

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FEEDBACK UTILIZATION STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of feedback in improving EFL students' academic writing by examining its functions, implementation strategies, and challenges from both students' and lecturers' perspectives. While previous studies have focused on feedback effectiveness and types, limited attention has been given to how students internalize and apply feedback through reflection and the challenges involved. This study employed a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach and was conducted at Yogyakarta State University, specifically in the fourth-semester Academic Writing course of the English Language Education undergraduate program. The participants consisted of seven students and one lecturer. Data validity was ensured through triangulation. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis, including draft writings with feedback annotations, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results show that feedback enhances EFL students' academic writing by improving accuracy and developing critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, and learner autonomy. It serves as both a corrective and developmental tool through interpretation, reflection, and revision using strategies such as categorization, self-reflection, peer collaboration, and digital tools. Despite improvements, challenges involving time, technical feedback comprehension, and emotional responses remained. Theoretically, this study extends EFL feedback literature by conceptualizing feedback as a learner-mediated process that integrates cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions in academic writing development. Practically, the findings provide implications for designing more dialogic, reflective, and student-centered feedback practices that enhance feedback literacy and academic writing instruction in higher education.

Keywords: *Feedback; Academic Writing; EFL Students; Feedback Strategies*

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INTRODCUTION

Academic writing is an essential skill in higher education, particularly in an English as a foreign language (EFL) environment. It not only conveys ideas and research findings

(Suastra & Menggo, 2020) but also develops students' critical thinking and creativity (Adizovna, 2023). As the foundation of academic communication, academic writing follows specific standards and conventions to ensure systematic and coherent writing (Schillings et al., 2023; Algburi & Razali, 2022). One important factor in improving academic writing is feedback. Feedback provides information about students' strengths and weaknesses, guides improvement (Yu et al., 2020), helps identify structural and content errors, and strengthens understanding of academic writing conventions (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022; Asnas et al., 2022). Therefore, appropriate feedback and its effective utilization are essential in the writing learning process.

However, not all students can utilize feedback optimally. Differences in how students respond to feedback, from in-depth revision to surface-level changes, indicate a gap in understanding (Henderson et al., 2021). Students also face linguistic and psychological challenges, including difficulty understanding lecturers' comments, time constraints, and writing anxiety (Algburi & Razali, 2022). Thus, feedback should be viewed not only as instructional information but also as an interactive learning process shaped by students' engagement. Previous studies Fatima et al., (2024), Wulandari, (2022), and Fitriyah et al., (2023) have shown that feedback positively contributes to writing quality and revision practices. However, these studies mainly focus on feedback effectiveness, types, delivery, or general perceptions, with limited attention to how students interpret and utilize feedback, develop metacognitive skills, and manage contextual and affective factors.

More importantly, research integrating these dimensions in the Indonesian EFL higher education context remains limited. Few studies have examined feedback roles, students' strategies, and challenges from both students' and lecturers' perspectives. Students' lived experiences are important because feedback effectiveness depends on how they perceive, interpret, and apply feedback during revision. These experiences influence feedback literacy, metacognitive awareness, self-regulation, and writing development. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is needed to explore feedback as a reflective learning experience.

A literature review shows that feedback can correct errors, provide guidance, strengthen writing competence, and develop effective writing strategies. Specific and constructive feedback can enhance metacognitive awareness and encourage meaningful revision. However, linguistic, psychological, and time-related challenges may affect its implementation. Therefore, effective feedback delivery is essential for students to internalize and apply it. Integrating feedback with formative assessment can further support reflection and continuous learning in academic writing.

This study explores how feedback improves EFL students' academic writing, the strategies they use, and the challenges they face. As Nicol, (2020) explains, feedback involves not only receiving information but also internalizing and making meaning from it. The study addresses three questions: (1) How does feedback improve EFL students' academic writing? (2) What strategies do students use to integrate feedback? and (3) What challenges do they face? Using a phenomenological perspective, the study examines students' lived experiences and integrates cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and contextual dimensions from both students' and lecturers' perspectives. The findings aim to enrich feedback theory and support more dialogic, reflective, and learner-centered practices.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach to explore how EFL students and lecturers experienced and understood feedback in academic writing.

