

EFL students' perceptions toward the use of electronic written feedback in academic writing classes

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Abstract

Feedback is one of the essential things for students to help them improve and develop their writing skills. Nowadays, the kinds of feedback are varied; a form that has often been used since the pandemic is electronic written feedback. This study aims to find out the students' perceptions toward the use of electronic written feedback. This study was conducted in the English Language Education Program at a private university in Salatiga. This study included 34 students registered in an Academic Writing class during the even semester 2023. The data for this study were gathered from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Both thematic analysis and statistical analysis were used to analyze the data from the interview and questionnaires. The findings revealed that the students' attitudes toward electronic feedback were positive. Moreover, this study found weaknesses and strengths in using written feedback electronically. Practical recommendations for maximizing the potential of the electronic written feedback and directions for future research are also presented in this paper.

Keywords: academic writing, electronic written feedback, students' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is one of the essential tools for English as foreign language (EFL) learners when writing English essays. Feedback in writing class is necessary for students to improve their writing performances because writing in English might be difficult for EFL students. [Shang \(2013\)](#) stated that students may become anxious when asked to compose an English essay because they fear making errors in language forms, like grammar and vocabulary. By giving written feedback and comments on students' writing, teachers indirectly organize and strengthen the material that the students have learned before. [Ellis \(2015\)](#) claimed feedback provided information students can use to enhance their interlanguage. So, as stated by [Race \(2001\)](#), as in many educational subjects, feedback (particularly on writing) is essential in teaching writing.

Academic writing is one of the universities' highest-level writing subjects, and feedback is one of the mandatory tools in this writing subject. Feedback varies in writing, but the most common feedback students receive is feedback in written form because the teacher can directly emphasize structure, content, discourse, punctuation, or any other component of language in isolation or combined. This feedback is one of the most awaited tools for students since it is seen as an "external learning condition" to boost learning effectiveness ([Gagne, 1985](#)). Furthermore, [Parr & Timperley \(2010\)](#) stated that the feedback given by a teacher will affect students' progress, the institutions' aims and expectations in terms of pedagogy and evaluation, the level of student involvement in the learning process, and the revision replies anticipated by students.

Nowadays, the way teachers give feedback has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced schools to switch the learning and teaching process to online education. Online learning has displaced face-to-face learning, and numerous institutions now use digital platforms to deliver and evaluate learning ([Kulikowski et al., 2021](#)). The researchers of this study also experienced the switch from offline learning to online learning in her first to second years of college. This makes the researchers eager to know the students' perceptions of using online learning tools, specifically electronic written feedback. Electronic feedback (e-feedback) is defined as written digital feedback delivered via the internet ([Tuzi, 2004](#)), for example, Google Docs ([Chong, 2019](#)). [Chong \(2019\)](#) further explained two types of e-feedback based on the time it was delivered, i.e., synchronous and asynchronous e-feedback. E-feedback has some characteristics such as (1) it is more distant in nature, (2) it is written, (3) it is time-independent, (4) there is no pressure to respond quickly, (5) it is place-independent, (6) it lacks nonverbal components, (7) it is written/cultural barriers, (8) there is a greater sense of anonymity, (9) there is less negotiation of meaning, and (10) there is less delivery effort.

In recent years, teachers have used Electronic written feedback online to give students comments, suggestions, and praise ([Ene & Upton, 2014](#); [Saeed & Al Qunayeer, 2022](#)). Even though e-feedback has already been shared in writing classes, [Acar & Külekçi \(2022\)](#) found that the students did not prefer e-feedback in writing classes because it was not easily accessible. Also, as stated by [Ali \(2016\)](#) and [Zareekbatani \(2015\)](#), although e-feedback has many advantages, it has certain perceived drawbacks, such as the time-consuming nature of the e-feedback processes and the lack of face-to-face interaction, as well as increased in the workload on instructors' shoulders, slow loading time, and inability to download virtual feedback.

Considering the issue in previous research, this research attempts to reveal the students' perceptions of using electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class. Knowing the students' perceptions and challenges may lead to new insight into giving

students such effective electronic written feedback. The following research questions guide the present study 1). What are the students' perceptions toward the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? and 2). What benefits do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? 3). What challenges do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? This research can provide helpful information for teachers and instructors to create effective feedback for students in Academic Writing classes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The researchers used a mixed-method design. The quantitative methodology with distributed questionnaires allows the researchers to get information on students' perception of using Electronic Written Feedback. The questionnaire was designed with Likert scale questions through the Google Form application as the primary data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: 1) demographic information of the respondents: five questions, and 2) 21 closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were about the students' perception of Electronic Written Feedback, which developed from the strengths and weaknesses of electronic written feedback in the literature review. Section two requires students to indicate their agreement with a series of statements on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree."

