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The negative impacts of student use of online tools during emergency remote teaching and learning on teacher–student relationships

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Abstract

This article focuses on the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships between teachers and students for the mutual benefit of both groups and explores this in one context during the Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) period in the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020. Ten instructors of university English as a foreign language (EFL) academic writing were interviewed about their experiences during this period. All questioned the academic honesty and ethics of their students due to what seemed to be their impossibly rapid progress in linguistic complexity and correctness, and the depth of ideas expressed growing very quickly. Due to communication between teachers and students being limited to text-based messages on the Learning Management System, teachers were unable to investigate without potentially causing university disciplinary action to fall on their students. This led to a worsening of relationships and spiraling levels of distrust. Forty first-year students were then asked to submit three-minute videos explaining how they undertook their homework assignments during the 15-week semester. Participants reported using a variety of technological assistance, particularly Machine Translation (MT) and online grammar checkers, to prepare assignments for submission. Findings suggest that educating instructors about how appropriate usage of such technology can benefit student learning could help prevent misunderstandings about unethical technology usage. Similarly, by recognizing the value of the relationship between instructors and students, time can be spent on building and fostering these bonds.

この論文では、教師と生徒の関係を確立して維持することの重要性に焦点を当て、両方のグループの相互利益のために、2020年の最初のCOVID-19パンデミックロックダウンの緊急遠隔教育および学習 (ERTL) 期間中にこれを1つのコンテキストで調査します。外国語としての大学英語 (EFL) アカデミックライティングの10人のインストラクターが、この期間中の彼らの経験についてインタビューを受けました。全員が、学生の言語的な複雑さや正確さがあり得ないほど急速に進歩し、表現される考えの深さ

が非常に速くなっているように見えたため、学生の学問的な誠実さや倫理観に疑問を抱いていた。教師と生徒の間のコミュニケーションは学習管理システムのテキストベースのメッセージに制限されているため、教師は大学の懲戒処分を生徒に負わせる可能性なしに調査することができませんでした。これは人間関係の悪化と不信のスパイラルレベルにつながりました。次に、1年生の40人に、15週間の学期中に宿題をどのように行ったかを説明する3分間のビデオを提出するように依頼しました。参加者は、提出用の課題を準備するために、さまざまな技術支援、特に機械翻訳とオンライン文法チェッカーを使用して報告しました。調査結果は、そのようなテクノロジーの適切な使用が学生の学習にどのように役立つかについてインストラクターを教育することは、非倫理的なテクノロジーの使用についての誤解を防ぐのに役立つ可能性があることを示唆しています。同様に、インストラクターと学生の関係の価値を認識することにより、これらの絆を築き、育むことに時間を費やすことができます。

Keywords: teacher–student relationships, Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL), on-demand classes, trust

Introduction

The sudden move online undertaken by institutions around the world in response to the escalating COVID-19 pandemic brought dramatic changes to the lives of both teachers and learners. Just as teachers quickly relearned how to run their courses and classrooms, students learnt new ways of getting things done. These changes affected the ways that relationships formed between teachers and students, impacting both groups. While positive relationships have long been “associated with optimal, holistic learning” (Cornelius-White, 2007, p.113) for learners, more recent research also connects them with teacher well-being. The present article explores the ways that the Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) period changed the ways that a group of instructors of L2 academic writing approached relationships with their students, and the ways that these changes affected them. The on-demand nature of the course, which precluded synchronous contact, resulted in poorly established teacher–student relationships that were insufficient to overcome what had in previous course iterations been interpreted as plagiarism or inappropriate Machine Translation (MT) usage (see Kennedy, in press).

This article is part of a larger research project investigating the intersection of the teaching of L2 academic writing and the ways that teachers and learners use technology during this process. Two data sets were collected: interviews with ten instructors, and reflective videos made by forty first-year university students. Here, the focus is on the instructors, with data from the student videos illuminating findings from the instructor interviews. In regular face-to-face teaching contexts, attachment theory and emotional resonance are the basis of positive teacher–student relationships. In this context, such relationships were found not to have formed due to the lack of opportunity to interact and bond. The instructors’ difficulties with this in the new on-demand environment are explored.

