

# The Effect of Instant Verbal Feedback on Pupil Learning

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## *Rationale*

The Scottish government states that learners learn best, and attainment improves, when learners are given feedback about the quality of their work, and what they can do to make it better (Scottish Government, 2005). William and Black (1998) also highlight the importance of feedback, stating that formative assessment is the most powerful tool in increasing pupil achievement. They also highlight that effective feedback is one of the many tools available to teachers to engage in formative assessment. Hattie (1992) describes feedback as “the most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement”. This highlights the importance of feedback in education.

Feedback should help learners improve in a specific activity; when feedback provides correction or improvement in a piece of work, it is valued by learners and acts as an incredible motivator (Jones, 2005). Conroy et al. (2009) suggests that in order for feedback to be most effective it should be prompt, direct, specific and positive. This paper will consider both instant and delayed feedback and evaluate whether the application of instant feedback does indeed provide a more effective means of improving pupil learning.

## *Aims*

The aim of this enquiry was to evaluate instant verbal feedback as a formative assessment technique and the impact it has on learning and teaching in a classroom setting.

## *Methodology*

This enquiry was carried out over a period of 4 weeks and focussed on an S1 Computing Science class consisting of 15 pupils. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected during the duration of the enquiry. All pupils were issued with a questionnaire at the beginning of the enquiry to establish their current feelings on instant and delayed feedback (Appendix 1). Pupils attended class for 4 periods during the enquiry and were given instant feedback or delayed feedback each week on an alternating basis as shown below.

| Week | Method of Feedback |
|------|--------------------|
| 1    | Instant            |
| 2    | Delayed            |
| 3    | Instant            |
| 4    | Delayed            |

As the aim of this enquiry was to evaluate the impact of instant verbal feedback has on learning and teaching in the classroom, both instant feedback and delayed feedback were issued over the course of the enquiry. This allowed for pupil’s progress to be monitored on a period-by-period basis, noting any changes that may be attributed to the method of feedback used.

Data has been collected using the following methods:

*Formative assessment*

Formative assessment techniques such as exit passes were used in order to gauge pupil understanding.

*Classroom observations*

Throughout each lesson, pupils were observed as they participated in tasks and any progress made was noted.

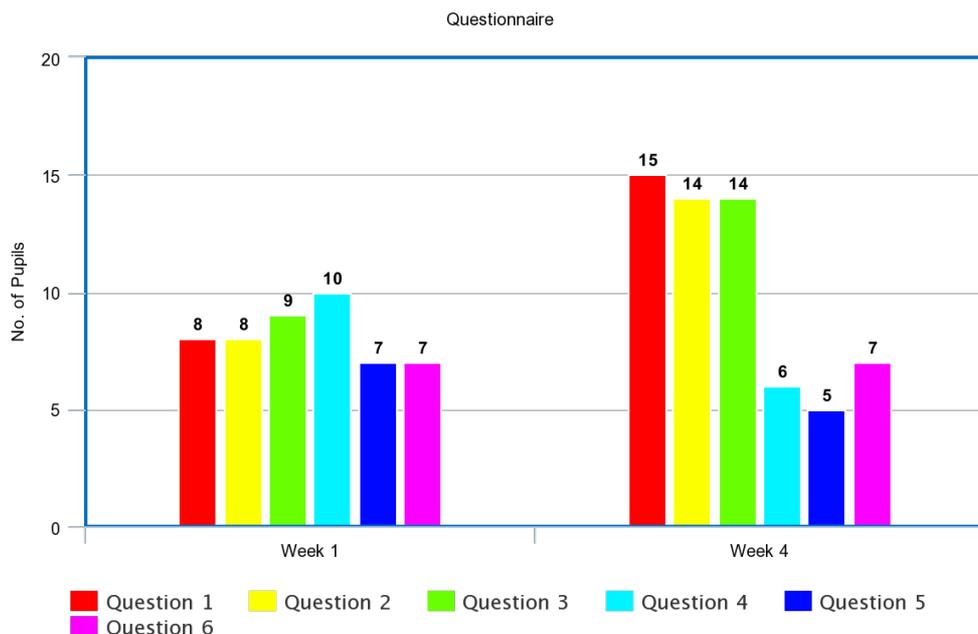
*Questionnaires*

Pupils were provided with a questionnaire at the beginning and the end of this enquiry. These questionnaires were used to assess pupils’ feelings towards both forms of feedback. Pupils were asked 6 questions relating to their preference between delayed feedback and instant feedback.

**Findings**

*Questionnaires*

The results from the questionnaires were collated and indicate an overwhelming preference for instant feedback. During week 1, pupils were split in opinion in their feelings towards both forms of feedback. It can be seen from *figure 1* that by week 4 almost all pupils showed a preference for instant verbal feedback.

