

Exploring Lecturers' Written Corrective Feedback in Academic English Writing Course: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the written corrective feedback (WCF) strategies employed by lecturers in an Academic English Writing course and to describe how these strategies are implemented in students' written work. The research problem arises from the limited understanding of how lecturers select and apply corrective feedback strategies in authentic Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing contexts. Although WCF is an important pedagogical practice, its implementation varies according to instructional objectives, students' abilities, and classroom conditions. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design involving two lecturers and 12 students in the English Language Education Study Program during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through classroom observations, document analysis of students' corrected writing, and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al., with feedback strategies categorized according to Ellis's typology. The findings revealed three WCF strategies: direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback. Direct feedback involved rewriting incorrect forms and adding missing linguistic elements, particularly in grammar, word choice, capitalization, and punctuation. Indirect feedback used underlining and highlighting to help students identify errors independently, while metalinguistic feedback provided comments guiding students to revise paragraph-level problems. The lecturers' choices were influenced by instructional stages, delivery modes, and perceptions of students' readiness. These findings highlight the importance of applying varied and context-sensitive feedback strategies to support students' academic writing development.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, feedback strategies, academic writing, EFL writing

INTRODUCTION

Written corrective feedback (WCF) is widely regarded as one of the most important pedagogical practices in second and foreign language writing instruction. By responding to students' texts, lecturers provide information that helps learners notice gaps between their output and target-language norms, revise their drafts, and gradually develop their writing competence (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Beyond its cognitive function, feedback also shapes learners' affective engagement with writing, as it can build confidence and motivation when delivered appropriately (Brookhart & Moss, 2009; Hidayati, 2016).

The role of WCF is particularly crucial for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), for whom writing remains one of the most demanding language skills. Producing an effective academic text requires students to manage several components simultaneously, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Weaknesses in any of these components can obscure the intended meaning of a text, which makes lecturers' corrective responses an essential source of guidance during the writing process.

However, the effectiveness of WCF does not depend merely on whether feedback is given, but on how lecturers select and implement corrective strategies. Feedback that is comprehensive, located precisely

where errors occur, clear, aligned with learning objectives, and delivered positively is more likely to support improvement (Hidayati, 2016). In practice, lecturers must decide which errors to correct, whether to supply the correct form directly or to prompt students to find it themselves, and how to adjust these decisions to course objectives and students' proficiency. In the Academic English Writing course of the English Language Education Study Program, students' paragraphs and academic texts frequently contain errors across all five writing components, requiring repeated cycles of feedback and revision. How lecturers manage these decisions in authentic classroom practice is therefore a pressing pedagogical problem.

Previous studies have examined corrective feedback from several angles. Amroune (2016) investigated the effectiveness of corrective feedback and students' attitudes toward it, while Nielsen (2015) focused on its impact on students' writing motivation. Hidayati (2016) measured the effect of WCF on students' essay-writing achievement through pre-test and post-test scores, and Karim (2013) compared the effects of direct and indirect WCF on students' revision accuracy. Astia (2018), meanwhile, examined corrective feedback in spoken classroom interaction. Most of these studies focused on the outcomes of feedback, such as achievement, motivation, or attitudes, or on oral feedback, and many relied on experimental or survey designs. Comparatively little attention has been given to describing the written corrective feedback strategies that lecturers actually use in an authentic academic writing course and the ways these strategies are implemented in students' texts, particularly in Indonesian EFL higher education. This study addresses that gap by examining lecturers' WCF practices through classroom observation, analysis of students' corrected texts, and interviews.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the written corrective feedback strategies employed by lecturers in an Academic English Writing course and to describe how these strategies are implemented in students' written work. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategies do lecturers employ when providing corrective feedback on students' written work?
2. How do lecturers implement these corrective feedback strategies in students' written work?

Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the literature on WCF in EFL academic writing by offering a descriptive account of feedback practices in a naturalistic classroom setting. Practically, the findings are expected to help writing lecturers select and combine feedback strategies more purposefully, and to serve as a reference for future researchers investigating corrective feedback in students' written production.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, which is appropriate for exploring a phenomenon in its natural setting and describing it in depth from the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was chosen because the study sought to describe how written corrective feedback is actually practiced in an authentic writing classroom, rather than to test its effects. Naturalistic classroom research of this kind addresses how and why feedback is practiced in real-world contexts (Zhicheng Mao, Icy Lee, 2024).

The participants were two lecturers teaching the Academic English Writing course and 12 students enrolled in the course in the English Language Education Study Program during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. They were selected through purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), on the grounds that students in this course had been taught the concepts of paragraph development and were regularly assigned writing tasks on which lecturers provided corrective feedback.

Data were collected through classroom observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Observations were supported by video recordings, field notes, and photographs, and focused on how lecturers provided corrective feedback during the teaching and learning process. Students' written work containing the lecturers' corrections was collected as documents to identify the feedback strategies used. Semi-

structured interviews were then conducted with the lecturers and students to confirm and deepen the observation and document data.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The corrections found in students' texts were coded according to the typology of written corrective feedback proposed by Ellis (2009), namely direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify how and why the lecturers applied each strategy. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied methodological triangulation by comparing observation, document, and interview data, as well as source triangulation by comparing lecturers' and students' accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are described based on the three (2) major research questions presented in Chapter I, namely: (1) What strategies do lecturers use in providing *corrective feedback* on students' written work? And (2) How do lecturers use *corrective feedback* strategies on students' written work?

Corrective Feedback Strategies Used by Lecturers

The observation results showed that *direct*, *indirect*, and *metalinguistic corrective feedback* were the feedback strategies most frequently used by lecturers in the Academic English Writing course. These strategies were used to respond to assignments given to students, including their written work.

Furthermore, the interview results showed that the two lecturers teaching the *Academic English Writing* course to second-semester students in the English Education Study Program during the 2025/2026 academic year, with 12 students as participants, used different strategies. One lecturer used only one strategy, namely *direct corrective feedback*, when checking students' written assignments, whereas the other lecturer used three strategies: *direct*, *indirect*, and *metalinguistic corrective feedback*. The differences in the use of these strategies were based on the instructional objectives of the learning materials and the conditions of the students in the classroom. The data are illustrated in the following interview excerpts.

Extract 1 (Lecturer 1: July 15, 2025)

"For me, Ma'am, I used *direct [feedback]* because at that time the classes were conducted online, through videos uploaded to YouTube."

Extract 2 (Lecturer 2: June 17, 2025)

"In the *Academic English Writing* course, I often use three strategies when providing feedback on students' writing. These strategies are *direct feedback*, *indirect feedback*, and *metalinguistic feedback*."

The findings above indicate that the lecturer who used the *direct corrective feedback* strategy provided students with the correct forms of their errors by marking them through such techniques as crossing out, rewriting, and adding information. In contrast, the lecturer who used *indirect corrective feedback* did not directly correct errors in students' writing. Instead, the errors were marked by underlining, circling, or highlighting the locations of the errors, thereby encouraging students to identify the errors themselves. Meanwhile, *metalinguistic feedback* required students to recognize and correct their own errors, which encouraged the development of critical thinking and creativity in expressing their ideas in written form.

Implementation of Corrective Feedback Strategies

With regard to the findings of the first research question described above, it is clear that three corrective feedback strategies were used: *direct*, *indirect*, and *metalinguistic corrective feedback*. These strategies were implemented differently and were adjusted to the objectives of the teaching and learning materials and classroom conditions, particularly the abilities of the students in the classroom. Several forms

of implementation reflecting the use of these three strategies were identified through the data analysis and are described below.

Direct Corrective Feedback

Both lecturers used direct corrective feedback by identifying errors and supplying the correct forms in students' texts, so that students did not need to locate the errors themselves. This strategy took two forms: rewriting, in which the lecturer replaced an incorrect word, phrase, or structure with the correct one, and addition, in which the lecturer inserted a missing element such as a word, capital letter, or punctuation mark. The lecturers explained their reasons as follows.

Extract 1 (Lecturer 1: July 15, 2025)

"...I discussed [the errors] by showing and explaining several examples of students' writing. I presented them anonymously, without mentioning who owned the writing, to show what kinds of errors there were, which parts needed to be improved, and issues related to plagiarism..."

Extract 2 (Lecturer 2: July 17, 2025)

"I usually use direct feedback so that students can immediately recognize the mistakes they have made and quickly understand the material."

Rewriting was used mainly for grammatical errors. The most frequent was the omission of the third-person singular -s in the simple present tense, for example:

1. Jessica go (goes) outside and feed (feeds) the bird.
2. My friend have (has) two goldfish.

Other grammatical corrections addressed subject order and missing predicates, as in *I and my friends (My friends and I) breakfast (have breakfast)*, and missing subjects or auxiliaries, as in *Riko reading (is reading)*.

Addition was used for omitted words and for errors in capitalization and punctuation. Omitted words were inserted, as in *...and she thought (about) the general election*. Capitalization corrections addressed both unnecessary and missing capitals:

1. ...and She (she) looked outside.
2. I eat cake, but i (I) never eat biscuits.

Punctuation corrections most often involved missing sentence-final periods and missing commas before coordinating conjunctions:

1. Doni and Ana are reading a book (put period).
2. Ria wanted to sweep (put comma) but she also wanted to cook

Indirect Corrective Feedback

Both lecturers also used indirect corrective feedback by marking the location of an error without supplying the correct form, leaving students to diagnose and correct it themselves. This was done by underlining errors or highlighting them in a color different from the text.

Extract 3 (Lecturer 1: July 15, 2025)

"...Besides that, I highlighted several parts using different colors. Initially, I wanted to use the same color throughout, but sometimes I forgot which color I had used previously, so the colors changed. What mattered was that the color was different from the writing itself, which was black."

Extract 4 (Lecturer 2: July 17, 2025)

"I use indirect feedback when I want students to recognize and become aware of errors in their writing and

correct their writing themselves. I only underline the errors in their writing, and they correct and revise their work."

Examples include *My mother go to a market today* and *I and my friends breakfast*, in which the erroneous segments were underlined or highlighted but not corrected.

Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback

Only Lecturer 2 used metalinguistic feedback, which took the form of end comments describing the type of problem in a paragraph rather than marking individual errors. Typical comments were *pay attention to the supporting sentences, transition words, punctuation and capitalization* and *check parts of a paragraph, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation*. The lecturer used this strategy once students began writing full paragraphs.

Extract 5 (Lecturer 2: July 17, 2025)

"I use metalinguistic [feedback] when students are expected to identify, recognize, and correct their own errors. Students are expected to think critically and creatively when writing. I usually do this when students begin writing a paragraph."

The following paragraph received this type of comment. It shows problems that are difficult to address error by error, such as paragraph organization, missing transitions, and punctuation:

Student B: *There are three reasons why I like Coto. The first Coto is the food from Makassar, and then it is different with Soto, and it taste is delicious. In conclusion Coto from Makassar city, different with Soto, and the good taste.*

Discussion

The findings show that the lecturers drew on all three strategies in Ellis's (2009) typology of written corrective feedback, namely direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback, but did not use them uniformly. This pattern echoes Purnomo et al. (2021), who reported that Indonesian university lecturers commonly apply both direct and indirect feedback. The present study extends that finding by showing, through observation of authentic student texts rather than self-reported survey data, how these strategies were distributed across error types.

Direct feedback dominated the correction of grammar, word choice, capitalization, and punctuation. It is efficient and especially useful for learners who cannot yet identify the correct form on their own (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Lecturer 2 explicitly chose it so that students could recognize their errors immediately. However, because the correct form is supplied, direct feedback may lead students to copy corrections without processing them. This risk matters here because many corrected errors, such as missing periods, commas, and capital letters, are basic mechanical errors that students could plausibly self-correct if prompted.

