

TEACHER AND STUDENTS' VOICES ON UNFOCUSED WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK METHODS TO INCREASE THE QUALITY OF ESSAY

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Abstrak

This study explores how teachers and students perceive the use of unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF) in improving essay writing. Unfocused WCF refers to corrections that cover various types of errors instead of focusing on a single issue. The study was conducted at a private university in East Java, involving one teacher and three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Using a qualitative approach, the data were collected through interviews to understand their experiences and opinions. Results showed that both the teacher and students found unfocused WCF helpful in improving grammar, organization, and overall essay quality. However, they also noted challenges such as time constraints for teachers and the potential for students to feel overwhelmed by too many corrections. Despite these challenges, students appreciated the clarity and usefulness of detailed feedback, which helped them revise their writing more independently. The findings suggest that when given clearly and supportively, unfocused WCF can significantly aid student writing development. This study recommends further training and resources for teachers to provide more effective feedback and suggests broader research with more participants to validate the findings.

Keywords: Written Corrective Feedback; Unfocused Feedback; Essay Writing; Teacher and Students' Voices

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a foundational skill that involves not only putting words together but also structuring ideas and arguments in a clear, coherent manner. According to Aliakbari et al. (2023) writing is a productive skill that demands learners create texts expressing thoughts and ideas. In academic context, writing become one of the fundamental skill in education, as it allows students to articulate and critically evaluate ideas. Academic writing is an important ability since it helps students grow themselves through opinion writing, grant essay writing, and other activities Nenotek et al. (2022), and poor writing skills may hinder success (Moses & Mohamad, 2019; Cer, 2019).

Building strong writing skills takes more than practice, it needs clear and helpful teaching. Good writing gave students regular chances to practice, revise, and get feedback on their work. Feedback, particularly written feedback, has long been regarded as a tool to improve the quality of students' writing. That's why students need guidance, structure, and feedback to improve their writing, especially in academic contexts. Written corrective feedback (WCF) plays a key role, yet its best application, whether focused or unfocused is still debated. Unfocused WCF refers to teacher feedback that addresses a wide range of errors in student writing, including grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, coherence, organization, and content, rather than focusing on one or two specific error types. Studies in Iran (Aliakbari et al., 2023), Turkey (Berkant et al., 2020), and Malaysia (Wan, 2020) highlights the effectiveness of WCF but also shows varying impacts based on student preferences and contexts. These differences in findings indicate the importance of understanding how students emotionally and cognitively respond to WCF, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Despite numerous studies have examined the impact of various feedback strategies on students' writing accuracy, few have specifically focused on the effectiveness of unfocused WCF in enhancing essay writing, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language. Many studies have explored the effectiveness of written corrective feedback (WCF) in improving grammar, but its impact on the overall quality and flow of essay writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is less explored. Most studies focus on correcting specific types of errors, and often ignore how unfocused WCF affects the structure and coherence of more complex texts, such as narrative and argumentative essays. In addition, these studies rarely include teacher and student perspectives, leaving gaps in understanding how those directly involved in the feedback process experience and perceive it. Another aspect that has been missed is the potential difficulties students face when feedback addresses too many errors at once, which can sometimes overwhelm students rather than help them.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by exploring both teacher and student perceptions of using unfocused written corrective feedback in the context of essay writing. It focuses on their experiences, challenges, and strategies in giving and receiving feedback, as well as how it influences students' writing quality.

1. How does the teacher perceive the effectiveness and challenges of unfocused written corrective feedback in improving students' essays?
2. How do the students perceive and respond to the use of unfocused written corrective feedback for essays?

METHOD

Research Design

A qualitative approach is used in this research to understand the teacher and students' thoughts on how unfocused written feedback helps improve essay writing. The need for qualitative research in this area is underscored by previous findings highlighting students' emotional responses to feedback (Yi, 2020). A single case study design is chosen, focusing on exploring a specific phenomenon in-depth within its real-life context. This research method is employed to allow a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences by examining multiple pieces of information and perspectives. Four participants are involved in this qualitative design, and interviews are conducted to extract as much detailed information as possible from the data.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a private university located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The participants in this study were an English lecturer from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, specifically from the English Education Department, and three third-semester students from the same faculty and department. The four participants were selected by purposive sampling based on their experience in giving and receiving unfocused written corrective feedback.

