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Exploring intercultural dialogic interactions between individuals with diverse feedback literacies

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ABSTRACT

Feedback is a dialogic process in which diverse individuals are involved. In internationalised higher education, individuals with different feedback literacies are likely to participate in feedback dialogues and interactions across feedback cultures. Such intercultural interactions can be challenging; some degree of intercultural competence is needed for dialogues between cultures to be effective and appropriate for all involved. This paper brings together feedback and intercultural competence research, exploring whether developing intercultural competence specific to feedback contexts can support more effective dialogues. Narrative interviews and audio diary methods were employed over a 9-month period of time to explore the role of intercultural competence in feedback dialogues across feedback cultures. Changes over time were captured through the longitudinal design of the study. Findings show that knowledge and awareness of diverse feedback practices and cultures, intercultural critical reflection, intercultural emotional management, alongside a set of skills and attitudes towards diversity of feedback practices can impact on facilitating intercultural feedback dialogues. A framework of feedback intercultural competence is proposed, and further research is encouraged to expand upon this exploratory papers' initial contribution.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural competence;
feedback literacies;
interculturality;
wdialogue

Introduction

Recent work on feedback literacy has highlighted its socio-cultural and contextual nature (Gravett 2020; Chong 2021). The idea of multiple, context and culture-specific feedback literacies has also been recently introduced: in contexts of increasingly internationalised higher education, students and educators are likely to have diverse literacies and to conceptualise, recognise and approach feedback in different ways. This was first investigated and recognised in our previous exploratory empirical work (Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021); however, there is still limited understanding about how the reality of diverse literacies might impact on feedback processes within intercultural higher education contexts. Building on our previous work, we address this gap by investigating how literacy diversity might play a role in intercultural feedback interactions. We conceptualise feedback as a dialogic, comparison-making process in which both learners and educators interact (Boud and Molloy 2013; Carless 2015), and where students are supported to independently generate internal feedback drawing on other work and on prior and ongoing experiences (Nicol 2021; Malecka and Boud 2021; Nicol and McCallum 2021). We

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also understand dialogues between diverse players and literacies as what co-shapes and mediates feedback processes at the intercultural level (Ajjawi and Boud 2017). Dialogues are the means through which individuals can learn to utilise feedback effectively and appropriately across diverse cultures. Adopting a socio-cultural approach, we consider that fundamental aspects of feedback dialogues are the people, their experiences and the socio-cultural academic context in which interactions occur (Värlander 2008; Tian and Lowe 2013; Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021).

When dialogues and interactions are shaped by diversity and multiculturalism, barriers that have not yet been fully considered nor explored are likely to arise. Theories of intercultural communicative competence (or intercultural competence) suggest that, for effective and appropriate communication to occur between cultures (*inter-cultures*), individuals involved need to be able to recognise, interpret and comprehend individuals from other cultures and their messages (Byram 1997; Byram, Nichols, and Stevens 2001; Dearsdorf 2015). Because of the diverse feedback cultures and literacies of the individuals who play crucial roles in feedback contexts (Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021), we argue that framing our understanding and investigation of feedback processes within theories of intercultural competence can help uncover what might be needed for effective intercultural feedback interactions. Further, underpinning feedback research with theories of intercultural competence is a first step towards bridging the gap between the reality of internationalised higher education and the often 'mono-cultural' approaches to feedback research.

We therefore explore existing models of academic intercultural competence within the particular context of feedback processes and dialogues. We then discuss the features of feedback intercultural competence as facilitator of effective dialogues across individuals with diverse literacies. We adopt a longitudinal approach to narrative inquiry to investigate changes and developments over time. Finally, we conclude by suggesting how feedback intercultural competence can be further researched and practically employed by those involved with teaching and supporting international students. For the purpose of the present paper, we focus primarily on students, their intercultural competence, and roles within dialogues; we, however, remain aware that communication and feedback involve educators as much as students.

