# Employing multimodal dialogic feedback on EFL tertiary students' writing: Formative assessment framework

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## ABSTRACT

Feedback is essential for improving EFL students' writing skills, even though it is still underutilized. Yet, only some studies examine multimodal dialogic feedback (MDF) on students' writing. To address the gap, this study, which employed an exploratory mixed-method, investigated the impact of MDF mediated by utilizing Google Docs and Zoom conferences as convenience platforms in a writing class among some Indonesian university learners and the impact of this MDF on the revision quality of the student texts. Furthermore, the study explored the students' perceptions of MDF from the formative assessment framework. While the quantitative method through classroom action research (CAR) with 39 students recruited purposively, examined the impact of MDF on students' writing skills, the qualitative approach using semi-structured in-person interviews with eleven students recruited conveniently, addressed the student's perceptions of the influence of MDF on their writing skills. The quantitative data were analyzed through simple descriptive statistical analyses to visualize the trend of students' improvement and the instructor's feedback. The qualitative data on the students' positive perceptions of the

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impact of MDF on their writing were analyzed using thematic analysis. Statistical analyses of the student's texts reveal that the student's writing skills are gradually developing. The results demonstrate how mediating MDF during teaching-learning writing affected the student's work on organization, content, language use, mechanics, and text length. Implications for writing instruction and the instructor's feedback are also discussed. Although this current study has limitations, suggestions for further research are offered.

**Keywords:** *Dialogic; Feedback; Multimodal; Google docs; Zoom conference*

## 1. Introduction

Giving feedback in higher education typically treats learners as objects, making them more passive in responding to the teacher's comments. Students become less active, making it difficult for them to remember and retain the comments they hear (Winstone & Carless, 2020). As a result, students perceive feedback as less helpful in improving their learning outcomes, particularly when learning to write. Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Lee (2017) assert that feedback is one of the most important impacts on teaching-learning achievement. Formative assessment feedback is not concerned with scores; instead, it is concerned with clear and detailed information on students' learning performances that are in the form of correcting, clarifying, inspiring, and encouraging ideas (Forsythe & Johnson, 2017; Ghazali *et al.*, 2020; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Saputra *et al.*, 2023). Feedback should, therefore, include task-specific information that bridges the gap between what is known and what is desired to be understood (Bakla, 2020). In this study, the researchers provided an analytical scoring rubric as a guide to help students improve their content. Graham (2019) points out that the assessment criteria are necessary to enhance feedback contributions to make adjustments.

It is widely recognized that feedback is critical in writing learning since it helps students and teachers improve student's text production. However, the preliminary study conducted by the researchers revealed that the teachers reported that they conducted formative assessments but rarely provided students feedback due to time barriers. This situation is also in line with a study by Lachner *et al.* (2017), which revealed that less feedback is given to students due to large-lecture classes and time-consuming. If they give feedback to students, it is merely written feedback that needs to be clarified through dialogue. While the teacher's written feedback may offer students information on how well they have mastered the course topic, not all messages conveyed are explicit or even relevant to the activity at hand (Hyland, 2013; Saputra *et al.*, 2023). In addition, McCarthy (2015) revealed in his study that written feedback is limited to text with no visual or aural element, static, and less substantial/detailed. Therefore, several educationists, such as Hounsell *et al.*, (2008), Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), Steen-Utheim and Wittek (2017) recommend that in the higher educational context, students should participate actively in feedback activities, and communication should be organized dialogically.

Today's advancements in information and communication technology (ICT) enable teachers to provide feedback, which is aided by numerous learning platforms. Even though technology is not a panacea for all educational issues (Irons & Elkington, 2022; Thamrin & Fahri, 2024). It is beneficial to assist the instructor in providing interactive, timely, and sustainable feedback, either during an emergency or a normal situation. Using platforms such as Google Docs, Zoom, other social media, or multimodal can efficiently provide feedback (Susilawati, 2023). Furthermore, technology-mediated learning is becoming increasingly popular worldwide (Irons & Elkington, 2022). To address the gap, the current study intends to maximize feedback to students in writing teaching by utilizing a multi-learning platform.

