

Student Voice in Distance Education – Initial Analysis

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Background

- Senior Lecturer in Professional Development and International Education at the University of Sunderland
- Programme Leader for MA Education (on campus and distance education). Previously worked on and led UoS international PGCE Education (distance education).
- Worked in education for 20 years and a career changer into HE
- Interest in student voice and sense of belonging as part of my Professional Doctorate research
- Established Student Voice for our distance education students on PGCE Education, PGCE Early Years and PGCE iQTS (Primary and Secondary).

Course changes due to student voice

- Trainees are now given earlier feedback on their teaching from UoS staff on PGCE Education. This has changed after the last round of student voice feedback
- Reduced requirement for lesson planning evidence
- Increased flexibility for accessing subject specialist sessions (PGCE iQTS only)
- Reduced academic content on practice and theory module.
- Completing second school experience (PGCE iQTS only) at any point in the year
- Adapting frequency of seminars in semester two (PGCE Education)

Research Questions

How is student voice is experienced by distance education students?

What does an effective student voice design for distance education look like?

PEO framework	
Population (who is the question focused on?)	Distance education students
Exposure (what is the issue being explored?)	Student voice
Outcomes/themes (What is to be examined?)	Experiences and effectiveness

Questionnaire creation

- Co-creation with DE students
- Open questions moved to interviews
- Student Voice preference as ranking. Six options: 1. Verbal feedback via Teams, 2. Feedback via a course representative, 3. Written feedback submitted via email, 4. Online discussion board dedicated to feedback, 5. Online survey (multiple choice, Likert scale), or 6. A combination of these methods
- Trialled questionnaire with feedback from Centre for Teaching Excellence team, a former DE student working in software development and a colleague with a lot of experience of the University Ethics Committee

Questionnaire and initial analysis

- All students studying at distance.
- Three different forms of distance education: 1. Fully asynchrononous, 2. Combination of asynchronous and live online seminars. 3. Combination of asynchronous learning, live online seminars and in person mentoring.
- 305 responses from 61 different countries
- Ten areas of study including: Teacher Training, Law, Nursing, Business, Computing, Psychology and Engineering
- 166 interested in being interviewed. 16 interviewed across three forms of distance education

Initial analysis

- Online survey and written feedback via email were the most popular choices.
- It is worth noting that feedback via a course rep was particularly unpopular. Put most commonly as 4th,5th,6th choice.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The questionnaire feedback consistently showed that the most popular format for student voice feedback would be an online survey with written feedback, submitted via email, as second choice. Why do you think this may be?

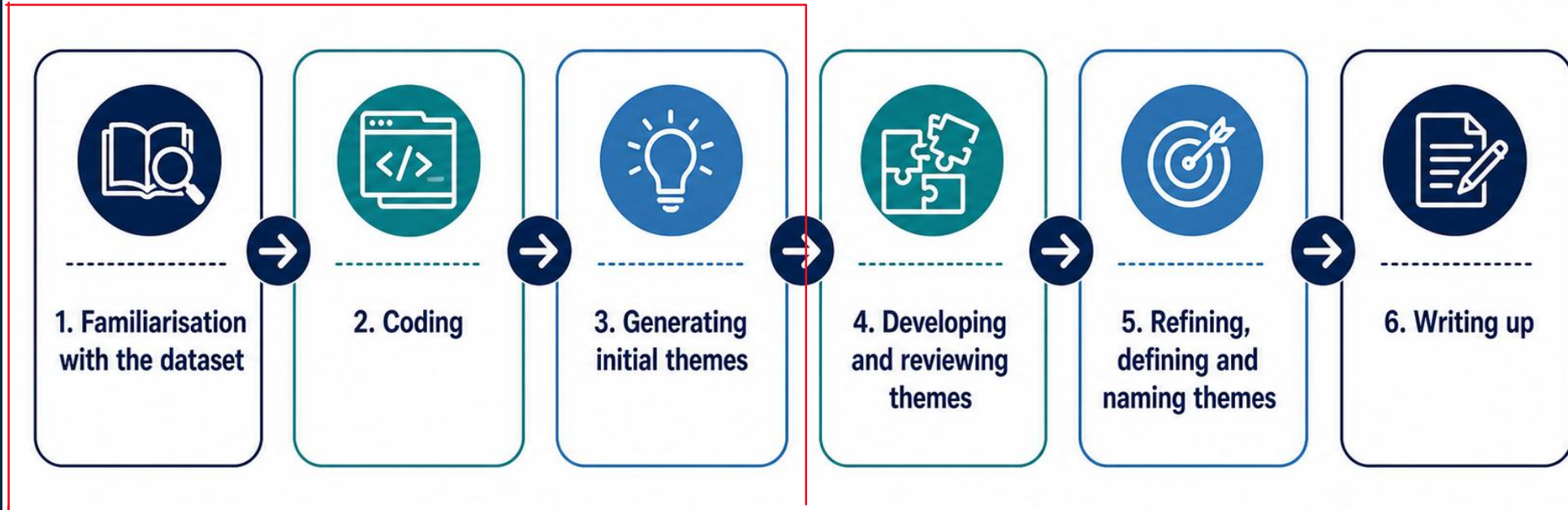
What questions do you think should be asked in student voice feedback submitted via online survey or written responses? What is important to you?