The researchers also used qualitative methodology to get deeper information about students' perceptions and challenges while taking Academic Writing classes. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to obtain more explanation from the respondents regarding their perceptions and answers to the questionnaire.

Research Objectives

This study involved 34 students from the 3 Academic Writing classes taking this course in Semester Genap, 2023. The participants consist of 10 male and 24 female students. In this study, students were selected using probability sampling, specifically with simple random sampling, to allow an equal chance of being selected as participants. The participants were chosen to obtain various responses regarding their perceptions of using Electronic Written Feedback in Academic Writing classes. Four participants were interviewed to give a deeper insight into what they have filled out in the Google Form questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers sent the questionnaire via a link in each Academic Writing class on July 14, 2023. Every participant was asked to fill out the Google Form questionnaire. They completed the Google Form questionnaire on February 3, 2024. The interview was conducted via face-to-face and Google Meet on February 5, 2024, until March 12, 2024. The researchers scheduled a time for a meeting with the participants and requested consent to record the interview before the session began. The researchers then analyzed, transcribed, and classified the data collected through questionnaires and interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

After the researchers collected and completed the data collection, the researchers analyzed the data for data analysis purposes. First, the researchers analyzed the results of the questionnaire using statistical analysis in Google Forms. The data was arranged from the highest to the lowest statement using electronic written feedback based on the participants' response frequency. In addition, the researchers did a thematic analysis to discover the overarching topic revealed by the participants' responses. [Braun & Clarke \(2012\)](#) stated that thematic analysis systematically locates, organizes, and provides insight into meaningful patterns (themes) throughout a dataset. The method distinguishes and

makes sense of what is expected in how an idea is discussed or written. After analyzing the data and knowing the result of the thematic analysis, the researchers concluded the study's findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings from 34 English Language Education Program students at a private university in Salatiga who have taken an Academic Writing course. The findings were analyzed and discussed to answer these questions; a). What are the students' perceptions toward the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? and a.1). What benefits do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? a.2). What challenges do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? The findings are figured below.

Positive Perceptions toward Electronic Written Feedback

According to the data collected, 24 students (70.6%) strongly agree, and 10 students (29.4%) agree that they have ever received electronic feedback through some applications that were used in the Academic Writing class (Figure 1).