Feedback, literacies and dialogues

In the last 10 years, research has driven a shift in the conceptualisation of feedback, moving from feedback as information towards feedback as process (Winstone et al. 2021). Students are considered active agents who are central to the feedback processes in which they seek, make sense of and act upon the feedback (Boud and Molloy 2013; Carless 2015; Carless and Boud 2018). The concept of student agency is increasingly discussed in recent literature on feedback interactions (Gravett 2020; Chong 2021; Nieminen et al. 2021) and is closely linked to that of feedback literacy. Agency is needed for students to be actively involved in feedback processes and to locate, appreciate and act upon the feedback (Sutton 2012; Carless and Boud 2018). However, agency and feedback literacy are context-related concepts (Matusov, von Duyke, and Kayumova 2016): students need to recognise feedback processes as a context in which they can and should purposefully act (Gravett 2020), and this might not be the case for students with diverse feedback literacies (Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021). If students do not recognise feedback processes as contexts where active agency is paramount, they are less likely to benefit and learn from feedback interactions. Research is moving away from 'instructing' international students to adopt new academic conventions, promoting instead critical inclusion through dialogue and co-constructed meaning-making (Hyatt 2005). Effective dialogues and interactions within feedback processes then become crucial in supporting active agency.

The literature suggests that all students need to be involved in dialogues with feedback providers and peers for sense-making to become a constructive and shared practice (Yang and Carless 2013, Pitt 2019). The paradigm of dialogic feedback describes feedback processes as an act of ‘communication’ (Beaumont, O’Doherty, and Shannon 2011; Carless 2016), a ‘process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies’ (Carless 2015, 192). Dialogue should become a useful tool for uncovering and reconciling the different perceptions teachers and students might have of the feedback process (Yang and Carless 2013; Pitt and Carless 2021), wherein feedback and assessment standards and criteria are approached and unpacked through co-construction of meaning (Nicol 2010). If dialogic feedback is a discursive social practice (Pryor and Crossouard 2008), the individuals involved define the modalities and contents of such dialogue.

Dialogues have been widely considered to happen between different players in feedback processes (students, educators, peers, informal networks). However, they can also occur internally to students when comparisons are made to support sense-making of feedback ‘information’. Nicol (2021) observes that students benefit from developing strategies to reach learning goals that are both external and internal products. Through dialogues, students ‘make comparisons of their own thinking about their work with that of others and generate internal feedback’ (Nicol 2021, 4), rather than simply ‘trying’ to align to what feedback ‘providers’ request. They can then make such comparisons ‘explicit’ and develop the ability to independently generate useful feedback (Nicol and McCallum 2021). Overall, much research suggests that ‘involving students in feedback dialogue is essentially an enabling process’ (Xu and Carless 2017, 1083), although this is not always the case. Interactions can be facilitated or hindered by contextual, cultural and material factors, and therefore be more or less ‘enabling’ (Ajjawi and Boud 2017).

Intercultural communicative competence

Feedback interactions in international higher education involve interlocutors who have different feedback cultures and literacies. Internal comparisons are likely to be made against prior knowledge and experience that can be very diverse; communication and (external) dialogues around the work produced and feedback occur across diverse literacies. For feedback interactions between cultures to be successful and useful, communication needs to occur in an effective (for the self) and appropriate (for the other) manner (Deardorff 2006).

The concept of communication was first linked to that of competence (or communicative competence) in foreign language education, where it refers to individuals’ ability to communicate between different cultural and linguistic systems when sojourning ‘abroad’ (Byram 1997). When communication occurs between international players, it is conditioned by culture, and effective communication cannot happen without awareness of cultural conditioning of the self and the other (Fantini and Tirmizi 2006). Within feedback contexts in international higher education this is no different. Those involved in intercultural feedback dialogues have previously developed diverse primary cultural and communicative systems that reflect and affect different conceptions of assignments, quality work and feedback. In other words, they have developed diverse feedback literacies. When international students enter a ‘new’ system, they potentially attempt to create a ‘second’ literacy. However, once the initial, primary literacy is established it is increasingly harder to transcend and enter a second one (Fantini and Tirmizi 2006). As the aim is to reach an interaction between the two (or more), the concurrent development of ‘intercultural’ (between cultures) communicative competence is required (Deardorff 2015).