The questionnaire feedback also consistently showed that course reps were consistently one of the least preferred options for student voice. Why do you think this may be?

What would an effective student feedback process look like for DE students?

How could responses rates for online student voice survey questionnaires/and/or written feedback via email be maximised?

Six Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis



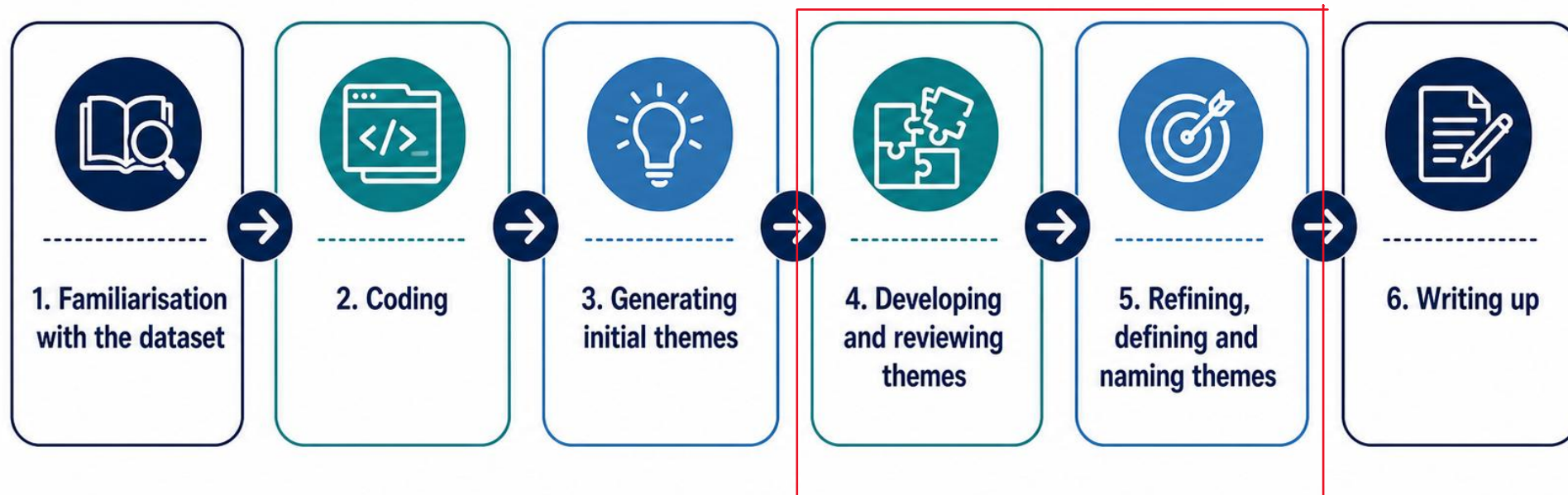
Interviews

16 Interviews were conducted with students learning across different forms of distance education

Initial themes

1. Strong preference for asynchronous feedback
2. Co-creating surveys to ensure relevance and buy-in
3. Anonymity and psychological safety
4. Course reps are not suitable for distance education
5. Close the feedback loop
6. Inclusion and parity of treatment

Six Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis



Reviewing Themes

Interviews

16 Interviews were conducted with students learning across different forms of distance education

Theme Revision and Development – Overall

- Agency and representation. Reimagining student voice for distance education
- Speaking honestly. Trust and psychological safety
- Student voice as a human-environment-technology entanglement
- Human connection enables student voice

Theme One. Agency and representation. Reimagining student voice for distance education

This theme is about students wanting more control over how and when they give feedback. Traditional student voice models, especially course reps, do not work well for distance education. Especially as they may not know each other, study asynchronously, share modules for a limited period of time or have very different contexts.

Theme Two. Speaking honestly. Trust and psychological safety

This theme focus is about whether students feel psychologically safe in order to to give honest feedback. It includes areas such as anonymity, power and fear of consequences

Theme Three. Student voice as a human-environment-technology entanglement

Voice is more than individual students and is shaped by wider life circumstances. It is an entanglement of actants (Latour 2005), such as technology, platforms, study spaces, employment, caring responsibilities, time. They influence opportunities to speak.

Theme Four. Human connection enables student voice

Human connection helps students use their voice. Trusted staff members such as module leaders or Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) can enable students to raise concerns, highlight what is working well, ask questions and feel seen.

Next steps

- Review scripts again
- Review codes and themes.
- Scope drawing on wider theory such as relational pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning