Enhancing Academic Writing Proficiency Through Formative Feedback

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Abstract

This concurrent mixed-methods action research study investigated the effectiveness of targeted formative feedback while introducing Coxhead's Academic Word List to improve the academic writing proficiency of students at the foundation level of university education and its relationship with students' confidence. Informed by the theoretical underpinnings of control theory, self-regulation theory, and cognitive overload theory (Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021), three intervention cycles were designed to investigate the efficiency of targeted formative feedback provided by teacher, peers, and self. The participants were 135 university foundation students at a private higher education institute in Sri Lanka. The student questionnaires; classroom performance of 101 students and focus group discussions with 5 teachers showed marked improvement in student writing though at disproportionate levels The students also expressed a significant increase in confidence, and displayed heightened awareness of academic vocabulary. Teachers' feedback stimulated inquiry and reasoning behind the choice of academic words and remained the most preferred type of feedback among students. Peer feedback created the most interaction, the highest average grades, and the most sharing of knowledge, thereby decreasing the gap between current and expected level of achievement. However, self-feedback lacked the enthusiasm and performance shown in other cycles, although it promoted student autonomy. This study confirmed the necessity of consistent scaffolding for university foundation students to support their academic writing development and highlighted the importance of the teacher as the main channel of support. The study recommends implementation of varied feedback mechanisms and continuous attempts to increase students' confidence through teaching of academic vocabulary.

Introduction

Having a strong academic vocabulary is an important goal for learners of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Research consistently concurs that there is a significant positive relationship between strong vocabulary and overall language proficiency (Rafique et al., 2023). Nation (2000) categorizes vocabulary into four main types, namely high-frequency, academic, technical, and low-frequency words. Academic vocabulary occupies 10% of the words in academic texts, according to Coxhead (2000), thereby underlining its importance. In her extensive study, a corpus of 3.5 million words of written academic texts was analysed to create an Academic Word List (AWL) of 570 word families divided into 10 sub lists based on frequency of use. This list has been utilized as the key source for vocabulary building activities that form the core of this research.

Though possessing a strong vocabulary is not the only determining factor of academic success, in a higher education setting, students are expected to explain concepts, critically analyze literature, synthesize arguments, and communicate their ideas orally and in writing. Thus, knowledge of academic vocabulary is deemed important for the undergraduates. University foundation-level students, particularly those transitioning from secondary education to higher education in the Sri Lankan context, often find adapting to the rigorous academic writing requirements challenging. As a consequence, they produce writing that has a combination of academic and non-academic words. Paxton (2007) claims that this heteroglossic nature of writing, where features of primary discourse (used at home) and the secondary discourse (used in academic and official settings) is produced in writing tasks because of the students' inability to identify and incorporate academic writing conventions.

In navigating these challenges, the role of teachers in assessing the work of the students and giving them feedback is paramount. Extensive research underscores the necessity and benefits of formative assessment and feedback in student writing (Morris et al., 2021; Wingate, 2010; Esambe et al., 2016). However, the efficacy of formative feedback depends on the clarity, specificity, immediacy, level of personalization, degree of scaffolding, and the mode utilized (Shute, 2008). According to Winstone et al. (2017), the inability to use the feedback stems from non-comprehensibility, lack of opportunities to improve, and lack of motivation. By providing targeted formative feedback on specific language features and opening multiple channels (teacher, peer, and self-feedback) for providing feedback, students get better scaffolding in class, thereby aiding in becoming confident users of academic language.

This action research study specifically seeks to understand the effectiveness of giving targeted formative feedback while introducing the AWL and analyse the impact of formative feedback on the perceptions and performance of academic writing in foundation-level students. It further aims to investigate the possible correlation between improved academic writing and students' confidence in using academic vocabulary. The research questions are:

1. How does targeted formative feedback on AWL application improve the academic writing proficiency of the students?
2. What is the relationship between improvements in academic writing proficiency and students' confidence?
3. How do AWL applications and formative feedback influence students' orientation towards academic writing?

The findings of this study will offer practical insights for English language educators in Sri Lanka and similar EAP/ESL contexts, providing evidence-based strategies for integrating Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List with writing development. Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing context-specific data on the correlation between students' confidence and academic writing.

