

Student Engagement With Teacher Written Feedback in Online EFL Writing Context

Endar Rachmawaty Linuwih*

Department of English Language and Literature Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia;
English Department, Universitas Widya Kartika, Indonesia

Slamet Setiawan

Department of English Language and Literature Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Ahmad Munir

Department of English Language and Literature Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract—Advanced technology offers new opportunities for language learning and teaching. Indeed, the way students receive the teacher's written feedback has adopted innovative technology in an online English as Foreign Language (EFL) writing context. This narrative inquiry investigates six Indonesian students' affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement with written feedback provided by the teachers in the context of online EFL writing. Data analyzed was gathered from teacher-written comments mediated through the Ms. Word comment column and semi-structured interviews. The research has revealed that the students showed positive affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. In behavioral and cognitive engagement, the students show different ways to understand the teacher's written feedback, especially the indirect one, since the level of language proficiency among the students is different. The findings illustrate that the written feedback encourages the students to have a balanced emotion (affective engagement), learn to write collaboratively (behavioral engagement), and assist the students to enhance their writing (cognitive engagement). In conclusion, the findings lead to a greater understanding of how EFL students engage with written feedback from teachers in an online environment.

Index Terms—EFL writing, online context, student engagement, teacher feedback, written feedback

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing feedback is essential for students in their writing process. Tai et al. (2015) discovered that teachers' written feedback significantly affects students' holistic writing abilities in content, organization, grammar, mechanics, and design. Hattie et al. (2021) conducted additional research and discovered that students who receive feedback show increased performance in their updated drafts and a greater comprehension of the writing skills needed to tackle more challenging writing tasks. Students that receive extended feedback respond more constructively, engage the assigned content, and subsequently make substantial changes to the text's arguments.

Students are critical to their learning and should, therefore, be actively engaged as feedback recipients. Many factors impact student engagement, such as support from teachers and peers, but only teachers' role significantly influences students' commitment to learning (Vayre & Vonthron, 2017). There have been numerous previous researches that interpreted students' engagement with written feedback as the perceptions of learners (Ferris, 1997; Lee, 2004), the consistency of revision (Razali & Jupri, 2014), implementation (Guo et al., 2014), and incorporation of feedback and self-checking (Ferris et al., 2012). Learner engagement with feedback refers to how students react to feedback (Ellis, 2010). Additionally, three perspectives on the subject were examined: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Students' views regarding feedback are examined from an affective perspective. The behavioral perspective concerns students' responses to criticism and how and when they alter their responses. The cognitive perspective examines how students use their thinking assets to respond to feedback about their learning outcomes. According to Han and Hyland (2015), students' engagement with feedback entails affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses. According to previous studies, students' responses to teacher feedback are manifested in three dimensions: affection, behavior, and cognition. Under the theory framework, the three viewpoints are inextricably linked. The following figure describes the conceptual structure for learner engagement in response to teacher feedback.

* Corresponding Author.

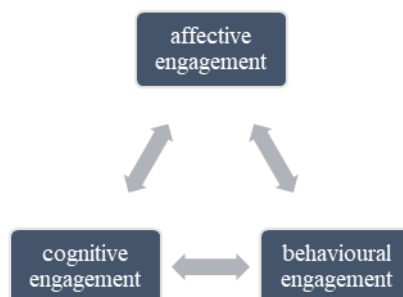


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework for Learner Engagement With Teacher Written Feedback

The conceptual framework presents that affective engagement equals students' attitudes (Martin & Rose, 2007), including affection, judgment, and appreciation. Ellis (2010) added that the affective perspective in student-teacher engagement could be seen from students' attitudinal response to the feedback. Martin and Rose (2002) elaborated on this point by stating that attitudinal responses fall into three categories: affection, which refers to expressing an emotion; judgment, which refers to judging character; and appreciation, which expresses the worth of things or individuals. In light of this, students' feelings and emotions conveyed in response to teacher feedback are referred to as affection (personal judgments of criticism or admiration), judgments (moral judgments of praise toward teacher feedback as the judgment), and appreciation (valuing the worth of teacher feedback).

Behavioral engagement with the teacher is considered the students' action when receiving the teacher's feedback. Numerous studies were conducted to see what the students do with the teacher feedback and the strategies in revising (Ferris et al., 2012; Hyland, 2003). Hyland (2003) revealed that behavioral engagement was manifested in students' textual changes comparing the student's original texts and revised ones. Ferris et al. (2012) interviewed students to elicit information about their strategies for editing texts in response to teacher feedback.