This approach was chosen because it focuses not only on describing experiences but also on interpreting their meanings. It was considered suitable for examining the cognitive, emotional, and contextual processes involved in how students use feedback to improve their writing. The qualitative approach explores the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). In this study, it examined students' and lecturers' experiences of giving, receiving, interpreting, and using feedback in academic writing. The interpretive phenomenological approach helped researchers understand participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections on feedback practices.

Participant and Setting

The participants were seven fourth-semester students and one Academic Writing lecturer, selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in the feedback process and willingness to participate. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and writing documents, including drafts, lecturer feedback, and student revisions. These multiple data sources supported methodological triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of feedback utilization. The study was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture, Yogyakarta State University, during the fourth-semester Academic Writing course.

Data collection

Data collection techniques included observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Non-participatory observations were conducted to record students' responses to the feedback provided.

Observation

The observation aimed to examine how students received and responded to feedback, including comments, suggestions, and criticism on their writing assignments. The researchers acted as non-participatory observers and used observation sheets and field notes to collect data. The observation sheet was adapted from Putri, (2021).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore students' and lecturers' views and experiences regarding feedback strategies and effectiveness. Using a semi-structured interview guide adapted from (Hadiyanti, 2013) & (Wahyuni, 2023). participants were encouraged to respond freely and in depth. The questions covered students' understanding and strategies for using feedback, difficulties in interpreting feedback, and lecturers' strategies for providing effective feedback. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed as part of the data collection process.

Document Analysis

Document analysis examined students' writing, the feedback provided by lecturers, and the revisions made to assess the impact of feedback on writing quality. The researchers collected and analyzed student writing assignments based on these criteria.

Data Validity

Data trustworthiness was ensured through methodological and source triangulation by comparing data from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where participants reviewed interview summaries for accuracy. Peer debriefing with research supervisors was also conducted to review coding and emerging themes and reduce researcher bias.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Creswell (2013). The analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the research process rather than only after all data had been collected.

Organizing and Preparing Data for Analysis

All observation notes, interview transcripts, and writing documents were organized systematically. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim before analysis.

Reading and Understanding the Data

The researchers repeatedly read the interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences and identify meaningful statements related to feedback utilization.

Data Coding

Initial coding used open coding to label meaningful data units representing participants' experiences, actions, perceptions, emotions, and responses to feedback. Similar codes were compared across data sources to identify recurring patterns, while new codes emerged inductively rather than being predetermined by existing theories.

Identifying Themes or Categories

After coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories and synthesized into themes. Themes were developed through constant comparison across participants and data sources to capture shared patterns while maintaining individual differences.

Theme Validation:

Theme credibility was ensured through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents. Themes were refined by revisiting transcripts and discussing coding and interpretations with research supervisors to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Developing a Representation or Description of the Data

The validated themes were presented narratively and supported by representative interview excerpts, observation findings, documentary evidence, and summary tables to illustrate the relationship between participants' experiences and the research questions.

Interpreting Findings

The themes were interpreted using the theoretical framework and previous studies, focusing on how participants understood feedback and how it supported their academic writing development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result and discussion should be written in different part. They should be presented continuously start from main result until supporting results and equipped with a discussion.

The findings are presented based on three themes identified through thematic analysis: (1) the role of feedback in improving academic writing, (2) strategies for implementing feedback, and (3) challenges in feedback utilization. Each theme is supported by representative quotations and interpreted to reflect participants' lived experiences, including both shared and differing perspectives.