Literature Review

Feedback is an integral part of the learning environment. It is a process where the effects of language production are communicated back to the learner, enabling learning, growth, and performance. Sadler's (1989) seminal work on formative feedback indicates that knowing the assessment criteria, being able to monitor one's own work, and having access to different strategies like peer assessment and examples make feedback more effective. However, any single theory might fail to address the multifaceted nature of feedback and its implications. Hence, integration of theoretical frameworks as suggested by Bruin et al. (2020) and Lipnevich and Panadero (2021) is warranted.

Building on this principle, for this action research that focuses on strengthening academic vocabulary proficiency of students by introducing AWL and providing targeted formative feedback, an integration of the following theories will form a solid theoretical grounding. Control theory, explained by Pekrun (2007 as cited in Lipnevich and Panadero, 2021), asserts that feedback helps the learners identify the discrepancies between set goals and their current performance. Understanding this discrepancy-reduction function is vital for designing feedback on AWL because the gap between students' current word choices and the expected academic discourse can be highlighted precisely. They further explain that according to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's self-regulation theory (2006), feedback assists the learners in monitoring their progress, adjusting the strategies to achieve the goal, and maintaining motivation. This means that the formative feedback given to the students should be aimed at empowering them to self-monitor and adapt their writing strategies for accuracy. Cognitive overload theory, explained by Panadero et al. (2018 as cited in Lipnevich and Panadero, 2021), states that clear and well-structured feedback optimizes the capacity of the working memory by reducing unnecessary mental effort and aiding efficient processing, necessitating the need for highly targeted, comprehensible feedback.

Beyond these theoretical underpinnings, empirical studies also identify practical features of effective feedback, often revealing divergences in perspectives between teachers and students. Dawson et al. (2019) list the key features that constitute effective feedback according to the teachers and the students. They indicate that the teachers think effective feedback should lead to improvement in the work, self-regulation, and creation of a positive effect. They also believe that feedback has to be timely, include peer feedback, and provide examples. Students, however, express that it has to be personal, explicable, objective, detailed, specific, thorough, constructive, and encouraging. This multifaceted nature of feedback asserts the current understanding that the focus of feedback has shifted from being a mere transfer of information about someone's performance to an interactive process which gives importance to acceptance and use by the learner (Winstone et al., 2017; Wisniewski et al., 2019).

Discussions about the kinds of feedback, namely oral, written, and corrective, shed some light on the nature of feedback and how it influences the learner uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) list explicit correction, recast, clarification requests, elicitation, repetition, and

metalinguistic feedback as the oral corrective techniques used by teachers. Explicit correction and elicitation led to high learner uptake, while metalinguistic feedback encouraged self-repair among the students. Hyland and Hyland (2006) insist on the need for written corrective feedback from the teachers. They believe that the teacher's comments should be informative, satisfy pedagogical needs, and take students' likely reactions into account. In the event of giving peer feedback, those authors propose that some training on giving constructive feedback will ensure a positive impact.

The significance of training the students has been reiterated in other studies as well. Sadler's (1989) article that redefined formative feedback and its importance in developing confidence outlines three conditions that need to be satisfied in closing the gap between current and desired performance of the students. He posits that knowing what '*good*' work looks like, knowing how the current work compares to the goal, and possessing the skills to achieve it are mandatory in improving confidence. AWL positively serves as the tool for gap closure. Popovska Dimova et al. (2024), in their recent article about the link between formative assessment and student confidence assert the irreplaceable role played by teacher feedback and the importance of training students for self-feedback. They believe self-assessment and self-confidence are directly proportional. In line with the above study, Shaddad and Jember (2024) also discuss the importance of peer-work activities in improving self-esteem.

Further analyses of literature reveal a close connection between the academic positioning of the students in the university, their perceptions of their language competence, and the type of feedback they receive. Paxton (2007) claims that 'avoidance of new terminology' (p. 8) is one of the strategies followed by students in their interim literacy state. Insufficient use of academic vocabulary is directly connected to this behavior. In-depth investigations by Esambe et al. (2016), Alzamil (2021), Wingate (2010), and Morris et al. (2021) reveal the following notions. Formative feedback, both oral and written, plays a vital role in shaping academic success. Additionally, formative feedback with learning strategies and metacognitive information that helps students with future writing work was seen as the most successful form of feedback. Though all students benefited from targeted formative feedback, the weaker students needed more detailed, positive, and encouraging feedback. In terms of timeliness, students mostly preferred immediate and repeated feedback from different agents (peer, self).

