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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL WRITTEN FEEDBACK ON THE WRITING ACHIEVEMENT OF AN ESL LEARNER: A CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT



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Interpersonal written feedback is a contentious and complex task that has long piqued the interest of scholars and educators. Feedback fuels improvement in a learner. This paper examines the effects of interpersonal written feedback on an ESL learner's writing achievement using a single-case study design. The participant is a primary school ESL student who was engaged in a series of writing tasks over 12 weeks. This study aims to examine how interpersonal written feedback influences an ESL learner's writing achievement and development.

Data was collected through pre-test and post-test writing samples and multiple drafts of writing assignments, on which interpersonal written feedback was provided, along with three semi-structured interviews.

The writing samples were assessed using an analytic scoring rubric that focused on content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The findings revealed a notable improvement in students' writing achievement, particularly in accuracy and organisation. Furthermore, the interview data indicated that the learner perceived the feedback as very supportive, helpful, and motivating. The study highlights the potential of using interpersonal written feedback as an effective strategy for enhancing ESL learners' writing performance. It contributes to the growing body of research on feedback in second language learning.

Better feedback produces better writing. Thus, future research should focus on maximising the potential of interpersonal written feedback and focusing on the contextual variables of feedback as well, and how teachers can provide feedback for best performance output, and introducing in-service teacher training programmes for teachers to understand how feedback in a classroom works and how the process of giving interpersonal feedback can be made more productive and impact-driven.

**Keywords:** *Interpersonal Written Feedback, Writing Achievement, Case Study, ESL Learners*

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most demanding language skills for learners of English as a second language. While listening and reading involve comprehension, writing requires learners to generate and organise new ideas, use vocabulary appropriately, and apply grammar rules. Good writing, therefore, demands integration of skills like linguistic competence and meta-cognitive strategies. For many ESL learners, writing proficiency remains a challenge because they struggle with grammar, language structure, and the organisation of ideas. These challenges can also hinder a learner's academic performance. Feedback is any information communicated to the learner intended to modify the learner's thinking or behavior to improve learning. As Brown (2019) states, providing feedback includes at least some of the following factors.

A lot of attention has been devoted to feedback. The topic of written feedback in writing achievement has been a subject of extensive research and discourse within the academic community. Feedback, as defined in the literature, is information communicated to the learner to modify their thinking or behavior and to improve learning, emotions, and motivation. Feedback is widely recognised as one of the most influential pedagogical tools in second-language writing because it enables learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve their performance. Effective feedback is an ongoing dialogue between students and the teacher, which helps students understand their errors and become independent writers. Recent studies have highlighted the significant role of interpersonal and personalized feedback in writing, indicating that it is essential for

educators to support the revision process. Interpersonal written feedback is a two-way communication between a student and a teacher. Past research has consistently demonstrated the importance of instructional feedback in improving writing skills. Individual differences play a very important role in feedback. Learners bring different sets of beliefs and attitudes when writing. To some extent, these are shaped by previous learning experiences, and at a certain stage, they are accustomed to having all their errors corrected. The somewhat problematic result of this practice may be that learners come to associate good speaking or writing with good grammar (Hyland, 2019).

Feedback has been recognized as essential to support the revision process, with studies comparing the effects of feedback on writing to no feedback demonstrating its benefits (Song & Song, 2023).

Feedback typically consists of constructive criticism or advice, but can also include behavior, social interactions, and praise (Sutton, Hornsey, and Douglas, 2011). Teachers and parents may provide corrective information or alternative strategies to improve a student's writing performance. With this, feedback can be an effective strategy for teachers to improve students' writing performance, as it helps students internalize and process the demands of the task at hand and identify what needs to be done to improve their writing skills. Thus, feedback is an essential component in improving the writing skills of students, which, if used appropriately, can support and scaffold student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

Research in the past has consistently demonstrated that interpersonal written feedback



can positively influence learners' writing achievement. Studies have reported drastic improvements in grammar, vocabulary use, organisation and overall writing quality. Interpersonal written feedback has been associated with increased learner motivation, reduced anxiety, and greater confidence in expressing ideas. Students who see interpersonal written feedback as supportive and encouraging are more likely to engage in revision and to view writing as a continuous improvement process rather than a one-time process.

By elucidating the rationale behind successes and shortcomings, descriptive feedback provides actionable insights that foster deeper understanding and promote self-regulation (Lin et al., 2024).

Even after all these studies, the literature presents many unresolved issues regarding the effectiveness of interpersonal written feedback on the writing achievement of ESL learners. Past studies have focused on large groups of learners and employed quantitative research designs to measure overall progress in writing achievement, often overlooking the individual learning processes that take place. Writing proficiency is a subjective, independent concept and may be researched on an individual basis as well. Quantitative findings alone may not fully capture the complexity of how interpersonal written feedback contributes to writing achievement and how learners react to it.