There is a growing corpus of literature that acknowledges the contribution of modern technologies in assisting teachers in providing feedback. For example, Dathumma and Singhasiri (2015), in their study on students' perceptions of teacher feedback using Google Docs, discovered that students have a positive attitude toward utilizing Google Docs in offering feedback; however, they did not reveal how the instructor established interactive dialogue during the feedback session. Bakla (2020) conducted a similar study in which he investigated the use of three online feedback modes, written, audio, and screencast, helped by Google Drive, in improving students' writing, but he only looked at one-way interaction. Although the current study by Cui *et al.* (2021) studied the application of multimodal feedback in education, it solely focused on Big Data Visualization. These prior studies enable future research to investigate the benefits of implementing multimodal feedback that is more engaging and improves students' writing skills. The previous research findings, of course, contribute significantly to future research in the use of more bichronous-learning platforms. In this study, the researchers used Google Docs in addition to Google Zoom meetings to anticipate technological issues during the writing lesson.

Responding to the gap in previous studies and time constraints as a common issue during writing instruction, the rationale of this study seeks to initiate the use of Google Zoom conference and Google Docs to provide feedback in a timely manner and to enhance students' active role in revising their text clearly as they can communicate interactively with the teachers by asking clarification. Additionally, the researchers foresee technological problems during education, such as internet access and power outages; Google Docs-mediated feedback allows for both synchronous and asynchronous learning circumstances (Ebadi & Alizadeh, 2021; Fastaggi, 2015; Scissors, 2021). As a result, we conducted a mixed-method study in which we used multimodal dialogic feedback (MDF) in writing instruction and investigated the influence on students' writing skills by addressing the following questions:

1. To what extent does MDF improve students' writing quality?
2. What do the students think about MDF toward their writing skills?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Formative feedback

Enhancement of student learning outcomes can be achieved not only through the utilization of engineering-learning methods or techniques but also through the analysis and interpretation of assessment findings. Thus, in order to make adjustments and meet learning objectives, assessment should be done throughout the learning process rather than just at the end of the teaching-learning process. Formative-based assessment is an evaluative approach designed to enhance the learning experience. According to Black and Wiliam 1998, 2009), for formative assessment to effectively serve as a tool for learning, students need to possess a comprehensive understanding of the competencies being targeted, their existing level of competence, and the strategies required to attain the desired abilities. Irons and Elkington (2022) assert that formative assessment serves the purpose of aiding students in comprehending their level of learning and providing clarity on expectations and standards. According to Cheng and Fox (2017), formative assessment is conducted collaboratively, with the main focus being determining the appropriate direction for teaching and learning. In short, incorporating formative assessment concepts and procedures in the learning process can facilitate students' acquisition of the aforementioned three aspects, as stated by Black and William.

Moreover, Black and William elucidated that educators can adapt classroom instructional strategies based on the insights gleaned from student performance evaluations within the context of formative assessment. Therefore, to meet the learning goals, the feedback provided must be pertinent to the task's criteria. According to Lee (2017), the effectiveness of feedback is contingent upon the presence of precise and demanding goals and the perception of a non-threatening nature. In the context of learning writing skills, providing feedback on learning assessment outcomes holds significant importance as it enables students to make necessary adjustments to their own learning trajectory based on the guidance provided by their teachers.

Numerous scholars have researched the advantages of providing feedback in enhancing students' writing skills. Jamalinesari *et al.* (2015) conducted a study that investigated the provision of feedback by teachers in the context of a writing course in Iran. A novel instructional approach was implemented, wherein one group of students received direct feedback from the teacher on their written work, while another group received indirect feedback after completing a writing assignment. The remarks primarily centered on the linguistic aspects employed. The teacher-implemented direct feedback was through identifying and addressing the linguistic errors made by the students, along with providing remedies. On the other hand, the indirect feedback solely entailed underlining the problems without any further intervention. The researchers observed that the group receiving indirect input improved more than the group receiving direct feedback. Nevertheless, the authors failed to provide a comprehensive explanation in their research regarding the impact of teacher-indirect feedback on the accuracy of student writing.

