have a close and personal relationship, would be their first choice. Then, going to a tutor, a liminal figure in the academic community, as sometimes they are still students themselves. Students also have weekly, more intimate learning relationships with tutors. As a last resort, they would seek aid from a lecturer, a person who holds an authoritative position in the academic society, whom students usually only know from a distance. This would imply that although there is a willingness to receive communicative feedback, and to initiate said feedback communications, doing so with those above their cohort is generally what prevented Jade from engaging in and/or initiating verbal feedback. This finding is supported by Lea and Street (1998), who argue that power and authority are determinants of students' acquisition and development of academic literacies, and by extension, feedback literacy. Thus, it is not strange that Jade seeks and engages with feedback better where there is a stronger sense of familiarity.

Although not much has changed in Jade's communication with tutors during online learning, there was a marked improvement in their communication overall. This is evident when they stated:

> **I would reach out to a tutor, yes, we have the WhatsApp tutorials groups so I would post in there and the tutor would either encourage other students to answer,** so like I would be a whole engagement type of thing but I **would also choose to speak to a peer, someone in the same tutorial group or someone with the same** module because most of the time, the way a students [sic] explains you grasp it much better because they in the same boat. **I think it's because there's no higher position that can intimidate you, it's just like let's speak about the work and consulting with each other. It's like I would contact a tutor first besides the lecturer, I really wouldn't, to be honest with you**. (*Interview*)

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Notably, the contact with tutors here was not direct, intentional, nor aimed on the part of Jade. However, there was a slight increase in proactivity when communicating with tutors. This is because Jade communicated on a forum where the tutor was present and could possibly give their input, instead of shying away and directly messaging a peer they are comfortable with which was a signifier of their growing appeal to Ubuntu. Hence, the anxiety of directly interacting with tutors is still present but negated through open interaction on an online forum with peers because of a grown comfortability with them. Put differently, Jade became more open to communicating with and in the presence of tutors because online learning provided a lessened form of tutor immediacy (Barker, 2010). Interestingly, it is implied that the use of the online learning environment may diminish the hierarchy of the academic society and the inherent intimidation it carries for students (Carless, 2006; Dawson *et al.*, 2018; Gallien and Oomen-Early, 2008; Young, 2000). Similarly, the development of Jade's openness to communicate in the 'presence' of a tutor, or even other students, indicates that the communication and relationships formed in the online learning environment may indicate that Jade has, albeit to a small degree, progressed in their feedback literacy development (Moses, 2020).

5.2.3 Discussion

Notably, for the two respondents above, online learning has contrasting implications for their communicative process. Although Jade became more open to communication during online learning, Diana's openness remained the same. This suggests that communication in online learning is complex and is dependent on students and their ideal conditions for communication and learning (Morfaki and Skotis, 2023).

A point of interest is that these responses (unconsciously) reiterate the values of Ubuntu as a factor that positively impacts students' academic learning and progress. For Diana, not being physically part of the academic community negatively impacted their ability to communicate, while for Jade, the lack of a physical presence was exactly what positively impacted their ability to communicate. Thus, the social lens of Ubuntu highlights the importance of one's connection to the community and the interpersonal relationships within it. This is because, like feedback literacy and academic literacies, it is implied that fully internalising a culture and its knowledge which can only be fully adopted by the novice through observation and interaction with 'saged' members of said culture (Lea and Street, 1998; Lefa, 2015; Lillis and Scott, 2007; Molloy, 2012).

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Thus, during the online learning period, the traditional modes of interaction and observation that changed or were omitted may have influenced how connected students' felt to their academic society, and by extension, impacted how their feedback literacy developed. The next section discusses if and how online learning may have impacted the respondents' academic relationships.

5.3 Impact of online learning on academic relationships

"I just think the relationship between students and tutors helps to make interaction between the two a lot easier and smoother." (Thato, *Questionnaire*).

Thato's questionnaire response highlights the intersection of academic relationships (the sense of community), interactions with the academic community, as well as feedback which is foregrounded in the theory of Ubuntu (Moses, 2020). Although my previous study found that academic relationships impact how students engage with feedback, it was conducted in the context of face-to-face learning (Moses, 2020). This section aims to explore if and how the context of online learning may have affected participants' sense of community (Ubuntu and beneficial learning relationships), and if this impacted how they engaged with feedback, as well as their feedback literacies development.

In terms of academic relationships during online learning, students' experiences of connectedness to the academic community are important. Thus, participants' connection to the academic community during online learning was studied in terms of their interaction with others from the same and recorded in Figure 5.1 below. The majority of participants felt connected to their academic community to some degree, while two participants did not feel connected at all, as illustrated below.

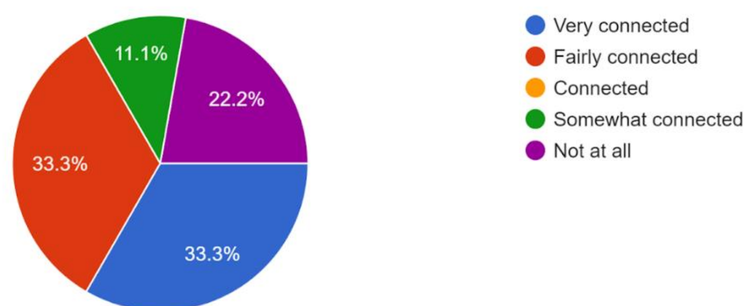

Figure 5.1 Students perceived connectedness to the academic community

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The sections that follow are derived from both, the questionnaires and interviews. The presented interview findings will highlight respondents' experiences of community during online learning. These experiences were categorised into negative and positive experiences and will be discussed separately.

5.3.1 Negative experiences of academic relationships during online learning

Participants' negative views of their sense of community during online learning is informed by external determinants. Two such participants are Zaaids and Sunny.

> I am not in the community. I am on a laptop, disconnected except from the interface of the internet. What is not considered is economical factors such as the cost of internet and environmental factors such as loadshedding. When you are physically in the community there is a sense of belonging. (Zaaids, *Questionnaire*)

Zaaids' proclamation that 'I am not in the community. I am on a laptop, disconnected [...]' highlights their opinion of an almost complete disconnect from the academic community. From the tone of Zaaids' response above, it is clear that "the interface of the internet" does not equate to being physically embedded in the academic context during face-to-face learning. This suggests that although they tried to engage, Zaaids feeling of connection and belonging is derived from physical proximity, and the lack thereof put them on the backfoot.

Moreover, Zaaids' response highlights that their virtual learning experience and sense of belonging to the academic community was affected by factors which is closely associated with online learning in the South African context, such as loadshedding[6]. As reported by Fouche and Andrews (2021), during online learning, students' academic development and progress is impacted by the context in which they are studying. Thus, Zaaids pointing out that their sense of belonging was impacted by loadshedding, which could at times limit their access to academic materials and online teachings platforms that are needed to interact with their peers and tutors, impacted their academic progress. In addition to all the other stressors, there is also other external factors that impede student progress.

[6] Loadshedding is an energy conserving scheme implemented in South Africa during their electricity crisis. Loadshedding refers to a period of time (s) when the electricity of a particular suburb is totally switched off. These total blackouts can occur scheduled or unscheduled multiple times a day (Fouche and Andrews, 2021).

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Sunny echoed Zaaids' sentiments:

> I feel somewhat connected because online teaching is something that does not really work for me although I try my best to communicate with my lecturers. At times I don't even bother to log onto lectures because of network issues and all those things. (*Questionnaire*)

This suggests that although the institution put interventions in place such as Google Meet lectures and tutorials to imitate traditional teaching and simulate the "connection", Sunny did not feel connected enough. This is because Sunny's attempts to engage and interact with tutors were also hindered by external determinants such as "network issues" (Sunny, *Questionnaire*). The tone of Sunny's statement suggests that these "network issues" were so persistent that it may have disrupted their ability to be present during synchronised (i.e. live) teaching sessions. Consequently, this implies that Sunny's sense of belonging was at first impacted by poor internet connectivity, which later deterred them from even attempting to be present in live classes or engaging with the online community. Thus, in the case of Sunny, the online learning interventions may have initially sustained a sense of affinity or academic inclusion within the academic context. However, over time, their sense of belonging to the academic community may have weakened so much so that they chose to remove themselves almost entirely.

Additionally, Sunny's inability to readily interact with tutors, coursework, and feedback, (willingly or unwilling), negatively affected their academic performance as well as their ability to develop their feedback literacy. This is supported by Sunny's statement: "most of the [feedback comments] did not make sense to me", later adding, "Some of it I understand especially with the grammar but the other things I did not understand as I saw I kept on receiving the same feedback with my essays even after I tried changing my writing style." (*Questionnaire*). The former comment shows a partial understanding of the feedback received, while the latter speaks of subsequent attempts to engage with feedback and 'fix' errors. This suggests that although there were efforts to engage with and use feedback for improvement, there was a lack of understanding on how to improve according to the feedback received. This challenge could be a result of Sunny not feeling connected enough to understand the feedback, or it could suggest that online communication is not (as) clear as face-to-face verbal communication.

Moreover, their removal of self from the online academic community may have exacerbated their lack of understanding of feedback received, which would have impacted their

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overall academic progress. Thus, the interactive relationship for effective learning which Ubuntu values was disrupted. In other words, the lack of feedback comprehension and progress with feedback literacy may be a direct result of the academic interruptions which disrupted their relationship with tutors, lecturers, and other students.

Notably, both these respondents had different opinions about their sense of connection to their academic societies during online learning, but their reasoning were similar. Hence, although there was a willingness, by both of these participants, to engage with other agents of their academic society, they could not because of circumstantial influences. It should also be noted that neither of these participants mentioned having challenges with online learning interventions like Google Meet itself, but both strongly feel that it does not replace the reliability and embeddedness of face-to-face learning.

5.3.2 Positive experiences of academic relationships during online learning

In contrast, other questionnaire respondents who felt a stronger connection to their academic community during this period of online learning, stated that it is a direct result of the constant interaction with their peers and tutors via the teaching forums that the university had put in place.