A case study will enable the researcher to explore the dynamic interaction between the teacher's feedback and the student's writing achievement over time. By examining multiple writing tasks and feedback episodes, the researcher can better

understand how interpersonal written feedback operates and how it can facilitate a learner's improvement in writing skills. This detailed investigation will contribute valuable insights that may have been overlooked in broad experimental studies done in the past.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the effects of interpersonal written feedback on the writing achievement of an ESL learner over an extended instructional period (i.e., 12 weeks). This study does not solely focus on numerical improvements in writing scores but also examines how the personalised feedback experience influences the writer's writing achievement, confidence, and engagement throughout the experiment.

## RESEARCH GAP

There has been extensive research on feedback; however, the role of interpersonal written feedback remains a gap in the existing literature. Previous studies have primarily focused on corrective and peer feedback. While the studies have demonstrated that both types of feedback contribute to improved linguistic accuracy, less attention has been paid to the interpersonal aspect of written feedback, which includes personalised comments on the learner's writing achievement. Writing development is a highly individualised process, influenced by learners' linguistic proficiency, motivation, prior learning, experiences, and affective factors such as self-esteem and confidence. Quantitative findings alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal feedback facilitates writing improvement.



Providing effective feedback in an English as a Second Language classroom is critical to facilitating students' learning and language acquisition. Feedback, both positive and negative, serves as a vital tool for supporting second language development in learners. In the field of second language acquisition, the role of corrective feedback has been extensively studied and debated, with researchers offering various perspectives on its efficacy and implementation. (Fathimah, 2020).

A very few studies have adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate the longitudinal impact of interpersonal written feedback on an individual. Single case studies offer researchers more opportunities to examine development in learners' improvement. Such an approach enables researchers to explore not only how writing achievement improves, but also why it occurs throughout the longitudinal study.

Another gap that exists is the geographical context of the existing research. Most of the research conducted has been in Western countries. In contrast, fewer studies have examined interpersonal feedback among ESL learners in Indian middle schools, necessitating an examination of how it functions in this context.

The present study employs an in-depth single-case study to investigate the effects of interpersonal written feedback on a learner's writing achievement by examining multiple writing tasks and interpersonal teacher feedback over an extended period of 12 weeks. The study seeks to provide a very comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal written feedback affects writing achievement and the affective processes that take place in a student's

mind, not only by discussing pre-test and post-test scores, which limit learners' perceptions, emotional responses, and ideas about feedback.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to investigate the effects of interpersonal written feedback on an ESL learner's writing achievement. The study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the impact of interpersonal written feedback on the writing achievement of the selected ESL learner?
2. What types/ways of feedback are most understood by the learner?
3. What changes (if any) occur in the learner's writing content, accuracy, grammar, vocabulary and organisation after receiving feedback?
4. How does interpersonal feedback influence learners' motivation, confidence, and self-esteem in writing?

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative single-case study to investigate the effects of interpersonal feedback on the writing achievement of an ESL learner. The case study design was selected because it provides an in-depth exploration that yields a comprehensive understanding of the effects of interpersonal written feedback. Unlike experimental designs that focus on statistical generalisation, a case study allows the researcher to dig deep into the learners' writing development over a period of time.



The study also incorporated descriptive quantitative data in the form of writing scores from an analytic rubric, providing a better understanding of the progress by integrating numerical evidence.

### **PARTICIPANT**

The participant was a grade five student enrolled in a private school in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India. Purposive sampling was employed to select the participant, as the learner demonstrated a willingness to participate in the study and regularly completed all writing activities.

Before the intervention, the participant and her parents were asked to provide consent and were assured that her confidentiality would be maintained by using a pseudonym.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE**

The instructional intervention was implemented over a period of twelve weeks, and the participant had to complete ten writing tasks, each requiring an essay of approximately 1,000 words on topics appropriate for middle school students, including argumentative, narrative, and descriptive essays. After the essay was completed, the researcher reviewed it and provided feedback one-on-one. The participant was then asked to revise the essay based on the feedback given and then begin the next writing task after a week.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The primary source of data was ten essays. These essays were checked and analysed, and feedback was provided to assess changes and improvements in writing achievement and quality over time.

The participant completed one writing task before the intervention and all the others afterward.

Three semi-structured interviews were also conducted to explore the participant's perception of interpersonal written feedback, whether it has influenced her writing, and what (if any) recommendations she could make to the teachers.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative procedures. The writing samples were analysed using an analytic scoring rubric to compare pre-test and post-test performance.

Qualitative data was obtained from revised drafts, interview transcripts, and the teacher's feedback. Feedback was analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed six stages.