Olsen and Hunnes (2023) conducted a study using the survey method to examine the impact of formative feedback on 300 students. The results revealed that a significant number of students reported that feedback played a crucial role in helping them achieve their learning objectives. Furthermore, the students demonstrated attentiveness toward feedback and acknowledged its motivational influence on their studies. While the majority of students expressed overall satisfaction with the feedback they received, it is important to acknowledge that there are some discernible distinctions between the two modalities. When questioned about the dialogical feedback, the students expressed a slightly higher level of satisfaction in comparison to the exclusively written feedback. Therefore, regarding the significance of feedback in relation to students' motivation and academic performance, they suggested that formative feedback should be incorporated throughout entire courses. Hao *et al.* (2021) asserted that providing feedback that specifically addresses the disparity between anticipated and realised outcomes is crucial for efficient learning. Insufficiently detailed feedback may result in the development of behaviours aimed at manipulating the system. In a nutshell, formative feedback aids students in identifying their strengths and areas for growth, as well as any potential support resources they might require and how they can modify their learning strategies to achieve the course objectives.

## 2.2. Multimodality in providing feedback

Multimodal learning is becoming increasingly popular as a successful teaching tool in an era of rapidly advancing technology. Diamantopoulou and Ørevik (2022) (2022) assert that a variety of multimodal resources are being used more and more in the teaching and learning of English as an additional language (EAL). These resources can be digitally mediated texts like applications or components of novel text-making practices like blogging, coding, and gaming. Overall, multimodal learning is an approach to education that uses a variety of media, including audio and visual material, delivered through electronic learning platforms.

In addressing the insufficient corrective feedback from the lecturer, this study was conducted in blended learning assisted by e-learning platforms. The lecturers can use the ICTs to minimize the time constraints in providing feedback as the ongoing barrier to writing instruction. The use of ICTs in education is becoming a normal practice worldwide nowadays. Several educationists recommend utilizing ICTs in learning English, especially writing skills with various models and media (Reynolds & Kao, 2021; Sarré *et al.*, 2021). It is because the implementation of ICTs in teaching writing proves significant contributions to students' writing development, students' independent learning and enables providing materials and feedback (see Cahyono & Mutiaraningrum, 2016; Dziuban et al., 2018; Latifi *et al*., 2021; Su Ping *et al*., 2020).

Dialogic feedback has been progressively incorporated into the new teaching approach of EFL writing (Zhang, 2023) as it involves exchanges where interpretations are shared, meanings are negotiated, and expectations are clarified (Carless, 2012; Heron

*et al.*, 2023). The researchers in this study utilized dialogical feedback by utilizing the e-learning platform, specifically Google Zoom Meetings and Google Docs. We believe that multimodal dialogic feedback is the dynamic exchange of information and insights between the teacher and the student regarding the student's performance. The teacher offers feedback to the students, providing clear explanations to help them correct their mistakes. Steen-Utheim and Wittek (2017) advocate for the benefits of dialogic feedback: 1) It facilitates students' emotional and interpersonal development, 2) it sustains the communication between teacher and student, 3) it provides students with an opportunity to articulate their thoughts and feelings, and 4) it fosters personal growth in the process of learning. Furthermore, employing dialogic feedback enables students to elucidate any gaps or misunderstandings by posing inquiries to the teacher (Arinda & Sadikin, 2021; Pitt & Norton, 2017; Pitt & Winstone, 2020; Tu & Phung, 2023).

## 3. Method

This study used a mixed-method approach to investigate the impacts of development on L2 learners' writing proficiency and their reactions and responses to interactive feedback delivered via multiplatform technology-mediated learning. A mixed-research design, according to (Creswell, 2023), allows for numerous data evidentiary for research purposes. This study gathered data to provide a complete analysis of students' responses to feedback and its potential impact on the learners' writing. While quantitative data were gathered through formative assessment, writing a 250-300 word argumentative writing during classroom action research (CAR) cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), semi-structured interviews were used to elicit learners' perceptions of MDF.