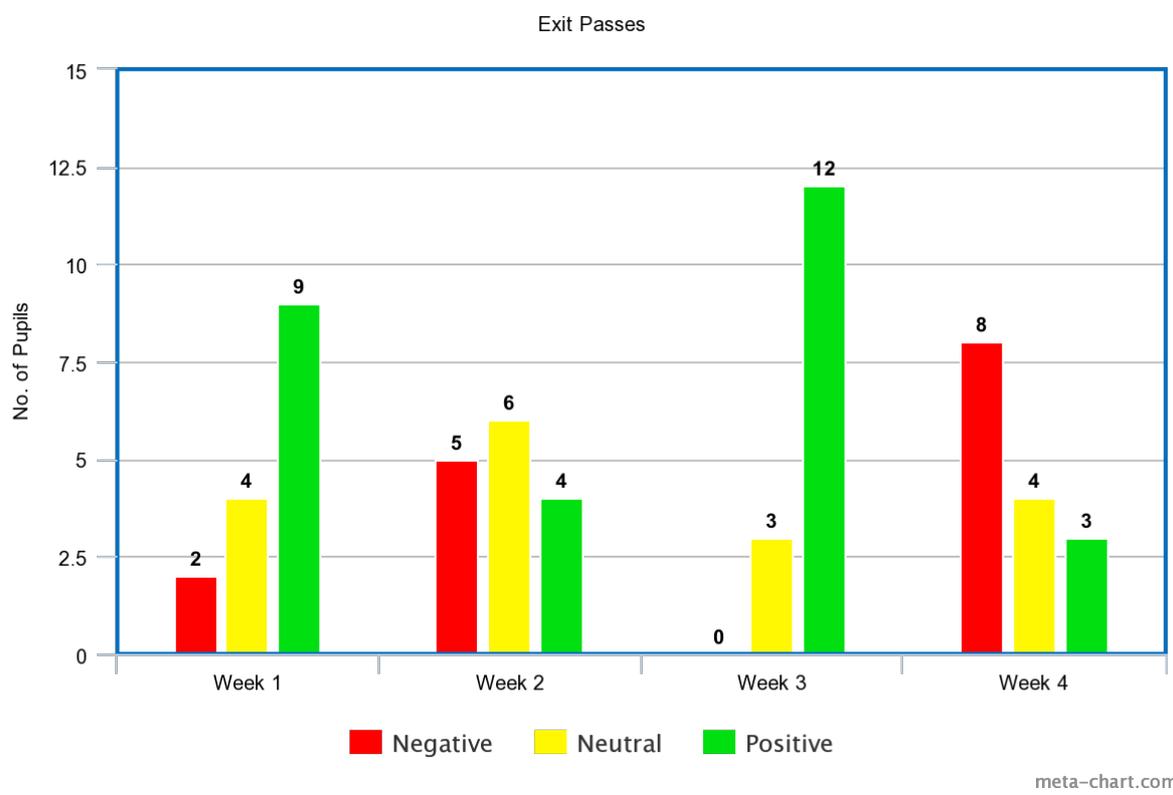


Responses to questions were split into two categories: positive comments and negative comments. The graph shows the number of positive comments received from pupils. Questions 1-3 related to a preference for instant feedback, while questions 4-6 related to a preference for delayed feedback.

The graph clearly shows that pupils initial view of both types of feedback was largely similar. However, after week 4 pupils showed a significant preference for instant feedback.

*Exit Passes*

Pupils were asked to fill out exit passes each week assessing their own progress made within the lesson. Exit passes were sorted into 3 categories: positive, negative and neutral. The results were then collated (*figure 2*) and show that pupils felt that they had made greater progress during the weeks that they were given instant feedback.



