

“I feel sad”: Students’ voices on lecturer’s feedback on Google Docs

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ABSTRACT

Students' responses to teacher's feedback can affect their emotions and attitude toward tasks they are working. Amidst the growing use of digital tools in facilitating English writing classes, this current article explores students' emotions and their attitude toward teacher's feedback given to their writing tasks on Google Docs. This descriptive qualitative study gathered data through a questionnaire from twenty-three university students majoring in English Education Department and semi-structured interviews with three students. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions to elicit information about the students' emotions and responses to teacher's feedback. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interviews were carried out for further investigation as well as to provide data source triangulation. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying the themes from the groups of data which correspond to the research questions. The findings revealed that the students experienced two kinds of emotions, either positive emotions (curious and happy) or negative emotions (sad and confused). Their emotions were influenced by the students' expectation, lower proficiency levels, and their learning commitment while their positive emotions were influenced by their self-efficacy in the learning process, higher proficiency level, and higher learning motivation. These emotions contributed to their attitude in the writing class. The students with positive emotions tend to commit to the task and do revision, but negative emotions didn't encourage the students to reflect on the feedback and do revision. Moreover, Google Docs was typically used for asynchronous tasks that they couldn't directly confirm or clarify their understanding. Several implications and suggestions are also discussed.

Keywords: feedback, emotions, Google Docs, writing

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Introduction

Writing classes today can be facilitated by various online media, one of which is Google Docs, as has been reported by several previous studies (Hoang & Hoang, 2022; Mansor, 2012; Mills, 2013; Neumann & Kopcha, 2019; Rastgou, 2022). Those previous studies have indicated that Google Docs eases English educators and language learners to work together on projects, either by creating the content jointly or by providing feedback for students' tasks. It is particularly useful for writing classes where students are required to generate and deliver their ideas in written forms which often also receive feedback and/or correction from the

teachers. The purpose of feedback is to let students know their progress regarding what they have achieved about the learning goals and to make them recognize their writing's strengths and deficiencies (Lee, 2014).

English as Foreign Language (EFL) educators may check the students' activity records and progress at any time by using Google Docs, such as their punctuality in completing the task and the responses they give to the teachers' feedback. On the other hand, pupils can revise in real-time, and the system effectively records their activities (Chen, 2016; Neumann & Kopcha, 2019). Google Docs also enables teachers to give

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more systematic feedback compared to hand-written ones. Moreover, in order to decrease the students' grammatical and mechanics faults, combining automated and teacher feedback was more efficient (Han & Sari, 2022). As usually Google Docs had to suggest corrections for grammatical and spelling issues, teachers can focus on content, organization, writing strengths, and weaknesses (Awada & Diab, 2021). However, face-to-face oral feedback or written feedback on students' working papers is also still considered as effective and amidst the digital tool-assisted writing classes, combining both online and face-to-face feedback is considered the most appropriate solution (Pham, 2021).

Feedback is the process through which students interpret data from multiple sources and apply it to improve their projects or learning methods. Feedback can be in form of making judgments, effective management of effect, and giving appreciation (Carless & Boud, 2018). In other terms, it is described as feedback from a reader to a writer with the intention of assisting the writer in making revisions. Comments, inquiries, and recommendations are all acceptable. Through feedback, writers learn where they have misled the reader by not providing enough details, organizing the text in an illogical manner, failing to develop the concepts, or using language or verb tenses that aren't acceptable (Keh, 1990).

Students greatly value written feedback on their works compared to alternate forms of peer and oral feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017). Concerning written feedback as the most widely used feedback for students' tasks (McCarthy, 2015), there are different characteristics of offline and online feedback. The number of comments increases dramatically when textual asynchronous dialogue occurs on Google Docs. Additionally, the rate at which these comments are taken into revision increases, which ultimately results in more revision

being done (Liu & Sadler, 2003; Pham, 2021). Online written feedback ensures the feedback is readable compared to handwriting since handwritten feedback is sometimes messy (Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Additionally, it aids students whose cultural origins prevented them from interacting amicably in a face-to-face setting. They claimed that in-person communication by receiving individual feedback on their works is more efficient since it promotes nonverbal communication more effectively (Liu & Sadler, 2003).

