265 Research trends in the higher education feedback literature since the 'new paradigm' shift to learner-centred feedback practices

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Research Domains

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

Abstract

The last decade has seen a shift in the feedback literature from a transmission-focused perspective to a 'new paradigm' of learner-centred feedback approaches. To understand research trends and 'hotspots' in the literature since this shift, bibliographic analysis was used to perform a science mapping of feedback literature within a higher education context. Web of Science's Social Sciences Citation Index was searched for literature on this topic since the new paradigm was first proposed in 2015. A keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed on 933 studies, and the following subtopics were identified: Student agency; self-regulation; online learning; student engagement; peer activities; student-supervisor dialogue; technology-enhanced feedback; assessment outcomes; e-feedback; and feedback information delivery modes. Research on peers as a source of feedback appears to dominate the field, so it might be beneficial to explore this hotspot further to determine whether the outcomes can inform and enrich future research in the other subtopics.

Full paper

Introduction

Historically, feedback was often defined in the literature as information about a student's performance, usually transmitted from the teacher to the student (Winstone et al., 2022). While the late 1990s saw a shift to focusing on what the student does with this information (Biggs, 1999), it was Carless' (2015) seminal work that first used the term 'new paradigm' to refer to feedback practices that emphasise students' active role in feedback processes. This led to a proliferation of feedback research being published in the last decade, particularly in higher education. Post-2015, research has tended to emphasise more learner-centred feedback approaches (Winstone et al., 2022).

Understanding the foci of feedback research since the new paradigm shift would be valuable, particularly in terms of uncovering the subtopics that have received priority. The current study used bibliometric analysis to perform a science mapping of feedback literature in higher education since 2015. This approach is "useful for deciphering and mapping the cumulative scientific knowledge and evolutionary nuances of well-established fields" (Donthu et al., 2021, p. 285). The aim was to chart research trends in the new paradigm feedback literature to identify research 'hotspots' and make recommendations for future research.

Method

The Web of Science's (WOS) Social Sciences Citation Index was searched for literature on feedback in higher education published since 2015. Titles and author keywords were searched for the terms "feedback" or "feed-back", then the following limiters were used: English only; education & educational research WOS topic. A total of 1461 records were manually screened to remove the following: Studies explicitly focused on children or school students, not higher education; professional development studies outside of the higher education context (e.g., training of school teachers, police officers, etc.); studies based in the workplace; studies on students' feedback about their learning (e.g., student evaluations of teaching). After this screening 933 records were retained for analysis.

The science mapping approach involved a keyword co-occurrence analysis being performed using the visualisation software, VOSviewer 1.6.18 (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). By producing a network map of author keywords and the

connections between them, 'research hotspots' within a field can be identified (Zhang et al., 2022). Keywords that cluster together co-occur more in the literature, indicating that a distinct subtopic is represented by these terms (Chen et al., 2022).

