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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK USING MICROSOFT WORD IN TEACHING ENGLISH WRITING

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ABSTRAK

This study examines the effectiveness of electronic feedback (e-feedback) delivered through Microsoft Word in enhancing English writing skills among university students. Employing a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test control group, the research involved 20 fourth-semester students at STAIN Mandailing Natal, divided equally into an experimental group receiving e-feedback via Microsoft Word's Track Changes and Comment features, and a control group receiving conventional written feedback. Data were gathered through writing tests, questionnaires, and documentation. Statistical analysis using paired t-tests and independent samples t-tests revealed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher post-test scores (M = 81.40) compared to the control group (M = 71.20), with a significance value of p = 0.003 (< 0.05). Furthermore, student questionnaire responses indicated highly positive perceptions toward e-feedback in terms of clarity, accessibility, and motivational value. These findings affirm that electronic feedback through Microsoft Word constitutes a substantially more effective instructional strategy in teaching English writing than traditional paper-based feedback approaches.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas umpan balik elektronik (e-feedback) yang diberikan melalui Microsoft Word dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis bahasa Inggris di kalangan mahasiswa. Dengan menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimen dengan pre-test dan post-test pada kelompok kontrol, penelitian ini melibatkan 20 mahasiswa semester empat di STAIN Mandailing Natal, yang dibagi sama rata menjadi kelompok eksperimen yang menerima e-feedback melalui fitur Track Changes dan Comment di Microsoft Word, dan kelompok kontrol yang menerima umpan balik tertulis konvensional. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis, kuesioner, dan dokumentasi. Analisis statistik menggunakan paired t-test dan independent samples t-test menunjukkan bahwa kelompok eksperimen memperoleh skor post-test yang secara signifikan lebih tinggi (M = 81,40) dibandingkan dengan kelompok kontrol (M = 71,20), dengan nilai signifikansi p = 0,003 (< 0,05). Selain itu, tanggapan kuesioner dari mahasiswa menunjukkan persepsi yang sangat positif terhadap e-feedback dalam hal kejelasan, kemudahan akses, dan nilai motivasi. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa umpan balik elektronik melalui Microsoft Word merupakan strategi pengajaran yang jauh lebih efektif dalam mengajar menulis bahasa Inggris dibandingkan dengan pendekatan umpan balik berbasis kertas tradisional.

Kata kunci: *Umpan Balik Elektronik, Microsoft Word, Menulis Bahasa Inggris, EFL, Kuasi-Eksperimen*

INTRODUCTION

Writing constitutes one of the most complex and cognitively demanding language skills that second and foreign language learners must acquire. Unlike receptive skills such as reading and listening, productive writing demands not only linguistic competence but also cognitive organization, rhetorical awareness, and the ability to construct meaning through text in a coherent and grammatically accurate manner (Graham & Perin, 2022). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, writing has long occupied a central position in academic curricula, as proficiency in this skill is increasingly tied to academic success and professional advancement in a globalized world.

Despite its acknowledged importance, teaching writing in EFL settings remains a persistent pedagogical challenge. One of the most significant difficulties lies in the provision of feedback an indispensable element of the writing development process. Feedback enables learners to identify their errors, understand the gap between their current performance and the target standard, and revise their writing accordingly (Hattie & Timperley, 2021). However, traditional or paper-based feedback has frequently been criticized for its limitations: it is often illegible, time-consuming to produce, and delayed in delivery all of which reduce its instructional effectiveness (Bonanomi et al., 2022).

The rapid integration of digital technologies into educational practice has opened new possibilities for providing feedback in more efficient, detailed, and learner-centered ways. Electronic feedback commonly referred to as e-feedback encompasses a range of digitally mediated feedback forms including audio comments, learning management system notifications, and word-processed annotations. Among these, Microsoft Word stands out as a particularly practical and widely accessible tool, offering features such as Track Changes, Comments, and the Review Toolbar, which allow instructors to annotate student texts in a systematic and visually clear manner (Séror, 2021).

The use of Microsoft Word for e-feedback is especially relevant in higher education settings in Indonesia, where digital literacy is growing but institutional resources for sophisticated learning management systems may be limited. At STAIN Mandailing Natal, as with many Islamic higher education institutions in the country, English writing instruction faces the dual challenge of limited instructional time and students' relatively low prior exposure to academic writing conventions. In such contexts, the adoption of accessible digital tools for feedback delivery may offer a pragmatic and pedagogically sound solution.