Cognitive engagement refers to the cognitive investment in handling teacher feedback (Ellis, 2010), demonstrated in an in-depth teacher feedback process to notice and understand the feedback. Students' cognitive engagement is essential to indicate students' cognitive operation. It teaches students how and to what degree their texts should be modified and how to modify them. Additionally, cognitive involvement can be observed in students' monitoring and regulating the mental effort required to respond to teacher feedback.

Several studies examined learners' engagement with automated written corrective feedback (Koltovskaia, 2020), teacher-written corrective feedback (Zheng & Yu, 2018; Han & Hyland, 2015), both peer and teacher-written feedback (Nguyen, 2021), both teacher and automated feedback (Zhang, 2017), student and teacher attitudes toward the written feedback (Cinkara & Galaly, 2018), and students' preferences for supervisors written feedback (Nurie, 2020). Given the numerous studies demonstrating the benefits of feedback in the language classroom, it becomes a vital stage in the writing process (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). This phase can help learners collaborate with teachers and improve their writing quality (Elfiyanto & Fukazawa, 2020).

Most previous research examined how learners engage with feedback in a classroom context. Teacher feedback engagement in an online EFL writing situation is under-researched. The emergence of digital technology has significantly influenced the tradition of providing written feedback through online means, impacting how classes operate, how teachers teach, and how students learn and benefit from educational tools. These examples demonstrate the importance of academic institutions in responding to such dynamic changes in education. As such, this study explores how learners engage with teacher-written feedback through an online platform.

II. METHOD

This study aimed to establish students' engagement with written feedback from teachers. The teacher's written feedback was mediated asynchronously through the Ms. Word comment column. This present study used the narrative inquiry to reveal student engagement with teacher feedback on an online platform. Clandinin et al. (2007) stated that the design of a narrative inquiry study is used to gather information about someone's experiences. The design aided in obtaining the students' experience of engaging themselves with teacher written feedback mediated by an asynchronous online platform, and the experience was further analyzed profoundly and thoroughly.

This study involved six participants who wrote their thesis writing and applied mediated writing feedback in their thesis writing process in the academic year of 2019-2020. They were students of the English Department at a private university in Indonesia who finished their thesis in six months. The following table summarizes the students' demographic information who participated in the study.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Gender	Linguistics Background	Educational Background	Length of English Learning Experience
Learner 1	Male	East Javanese Central Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate study	13 years
Learner 2	Male	East Javanese Indonesian Chinese	Undergraduate study	13 years
Learner 3	Male	East Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate study	13 years
Learner 4	Female	West Javanese East Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate study	13 Years
Learner 5	Male	Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate study	13 years
Learner 6	Female	Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate study	13 years

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews (in Bahasa Indonesia) were conducted to collect data. The interviews were performed for approximately 30-45 minutes, and the entire process was video recorded using ZOOM Cloud Meeting. Interview data aims to find out students' experiences with online teacher feedback. The directed questions were formed using the conceptual framework as a reference. During the interview, the participants were asked about their thesis writing process in terms of online written feedback.

The researchers transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews and had them proofread by a colleague. The data were analyzed using a conceptual framework for student engagement with teacher feedback. Initially, the data was coded using only engagement-related information. At the second level, the data were coded according to affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions, as well as sub-dimensions within each critical dimension.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

The conceptual framework of how students affectively engage with teacher written feedback examines students' affection, judgment, and appreciation. Affection deals with students' emotions and feelings when receiving teacher feedback to make revisions. In this study, every student expressed interest in receiving teacher feedback and engaging with online teacher feedback. Two students stated in the interview.

I always look forward to feedback from the teacher. My teacher has read my written work, as shown by the given comments. I believe my efforts have been acknowledged, regardless of whether her feedback is positive. The experience of interacting with online writing feedback made it possible for me to practice collaborative writing, which encouraged me to continue to write and revise.

This is my first experience in doing online writing feedback, and it is completely different from what I have done before. I have to admit that there is a limitation in terms of communication compared to face-to-face discussion. However, I am getting used to it since the guidance provided by the teacher assists me in refining my paper, then I start enjoying it.

The majority of students responded positively to receiving online feedback. They are grateful for the teacher's time spent providing feedback on the draft. The students stated that teachers should motivate them to write by mediated writing feedback. It enables them to collaborate on writing. They also admitted that the feedback was sufficient to help them learn to write. The discussion between the teachers and students about writing the context and evidence showed the engagement with the teacher in online feedback. As the teacher allowed the student to refine their writing, it made them self-regulated learners. As a result, the students kept writing their papers simultaneously.