To select the participants, first, the teacher was selected because of her teaching experience in English, particularly in Essay Writing courses, with more than five years of experience in teaching the subject. Many academic publications had been written by the teacher, especially

articles focusing on writing skills, and some of these publications had been published in reputable international journals.

Second, the students, aged 19–20 years old, were chosen because they had completed the Essay Writing course in the third semester. The students were selected not only for their experience with unfocused written corrective feedback but also because they had different levels of writing skills, one student was very good at writing, another was average but liked to reflect and learn, and the last one found writing hard but kept trying and showed progress. This difference helped the study show many kinds of student experiences with unfocused feedback.

Third, the participants were selected because their consent to participate in the study had been obtained. A printed consent letter was given to each participant, which included their name, the title of the study, and an agreement to keep the data confidential. To ensure confidentiality, the identities of the participants were anonymized, with P1 referring to the first participant, P2 to the second participant, P3 to the third participant, and P4 to the fourth participant. The consent letter was signed by the participants and the researcher.

Instruments

The main instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions designed to explore participants' views, experiences, and responses toward unfocused WCF. The teacher's questions focused on how feedback was given, the reasons for using unfocused WCF, and the challenges encountered. The student interviews explored how they received and responded to feedback. The questions were validated by a writing expert to ensure their clarity and relevance.

Data Collection

The data for this study collected through a series of semi-structured interviews, which were designed to gather detailed insights from the participants about their experiences with unfocused written corrective feedback in essay writing. The interview was conducted via zoom with the P2, P3, P4 and face-to-face interview with the P1 at different times. This was done to ensure that sufficient time was provided for both the participants and the interviewer to gather more information. The second interview, which served as a follow-up with all the participants, was conducted via WhatsApp to ensure that the data was valid and remained unchanged. During the interview process, Indonesian was used by the researcher to minimize potential misunderstandings between the researcher and the participants. Each participant was interviewed for 60 minutes, and the interviews were recorded with the participants' permission for documentation purposes. After the interview session was conducted, the participants were thanked for their willingness to participate in this study.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed by using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps. First, the interview transcripts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity. Second, initial codes were generated to identify significant points in the data. Third, related codes were grouped into themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data. Fifth, each theme was defined and named clearly. Finally, the findings were interpreted

and connected to the research questions. This method helped the researcher understand how participants perceived and experienced the use of unfocused WCF in essay writing.

FINDINGS

Data in this study were obtained through interviews with one English lecturer and three third-semester students who had experience giving or receiving unfocused written corrective feedback (UWCF). The findings are organized into two major parts: teachers' voices and students' voices, each with its own sub-themes.

A. Teachers' Voices on Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback

Perception of Effectiveness: Enhancing Essay Quality

P1 viewed UWCF as a useful tool to help students improve various aspects of their writing, especially grammar, content development, and coherence. By addressing multiple types of errors, students became more aware of their weaknesses and gradually produced better-structured essays.

"The students' essays looked better as academic essays after unfocused feedback was given. The flow looked good, the essays were coherent and cohesive."

He emphasized that UWCF encouraged deeper revision and more critical thinking, not just surface-level correction.

Implementation Strategies: Combining Feedback Methods and Peer Review

To make feedback more effective and easier to understand, P1 used both asynchronous written feedback (via Google Docs) and synchronous explanations in the classroom. He also involved peer feedback and online tools such as Grammarly and Turnitin.

"By combining the two methods (synchronous and asynchronous), I thought it was better than using only one method."

"I asked my students to do peer feedback first... I supervised their work in Google Docs."

This method allowed students to revise their work with more clarity while reducing the teacher's workload.

Pedagogical Purpose: Encouraging Academic Responsibility and Independence

P1 believed that UWCF was not only about correcting mistakes but also about building academic responsibility. He used feedback to educate students on issues like plagiarism, summarizing, and paraphrasing, encouraging them to think critically and write more ethically.