For instance, Ceecee, who claimed that they felt "fairly connected", explained:

> I feel like I am in constant contact with my fellow classmates and some tutors who have granted students access to them via WhatsApp. WhatsApp has allowed for students to create WhatsApp tutorial groups where discussions are held and often students will ask questions about tutorials and tests or test dates etc. and other students will respond. WhatsApp has even become a place where students come for motivation and encouragement from their fellow classmates. I particularly feel disconnected from tutors who have not granted students access to them via WhatsApp. (*Questionnaire*)

Ceecee's response implies that their initial needs for learning were met through the teaching methods of online learning, while their communicative needs were met via interaction with their peers and tutor via WhatsApp. According to Ceecee, the secondary platform of interaction strengthened their engagement with the academic community, since the WhatsApp groups were used as a platform to ask for mass feedback from tutors, serving as a 'consultation'. The response also points out that Ceecce's experience of the academic community was two-fold, as it speaks to inter-cohort as well as in-cohort interaction. This highlights a cornerstone

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of Ubuntu, that effective interaction(s) is essential to learning (Lefa, 2015). In other words, they were able to easily communicate with their peers as well as their tutor. There could also have been an increased sense of community amongst students as they became more interdependent, forming a sense of camaraderie. This can be observed when participants first sought aid among themselves before consulting tutors as stated by Sunny, Phoodie and Dee in their questionnaire responses.

It should also be noted from the response above that Ceecee's experience of connectedness was conditional on access to tutors via WhatsApp. This could in part be because having tutors on WhatsApp made it easier to ask them for feedback individually. Alternatively, WhatsApp is a familiar platform when compared to the relative 'unfamiliarity' of the other platforms. Therefore, WhatsApp may have provided a way to create that 'in-class' interaction or connection, where communication between tutors and students are more accessible, and not limited to 'office hours'; unlike email and Google Meets.

Moreover, Ceecee's connectedness could have stemmed from the fact that access to tutors via WhatsApp meant that they were always available, whereas prior to this, students were dependent on rigid consultation times, competing with other students for tutors' availability. Thus, the required interactions which facilitate learning was always available hence increasing sense of Ubuntu- learning through interaction (Lefa,2015). Ceecee's responses suggested that they were engaged in multiple feedback loops, i.e., the standard feedback on assignments, the group feedback sessions on the WhatsApp group, and the optional individual feedback on personal student-tutor WhatsApp chats. CeeCee's use of "constant" would suggest that that interactions were frequent. This would establish a good foundation for the formation of strong academic relationships with their peers as well as their tutors (Lefa,2015). In turn, this may have positively impacted their feedback literacy development.

Dee echoed CeeCee's testimony of feeling "fairly connected":

> The university staff are doing a great job in helping students with as much as they can and because of this my experience of learning online is not bad at all. I don't [feel] left behind at all. As a result, my grades have improved dramatically from the previous year. (Dee, *Questionnaire*).

It can be assumed that although there was the absence of a physical community set in a physical academic environment, the communication and teaching platforms used during this

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time served as an appropriate substitute to have inspired, at least to some degree, a sense of community and togetherness amongst students and with tutors. This assumption was supported by Dee's testimony that they "don't [feel] left behind at all". Additionally, Dee established that the efforts of the university staff to engage students resulted in their positive academic progress. This would suggest that indeed, students' academic development and progress is a result of how the online interventions put in place by the university staff could facilitate academic relationships.

It is important to note that participants' experiences of online learning in terms of community and academic relationships are complex. On the one hand, for Diana, their sense of community and connectedness to the academic community during online learning was not as strong as it was during face-to-face learning. This may be due to the fact that they perceived there was little to no collective involvement which may have led to a more fragile sense of connectedness (Barker, 2010). On the other hand, Jade and Dee felt more part of the academic community because the lack of physical social presence, ironically, enabled them to engage with and participate more in the online academic community.

Additionally, for students like Jade who have social anxiety, the online environment helped them feel more comfortable in forming academic relationships, leading to them feeling more part of their cohort. This can be seen when Jade said:

> I don't know, **I made way more friends like even without the academic thing,** I kinda made a personal connection as well, like **being online and we meet up**, yeah I recall **I have met-up with them and I do know them now personally, socially it's just like you said it builds a community online which is very weird if you think about it but the main purpose of social media is to create this virtual community so it really helped me adjust lot**. (*Interview*)

Thus, Jade not being in the same physical environment as their peers made them more open to interacting within the academic community. So much so, that they referred to them as "friends", suggesting that the closeness extended beyond the academic sphere and benefits. Moreover, the indication that Jade became more social within the academic sphere could have led to an increase in engagement with feedback discourse and progress in feedback literacies development which is delineated by the theory of Ubuntu (Lefa, 2015; Lea and Street, 1998; Moses, 2020). This is a great possibility, as Jade expressed above that they would first ask a friend for feedback, then any academic staff like tutors. It is then safe to assume that because

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of online learning, not only did Jade's sense of community grow, but also their willingness to participate in said community, and possibly, their feedback literacy.

5.3.3 Discussion

These participants' testimonies of the value of academic relationships during online learning resembles the shared collective understanding valued in the framework of Ubuntu: "I am because you are", as well as in feedback literacy development (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Lefa, 2015; Sutton, 2012). In other words, there is an emphasis that the value of the shared space, as well as the sharing and/or forming of a collective understanding, plays in the individual academic progress and feedback literacy development (Carless and Boud, 2018; Lefa, 2015; Molloy *et al*., 2020; Sutton, 2012). For participants whose sense of community and belonging to the academic community was fulfilled with the online learning interventions, like CeeCee and Dee, their academic progress and development bettered. This most likely improved the development of their feedback literacies. Alternatively, for participants like Sunny and Zaaids who felt disconnected from the online academic community, their academic progress as well as their feedback literacy development may have been poorly affected. Therefore, to some extent, it can be concluded that the academic relationships and participants' sense of belonging to the academic community during online learning may have a direct impact on participants' willingness to engage with course content and feedback, and consequently, proportionally impact their academic progress and feedback literacies development.

5.4 Conclusion/ Summary

This chapter examined firstly, if and how online learning may have impacted on participants ability to interact with the academic community, and secondly, if and how online learning may have impacted their academic relationships.

In terms of the impact that online learning had on communication within the academic community, the findings were complex and dependent on the participants' communicative needs. Some participants may have preferred communicating physically, in a classroom, because the presence and input of other participants may have bettered their comprehension of and engagement with the course content. For other participants, the online learning environment - the removal of other students' physical presence - drastically increased their willingness to communicate with other students and even tutors (Barker, 2010). In fact, for some participants, online learning provided a strong sense of community, because this mode

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of teaching provided multiple (and less formal) avenues of access to tutors and students, like Google Meet and WhatsApp. These forums enabled participants to interact with tutors and students more frequently.

Additionally, in terms of the impact of online learning on participants' academic relationships, it was found that online learning was effective in this regard as long as all associated factors such as loadshedding and network challenges do not deter students. In other words, online learning as a mode of teaching can weaken academic relationships, but often, it is the broader societal issues that deter them from even participating in online learning.

As this chapter shows, effective communication led to strong academic relationships, which in turn led to a strong sense of community. Ultimately, this led to positive academic progress, and at times, more opportunities for participants to develop their feedback literacies. The chapter that follows will look at if and how participants' feedback literacies were developed during online learning more keenly.

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Chapter 6:
Students' feedback literacy development

6.1 Introduction

As established in the previous chapter, participants were aware of the importance of academic interactions contributing to their academic development, as well as openness to feedback cycles. This is supported by the findings of Moses (2020) and van Heerden and Bharuthram (2021) , which found that student familiarity to the learning context and feedback giver provides a forum for openness to feedback, and could inspire eagerness to engage with, initiate and continue feedback. Throughout the data analysis, it was found that there was a relationship between participants' preferred mode of learning and their feedback literacies development. Keeping this in mind, this chapter aims to explore if and how participants feedback literacies development was impacted by face-to-face learning and/or online learning. This will be done by firstly, discussing which mode of learning participants most and least preferred (face-to-face or online learning), and why. Secondly, this chapter will draw on Molloy *et al*. (2020)'s framework to determine which feedback literacies participants may have had or developed during Covid-19.

6.2 Most and least preferred modes of learning and teaching

The majority of respondents indicated that they had experienced both online learning and face-to-face learning at UWC; only one respondent (Zaaids) indicated solely online learning. This allows us to establish that the majority of the respondents have had the opportunity to develop their feedback literacies both, during online, and in-person learning. This then also puts them in the best position to share their experience of the change in feedback practices and the development of feedback literacy during both periods of learning. Although Zaaids did not experience face-to-face learning at UWC, their responses to this series of questions were not disqualified. This is because it is safe to assume that since the data was collected at a point when respondents were in their third year of study, Zaaids would have experienced face-to-face learning albeit at another tertiary institution. Hence, their responses pertaining to both mediums of learning are valid.

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6.2.1 Most preferred

6.2.1.1 Face-to-face

When participants who had experienced both online and face-to-face learning were asked which mode they preferred and why, most respondents stated that they preferred face-to-face learning. This is similar to other studies (see, for example Tsantopoulos *et al*., 2022). When asked to motivate their preference, Sunny said: :

> I prefer the face-to-face learning. Due to the reason that if you do not understand anything you can ask another student that is in the same class as you. Online learning is not a wonderful experience but it worked for the mean time. (Sunny, *Questionnaire*).

Mary elaborated:

> The energy that people give off when you are in the same room is completely different to online. (*Questionnaire*).

In other words, face-to-face teaching provided a forum for in-cohort academic support from which a positive energy was derived. This could have encouraged a stronger sense of engagement with and comprehension of with academic material and teachings through in-person, in-class collaborations. Thus, face-to-face learning broadened and strengthened student understanding of the academic material while providing the closeness and collaboration; enabling them to become familiar with their peers, and form, as Phoodie termed it, "informative friendship(s)". Hence, to these respondents, learning while physically in a shared academic context was better for their learning experience due to the shared academic interest and collaborative interactions.