The research was carried out in the English Education Department of a public university in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The department provides six parallel classes specifically focused on Writing for Professional Context. The researchers purposefully selected a class of 39 students (20-21 years old, five men and 34 girls) for various reasons. First, all students have completed the two required courses for the course. Second, no student was classified as a re-taker of the course. Finally, they agreed to take part in this study. On the other hand, eleven students who participated in the interview session were recruited conveniently. After the CAR session, a model teacher invited anyone who desired to attend the interview regarding their responses about MDF.

The instruction lasted four months and covered two and a half hours per meeting in two cycles once a week in a flipped classroom. The instructor adopted a genre-based approach while providing MDF. The genre of the text is argumentative writing, and teaching resources address contextual concerns in educational technology and food based on student preferences. Before starting the intervention, the researchers asked the participants about the argumentative text's topic, which they were familiar with. The writing instruction was delivered in two cycles, the first of which included comments from the researchers via Google Zoom (figure 1). Following the reflection, cycle two was carried out utilizing Google Docs. After completing their text, the students saved it on the

given Google Drive in order to receive feedback. While feedback in cycle one was offered in English, feedback in cycle two was provided in Indonesian based on the student's preferences so that they may comprehend it effectively. Yu (2016) argues that L1 mediates cognitive resources in working memory and influences feedback practices positively.

Then, in the second cycle, the students revised the same text they shared on Google Drive but highlighted it with a different colour to indicate the changes they made (Figure 2). Furthermore, students could react to the comments they received via the "chat box" offered by Google Docs (see Figure 2). Conversely, this research only addresses the contribution of feedback supplied via two technology-mediated learning platforms.
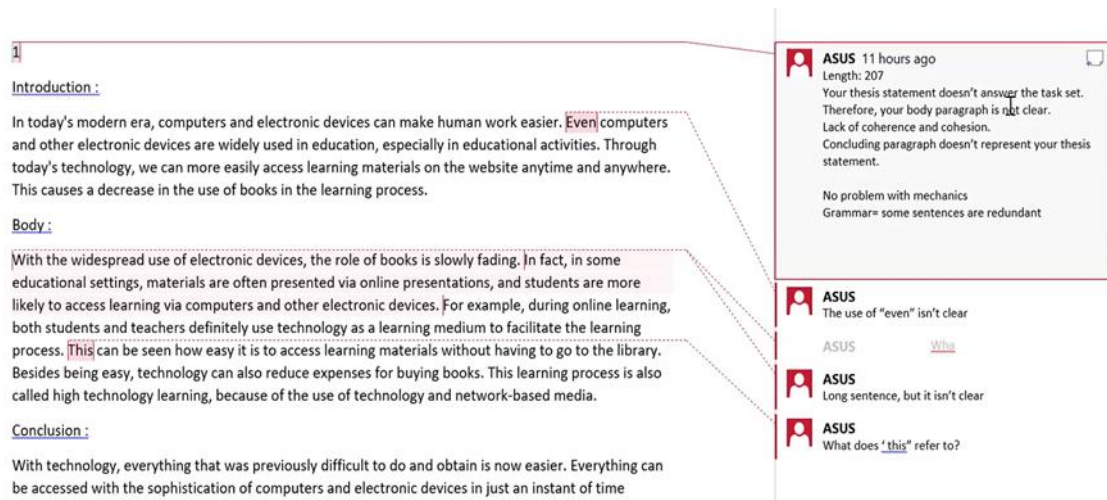