*Figure 2*

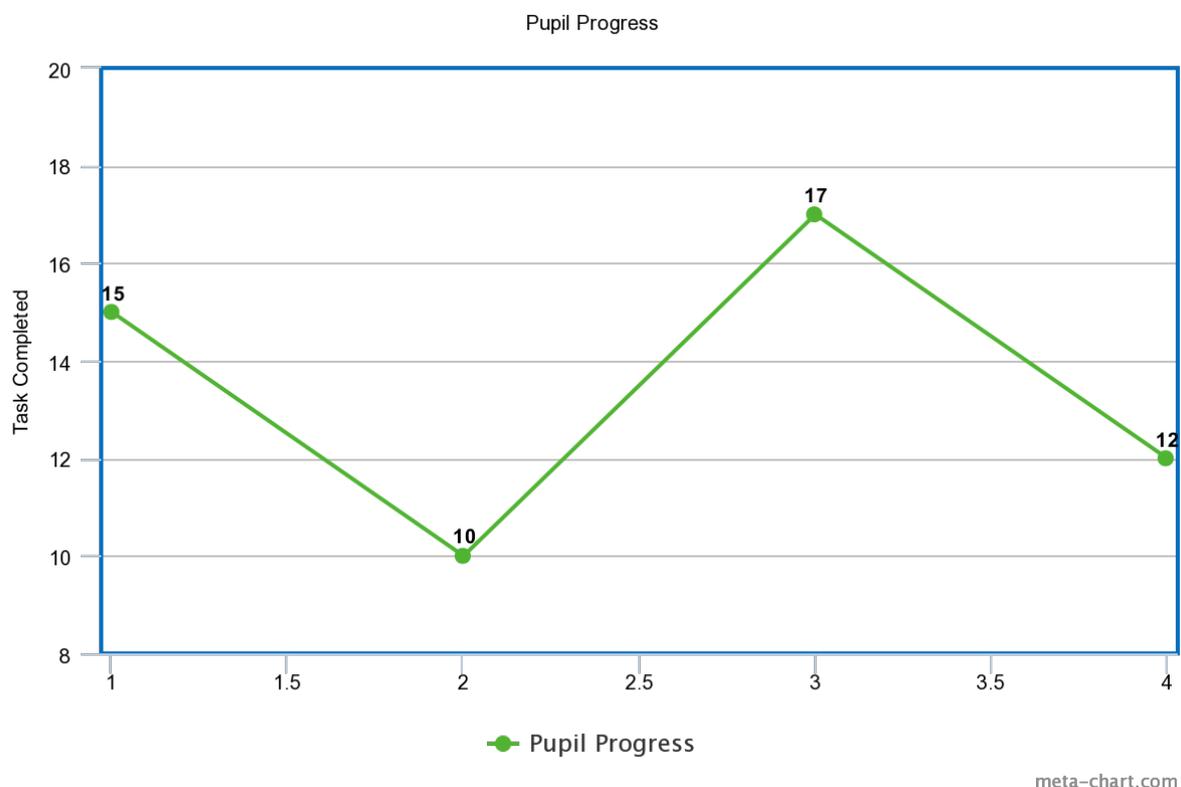
The question posed on all exit passes was “Do you feel that the feedback you received today improved your learning?”. The comments added by pupils were varied throughout and were sorted into 3 categories. Comments that were sorted into the positive categories contained statements such as “I think that it did”, “I liked it better than the other one” and “yes, I thought it was good”. Neutral comments were any comments that included phrases such as “Don’t know” or “I’m not sure”. Negative comments included phrases such as “I needed more help” and “I preferred when we got help quicker”.

The data from week one shows that most pupils felt that instant feedback was beneficial to their learning. However, it is important to note that more than one third of the class did not feel that it had a positive impact on their learning. Week 2 focussed on delayed feedback and received a mixed response. While 4 people thought that it was beneficial, the majority of the

class thought that it had no impact on their learning or even a negative impact on their learning. Week 3 saw a massive shift in pupil opinion, with almost all pupils perceiving a positive outcome and no pupils feeling as though it had a negative impact. The massive change from week 1 to week 3 could possibly be attributed to pupils further understanding delayed feedback following the previous week. During week 4 there was a shift towards a mostly negative opinion on delayed feedback. However, the number of negative opinions was not vastly greater than week 2.

### *Pupil Progress*

During the 4 weeks, pupil progress was noted. As part of the current topic, pupils were working through tasks at their own pace. Each week a note was the progress of each pupil, this was a combination of the task the pupil reached, the quality of their work and their understanding of the content. Pupil understanding was assessed through formative assessment throughout the lesson and at the end of the lesson during a plenary session. This data was then collated as seen in *figure 3*.



*figure 3*

The number of tasks completed by the class as a whole has been plotted in *figure 3*. During week 1 pupils completed 15 tasks, equating to an average of 1 task per pupil. This lower significantly during the first week of delayed feedback being used. Week 3 saw a sharp rise in pupil progress, this correlates pupil opinions given on exit passes. Week 4 saw another drop in progress. This seems to suggest that instant feedback is having a positive effect on pupil progress when compared to delayed feedback. However, it is important to note that the number of tasks completed during certain weeks may be lower or higher due to the difficulty of the tasks completed on a given week.

### ***Conclusions***

This enquiry looked at the effect of instant verbal feedback as a formative assessment technique and the impact it has on learning and teaching in a classroom setting. In the Computing Science classroom, it was found that during the weeks that instant feedback was given pupil work was of a higher quality, they completed more tasks during the lesson and had a better understanding of the content as shown through formative assessment. Self-evaluations taken by pupils through exit passes indicate a preference for instant feedback over delayed feedback. This seems to show that instant feedback is more beneficial in the classroom than delayed feedback. However, in order to assess the true validity of this conclusion, this research would have to be conducted over a longer period of time with a much wider sample group.

### ***Implications for Future Practice***

The purpose of conducting this enquiry was to help inform future practice in order to ensure an excellent learning and teaching experience for all young people. The findings of this enquiry suggest that instant feedback is not only preferred by young people, but also has a beneficial effect on their progress and understanding as shown by the quality of their work and their responses when answering questions during plenary sessions.. For this reason, instant feedback will continue to be provided to pupils during every lesson.

This is not to discount delayed feedback. Pupils benefit most when they receive meaningful and relevant feedback. Delayed feedback may have a place depending on the task being undertaken. An approach using both instant and delayed feedback may be most beneficial to pupils. It would be useful to complete a follow-up enquiry, exploring the effects of using both methods of feedback in conjunction, evaluating if it has an even greater impact than instant feedback alone.

### ***Bibliography***

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