On the other hand, one student responded with a slightly different attitude. She felt discouraged when the teacher marked similar grammar errors in their previous drafts. In this respect, it occurred to her that she did not make any progress. Thus, it made her frustrated. The student stated in the following report:

It is hard for me to use gerund appropriately; sometimes, it is quite confusing to differentiate the verbs that must be followed by gerund or to-infinitive. My teacher has corrected the errors about gerunds in the previous draft, but I still repeated the errors. I think my grammar is very poor, and during the student-teacher engagement with online feedback, I feel that my grammar is still not good enough.

Regarding judgment and appreciation as the other sub-dimension of affective engagement, the students involved their personal judgment of admiration or criticism toward mediated writing feedback. All students stated that the teacher's online feedback was working well, though they admitted it would have been better if the teachers provided more opportunities to have teacher-student virtual meetings, in which students can ask questions and receive oral feedback synchronously. In respect of the appreciation of online teacher feedback, the students expressed their admiration directly. One student's interview response seemed to represent the majority opinion.

I really appreciate what my teacher has been doing regarding the feedback he provided. I think I am getting used to this mediated teacher feedback since we have been doing it for almost one semester. I think it is not a big deal for me to adopt this new normal version of receiving feedback, as the teacher gives us full support by responding to our draft accordingly.

The response to the revision demonstrates a student's behavioral engagement with the teacher's written feedback. In revising, the student corrected the errors and modified the text. Using appropriate language use is a situation that is frequently encountered in writing. This result is in line with previous analysis (Nanda et al., 2016; Alharbi, 2019), which found that grammar errors in writing are still a major problem in the EFL context. All the students modified based on the received feedback in terms of textual modifications, even though some did not meet a teacher's expectations. In this regard, the interviews provided more perceptions that direct feedback performed better for successful modification than indirect teacher feedback. Arifin et al. (2019) stated that accurate revisions are best produced based on direct correction, and students find direct feedback the quickest and easiest way to revise the drafts. However, because indirect feedback requires a higher level of cognitive engagement to interpret the teacher input and a higher level of linguistic ability to self-edit, it would be more demanding for students to respond to indirect teacher feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

In the interviews, the students stated that they used different strategies to improve both the English language competence and the accuracy of their draft, which also showed their behavioral engagement with mediated teacher feedback. Three students reported that they read through the text after looking at the highlighted words or phrases as the teacher's feedback when revising. They stated that they made the revisions under the suggestions made by the teachers. Two students shared their experience of revising their draft based on the mediated teacher feedback in the interview.

I began my writing by composing the text in Bahasa Indonesia and then translating the words into English. My teacher sometimes commented, "This is Indonesian English" identifying the inappropriate words and language use. The teacher also provided some alternatives to make it English native-like, then I found it very helpful. Therefore, I revised all the words, phrases, and sentences that had received teacher feedback and replied to the teacher's comment in Ms. Word's comment column, clarifying that I had followed the suggestions.

When revising my draft, I also seek extra assistance by consulting the internet and friends. Sometimes, I also text my teacher directly since we cannot see each other in person to discuss my draft further.

These interviews interpreted how the students were seeking extra assistance as a revision strategy. They might have different strategies for revising the draft, but they all do the revision suggested by the teacher. It indicated that they behaviorally engaged with the mediated teacher feedback.

The degree to which students engage with teacher feedback cognitively can be determined by using cognitive operations to process and refine their draft in response to the feedback received. Some students had difficulty comprehending the message conveyed by the teacher through indirect feedback. They were confused about revising as they thought they had provided sufficient information and details to support the sentences. One reported in the interview.

Despite my best efforts, I was confused when the teacher marked the sentences and wrote "What does it mean?" I guess there is something unclear in my sentences, but I have no idea what I should exactly revise. Consequently, I did not modify the sentences in my second draft.

Another student expressed confusion about one case of indirect teacher feedback. The teacher underlined the sentences then wrote, "A bridge is needed to connect these two sentences". Instead of adding a bridging sentence, she changed the whole sentence into the new one. This indicated the student's inadequate knowledge of context.