Result

The Role of Feedback in Improving Academic Writing Skills in The EFL Context

The findings indicate that feedback improves EFL students' academic writing by serving as both a corrective tool and a means of metacognitive development. Through verbal and written feedback, students identified weaknesses in structure, argumentation, and academic language. Thematic analysis revealed six interrelated subthemes: (1) recognizing writing weaknesses, (2) structured feedback utilization, (3) developing reflective awareness and learner autonomy, (4) adaptive feedback strategies, (5) challenges

in feedback implementation, and (6) improvement in subsequent writing tasks. These themes reflected both shared and individual experiences in understanding and utilizing feedback. As expressed by Participant 1 in table 1,

"When the lecturer gave me comments on the argumentation section, I just realized that my idea was not strong enough."

The findings indicate that feedback increased students' awareness of weaknesses and encouraged deeper improvement. Students viewed feedback as a reflective learning experience that helped them identify problems in arguments, organization, and academic language, leading to more critical and conscious revision.

This process includes five main procedures: receiving, understanding, reflecting, applying, and re-evaluating feedback. In table Participant 3 said,

"I like it when I get comments directly in the document, because it helps me know where to improve,"

while Participant 2 stated,

"I usually focus first on the main idea and structure, then lastly I check the grammar or spelling," which shows a sequential strategy in revising writing.

Although both participants viewed feedback positively, they used different approaches. Participant 3 preferred explicit written comments, while Participant 2 systematically addressed ideas and organization before language errors. These differences reflect individual learning preferences. Overall, feedback improves writing quality while fostering reflective awareness, critical thinking, and independence. Participant 5 emphasized based on table 1 below,

"Feedback really helps me in writing clearly and makes me aware of mistakes... to make me more sensitive to mistakes and not repeat the same mistakes."

The findings show that feedback improved writing quality and encouraged reflection. Students became more aware of recurring errors and took greater responsibility for monitoring and revising their writing, indicating increased metacognitive awareness. Lecturers also adapted verbal and written feedback to students' needs through brief, personalized consultations. The lecturer said based on table 1,

"I give them verbal feedback... and sometimes I also write it down in a workbook. I think that will be very effective for me."

The lecturer used examples of paraphrasing and diction to clarify academic expectations and revision strategies. Feedback was delivered dialogically through written comments, verbal explanations, and individual consultations, allowing students to clarify misunderstandings, interpret feedback, and actively engage in revision.

However, there are several challenges faced, especially time constraints and technical difficulties of students in implementing feedback, especially in the paraphrasing aspect. The lecturer stated,

"The main challenge is probably time... sometimes one student only has three to four minutes."

The findings indicate that limited class time is a major obstacle to providing optimal feedback. Some students also struggle to apply complex writing techniques despite receiving explanations. Therefore, feedback effectiveness depends on students' readiness and continuous lecturer support through additional practice and training. Its success is reflected in improved writing quality in subsequent assignments. As the lecturer said,

"If their writing is better, then it means they understand my feedback from the previous meeting."

Overall, feedback effectiveness depended not only on the quality of lecturers' comments but also on students' ability and willingness to interpret and apply them. Although students used different forms of feedback, such as written comments, verbal explanations, and consultations, they shared a common experience: feedback became meaningful when actively interpreted and applied during revision. This process represents

the central essence of students' experiences in utilizing feedback in the EFL academic writing classroom.

Table 1. The Role of Feedback in Improving Academic Writing Skills in The EFL Context