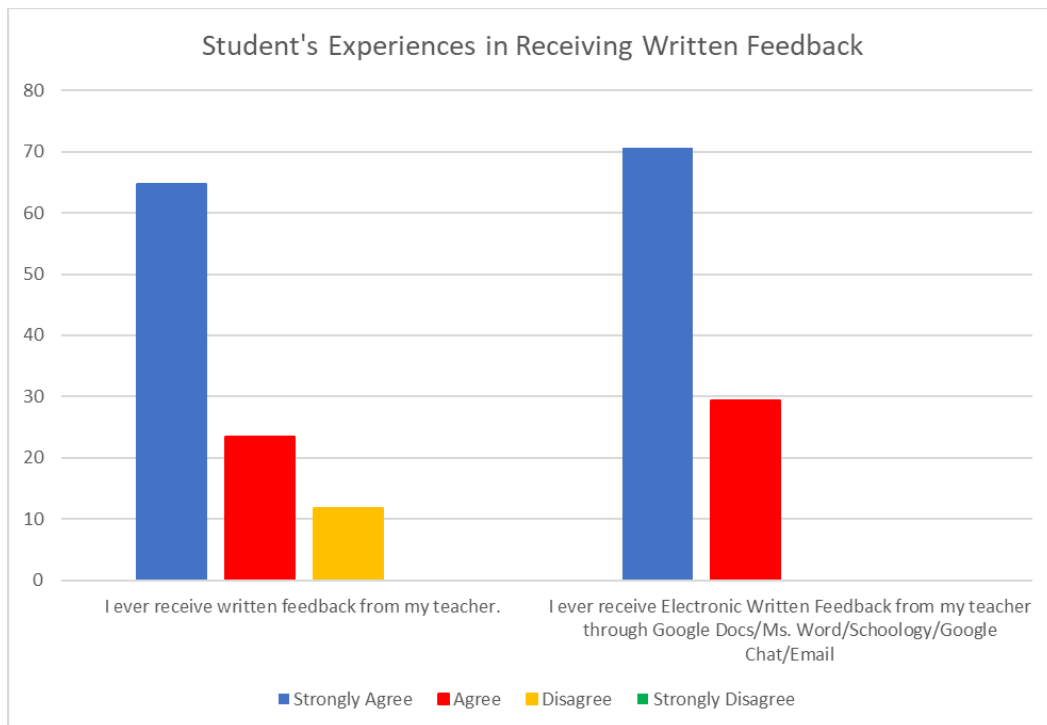


Figure 1. Student's Experiences in Receiving Written Feedback

The students' perceptions of using electronic written feedback in the Academic Writing class are beneficial for improving their essays. It can be seen from the bar chart in Figure 2. In the first statement, 26 students (76.5%) said they could comprehend the written feedback they received electronically in their academic writing course. Also, in the second statement, 22 students (64,7%) strongly agree that electronic written feedback helps them to identify errors. They also claimed that the electronic, written feedback was concise, detailed, specific, and straightforward.

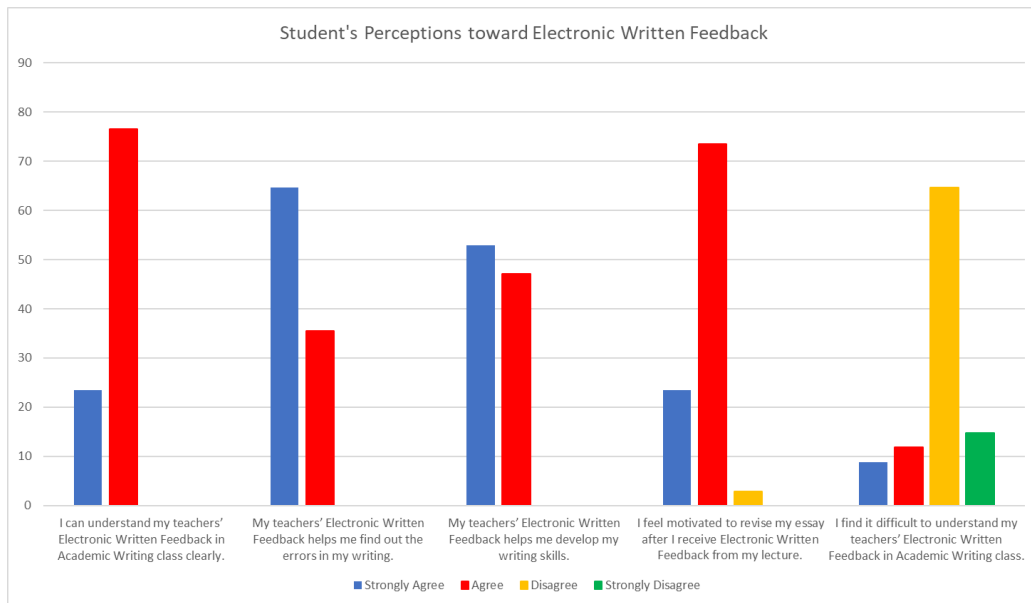


Figure 2. Student's Positive Perceptions toward Electronic Written Feedback

The other proof that supports the argument was taken from the interview results. The students claimed they could easily comprehend the electronic written feedback. According to Student C, the lecturers provided concise feedback on the essay. While student B said that the lecturer gave highlights for the feedback.

Excerpt 1:

"I can understand the feedback given because this electronic written feedback highlights only certain parts that need revision." - Student B, Interview, February 16, 2024.

Excerpt 2:

"Yes, I can because the lecturer provides feedback that is to the point and not complicated. So, it is clear what needs to be corrected, reduced, and added." - Student C, Interview, March 6, 2024.

The student's B statement demonstrated that by providing electronic written feedback, the teacher could highlight the sections needing revision. It helps students determine what parts of their work require improvement so they are transparent about the evaluation provided, even if it is merely written comments.

Moreover, student C stated that students easily comprehend written feedback from electronic sources since it employs to-the-point language. She added that she could quickly identify the parts of her essay that needed revision, omission, or addition by receiving to-the-point electronic written feedback. Students' writing skills will develop if they understand the teacher's feedback. Therefore, the teacher should provide clear and concise feedback to the students. [Adi \(2013\)](#) stated that to help them identify their writing skills, students needed to be able to read and understand teacher feedback in writing.