Although some students remarked that they could not fully understand the teacher's feedback, most of the students were engaged in collaborative writing through mediated writing feedback. The feedback helps them to generate ideas and develop their drafts. As the feedback is recorded in a written form in a soft file, it allows the students to have ample time to read the draft repeatedly to understand the received feedback better. When students processed mediated teacher feedback, it appeared as though they engaged in a variety of metacognitive processes to adapt their intellectual effort. They stated that they thoroughly revised the draft and made adjustments despite the fact that the correct forms were not provided because the teacher provided only indirect feedback. Additionally, they occasionally contacted the teacher directly to ensure that they made the appropriate revisions based on the indirect feedback obtained. They used their intellectual ability to connect the concepts and get a better grasp of the language.

The students' interviews revealed that they had different cognitive operation levels, but generally, their cognitive operation was moderate. Three students admitted that they focused on correcting the words, phrases, and sentences that the teacher had corrected. Two students conveyed their cognitive process during the interview as follows.

I try to follow teacher's feedback to detect the errors effectively. So, I examined the feedback intensely and read the underlined passages.

I noticed the errors only from the words marked. Then I knew the correction must have been provided in the revised draft.

A cognitive operation was conducted, but it was too general. The students did not mention specifically what to do with the received feedback. One student straightforwardly expressed that she consistently tried to understand what the teacher expected in the given feedback and how to do her revision accordingly in reading the teacher's feedback.

I was thinking about what my teacher expected when I revised my draft. Was it acceptable? Why were some words crossed out? What did the teacher want me to explain by underlining some sentences? I had to read the incorrect sentences more to revise them.

The student believed beyond the teacher's feedback and focused more on her teacher's intentions. Nonetheless, it was most likely due to her limited linguistic skills, as she often could not detect other errors in her draft when the teacher provided the indirect written feedback without providing the corrected version.

B. Discussion

The students were encouraged to engage actively in receiving teacher feedback through the online platform. It is consistent with Vadia and Ciptaningrum's (2020) argument that teacher feedback in an online forum fosters communication and provides opportunities for meaningful English practice. It also encourages students to participate in the writing process by allowing them to revise (Ene & Upton, 2018). The engagement resulted in active participation and discussion, which led to the students engaging in reflective practice. Liu (2020) asserted that online feedback is less threatening and thus promotes student-teacher interaction. Mediated writing feedback provides interactive feedback to students, scaffolding their interaction. This study exposed the complexities of students' engagement with teacher feedback and offered new insights into the process by observing Indonesian EFL students as they dealt with online feedback on affective, behavioral, and cognitive levels.

From the affective perspective, most participants respected the teacher's time spent providing the mediated feedback online. The students also showed their positive attitude toward the engagement with the mediated teacher feedback. Most participants expressed appreciation for teacher feedback in the interviews: five students responded that teacher feedback was insightful and helped them revise their drafts. Only one student answered that she felt discouraged by the feedback received since she could not see the teacher's facial expression when she made the same errors. Although the majority praised the mediated feedback, the students also expected synchronous oral feedback, but the teacher did not fulfill the expectation due to the limited time and desire. Some of them realized that they only made little progress but could not find an alternative to improve.

Regarding the behavioral perspective, a noticeable engagement can be seen in the students' revised drafts. The students put some effort into error correction and language modification. Additionally, students' behavioral engagement with teacher feedback significantly resulted in better writing. Although some students had difficulty revising the draft if the feedback was absent or implicitly provided, they tried to find alternative assistance. Numerous students indicated that one of the obstacles to behavioral processes could be indirect feedback, but their solid linguistics knowledge enabled them to identify some faults or the target forms specified in the teacher's feedback. This may also result in successful adjustments. This means that, as indicated by their successful adjustments, the participants' language proficiency as an individual factor and mediated teacher feedback may have affected their behavioral engagement. It was also fascinating to see how the students revised the sentence level. Students recorded this because feedback included not only linguistic problems but also ideas and textual organization. The teacher's feedback practice seemed to interfere with the students' revision behaviors significantly.

In term of the cognitive perspective, most students did not encounter major difficulty in noticing the teacher feedback. They had sufficient knowledge to comprehend both direct and indirect feedback. The students demonstrated cognitive engagement with teacher feedback in order to participate in an online discussion (Guo et al., 2014). Writing feedback that was moderated encouraged students to write more efficiently. Creating ideas, drafting, writing, reviewing, revising, and publishing are all part of the writing process. It also provides students with guidance and effective revision of their thesis. Furthermore, online writing feedback had an impact on writing well.