"They realized the shortcomings of their essays... they had to understand what plagiarization was, and be able to paraphrase and summarize."

Challenges in Practice: Emotional Barriers and Time Constraints

Despite its benefits, P1 found that some students became emotionally overwhelmed by UWCF. They were unsure how to respond to so many corrections at once, which affected their motivation.

“They didn’t know what to do... they felt hesitant, burdened, and unmotivated. Some students felt traumatized when we gave too much feedback.”

He also noted that checking essays from large classes took significant time and energy, even when digital tools were used.

“When I had to handle two classes and check their assignments one by one... of course I was a little overwhelmed.”

B. Students’ Voices on Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback

Understanding of UWCF

The students clearly understood that UWCF addressed various aspects of writing simultaneously like grammar, structure, ideas, and vocabulary. This kind of feedback helped them see the overall weaknesses in their writing.

P2: *“It’s when you give feedback on many types of mistakes... not just one.”*

P3: *“I understood that the feedback talked about content, grammar, and organization too.”*

P4: *“It’s when the lecturer corrects all kinds of mistakes in the writing and gives written comments”*

Emotional Responses: Between Motivation and Overwhelm

Students responded differently to UWCF. One student felt encouraged by the detailed feedback, while others felt confused and demotivated when faced with many corrections.

P3: *“I actually felt happy when I got a lot of feedback because it helped me improve.”*

P2: *“Sometimes it’s confusing... I like to focus on one part first.”*

P4: *“If I made a lot of mistakes, I felt like I had to start all over again.”*

These responses reflected individual differences in emotional resilience and learning styles.

Strategies for Processing Feedback

To make sense of the feedback, students used different personal strategies. They marked the comments, checked their notes, revised their writing, and waited for further explanation in class when needed.

P2: *“I look at my notes and try to understand the feedback and correct my mistakes.”*

P3: *“I marked the feedback and revised that part in my essay.”*

P4: *“I usually waited for the teacher to explain the feedback again in class.”*

Preferences and Challenges in Understanding Feedback

Students preferred when written feedback was followed by oral clarification. Purely written feedback was often unclear, especially when it involved unfamiliar vocabulary or grammar rules. Some students found it hard to rewrite their sentences due to limited vocabulary.

P3: *"I understood better when I got both written and oral feedback."*

P4: *"I struggled to rewrite my sentences because I didn't know many synonyms."*

Both teacher and students found unfocused written corrective feedback (UWCF) helpful for improving essay writing, especially in grammar and coherence. The teacher used a mix of written, oral, and peer feedback supported by digital tools, but faced time limits and student overwhelm. Students appreciated the feedback but sometimes felt confused or discouraged. They preferred combined feedback methods and used personal strategies to revise their work. Overall, UWCF was effective when clearly delivered and emotionally supportive.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that both the teacher and the students perceived unfocused written corrective feedback (UWCF) as a useful tool for improving the quality of essay writing. The teacher believed that UWCF helped students revise their work more thoroughly by addressing various aspects such as grammar, structure, coherence, and content development. This aligns with Listiani (2017), who found that most students valued feedback on all writing aspects. Similarly, Reynolds and Kao (2022) concluded that unfocused WCF improved writing accuracy, especially with continued practice.

The teacher used a combination of asynchronous written feedback and synchronous explanation in class. This hybrid method enabled students to review corrections at their own pace and clarify any confusion through direct interaction. The teacher also used tools like Google Docs and Grammarly, combining written and face-to-face feedback. This approach is supported by Diab (2019), who noted that students prefer feedback delivered in clear, segmented formats. Other studies (e.g., O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Hoa & Lap, 2021) showed that digital tools enhanced understanding and revision quality. Peer review, supported by technology, further enabled students to engage critically with feedback. The use of digital tools such as Google Docs, Grammarly, and Turnitin also supported the feedback process. These tools helped the teacher check for technical errors efficiently and allowed students to see real-time corrections and suggestions. In addition, peer feedback was used to enhance students' ability to assess each other's writing. This practice gave students the opportunity to reflect more critically and actively engage in the writing process before receiving teacher feedback.