The participants' motivations above for their preference of face-to-face learning underscores how in-class interactions amongst students benefitted their comprehension and engagement with academic material. Another participants' testimony expanded on this by saying that not only did in-class interaction with other students aid in their academic development, but to them, it also provided opportunities for them to readily interact with tutors and/or lecturers. Put differently, in addition to in-cohort interactions and forming beneficial academic relationships, face-to-face learning also with the space to interact and form academic relationships with tutors. This was evident in the responses below:

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> I think, a lack of that sort of **class interaction, where we maybe more engaged with the lecturer face-to-face** and fellow students and stuff [...]. (Diana, *Interview*)

> I would go to **my tutor and I would get verbal feedback and take notes and like the meetings with my tutor or lecturer**. [during online learning] I didn't get it to speak directly to the tutors, so it's mostly like a one-way of communication [...]. (Ama, *Interview*)

It can be noted from the statements above that these participants valued the opportunity for immediate inter-cohort interactions that face-to-face learning offers easily. For Diana, their academic progress benefited from direct, immediate interactions with both students and tutors. Similarly, Ama's case, who stated that during face-to-face learning they would physically go to tutors for consultations, highlights that online learning does not allow this close physical interaction to take place (Ajjawi and Boud 2017; Carless 2006; Moses 2020). This would imply that to Ama, face-to-face learning had more favourable openings for feedback, thus marking their preference for this mode of learning as being more feedback driven.

As is evident, participants preferred face-to-face learning because it strengthened their sense of community and emulated the value of the Ubuntu in the academic sphere. The sharing of knowledge echoes the foundation of this ideology - "I am because you are" (Lefa, 2015). Thus, the preference for a shared academic space could be based on the respondents' sense of togetherness, as this could have subsequently improved their engagement and may have even improved their understanding of academic material. In turn, this may have translated to the development of academic literacies and consequently, their feedback literacies.

6.2.1.2 Online learning

Alternatively, those who reported that they preferred online learning stated that there was an increase and flexibility of time and communication. For instance:

> **Online teaching is much better as it saves time and money** as you don't have to pay for transport to get to campus, plus you attend all of your classes at the comfort of your home. (Thato, *Questionnaire*)

> I have found that **online learning has given me much more time with each task**. **The lines of communication are more open** and **while the readings have increased in**

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> **number, the opportunities for extra research have been invaluable.** (Naidoo, *Questionnaire*)

> I prefer online learning because **it provides recorded lectures that I can access at any given time** even if I did not attend a particular lecture, whereas when we were still at campus before the pandemic, if you missed a lecture, for the week, you only had the slides to refer to for information. (Ceecee, *Questionnaire*)

As discussed in chapter 2, one of the determinants of students' academic learning and development is time is an important determinant in relation to students' engagement with feedback (Gravett *et al*., 2020; Shute, 2008). Thus, the flexibility of time is regarded as a primary benefit of online learning and if used correctly, can aid in the development of feedback literacy. Additionally, the "extra" time saved from travelling was used not only to engage with primary learning material provided by tutors, but also to do "extra research" (Naidoo, *Questionnaire*). This suggests that students who chose to use their extra time in academic tasks were further committed to academic improvement. It also suggests that online learning facilitated a correlation between time and engagement that may have encouraged the development of students' academic literacies.

As alluded to in chapter five, "the lines of communication" which Naidoo speaks of may be referring to the fact that some tutors provided WhatsApp forums like group chats to facilitate engagement of questions from students and tutors. Since WhatsApp is an instant messaging application, concerns and questions can be shared at any time. Thus, these responses or discussions could be considered feedback which provided less rigid, more informal opportunities for feedback literacies development (Henderson *et al*, 2019; Preto-Bay, 2004).

Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter five, Jade stated that they preferred online learning because of its direct yet impersonal nature:

> Actually, **it [online learning] was much better [than face-to-face learning], surprisingly.** I have social anxiety so for me to make friends like first year face-to-face, I had like 2 or 3 friends, the way I like got in contact with them is that I had one friend and she made friends and they all became my friends. So, yeah **when it came to second year and it was online *inaudible* I would have people reaching out to me and we would form a friendship in that way and I feel like it really improved a lot because I feel more confident at home instead of in- person** whereas if we would

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meet it in person it would have left more different to than what I am feeling **because of social conditions**. So, I hope that makes sense. (*Interview*)

Jade's above statement notes that they have social anxiety, an emotional disorder which could impact academic progress and academic development, and that it manifests during face-to-face interactions especially in academic institutions (Ifenthaler *et al*., 2023). Thus, during online learning, Jade acknowledged that their social anxiety lessened. They owed this to the perceived impersonal nature of this teaching method. This is contrary to the finding of Ifenthaler *et al*. (2023), who found that social anxiety can persist or even worsen in the online learning environment, especially when interactions occur between peers. Notably, this is contrary to Jade's recollection regarding the aspects of online learning, where they thrived. For instance, Jade stated that during the period of mandatory online learning, their ability to form academic relationships and friendships with peers improved drastically, and these relationships formed not only served them well academically, but socially as well. As Jade's statement above suggests, they were initially contacted by other students for academic purposes, but the forming of "friendships" would suggest that there was mutual continuance of these academic interactions. Therefore, online learning provided Jade with easier integration into the academic community. As discussed in chapter five, this may have been beneficial to their academic development. Thus, Jade's preference for online learning is not surprising in the context of their learning experience and social abilities.

Thus, participants' preferred teaching mode is determined by their individual learning needs. On the one hand, Diana and other proponents of face-to-face learning preferred it because they prefer interacting in close proximity with their tutor and peers which results in a collaborative synergy. Ceecee and the other proponents of online learning, on the other hand, preferred it because they value the frequent and convenient interaction online learning provides. It is worth noting that Jade's attitude towards interacting and communicating in the academic context drastically changed during online learning. To some extent, the move to online learning was beneficial to their sense of belonging in the academic community, as the distant interactions enabled them to comfortably communicate with peers and tutors.

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6.2.2 *Least preferred*

6.2.2.1 Online learning

When asked which mode of learning participants least preferred, it was the very reasons stated above that were seen as negative. For instance, Sunny, who said they least preferred online learning, stated that online learning "makes you lazy". This could be because of the more flexible nature of online learning and teaching; students had more time to engage with non-academic activities like social media, which could have impacted the development of academic literacies (Sunny, *Questionnaire*; see, for examples, Dhawan, S., 2020).

6.2.2.2 Face-to-face

Contrary to what the proponents of face-to-face learning said in section 6.2.2, some respondents like Thato claimed that they least preferred face-to-face learning because it is "boring and daunting". Thus, there is subjectivity in the matter of a preferred mode of teaching, which is based on personhood. What others might view as an energy to build on, some might see as an intimidating experience.

6.2.3 *Discussion on preferred mode*

It should be noted that above all else, there was one clear factor that most influenced which teaching mode participants preferred: their academic interactions. Each participant had different requirements for interactions that best simulated and developed their academic progress, and this influenced which mode of teaching they preferred. For instance, Ama prefers face-to-face learning because it provided opportunities for in-person consultations, while Diana, Sunny and Mary preferred face-to-face teaching as they were able to learn through collective input. Conversely, for Jade, their preference for online learning stemmed from their need for interaction to be somewhat distant, as this enabled their social anxiety to settle, allowing them to engage. On the other hand, Thato, Naidoo and Ceecee preferred online learning because it provided an excess of time for more academic engagement. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is no one set reason for a particular preferred learning mode, rather, that it is entirely subjective. In other words, although proponents of either mode of learning stated that their preferred method promoted engagement, it was derived from how and what they might value in their process of engagement. Hence, some students might prefer to engage with actual people rather than the material as they best learn through interaction, while others

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prefer engaging with academic material in isolation from others. Ultimately, each participant had a unique combination of ideal contextual learning requirements to satisfy their individual learning needs.

6.3 Feedback and feedback comprehension during both modes

A set of questions were asked which aimed to explore the quality of feedback during online learning, as well as investigate if it may have impacted participants' comprehension of feedback during the period of mandatory online learning. Participants reported varying degrees of feedback comprehension during face-to-face learning in comparison to online learning where feedback comprehension is more satisfactory. This can be seen in the two figures below:

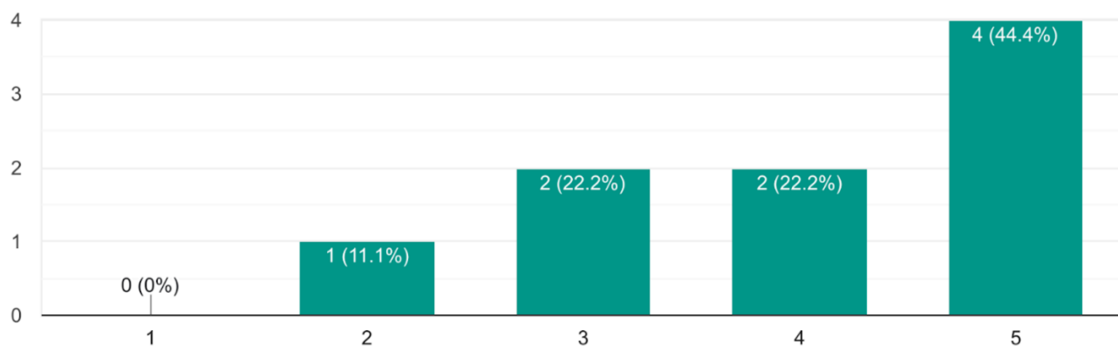

Figure 6.1 Participants' understanding of feedback received during face-to-face learning (1= unclear; 5= satisfactory)

