

Why Aren't They Listening?

Student Reticence in the Application of APA Style in Response to Faculty Corrective Feedback

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Welcome

One of the primary roles of faculty is to provide constructive feedback in response to the assignments authored by students. The goal of formative appraisal surrounds guidance intended to help learners recognize mistakes and, subsequently, strive to correct them.

But what happens when the noted errors continue in later assignments? Shouldn't faculty question why the corrective guidance is not being dutifully applied?

It's easy to misinterpret the inaction as the learner being unmotivated, or perhaps they consider the need for correction to be inconsequential. But there are many potential reasons for a lack of responsiveness...

“Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.”

Douglas Adams
Last Chance to See

Research Question

This presentation will report the results of a recent investigation concerning factors that influence graduate learner reticence toward the application of APA style.

The research question for the qualitative study considered:

Why do some graduate students demonstrate a disinclination to respond to corrective instructor feedback relative to the use of APA style in written assignments?

Theoretical Premise

The question of how learners manage correction feedback is consistent with the sociocultural theory of learning. Coining the metaphor '*zone of proximal development*,' Vygotsky (1978) proposed learning to be a self-guided behavior of assigning relevance and significance to certain events including whether to accept (or reject) accompanying feedback and how much is to be retained.

Vygotsky's definition theorizes that the ZPD is the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with the support of someone else (Landolf, 2000).

Prevailing Literature

Learner “uptake” refers to a range of possible responses made by students following instructor corrective feedback (CF). It can be either learner uptake or no uptake (Sheen, 2004).

Reticence is a lack of willingness or desire to do or accept something. A disinclination, unwillingness, or reluctance (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Soo & Goh (2013) surmised that a “lack of relevant knowledge about reticence has caused many instructors to wrongly perceive their students’ ability...[and to assume] that they do not have the desire to learn” (p. 67).

Prevailing Literature

Van Note Chism & Weerakoon (2012) explored factors commonly associated with errors that new graduate students make when formatting APA style citation. They examined the areas of:

- cognitive confusion
 - poor mental imaging
 - motivation
 - personal style
 - simple lack of practice
 - some combination thereof
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Prevailing Literature

Maclellan (2001) questioned a students' concept of feedback, suggesting that improvement in learning occurs when students perceive feedback as enabling learning, and not just as a judgment on their level of achievement.

Some have reported on the degree that which institutional and programmatic culture is conveyed through the manner in which corrective feedback is delivered at the course level. An investigation by Ivanič, Clark & Rimmershaw (2000) concluded that instructional feedback portrays departmental conventions and reinforces institutional orthodoxies, which affects learner perceptions.

Prevailing Literature

Waytowich, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao (2006) were forerunners in the study of relationships between errors on APA style and author characteristics. Findings from their examination include:

- learner perfectionism is correlated with adherence in citation style
 - an association between library anxiety and adherence to APA style citation
 - adherence weakened over time as graduate students advanced, possibly due to complacency or lack of consistent correction between instructors
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Participants

With the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the participating higher learning institution, an announcement describing the investigation was emailed to graduate faculty asking that they discreetly share details on the study with their students meeting the designated qualification profile.

Enrollment in the study was closed once the target sample of 10 individuals representing a group of consenting adult online graduate students had been qualified.

APA style is the required writing style for all graduate courses in the education discipline at the participating institution.

Methodology

This was a phenomenological study intended to examine why some graduate students elected not to apply (uptake) corrective feedback to address errors noted in their application of APA style.

Once a list of questions was defined, pilot interviews were conducted with two non-participant subjects resulting in minor modifications to further ensure the clarity of the questions.

Telephonic interviews with each participant to allow for more individualized responses and to offset the threat of respondent bias.

All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, who had not met any of the subjects prior to the interview session.

Methodology

Participants were asked open-ended questions relative to their perceptions of APA style, how their recent experiences with instructor feedback on the application of APA style affected their learning, and why there was no uptake in the corrective feedback.

Each of the interview sessions were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A line-by-line analysis of the transcripts was subsequently completed by the investigator.

As keywords emerged, they were sorted into emergent themes expressed by the respondents based on the three categories, which provided a contextualized representation of the data.

Representative quotes were also selected.

Results

The 10 individual interview sessions ranged in length from 16 to 48 minutes in length, with a mean of 22 minutes. Each participant responded to the list of questions presented resulting in 33 pages of transcribed detail.

The three categories under review included:

- Perceptions of APA style
 - Recent experience with instructor feedback on APA style
 - Reasons for no uptake in the corrective feedback
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Results

Perceptions of APA style

“APA is a nightmare. It keeps me up at night worrying if I got it right”

“Why do we even need to learn this stuff”

“I guess it is important – wish that I only had the time to learn it”

“How many ways does there need to be to format a damn citation?”

“A.P.A. should stand for “*A Pain* (in my) *Ass*”

“I’m far to (sic) busy to worry about learning APA style”

Results

How recent experiences with instructor feedback on APA style affected learning

“For a long time, I didn’t know that feedback was even provided because the comment markup in Word was not properly set.”

“Most teachers don’t know APA style themselves”

“I got papers back with notes that there were mistakes with APA but without clarification on what they were. When I asked, I got no response and so I figured it wasn’t too big of a deal.”

“I knew that I was losing points, but I just gave up and had to move on.”

Results

Reasons for no uptake in the corrective feedback

Respondents Limited Prior Experience

“I never received any preparation on APA style in my past school work”

“English is my second language.”

“Mostly I’ve only received generic feedback in return, without guidance on how to correct the errors that I might have made.”

Results

Reasons for no uptake in the corrective feedback

Question of Relevance and Significance

“I simply do not find APA to be relevant to my success in studies.”

“If it were that important, the teacher should have told me exactly what was wrong and sent it back to me so I can fix the errors”

“The point value was not significant enough to prompt corrective response. I can blow off APA and still get an A”

Results

Reasons for no uptake in the corrective feedback

Inconsistencies with Corrective Feedback

“There is a huge gap between how instructors expect attention to APA style from their students. Some don’t seem to care, while others are like ‘APA zealots.’

“Until you get a paper back, it hard to know what they want from me”

Results

Reasons for no uptake in the corrective feedback

Inconsistencies with Corrective Feedback

“In one class, the instructor tells us to do it one way, and then that changes in the next class with a different instructor.” For example, do we use the Student version or the Professional version?”

“What feedback? Most of the time all I get back is a grade in response to the assignments that we submit”

Discussion



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Thank You



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