According to Kadwa and Alshenqeeti (2020), linguistic competency is required to understand feedback, especially the indirect one. Direct feedback allows students to see the right forms and simply adapt them into the revised draft, whereas indirect feedback requires students to self-edit using their linguistic ability. As a result, in this current study, the students' adequate comprehension of feedback could be associated to their adequate linguistic competence, which enabled them to correct the ungrammatical patterns marked by the teacher. It is worth noting that many students misunderstood what the teacher was trying to express through indirect feedback. In this regard, other researchers, in their findings, discovered that students considered teacher feedback challenging (Nematzadeh & Siahpoosh, 2017; Henderson et al., 2019). Aside from the language competence discussed above, the current research found that the participants' behavioral participation affected their interpretation of teacher feedback. They sought more assistance in responding feedback and refining drafts. Confusion among the students could be overcome, and there was adequate knowledge.

The results of this study have three significant implications for increasing students' engagement with mediated teacher feedback. Firstly, the teachers should pay close attention to the feedback's explicitness to ensure that teacher-written feedback is thoughtfully given to students. The study discovered that a few students had cognitive difficulties interpreting the indirect feedback. Since they were unable to specifically communicate to the teacher what to do about the feedback, it is recommended that teachers take students' language proficiency into account, especially in an online writing class, when deciding whether feedback should be direct or indirect. Ferris et al. (2013) stated that teachers' explicit feedback is more beneficial to students' cognitive involvement.

Secondly, teacher feedback should be justified or clarified deliberately and thoroughly using a synchronous online platform to reduce confusion and encourage students' affective and cognitive engagement. They can do this by having Zoom cloud meetings or G meet directly with the students about feedback, especially the indirect ones. This virtual conference also allows students to clarify the feedback and develop an affective engagement with the teacher's feedback.

Thirdly, the findings suggest that students' training might be needed to respond to mediated teacher feedback affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally. During the training, the students should be reminded that teacher written feedback is intended to help them develop knowledge of error patterns and skills to self-edit to prevent certain forms of errors. Teachers may also guide students in having discussions in pairs or groups about their feedback. This task differs from peer reviews in that it allows students to explore the obtained feedback from various perspectives. As a result, students with varying levels of proficiency can learn from the exercise, especially the lower ones who can benefit from scaffolding from the higher ones. This scaffolding and peer sharing can help the students to become cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively engaged.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate students' engagement with written feedback in an EFL online context. The teacher provided feedback through mediated writing feedback. Using qualitative analysis, data from six university students and their drafts with teacher-written feedback were analyzed to determine how the students reacted affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively to teacher feedback on their English thesis writing. According to the report's findings, mediated writing input inspired and trained students to learn to write collaboratively. It also aided students in coming up with ideas for their writing. As a result, this feedback prepared students to learn to write using an online forum. This study also demonstrates the complexities of students' engagement with teacher feedback online, implying that students' linguistic competence can influence their cognitive and behavioral engagement with teacher feedback. Although most students demonstrated positive behavioral and cognitive engagement, two students demonstrated limited behavioral and cognitive engagement. Even though every effort was made to remove errors, this study had limitations. As a result, further research into this subject is highly recommended. Future studies could separate students into high and low-proficiency groups and evaluate their interaction with written input from teachers in the online writing setting. Finally, future research is planned to examine multiple approaches to providing feedback to students in order to improve their writing quality.

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Endar Rachmawaty Linuwih is a lecturer at English Department of Universitas Widya Kartika Surabaya. She is currently doing her Doctorate Degree in English language and literature education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya. Her research is situated in the field of English teaching with special focus on the teaching of specific skills.

Slamet Setiawan is a professor of linguistics at Universitas Negeri Surabaya's English Department. He earned a B.A. in English Language Teaching from Universitas Negeri Surabaya, an MA in English Language Teaching from the University of Auckland in New Zealand, and a Ph.D. in English Language Teaching from the University of Western Australia (both in Linguistics). As a result of his educational background, he is interested in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics (English Language Teaching). *Heliyon*, *Asian EFL Journal*, *Asian ESP Journal*, *GJAT: Global Journal of Al-Thafaqah*, *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, *LLR: Language Related Research*, *TESOL International Journal*, and *CALL-EJ* have all published his works.

Ahmad Munir Ahmad Munir is a lecturer at Universitas Negeri Surabaya's Postgraduate School. He earned master's and doctoral degrees in English language education from Monash University. His research interests include the education of English teachers and classroom conversation. He is now the head of Universitas Negeri Surabaya's graduate English teacher education program.