Therova (2021) emphasizes the importance of academic vocabulary exposure, learning, and practice among foundation-level students, as proficiency in academic vocabulary is directly linked with academic achievement. According to her, the Academic Word List introduced by Coxhead (2000) proves to be one of the important sources for modelling vocabulary in the classroom. Brun-Mercer and Zimmerman (2015) add that receiving feedback on vocabulary usage leads to measurable improvement in students. The same is evidenced in a study conducted by Winkler et al. (2021).

Based on the analysis of literature about the acquisition, implementation, and production of academic vocabulary among foundation-level students in universities, the need to focus on teaching and giving feedback explicitly in the classrooms is pertinent. However, despite the recognized importance of academic vocabulary and formative feedback, there is a limited body of empirical research, particularly in the form of action research, that specifically investigates the direct impact of targeted formative feedback on the AWL application while simultaneously enhancing both academic writing proficiency and student confidence among Sri Lankan university foundation-level students. This study aims to fill this gap by implementing

interventions that measure the efficiency of targeted formative feedback given by the teacher, peers, and self in improving students' academic writing proficiency and confidence.

Methods

Research Design

A concurrent mixed-methods action research design has been adapted in this study. Burns (2009) explains that one of the main goals of action research is to identify problematic areas for the stakeholders involved in a learning environment, intervene in a deliberate manner to address the problems while collecting information systematically, so that decisions can be made to vary the approach until the desired changes are observed. She proposes the cyclical pattern of Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect as the broad phases of the research cycle. This study utilizes the self-reflective action research principle suggested by Burns. In terms of the research design, Creswell (2018) explains that a mixed methods study "combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative approaches, so that the overall strength of a study is greater…" (p.23). He continues to explain how concurrent data collection of both qualitative and quantitative nature provides a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. With these foundational principles, this study has been designed as concurrent mixed-methods action research, where three cycles of interventions are implemented to collect data.

Procedure

The interventions were administered during the second week of the semester, in the "Introducing Academic Vocabulary" lesson. The objective of the lesson was to introduce the AWL and instruct the students to use the academic vocabulary in context. The following steps were followed to implement the lessons:

1. The teachers were provided with the necessary lesson material (the lesson plan, worksheets, answer keys, and relevant presentation slides)
2. Instructions were given on the procedure, the purpose of interventions, and data collection mechanisms
3. Data was collected from the students and the teachers during and after the interventions

The lessons were executed in the following manner. Starting with a warmer activity that introduced the AWL and their definitions, the lesson was followed by the intervention cycles (see Appendix A for full details). In the first intervention, the students completed an activity of converting non-academic words to academic in a given paragraph with the help of teachers' oral and written feedback. In the second, the students completed a similar activity and provided feedback to each other with the help of error correction codes (see Table 1). They were also instructed to use affirmative feedback comments from the templates (see Table 2) provided to them. In the third, the students completed a task of rewriting a paragraph using academic vocabulary and self-corrected it, using the answer key. They were asked to write 'points to remember' as a takeaway message after the interventions. The activities were graded in all three interventions, and the marks were collected. At the end of the third intervention, the students were requested to complete a survey, and teachers participated in a focus group discussion to obtain their feedback on the whole process.