The student's performance in writing could be improved after receiving electronic, written feedback, as seen from the third and fourth statements (Figure 2). The third statement shows that 18 students (52.9%) strongly agree that electronic written feedback helps them develop their writing skills. Moreover, in the fourth statement, 25 students (73.5%) agree that they feel motivated to revise their writing after they receive electronic written feedback. Student D's statement also supported this finding; he stated that electronic, written feedback helped him to know where his weak points are. Moreover, student A felt motivated to revise her writing after receiving her teacher's electronic written feedback. These findings aligned with a study by [Ciftci & Kocoglu \(2012\)](#) and [Kitchakarn \(2013\)](#), which

found that feedback helps students improve their revised drafts and understand the writing skills required for more challenging writing assignments.

Excerpt 3:

"Of course, I am very motivated to revise my draft. So, soon after I received the electronic written feedback from my teacher, it urged me to revise as I can identify my mistakes and minimize the possibility that I will make the same mistakes." - Student A, Interview, February 5, 2024.

Excerpt 4:

"Yes, I believe electronic written feedback has a significant impact because it makes me aware of my weaknesses. In summary, feedback helps my writing or assignments improve" - Student D, Interview, March 12, 2024.

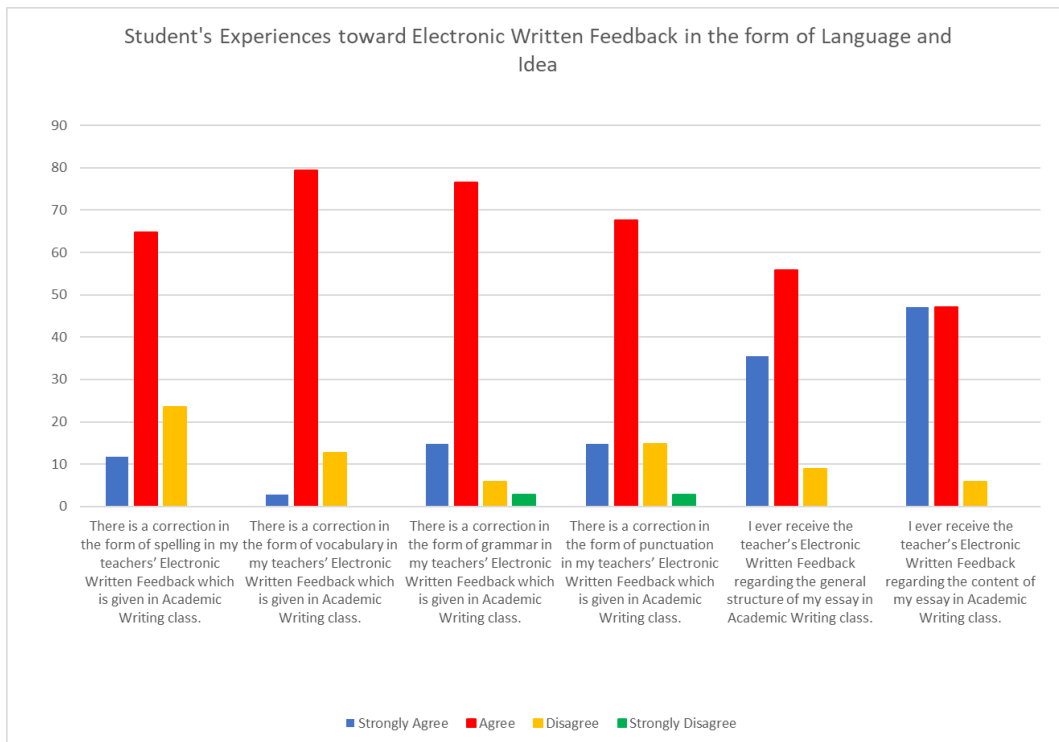


Figure 3. Student’s Experiences toward Electronic Written Feedback in the form of Language and Idea

The students' experience receiving feedback in the form of language and ideas varied. The first to the fourth statement is the feedback that the students receive in the form of language, while the fifth and sixth statement is the feedback in the form of content (Figure 3). From the bar chart above, the feedback from the teacher was varied; there were corrections in the form of spelling, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, general structure, and content of the essay. The interview session also supported this finding. The students stated that the teachers immediately pointed out the students' errors, such as grammatical problems, mispronounced words, and missing punctuation, on their paper. It enabled students to access the comments and comprehend the comments provided.

Excerpt 5:

"I usually get two kinds of feedback, language and ideas. If the content is inappropriate, the teacher will add written feedback regarding my ideas. I also received feedback in the form of grammar on my essay from my teacher."- Student A, Interview, February 5, 2024.