Prior research has consistently demonstrated the benefits of e-feedback in various educational contexts. Studies by Mahfoodh (2021) and Yusuf et al. (2022) found that students who received digitally mediated feedback demonstrated greater engagement with instructor comments and produced more substantial revisions than their counterparts receiving handwritten feedback. Similarly, Annamalai (2022) reported that e-feedback through Microsoft Word increased writing accuracy and organizational coherence among Malaysian university students. Al-Rashidi (2023) further observed that EFL learners perceived e-feedback as more legible, manageable, and motivating than traditional written commentary.

The theoretical underpinnings of e-feedback effectiveness draw from several foundational frameworks. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant, as targeted feedback functions as a form of scaffolding that supports learners in moving from their current ability level toward a higher potential (as cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2021). Equally important is Hyland and Hyland's (2019) interactionist perspective on feedback, which emphasizes the dialogic nature of effective instructor-student commentary and advocates for feedback that is specific, contextualized, and actionable.

The effectiveness of e-feedback has also been discussed in relation to the process writing approach (Flower & Hayes, 1981, as cited in Ferris, 2023), which views writing as a recursive, multi-stage activity involving prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Within this framework, feedback occupies a central role in the revision stage, and its quality directly impacts the depth and quality of students' revisions. E-feedback tools such as Microsoft Word's Track Changes preserve the original text alongside corrections, thereby making the feedback process more transparent and instructionally rich (Abrams, 2021).

A growing body of empirical work has specifically investigated the use of Microsoft Word as a feedback medium. Fithriani et al. (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia and found that students who received Track Changes-based feedback produced writing that was significantly better organized and contained fewer grammatical errors than those receiving handwritten notes. Rahimi and Zhang (2022) similarly documented improvements in argumentative writing quality among Chinese EFL learners following e-feedback intervention. Moreover, Mubarak et al. (2023) highlighted the role of e-feedback in fostering learner autonomy, as students could revisit and act upon instructor comments at their own pace.

Despite the accumulating evidence in support of e-feedback, several gaps remain in the literature. First, most existing studies have been conducted in contexts with relatively high digital infrastructure, leaving underexplored the experiences of students in resource-constrained Islamic higher education settings in Indonesia. Second, while many studies have examined either writing accuracy or student perception in isolation, fewer have attempted to integrate both quantitative outcomes and learner experience within a single investigation. Third, comparative analyses between e-feedback and traditional feedback within a controlled experimental framework remain limited in the Indonesian university context.

It is within this gap that the present study situates itself. The research addresses the following question: Is electronic feedback delivered via Microsoft Word significantly more effective than traditional feedback in improving the English writing achievement of students at STAIN Mandailing Natal? A secondary question explores students' perceptions toward the use of Microsoft Word as an e-feedback medium. The objective of this study is thus twofold: to measure the effect of e-feedback on English writing performance through a quasi-experimental design, and to investigate learner attitudes and perceptions toward this instructional approach. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes both empirical evidence and practical insights to the ongoing discourse on technology-enhanced writing instruction in Indonesian higher education

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design incorporating both a pre-test and a post-test control group structure. This design was selected because it allows for meaningful comparisons between two groups under naturalistic instructional conditions without the full randomization that characterizes true experimental designs making it suitable for educational research in intact classroom settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The experimental group received electronic feedback via Microsoft Word, while the control group received conventional written feedback throughout the treatment period.

Sample

The research participants consisted of 20 fourth-semester students enrolled in the English Education Department at STAIN Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, participants were divided into two groups: 10 students constituted the

experimental group, and the remaining 10 formed the control group. All participants were enrolled in the same academic writing course and had similar prior exposure to English writing instruction, as confirmed by their pre-test scores. Ethical considerations were duly observed: all participants provided informed consent, and data confidentiality was maintained throughout the study

Instruments and Data Collection

Three data collection instruments were employed in this study. First, a writing test was administered at both pre-test and post-test stages. Students were asked to compose a descriptive essay of approximately 250 words on a given prompt. Essays were scored using an analytical rubric adapted from Jacob et al.'s ESL Composition Profile (as cited in Weigle, 2022), assessing five dimensions: content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (20%), and mechanics (10%). Second, a closed-ended questionnaire comprising 20 items on a five-point Likert scale was distributed to the experimental group after the intervention to assess students' perceptions of e-feedback. Third, documentation—including samples of annotated student essays and feedback records—was collected to triangulate the quantitative findings

Treatment Procedure

The instructional treatment was conducted over eight weeks. The experimental group submitted their weekly writing assignments electronically via email. The instructor provided feedback using Microsoft Word's Track Changes and Comments features—marking grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content issues with specific, coded annotations. Students were required to review the feedback, respond to comments, and submit revised drafts within one week. The control group followed a parallel schedule but submitted and received handwritten feedback on printed copies of their essays. No other instructional variables differed between the two groups