Online written feedback on Google Docs enables teachers to give feedback systematically and well-documented on digital platforms, but it can't facilitate direct communication unless in synchronous ones. It results in unclear information gained by the students especially when the teachers use complex academic language or due to vague and unconstructive feedback (Henderson et al., 2021; Winstone et al., 2017). Otherwise, feedback is about allowing students to achieve valuable information about how they can improve their performance in the future as well as their learning strategies (Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Therefore, teachers need to consider digital tool-mediated feedback as a real interaction with the students by providing clear feedback (Lam, 2021). To increase learning, feedback must include informative and illustrative components that demonstrate how to improve performance. Personal critique without recommendations for how the student might have improved their writing is detrimental to their learning (Anjarani & Furqon, 2022).

Emotion is a contributing factor in students' learning journey and it can influence students' achievement (Tempelaar et al., 2012). One's affective state in response to particular stimuli is referred to as one's emotional state. Emotions are complex phenomena that include cognitive, emotional, expressive,

psychological, and motivational elements (Uzuntiryaki-Kondakci et al., 2022). This study tries to focus on the nature of emotion which can be dynamic as a part of the learning process which involved the subjective feelings of the students and its effect on their learning behavior.

Research on writing feedback often focuses on students' perception and the teachers and students' activities regarding the feedback (Anjarani & Furqon, 2022; Mahfoodh, 2017; McCarthy, 2015; Ryan & Henderson, 2018; Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2022). However, students' responses to feedback from teachers still lack attention. Responding to feedback may result in different emotions, especially through digital media in which teachers and students don't do face-to-face interaction. McCarthy (2015) investigated the use of written feedback, audio feedback, and video feedback for summative assignment tasks at tertiary education level. The students perceived video feedback as the most beneficial compared to written and spoken ones since it provided an in-depth analysis of their academic performance. However, it was also influenced by the types of tasks, whether text, audio, or visual tasks. Their preference for video feedback was also influenced by the adequate internet connection and supporting devices. This study pointed out the appropriateness of the feedback with the task form and supporting facilities.

Ryan & Henderson (2018) examined students' emotional responses to educator feedback. Using a quantitative examination, they focused on two student variables: different citizenship backgrounds and different grade expectations. It revealed that international students tended to be more upset, discouraged, and felt that the feedback was too critical. Students who received lower grades than their expectation on a particular task were more likely to feel shameful, angry, and sad compared to those who received a higher grade than

they expected. Without mentioning the detailed form of feedback, this study pointed out two factors that might contribute to students' feelings toward feedback: cultural background (citizenship) and grade expectation. Educators need to consider these aspects in giving feedback.

Anjarani & Furqon (2022) explored students' perceptions towards feedback in virtual writing classes using audio modality during distance teaching and learning. It reported that the students perceived positively on the use of audio feedback. It was personal, clear, and detailed. They also could feel the teacher's presence. It implied the need to engage with the students in giving feedback. Further, Saeed & Al Qunayeer (2022) investigated interactive feedback conducted by teachers on students' writing projects using Google Docs. It pointed out the need to encourage students to actively respond and make more dialogic feedback which eventually resulted in more accurate revisions. The implementation of this dialogic feedback was influenced by task-related, teacher-related, and learner-related aspects.

Getting more specific on students' emotions toward teacher written feedback in tertiary education EFL writing classes, Mahfoodh (2017) reported in his study that acceptance, rejection, surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and contentment were the different emotional reactions that EFL university students displayed. Those remarks were a result of harsh criticism, poor assessments, and misunderstandings between teachers and students. It implies that pupils' comprehension and use of feedback can be impacted by emotional reactions. However, this study doesn't take into account the online or blended learning context which is getting popular in Indonesia in recent years, while in online settings, emotions have a significant role in learning, success, and engagement (Artino,

2012). Furthermore, emotional processes are vital in improving teachers' and students' performance (Cowie, 2011).

In the previous studies, the concern about students' emotions and their effects on students' performance in responding to written feedback through digital platforms in Indonesian context is still unexplored. To fill the gap, this current study tries to shed light on Indonesian EFL learners' attitudes toward written feedback from teachers and their emotions in responding to feedback from teachers. This study will be beneficial for English educators in providing evidence about students' emotion as well as their attitude in receiving constructive feedback which can help them best to understand the feedback and improve their performance.