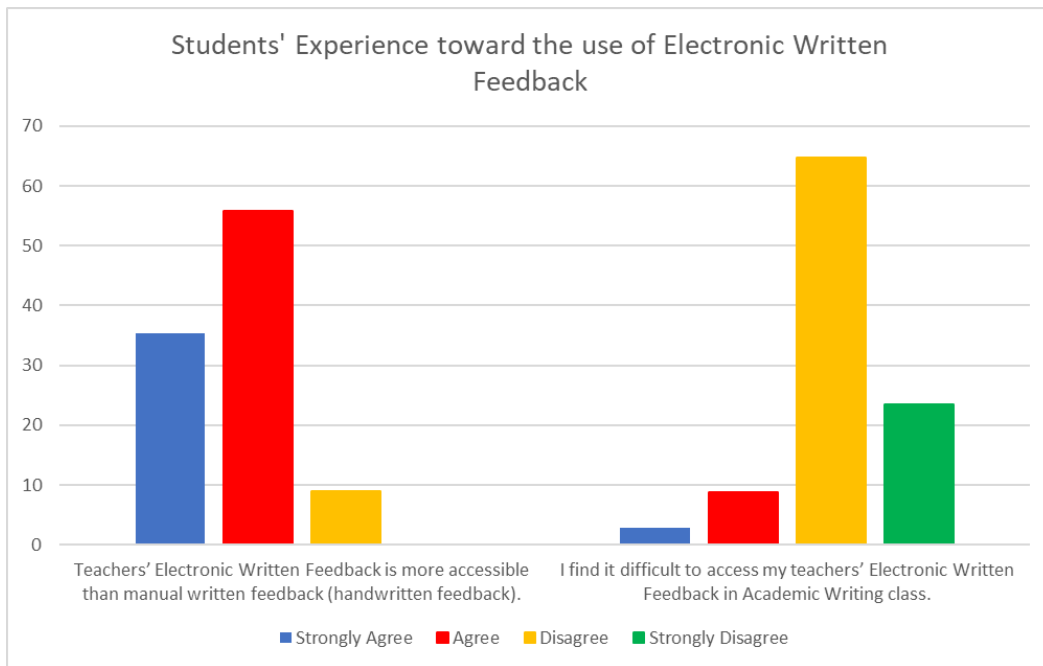


Figure 4. Students' Experience toward the use of Electronic Written Feedback

Furthermore, the bar chart above depicts students' accessibility experiences while getting written comments electronically. Most students believe electronic written feedback is more accessible. It is proved by 19 students (55,9%) who agree that electronic written feedback that is given through some applications is more accessible than handwritten feedback and supported by 22 students (64,7%) who disagree that they find it difficult to access the electronic written feedback given by their teachers (Figure 4).

From all the findings, it can be inferred that students' perceptions of electronic written feedback are positive. The statements from the students confirmed that they could comprehend the electronic written feedback since it was to the point, coherent, and straightforward. In addition, they receive not only feedback but also language and idea feedback that help them understand and improve their weakness. They claimed that electronic written feedback is more accessible than handwritten feedback given by the teachers. Moreover, by receiving electronic written feedback, the student's writing performance could improve due to the feedback that urges the students to improve and develop their writing.

Weakness of Using Electronic Written Feedback

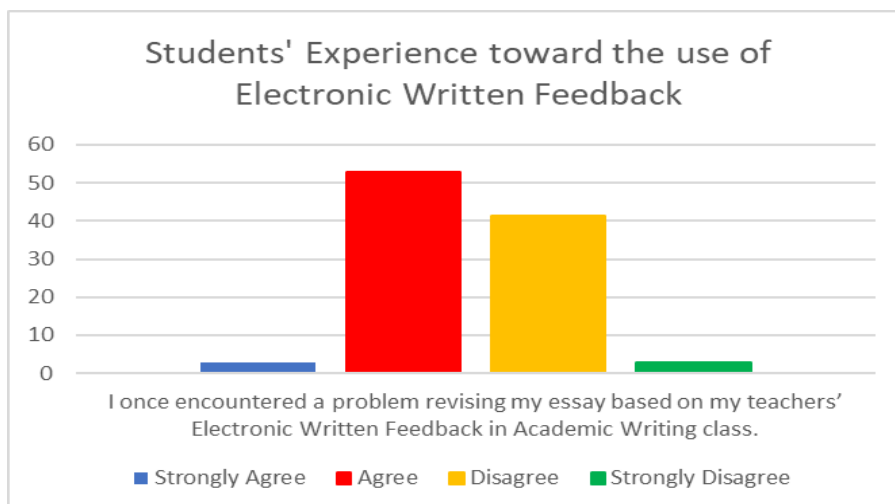


Figure 5. Students' Experience toward the use of Electronic Written Feedback

According to the findings, even though the students feel that electronic written feedback is more accessible, at the same point, they once encountered a problem while revising their essay with the electronic written feedback given. Eighteen students (52,9%) agree that they once encountered a problem in revising their essays with the electronic written feedback given by the teacher. The interview results support that they needed more accurate information and that there were technical issues in accessing the electronic, written feedback.