Table 1.
Error Correction Codes

Code	Area	Explanations	Examples
AW	Academic Word Needed	Replace with a more academic term from the AWL	"looked at"→ analyzed
C	Collocation	Word choice doesn't form a natural academic phrase	"strong improvement"→ significant improvement
WF	Word Form	Correct root word, but wrong form (noun/verb/adj)	"feedback was **benefitting** to students" → beneficial
R	Register	Too informal or conversational for academic tone	"kids" → students,
V	Vague Language	Replace vague word with more precise academic vocabulary	"a lot of" → a significant number of
WC	Word Choice	Word is incorrect or awkward in context	"Students were **forced** to use academic vocabulary"→ required

Table 2.
Affirmative Feedback Sentences Template

No	Sentence templates
1	You used strong academic words like [word], which made your writing sound formal and clear.
2	I noticed that you used academic terms such as [word/phrase]. That was really effective.
3	The word [word] was a great choice- it fits the academic tone very well.
4	This sentence is clear, but you might try using a more academic word instead of [word].
5	Consider changing [word] to something more precise to match academic writing.
6	To make your writing more academic, you could use a collocation like [collocation] here.

Participants

The study included 135 students in the University Foundation Programme at a private higher education institute in Sri Lanka, following EAP as a core module. The foundation programme in this context functions as a bridge between the Ordinary Level (O/L) and the university degree. This program is designed to fill the essential knowledge and skills gap required to transition to a degree programme without completing the Advanced Level (A/L) or failing to get pass grades in the board examination. Further details are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3.
Basis of University Foundation Programme

Ordinary Level (O/L)	University Foundation Programme	University Degree
Students aged 15/16 who complete Grade 11 board examinations	For Students aged 16 -18 (i) who do not proceed to advanced level grade 13 board examinations And/or (ii) Fail to get pass grades in A/L	3 or 4 years

Given the above context, the student cohort in this study comprised 15 to 20-year-old (15 years – 2%, 16-18 years - 57% and above 18 – 41%) students in the business, computing, and law subject streams, with varied English language proficiency levels (A1-C1). Each class consisted of 20 – 35 students based on the stream chosen.

Students' first language distribution – Sinhala (63%), Tamil (22%) and English (15%) – reflects the multilinguistic culture of Sri Lanka. Though the official languages (Sinhala and Tamil) are mutually intelligible, the educational policy promotes learning of both national languages along with the 'link' (English) language. Typically, in the Sri Lankan school system, students are introduced to the English language formally from Grade 3 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2023; Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022). However, those who study in bilingual schools (which offer a few subjects in English and the others in students' first language) and in international schools (that follow Cambridge or Edexcel syllabus) learn English from pre-school to A/L, leading to a big disparity in their language level (MoE, 2023). Despite the years of learning and varied language levels, all students lack the necessary academic language and vocabulary expected at university. For the findings and interventions to be comprehensible and credible, all students in the cohort and teachers were invited to participate in the study.

Instruments and Data Sets

Quantitative data was collected through the graded answers after the interventions and through the questionnaires from the students. Out of the 135 students who participated in classes, 101 submitted the completed questionnaires. The students' demographic information, years of exposure to English language, their opinions about getting feedback (teacher, peer, and self), and their level of engagement during the lessons were collected from the questionnaires. Qualitative data was collected through the focus group discussions with all the teachers after the completion of the interventions. The teachers were encouraged to discuss their teaching experiences at the foundation level, their opinions about giving feedback, how it was received by the students, and the challenges faced while implementing the interventions.

Data Analyses

Keeping in line with the basic principles of mixed methods research design explained by Creswell (2018), the quantitative and the qualitative data collected were compiled and analysed. Students' performances in the academic vocabulary tasks were measured by the grades obtained. This was compared against the level of engagement observed by the teachers and the opinions given by the students in the survey. Data was triangulated and presented in a thematic manner with the aim of answering the research questions.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Institutional approval was obtained to conduct the interventions, collect data, and share results with the academic community. Informed consent was obtained from the student participants and the teachers. Data was treated confidentially, and pseudonyms were used to refer to each participating teacher.

Given the time constraints in implementing the lessons and collecting data, the study has its own limitations. Firstly, only one cohort of students in one semester from a single private higher education institute was considered for the study. Hence, data cannot be generalised to a larger group. Moreover, qualitative data in the form of interviews or discussions were not collected from the students after the interventions. This could have given a much better picture of the students' perceptions. In addition, to assess the effectiveness of targeted formative feedback, a follow-up study could have been conducted after a time period with the same set of students to check their academic progression. In the future, a longitudinal study involving multiple batches over several semesters would give much better results.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: How does targeted formative feedback on AWL application improve the academic writing proficiency of the students?