In contrast, indirect and metalinguistic feedback placed greater cognitive demands on students, requiring them to locate, diagnose, and repair problems themselves. Lecturer 2 linked metalinguistic comments to the goal of developing critical thinking once students began writing paragraphs, and such comments suited problems of organization and coherence that cannot be fixed by correcting single words. This finding supports Wei and Cao (2020) who found that university EFL lecturers adjusted their feedback strategies to students' proficiency levels and contextual factors. In this study, the lecturers' choices were likewise shaped by the instructional stage and their perception of students' readiness.

The findings also reveal an issue of feedback scope. Most corrections addressed a wide range of errors in a single text, reflecting a largely comprehensive approach. Lee (2019) argues that comprehensive correction is time-consuming for teachers and can overwhelm students, and recommends targeting a limited number of

error types. Mao and Lee (2020) likewise identify feedback scope as a key concern for classroom teachers. Lecturer 1's admission of inconsistent highlighting colors suggests that a more focused and systematic approach, such as a consistent error-coding system, would make indirect feedback clearer for students and more manageable for lecturers.

Finally, students responded positively to the feedback, reporting that it helped them identify their errors and motivated them to revise. One student stated, *"It is very useful for my writing because I can identify and correct my writing errors"* (Student 3, July 23, 2025). Such responses indicate that the feedback was well received, but they do not by themselves show that students internalized the corrections. Naturalistic classroom research is valuable precisely because it reveals how feedback operates in real teaching conditions (Zhicheng Mao, Icy Lee, 2024). In this case, it suggests that the effectiveness of feedback depends not only on the strategy chosen but also on whether lecturers follow up on students' revisions.

Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes naturalistic classroom evidence to research on written corrective feedback in EFL academic writing. Rather than testing the effects of particular feedback types, it shows how lecturers select and combine direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback according to the instructional stage, the delivery mode, and their perception of students' readiness. Practically, the findings suggest that writing lecturers should use direct feedback mainly for errors students cannot yet correct on their own, and shift toward indirect and metalinguistic feedback as students progress to paragraph-level writing. Lecturers may also benefit from a more focused feedback scope (Lee, 2019), and from a consistent error-coding system, which would make indirect feedback easier for students to interpret. At the program level, the findings point to the value of shared feedback guidelines so that students receive consistent feedback across lecturers.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it involved only two lecturers and 12 students in one course at one study program during a single semester, so the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. Second, the study described the feedback strategies used but did not trace students' subsequent revisions, and therefore could not determine whether the feedback led to improved accuracy in later drafts. Third, part of the course was delivered online, which may have shaped the lecturers' preference for direct feedback. Finally, the interview data relied on participants' self-reports, which may not fully reflect their actual practices or uptake of feedback.

Future research

Future studies should involve more lecturers and students across several institutions to capture a wider range of feedback practices. Researchers are also encouraged to compare students' drafts before and after feedback to examine how each strategy affects revision and long-term accuracy. Comparisons between online and face-to-face writing courses would clarify how delivery mode shapes lecturers' choices. In addition, future research could explore students' cognitive and affective engagement with written feedback, as well as the beliefs underlying lecturers' feedback decisions, to provide a fuller account of how feedback works in authentic classrooms (Zhicheng Mao, Icy Lee, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to identify the written corrective feedback strategies used by lecturers in an Academic English Writing course and to describe how these strategies were implemented in students' written work. The findings show that the lecturers used direct, indirect, and metalinguistic feedback, but in different combinations. Direct feedback, delivered through rewriting and adding missing elements, dominated the correction of grammar, word choice, capitalization, and punctuation. Indirect feedback was provided by underlining or highlighting errors, while metalinguistic feedback took the form of end comments that guided students to revise their paragraphs independently. The lecturers' choices were shaped by the instructional stage, the delivery mode, and their perception of students' readiness. These findings imply that lecturers should combine strategies purposefully, moving from direct toward indirect and metalinguistic feedback as students develop, and adopt a more focused and consistent approach to marking errors. As the study involved only two lecturers and 12 students in one course and did not trace students' revisions, its findings cannot be generalized. Future research should involve larger samples across institutions and examine students' drafts over time to determine how each strategy affects revision and writing development.

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