Excerpt 6:

"The difficulty I encountered came from the fact that the feedback was limited to written communication; hence, there were situations where the lecturer's meaning and my understanding diverged. As a result, I need to double-check the written comments I received electronically to see if what I perceive is right." - Student B, Interview, February 16, 2024.

Excerpt 7:

"The hardest challenge is accessing the lecturer's feedback while the Wi-Fi is unavailable or the internet is down" - Student A, Interview, February 5, 2024.

Excerpt 8:

"One time, my lecturer provided feedback in PDF format, which made it difficult to edit. This is because I need to convert it to Word before I can edit it. Another example I have encountered is that lecturers frequently make incorrect comments in sections of FLearn. Therefore, I must ensure that the lecturer's comments are appropriate for the particular section. Moreover, slow internet signals make accessing online comments and files difficult." - Student B, Interview, February 16, 2024.

Student B's statement demonstrates that receiving electronic, written feedback might cause miscommunication between the teacher and the students. It makes the students take much time to process and double-check the comments given to align with their interpretation. At the same point, student A stated that the internet connection is the most complex challenge in dealing with electronic, written feedback. Due to a slow internet connection or internet down, the students can only access the online electronic, written feedback given if they have downloaded the files before. Electronic, written feedback can be helpful for students because it can be accessed anywhere they want. However, it might be challenging if the feedback deviates or the students need internet access. These findings align with the statement from [Zareekbatani \(2015\)](#) that e-feedback has some perceived disadvantages, including the time-consuming e-feedback processes, the loss of face-to-face communication, poor loading times, and the inability to download electronic feedback.

CONCLUSIONS

Feedback has become one of the most critical parts of foreign language learning in writing courses. Feedback is essential as it influences the student's performance and ability to improve in writing. Several types of feedback may be utilized in writing lessons, including electronic written feedback. Electronic written feedback was commonly used in language learning when COVID-19 changed the learning and teaching process to become online.

This study focused on students' perception of using electronic written feedback in Academic Writing classes. The following research question guides the present study: a). What are the students' perceptions toward the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? Moreover, a.1). What benefits do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? a.2). b). What challenges do students experience with the teacher's electronic written feedback in Academic Writing class? The research discovered that the students who had taken Academic Writing courses

had positive perceptions of using electronic written feedback. Twenty-six students stated that they could comprehend the electronic written feedback their teacher gave. They also mention that the electronic written feedback was provided in detail, expressly, and clearly, which assisted them in addressing mistakes in their essay.

Another finding in the study is that electronic written feedback could improve the student's writing performance. Twenty-five students claimed that after receiving the teacher's electronic written feedback, they felt motivated to revise the essay and develop their writing skills. This is supported by a statement from the students that they could find the weak points in their essays after receiving the electronic written feedback. Even though the students had a positive perception toward the electronic written feedback, the researchers found that there were challenges that the students faced during the writing courses. The first challenge came from how the teacher gave the feedback; electronic written feedback caused miscommunication between the teacher and the students due to the lack of interaction. Then, the most complex challenge was an internet connection. They mentioned that a slow internet connection prevents access to electronic written feedback and takes much time to process.

Based on the findings above, the researchers proposed suggestions to benefit the learning and teacher process in future academic writing courses. The lecturers in Academic Writing classes should provide improved electronic written feedback to the students. The teachers could be more specific and detailed in giving electronic written feedback and provide direct consultation to minimize miscommunication between the teacher's intention and the student's understanding.

The researchers faced some limitations while conducting this study. The researchers had difficulties with the number of participants because some students dropped the Academic Writing class in the middle of the class, which limited the discussion session. The other limitation the researchers faced was the need for more detailed answers from the participants in answering the interview questions. The researchers proposed recruiting additional participants for the questionnaire and interview sessions to obtain in-depth perspectives in future studies. To obtain more thorough responses from the participants, the researchers also recommended that the questionnaire include a few open-ended items in future studies

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