### **TRUST WORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical approval was obtained from the student and the student's parents, as the study was conducted outside of school. The participant voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving information about the research purpose and procedures. To ensure confidentiality, the participant's identity was protected by using a pseudonym. Research data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

### **FINDINGS**

The participant demonstrated noticeable improvement in her overall achievement after receiving interpersonal feedback over the twelve-week intervention. A comparison of pre- and post-test writing scores revealed significant progress across all five assessment criteria: content, organisation, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The participant's overall writing score increased from 42% to 80%.



Table 1

| Themes of Analysis | Pre-test scores | Post-test scores |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Content            | 9/20            | 17/20            |
| Grammer            | 8/20            | 20/20            |
| Mechanics          | 8/20            | 16/20            |
| Organisation       | 8/20            | 15/20            |
| Vocabulary         | 9/20            | 12/20            |
| Total              | 42 %            | 80%              |

Table 2

| Score | Level     | Description                                                                                                    |
|-------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0-4   | Very poor | Extremely limited vocabulary, persistent errors, limited writing and organisation                              |
| 5-8   | Poor      | Limited ideas, repetitive vocabulary, and grammar errors interfere with understanding                          |
| 9-12  | Fair      | Partially developed ideas, inconsistent organisation, limited vocabulary, frequent grammar and spelling errors |
| 13-16 | Good      | Clear ideas, logical organisation, appropriate vocabulary, grammar errors that do not affect meaning           |



|       |           |                                                                                                          |
|-------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 17-20 | Very Good | Very clear and developed ideas, well-organised writing, varied vocabulary, very few grammatical mistakes |
|-------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to both research and classroom practice. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature and feedback on second-language writing by providing highly detailed, structured evidence of how interpersonal written feedback facilitates writing development at the individual level. From a pedagogical perspective, this research will offer insights for English language teachers on how learners respond to interpersonal written feedback and may assist educators in designing effective writing instruction that encourages active learner participation and improvement.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the impact of interpersonal written feedback on ESL learners' writing achievement through an in-depth case study that documents changes in learners' writing performance, as well as their experiences and perceptions of the teacher's feedback.

### LIMITATIONS

The study has certain limitations as well. As a single-case study involving one participant, the findings cannot be generalised to all ESL learners at all levels. Future research may include multiple participants, longer intervention periods, and more personalised strategies to involve participants in the feedback process.

ESL learners are encouraged to provide feedback that is individualised and supportive rather than focusing solely on grammar. Interpersonal feedback after the writing process can foster self-reflection, confidence, and higher self-esteem. Educational institutions may also consider providing professional development opportunities for teachers to equip them with effective feedback strategies to support learners throughout the process of writing development.

### CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of interpersonal written feedback on an ESL learner's writing achievement using a single-case study design. The study found that written interpersonal feedback positively influenced participants' writing achievement. Drastic and noticeable improvements were observed in all areas of writing, including content, grammar, mechanics, organisation, and vocabulary. The participant also demonstrated increased self-esteem, confidence, and motivation to engage in revision after receiving feedback.

The study highlights the importance of interpersonal written feedback in correcting linguistic errors. The researcher's interactive approach enabled the participant to view the writing process as a continuous improvement strategy rather than a one-time event. Through repeated cycles of writing, the learner developed greater independence in producing written texts by the end of the study and



made fewer mistakes, showing massive improvement in her writing skills.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) stated that ESL students consistently rate written feedback more highly than alternative forms, such as peer feedback or oral feedback, in writing conferences.

As concluded from the semi-structured interviews, the qualitative results were as follows:

- It is very important for students to understand the purpose of feedback, as the interview concluded. Anushka did not understand the reason behind the feedback, so she did not give it importance.
- The students need to know that feedback is given for their own good. For this, the teachers must give them examples/stories of improvement, as these learners are too young to understand the whys and whats of improvement / interpersonal written feedback.
- It was concluded that if the feedback the student was getting was not regularly given in the classroom and not discussed in the next class; she would forget it. According to Anushka, the feedback should be given immediately so that any mistakes she made can be discussed and remembered.
- The feedback should be framed to motivate students to do better rather than demotivate them. The feedback should be positive in language but honest.
- The language should be comprehensive and appropriate for students' age, rather than

using difficult words they do not yet understand at this stage.

As suggested by Anushka, the feedback should be checked for any writing mistakes (of the teacher) and ensure that the students have understood the teacher's writing as well as the content.

- Students should internalise the feedback.
- The feedback should be linked to the material taught in the same class.
- Clear language learning objectives should be communicated to the students.
- Learners must be helped to see language and language learning in new, more active, learner-centered ways.
- If needed, the curriculum should be changed if the majority of the class does not understand a particular element of the language, grammar, or content.
- Learners should not be overwhelmed by too much feedback.
- Do not always give feedback in front of the whole class, and keep the child's self-esteem in mind.

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