No	Key Findings	Description	Participant Quote
1	The Essential Role of Feedback	Feedback helps students identify weaknesses and improve their writing in both structure and argumentation.	<i>"When the lecturer gave me comments on the argumentation section, I just realized that my idea was not strong enough."</i> (P1)
2	Students' Feedback Utilization Process	Students undergo several stages in utilizing feedback: receiving, understanding, reflecting, applying, and re-evaluating it.	<i>"I like it when I get comments directly in the document, because it helps me know where to improve."</i> (P3) <i>"I usually focus first on the main idea and structure, then lastly I check the grammar or spelling."</i> (P2)
3	Development of Reflective Awareness and Autonomy	Feedback fosters students' metacognitive awareness and critical thinking toward their own writing.	<i>"Feedback really helps me in writing clearly and makes me aware of mistakes... to make me more sensitive to mistakes and not repeat the same mistakes."</i> (P5)
4	Lecturers' Feedback Strategies	Lecturers provide flexible feedback through individual consultations, combining oral and written comments, and offering concrete examples.	<i>"I give them verbal feedback... and sometimes I also write it down in a workbook."</i> (Lecturer) <i>"...when I explain to my students about how to paraphrase... I give them a concrete example..."</i> (Lecturer)
5	Challenges in the Feedback Process	Limited time and students' difficulties in understanding techniques such as paraphrasing are major challenges.	<i>"The main challenge is probably time... sometimes one student only has three to four minutes."</i> (Lecturer)
6	Indicators of Feedback Effectiveness	The success of feedback is indicated by the improvement in students' writing quality in subsequent assignments.	<i>"If their writing is better, then it means they understand my feedback from the previous meeting."</i> (Lecturer)

The table shows that feedback helps EFL students identify weaknesses, improve structure and argumentation, and enhance writing quality. Its use involves understanding, reflecting on, and applying feedback, while promoting reflective awareness and independent learning. Despite time and language challenges, lecturers use various feedback strategies. Overall, feedback improves students' subsequent writing.

Strategies Used in Implementing Feedback

The study found that students used various cognitive, metacognitive, and collaborative strategies to understand and apply lecturers' feedback. Rather than passively accepting corrections, they actively transformed feedback into meaningful revisions. Thematic analysis of interviews and documents showed that feedback utilization was a reflective and self-regulated process. Although students shared the goal of improving their writing, their strategies varied according to their learning habits, confidence, and individual needs.

The first strategy commonly used was making a revision list or noting down important points from the feedback, which serves as systematic documentation for continuous improvement. As stated by several participants as in the table 2 below,

"Everything that you give me feedback, I will note it all..." (P1) "Yes, I note down important points from the feedback." (P2) "I write it down in my notebook." (P3).

In addition, students also grouped types of feedback such as structure, idea development, and grammar so that revisions were more focused and organized. Based on the table 2, Participant 5 stated that,

"I make a revision list to organize feedback for my writing." (P5)

The findings show that recording and organizing feedback was an important first step in students' revision process. Instead of relying on memory, students documented lecturers' comments to identify recurring errors and prioritize revisions. While Participants 1, 2, and 3 recorded feedback systematically, Participant 5 categorized it by writing aspects, making revision more structured. These differences reflect varying levels of self-regulation while showing a shared commitment to improving writing quality.

The second strategy involved comparing lecturers' feedback with academic references. Students used examples from scholarly works to deepen their understanding of academic concepts and see how theories and principles are applied in practice. Based on the statement of participant 4 in the table 2, it states that

"I will always apply all of that back-to-back reference... to see the principles of academic writing in real scientific works." (P4).

Unlike participants who mainly relied on lecturers' comments, Participant 4 also consulted published academic texts during revision. This strategy helped validate feedback through authentic examples of academic writing, showing that feedback served not only as advice but also as a starting point for independent learning and knowledge development.

In addition, self-reflection and discussion or consultation with lecturers or friends are also important strategies that increase critical awareness and help understand unclear parts of the feedback. The statement from participant 6 in the table 2 is,

"I hold discussions or consultations to improve my understanding of feedback." (P6).

Collaboration made feedback more meaningful by clarifying comments, sharing revision strategies, reducing uncertainty, and increasing students' confidence during revision.

Another strategy is to utilize digital technology, such as Grammarly or AI, to help check for basic errors in grammar and sentence structure. Statements from several participants were,

"The correction tool is usually AI... to correct grammar." (P1) "I use Grammarly to check grammar, but I still revise manually too." (P7).

However, students still realize the importance of manual revision so that writing remains in accordance with the broader academic context. Based on the table 2, Participant 7 stated that

"I still revise manually too." (P7).