Data from the students' survey and the discussions with the teachers collectively supported how students' academic writing proficiency improved with targeted formative feedback. In fact, they provide an affirmative position. In the foundation year, students are generally expected to develop clear and cohesive writing ability while using academic vocabulary appropriately. While targeted formative feedback from the teachers increased awareness and a positive mindset, peer feedback generated more marks. Self-feedback promoted reflective thinking.

Teacher's feedback

According to the survey, 67% of the students said that they found the teacher's feedback useful. In addition, 70% of the students have expressed the desire to get teacher's feedback in the future as well. This positive reception of teacher's feedback could be a result of the step-by-step introduction of the AWL and how this intervention was executed with continuous scaffolding. During the presentation phase, teachers introduced AWL and discussed the difference between academic and non-academic vocabulary. Learning to distinguish between what is wrong and what is expected, which is the key tenet of the control value theory as stated by Pekrun (2007, as cited in Lipnevich and Panadero, 2021), aided the students in understanding the lesson objective. Then, during the practice phase, the students were asked to identify non-academic phrases in a text with the teacher's oral feedback. Following that, a student's answer for the activity was displayed on screen, and constructive feedback was given using the error correction codes. This process of showing an example, according to Dawson et al. (2019) increases student comprehension. Finally, in the production phase, the students answered a similar activity (see Appendix B for a sample activity), which was corrected with written feedback from the teacher.

The success of the first intervention falls in line with Shute's (2008) notions about clarity of instructions, specificity of the task, and immediacy of formative feedback. In alignment with this finding, teachers shared that giving on-the-spot formative feedback helped the students

learn 'how to receive and give feedback.' In other words, teacher feedback served as a model for the successive peer and self-feedback interventions. However, the ineffectiveness of teachers' feedback in translating into increased marks, as seen in Figure 1 below, needs further exploration.

Peer's feedback

Marks obtained after the intervention where the peers gave feedback were on average higher than the other two interventions with teacher and self-feedback, according to Figure 1. While peer feedback sessions were evidently successful in terms of more correct answers, mixed opinions were expressed by the teachers in focus group discussions.

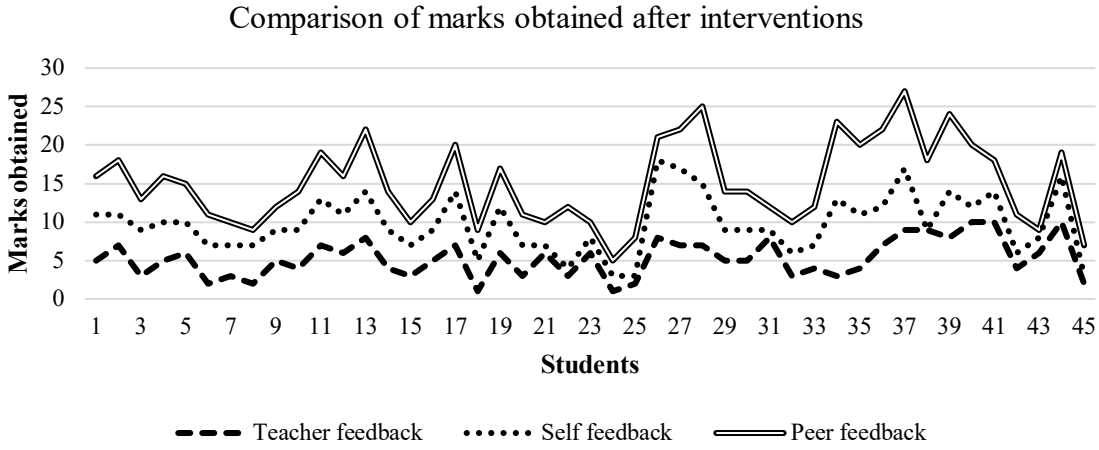

Figure 1.
Comparison of Marks Obtained after Interventions

The second intervention with peer feedback encouraged the students to use the error correction codes as a form of metalinguistic feedback after being introduced in the teacher feedback cycle as proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The codes (see Table 1) were given with necessary information (the code, the area where the error has occurred, and the explanation for it) so that both students can benefit from sharing feedback. In addition, they were also encouraged to write affirmative feedback, as shown in Table 2. Thus, reducing the cognitive overload (Lipnevich & Panadero, 2021) during the task. Consequently, the students were seen to be interacting throughout the task.