Method

This study employed a case study design since it conducted an in-depth and contextualized investigation of a phenomenon gained from participants' perspectives (Gall et al., 2003). This research design is appropriate for this study to explore students' emotions as well as their attitude in receiving feedback on Google Docs.

This study took place at an English Language Education Department at a state Islamic university in Indonesia. The students joined an argumentative writing class which was conducted in a blended learning model. They submitted their writing tasks on Google Drive and their works were in Google Docs form. They would receive written feedback from the lecturer on their document by using the comment feature or by writing the feedback on the body document using different colors or highlights.

As many as 26 students from two classes were invited to be the participants of this study representing various achievements and 23 students confirmed their willingness to be the participants. The data sources of this study were a

questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of general information about their activities in responding to feedback they received on Google Docs during the argumentative writing class and some open-ended questions dealing with their emotions and attitude in responding to the feedback. The semi-structured interviews were carried out with 3 students who gave prominent information. It was also to provide data triangulation. The semi-structured interviews used interview guidelines. The individual interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, which were later translated into English to prevent misunderstandings.

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic coding (Creswell, 2014) to identify the themes from the groups of data which corresponded to the research questions and became the research findings. Furthermore, those findings were elaborated narratively. Students' emotions in responding to feedback from teachers as well as their effects on their learning attitude were evaluated and corresponded with certain relevant theories and/or previous literature.

Results and Discussion

Students' Emotions in Receiving Written Feedback on Google Docs

In this study, the students would receive feedback on Google Docs from the teacher after they previously uploaded their works. The feedback was given in a written form by giving comments, giving a general opinion on the students' tasks, and/or highlighting the words in the body text to invite students' attention. The students experienced various emotions when they responded to the teacher's feedback on their tasks.

Students' emotions during the learning process can influence their motivation and learning attitude, and therefore, it needs enough attention from educators. Students' emotion is a natural

part of their learning experience and should not be considered as hindering learning (Värlander, 2008). Several themes of emotions were figured out from the research data regarding students' emotions, namely sad, curious, happy, and confused as indicated by several responses.

"Sometimes it's sad. How come my task still has many mistakes, but I'm also happy to be more active in learning from my mistake." (Questionnaire)

"So far the response from the lecturer makes me curious because I think my project itself is correct, but it turns out that there are still mistakes and that is what makes me try to improve to make it better" (Questionnaire)

"I feel happy because the lecturer responded well and friendly, as well as explaining if I had difficulties." (Questionnaire)

Those emotions correspond to the results of a previous study. As it is reported by previous studies, responding to feedback may result in various feelings both positively such as happiness, satisfaction, and acceptance, or negatively such as frustration, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. Students' utilization and understanding of the teacher's written feedback and students' success with revisions were influenced by those emotions (Mahfoodh, 2017). Surprisingly, this study reported that the student's success with revisions didn't always correspond the positive emotions, but it was inspired by students' ideas that written feedback from the teacher should be properly followed because they had superior knowledge.

The sad feeling can be identified as the result of unachieved expectations. As it is indicated in the student's quote, they feel sad because they thought that their work had been good enough. Then there

was a lot of corrective feedback from the teacher. This finding confirms the previous study which reported that high expectations tended to make students feel shameful and sad when they got negative feedback compared to those who didn't have high expectations of their work (Ryan & Henderson, 2018).

The negative emotions of sadness and confusion potentially have a negative effect on students' writing habits, feelings about learning, and motivation (Yu et al., 2021). Furthermore, emotions significantly affect learning, engagement, and success in online situations (Artino, 2012). Their confusedness could be derived from many factors as the previous section has elaborated. One of the factors is their misunderstanding of the feedback which is given by the teacher. In this study, the students got no idea of how to improve their work, while asynchronous learning didn't support them to get immediate feedback from the teacher when they had any questions. For this reason, in an online learning setting, written feedback needs to be combined with other sources such as conferences (Mahfoodh, 2017), oral feedback (Anjarani & Furqon, 2022), or audio-visual feedback (McCarthy, 2015) although the implementation may be influenced by many factors, such as the available facilities and time allotment.

The manner in which students make mistakes, their degree of proficiency, and the type of writing that is required of them all affect whether or not feedback is successful (Guénette, 2007). Students' confusedness in responding to feedback may be caused by the lower proficiency level, and thus they don't get the points about what and how to improve. It corresponds to the previous study which revealed that feedback is more beneficial for higher performers' motivation, but it showed negative effects on lower performers, especially in their affective-motivational factor (Kuklick & Lindner, 2021).