Participants viewed digital technology as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for lecturers' feedback or their own judgment. It was mainly used to support grammar and sentence accuracy. However, students still manually reviewed their revisions to ensure coherence, argument quality, and academic conventions. This shows that they used technology critically rather than relying entirely on automated corrections.

Finally, collaboration between students is also used as a means of gaining new perspectives, clarifying ideas, and enriching the writing process through social interaction. Like the statement of participant 6 in table 2, he stated that

"I discuss it with my friends or ask the lecturer directly." (P6).

Feedback utilization involved reflection, collaboration, and learning resources. Students used various strategies to understand and apply feedback, showing that its effectiveness depends on active student engagement.

Table 2. Strategies Used in Implementing Feedback

No	Strategy	Description	Participant Quote
1	Taking Notes and Creating a Revision List	Students record feedback as a systematic guide for revisions and for developing future writing tasks.	<i>"Everything that you give me feedback, I will note it all..." (P1) "Yes, I note down important points from the feedback." (P2) "I write it down in my notebook." (P3)</i>
2	Categorizing Feedback	Students categorize feedback into areas such as structure, ideas, and grammar to make revision more focused.	<i>"I make a revision list to organize feedback for my writing." (P5)</i>
3	Comparing with Academic References	Students match the feedback with examples of scientific writing to strengthen their understanding.	<i>"I will always apply all of that back-to-back reference... to see the principles of academic writing in real scientific works." (P4)</i>
4	Self-Reflection	Students analyze their mistakes and learn from the feedback to avoid repeating them.	<i>Implied in other strategies, especially by P6</i>
5	Consultation and Discussion	Students engage in discussions with lecturers or peers to better understand and explore feedback.	<i>"I hold discussions or consultations to improve my understanding of feedback." (P6)</i>
6	Use of Technology (Grammarly/AI)	Students utilize digital tools to assist with grammar correction and idea development.	<i>"The correction tool is usually AI... to correct grammar." (P1) "I use Grammarly to check grammar, but I still revise manually too." (P7)</i>
7	Manual Revision	Despite using technology, students still revise manually for academic accuracy.	<i>"I still revise manually too." (P7)</i>
8	Collaboration with Peers	Students discuss with peers to gain new perspectives and writing solutions.	<i>"I discuss it with my friends or ask the lecturer directly." (P6)</i>

The table shows that students use various strategies to utilize feedback, including recording, categorizing, comparing with academic references, reflecting, discussing, and using technology such as Grammarly or AI. These strategies help students apply feedback systematically while maintaining manual review for accuracy.

Challenges Faced in Implementing Feedback

The study found three main challenges in using feedback effectively: difficulty understanding technical or academic feedback, limited revision time, and emotional responses to criticism. These challenges show that feedback utilization involves cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors.

The first challenge was the difficulty in understanding the language of feedback. Many students felt that the language or terms used by the lecturer were too academic, technical, or abstract. This made them confused in understanding the meaning of the

comments given, thus hampering the revision process. As stated by Participant 1 based on the table 3 below,

"...they use higher language or higher explanations... I feel like the meaning is like that, but it turns out to be different."

These experiences show that understanding feedback is not automatic. Although students valued detailed comments, effective feedback depended on their ability to interpret them correctly. To overcome difficulties, some students asked lecturers for clarification, while others consulted peers or academic references. Despite these differences, all students emphasized the importance of understanding feedback accurately before revising their work.

The second challenge is time constraints. Students often have to divide their time between assignments from various courses, so the time to revise their writing based on feedback is very limited. This causes revisions to be less than optimal or only focused on aspects that are easier to fix. Participant 3 said in table 3,

"I have to manage my time because there are a lot of assignments from other courses."

"I apply a study schedule every night..." (P5)

"Sometimes the time is tight..." (P6)

Although all participants faced time constraints, they used different strategies to manage them. Participant 5 created a regular study schedule, while Participants 3 and 6 experienced pressures from overlapping academic tasks. These findings suggest that effective feedback utilization depends not only on students' motivation but also on their ability to manage academic demands and contextual constraints.