Focus group discussions revealed the teacher's observations during the class. Prasadhini noticed more interaction among the students and opined that active participation meant that both students learned during the task. All of the teachers accepted that peer feedback generated the most interaction and visible interest in the tasks among the students. However, Shaheema felt that peer pressure was partly the reason for students' increased level of activity in class because 'they did not want their peers to see their faults'. She also pointed out the requirement for expert knowledge. According to her, the students did not take the peers' feedback seriously. If they had written two different answers, they came to the teacher to get the answer finalized. Nalini too observed that the students took the teacher's opinion as the final word. This leads to the understanding that generating more interaction does not necessarily mean more learning.

Self-feedback

During the self-feedback intervention, the students were given an informal paragraph with errors in academic vocabulary. After completing the activity, they were given the answer

key with additional explanation (e.g., replacing the non-academic expression *real skills* with the academic collocation *transferable skills*) to justify the answer. Finally, they were advised to write 'Points to remember' based on their experience with the interventions and their response to the tasks. This metacognitive reflection enabled the students to internalize the feedback so that they could accommodate the new information and perform better in the next activity, effectively closing the self-regulation loop (Sadler, 1989).

Students' survey shows that 42% of the students liked self-feedback, which is a moderately high preference. Fazra saw the swiftness in completion of the task during this intervention positively, while Shaheema viewed the same as a lack of enthusiasm. Other teachers too, felt that self-feedback lacked interaction. Though self-feedback encouraged self-reflection, according to the teachers, more training is needed in reflection. Sadler's (1989) article justifies this by saying that students need to be given more opportunities to self-correct. He also questions the act of evaluating peers' work as a training mechanism to self-correct. According to him, evaluation, which is at the top of cognitive skills in Bloom's taxonomy, might not come naturally to young children. He further doubts that the ability to evaluate can successfully translate to the ability to produce language. Hence, self-feedback worked as a novel attempt but not an immediate success.

Overall, the interventions highlighted key indicators of academic writing proficiency, namely awareness of academic vocabulary, critical thinking, collaborative work, interaction with peers, increased performance, and self-reflection. Hence, in combination, the interventions did improve academic writing proficiency.

RQ2: What is the relationship between improvements in academic writing proficiency and students' confidence?

There is a strong positive relationship between academic writing improvement and a rise in students' confidence, as 98% of the students reported that their confidence in academic word usage had increased. This show of confidence is consolidated with teachers' classroom observations and experiences during the interventions. They conveyed that the students' questions indicated confidence development in getting guidance from teachers ('Can I use this?') and promoting critical thinking ('Why can't I use this?'). This activation of engagement was also referred to in Shaddad and Jember (2024), when feedback-supported tasks and peer-work activities significantly increased learners' self-esteem and engagement compared to traditional instruction, indicating higher task confidence and willingness to participate.

In addition to this, Shaheema and Fazra shared that the students were convincingly exposed to academic vocabulary because they were introduced to AWL, explained about the importance of using it, provided with the list for reference, given a list of possible errors that might occur, and given an option to correct them. This is what Sadler (1989) refers to as "gap-closing" strategies (p. 22). The students were not merely given formative feedback; they were also given tools to improve their own work, thereby making them more confident. Malika expressed that, not only do they now know how others may use academic vocabulary differently, but also how they can go wrong. In other words, because of the feedback received, the students were clear about what is considered non-academic language. This demonstrates the activation of social and affective dimensions of students' writing identity, which is a crucial part of confident academic writing development. In this way, students' confidence levels rose with improved academic writing proficiency, developed through interventions.