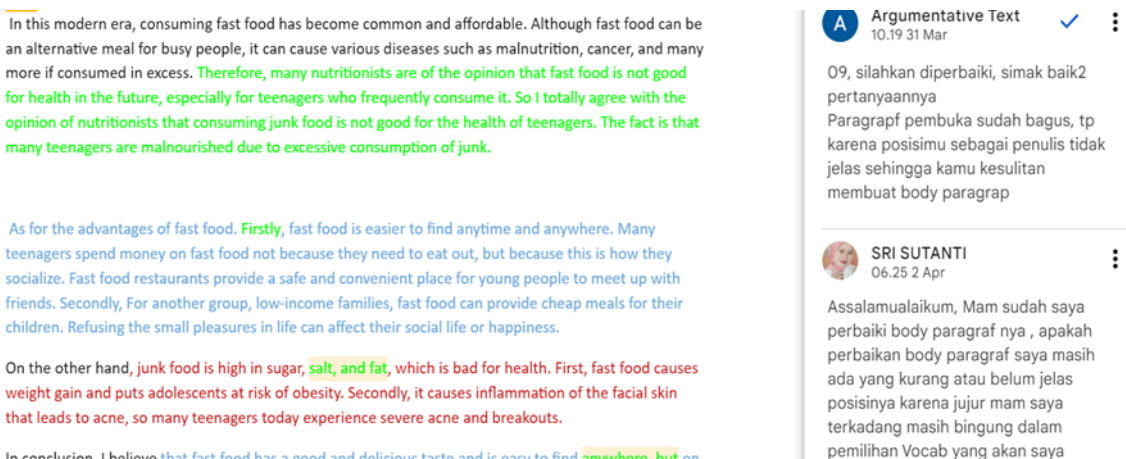**Figure 1**. An example of feedback delivered through Google Zoom



**Figure 2**. An example of feedback delivered through Google Document

For research objectives, the researchers first examined the students' text writing learning progress and feedback amount using the analytical scoring rubric in simple

statistical analyses. The analytic scoring rubric comprises the elements of writing, namely organization, content, language use, mechanics, and length of the texts. The analytic rubric was designed based on the references, such as from (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018; Chong & Ye, 2021; Cumming *et al.,* 2005; O'Connell, 2010; Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

Then, thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted to analyse the interview data. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis provides an adaptable technique and abundant, specific, and diverse data, allowing researchers to refashion them to match the required empirical investigation. The technique includes familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and identifying themes, and producing the report.

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1. The contribution of MDF toward students' writing skills

The current study collected 144 argumentative texts to address the first research question, and each cycle inquired students to submit two drafts (before and after the feedback session). As a result, the text amount is the same for each draft (39 texts). The researchers examined the texts in the five sub-elements of writing, namely organization, content, language use, mechanics, and text length, to evaluate whether the revision quality of students' texts improved in each cycle. It aimed to examine the student's composition progression from draft to draft (see Figure 3.). However, the current article focused on improving revision for each element rather than the overall scores for each cycle draft.
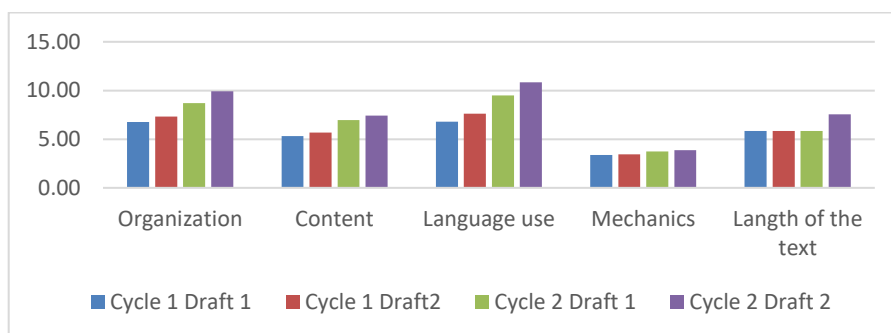


**Figure 3**. Students' text-writing progress

Figure 3 depicts the students' writing growth trends from cycle one in five composition categories. To begin, the student's writing skills in organization, content, and language use improved steadily, starting with the first draft. While the students' drafts improve just slightly in the first cycle, their texts greatly improve in cycle two, except for mechanics. Students' hesitancy to seek clarification has been noted as a problem when offering feedback via Google Zoom. Not all students sought clarification on the feedback they received. Unstable internet connections were also the cause of some students' inability to capture the lecturer and students' interactions via Zoom. The finding aligns with the research findings by some practitioners, such as (Nasihah & Senta, 2022;