Intercultural competence has been widely theorised, investigated, measured and employed as a theoretical framework across disciplines and contexts (including higher education), however not specifically within feedback research. The models developed propose different foci on various aspects and processes of intercultural competence (King and Baxter Magolda 2005; Rathje 2007)

and are interested in promoting communication in various contexts. In higher education, institutions are now more than ever encouraged to promote and support their diverse student body to develop intercultural competence (Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith 2017) to enable effective interaction. However, they concentrate on the wider, non-academic experience of international students with social interactions. They present the enhancement of student intercultural competence as a preparatory and introductory activity, separating it from the core learning and teaching practices. On the contrary, we argue that intercultural competence should not be conceptualised as generic and universal to 'fit' any intercultural context (Lustig and Koester 2013; Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009); rather, it needs to be adapted and operationalised considering the nature of a particular interaction and the individuals involved.

In particular, we argue that conceptualising it to support intercultural interactions between individuals with diverse feedback literacies is necessary, as dialogues between diverse feedback cultures are likely to be more complex. In this regard, we suggest that building feedback-specific intercultural communicative competence could enhance the effectiveness and usefulness of intercultural feedback dialogues.

Model of feedback intercultural competence

In this article, we explore the role of feedback intercultural competence in facilitating effective dialogic interactions in intercultural feedback contexts. We draw on the popular KASA models of intercultural competence and investigate the role of the four elements that such models value: (i) knowledge of diversity between cultures, (ii) awareness of the culture of the self and of the other, (iii) skills to interpret and relativise and (iv) attitudes towards the 'diverse' and their values (Byram 1997; King and Baxter Magolda 2005; Deardorff 2006; Fantini 2020). We also investigate the role of the additional components of: (v) 'intercultural critical reflection' and (vi) 'intercultural emotional intelligence' (Yarosh, Lukic, and Santibáñez-Gruber 2018), as much importance is attributed to emotions, interactions and reflections within feedback dialogues. The six elements are recognised to be fundamental in the literature on intercultural competence. In this paper, we explore them for the first time within feedback contexts. We also explore whether relations exist between the development of intercultural competence and more effective feedback dialogues, and whether this changes over time. We aim to answer the following research questions:

1. How do international postgraduate students benefit from feedback intercultural competence when involved in dialogues where interlocutors have diverse feedback literacies?
2. How does a student's feedback intercultural competence and the effectiveness of intercultural feedback dialogues develop over the course a one-year postgraduate programme?

Methodology, methods, analysis

This is an exploratory study that investigates the role of intercultural competence development in feedback contexts. A longitudinal narrative inquiry (September 2019–May 2020) was carried out with ten international postgraduate taught students. The exact number of participants or reaching saturation, however, were never particularly relevant to this study. The focus of narrative inquiry is rather on providing a rationale for the participants' selection and on the description of their characteristics. Purposive sampling was employed to select the student-participants, who were enrolled on a range of 1-year taught postgraduate degrees at an English university in the south of England. Purposive sampling allowed to select participants who could better inform an understanding of the research questions. They all had completed their undergraduate

degrees outside of the UK, had previously developed diverse feedback understandings and literacies and were speakers of English as a second or foreign language (see Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone (2021) for more on the student-participants and data on their literacies).