Reduction of confidence

However, teachers shared their thoughts on what did not work well during the interventions. Self-feedback has been the least effective tool in improving students' performance in using AWL, according to the teachers. This is evident from the initial confusion observed in using the error correction codes on their own. This could have, in turn, negatively influenced the confidence of the students. 13% of the students mentioned that the error correction code was not useful. Though the use of error correction codes was unconventional, the benefits of learning to self-correct could have been enhanced with extended teacher scaffolding and additional modelling of correct answers. When agreeing to the low performance of the students in comparison to peer feedback, during the self-feedback cycle, teachers believed that weaker students were not forthcoming and might need more time to get adjusted to the idea of self-learning. Though the teachers believed that self-feedback intervention was informed by the first two interventions, only 9% of students had scored the highest marks during the self-feedback cycle among all three interventions, in contrast to 56% who scored the highest during peer feedback, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4.
Percentage of students with the highest score

Type of feedback	Highest Score
Peer	56%
Teacher	35%
Self	9%

The teachers also looked at the affective factors. Shaheema believed that 'the students were not willing to self-evaluate,' due to which 'enthusiasm died' in self-feedback. However, Fazra and Prasadhini noted the positive side by saying that the evaluation was quick, and it made them reflect on their own writing. Deriving from Nicol and Dick's self-regulation theory as cited in Lipnevich and Panadero (2021), which posits that feedback should assist students in monitoring their progress and adjusting strategies to achieve their goal, the art of self-monitoring and reflection needs to be developed through consistent practice. Overall, with careful formative feedback and sufficient availability of tools to improve their work, the students displayed improved confidence.

RQ3: How do AWL applications and formative feedback influence students' orientation towards academic writing?

As established in the introduction and literature review, students often find the use of academic vocabulary challenging. Accordingly, one of the objectives of this study was to examine whether the use of AWL applications, combined with formative feedback, could influence students' orientation towards academic writing. This challenge was also corroborated by teachers during the interviews, who described students in previous semesters as having 'insufficient vocabulary', 'struggling', or finding the AWL 'challenging'. The interventions were designed with these challenges in mind.

Following the completion of the interventions, students' responses to the questionnaire indicated a highly positive perception of formative feedback. When asked whether they liked receiving feedback from teachers, peers, and themselves, an overwhelming majority (98%) reported that they valued the feedback provided during the interventions. This finding suggests that formative feedback was perceived as supportive rather than evaluative and that it played a meaningful role in shaping students' engagement with the learning process. Furthermore, 99%

of students indicated their intention to apply the feedback received to future writing tasks. This suggests that sustained formative feedback not only supported immediate task completion but also fostered a forward-looking orientation towards academic writing, characterized by increased willingness to revise, improve, and transfer learning beyond the intervention.

Nevertheless, the presence of a small minority (2%) who reported that they did not like receiving feedback is noteworthy and necessitates further exploration. This resistance may stem from factors such as negative prior experiences with feedback, presumed high cognitive demand, particularly when dealing with complex academic vocabulary, or emotionally challenging learning experiences with different types of evaluations.

Insights from focus group discussions illuminate heightened awareness of the role of feedback among the teachers and the students combined. The teachers collectively expressed positive feelings with regard to interventions and their effect on the students. Nalini noted that feedback provided immediately during the lesson prompted greater student responsiveness compared to summative feedback delivered previously at the end of the semester. She emphasized that 'Students realized what words they should use and what words they should not use'. Prasadhini continued to say that 'They did a good job of replacing the non-academic word with an academic alternative.' The shift in realization that academic words are better learned through practice and consistent usage rather than rote learning created a sense of relief among the students; as Fazra mentioned, 'it was an eye opener' for them. Paxton's (2007) claim that the students use avoidance of new terminology as one of the coping mechanisms has been contested because the students in this context were given the realization that rote learning can be replaced with consistent practice, thereby reducing the resistance to academic word usage. This leads to the conclusion that the students have developed a positive attitude towards receiving formative feedback and are open to receiving it in the future as well.

Conclusion

This action research solidified the benefits of formative feedback in developing the confidence of the students in using academic words in higher education settings. Multiple advantages of formative feedback are not limited only to improving proficiency but extend into the affective factors. The first was the sharing of knowledge among the students, which was evident during peer feedback. In mixed-ability classrooms like the ones in this context, teachers find it challenging to disseminate knowledge for the benefit of the entire class. This was overcome through peer feedback, which resulted in bridging the gap between the current and expected level of knowledge.