The third challenge was students' emotional responses to criticism. Some students felt discouraged by receiving many corrections, which affected their motivation. However, others were able to manage these feelings and use criticism as motivation for improvement. As expressed by Participant 6 based on the table 3,

"Initially yes, I was a bit down... But I tried to see the positive side..."

"Sometimes it can increase motivation, sometimes it can reduce motivation too." (P2)

"I might be a bit down, but because of that I know my mistakes." (P3)

"I consider it a learning process, so I try to stay enthusiastic." (P7)

Participants showed varied emotional responses to feedback, with some initially feeling discouraged or less confident, while others viewed it as a learning opportunity. Most students managed their emotions and continued revising. Overall, feedback challenges involved cognitive, contextual, and emotional factors, which students addressed through clarification, self-regulation, collaboration, and reflection. These findings show that effective feedback depends on both feedback quality and active student engagement.

Table 3. Challenges Faced in Implementing Feedback

No	Challenge	Description	Participant Quote
1	Difficulty Understanding Feedback Language	Lecturers often use academic or abstract terms that are difficult for students to grasp, which hinders their understanding of the feedback.	<i>"They use higher language or higher explanations... I feel like the meaning is like that, but it turns out to be different." (P1) "Is my understanding in accordance with what the lecturer said?" (P5) "Too academic or abstract... makes me confused." (P6) "Too technical or uses difficult academic terms..." (P7)</i>
2	Limited Time	Students struggle to allocate enough time for revision due to workload from other courses.	<i>"I have to manage my time because there are a lot of assignments..." (P3) "I apply a study schedule every night..." (P5) "Sometimes the time is tight..." (P6)</i>

No	Challenge	Description	Participant Quote
3	Discomfort Receiving Criticism	Excessive or overly critical feedback may lower students' confidence or motivation.	<i>"Sometimes it can increase motivation, sometimes it can reduce motivation too." (P2) "I might be a bit down, but because of that I know my mistakes." (P3) "I was a bit down... but I tried to see the positive side." (P6) "I consider it a learning process, so I try to stay enthusiastic." (P7)</i>

The table highlights three main challenges in utilizing feedback: difficulty understanding technical language, limited revision time, and emotional discomfort with criticism. These challenges may limit effective feedback use, although some students still use criticism as an opportunity for learning and improvement.

Discussion

The findings emphasize that feedback plays a crucial role in developing EFL students' academic writing. Rather than serving only as corrective input, feedback functioned as a recursive learning process that encouraged students to identify weaknesses, interpret comments, make revisions, and evaluate their progress. Consistent with Hattie & Timperley, (2007) feedback model, feedback was most effective when students actively understood and applied it. The findings also show that feedback supported cognitive and metacognitive processes, including problem identification, reflection, strategy selection, and self-evaluation. Through this process, students gradually became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and more capable of regulating their own revisions. Thus, feedback not only improved writing quality but also promoted students' independence and responsibility in academic writing development.

While previous studies have mainly viewed feedback as information provided by instructors (Hyland & Hyland, 2006), (Carless & Boud, 2018), this study shows that feedback becomes meaningful when students actively interpret lecturers' comments through reflection and revision. This finding aligns with Carless and Winstone (2023), who view feedback as a dialogic process that requires active learner engagement rather than one-way information transfer. However, given the small number of participants from a single Indonesian university, the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized to all EFL learners. Nevertheless, the study provides valuable insight into how students interpret and use feedback in developing their academic writing.