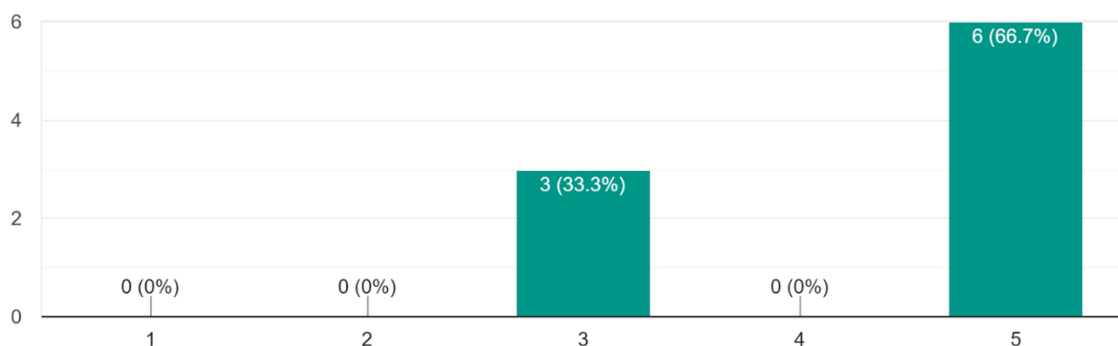

Figure 6.2 Participants' understanding of feedback received during online learning (1= unclear; 5= satisfactory)

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These two figures show different levels of student satisfaction of their feedback comprehension during face-to-face learning and online learning respectively. Opinions on feedback comprehension during face-to-face learning varied quite a bit (ranging from slightly unclear to satisfactory; 2-5), while those for online learning tended to be more positive overall (majority giving 5; satisfactory). This would imply that during online learning, participants' overall understanding of feedback increased. This increase in comprehension may be a result of consistently receiving written feedback during online learning (Figure 6.3)

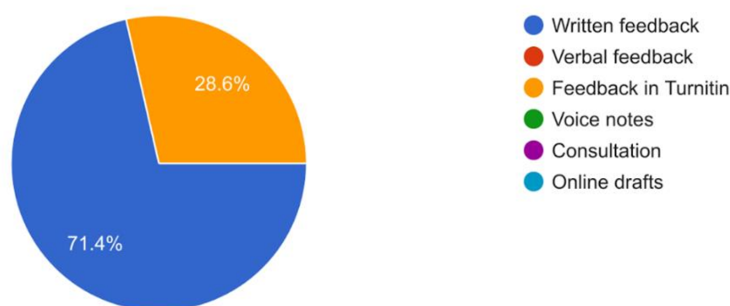

Figure 6.3 Which type of feedback was most often received during online learning

This pattern establishes an unexpected positive relationship between feedback comprehension and written feedback. Written feedback, in comparison to verbal feedback, because of its indirect and impersonal nature, is criticised for being prone to miscommunication, which leads to poor understanding of feedback (Higgins, 2000). Considering the distance during mandatory online learning, I expected that these 'issues' surrounding written feedback to worsen. Yet, it seems to have improved. This improvement could be because online feedback is typed, and so participants would not have tried to read tutors' handwriting, making it easier for them to read and understand the provided feedback. Participants might also have received more detailed feedback online. Moreover, the data collected indicates that participants' feedback literacies became more developed, as comprehension of feedback is the cornerstone of feedback literacies and its development (Carless and Boud, 2018).

The increase in feedback comprehension during online learning could also be attributed to the change in the quality of feedback. For example:

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> In my experience, the feedback process has been more purposeful in that the lecturers and tutors make regular announcements about when course work is due and whether there are any changes or whether extensions were granted. This is most helpful in keeping track of what is going on in different modules. For example, before when we were still at campus, one had to stand in a long line to book a PC to access announcements on iKamva for a limited time of about 15mins, which was time consuming and tedious because once the 15 minutes had elapsed, one was automatically logged out and had to grant someone else an opportunity. Now with online learning, one can easily log on to iKamva at your convenience and check all communication without a time limit. One could especially access the lecture readings and recorded lectures with ease. (Ceecee, *Questionnaire*)

> Yes, in my opinion, because we are mostly online, lecturers and tutors have a better turnaround time to responding to emails and requests for feedback. (Angel, *Questionnaire*)

> Yes, the feedback process has changed. The quality has increased because we receive comprehensive feedback from tutors via the WhatsApp groups and email. The lecturers are readily available even though they do have a heavy workload with hundreds of students. (Naidoo, *Questionnaire*)

> Yes, I believe the feedback back process has become more intensive. Because we are not having face to face lectures we rely heavily on essay feedback, the feedback is what we could have gone to our lecturers or tutors for face to face. (Mary, *Questionnaire*)

These responses suggest that feedback played a greater role in these students' academic development during online learning than it did during face-to-face learning, since it may have been recognised and intentionally utilised by tutors as a teaching tool. This suggests that during online learning, awareness of feedback and its abilities grew for both participants and tutors, as feedback now had to take the role of traditional interactions. Due to this, tutors may have intentionally used it as a primary teaching tool, while participance committed to it as one of the primary means of improvement. Therefore, due to the increase of feedback, participants were not only provided the opportunity to further develop their feedback literacies but were also tasked and/or compelled to regularly engage with feedback more effectively in order to ensure their academic success.

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6.4 Molloy *et al's* (2020) Feedback literacy characteristics

This section discusses participants' responses in terms of Molloy *et al*'s (2020) framework of characteristics of a feedback literate student (see chapter three). It should be noted that even according to Molloy *et al* (2020: 534), some of these characteristics "remained aspirational". That is, they were not possessed by participants in their research and were added in hopes of the existence of the ideal feedback literate student. This means- that students do not have to display all seven characteristics in order to be considered feedback literate, but the presence of one or more would indicate that there is a degree of feedback literacy. Therefore, the analysis and discussion of these responses does not aim to determine if participants are individually feedback literate, but instead to collect their general knowledge of and engagement with feedback, in order to analyse which characteristics, they display or lack. Overall, the responses gathered indicated a fairly limited understanding of feedback, and adequately mixed markers of Molloy *et al*'s (2020) seven characteristics.

6.4.1 Commits to feedback as improvement

This characteristic discusses how students should recognise and value the purpose of feedback as a process needed for academic improvement (Molloy *et al*., 2020). The ideal illustration of feedback as a way of improving was encapsulated in the responses that describe feedback as facilitating improvement:

> [T]o **help** the person **better** themselves in any regard. To **improve** on certain skill sets. (Sunny, *Questionnaire*)
>
> To **help** you learn from your mistakes; also teaches about **better** ways of approaching a topic, for example. (Thato, *Questionnaire*).
>
> To **improve** on whatever is lacking in the subject in question. To provide people the opportunity to be actively involved in developing their skills. Feedback is deeper commentary than merely percentages but rather explains exactly why you got a particular mark. (Mary, *Questionnaire*).
>
> [A]t the end of the day it just **helps** you to do **better** (Diana, *Questionnaire*).

(*bold added for emphasis)

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These participants were able to identify that feedback is not just a commentary 'on' what you have learnt but is also a process used in and/or 'for' learning, as discussed by Lea and Street (1998) and Sutton (2012). This finding is suggested by the association of the words better (Sunny, Thato, Diana), help (Sunny, Thato, Diana), and improve (Sunny and Mary) when discussing the definition and purpose of feedback. In other words, participants acknowledged that feedback adds to and refines their existing intellectual faculties (Boud 2000; Malecka *et al*, 2020). Additionally, some of these responses are also significant because they highlight that academic progress is indeed, at times, also subsequent to the receiving of feedback. Acknowledging this shows that participants understood the purpose of feedback and its intended influence on their academic development. Furthermore, recognising that feedback offers the opportunity to improve implies that these respondents knew that in order for the feedback process to be effective, they ought to commit to and/or engage with feedback to develop their academic skills, as foregrounded by Molloy *et al* (2020); and by extension, develop their feedback literacy.

6.4.2 Appreciates feedback as an active process

This characteristic is defined by students appreciating feedback and playing an active role in its process (Molloy *et al*., 2020). When discussing the purpose of feedback and how participants feel about feedback, most of the respondents viewed feedback in a positive light. This is evident in the responses below:

> I feel **appreciative** of feedback that I receive as it helps me to navigate w**hat I should change,** or what I have done well' (Dee, *Questionnaire*)
>
> I **appreciate** feedback, it provides information about many things (Ceecee, *Questionnaire*)
>
> I **welcome** feedback. It is a positive way of teaching ... I view feedback in a positive light**. I always implement what my tutors/lecturers suggest.** (Naidoo, *Questionnaire*)
>
> I **love** getting feedback even if I did well in an assignment (Thato, *Questionnaire*)
>
> [W]hat I do is, I read the essay and all the comments on the feedback and when what I do is sometimes **I would take notes of the points that [the tutor] mad**e **or when I write my second essay or the essay after that I will when I'm editing my essay, I**

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go back to the comments and I make sure that I ticked off everything on the list and that what I do. (Ama, *Interview*).

I **appreciate** feedback. I like that **markers take the time to explain my marks to me.** (Mary, *Questionnaire*)

As can be seen, these participants valued feedback and viewed it as part of their learning process. This positive attitude towards feedback could also suggest that there was an openness to engage with feedback. This could further suggest that participants are willing to play active role in the feedback cycle. Additionally, amongst the participants, Ama, Naidoo, and Mary recognised and valued feedback back as a continuous and active process. This is indicated when they mentioned that for them, feedback goes beyond just receiving it but extends into engaging with it. Mary, for instance, engaged with the comments. Similarly, Naidoo and Ama understood that feedback engagement is an active and continuous process. This is shown when Ama stated that they not only read but re-read feedback for the purpose of understanding the 'mistakes' on their current assignment and remained conscious about the provided feedback while working on the subsequent assignment. This suggests that Ama invested time in the feedback process, implying some degree of feedback literacy.

6.4.3 Elicits information to improve learning

In conjunction with playing an active role when receiving feedback, students who possess this characteristic go one-step further to seek out feedback (Molloy *et al*., 2020). The participants and their responses below show that they not only received passive feedback on assignments but also sought feedback through interaction with tutors. For example:

I ask questions to solicit feedback. (Ceecee, *Questionnaire*)

I always try my best to improve where I can, if there's **I don't understand I'll ask my tutor to clarify it** for me. (Thato, *Questionnaire*)

I suck up my pride and accept that I don't know everything. The first stage of improvement I believe is accepting or being open to change. **I then go through the feedback paragraph by paragraph, that is why I like Turnitin** because you can see the markers commentary and the particular word or phrase is highlighted that needs to be fixed or is considered good. (Mary, *Questionnaire*)

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This is line with Molloy *et al*'s (2020) definition of a feedback literate student who elicits feedback, because this group of participants had a good relationship with feedback primarily. This could be because they understood that the fundamental purpose of feedback is to help them. Hence, through their commitment to improve, they played an active role in seeking and engaging with feedback, which could also suggest advanced feedback literacy development. Put differently, all these participants' responses suggest that they have gone beyond simply receiving feedback, but also continuously engaged with and analysed feedback on multiple platforms. In fact, they even have gone so far as to actively seek out feedback.