Narrative interviews (40–60 min) were carried out at three different stages: September/October 2019, January and April/May 2020. The first interviews gathered in-depth and comprehensive narratives of students' feedback histories and prior literacies; the second and third set of interviews gathered insights into the impact of students' literacies on how they recognised, processed and utilised feedback as they progressed in the academic year. Event-contingent audio diaries were also utilised as a supportive data collection method (Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli 2003; Hislop et al. 2005). Students recorded diary entries when relevant events occurred. Relevance was described in a diary protocol where prompts described hypothetical situations that would be considered of interest to the research, and in a preliminary informal conversation with the principal researcher. The prompts encouraged participants to record entries about feedback, behavioural and emotional reactions to it, and any similarity or difference with their prior feedback experience. Reminders were sent fortnightly during term time; between 2 and 10 entries were obtained for each participant. Some participants requested entries to be written and some preferred to record their audio entries in their first language; both requests were accommodated where students' first language was the same as the principal researcher's. Some participants voluntarily shared extra materials such as emails, feedback comments, assignment briefs as a support to their narrative. Table 1 gives an overview of the support data obtained for each participant.

Data were analysed through thematic analysis that guided the search for patterns of shared meaning across narratives and offered an interpretation of the patterns identified (Braun, Clarke, and Rance 2014). Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006) interpretation of thematic analysis, we utilised a combination of different approaches underlined by a qualitative (rather than positivist) philosophy: codebook and reflexive analyses. As is common with codebook analysis, six main themes were determined before the coding began (knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, intercultural critical reflection, intercultural emotional intelligence). These guided the initial search for patterns of meaning; however, a degree of flexibility was maintained, and themes were regarded as potentially changing and shifting through the interpretive process. Data were analysed longitudinally as the data collection events took place, and codes were revised and re-interpreted numerous times as the narratives evolved. The initial themes were confirmed, and their meaning was defined as a result of the longitudinal interpretive coding process.

Table 1. Support data by participant.

Participant	Audio diary entries	Written diary entries	Length of transcription	Language	Extra material
Ann	2	1	4 pages	Italian	Rubrics, guidelines, examples of feedback
Antonio	11	–	13 pages	Italian/English	Examples of pre and post feedback work, written feedback
Diana	2	–	2 pages	Italian	–
Eileen	–	2	2 pages	English	–
Jalil	2	–	2 pages	English	–
Mahmoud	2	–	3 pages	English	–
Malak	3	–	5 pages	English	Feedback-related email communication, written feedback
Marlene	–	2	2 pages	English	–
Nik	2	–	2 pages	English	Rubrics, written feedback received
Numi	–	2	3 pages	English	–

Table 2. Intercultural competence and its role with intercultural feedback interactions.

Themes	Sub-themes
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts and information about own and others' feedback practices and cultures • Values and philosophies underpinning practices and cultures • Implicit/explicit knowledge or 'common way of knowing' of the self and the other
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of feedback cultures • Diversity of practices • Individuals' diversity
Intercultural Critical Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection and critical analysis of personal opinions and others' perceived opinions on feedback practices and behaviours • Ability to recall, reflect on, and understand own experience of feedback • Evaluation of own experience of feedback in light of own and others' perspectives
Intercultural Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy towards own and others' feedback cultures, perceptions and behaviours • Dealing with uncertainty caused by unfamiliarity of practice • Managing the emotional side of diverse cultural perspective-taking
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility in one's behaviour within feedback processes • Realisation of what behaviour is expected by the other and why • Capacity to modify feedback behaviour to be effective for self and other • Self-learning about one's and others' feedback cultures
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity and openness towards diverse feedback cultures and practices • Willingness to manage disbelief about others' feedback cultures • Re-consider own and others' feedback beliefs in light of intercultural experience

Findings

The findings of this study show that development of feedback intercultural competence can support more effective communication that mediates comparisons between feedback cultures and literacies. This supports student active agency and generation of internal feedback. They build on findings discussed in our previous paper (Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021) that focussed on the diversity of feedback histories, cultures and literacies of the same group of students. The findings also suggest that intercultural competence increased over time although to different extents; open discussions about diverse practices and literacies tended to be beneficial and support such development. Findings related to each aspect of intercultural competence and its role with intercultural feedback interactions are summarised in Table 2.