Positive teacher–student relationships

A positive teacher–student relationship depends on many variables. While much research focuses on how students view this relationship, with the highest value consistently placed

by students on teachers who are seen to care about their students (Phelan et al., 1992) and relationships that comprise closeness, support, liking, warmth, and trust (Roorda et al., 2011), there is little exploration in the literature of how the relationship is viewed from the teachers' side. Wilkins' (2014a, 2014b) investigated what defines a positive relationship from both perspectives, surveying both teachers and students, and therefore provides a useful framework in this context. While her work studies an American high school population, her observation of both stakeholder parties and acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional nature of the issue is rare in the literature. A principal components analysis of Wilkins' student survey identified a seven-factor structure. Teacher attributes found to contribute to a positive relationship were: (a) providing academic and personal support for students, (b) showing concern for and interest in students, (c) motivating students and attending to their personal interests, (d) treating students with respect, (e) being compassionate to students, (f) being accessible to students, and (g) understanding and valuing students' opinions and feelings. Many of these attributes come under the umbrella term 'caring' as initially outlined by Phelan et al. (1992). In Wilkins' teacher survey, three student behavioral factors that teachers viewed as contributing to a positive relationship were found: (a) demonstrating engagement and interest in schoolwork, (b) being respectful, rule-abiding, and cooperative, and (c) demonstrating positive social behaviors.

Attachment theory and emotional resonance

A positive teacher–student bond has parallels with the relationship between children and their first caregivers (Roorda et al., 2011). When infants are secure in their relationship with their parent(s), they are confident to explore their world (Blatz, 1966), and when they are cared for by a teacher as they were ideally cared for by their parent(s), they form a similar reliable bond. This in turn gives them the confidence to take risks, move out of their comfort zones and make academic progress (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). A positive teacher–student bond is therefore seen to support student learning and achievement (Allen et al., 2018; Holzberger et al., 2019; Mainhard et al., 2018; Pianta et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). Teachers who show empathy and warmth to their students are strongly associated with positive learning outcomes for them (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Poor teacher–student relationships have been recognised for decades as a predictor of teacher burnout (Corbin et al., 2019; Friedman, 1995; Phillips, 1993) and educator cynicism (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008.) Conversely, research suggests that positive relationships with students can both reduce stress levels for teachers (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Gugliemi & Tatrow, 1998), and play an important role in teachers' emotional experiences of their teaching (Hagenauer et al., 2015). The World Health Organization (2018) defines mental health as "a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (para.3). While the impact of the quality of teacher–student relationships on teacher wellbeing has been considered, it has not been seen to be an important component of it (Corbin et al., 2019; Friedman, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001; Spilt et al., 2011). This is despite the centrality of this relationship to the work that teachers do, and how much teachers typically consider their relationships with students when making choices in how to conduct lessons (Hargreaves, 2000).

Method

The data was collected at a nationally funded university in Western Japan (see Kennedy, 2021, in press) in 2020 at the end of the first semester conducted during COVID-19 restrictions. All ten instructors interviewed for the project hold post-graduate degrees attained in English in the liberal arts, speak English at native level, and have taught English for Academic Purposes at universities in Asia for between 12 and 31 years. The course they teach quickly progresses through a range of writing competencies. Students are first taught how to structure an academic paragraph correctly and move from there to problem-solution essays and finally five-paragraph essays. They are taught to cite sources within their writing, paraphrase appropriately and list references. Feedback is provided regularly, with instructors reading, commenting on, and returning student work each week. While the functions of language are focused on, rather than linguistic correctness, instructors also alert students to grammatical or spelling errors or word choice problems. Explicit guidance about academic integrity is given in Japanese during the orientation process, and students understand that in the course described here, the ideas, structure, and language of submitted work must all be original. Students are explicitly told that they may not submit text translated by MT because the grades that they achieve rest partially on the linguistic accuracy of texts they submit. As such, they are warned against writing in their L1 (Japanese), pasting paragraphs into an MT website, and pasting the resulting L2 (English) text into their assignment. Students are encouraged instead to write directly in L2, then to check their writing for grammatical and lexical errors. They are told that this method will result in their both gaining L2 academic writing skills and improving their productive language skills. Students are warned that the use of MT to translate L1 passages will result in them losing valuable opportunities to both foster their ability to think in L2, and to reflect on the language that they produce. Instructors are familiar with these issues and have developed proactive methods to guide students away from academic misconduct, and gentle, non-punitive methods of addressing it should it happen (see Kennedy, in press).

The university that they teach at is highly ranked academically, and its entrance examinations, grueling. Students work hard both to matriculate and graduate, with approximately 33% of the intake each year facing one or more years' extra study between high school and university admission as is common in Japan in prestigious national universities (Goto, 2020; Ono, 2007). Teachers maintain a consistent program of formative and summative assessment throughout due to a combination of continuous assessment and end-of-semester examinations. This fosters student engagement (Holmes, 2015), improves learning outcomes (Rezaei, 2015) and increases opportunities to give feedback to students (de Kleijn et al., 2013). Students have an average Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) score of 570, which equates to approximately B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages scale.