Meanwhile, some students responded to the feedback in a much more positive way by feeling curious and happy with the feedback. They could accept their mistakes and take action by revising their work. It indicated that the student's attitude toward the teacher's feedback could contribute to their feeling. Students tended to feel curious and happy when they consider feedback as part of their learning process, not as another task to complete or even a judgment of the work. They found the feedback very beneficial for their improvement in the next writing projects.

"In my opinion the feedback from the teacher is very important because the teacher has more experience in writing and she can give me some suggestions. I try to remember the notes and corrections from her so I don't make the same mistake. And I feel that my writing is getting better from time to time."
(Questionnaire)

Their positive emotions were through the process. At first time, they felt sad but then they realized that the feedback from the teacher was beneficial for them. It can be explained that negative emotions may operate as a motivating factor for students who want to achieve better (Lipnevich et al., 2021). However, it doesn't occur to every individual. Hence, it is important to let the students know the notion of feedback and how they should respond to it.

Students' Attitude toward Written Feedback on Google Docs

The students revealed that they mostly read the feedback from the teacher since they were asked to so do. As many as 91.3% of the participants always read the feedback, while 8.7% sometimes read the feedback.

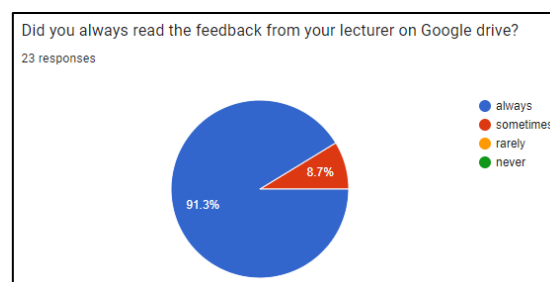


Figure 1. The percentage of students who read the teacher's feedback

Of this percentage only slightly more than a half revised their works based on the feedback as indicated in figures 1 and 2. Meanwhile, the rest of the participants did not revise their work due to several reasons. This is something that commonly occurs that regardless of what teachers accomplished, some students would gain from receiving constructive criticism while others would not (Guénette, 2007). The students who benefited from the feedback were those who did the correction after receiving the feedback. In this way, they recognized what to correct as well as what to improve from their piece of writing.

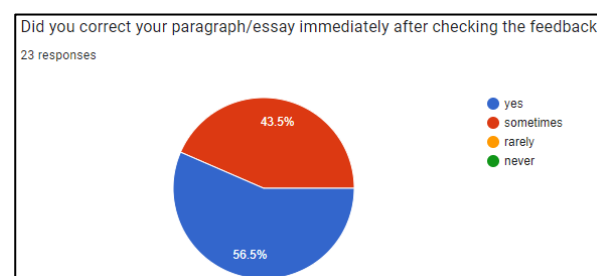


Figure 2. The percentage of students who revised the works

One of the reasons was the students got confused about the feedback and didn't know how to fix their work. This is the weakness in delivering feedback in an asynchronous context in which students can't directly confirm their understanding of the feedback (Henderson et al., 2021). Hence, it also can be pointed out that the students' confusion in responding to the feedback was due to the limited communication through asynchronous

learning media and students' reluctance to initiate further discussion with the teacher through the online platform. Online learning context disabled students to give direct confirmation on their work, ensuring that they didn't mislead in understanding the teacher's feedback, and they can't directly confirm whether their responses were correct or not (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

"It is very helpful actually, but sometimes, to be honest, I don't understand what is meant. I try to understand and ask questions until I understand and can make improvements to my essay." (Questionnaire)

Using the Google Docs application has eased its users to do corrections dealing with grammar and spelling since its feature can identify the errors and the students can directly correct them. It also enabled the students to give comments and ask for collaborative work (Hoang & Hoang, 2022; Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2022), but some of them seemed didn't use this feature. The students required detailed feedback and they assumed that feedback was about the correction of errors or mistakes in their essay, and thus they know their mistakes as well as how to revise them. Students' perceptions of feedback can be seen as the influencing factors on their attitude. They expected that the teacher would correct their work in detail, while the facts were different. The teacher only gave comments on essay organization, confirmed their writing, gave suggestions, and only did a few corrections in grammar. Meanwhile, they were not accustomed to this kind of feedback before. It relates to the previous study which reported that when teachers failed to point out the mistakes in their students' writing, the students were frustrated (Irwin, 2017).