Thamrin *et al*., 2023). In addition, most students were reluctant to clarify their feedback on their psychological barriers. Some students were timid in the face of their errors. This condition is in line with the study by Yoshida (2010) that the learners' reactions to corrective feedback without being aware of the feedback appeared to be motivated by a desire to avoid social strain or embarrassment in the classroom. According to some practitioners (such as Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Karabenick, 2006; Yang *et al*., 2021), obtaining comments from others can elicit feelings of embarrassment stemming from the prospect of having one's work publicly evaluated.

As a result, feedback was supplied via Google Docs in cycle two. Students may easily interact with the instructor, clarifying their corrections and revising their drafts anytime, without worrying about internet connectivity gaps. On the other hand, the trend of text length stayed consistent for the preceding three drafts because the students focused on refining their texts' organization, extending their texts to correspond with the goal set, and achieving coherence and cohesiveness. Overall, the students' writing skills were developed in cycle two when they had feedback through Google Docs. The present study supports the findings of several practitioners (Alharbi, 2020; Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2022) about the potential of Google Docs to enhance teacher-student interaction by utilizing its commenting and answering features. In addition, a study by Saragih *et al*. (2023) supports the present study, in which they reported that most lecturers preferred online feedback modes, such as Google Classroom, Google Document, SPADA, and Moodle.

The students' learning achievement reflects the amount of feedback they received through Google Zoom or Google Docs. The number of students was used to count organization, content, and text length. In contrast, language use and mechanics were examined based on the total number of errors performed by all students.

**Table 1**

Amount of feedback provided in Google Zoom and Google Docs.

| Element of writing | Sub-elements | Google Zoom | | Google Docs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Draft 1 | Draft 2 | Draft1 | Draft2 |
| Organization | Introductory paragraph | 23 | 18 | 25 | 10 |
| | Body paragraphs | 30 | 26 | 9 | 4 |
| | Concluding paragraph | 24 | 22 | 11 | 9 |
| Content | Relevance | 18 | 16 | 20 | 10 |
| | Coherence | 29 | 22 | 11 | 11 |
| | Cohesion | 33 | 27 | 15 | 9 |
| Language use | Grammar | 231 | 184 | 118 | 16 |
| | Vocabulary | 34 | 19 | 15 | 10 |
| Mechanics | Spelling | 48 | 15 | 14 | 1 |
| | Capitalization | 112 | 71 | 13 | 1 |
| | Punctuation Marks | 82 | 50 | 15 | 12 |
| Length of the paragraph | | 31 | 20 | 5 | 7 |

Table 1 illustrates that there were clear differences in the amount of feedback that was offered across the two different modalities. The interesting data was the students received more frequent feedback in draft two of cycle one than in draft two of cycle two due to the students' flexibility in clarifying their errors and revising.

*4.1. Students' perception of MDF towards students' writing skills*
*4.1.1. Perceived comprehensibility of MDF*

Data from semi-structured interviews revealed that technology-mediated feedback assisted by Google Zoom and Google Docs guided students clearly in revising their texts rather than through written feedback. Bahari (2021) examined the influence of computer-mediated feedback in 97 peer-reviewed studies published between 2012 and 2020 and discovered that computer-mediated tools can be utilized to provide feedback during teaching. A meta-analysis study carried out by Lv *et al.* (2021) also supports the usage of e-feedback. They discovered that online feedback on ESL/EFL writing contributes to learners' writing quality after analyzing 1568 relevant articles. These two prior studies show that e-feedback influences students' ability to produce high-quality work. Also, the students reported that two ways of communication between students and the teacher and among students in the Zoom room increased students' comprehension.

> Giving feedback via Zoom allows me to listen to and read my writing so I can grasp it right away, whereas giving feedback via G-Docs allows me to clarify things I don't understand and revisit the file repeatedly to improve it (R3, R02, R27).