Feedback in its nature is a social practice which chiefly involves interaction between students and tutors (Ajjawi and Boud, 2017). Moreover, its communicative processes are most efficient when feedback takes place in the form of a dialogue (verbal or non-verbal), between students and tutors (Molloy *et al*., 2020). In other words, feedback best aids in improving students' academic ability when students play an active role in engaging with and seeking feedback information to facilitate academic furtherance (Molloy *et al*., 2020). Notably, the responses below would indicate that respondents possess the capacity to be agents in the feedback cycle by actively continuing the feedback interaction:

> **I would go to my tutor** and **I would get verbal feedback** and take notes and like the meetings with my tutor or lecturer. (Ama, *Interview*)

> **I feel like I would easily consult with a friend** who has like the same module **then like they would maybe ask their tutor** instead of me asking like my own tutor or asking the lecturer. (Jade, *Interview*)

> I don't think I ever needed to, there was no, I mean **I'm that type of person to send a million emails** and stuff but there was never any reason for me to. (Diana, *Interview*)

Indeed, it is clear that these participants had and displayed the willingness to elicit (feedback) information to improve learning. However, the degree to which they possessed it varied. For instance, Ama used proactive language by saying "I would easily consult" in relation to feedback; their use of 'I would' here suggests that there is a familiar inclination to actively seeking feedback. This would imply that Ama took initiative in the feedback process. Additionally, in the case of Diana, although they stated that they did not have reason to initiate contact with tutors concerning feedback, they would initiate feedback interaction if the need arose.

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Moreover, although Jade did elicit information to improve learning by initiating prompt feedback, their process was quite conditional that they were more open to doing so with peers than with lecturers. This would imply that the closeness, in rank and/or physically, of the person they request feedback from played an important role in Jade's openness to start off a feedback interaction. This is because Jade's social anxiety, as mentioned in chapter five, worsens when the feedback giver is in a higher position than them (Ferguson, 2011; Hinett and Weeden, 2000; Robinson, 2012). Despite Jade's fear for authority, they still elicited feedback. Jade would often send messages on the WhatsApp group chat, in which their tutor are also present. Hence, during online learning, Jade was more open to addressing their concerns with peers and tutors because it was less confrontational through the online interface.

Interestingly, Jade's feedback literacy had developed during online learning to some extent, especially regarding their openness to feedback related interactions (see chapter five). This is especially true if one considers that feedback in its nature is a form of communication, and that feedback literacies and its development is considered a social practice (Lea and Street, 1998). Thus, Jade becoming more vocal within their academic community and cohort means that they may now be more outspoken and partake more willingly in feedback conversation, further developing feedback literacy. The other interviewees' openness to elicit feedback has remained at the same degree of openness in both teaching contexts. These interviewees mainly attributed this stagnant willingness in communication to various reasons. For instance, Diana is willing to initiate feedback discourse but found no need to because of the good quality of feedback during online learning. Conversely, Ama was usually keen to seek feedback and strongly preferred it in the verbal in-person form. Thus, the lack thereof may not have impacted Ama's openness to feedback in general, but just the frequency in which they initiated and engaged with feedback.

6.4.4 Processes feedback information

This characteristic refers to the existence of a process which students may use to engage with feedback (Molloy *et al*., 2020). Students who have this processing characteristic, which may be unique to them, guides them on how to grapple with feedback received (Molloy *et al*., 2020). The responses below are in line with this characteristic:

> I suck up my pride and accept that I don't know everything. The first stage of improvement I believe is accepting or being open to change. **I then go through the feedback paragraph by paragraph, that is why I like Turnitin** because you are can

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see the markers commentary and the particular word or phrase is highlighted that needs to be fixed or is considered good. (Mary, *Questionnaire*)

> [W]hat I do is, **I read the essay and all the comments on the feedbac**k and when what I do is sometimes **I would take notes of the points that [the tutor] made** or when I write my second essay or the essay after that I will when I'm editing my essay, **I go back to the comments** and I make sure that I ticked off everything on the list and that what I do (Ama, *Interview*)

> I would **analyse** what is being said [...]as to how they are trying to get you to approach the feedback. So, you just look for **keywords**, like if it was an English essay, they would speak about your grammar or your tone, things like that so I think it depends on the module you are busy with. You're gonna have to be able to make a link as to what they are trying to say and what you did wrong in the test. (Jade, *Interview*)

> **I will read the message then I'll go back to the work I submitted and just scroll over that again to see,** you know whether that or where exactly the feedback fits in and how I can apply it obviously into the work. (Diana, *Interview*)

The responses above indicate that the participants practiced diverse processes for engaging with feedback. This is evident as all responses suggest that students read the feedback, took their time to break it down, analyse it, and at times, organise the feedback. Thus, these participants display an understanding that engaging with feedback contributes to their learning (Sutton, 2012).

6.4.5 Acknowledges work and emotions

As can be noted above, some participants had an emotional response to feedback. However, according to Molloy *et al*. (2020), students who are feedback literate should be able to manage or overcome these emotions when engaging with feedback. When considering the emotional impact while engaging with feedback, participants indicated complex emotional responses, evident in their responses:

> It requires you to sort of pack up **my pride** and listen to what the tutors are saying. (Ama, *Interview*)

> It helps you **manage and deal** with constructive criticism so it's like a **personal thing** […]. (Jade, *Interview*)

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I suck up my pride and accept that I don't know everything [...]. (Mary, *Interview*)

Although all responses to some degree show signs that feedback may have had an emotional effect on respondents, they have developed ways of managing these effects. This would suggest that students have gained a level of confidence during their feedback literacy development journey (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*, 2020). In other words, regarding the emotive aspect of feedback, they have fashioned a way to not only deal with the emotional impact of feedback, but also how to overcome it; which often entailed setting their sense of self aside to objectively engage with feedback. Therefore, it can be assumed that they have developed an emotional scope, as the way they control their emotional response was by taking solace in the fact feedback is meant to help them improve for future tasks. This further highlighted that in the emotive regard, these participants' feedback literacies are well developed (Carless and Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2020)

However, another participant, Phoodie, demonstrated more complex emotions towards feedback. That is to say, their emotive response to feedback relied on the academic relationship held with the feedback giver.

> [I]t depends on what feedback I am receiving and from who but I am always willing to listen with understanding (*Questionnaire*).

Although this clearly shows that Phoodie's emotional response was impacted by feedback giver preference and the state of their academic relationship with the feedback 'giver', their process of engagement remained open-minded. In other words, this response acknowledged that feedback giving (and receiving) is subjective - some people give 'nicer' or 'stricter' feedback than others - which influences if and how this participant would engage with it (Moses, 2020). Hence, Phoodie foregrounded the relational influence of feedback engagement and subsequently feedback literacies development.

Thus, although the emotions that the participants above associate with feedback may not be entirely positive, their responses encapsulate and practice Molloy *et al*. (2020)'s aforementioned characteristic in a realistic manner by committing to feedback as [a means of] improvement, despite their initial emotional response. That is to say, initially in the feedback process, some of these respondents had negative emotional responses to feedback. However, they overcame these negative responses because they knew that the feedback would aid their academic progress. Thus, although these respondents' feedback literacies may not be

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developed to fit Molloy's characteristics exactly, they are in the process of developing these characteristics.

6.4.6 Acknowledges feedback as a reciprocal process

This characteristic refers to a behaviour where students are as equally involved in the feedback process as the giver (Molloy *et al*., 2020). As a social practice relying on dialogue, feedback and the development of feedback literacies is considered to be a reciprocal process (Lea and Street, 1998; Molloy *et al*., 2020). It can be seen from the responses below that although Jade and Diana recognised this, the recognition thereof did not always translate in practice.

> **<u>Interviewer:</u>** Do you ever initiate feedback discourse with your tutors?
>
> **<u>Jade:</u> I would actually say I don't** because most of feedback that I do get is like 'okay, so you are correct to a certain point and, you', they give me, they first like start with a complement and then like 'okay cool, so this is fine' and they would like add in the constructive criticism I would be able to see it in the work that I did but **I wouldn't really ask them 'can you look at this for me , can you look at this for me' I submit my work, wait for the essay or wait for the grade and then,** it is bad but yeah that how I do the whole thing. (Jade, *Interview*)

It can be extrapolated from Jade's responses that they were aware that feedback discourse should be a reciprocal discussion (i.e., a dialogue). This was Diana's response to the same question:

> NEVER! I never had to engage with them [tutor] on any feedback concerns because professor [lecturer's name] was really, like I say, even in the tutorials, the ones that I couldn't attend, i**t was like it was as if literally my brain opened when she spoke, like everything just made sense. I don't know how she does it.** (Diana, *Interview*)

It is evident that Jade and Diana had different perspectives of their role in the feedback process, as well as of their relationships with tutors. Jade's response quoted above clearly indicates that they did not actively participate in initiating and continuing the feedback cycle. Jade further elaborated that they were often passive recipients of feedback. This is not particularly surprising, as this participant has previously stated that they dreaded engaging with tutors and lecturers, which may hinder the growth of a good working/academic relationship. In the communication component of feedback literacy development then, Jade did not possess

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many skills. They did, however, show signs that their confidence for communicating and initiating communication was developing, which could also imply that their feedback literacy was developing.

