



From Critique to Insight: Student Voices on English Writing Feedback

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Abstract

This study delves into the pivotal role of feedback in English writing instruction, a crucial element for enhancing language proficiency and writing skills among English language learners. The primary aim of the research is to examine students' perceptions of teacher feedback and to identify the types of feedback they receive, which are essential for improving teaching strategies and student outcomes. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research analyzed responses from 22 students, collected through a questionnaire adapted from the frameworks of Lee (2011) and Ellis & Sheen (2011) to reflect the local educational setting. The results reveal a mixed reception to teacher feedback: while it is valued for improving writing skills, it also sometimes causes confusion and anxiety due to unclear instructions or the use of complex metalinguistic symbols. The types of feedback reported include direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback. Direct feedback proved effective in enhancing clarity and understanding, whereas indirect and metalinguistic feedback was occasionally linked to negative emotions such as anxiety and embarrassment. Despite these challenges, the study concludes that properly structured feedback can significantly foster cognitive development, prompting students to refine their thought processes, explore ideas independently, and become adept at self-correction. This underscores the need for educators to consider both the content and delivery of feedback to maximize its effectiveness and minimize potential stressors for learners.

Keywords: English writing, teacher's feedback, perspectives, L2 learning

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is a vital element in a process-oriented approach to writing. As Schwab et al. (2022) suggest, feedback significantly enhances students' English writing skills. Teachers provide feedback, offering valuable insights on writing tasks to aid students in revising their work for better academic outcomes and language skill development. The feedback typically includes comments on the form and content of compositions, draft evaluations, and error

corrections. In the writing process, teachers are tasked with reviewing students' assignments for content, organization, idea development, accuracy, word choice, tenses, punctuation, and spelling (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). To overcome these challenges, teachers and students must collaborate to improve writing techniques and effectively evaluate feedback. Feedback that is timely, accurate, constructive, outcome-focused, encouraging, and positive can greatly enhance the quality of English writing assignments (Schwab et al. 2022).

Irwin (2017) identified various types of teacher feedback in writing, including lexical, grammatical, structural, content feedback, and general comments. These comments can range from words of praise and encouragement to critical remarks, such as requests for clarification, elicitation, recasting, repetition, and acclaim. These feedback types can shape the methods and strategies students employ in their writing. Students may perceive feedback positively or negatively. Positive feedback can inspire students to set goals, adopt new strategies, and manage resources effectively (Mamoon-Al-Bashir et al., 2016). However, both positive and negative comments can influence the outcomes of L2 writing tasks, depending on students' perception of the feedback and their efforts to improve their academic writing skills. Motivated students can take appropriate actions, use feedback to improve their work, and play a crucial role in determining problem-solving strategies in L2 writing (Saidon et al. 2018). Interestingly, teachers often provide positive feedback more frequently than negative feedback, fostering a learning environment that encourages social acceptance (Burner, 2015).

Besides, feedback can be given in oral or written form (Rezazadeh et al. 2018). Many scholars have defined types of teacher feedback. The following types of teacher feedback are proposed by scholars: Teachers' feedback is divided into two types: direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback impacts students' learning progress and academic achievement (Hattie, & Timperley, 2007). Direct feedback focuses on students' errors, while indirect feedback involves teachers giving general comments about students' errors and asking them to revise on their own. The types of feedback proposed by Ellis (2009) have five components: (1) direct feedback: focusing on form, (2) indirect feedback: underlining errors without providing corrections, (3) metalinguistic: using codes as clues to indicate errors, such as art: article, ww: wrong word., (4) focus of feedback: correcting all errors or selecting one or two to correct, divided into unfocused feedback: extensive feedback or focused feedback: intensive feedback, (5) electronic feedback: providing a hyperlink to indicate errors, and (6) Reformulation: combining direct correction and revision. The teacher indicates and corrects errors directly to construct the correct formulation. In another study, types of teacher feedback proposed by Irwin (2017) in writing include lexical feedback, grammatical feedback, structural feedback, content feedback, and general comments, such as words of praise and encouragement