A key theoretical contribution of this study is its explanation of how students transform external feedback into actionable revisions. Students used strategies such as revision planning, comparison with academic models, and reflective evaluation to apply feedback systematically (Henderson et al., 2019; Yu, 2020). These strategies helped them prioritize feedback, identify recurring problems, and make purposeful revisions across drafts. Rather than applying feedback mechanically, students demonstrated different levels of feedback literacy by understanding feedback, judging its relevance, managing emotional responses, and taking appropriate revision actions. Consistent with Carless and Boud's (2018) framework, the findings indicate that effective feedback use requires students to understand, evaluate, and actively apply feedback throughout the revision process.

The findings show that students' revision strategies reflected key aspects of self-regulated learning, including planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. Students used feedback to identify weaknesses, prioritize revisions, evaluate drafts, and adjust their writing strategies. Thus, feedback functioned not only as external guidance but also as a resource for regulating students' own learning. This supports Nicol's (2020) concept of self-regulated feedback and highlights how feedback literacy enables students to take greater ownership of revision. However, students demonstrated different levels of feedback

literacy. While some independently categorized feedback, consulted references, and reflected critically, others needed additional explanations or guidance. These differences suggest that feedback literacy develops gradually and may be influenced by students' writing experience, confidence, and familiarity with academic conventions.

Digital tools functioned as supplementary support for linguistic accuracy but did not replace lecturer feedback or students' critical judgment. While these tools helped with lower-order issues such as grammar and word choice, higher-order revisions involving argument development, organization, and coherence remained dependent on students' metacognitive decisions. In line with Kim et al., (2024), digital tools are most effective when integrated into reflective revision practices. However, given the small sample from one academic writing course, the findings suggest possible patterns of feedback utilization rather than universal conclusions.

However, feedback effectiveness was influenced by linguistic, temporal, and affective constraints. Difficulties in understanding academic or technical language limited students' interpretation of feedback (Shang, 2019; Kim & Emeliyanova, 2019), while time constraints reduced deeper engagement. Anxiety and discouragement also affected revision efforts. From a feedback literacy perspective, receiving feedback does not automatically lead to learning; students must interpret, evaluate, regulate, and apply it appropriately. Thus, feedback effectiveness depends on the interaction of students' cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional capacities, as well as contextual factors.

These constraints show that feedback effectiveness depends not only on feedback quality but also on students' capacity and conditions to engage with it. This aligns with Yu & Liu, (2021) and Haro et al., (2023), who emphasize emotional readiness, time availability, and linguistic accessibility. However, the findings offer a more nuanced view than studies suggesting that corrective feedback reduces confidence and discourages revision. Although some participants initially experienced disappointment or anxiety, these reactions were often temporary and shifted toward viewing feedback as a learning opportunity after clarification and support. Thus, emotional discomfort may coexist with productive learning when students can clarify and reflect on feedback. However, given the small sample and single institutional context, the findings remain context-specific rather than universally representative.

The findings highlight the importance of responsive feedback approaches. Combining written comments, oral explanations, and short consultations can reduce ambiguity and support motivation (Phothongsunan, 2023). Personalized consultations also help students clarify feedback, negotiate meaning, and build confidence during revision, supporting Fitriyah et al., (2023). These dialogic practices promote students' cognitive and affective engagement. Overall, feedback in EFL academic writing is a learner-mediated rather than unidirectional process, involving cognitive, metacognitive, and affective dimensions. Effective feedback is not simply delivered but actively constructed through students' engagement, emphasizing their role as active agents in developing their writing.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that feedback supports EFL students' academic writing not only through correction but also by promoting reflection, critical thinking, metacognitive awareness, and self-regulated learning. Its effectiveness depends on students' active engagement in interpreting, evaluating, and applying feedback. Students utilized feedback through revision planning, categorization, consultation, self-reflection, and digital tools, although their engagement was affected by difficulties with technical feedback, limited time, and emotional responses to criticism. Therefore, effective feedback requires both

quality feedback and supportive learning conditions.

The study highlights the importance of dialogic feedback, clarification, and individual consultation in developing students' feedback literacy and autonomy. However, given its context-specific setting, future research should involve broader contexts and longitudinal designs to examine the development of feedback literacy and self-regulated learning.

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