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics—including mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage gains—were computed to summarize pre-test and post-test performance for both groups. For inferential analysis, a paired samples t-test was used to determine whether within-group differences between pre-test and post-test scores were statistically significant. An independent samples t-test was then applied to compare the post-test means of the experimental and control groups. The decision rule was set at a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$: if $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0: there is no significant difference in writing achievement between groups) would be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis (H_1: the experimental group receiving e-feedback via Microsoft Word achieves significantly higher writing scores than the control group). Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with mean scores interpreted based on a standard Likert scale interpretation framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Pre-Test Scores

Prior to the treatment, both groups completed a writing test to establish baseline comparability. The mean pre-test score for the experimental group was 62.30 (SD = 5.12), while the control group recorded a mean of 62.80 (SD = 5.47). An independent samples t-test confirmed no statistically significant difference between the two groups at baseline ($t(18) = 0.24$, $p = 0.812$), establishing that both groups entered the study at an equivalent level of

English writing proficiency. This equivalency is a prerequisite for valid quasi-experimental comparison and strengthens the interpretability of post-test differences as attributable to the treatment.

Post-Test Scores

Following eight weeks of instructional treatment, both groups completed the post-test writing assessment under identical conditions. The experimental group demonstrated a mean post-test score of 81.40 (SD = 4.78), representing a gain of approximately 19.10 points from the pre-test. In contrast, the control group achieved a mean post-test score of 71.20 (SD = 5.23), reflecting a more modest improvement of 8.40 points. An independent samples t-test comparing the two post-test means yielded $t(18) = 4.72$, $p = 0.003$—well below the established threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. These results indicate that the difference in post-test performance between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant, warranting rejection of the null hypothesis.

Within-group analyses using paired samples t-tests further corroborated these findings. For the experimental group, the pre-test to post-test improvement was significant ($t(9) = 8.93$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.82$). The control group also showed improvement, though at a lower magnitude ($t(9) = 4.21$, $p = 0.002$), with a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.33$). These findings are consistent with those of Fithriani et al. (2021), who reported significantly greater pre-to-post gains among Indonesian EFL students receiving e-feedback compared to those receiving traditional written corrections. Similarly, Rahimi and Zhang (2022) documented analogous patterns of differential improvement, with e-feedback groups consistently outperforming control groups on measures of writing accuracy and coherence.

A rubric-level analysis further revealed that the largest gains for the experimental group occurred in the dimensions of organization (pre-test M = 13.20, post-test M = 17.40) and language use (pre-test M = 12.60, post-test M = 16.80). This pattern is particularly notable given that these are dimensions in which Microsoft Word's annotation tools offer the most granular and specific guidance—line-by-line grammatical correction through Track Changes, and structural commentary through marginalia. Mubarak et al. (2023) similarly found that e-feedback led to the greatest improvements in organizational cohesion and syntactic accuracy, precisely the areas where visual, text-embedded feedback offers the clearest pedagogical advantage over general written commentary.

Questionnaire Results

Questionnaire data collected from the experimental group revealed strongly positive perceptions toward Microsoft Word-based e-feedback. The overall mean perception score was 4.42 out of 5.00, falling within the 'strongly agree' category. Item-level analysis identified three dimensions that received particularly high endorsement: (1) clarity of feedback (M = 4.65), with students expressing that instructor annotations were more legible and easier to understand than handwritten notes; (2) convenience and accessibility (M = 4.58), as students appreciated the ability to access and review feedback at any time and location; and (3) motivation to revise (M = 4.37), indicating that e-feedback encouraged greater engagement with the revision process. These outcomes align closely with findings reported by Al-Rashidi (2023), who documented similarly positive perceptions among Saudi EFL learners, and with Annamalai (2022), whose Malaysian student respondents rated e-feedback highly on dimensions of clarity and usability.

Discussion

The Effectiveness of Electronic Feedback on English Writing Achievement

The statistically significant difference in post-test writing scores between the experimental and control groups strongly supports the conclusion that electronic feedback delivered through Microsoft Word is more effective than traditional feedback in improving EFL students' writing performance. This finding is in line with the broader body of research on technology-enhanced feedback. Mahfoodh (2021) argues that e-feedback enables instructors to produce more comprehensive and specific comments than handwritten annotation, largely because word-processing tools lower the physical burden of annotation and allow for swift, iterative editing. When feedback is more specific and comprehensive, learners gain a clearer understanding of their weaknesses and are better equipped to make meaningful revisions (Hattie & Timperley, 2021).