Recent studies have explored various aspects of teacher feedback across diverse educational contexts. For instance, a study by Tan et al. (2019) probed into students' perceptions of teacher feedback via respectful inquiry in independent schools in Western Australia. The study underscored the significance of reciprocal feedback interactions in fostering self-regulation and enhancing writing skills. In a separate study, Simpson (2006) explored the attitudes of EFL students towards different styles of teacher feedback

addressing content, organization, and communication issues in writing tasks at a public university in Columbia. The study found that positive remarks and suggestions boosted student motivation and improved the quality of their writing. In addition, in the context of language learning and teaching, feedback is widely acknowledged as a crucial element, particularly in second language writing. Studies suggest the importance of tailoring feedback to meet learners' individual needs and concerns. However, [Şeker and Dinçer \(2014\)](#) study in Turkey found that feedback processes should be informed by students' perceptions and preferences to ensure effectiveness.

Despite the critical role of teacher feedback in enhancing writing skills, research focusing on the feedback forms for public health students is notably limited. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the perspectives of students on the comments provided by their English writing teachers and the types of feedback they receive on their writing assignments. In academic settings, students are expected to adhere to certain standards that emphasize text organization and unity. Teacher feedback is pivotal in this context as it addresses not just surface-level errors but also delves into vocabulary, content, grammar, and the structure of second language (L2) writing tasks.

The collaboration between teachers and students is essential to identify and overcome the challenges in teaching and learning writing. The impact and effectiveness of teacher feedback on student writing proficiency in English remains a contentious and vital topic. This research is driven by two primary questions: (1) What are the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perceptions of their teachers' feedback in English writing instruction? (2) What types of feedback do students typically receive on their writing assignments?

The objectives of this study are to explore and document students' perceptions of teacher feedback within English writing instruction and to categorize the types of feedback that teachers commonly provide. This paper aims to assess the appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency of written teacher feedback and explores ways it can be optimized to significantly enhance students' writing proficiency. By focusing on these aspects, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the practice of teaching writing and to foster improvements in educational outcomes for public health students.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to evaluate Public Health students' perceptions of teacher feedback and the types of feedback they received on their writing assignments. The flexible design of the study allows for a comprehensive investigation into the viewpoints and experiences of the participants ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). The participants, who were enrolled in an English writing course at STIK in Palembang and had completed writing tasks, were selected using purposive sampling. This resulted in a total of 22 respondents. Two out of three writing tasks completed by the students were collected for analysis. These tasks included first drafts, rough drafts, and final drafts. The study examined the feedback provided by teachers on the organization, content, and mechanics of writing, as well as the focus of their comments on students' tasks.

The questionnaires, adapted from [Lee \(2011\)](#) and [Ellis & Sheen \(2011\)](#) and modified to fit the local context, were divided into two sections. The first section contained a 7-item

Likert scale questionnaire assessing students' perceptions of teachers' feedback in teaching L2 writing. The second section consisted of a 10-item Likert scale questionnaire measuring students' opinions on the types of feedback received. Data collection involved distributing these questionnaires and collecting two sets of student work for analysis. The collected data was then described using percentage analysis, providing insights into students' perspectives and the types of feedback they received in their writing tasks.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed the frequency of the EFL students' perceptions toward the teacher's feedback in teaching L2 writing.

The students' perspectives of teacher's feedback in teaching English writing

To address the first research question, a detailed questionnaire was distributed to students, aiming to assess their perspectives on teacher feedback, with the findings presented in Table 1. The data reveals that a significant majority of the students recognize the substantial impact of teacher feedback on their writing performance. Specifically, 78.3% of the participants strongly agreed that such feedback significantly enhances their writing abilities. Additionally, an equivalent percentage acknowledged that it is instrumental in analyzing errors and fostering idea generation for their writing tasks. Furthermore, the responses indicate a strong motivational aspect of feedback; 56.5% of students strongly agreed, and 39.1% agreed, that feedback from instructors spurred them to improve their assignments promptly. This collective response underscores the critical role that constructive feedback plays not only in skill enhancement but also in motivating students towards continuous improvement and active engagement in their learning processes.