Knowledge

Knowledge of facts and information about feedback practices was shown to be fundamental for effective feedback interactions to take place, as well as for students to enact the feedback. Over time, students began to recognise they held diverse ways of knowing feedback processes and that this impacted on the effectiveness of such processes, particularly at the start of their university experience.

I would think if we had more knowledge on how to use the feedback at the start... because what we are doing is trial and error. (Mahmoud)

Students tended to gather knowledge over the course of the academic year, through direct experience and internal processes of comparison with previous work in the new context.

For the second semester it is a little easier for me. I know what to do, how to do it, it is a lot easier, and I can do it better than with the first ones [feedback]. (Nik)

Students' knowledge of the existence of diverse feedback practices did increase; however, this was not prioritised nor achieved intentionally. Their knowledge of facts and information on assessment technicalities was rather the centre of attention: assignment criteria were

recognised to be unfamiliar and potentially challenging for international students, whereas feedback was often overlooked. Students themselves tended to prioritise building knowledge on assignments standards rather than on actively participating in feedback processes.

So, I thought everything was about the marks on the assignment, not improving with the feedback and talking about the work. (Malak)

Gaining knowledge of what values and purposes inform feedback practices also supported students' effective feedback interactions. Initially, the common understanding of feedback purpose was to offer an 'expert' judgement on completed work. Time seemed to support increased knowledge of feedback purpose as a mediating interactive process that supports development of learning and future work; this supported more aligned and effective dialogic interactions.

It's not about 'this is the right answer, this is the wrong answer' anymore, it's very much a discussion on how you interpret things. (Numi)

I didn't really know this before. The feedback comments are more like advice and support, a kind of dialogue with the lecturer. (Ann)

Gaining increased knowledge of the diverse feedback practices and cultures meant students were able to step from 'implicitly' knowing feedback to 'explicitly' articulating their own and others' knowledges. Knowing that diverse 'common ways of knowing' feedback exist across culture supported them to actively engage in interactions that accounted for and respected diversity.

The feedback is increasing my knowledge about how others would think, what they would expect and why. So that is I think very good, it helps me better communicate. (Mahmoud)

This was fundamental as when knowledge of diversity was limited, communication tended to be harder and mutual understanding was often hindered.

I really don't understand them. Maybe they think 'what do you mean, you have never done this?' and for this reason they cannot really explain in depth what they mean. We cannot talk. (Diana)

Awareness

The ability to recognise the diversity of feedback cultures was fundamental for students to be willing to participate in feedback exchanges. Initially, awareness of this was low for most students; those who were aware of some sort of cultural diversity did not relate it to feedback practices.

When I came here, I didn't expect anything different. (Nik)

What is different here is the whole experience, the setting of the university... students they bring different kinds of perspectives... they perceive things in their own cultures and countries. (Mahmoud)

As students experienced the new context, they became increasingly aware of feedback practices' diversity. However, some did not recognise diversity as being cultural in nature or were not able to pinpoint it.

It's very different here, I don't know why. So, I am not sure how useful it is what we do here. (Diana)

I don't know how the work will be evaluated... I think this is a different cultural approach. There is something different that I cannot really point out. (Ann)

Low awareness of the cultural diversity that characterises feedback processes across institutional cultures tended to create uncertainty and, in certain cases low appreciation of the processes at the new institution. Awareness tended to increase over time for many, although to different extents. This seemed to depend on the exposure students had to purposeful discussions about feedback processes and potential diversity.

We have a lecturer, and she is not from here, so she knows. She talked to us about feedback and her initial experience with it and how it changed. She was the only one, that was useful, and we talk to her a lot. (Numi)

Awareness that individuals who participate in feedback processes are diverse and might show diverse behaviours, perceptions and expectations also contributed to more effective feedback interactions. With time, increased awareness tended to support student willingness to seek feedback and interactions, as uncertainty was reduced, and expectations clarified.