The next was heightened awareness of language use. Students showed a positive perception of academic language by realizing that rote learning can be replaced with continuous practice. More importantly, what is wrong was learned before learning what is right. By the end of the third feedback, students were quite confident in identifying non-academic phrases, which logically led to replacing them with academic words. Nevertheless, an underlying sense of peer pressure and competitiveness was evident in peer feedback. In terms of academic performance, the responses from the students and the teachers revealed that increased interaction did not automatically translate to improved marks but definitely resulted in increased awareness.

Finally, immediate targeted formative oral and written feedback from the teachers reduced resistance, increased questions, promoted critical thinking, and boosted the confidence of the students. Having the teacher as the source of affirmation permeated all three interventions, thereby asserting the need for continuous scaffolding in class. To sum up, learning is facilitated by the teachers, which is then shared among peers, leading to self-growth in individual students.

Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications of the results can be listed as follows:

1. Including feedback as an integral part of teaching for developing behavioral engagement increases active participation and bridges the learning gap.
2. Leveraging teacher expertise by remaining a constant source of scaffolding is paramount. They can expertly demonstrate the difference between right and wrong usage through continuous feedback.
3. Promoting self-correction for learner autonomy is recommended. As evidence suggests, it is a skill that needs to be fostered with the teacher's guidance.
4. Adopting a feedback-rich culture in the classroom is necessary. Students gain confidence when feedback is introduced as a tool for growth rather than a scale to measure deficit.
5. Integrating discipline-specific vocabulary will take the language precision of the students beyond general words. This will add strength to their repertoire and support professional communication in the future.
6. Designing the curriculum can be realigned to incorporate feedback as a standard component by allocating time for formative feedback.

This research clearly underlines that grades are not sufficient to measure students' academic writing potential. By creating a conducive environment for experimenting, sharing, and giving feedback, the students are empowered to transition from passive recipients to active self-regulated learners.

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All contributors have seen the contents of the manuscript, and all authors agree with the contents and the order of presentation. The listing of authors correctly identifies their level of contribution to this work.
Rajeswari Aiyer: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Writing - Introduction, Literature review, Results and discussion, Conclusion, Review & editing
Shalini Kaduwela: Conceptualisation, Data collection, Writing - Methodology, Discussion, Abstract, Data analysis
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We hereby certify that the submission is our own original work and is not under review at any other publication.

Appendix A: Plan for the Interventions

Phase	Objective	Activity	Mode of interaction
Pre-intervention	Introducing the AWL Eliciting the importance of academic vocabulary Identifying AWL sub-lists, Word families, and academic collocations.	Warmer: Student pairs match 5 words from AWL sub-lists with their meanings Gap-filling exercise with the same words Distinguish academic and non-academic words	Teacher-led whole-class discussion.
Intervention 1 Teacher feedback	Identifying appropriate academic alternatives for non-academic words	Identify and replace non-academic words with academic words in a paragraph	The teacher gives immediate oral feedback Whole class discussion with a model answer Written feedback for the students' answers
Intervention 2 Peer feedback	Identifying appropriate alternatives for non-academic words and non-academic collocations	Use error correction codes to identify errors Replace errors with academic words.	Peers give affirmative written feedback along with marks
Intervention 3 Self-correction	Replacing the non-academic words in a paragraph and rewriting it.	Use the answer keys to correct errors Write 'points to remember	Students self-correct using the answer key provided by the teacher.

Appendix B: Sample Intervention Activity

Read the paragraph below. It contains 10 academic vocabulary errors, shown in bold.

Use the error correction code to identify the type of error, then suggest a better academic alternative from the Academic Word List (AWL).

Paragraph (With Errors in Bold):

In recent years, **a lot of** attention has been given to the effects of social media on education. Researchers try to **find out** how online platforms **help** students learn better. While some say it **makes** communication easier, others argue it can be **bad** for focus. One **thing** that needs to be studied is how long students use social media during class. Some schools have created **rules** to limit phone use, but not all of them **work good**. Also, many **kids** do not understand how their digital behavior affects their learning. Teachers must **give help** to students so they can use technology in better ways.