The positive impact of teacher feedback on students' cognitive development and writing quality is strongly reflected in their responses. Students noted a decrease in errors and an improvement in their writing scores, attributing these enhancements to the feedback they received. This demonstrates their growing ability to independently analyze and correct their errors, underscoring the critical role that feedback plays in fostering improvement in second language (L2) writing tasks. However, the data also reveals a contrasting perspective among a substantial segment of participants. A majority expressed negative views regarding the impact of feedback on their writing process, with a significant number strongly disagreeing that feedback assists in their thought processes for completing writing tasks or in effectively correcting errors. This sentiment suggests a confidence in their self-correction capabilities. Additionally, many participants strongly disagreed that feedback heightened their awareness of the need to improve their writing skills, indicating a perceived lack of effectiveness in encouraging reflective practice. This dichotomy highlights the complex and varied influences of feedback on student learning and the importance of tailoring feedback to meet individual student needs and perceptions.

Table 1. Students' perception towards teachers' feedback

No.	Statement	Percentage (%)			
		SA	A	D	SD
1	Teacher's feedback can improve my writing ability.	21.7	78.3	0	0

2	I can analyze the errors and mistakes in my writing task after given the feedback	13	78.3	8.7	0
3	Feedback helps how to find out the new ideas for my writing tasks	26.1	73	0	0
4	Feedback given helps the way of my thinking to accomplish my writing tasks.	0	30.4	69.6	0
5	I correct errors to the best of my ability rather than based on feedback.	4.3	13	73.9	8.7
6	The feedback given by the lecturer motivated me to improve my writing assignment immediately.	56.5	39.1	4.3	0
7	Feedback raises my awareness of the need to improve my writing abilities.	0	8.7	65.2	26.1

Students may respond to feedback in both positive and negative ways, which can influence their learning progress. It is crucial for students to understand and absorb the feedback provided by teachers, as this can help them adjust their behavior and attitude towards learning, potentially leading to improved academic development (Gamlen & Smith, 2013). Positive responses may occur when students find feedback constructive and helpful in enhancing the quality of their writing. Conversely, negative feedbacks may arise when students struggle with writing tasks and perceive feedback as ineffective in improving their writing skills and decline students' motivation (Weidinger et al. 2016). Additionally, teachers' feedback may trigger negative emotions such as frustration and anger, particularly when students feel pressured by time constraints or lack opportunities to address feedback effectively. Furthermore, the length and complexity of feedback can contribute to emotional responses, potentially leading to feelings of anxiety and confusion among students (Schwab et al. 2022).

Types of teacher's feedback did students receive on their writing assignments

The feedback provided in this educational context can be classified into three distinct types, as adapted from the framework proposed by Ellis (2011): direct feedback, indirect feedback, and metalinguistic feedback. This structured approach to feedback aims to cater to different learning styles and needs, facilitating a more nuanced and effective learning process.

Direct feedback

Direct feedback plays a crucial role in educational settings, where instructors actively identify and rectify errors to aid students in crafting correct and effective textual expressions. An analysis of the data from Table 2 reveals interesting patterns in how students receive feedback on different aspects of writing. For instance, a significant portion of students (72.7%) reported receiving feedback on spelling and word choice occasionally, while half of the respondents indicated the same frequency for feedback on grammatical errors. Additionally, 54.5% of students noted occasional feedback on issues related to commas, punctuation, and sentence completion, whereas 36.4% received similar feedback concerning the main ideas and content of paragraphs. Importantly, the clarity of the feedback appears effective, with a majority (72.7%) of students describing the feedback as

consistently readable and understandable by selecting "always." This suggests that while the frequency of feedback on specific writing elements varies, the overall quality and clarity of the feedback provided are highly regarded by students, enhancing their learning experience.