Despite the benefits, The teacher reported emotional resistance from students who felt overwhelmed by the volume of corrections, especially when feedback covered many aspects at once. Giving detailed feedback to large classes was demanding, in line with Hutchison (2022), who discussed the pressures of feedback in digital settings. Emotional barriers such as discouragement also arose. Kurniasih et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of a stress-free classroom for better

student outcomes. Sari et al. (2022) also warned that too much feedback might hurt students' confidence.

Students' varying abilities meant that not all could apply the feedback equally. This issue is consistent with Ganapathy et al. (2020) and Negahi et al. (2022), who highlighted the need for feedback tailored to different proficiency levels. To address misunderstandings, the teacher often clarified feedback in class, supporting Mao and Lee (2020) recommendation for simplified feedback for lower-level learners. Students generally found unfocused WCF helpful for identifying and correcting errors in their essays. They actively revised their writing and took notes, which aligns with (Karim & Nassaji, 2019), who reported improved writing accuracy after receiving such feedback.

The students' responses also confirmed that UWCF can be more effective when they are given space to process it step by step. Although initially overwhelming, the feedback became manageable with repetition, guidance, and clarification from the teacher. Wahyudi et al. (2024) noted that clear and constructive feedback boosts motivation, though unclear feedback can frustrate learners. Mujtaba et al. (2022) highlighted that student preference for a feedback type doesn't always lead to improved outcomes. Students benefited from peer and teacher feedback via digital platforms. As shown by Elfiyanto and Fukazawa (2020), peer feedback could sometimes be more effective than teacher feedback. Combining both sources offers the best outcomes. Nevertheless, these emotional barriers were often managed through classroom support, clear explanation, and student effort in developing strategies such as highlighting key feedback, reviewing notes, and gradually applying corrections.

However, complex or unclear feedback, especially when delivered only in English, led to confusion. Students had different preferences: some preferred oral feedback because they could ask questions directly, while others liked written feedback because they could read it again later. Another challenge is that not all students could revise their writing by themselves. Some needed help from the teacher to fully understand the feedback. Mao and Lee (2020) emphasized that beginner learners benefit more from focused feedback that targets fewer issues at a time.

CONCLUSION

This research examined how unfocused written corrective feedback (WCF) was applied by an English writing lecturer and how it was received and interpreted by three university students enrolled in an essay writing course. Through their individual voices, this study aimed to uncover the impact of such feedback on students' writing quality and learning experience. After analyzing the data and reviewing the discussion, two key conclusions emerged.

The first conclusion relates to the teacher's approach to unfocused WCF. The lecturer used a combination of written comments, in-class clarifications, digital platforms, and peer feedback to address a range of writing issues, including grammar, coherence, vocabulary, and content development. Her method emphasized not only correcting students' errors but also guiding them toward greater independence in revising and improving their work. Although she encountered challenges such as limited time and students' emotional reactions, she adapted by creating a more supportive and responsive learning environment.

The second conclusion concerns the students' perspectives and responses. While they all recognized that unfocused feedback helped them identify various types of mistakes, their emotional and cognitive responses differed. One student felt motivated and benefited from the comprehensive nature of the feedback, while others felt overwhelmed or unsure about how to act on it. Most students preferred feedback that was not only written but also explained orally, suggesting that clarity and delivery strongly influenced how they engaged with and applied the corrections. Their efforts to revise their essays, take notes, and ask for clarification revealed a willingness to grow, though their success depended on the quality and accessibility of the feedback they received.

In light of these findings, future research could expand the participant pool and explore different feedback types or long-term impacts on writing development. Teachers are encouraged to blend various feedback strategies such as written, oral, peer, and digital while paying attention to students' readiness and emotional responses. Institutions should support this process by providing training and tools that enhance feedback delivery. Overall, for unfocused WCF to be effective, it must be delivered with clarity, empathy, and attention to the learner's context and needs.

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