> When I want to revise my text based on the written feedback, I sometimes forget (R09).

However, other respondents stated that receiving comments via Google Docs is more private than receiving comments via Google Zoom. Thus, they are more comfortable clarifying their errors. Furthermore, an intermittent internet connection did not hinder improving the text on Google Docs.

> Providing feedback via Google Docs is clearer, more personal, and more understanding because errors were highlighted, and I could ask many times. (R17, R22)

> I easily comprehended the feedback provided by GDoc since I felt more comfortable interacting with lecturers and being cared for. In contrast, I am embarrassed to ask about my errors in the Zoom room. (R17, R28)

The findings confirm the investigation conducted by Khoiriyah (2021) that the degree of students' reported comfort in using Google Docs for online writing classes is high, indicating that students have good attitudes toward their learning experience.

*4.2.2. Perceived usefulness of MDF towards students' writing skills*

According to the results of the interviews, students had a positive perspective on the usefulness of MDF for writing revisions. Almost all respondents noted that receiving dialogic feedback via Google Zoom and Google Docs is the most recent experience; previously, they had not obtained coherent responses during full-online lectures due to COVID-19. They also claimed that clear feedback boosted their writing abilities.

> Giving comments through Google Zoom and Google Docs is a new experience. Even though it was the Covid-19 era, we had never had the experience of engaging about our writing through these two easily accessible modes. Providing feedback via Zoom and Gdoc helps me understand the input given. My score is growing (R02,R33,R37).

The results align with the findings of research by Tan *et al.*(2021), which examined the impact of integrating automated written corrective feedback and computer-mediated peer feedback on students' revision needs, writing effectiveness, and the development of autonomy and motivation in the writing process. Additionally, Deeley (2018) demonstrated that by taking small incremental steps and adopting a flexible strategy, the use of various types of technology can be advantageous in supporting effective evaluation for learning and feedback in higher education.

It can be concluded that MDF is urgently needed to enhance students' learning of writing. In line with formative assessment principles, providing feedback should focus on how students can correct their mistakes rather than assessing student learning outcomes. Dialogical feedback views students as partners rather than recipients, so the feedback they receive is beneficial now and in the future. Therefore, in higher education, formative assessment and feedback are fundamental aspects of learning (Morris *et al.*, 2021).

It was evident that MDF engaged students in revising their text. MDF can develop their critical thinking (Paul, 2009) by clarifying or raising questions regarding the comments they received and the rubric used. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Tam (2020) with tertiary students in Hong Kong, in which some of his findings of dialogical feedback are positive contributions to students' learning outcomes and high motivation. Furthermore, feedback is frequently overlooked (Carless, 2012); yet, with the advent of technology, feedback is more frequent and timely, engaging students actively and communicatively. Wood  (2020) discovered in his study of students' perspectives on technology-mediated dialogic feedback that feedback practices in higher education are now frequent. The current study's most notable finding was that students' language revision improved dramatically. This finding aligns with the results of Merkel (2018). Lastly, providing feedback in Google Docs made students feel comfortable and cared for, which was not found in other research (such as in the study by Dathumma & Singhasiri, 2015), and it becomes the new finding regarding the integration of technology-mediated dialogic feedback.

## 5. Conclusion

The current study was carried out to investigate the influence of incorporating MDF into genre-based writing classes among a group of Indonesian EFL university students. Google Zoom and Google Docs aided MDF's engagement in action research to increase students' writing skills. The results reveal that student text revision increased from cycle to cycle. The students also have a positive attitude about MDF in terms of improving their comprehension and the benefit of MDF in enhancing their writing abilities. However, because this is a small-scale study examining the integration of MDF in the writing class, the results may vary greatly depending on the comparability of different situations. As a result, future research should look into other ways of including MDF (such as incorporating self- and peer-assessment in addition to instructor feedback).

This study has practical implications for using technology-mediated dialogic feedback in writing teaching. The former, this study supports the use of Google Zoom and Google Docs among EFL learners who need help writing a good text. Finally, teachers must remember that technology is not a panacea for all educational issues.

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