In contrast to Jade, Diana's above response foregrounds a great academic relationship with their feedback giver. Diana spoke of their tutor and their tutor's abilities in a fond manner, suggesting that they viewed their tutor as capable. This could also suggest that Diana's tutor's feedback was of great quality, "since everything just [makes] sense" (Diana). It is also interesting when one considers that previously, Diana said "I'm that type of person to send a million emails and stuff, but there was never any reason for me to." This would suggest that Diana was aware that they too, have a role to play in the feedback process. However, because of their tutor's high quality of feedback, there was no need to. This could also suggest that on the part of their tutor, there was enough additional information in place to 'anticipate' Diana's questions, thus possibly indicating well developed feedback literacies on the part of their tutor. In this case, one could assume that Diana's positive academic relationship with their tutor influenced their openness to engage with and initiate interaction in the feedback process as well as the development of their feedback literacies (Molloy *et al*., 2020; Moses, 2020; Vezne *et al*., 2023).

6.4.7 Enacts outcomes of processing of feedback information

This characteristic of a feedback literate student is defined as the practical stage of the feedback process wherein a student implements the feedback information in their tasks (Molloy *et al*., 2020). Ama's process of managing feedback highlights how they enacted outcomes of processing of feedback information:

> Okay, so what I do is, I read the essay and all the comments on the feedback and when what I do is sometimes I would take notes of the points that they made or when I write my second essay or the essay. After that **I will when I'm editing my essay, I go back to the comments and I make sure that I ticked off everything on the list and that what I do.** (Ama, *Interview*)

It is clear here that Ama did not only have an extensive feedback analysis process, but also that they made conscious efforts to include all previous feedback in their current and/or future assignments. Ama's use of feedback as feedforward, where applicable, also shows that

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in terms of their processes of feedback information and thereafter enacting outcomes of processed feedback information, they were quite advanced (Molloy *et al*., 2020).

Overall, it was found that online learning had a positive result on most participants' communication, as well as the practice and development of their feedback literacies. However, in terms of a sense of belonging to and engaging with the community, the findings were more complex, due to respondent subjectivity. This is discussed at length in chapter seven (7.3).

6.5 Conclusion

In terms of participants' preference to their mode of learning (face-to-face or online learning), this study has found that their preference is completely subjective. This is because mode preference is informed almost entirely by participants' combination' individual learning needs. Concise, face-to-face learning is preferred for immediate interactions. This is evident in the first section of this chapter, when participants Sunny, Mary, Phoodie, and Diana, reported that they preferred face-to-face learning since they learn better in collaboration with other students. Ama preferred face-to-face learning for interaction with lecturers. However, Jade prefers online learning because it removes the physically social aspect, enabling them to develop relationships that benefit their learning.

Furthermore, an interesting pattern arose: participants' comprehension[7] of feedback drastically improved during online learning regardless of their preferred learning mode. Put differently, although most participants preferred face-to-face learning, they testified that their feedback comprehension increased during online learning. The overall increase in comprehension could be a result of the improved quality of feedback given, or because students during online learning mostly received one mode of feedback and as such, they were able to become more accustomed to the way in which feedback was given. This pattern would suggest that during online learning, there was a significant improvement in participants' feedback literacy.

Drawing on Molloy *et al.* (2020)'s characteristics of a feedback literate student, the participants of this study have fair yet varying degrees of feedback literacy. This is confirmed by the fact that all characteristics were found in this pool of participants. As discussed previously, this study did not aim to investigate if and how feedback literate an individual

[7] It should be noted that students reported that they comprehended feedback better; I did not 'test' specifically whether it had.

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participant is, but rather how feedback literate the pool of participants is. Hence, the fact that the pool of participants presents all of Molloy *et al.* (2020)'s characteristics is positive and could indicate that the institution and/or disciplines' method of giving feedback has enabled the development of these characteristics. Notably, this finding does not consider during in which teaching mode these characteristics were developed but only measures the detection of these characteristics at the time that the data was collected. It should be mentioned that online learning does not seem to have negatively impacted participants' feedback literacies development. In the case of Jade, for example, feedback literacy development may have even been positively impacted by the move to online learning and teaching (made clear from the findings in chapter five). Jade's feedback literacies, specifically the interactive aspects of feedback literacies development, were developed during online learning. As previously seen, this is because the online learning context removes one of their biggest hinderances during face-to-face learning; namely, the physical presence of others. As such, Jade may have developed the characteristics of eliciting feedback and viewing feedback as a reciprocal process.

Consequently, it is clear that online learning has positively benefited participants feedback literacies development. This is because during online learning, there was an overall increase in feedback comprehension, and this mode of learning also sustained an academic environment which enabled participants to practice and, in some cases, develop Molloy *et al* (2020)'s characteristics of a feedback literate student.

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Chapter 7:
Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of this study. This is presented through a recap of the study aim and research questions, followed by a summary of both the results chapters (chapters 5 and 6) with the aim of drawing an overall conclusion for the study. Thereafter, the study's implications, recommendations, and limitations will be discussed.

7.2 Recap: Study Aim and Research Questions

The objective of this study was to investigate if and how online learning impacted 2021's English 3 students feedback literacy development at UWC. This was done by investigating the following:

- How online learning may have impacted academic relationships during COVID-19,
- How online learning may have impacted students' ability to interact with their tutors,
- Which mode of learning participants preferred for the feedback literacies development,
- How feedback literate the research participants are drawing on Molloy *et al* (2020)'s framework

7.3 Summary of key findings

In examining how the move to online learning affected communication, the answer found was quite complex. This is because online learning had both negative and positive effects on participants' interactions. Those who claimed that it had a negative impact on their interactions cited that although it was a suitable temporary substitute for face-to-face interactions, it lacked the collaborative learning and synergy created during in-class interactions. Thus, for these participants, the sense of community, or Ubuntu- I am because you are - was diminished because of online academic interactions (Lefa, 2015). On the other hand, those who viewed it as positively impacting their academic interactions claimed that the online learning environment helped them become more interactive in the academic environment. This was the

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case because online learning removed the physical interactions with others of the academic community, which is what these participants feared most. The complexity lies in the subjective perspectives of participants and their individual learning needs; especially in how they perceived each mode of teaching to fulfil their communicative needs to ensure successful academic development (Morfaki and Skotis, 2023).

Interestingly, participants indicated that forming and maintaining academic relationships during lockdown was positively impacted. This means that either, online learning did not affect how participants would form academic relationships (despite them stating that they build stronger relationships during face-to-face learning), or that, in the case of Jade, online learning drastically increased their ability to form positive academic relationships. There were however cases where little to no academic relationships were formed during online learning. However, this was not a result of the learning mode in and of itself, but instead due to broader societal issues like loadshedding which deterred participants from engaging with the academic community almost entirely (Fouche and Andrews, 2021).

Ultimately, according to the findings, online learning as a mode of learning mostly had positive effects on participants' communication and sense of community. As the researcher, I found this quite interesting, because my personal experience differed. However, it does ultimately highlight (again) the subjective nature of learning needs and development.

Moreover, it was found that participants preferred the mode of learning which most benefited the development of their academic literacies and feedback literacy. For most participants, this was face-to-face learning, since they felt that the learning in this context added an immediacy to their learning and feedback process; something that online learning lacked (Vezne *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, for others, online learning provided a distance between themselves and other members of the academic community. This resulted in them being more engaged in the learning and feedback process.

In terms of how online learning impacted feedback literacy development, it was found that these participants collectively, displayed all seven of Molloy *et al*'s (2020) characteristics of a feedback literate student. However, this study and the research questions used did not allow for the distinguishing of when these characterises were developed. Thus, it can only be assumed that most of these characteristics were developed during face-to-face learning first, and then were transferred to online learning. This is a good thing, as it would signify that online learning

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did not diminish existing feedback literacy but provided an environment in which these literacies could continue to be practiced.

Interestingly, there was a reported marked increase in the comprehension of participants' feedback during online learning. This would suggest that the move to online learning does not seem to have negatively impacted their feedback literacy development. In fact, in some cases, the move may actually have improved this development, as it gave participants more time to engage with feedback (and because written feedback was all they had, in essence). It might be that feedback was disregarded or not paid such close attention to during face to face, since students had other avenues to explore.

Thus, to answer the research question: yes, online learning had an impact on students' feedback literacies development, but only in the comprehension of their feedback. The impact noted was not negative. It is important to recognise, however, that this comes with caveat, as online learning was found not to meet all participants' learning and academic development needs like proximity, relationship-building etc. This is because these needs are complex and subjective, and at times also different and contrary. Perhaps, if more learning and developmental needs were met, more aspects of feedback literacies would have developed.

7.5 Limitations

It should be noted that this study was conducted in very rigid context(s), and therefore it may lack the ability to be generalised in a larger context. As such, more studies are encouraged to explore the impact of online learning on feedback literacies development within varying contexts. The findings of this study are not necessarily transferable very limited due to the small number of participants of this study, as their experience may not reflect the full third-year cohort's experiences. Hence, the research field would benefit greatly from a study which has a higher number of participants. It should also be noted that the findings of this study maybe not be transferable to first- or second-year students because the participants of this study as third years have had more time to get feedback and develop their feedback literacies.

7.4 Study Implications and Recommendations

In an effort to meet students' collaborative and interactive learning needs for feedback development during online learning, the following recommendations are made:

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1. Since some participants have challenges with the lack of inter-personal interaction during online learning, I would suggest that tutors a) make students more cognisant that online consultations are possible, and b) make consultations more accessible through the use of WhatsApp's voice or video call options.
2. Class consultations could be incorporated into the tutorial outlines. This would introduce the concept of online consultations naturally and make students more comfortable with the idea. As a result, those who are 'afraid' to speak up in group contexts may be more motivated to do so, as it also encourages familiarity.
3. On some academic applications like Turnitin, there is an option to provide voice recorded feedback. Tutors should be encouraged to use this option as a means to give summative feedback along with formative feedback throughout student submissions. In this way, both written feedback and verbal feedback is provided. This could meet the needs of those who value one type of feedback more while developing skills for the other type of feedback. Thus, the tutors would create more equal and holistic feedback literacies development for all students.
4. I would also suggest that in some tutorials, the 'class' activity is a take-home group assignment which could help formulate academic relationships amongst students. This could be done in hopes of increasing the connection and engagement for those who may feel 'alone' and isolated from the academic society. This recommendation is based in the findings of this study that suggest that academic relationships between students aid in their sense of Ubuntu and academic development.