Table 2. Direct feedback

No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Almost never
1	The feedback I received concerned misspellings and the correct word choice in the sentences I constructed.	13.6	9.1	72.7	4.5
2	Feedback was given regarding grammar errors in the sentences I wrote.	4.5	31.8	50	13.6
3	Feedback on commas, punctuation, and incomplete sentences was provided.	0	0	54.5	18.2
4	Feedback was provided regarding errors in the main idea and content of the paragraph.	13.6	22.7	36.4	27.3
5	Lecturers provide feedback that is both readable and understandable.	72.7	22.7	4.5	0

In terms of direct feedback, the majority of students selected "sometimes" for mechanics, grammar, and the main idea and content. However, it is important to note that grammatical inaccuracies significantly impact the quality of students' writing (Saidon et al. 2018). As highlighted in Zhan (2016) study, grammar holds particular importance in writing assignments, emphasizing the critical role of appropriate grammar and mechanics in completing writing tasks. Teachers can easily provide direct feedback by offering corrections, as demonstrated in Figure 1. According to Carvalho et al. (2014), such direct feedback can boost student motivation and increase self-awareness. Specifically, when students receive clear feedback, especially regarding grammar and mechanics, they become more conscious of their mistakes in English writing tasks. This heightened awareness often motivates them to rectify or minimize these errors in subsequent writing endeavors.

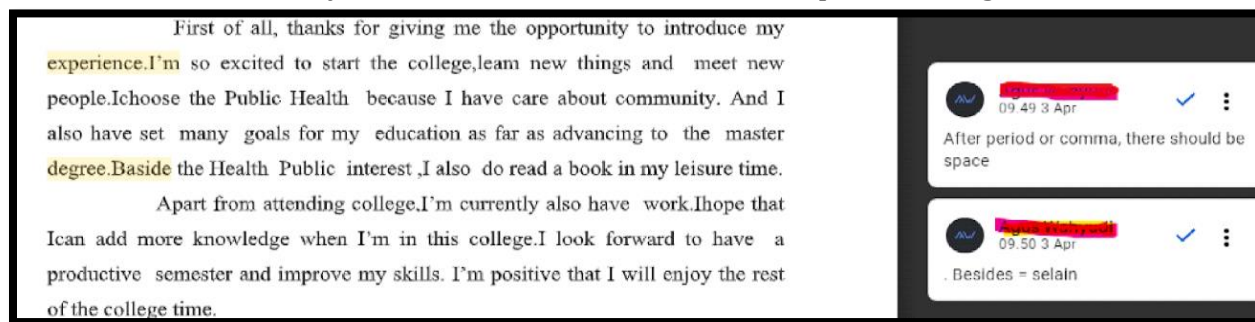


Figure 1. Student's writing drafts

As depicted in Figure 1, the teacher provided direct feedback that included specific corrections aimed at improving the students' writing mechanics. For example, the teacher noted, "After a period or comma, there should be a space," clearly pointing out a common punctuation error. Additionally, the teacher addressed errors in capitalization, offering

corrections that enhanced the students' understanding of proper noun usage and sentence structure. This direct approach not only clarifies the specific errors but also guides students in applying these corrections in future writing, ensuring a clearer understanding of standard writing conventions.

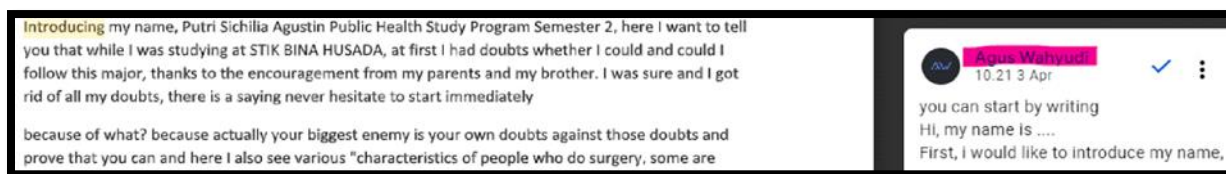


Figure 2. Teacher’s feedback

Yet, by offering corrections, students can improve their written English without necessarily engaging their cognitive skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2017). Moreover, providing direct revisions enables students to identify their errors while avoiding the exploration of cognitive aspects.