In the first semester of 2020, the course was delivered entirely on Moodle, the university Learning Management System (LMS), due to public health guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Instructors were given two weeks to find ways to deliver the course content via a medium that most had previously not used. Students were equally unfamiliar

with the system as LMS are not generally used in public high schools in Japan. A university mandate to ensure equitable access was wide-reaching: students should be able to complete all activities without access to unlimited Wi-Fi, and at any time during the week, with only one deadline each week. As such, online streaming activities like Zoom were not to be included. Nor were tasks such as class discussion board activities because some students would be advantaged over their peers. Instructors therefore uploaded videos of themselves teaching and provided links to existing materials online. They scanned and uploaded materials and found ways for students to do pair work activities alone. Students completed assignments asynchronously each week to replace regular classroom lessons and accompanying homework, spending a recommended 4.5 hours each week.

Semi-structured interviews took place to collect data via the Zoom platform. Following the example in Edwards and Holland (2013, pp. 56–57), a topic guide was prepared using the process outlined in Luker (2008, pp. 168–171). This interview structure was chosen to acknowledge the fact that “individuals understand the world in varying ways” (Luo & Wildemuth, 2017, p. 260) and allow the researcher to explore each interviewee’s worldview. Interviews began with questions about instructors’ academic backgrounds and moved through their experiences of first learning, and later teaching students, to write. Finally, pedagogical choices were explored with each interviewee.

A total of forty students were asked to submit videos made using their smartphone cameras in Week 15 of the course. Students spoke facing their cameras and talked about their strategies to perform the academic tasks required of them during the ERTL period. They structured their videos according to the same principles as a five-paragraph essay, and tried to speak in natural, unrehearsed L2. They were instructed not to write a script, but rather to prepare a brief outline in note form rather than full sentences to speak from. They understood that the opinions or strategies that they discussed in their videos would not affect their final grade, but that their structure, logic, and fluency would be assessed.

Transcripts of both instructor interviews and student videos were coded and analysed using the Steps for Coding and Theorization (SCAT) method (Otani, 2008), a four-step approach in which important words and phrases are identified, progressively refined, and finally combined to allow for a thorough understanding of the data.

Both student and teacher participants gave informed consent for all material collected to be used for research purposes, signing digital forms in either Japanese or English. One instructor asked that some parts of his interview be redacted as they were not directly pertinent to the research project, and this has been honored.

Results and discussion

This section first presents the key findings from the instructor interviews that relate to teacher–student relationships and their formation, and how the medium of instruction during the ERTL period impacted both of these.

Whereas for learners, the ‘children’ in the attachment theory model, being cared for and nurtured is important, teachers are socialized to assume the role of nurturer in the teacher–student dyad (Phelan et al, 1992). As such, many of the instructors interviewed described how “making a difference in someone’s life” or helping a young person “make

a decision that was really important to them”, caused them to feel good about their work, and, for two instructors, remember teachers who had guided them in the past. This idea of nurturing students as people was raised by seven interviewees. Nurturing students’ L2 academic writing skills was raised by five interviewees. For example, one instructor talked about the moment that a student suddenly comes to understand a key concept in class: “Seeing that lightbulb moment is always such a rush. There’s nothing like it.” Her pleasure is not only in witnessing the learning that she has fostered her student to achieve, but also in taking part in it with her student, leading to a feeling of emotional resonance and connection.

For nine of the ten instructors interviewed, the choice to teach initially came from a desire to connect with people and it was this desire that brought two participants back to the classroom after leaving it. One described wanting to return to teaching to “be back in the world” after her children started school. The other talked about how in company life colleagues were unwilling to interact, and that he missed “kicking a conversational ball around” in the way that he had done when teaching. His return to the classroom from the dry office environment was “so good. It just felt so much more right.” In Japan, where few have communicative competence in English (Morita, 2017), the opportunity to use English during class was also relished as a chance to communicate. “My Japanese simply isn’t as good as my English. I mean, I can get by, but it makes it really hard to gel with people.” His use of the verb ‘gel’ here has parallels in the word choice of several other instructors, who talked about the joy of being, for example ‘in sync with’ students, and really enjoying being in the classroom with students who shared a similar ‘vibe,’ ‘wavelength’ or ‘feel.’ Their language usage echoes the emotional resonance that they are describing without naming it explicitly. At the heart of their impetus to be in the classroom is the desire to make connections with others.