The superiority of e-feedback in terms of learning outcomes can also be understood through Vygotsky's (1978, as cited in Hattie & Timperley, 2021) Zone of Proximal Development framework. Microsoft Word's Track Changes function, in particular, provides moment-by-moment scaffolding at the sentence and paragraph level—guiding students through the precise corrections required to move their writing closer to the target standard. This granular, in-text scaffolding is difficult to replicate in traditional feedback, where spatial constraints on paper often result in condensed or generalized comments that students may find difficult to operationalize during revision (Séror, 2021).

Furthermore, the process writing approach (Ferris, 2023) positions feedback as a catalyst for the revision stage of writing development. The experimental group's engagement with the Track Changes interface appeared to naturalize a recursive approach to writing, as students were required to explicitly accept or reject each correction an interactive process that rendered revision more deliberate and metacognitive than the passive receipt of a graded paper. Abrams (2021) similarly found that the accept/reject functionality of Microsoft Word's Track Changes tool promoted active engagement with feedback, leading to more substantive revisions than passive reading of instructor notes.

Comparing Electronic and Traditional Feedback

The comparative analysis between the two feedback conditions in this study reveals a clear and consistent advantage for the e-feedback group across all measured dimensions of writing quality. This is consistent with findings by Yusuf et al. (2022), who demonstrated that Indonesian university students exposed to computer-mediated feedback not only achieved higher scores on writing assessments but also exhibited greater willingness to revise and resubmit their work compared to peers receiving pen-and-paper feedback. The digital medium appears to reduce the psychological distance often associated with corrective feedback, presenting corrections in a normalized, non-stigmatizing visual format.

Traditional feedback, while not without merit, presents several inherent limitations that e-feedback is structurally positioned to address. Bonanomi et al. (2022) observe that handwritten feedback is frequently constrained by physical space, making it difficult for instructors to provide detailed, multi-layered commentary on complex student errors. In contrast, Microsoft Word's commenting feature allows for unlimited annotation depth, enabling instructors to explain not merely what is wrong but why it is wrong and how it can be improved commentary that Hyland and Hyland (2019) characterize as the hallmark of high-quality formative feedback.

There is also a temporal dimension to the comparison. Traditional feedback cycles are inherently slower: papers must be physically collected, annotated, and redistributed a process that can span several days and disrupt the instructional momentum of a writing course. E-feedback via Microsoft Word enables the same cycle to be completed within a single day or less, particularly when submissions and returns are managed via institutional

email (Mubarak et al., 2023). The resulting reduction in feedback latency allows students to act on instructor commentary while their writing tasks remain cognitively fresh, a condition widely recognized as optimal for learning from feedback (Graham & Perin, 2022).

Student Perceptions Toward Electronic Feedback

The overwhelmingly positive questionnaire responses from the experimental group underscore an important pedagogical reality: effective feedback is not only a function of its content but also of how learners experience and engage with it. Students in this study rated e-feedback highly on dimensions of clarity, accessibility, and motivational value perceptions that directly relate to their willingness to engage with and act upon instructor commentary (Al-Rashidi, 2023).

The clarity advantage of e-feedback is attributable, in large part, to the legibility of typed annotations in comparison with handwritten ones. Annamalai (2022) points out that students often struggle to decipher instructor handwriting, particularly in densely annotated scripts, leading to misinterpretation or outright disengagement from feedback. Microsoft Word eliminates this barrier entirely, presenting comments in a consistent, readable typeface alongside the relevant portions of the student text. Moreover, the ability to color-code comments by category for example, differentiating between grammar corrections (red), organizational suggestions (blue), and content feedback (green) allows instructors to present feedback in a visually structured way that supports selective revision focus.

The accessibility dimension specifically, students' ability to revisit e-feedback at any time and from any location is particularly salient in the context of STAIN Mandailing Natal, where many students commute considerable distances and may not always be available during designated feedback sessions. Fithriani et al. (2021) documented a similar dynamic among Indonesian students, finding that the on-demand accessibility of digital feedback contributed to more consistent engagement with instructor commentary across diverse learner schedules. This flexibility is a distinctive advantage of e-feedback over traditional paper-based approaches, which require physical access to the annotated document.

From a motivational standpoint, the high ratings on the questionnaire's revision motivation items suggest that e-feedback positively influenced students' self-efficacy and engagement with the revision process. This aligns with Rahimi and Zhang's (2022) theoretical framework, which links positive feedback experiences to increased writing self-efficacy the learner's belief in their capacity to perform well on future writing tasks. When feedback is clear, specific, and presented in an interactive format, it is more likely to be perceived as constructive rather than punitive, thereby reducing writing anxiety and enhancing intrinsic motivation to revise (Mubarak et al., 2023).