At first it was a shock. But now I know they expect different, and they want you to do different. So now it's okay, I can go speak with them. (Eileen)

Intercultural critical reflection

Students' willingness and ability to critically reflect on personal opinions alongside their perceptions of others' opinions on feedback practices was shown to be growing over time. This supported more effective feedback interactions that lead to student development. Reflecting on their own, peers and educators' opinions on feedback supported students to 'decentre' and to consider, respect and take other cultural perspectives when engaging in feedback dialogues. At first, however, students seemed to either passively accept or reject other's opinions and beliefs, with little reflection taking place. This did not support intercultural feedback dialogues, rather students seemed to avoid co-mediation of meaning.

That's how it works in British system. Okay, if that's how it is! (Eileen)

I agree with my lecturer in Florence and not with my lecturer here. I completely disagree. I also want to talk to an Italian lecturer here and discuss this with her. (Diana)

At later stages, most students developed the ability to recognise the value of reflection on opinions and diverse perspective-taking. This supported them in actively engaging in feedback interactions and where they were able to critically analyse diverse perspectives on their work and on quality.

Now I can have a critical discussion on like what are the alternative perspectives or how it could be done in another way. (Jalil)

Recalling, reflecting on and understanding their own past and ongoing experience of feedback was also useful for students to effectively utilise the feedback and uncover unconscious internal processes of feedback generation.

At first, I was saying: 'What are they saying?'. If I look back now, I have unconsciously understood what they meant and why. I was also unconsciously following the feedback and using what they said. (Antonio)

Intercultural emotional intelligence

The findings show that student empathy towards the cultural diversity of feedback processes and of those involved played a role in facilitating intercultural feedback interactions. When students showed empathy towards what was diverse, they were more inclined to listen to others' perceptions and attempt to understand others' behaviours.

I think looking at and understanding differences is one of the most interesting things to do. Maybe you can also engage with people about this when you talk about the feedback. But it takes some time, yeah, it's not immediate, no. (Ann)

This was a more developed ability for some compared to others and it seemed to require time to develop. Alongside showing empathy towards others and what is different, the findings showed that empathy towards oneself was equally important. Recognising and accepting one

own's diversity supported students managing the emotional aspect of being faced with feedback that they interpreted through a diverse lens.

I am first time in UK. I have never been to this educational system, and these are my very first assignments and feedback. It's okay if it's difficult and if I do it different. (Jalil)

Managing the emotional side of diverse cultural perspective-taking was also shown to be central to more effective feedback interaction that would support feedback utilisation. Students who struggled to manage emotional reactions originating from facing diversity tended to reject the feedback and avoid engaging in dialogue.

These are like constraints you know? So, you have to specifically do this in this way. I don't want to write or do this, okay? (Antonio)

Students also experienced high uncertainty levels caused by the unfamiliarity of the new feedback processes. Uncertainty often led to frustration, disappointment and disengagement, especially when not addressed or reduced over time.

I am very disappointed... it's not what I expected! I lost marks because of misunderstanding. Oh my God! I feel like, I don't know, I can't even think about this in my mind! (Malak)

I don't know what to expect after evaluation, how it will work... I don't know how to approach, you know, so I am taking my time. (Ann)

Such emotions, although common at earlier stages, were often managed over time when expectations became clearer, and uncertainty was reduced. Those who could regulate such emotions decided to engage in communication that could further reduce uncertainty and support learning.

Feedback and discussions give you a better learning experience because you kind of know exactly where you are going. (Numi)

Skills

Students who, over time, showed flexibility in their behaviour within feedback processes also tended to develop the capacity to modify their feedback behaviour so that they would be effective for themselves and perceived as such by their educators. Over time, students who understood the value of flexibility in intercultural contexts also tended to shift their feedback behaviours from passive to active and past to future-orientated.

Well, now, first, I read it and analyse it and then I take this further [to the lecturer] if I need more information, no? For the next assignment! For example now there is the dissertation, it is something new, something to learn. But still I have some power like my skills that I gained until now. I can use that. (Jalil)

I can say that now I try to learn how to make the best decisions for my next work. (Mahmoud)

If before it was just a tick in a box when getting through the assignments, now the whole mechanism of feedback and also the approachability of the academics makes you think and act differently. (Numi)

Being flexible and modifying one's behaviour were often not possible if students did not recognise what behaviour was expected in the new environment and why. Students often reported realising this only late in the academic year.