Indirect feedback

In indirect feedback, teachers typically offer words or phrases of praise, such as "good job," "nice work," and "perfect." These expressions are consistently categorized as "always" by 40.9% of students. Additionally, reprimands such as "be serious," "focus more," and "please revise" are also frequently labeled as "always," chosen by 31.8% of students when receiving feedback on their writing assignments, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Indirect feedback

No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Almost never
6	Lecturers give feedback by using words of praise and encouragement like good job, it's nice, and perfect.	40.9	36.4	22.7	0
7	Lecturers give feedback by using reprimand words such as let's be serious, more focus, please revise, be consistent, and so on.	31.8	27.3	22.7	18.2

According to Harter (2012), the use of praise words can effectively encourage students to adhere to rules and regulations. However, it is important to reserve praise for students who have demonstrated exceptional performance in writing, labeling them as "excellent" and substantiating their achievements to bolster their confidence in their abilities. Conversely, it is crucial to refrain from offering praise to students who have underperformed, as this may evoke feelings of shame and distress, ultimately hindering their learning experience. Therefore, strategic use of praise can facilitate students' progress toward achieving their writing objectives (Poorebrahim, 2017).

Indirect feedback typically consists of presenting suggestions and posing questions, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. Educators often guide with comments like, "The conjunction should not be used at the beginning of the sentence," and "Please ensure this relates to STIK's

university life." In terms of inquiries, teachers use indirect feedback to stimulate deeper thinking and understanding. For example, they might ask, "What does 'completing the study loudly' imply?" This method encourages students to reflect on their choices and the implications of their writing, promoting a more interactive and thoughtful learning process.