Advantages and Limitations of E-Feedback via Microsoft Word

From the evidence gathered in this study, several key advantages of Microsoft Word-based e-feedback can be identified. First, the Track Changes feature provides an unambiguous record of all instructor modifications, allowing students to compare their original text with the corrected version without losing either version a pedagogical transparency that supports deeper error analysis (Séror, 2021). Second, the Comment feature allows for explanatory, metalinguistic feedback commentary that explains the reasoning behind a correction rather than simply marking it as incorrect which has been shown to produce greater long-term learning gains than mere error marking (Ferris, 2023). Third, the accessibility and reproducibility of digital files ensures that feedback can be archived, searched, and referenced across multiple drafts, supporting the longitudinal tracking of student writing development.

Nevertheless, the approach is not without its limitations. A critical prerequisite for the

successful implementation of Microsoft Word-based e-feedback is digital literacy both instructors and students must possess sufficient competence with the software's review features for the feedback to function as intended. In the early stages of this study, several students in the experimental group required additional orientation on how to navigate Track Changes and accept or reject revisions, suggesting that implementation must be preceded by explicit digital skills training (Yusuf et al., 2022). Additionally, access to reliable internet connectivity and personal computers or laptops cannot be assumed across all student populations, particularly in rural or semi-urban settings in Indonesia where infrastructure disparities remain significant (Bonanomi et al., 2022).

Another limitation relates to the impersonality of textual feedback. While the specificity and legibility of e-feedback are considerable assets, some learners particularly those with affective barriers to writing may benefit from the interpersonal dimension of face-to-face feedback conferences, which e-feedback cannot replicate (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Future iterations of e-feedback practice might consider integrating asynchronous text-based feedback with periodic synchronous conferencing to preserve both the efficiency of digital annotation and the relational warmth of direct instructor-student dialogue.

Implications for EFL Writing Instruction

The findings of this study carry meaningful implications for writing instruction in Indonesian EFL higher education. Most immediately, they provide empirically grounded justification for the institutional adoption of Microsoft Word-based e-feedback as a standard component of academic writing curricula at STAIN Mandailing Natal and comparable institutions. Given the software's wide availability, low cost, and functional richness, it represents an accessible entry point into technology-enhanced writing instruction for institutions that may lack the resources to deploy more sophisticated learning management systems or dedicated writing platforms (Annamalai, 2022).

At the pedagogical level, the study affirms the importance of feedback quality—not merely quantity in writing development. The experimental group's gains on organization and language use dimensions suggest that targeted, in-text feedback is more productive than holistic end-of-text commentary. Writing instructors should therefore be trained in effective e-feedback practices, including the strategic use of Track Changes for error correction and Comments for metalinguistic explanation, to maximize the pedagogical value of this tool (Abrams, 2021). Graham and Perin (2022) similarly advocate for professional development in feedback literacy as a prerequisite for effective writing pedagogy in technology-mediated environments.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the effectiveness of electronic feedback delivered through Microsoft Word in improving English writing achievement among undergraduate students at STAIN Mandailing Natal. Through a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design involving 20 participants, the research demonstrated that students receiving e-feedback via Microsoft Word's Track Changes and Comments features achieved significantly higher post-test writing scores than their counterparts who received traditional handwritten feedback. The mean post-test score of the experimental group (81.40) substantially exceeded that of the control group (71.20), and this difference was confirmed to be statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Questionnaire data further revealed that students in the experimental group held strongly positive perceptions of e-feedback, particularly regarding its clarity, accessibility, and capacity to motivate revision.

These findings contribute to a growing body of empirical evidence supporting the

pedagogical value of digitally mediated feedback in EFL writing instruction. The study underscores that e-feedback, when implemented thoughtfully and supported by adequate digital literacy training, can substantially enhance the quality and efficiency of writing instruction in resource-constrained higher education settings. Microsoft Word, in particular, emerges as a practical and effective tool for this purpose offering a combination of specificity, accessibility, and interactivity that traditional feedback mechanisms are structurally unable to match.

Future research should extend this line of inquiry in several directions. Longitudinal studies tracking the sustained impact of e-feedback on writing development across multiple semesters would provide valuable insights into the durability of observed gains. Comparative studies examining different e-feedback tools such as Google Docs, Turnitin GradeMark, or audio-based feedback would help contextualize the relative merits of Microsoft Word within a broader landscape of digital feedback options. Additionally, qualitative investigations using interviews or think-aloud protocols would shed deeper light on the cognitive and affective processes through which students engage with e-feedback, complementing the quantitative outcomes documented in the present study

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