This digital era has assisted students to address their grammatical and spelling errors such as on Google Docs and

teachers can focus more on essay organization and other aspects. This can be another concern in conducting online writing classes to see students' awareness of the tools they are working with. This point should be made clear in the preparation activities as Värlander (2008) states that students should be trained on how to receive and respond to feedback, as well as to let them know that their emotions in receiving feedback can even contribute to their achievements. Besides, it is also considered important to determine and communicate the feedback focus, whether it focuses on the content and organization or grammar and mechanical aspects.

Another reason was due to the fewer supporting devices. Not all students occupied personal computer devices which were available at any time and they tended to check the feedback using mobile phones. However, checking the feedback using a mobile phone only enabled them to check the feedback on the body text, whereas feedback on comments was unexplored. Therefore, they couldn't even read the feedback in the comment section, but they only saw some highlighted words on their documents. Accessing Google Docs using mobile phones also provided limited editing features and was less easy than using a laptop or personal computer. This finding corresponds to the previous study that facilities influenced students' responses to feedback (McCarthy, 2015) and students reported issues related to the device they used which affected their performance in writing class, including responding to teachers' feedback (Bowen et al., 2022).

Further investigation about their reluctance to check and revise their work was because they expected that their revisions would not be checked again by the teacher. Besides, students' rejection of the teacher's comments also resulted in their reluctance to do revisions (Mahfoodh, 2017).

"Students think that she (the lecturer) will not check the revisions, but in fact, she checks it." (Interview)

"Sometimes students don't make revisions since they feel certain with their works, or they disagree with the teacher's feedback so they don't make any revisions." (Interview)

Still, in accordance with the study by Mahfoodh (2017), students are reluctant to use the written feedback from the teachers because they sometimes disagree on some feedbacks. However, in this use of Google Docs, the students cannot easily encounter their opinion toward the feedback, and they rather leave their task without any revision.

On the other hand, some students were very enthusiastic about checking the feedback from the teacher. They were curious about the feedback they might get. They felt that their work had been correct but it turned out that the teacher could identify the errors or other aspects to improve. Therefore, they found the feedback very helpful and that's why they responded positively to the teacher's feedback. These students were more motivated to do corrections and improve their writing performance.

"When I got the feedback, I immediately checked it and revised my work if there were errors or comments from the teacher." (Interview)

They considered the teacher's feedback as part of their learning experiences, and yet they didn't feel it as judgment or scoring on their works. It made them get a better engagement in the task and the learning commitment to regulate themselves in the learning process.

"Sometimes I still make mistakes doing the assignments. However, I tried to take it as a lesson. Sometimes, I always try to

do the best I can. However, there's always a bit of problem going on." (Questionnaire)

There is currently a rising awareness that feedback should focus on promoting the growth of self-regulation. This self-regulation is very powerful to improve students' engagement in their tasks. It corresponds with their commitment to continuous effort in completing the tasks. It also improves self-efficacy, and hence they deserve any kinds of feedback and respond positively to it (Bowen et al., 2022). It is supported by Pearson (2022) who states that the ability of students' self-regulation or students self-concept belief in their role mediates their engagement in written feedback.

Conclusion

This study points out two groups of students' emotions in responding to teachers' feedback on the digital platform of Google Docs. The students experienced negative and positive emotions which were influenced by several factors, such as students' English proficiency, learning motivation, and supporting facilities. The feeling could affect their attitude in responding to the task, whether they followed it with revisions or they didn't do any revisions. It also correlates with their engagement and commitment to the learning process.

It implies that receiving feedback may affect students' emotions, and thus, English educators need to take it into account by building the students' understanding of the nature of feedback. Feedback, furthermore, can be delivered step-by-step. For example, in a series of students' tasks, the teacher can focus on giving feedback on certain aspects of the first feedback and another aspect of the following task. The limitation of this study lies in the limited number of participants and the learners' level. Further studies may take more participants or different learners'

levels for deeper investigation and point out possible different characteristics of the learners.

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