These nine instructors had come to expect bonds to form naturally through the normal interactions of the classroom and were, as one described it, “blindsided by the move on-line.” While they expected there to be difficulties in learning to work with new technological tools in the online environment, they did not foresee that the relationships that formed the very foundations of their teaching lives would be threatened by the new medium of instruction. The following sentiment was expressed by all but one of the instructors interviewed:

I was totally focused on getting all the materials onto Moodle [the LMS]. Scanning stuff in and making sure that I attached the right file in the right place and setting the right deadlines in the calendar. I didn’t even once think about getting to know the students in my classes. I really wish that I had done it differently, started out differently, set it up differently.

For these teachers, motivated by a desire to connect with people, the forced separation of the ERTL period was very different from previous courses. Instructors talked about how, for example:

The first day in class I normally do warming-up and getting-to-know-you activities. I thought they were for the students, to make them feel comfortable with each other.

But, and I didn't really realize that I was actually doing this, but I was listening, and watching them, and seeing them responding to one another. Getting a feel for the sort of people they are. This year there's been none of that. I have no idea who anyone is.

Another instructor talked about how with previous intakes he made time during the first few lessons of the semester to "read the vibes, both of the class as a whole, and to try to, you know, get a feel for each of the students individually." A different instructor described the process with an analogy, saying:

It's like you have their names on a list, then when you meet them, you hang their face, mentally, on their name hook. Then each time you talk to them, or they tell you something, or whatever, you hang it on that hook. You gather up all this stuff about them, and you have a place to, mentally I mean, put it.

The words shared by this instructor seem to sum up what many were feeling: "Putting names to faces is one of the things that starts on the first day of class. Without it, without that first day, I just had no idea at all." Many instructors talked about how they didn't feel that they knew their students: "Knowing the students, it's not about remembering what sort of music they like, it's more about how they are with each other. You can tell a lot about someone by watching how they listen to their partner in pair work." Without being able to quietly observe his students, this instructor was unable to form organic understandings of them as people. "I don't even know what they look like," he then said, sighing.

On-demand teaching without synchronous feedback was described by one instructor as teaching "into the abyss," akin to another instructor's comment that, "I don't know how they look at me." Asked to clarify, he explained:

When you're in the classroom you can always tell if they understand, if you're on the same wavelength, if they're getting you. Without any feedback, you can't teach.... It's instant, it's visual, it's visceral. You can see it in their eyes, their expressions, where they're looking, if they're leaning forward to listen.

A similar sentiment was described by another instructor, who used an analogy to describe her feelings:

I didn't feel like a teacher. I felt more like an actor, like I was suddenly going on stage, blinded by the lights. I couldn't see them at all, the audience, you know, the class, and there was no reaction: I couldn't see their faces, see whether they were following me, see if they were okay.

The final phrase of her analogy makes it clear that she is aware of the role that she is expected to play as the students' teacher, their nurturing caregiver. Without the chance to spend time together in the physical, or even synchronous virtual, classroom, however, interpersonal bonds did not form.

Without such bonds, the instructors found themselves acting more reactively and unequivocally than in the past when faced with issues surrounding academic integrity. They were more suspicious of student work, and more emotionally affected by it. All ten

instructors talked about their ability to recognize problematic work. For example, "My Spidey-sense lets me know every time" and "It's hard to explain how I know, but something just feels off." Another explained how she tries to rationally process what she called this "niggle":

I think about how they are during pair work, and when they talk to me. I'm looking for the same level of confidence in the writing as in the way they are in class. When it doesn't match, when there is a forcefulness in the writing that isn't there in class, that's when I know.

Another instructor brought it back to language: "If they can't tell you that their bus was late, then they're not going to be able to write 400 perfect words. There's just no way." One instructor laughed and quoted Judge Potter Stewart: "It's like porn, I know it when I see it."

In the new online environment, however, instructors found themselves questioning the integrity of student work more often, but unsure as to their reasons for doing so. Without classroom observation of casual L2 language usage to compare the submitted work to, their suspicions seemed groundless and unreasonable. This led to a sense of self-doubt for four instructors. "I'd always thought of it as an instinct before... it was utterly reliable." Another reported a loss in confidence, saying, "I don't think I've ever got it wrong before, but when we were on-demand, I dithered backwards and forwards." "I wondered whether I was going a bit mad. Suddenly it seemed as if they were all either copying from one another, or they'd all found someone to do their homework for them." Instructors were preoccupied by their suspicions.