If I retroactively look at it and think about how it could be useful to talk to the lecturers... I can't believe I never realised this. (Ann)

Students' willingness and ability to independently learn about diverse feedback cultures was shown to be connected to behaviour flexibility. However, although proactively learning about

and exploring diversity at the international institution was often encouraged, students initially rarely recognised its value within feedback contexts.

Here they are very good because they want you to learn on your own, to research on your own, depends on you... they ask you to be proactive. But the feedback is not, it doesn't have any value for students in this. (Nik)

I always kind of reflect on it myself and like try to just by myself get better with it and like learning how to improve my writing process. And I think that, overall, it helps a lot if you have certain strategies, like how to deal with it yourself. (Marlene)

Some students retrospectively observed that dedicating more time to exploring intercultural feedback dialogues could support more effective communication that in turn would foster more effective use of feedback.

We need a lot more time and more dialogue with like more time to actually deal with the feedback and use it for your own future work. (Marlene)

Attitudes

The findings suggest that students who showed attitudes of curiosity towards diverse feedback cultures and practices were also more willing and interested in engaging in feedback interactions. Being open towards diversity also facilitated more effective intercultural interactions, in which diverse perspectives were welcome.

People would put their input and feedback from their own backgrounds and perspectives, which I am interested to see. (Eileen)

I am really interested now to hear what kind of assessment and feedback style this is and people specifically from this university are expecting from us. (Marlene)

I am very excited about this because it is very different. You can work with others and you can share and discuss your ideas with others, and they will give you feedback! (Antonio)

Although some students showed quite long-lasting 'resistance' towards the new feedback processes, curiosity eventually supported their willingness to attempt to manage their disbelief about others' feedback cultures.

I think I tried to talk to them for curiosity about this thing [feedback dialogues], and relationships and how they work. Although I'm not sure it works. (Nik)

This was not immediate nor a simple step to take. However, it was a first step towards re-considering both their own and others' feedback beliefs in light of the new and evolving intercultural experience.

I have talked with some lecturers about their feedback and what they mean. I also contacted [Iraqi] friends to see what they think it means and make the most out of it. (Mahmoud)

Discussion

Student development of feedback literacy is recognised to support learning, as it facilitates feedback enactment and improvement of subsequent work (Carless and Boud 2018). Communication and interaction are vital in feedback processes, as students benefit from being active agents who co-mediate meaning through effective dialogue (Boud and Molloy 2013). The present study brings an original perspective to the role of cultures, literacies and effective interactions in international feedback contexts. It shows that, when individuals have diverse literacies, these become the 'frames of references' through which communication is

shaped (Fantini and Tirmizi 2006). These are developed within different academic contexts and cultures of feedback (Rovagnati, Pitt, and Winstone 2021) and become the lens through which students engage in and perceive feedback interactions. The findings of this paper have shown that engaging in and interpreting communication occurring between diverse 'frames of reference' can present extra challenges, particularly in early stages of students' experience with 'new' feedback processes. They also provided evidence that students can benefit from the development of some degree of feedback intercultural competence, that supports their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural feedback contexts.

This paper has shown that developing knowledge, awareness, attitudes and skills in relation to feedback processes, alongside the ability to critically reflect and manage emotions in intercultural feedback situations had an impact on how students approached and dealt with feedback interactions. Our data provide empirical support for the validity of bringing together the concepts of intercultural competence and dialogic feedback interactions. Being more interculturally competent influenced student willingness to engage with or to initiate (seek) feedback dialogues. Proactive agency is crucial for effective and successful utilisation of feedback (Gravett 2020), and our analysis showed increased agency at later stages in the academic year where students' feedback intercultural competence had somewhat developed.