Furthermore, my recommendations for students' feedback literacies development overall are as follows:

1. I would suggest that during face-to-face learning, students should be made more comfortable with the online feedback process. This is due to the fact that the shift to online learning is often sudden, requiring students quickly adjust to the online learning processes. One way that this could be implemented include using a Google Meets crash course at the beginning of the year; this could be provided via one link which students can use throughout the year in all instances where learning occurs online. Most platforms used for online learning and teaching events can be scheduled for specific times, which can be accessed at any time. I have personally used this method during my time as a tutor online in 2021 and 2022, making it easier for students to log onto the

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tutorial session and creating some kind of structure, i.e., like one would have in a physical tutorial venue.

2. Another recommendation is to implement online consultations during face-to-face learning for those who wish to consult with tutors but are intimidated by their presence. This could aid in not only building a rapport, but ultimately, developing student feedback literacies with the help of tutors.
3. To develop specific feedback literate characteristics of Molloy *et al*. (2020), namely: processes of feedback information and enacts outcomes of processing of feedback information, students should be required to attach all 'old' or 'previous' feedback of the year as an appendix to the current assignments. This would act as a reminder for students that this old feedback exists, and that it should be engaged with, especially because to some extent, it is applicable to their current assignment. In other words, students could become more cognisant thereof and use previous feedback. Moreover, this recommendation would also help tutors in tracking the development of and commenting on individual student feedback literacies and academic literacies. This is vital because tutors have at least 20 students and cannot possibly keep track of individual students' feedback and academic literacies. However, with this type of a record, tracking a student's progress would be made possible. Finally, this could serve as a method that helps tutors identify any persisting areas of improvement for a student and guide them in bettering it.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: English Studies marking rubric

UNDERSTANDING YOUR MARKS

All your assignments are marked out of 100%, except where otherwise specified. If you are presented with a question which is divided into sub-questions which have to be answered in paragraph form, and if these sub-questions are allocated a certain mark each, it is up to you to divide your time on them according to the relative weight of the marks allocated.

The mark you get takes into account the following aspects of your work:

- Language: accuracy, and fluency;
- Content: scope, and insight;
- Organisation: plan, paragraphing, connections, use of evidence.

Note: Some tests, such as reading evaluations merely test whether you have read and followed the basic meanings of your prescribed works. Most students who read their setworks score high marks for these reading evaluations, so that the scale below does not apply to these tests.

Marks are given according to the following scale:

A	90%+	Outstanding in all respects.
	80%+	Exciting and individual, extremely perceptive and well-written.
	75%+	Very perceptive and clearly written.
B	70%+	Very good analysis and persuasively expressed, heading for an A. Often given to students whose ideas are very perceptive and individual, but who could develop these ideas more fully or clearly.
C	60%+	Competent. Has convincing details and insights, but lacks individuality or curiosity, so ideas are not fully or creatively explored. Covers the field but could explore further.
D	53%+	Has some competence, knows the work, knows what is required; but is hindered by weakness of organisation and expression (especially limited vocabulary and formulation difficulties), and a failure to analyse closely or to use evidence. Work in this category may also show lack of reflective thinking on issues, a tendency towards generalizations, cliches and superficial or unassimilated opinions.
D/E	48% - 53%	Borderline. Has tackled the question, but at a very superficial level. If expression of ideas is reasonably clear, 53%. Otherwise 48%. Very many borderline cases reflect

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- excessive paraphrase, or demonstrate that they do indeed know the setwork, but have tended to ignore the specific requirements of the question. This usually means that there is a lack of detailed analysis, and a tendency to ramble or generalize or to ignore the set passage. We do not award marks of 50% for specific assignments, although students may well have 50% as a final mark for a course, resulting from the average of their other marks.

E	45%+	Either major expression problems which affect promising ideas, or generally weak but with some idea of what is required. Work is often generalized and unfocused. There is potential for development and more practise would improve the analytical skills, expression or organisation for a pass.
F	40%+	Weak and very unclear expression, rambling commentary rather than analysis, failure to identify what the question requires.
G	39%-	Degrees of ignorance of the setwork, neglect of the terms of the question, very weak comprehension and often confused or contradictory ideas; ideas unclear and expression very confusing for the reader.
	25%-	This is the bottom line. The work is either extremely unclear, weakly expressed, uninformed, or careless; or a potentially competent answer may have been affected because the student ran out of time in an examination and was unable to tackle the question adequately.
	0%	This mark means that the topic and text were totally ignored, or that there is evidence that the student does not know the setwork at all. This mark is also given for any kind of dishonesty, including plagiarism.

Poorly presented essays may have marks deducted:

- Incomplete cover page – up to 5%
- Incomplete bibliography – 5%
- Incomplete in-text references – 5%
- Late submissions – 5 % per day
- Poor presentation (no page numbers, incorrect formatting, fonts , line spacing, referencing etc.) – up to 5%
- No attached Turnitin Digital Receipt, and similarity index – the essay will be deemed late until the report is submitted.
- Plagiarism – 0%. (This includes missing in-text or bibliographic references).

LEARNING FROM COMMENTS AND MARKS

Your marks and comments (especially for tutorial essays) are there to help you to develop your writing and analytical skills; they are not simply aimed at grading your work. Always read your marker's comments;

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Appendix B: English Studies feedback codes

they are far more important to your development than your actual mark.

If you continue to receive the same critical comments on your essays, and are unclear about how to improve your work, consult your marker. Discuss your essays and progress with your tutor during his or her consultation times.

Common Student Errors Noted in Essays:

SS: Sentence structure. Incorrect use of punctuation. Restructure as shorter sentences.

T: Tense. Incorrect or confused use of tense

P: Punctuation

SP: spelling

Pr.: incorrect prepositions

A: Agreement. Subject-verb agreement, or noun-pronoun agreement

^: point needs further clarification

X: incorrect information

When class tests/examinations have been marked, lists of results are posted on the notice boards in the DL block. It is essential that you check the mark on your returned test script and ensure that it is the same as the mark on the notice board. Report any discrepancy to your tutor immediately. Mistakes cannot be rectified later.

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Appendix C: Questionnaire

1. For which English 3 module(s) are you registered? (e.g. ENG 311, ENG 321)

1.2. Were you previously registered for any English literature modules? (e.g. ENG 1, ENG 2). Yes/no

2. 1 How would you define feedback?

2.2 What do you think is the purpose of feedback?

2.3 How do you feel about feedback?

2.4 How do you approach feedback?

3.1 During the course of your studies at UWC have you experienced (Only mark ONE of the boxes below):

	YES	NO
Face-to-face teaching		
Online learning		
Both		

3.2 If you said YES to both, please state which mode of teaching you prefer (face-to-face teaching/ online learning). Please motivate your answer.

3.3 Please state which mode of teaching you least prefer and briefly explain why?

4. 1 Throughout the period of online learning, how connected do you feel with the academic community?

Very connected
Fairly connected
Connected

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Somewhat connected
Not at all

4.2 Please motivate your answer to question 4.1

5.1 During **face-to-face learning**, which type of feedback did you often receive?

Written Feedback
Verbal feedback
Feedback on Turnitin
Voice notes
Consultation
Online drafts
Other

5. 2 Which type of feedback did you prefer?

Written Feedback
Verbal feedback
Feedback on Turnitin
Voice notes
Consultation
Online drafts

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Other

5.3 Please explain your answer to question 5.2.

5. 4 During **online learning**, which type of feedback did you most often receive?

Written Feedback
Verbal feedback
Feedback on Turnitin
Voice notes
Consultation
Online drafts
Other

5. 5 Which type of feedback did/would have been preferred during online learning?

Written Feedback
Verbal feedback
Feedback on Turnitin
Voice notes
Consultation
Online drafts
Other

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5. 6 Briefly explain your answer to question 5.5.

6. Has the feedback you received made you feel more or less connected to your tutor? Please explain your answer

7.1 How would you rate your overall understanding of the feedback which you have received during **online learning**? Between 1-5, 1 being unclear and 5 being satisfactory.

7.2. Please motivate your answer.

8.1 How would you rate your overall understanding of the feedback which you have received during **face-to-face learning**? Between 1-5, 1 being unclear and 5 being satisfactory.

8.2 Please motivate your answer.

9.1 During the period of on campus learning, how did you feel about discussing written feedback (the comments on class exercises) with the lecturer/tutor who wrote it? Please be detailed in your response.

9.2 How do you feel asking for advice/clarity on feedback? Please be as detailed in your answer as possible.

10. During the period of online learning, how do you feel about discussing written feedback (the comments on class exercises) with the lecturer/tutor who wrote it? Please be detailed in your response.

11.1 How do you feel about approaching (via email or any form of communication) your lecturer/tutor for feedback advice during online learning?

11.2 Is this any different to approaching your lecturer/ tutor during face-to-face teaching? Please be detailed in your response.

12. Are there any ways you could suggest improving the feedback process during online learning? Please elaborate at reasonable length

13. Do you feel that the feedback you have received during the online learning period so far is constructive or critical? Please motivate your answer.

14.1 Do you understand all/most/some/none of the written comments?

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All
Most
Some
None

14.2 Please motivate your answer.

14.3 If you don't understand all the comments, what do you do?

Consult my tutor/ lecturer
Consult with a friend
Other

14.4 Are there any ways you could suggest improving the language used when giving feedback?

15.1 What do you often do with said feedback?

	YES	NO
Read it		
Try and identify where and why the comment was given		
Try and implement it future work		
None of the above/other		

15.2 If you chose 'other', please elaborate.

16.1 Briefly describe the environment in which you have been fulfilling your academic obligations? (is it quiet, loud, do you have access to academic resources, do you use a smartphone or laptop to complete assignments etc.)

16.2 How do you think your environment has impacted your engagement with feedback?

17. Would you be interested in partaking in an online interview? Participation is completely voluntary and will take place on the platform of your choice (either WhatsApp or Google

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Meets). If ‘yes’ please provide your email address below, so that you could be contacted in future.