Eight instructors compared how they dealt with a suspected case of non-original submission before and during the ERTL period. A common initial step (n=7) was previously taking "a kid aside at the start of class and ask[ing], you know, what was going on." Without "any unpleasantness" or direct accusation, five instructors reported simply showing the student their assignment and waiting for the student to respond. The student's demeanor was often enough to show that the student was aware of what they were being indirectly asked. One instructor talked about:

wait[ing] till they're ready to lead where the conversation needs to go. So, sometimes that's an apology, and sometimes it's a justification, and sometimes... it's tears, or them quickly packing up their things and getting themselves out of there. Sometimes it's all those things.

One instructor has a prepared script that he uses that "makes it clear to them that it's clear to [him] that they haven't written it" to protect himself from potential disciplinary action should the student make a complaint. After this initial first step, "I usually ask them what they think should happen next," said one participant, continuing, "They don't want trouble, so they often just take their assignment off my desk, and say something like, 'I'll start again.'" This strategy of allowing the student to suggest the course of action was reported by six participants. When a student did not suggest a course of action, instructors told them either to rewrite the whole assignment (n=5) or the offending parts of it (n=3). Four participants described resubmission on a tight schedule set by the instructor as being important in reestablishing trust. In contrast, another instructor talked about how rather

than do this he “let them get on with it and do the right thing,” which he, in turn, felt would rebuild the trust lost. “That way, they show you that they really want to be there, deserve to stay,” he said. By allowing their students another chance, these teachers are carefully nurturing their students.

All talked about the importance of understanding what motivated the student’s behavior. One instructor’s sentiments were echoed by six others: “For me it’s not about punishment, it’s about making sure that it doesn’t happen again.” Asked why, the instructor continued:

They’re plagiarizing, or using MT, either because they’ve run out of time to do their homework, or because they don’t feel that they can do it, or because they think that I’m not going to spot that it’s someone else’s work. All of those things need to be dealt with. Otherwise, it’s just going to happen again.

By recognizing that these issues need to be addressed rather than punished, the instructors were working within the nurturing, caring facet of the teacher role.

It should also be noted that several (n=6) of the instructors interviewed talked about using MT as L2 Japanese speakers living in Japan, describing the benefits of tools like “a widget on [Google] Chrome that automatically lets me read Japanese websites in English” and a smartphone application that lets the user “just point the camera at Japanese text and [have] it morph[...] into English words.” One instructor talked about how much easier it is to communicate with university administrative staff now that written information can be so easily processed from one language to the other: “DeepL saves me, and the staff in the office, so much time and bother.” None of these six participants described using these tools to better their L2 skills, with one describing rather how she no longer feels the need to work on her Japanese skills: “it’s as if a burden has been taken off my shoulders.” She went on to describe how difficult she had found learning Japanese as an adult beginner, and because of the differences between it and more familiar, European languages. This was a theme that several (n=4) instructors mentioned. None acknowledged that for their Japanese students, English is similarly foreign. Instead, they assumed that their own relief finding how MT removed the necessity for laborious translation and eased communicative difficulties would be similarly felt by their students, and would result in them, too, abandoning L2 language-learning efforts.

As previously noted, during the ERTL period instructors were unable to talk to students about the work that they suspected to have been copied or machine generated in an informal manner because the only communication was via written message via the LMS. This was problematic for four reasons. Firstly, the instructors’ strategy of standing next to the student and waiting for them to either capitulate or explain rested on physical presence, and the synchronous passing of time. A written message does not allow for either of these. Secondly, while a teacher asking a student about the academic integrity of their work is a serious matter, the formality of written rather than spoken communication means that many felt that the first, familiar, more intimate step of talking about the problem had been omitted. Thirdly, text-based messages are also easily misinterpreted (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014), and the level of intensity of the writer’s intention misjudged (Hernandez, 2021). Finally, everything that is posted on or uploaded to the LMS becomes an item of

permanent record that might affect the teacher, the student, or both, adversely in the future. As such, instructors were reluctant to write to students about their suspicions, with one noting she was hesitant to “put anything in written form. I didn’t want anything to come back and, you know, cause a problem.” Asked what she meant, the instructor explained that putting something in writing made her vulnerable to criticism from the university administration should a student complain.