Results

Only keywords present across five or more studies were included in the analysis to reduce the potential for 'noise' in the map. Ninety-one keywords were analysed after grouping together similar terms, removing generic terms (e.g., learning) and removing keywords that are not specific to a single cluster (i.e., because they should be relevant to all studies, such as 'feedback' and 'higher education'). Figure 1 displays the keyword co-occurrence network map.
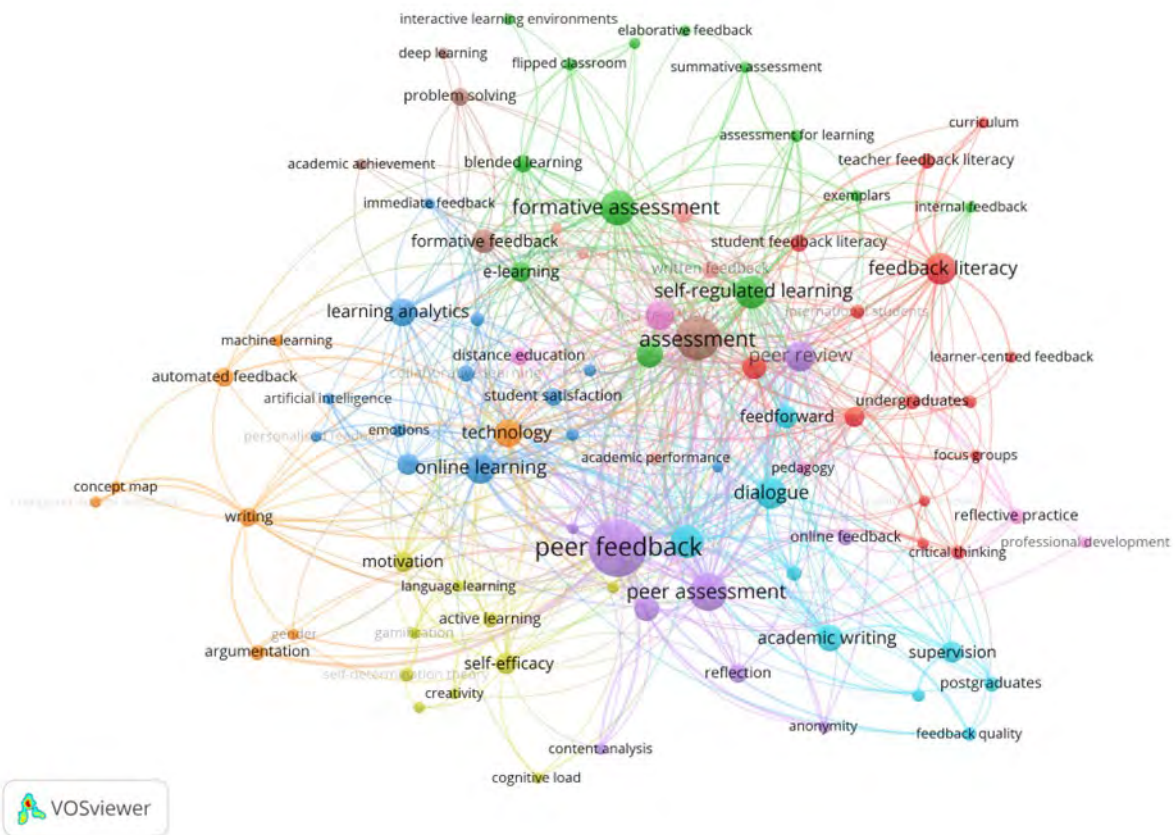

Figure 1. Keyword co-occurrence analysis network map.

Nine clusters (research hotspots) were identified. These are distinguished by the different colours in the map. A holistic interpretation of each cluster's focus was determined by making qualitative judgements about the associations between terms within a cluster (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research hotspots

Cluster colour	Cluster focus	Exemplar keywords (with occurrences)	Average publication year
Red	Student agency	agency (7) feedback literacy (41) self-assessment (23) evaluative judgement (5)	2020
Green	Self-regulation	self-regulated learning (43) formative assessment (51) assessment for learning (7) internal feedback (6)	2019
Dark blue	Online learning	online learning (35) learning analytics (30) immediate feedback (6) personalised feedback (5)	2019
Yellow	Student engagement	active learning (9) self-efficacy (19) motivation (16) self-determination theory (8)	2019
Purple	Peer activities	peer feedback (134) peer assessment (57) peer review (36)	2019
Light blue	Student-supervisor dialogue	dialogue (38) supervision (18) postgraduates (10) supervisory feedback (7)	2019

		technology (32) automated feedback (14) computer-based feedback (5)	
Orange	Technology-enhanced feedback	technology (32) automated feedback (14) computer-based feedback (5)	2019
Brown	Assessment outcomes	assessment (78) academic achievement (5)	2018
Pink	E-feedback	video feedback (33) distance education (12)	2019
Peach	Feedback information delivery modes	audio feedback (14) written feedback (13)	2019

Discussion

Peer activities were the highest-frequency terms, suggesting that efforts to encourage students to generate feedback collaboratively are a priority within the literature since the move away from focusing on what the teacher does in feedback processes. There also seems to have been a move from focusing on assessment outcomes (the least recent hotspot) to developing student agency (the most recent hotspot) in their own learning. It may be beneficial to further unpack why research specifically on peer feedback is so prolific to understand whether some of the findings can inform and enrich other subtopics within this field.

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