We support that feedback intercultural competence can enhance student ability to communicate both *about* and *within* feedback processes. What changes when students develop feedback intercultural competence is the type of communication they can have about their work, their learning development, the feedback information, and how to use it. Communication becomes more effective as students become increasingly aware and considerate of what would be regarded as effective and appropriate by all players involved in the interactions. Our data support this is what it takes to have successful intercultural interactions (Deardorff 2015) and highlight its particular relevance to intercultural feedback contexts. Reducing barriers to intercultural communication is crucial, as more effective feedback dialogues are shown to support students' mediation of meaning, active agency, and overall learning and development (Carless 2015). This further stresses the importance of intercultural competence development to be considered as context specific rather than universal (Lustig and Koester 2013; Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009).

Our data also uncovers that development of feedback intercultural competence can happen over the time of an academic year. However, the extent to which change occurred varied, depending on individual and circumstantial factors. Our analysis suggests that experience alone plays a marginal role in supporting feedback intercultural competence development. Similar observations put forward by Yarosh, Lukic, and Santibáñez-Gruber (2018) support that intercultural competence development in higher education can be enhanced unintentionally and automatically to some extent. Our exploration contributes new knowledge on this, and suggests that purposeful, intentional discussions about feedback processes and cultural diversity seemed to be key influential factors. We acknowledge we could only observe some of the factors that reportedly supported student intercultural competence, as our study was exploratory and did not include any targeted intervention that would support intercultural competence development. Despite its exploratory nature, this paper highlights the importance of integrating an intercultural dimension into feedback processes and dialogues. If effective communication across cultures and literacies of feedback is fostered through enhanced intercultural competence, interacting to create intercultural literacies can become easier.

Limitations

This paper explores students' intercultural competence within feedback contexts although interactions occur between multiple players. Future work needs to extend this exploration to include educators' feedback intercultural competence and interactions between peers. Further,

we only looked at development over a 9-month period of time as the focus was on full-time international postgraduate students. Longer longitudinal inquiries involving students and educators at different levels (undergraduate, doctoral) would be extremely valuable. This study is exploratory in nature and consequently gathered general insights into broad issues; this should be considered as a starting point for more in-depth focused research. Moreover, future research could consider implementing practical interventions, offering an alternative approach to our inquiry that chose observation without interference. Lastly, setting a minimum but not a maximum of diary entries per participant meant gathering more in-depth data from some students compared to others. We have kept this into consideration during the data analysis phase, but we still acknowledge it might have influenced the interpretation of meaning patterns.

Implications

Facilitating effective and appropriate communication between diverse feedback cultures and literacies should become embedded in the way in which we 'do' feedback interactions. Creating a space where mediated discussions about the diverse feedback cultures occur can be a simple but effective way to enhance intercultural competence. This can lead to co-authorships of feedback processes, where students are not only faced with diverse perspectives, beliefs and behaviours, but they are also invited to share their own and (re)consider diverse perspectives in light of the 'new' intercultural experience. This, in turn, can support student agency in feedback interactions. When students become active agents, they can transform feedback into something that is self-generated, filling the potential of developing an intercultural feedback literacy for long-term development. This alone, however, is not sufficient but needs to be fostered by ongoing commitment of all involved and intercultural competence development 'explicit' interventions.

Designing space for continued reflection and purposeful discussion about feedback histories, cultures and literacies could foster awareness and knowledge development, curiosity and openness, and support emotional management. Such reflections and discussions could be peer-led and facilitated by trained 'buddies' who could be more experienced international students. Further, encouraging students to keep a portfolio of their reflection and discussion sheets has the potential to help them identify recurring themes in diverse feedback cultures and track the way in which they manage emotional reactions over time. The use of 'feedback diaries' could also be beneficial. Moreover, drafts and exemplars could be used to guide comparisons with previous works and feedback, guide purposeful intercultural reflection and support students to recognise diversity and manage expectations.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval was obtained from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG), University of Kent.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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