Again, showing the caring, nurturing, protective aspect of the teacher role, the same instructor and one other worried that writing a message to a student about academic integrity on the LMS might blight their academic record. These two instructors took different courses of action. The first, despite her misgivings, wrote to a student who she felt was making “literally unbelievable leaps and bounds” in his learning. She tried to follow her usual procedure of showing rather than telling the student the problem. As such, she returned his assignment to him on the LMS having highlighted all the grammatical and spelling mistakes in one part of the essay and drawn a large rectangular box around another similarly sized “perfectly unblemished” area of text. In her accompanying message, she asked the student to explain why there were so many errors in one part of the assignment and not in the other. The student’s reaction was effectively to drop out of the class by no longer submitting the weekly assignments. While he was accessing the course frequently, sometimes twenty or more times each day, he was not interacting with the material that she posted on the site. Initially concerned for him, she sent messages of reassurance, but these received no reply. Even a request for him to make contact sent through Student Services was ignored. His behavior came to seem “more and more threatening.” “What was he planning? How could this pan out?” “I found myself really doubting my treatment of him. Had I screwed up?” Her effort to transfer her regular classroom methodology into the on-demand medium was not successful and led to a period of intense self-doubt. When other students in this instructor’s classes showed similar evidence of the use of MT, online grammar checkers or perhaps simple cut-and-paste from the Internet, she pretended not to notice.

The other instructor who was concerned about the potential impact of a virtual paper trail implicating a student in an academic misconduct problem decided to ask her classes about how they were performing the academic writing tasks that she set for them each week rather than accuse them of something and potentially damage the teacher–student relationship. She assigned a three-minute video presentation task and asked that students describe their writing processes, and this data forms the second data set for this article. Her students reported making use of a wide range of tools to support their learning and spoke candidly about developing processes to not only streamline their work, but also to deepen their learning and make it more personally satisfying. They described using paper, electronic, and online dictionaries, and online concordances, proofreading their work with online grammar sites, and translating L1 sentences with MT before paraphrasing them or swapping out unfamiliar vocabulary. A subset of learners also described using MT for whole document translation at the end of their writing process to check their work before submission. Several of these students expressed thoughts like, “does my essay truly communicate my opinions?”, and “I use a translation site to make sure one more time it is truly my ideas.” (Student quotes have been left unedited to reflect their authentic voices.) The

more of these tools that learners reported using, the more significant improvements they reported in their confidence in L2 writing ability.

Other students talked about how much time they spent on the assigned tasks each week. Some complained about the amount of homework. Others expressed gratitude, either for their teacher's careful preparation and feedback, or for the time at home that the preventative pandemic lockdown had given them. "I am sure I learn more because we are under this situation." "I work hard doing assignments so that I don't regret [wasting] this time."

When the processes that the students described using to produce course assignments are considered alongside the instructors' interpretations of the assignments that were submitted to them, it becomes clear that there is an urgent need for both students and instructors to understand one another's perspectives. A large majority of students reported their motivation to both attain good course grades and to improve their L2 and academic writing skills, and highlighted their use of MT and other technological tools as being the most efficient way to achieve these goals simultaneously. Instructors, however, regarded the grammatically and lexically perfect text that their students produced as being so different from that achievable by students unsupported by technology that they were unable to see it as the earnest effort that it was.

Conclusion

The importance of carefully established and maintained teacher–student relationships cannot be overstated in any classroom, virtual or face-to-face. Trust, built on shared goals and experiences, benefits both groups. This article builds on previous research, notably by Hagenauer et al. (2015), that describes the impact of good quality relationships between teachers and their students on teacher well-being, and adds to the presently limited body of work focussing on teachers rather than students (see Corbin et al., 2019; Spilt et al., 2011.) For the ten instructors of L2 academic writing at the Japanese national university described here, building trust with their students in the ERTL context proved difficult, however, and led to them doubting their teaching skills and their students' academic integrity. This occurred for two reasons. Firstly, because they had not considered how important finding ways to get to know their students would become within the new on-demand medium of instruction, they instead focussed on the technical details of setting up their lessons online. Secondly, there was a need for greater awareness of the potential benefits of MT and online grammar checkers to be used in ways that are beneficial to learning rather than simply as labor-saving devices or as ways to attain undeserved academic grades. Moving forward it is important that instructors reflect on the need to not only build relationships with their students, but also facilitate learning by trusting that learners will do their best with the tools available to them. By respecting students' drive to acquire academic skills, instructors can not only foster positive teacher–student relationships, but in doing so, improve learning outcomes and increase their own well-being.

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Author’s bio

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