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Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview questions

Questions:

1. How would you define feedback?
2. How do you approach feedback ?
3. Has your methods of engaging with feedback changed during online learning?
4. Has your perspective of feedback changed during online learning?
5. 5.1) Do you contact your tutors or lecturers with course and feedback related issues?
   5.2) If yes to the above question, how do you do so?
6. What has the quality of your interaction been with your tutor?
7. Has online learning affected your relationship with you tutors?
8. Describe the environment you have been in during this period of online learning and how describe how this has affected your learning experience
9. Have you had any accessibility issues to resources or tutors? If yes, please elaborate.
10. What has your overall online learning experience been like?
11. As a student who has experienced face-to-face teaching and online learning, which do you most prefer and why?

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Appendix E: Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

20 October 2021

Ms A Moses
English
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

HSSREC Reference Number:	HS21/8/20
Project Title:	Out of sight, out of mind: An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of Lock down and the shift to online learning in a 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape.
Approval Period:	**19 October 2021 – 19 October 2024**

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology, and amendments to the ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.

For permission to conduct research using student and/or staff data or to distribute research surveys/questionnaires please apply via:
https://sites.google.com/uwc.ac.za/permissionresearch/home

The permission letter must then be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study. .

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

Director: Research Development
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville 7535
Republic of South Africa
Tel: +27 21 959 4111
Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC-130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

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Appendix F: Consent form Questionnaire

Consent Form University of the Western Cape

Out of sight, out of mind:

An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of Lockdown and the shift to online learning in a 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape.

Dear Student

This questionnaire examines the impact of online teaching and learning on the extent to which students maintain and establish academic relationships with their tutors and/or lecturers, and, concomitantly, the extent to which this enables the development of necessary feedback literacy. Ultimately, we are hoping to find out what we can do to improve our feedback practices to best help you. The study entails your voluntary completion of the questionnaire which would be used to assess this relationship. Please be as thorough and detailed in your responses as possible.

If you consent to this, please fill in the consent form. Your name will not be included in the study and you will remain completely anonymous throughout. Please select a pseudonym for yourself and write it in the appropriate slot on the questionnaire

We thank you for participating in our project.

Kind regards

Please tick box

https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/home

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free not to participate without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3 I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Please select a pseudonym for yourself : ....

Should you have any queries, feel free to contact:

Abaashieyah Moses (3774915@myiwc.ac.za)

(Principal Researcher)

Dr Martina van Heerden (mavanheerden@uwc.ac.za)

Assoc. Prof. F. Fiona Moolla (fmoolla@uwc.ac.za)

(Supervisors)

https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/home

Appendix G: Consent form for Interview

Appendix D: Informed Consent (Interview)

Consent Form University of the Western Cape

Out of sight, out of mind:

An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of Lockdown and the shift to online learning in a 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape.

Dear Student

This interview serves as a continuation of the questionnaire which examines the impact of online teaching and learning on the extent to which students maintain and establish academic relationships with their tutors and/or lecturers, and, concomitantly, the extent to which this enables the development of necessary feedback literacy. Ultimately, we are hoping to find out what we can do to improve our feedback practices to best help you. The study entails your voluntary completion of the questionnaire which would be used to assess this relationship. Please be as thorough and detailed in your responses as possible.

If you consent to this, please fill in the consent form. Your name will not be included in the study and you will remain completely anonymous throughout. Please select a pseudonym for yourself and write it in the appropriate slot on the questionnaire. If you decide not to participate in the interview or wish to discontinue from the study, then you may do so without repercussions. Additionally, if there is any question you do not feel comfortable answering, then you may refrain from doing so.

We thank you for participating in our project.

Kind regards

https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/home

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free not to participate without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3 I understand my responses and personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports or publications that result for the research

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Please select a pseudonym for yourself : ....

Should you have any queries, feel free to contact:

Abaashieyah Moses (3774915@myiwc.ac.za)

(Principal Researcher)

Dr Martina van Heerden (mavanheerden@uwc.ac.za)

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(Supervisors)

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Appendix H: Information sheet

English Department, Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa.

September 2021

Out of sight, out of mind:

An exploration of the development of feedback literacies under the context of Lockdown and the shift to online learning in a 3rd year English course at the University of the Western Cape.

Dear Respondent

My study aims to obtain information, from you the students, to improve the distance learning experience while measuring how current academic circumstances have affected your learning. Therefore, this letter serves as a means to inform you about the research study and explain how I and my supervisors have structured this study to protect your identity and your academic interests, if you choose to participate.

The objective of this study is to focus on how the academic relationships between students and tutors, formed and maintained during the period of mandatory distance learning, has affected students' feedback literacy development. In other words, I am fundamentally focusing on student engagement with and/or comprehension of feedback while learning in physical isolation of the academic environment and staff, and how this is affected by their academic relationships with tutors and/or lecturers.

I have selected third year English literature students, such as yourself, because this study aims to comparatively investigate the development of feedback literacy and how it is affected by the context of distance learning (primarily) and the traditional face-to-face academic context. The

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Email: hwittenberg@uwc.ac.za
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Department Administrator: Ms Portia Ngeno
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Kind regards,

Abaashieyah Moses (3774915@myuwc.ac.za)

Principal Researcher

HSSREC

Research Development

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Appendix I: Permission from Third-year coordinator

July 2021

Department of English

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

Dear Dr. Mark Espin

PERMISSION TO USE THIRD YEAR ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENTS FOR A MASTER'S RESEARCH STUDY

For my Master's thesis, I would like to focus on how the academic relationships between students and tutors, formed and maintained during the period of mandatory online learning, has affected students' feedback literacy development. This is by no means an attempt to investigate the quality and/or method of teaching, rather this study aims to explore how academic relationships contribute to students' literacy development in regard to feedback during this period. In other words, I am fundamentally focusing on student engagement with and/or comprehension of feedback while learning in physical isolation of the academic environment and staff.

This research is inspired by my own experience as a online learning student during my Honours year in 2020. Needless to say, throughout my years as an undergraduate student I had never experienced online learning in any form; it was a privilege I have now come to realise I took for granted. This is because being physically embedded in the academic environment and in physical contact with academic staff provides an implicit connection with academic norms and/or standards of literacies. Additionally, the option to verbally communicate with tutors and lecturers served as reassurance of progress and clarification. Although online learning is not devoid of these privileges, it has weakened somewhat, to which my peers and I can attest during our Honours (as proven in my Honours thesis). Therefore, with your permission of course, I would like to explore how online learning has affected students' academic relationships with their tutors/lecturers and consequently feedback literacy development.

The decision to select the third year English literature students is influenced by the fact that this study aims to comparatively investigate the development of feedback literacy and how it is affected by the context of online learning (primarily) and the traditional face-to-face academic context. The current third year students are the only class of English Studies students who are equally familiar with both modes of learning which, consequently, makes them an appropriate research population.

I intend to use a qualitative research design in the form of a structured questionnaire which would consist of predominantly open-ended questions (see Appendix B). This design enables participants to express their views at length and hopefully capture their views holistically. These questions will be drafted and reviewed by my supervisors, Dr Martina van Heerden and Prof

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Fiona Moolla. Permission to conduct research in the university will be obtained from the Registrar's office and ethical clearance will be obtained from HSSREC.

I do think that this research project would prove to be an asset to the English Department, as it could possibly improve the quality of feedback given to students and more so bring about (greater) awareness of common feedback-related concerns of students. Additionally, this research topic is relatively new, and this study could potentially contribute to the research field.

In order to do this, I would like to ask for permission from you, as the third-year coordinator of English Studies (2021), to, firstly, grant me permission to work with said population, secondly, for an iKamva announcement with the link to be sent out to the students in question (with one or two subsequent announcements to serve as a reminder), and, lastly, seek the aid of volunteer students for this project. The reason I need temporary administrative access to Ikamva is because I could personally send out the announcements and reminders about the questionnaires. Although the number of respondents analysed in the full thesis will be capped at the first 30 participants, the questionnaire will be sent to the entire third year English literature class. This will ensure that the desired number of participants is met.

Students will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which will be sent via Google Forms. The use of Google Forms will ensure anonymity. Included in the form will be an information sheet detailing the purpose and procedure of the study as well as the contact details of myself and my supervisors. Students will be assured that participation is voluntary and anonymous. An informed consent form (see Appendix A) will be attached to the questionnaire; students will have to sign showing that they are aware and approve of what the project expects of them.

Participants' confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways:

- They will remain anonymous, as the questionnaire would not require any personal information such as their name or student number nor will any form of numerical coding used reveal participants' identity. Thus, ensuring total anonymity and safety of prejudice from either student or tutor.
- The data will only be accessed by myself, researcher, and my supervisors (Dr Martina Van Heerden and Prof Fiona Moolla).
- The responses of participants would not be discussed by anyone else other than myself and my supervisors, creating space for confidentiality.
- Participants' identity will in no way be connected to data or disclosed to the reader of the published work.

Data collected from this study may help with addressing any feedback related problems in the discipline.

Should this be agreeable to you, please sign below indicating that you not only understand the purpose of the study, but also that I may ask students to volunteer for the study.

Thank you in advance.

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Dr Espin

Kind regards

Abaashieyah Moses (Researcher)

3774915@myuwc.ac.za

Hermann Wittenberg
to ABAASHIEYAH, Alannah, Martina

Mon, Jul 12, 10:12 AM (3 days ago)

Dear ABAASHIEYAH

From my side, full support of your research project, and I look forward to reading your work when completed.

I'm copying in also Dr Mark Espin, who is coordinating English 3 -- Dr Birch is on sabbatical leave next semester.

Best regards
Hermann

Prof. Hermann Wittenberg
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Research: https://uwc.academia.edu/HermannWittenberg/

New Publications:
J.M. Coetzee and the Archive. Fiction, Theory, and Autobiography, edited by Marc Farrant, Kai Easton and Hermann Wittenberg (2021) https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/jm-coetzee-and-the-archive-9781350165977/

J.M. Coetzee: *Photographs from Boyhood*, Introduced and ed. H. Wittenberg. 2020. https://proteabooks.com/index.php/protea/photography/j-m-coetzee-photographs-from-boyhood.html

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