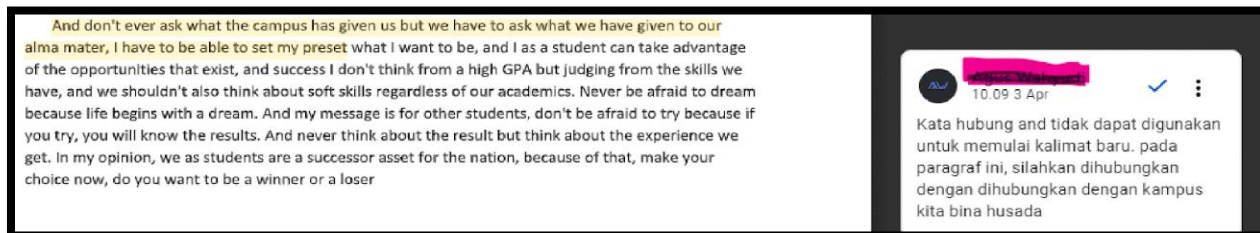


Figure 3. Teacher's feedback

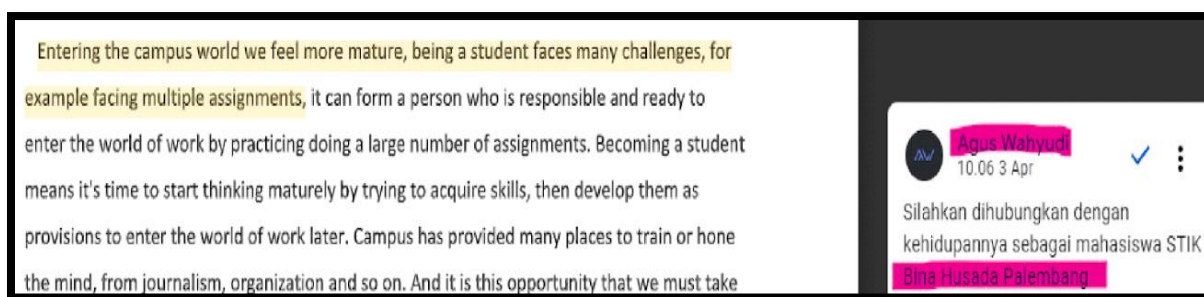


Figure 4. Teacher's feedback

Effective feedback has a significant impact on students' learning experiences. It not only enhances the quality of their subsequent work but also motivates them to actively engage in learning. By carefully reviewing their work, students can avoid frustration and negative emotions when completing English writing tasks. Indirect feedback, particularly in the form of questions, plays a vital role in stimulating students' cognitive skills. By encouraging students to explore their own ideas, this type of feedback helps them identify mistakes and errors in their writing independently, reducing their reliance on teacher feedback. Additionally, the use of open-ended questions promotes cognitive engagement by increasing students' awareness of their errors (Cheng et al. 2015).

Moreover, feedback fosters students' writing capabilities by facilitating the analysis of mistakes and the exploration of new ideas for writing tasks. This encourages students to adopt a proactive approach to completing writing assignments. Furthermore, indirect feedback contributes to students' motivation by promoting dialogue and discussion about their second language writing tasks. By clarifying the meaning of feedback, teachers can enhance students' understanding and motivation (Harter, 2012). Additionally, providing motivational feedback and learning goals can bolster teachers' confidence and optimism (Putri et al. 2021; Vattøy and Smith, 2019).

Metalinguistics

In the field of metalinguistics, students frequently encounter a range of symbols and codes on their writing assignments, including question marks, "X," and various other annotations. These are used with notable regularity—27.3% of students report that such

markings are used "always," "often," or "sometimes," while 59.1% see them as "always" or "often." Teachers employ these tools not just for correction, but as a means to guide students in refining their writing. Common symbols like "ex." are used to highlight examples or areas needing attention, whereas ellipses ("...") often indicate an incomplete sentence, prompting students to engage critically by filling in the missing words. For instance, a sentence like "My name is..." invites students to consider their response and complete the thought, fostering deeper reflection and learning.

Table 4. Metalinguistics

No	Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Almost never
8	The lecturer provided feedback by indicating errors in sentences that I needed to find and correct using symbols.?, X, and so on.	27.3	27.3	27.3	18.2
9	The lecturer provided feedback by crossing out errors and correcting them for me.	31.8	9.1	40.9	18.2
10	The lecturer provided feedback by identifying the type of error using code, which I corrected. Such as: <i>He flied to Japan.</i> *	31.8	27.3	27.3	13.6

However, teachers' feedback can sometimes deter students from revising their work (Wen, 2013). This reluctance often stems from teachers using abbreviations, codes, and vague suggestions for improvement, along with a focus on surface-level errors such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Furthermore, teachers may employ implicit instructions, leaving students unsure whether to edit, revise the task, or expand their knowledge (Poorebrahim, 2017). Meta-linguistic feedback presents another approach to error correction, where teachers encourage students to self-correct rather than simply providing the correct form. Moreover, providing students with meta-linguistic information about the error, such as additional context or explanations, has been shown to be more effective than direct feedback (Schwab et al. 2022).

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the complex attitudes students have towards teachers' feedback on their English writing. Generally, students view feedback positively, appreciating its role in enhancing their writing skills and inspiring new ideas. It motivates them to revise and maintain engagement in the writing process. However, feedback also presents challenges; it can heighten students' awareness of their errors, leading to frustration, particularly when compounded by time constraints, confusion, or the complexity of the feedback itself. The nature of the feedback—direct, indirect, or metalinguistic—significantly shapes students' experiences. Direct feedback, focusing on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and content, boosts motivation and self-awareness but doesn't consistently engage cognitive skills. Indirect feedback, including praise and questions, promotes independent thinking and

problem-solving in writing tasks, enhancing error correction and task completion autonomy. Metalinguistic feedback, using symbols like question marks, varies in use and effectiveness, occasionally causing confusion and stress due to its implicit nature. Despite these issues, feedback is vital in the writing process, improving self-awareness, fostering positive behaviors, and developing cognitive skills. By integrating various types of feedback effectively, teachers can enhance students' motivation and critical thinking, helping them refine their work, learn from past drafts, and reduce errors in future assignments.

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