

Written Feedback on Undergraduate EFL Theses in Indonesian Universities: Exploring Supervisors' Feedback Focus and Language Functions

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Abstract:

This study aimed to examine the focus and language functions of supervisors' written feedback on EFL undergraduate theses in three Indonesian universities. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, with quantitative and qualitative strands given equal priority and collected concurrently. Quantitative data comprised 417 written comments from six thesis drafts and questionnaire responses from 46 undergraduate students, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with three supervisors. Written comments were coded for feedback focus and language function, questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and interview data were examined through qualitative content analysis. The two strands were integrated through side-by-side comparison and joint interpretation to identify areas of convergence and divergence. The findings showed that supervisors' written comments focused primarily on content knowledge (53.5%), followed by genre knowledge (32.8%) and linguistic accuracy and appropriateness (13.7%). Directive functions predominated (77.4%), particularly directive questions and instructions, whereas expressive functions accounted for 22.6%, with very limited praise. The integrated findings indicate that supervisors primarily used directive language to address higher-order content and genre concerns, while linguistic issues received comparatively less attention. The study highlights the importance of balancing explicit revision guidance with supportive evaluation in undergraduate EFL thesis supervision.

Keywords: feedback focus, Indonesian EFL, language functions, thesis supervision, written feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing plays a central role in higher education because students are required to complete various academic writing tasks throughout their studies. Among these tasks, writing an undergraduate thesis represents one of the most demanding forms of academic writing, requiring students to demonstrate critical thinking, disciplinary knowledge, and adherence to academic conventions.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia, completing a thesis in English is particularly challenging because English is learned as a foreign language rather than being used in daily communication. Consequently, students often encounter difficulties in organizing ideas, developing arguments, employing appropriate academic language, and complying with disciplinary writing conventions. To address these challenges, teachers and thesis supervisors are expected to provide sufficient and meaningful written feedback that facilitates students' academic writing development (Stracke & Kumar, 2016; Raihany, 2014).

Written feedback is widely acknowledged as an indispensable pedagogical practice in thesis supervision because it provides students with opportunities to revise their writing and bridge the gap between their current performance and expected academic standards (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Nurie, 2020; Razali & Jupri, 2016). Frequent written comments on thesis drafts enable supervisees to refine their arguments, improve organization, strengthen academic language, and produce higher-quality theses. Moreover, feedback functions as one of the primary sources of learning and academic development during the thesis writing process (Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020; Musyarofah et al., 2021). Furthermore, recent studies highlight that students' active engagement—encompassing affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions—with teacher written feedback in online environments plays a crucial role in improving their writing skills (Linuwih et al., 2024)

Although written feedback has been recognized as an essential component of effective supervision, previous studies have reported several concerns regarding its implementation in higher education. Students often perceive supervisors' comments as lacking clarity, insufficiently focused, or providing limited guidance for revision (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Henderson et al., 2019; Derham et al., 2021; McGuire et al., 2019). These findings indicate that the effectiveness of written feedback depends not only on what supervisors comment on but also on how they communicate their comments.

Existing literature further reveals that supervisors tend to employ directive comments more frequently than other language functions. Studies by Lei and Pramoolsook (2020), Musyarofah et al. (2021), and Qunayeer and Suleiman (2020) consistently found that directive feedback predominates supervisory written comments. Similarly, Nurie (2018) reported that Ethiopian lecturers relied primarily on directive and clarifying functions, whereas expressive comments, particularly those conveying approval or encouragement, were rarely employed. As a result, supervisory feedback tended to emphasize criticism rather than balanced encouragement and constructive guidance. Likewise, Ghazal et al. (2014) demonstrated that supervisors produced considerably more criticism than suggestions, while Lee (2009) observed that supervisors frequently highlighted students' weaknesses without adequately recognizing their strengths. Nevertheless, effective written feedback should provide an appropriate balance among praise, constructive criticism, suggestions, and reflective comments delivered through supportive language (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Ghazal et al., 2014). Atefinia and Alavinia (2019) further revealed that supervisors' teaching experience influenced their feedback practices, with less experienced teachers tending to provide more criticism and suggestions, whereas more experienced teachers tended to provide more compliments.

In addition to language function, previous studies have also examined the focus of supervisors' written feedback. However, inconsistent findings have been reported. Nurie (2018) found that supervisors predominantly commented on genre, topic understanding, and linguistic accuracy.

Other studies emphasized grammar and spelling corrections as the dominant focus (Lucero et al., 2018; Gul et al., 2016; Saeed et al., 2021). Conversely, Ghazal et al. (2014), Bitchener et al. (2011), Stracke and Kumar (2016), Rizqiyyah and Prianty (2020), Saidon et al. (2018), and Basturkmen et al. (2014) reported that supervisors concentrated primarily on content development and idea construction. These inconsistent findings suggest that the dominant focus of supervisory written feedback may vary across educational contexts.

Previous studies have also differed in terms of research perspectives and methodological approaches. Some investigated written feedback solely from supervisors' perspectives (Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Gul et al., 2016; Purnomo et al., 2021), whereas others incorporated both supervisors' and students' perspectives (Agbayahoun, 2016; Irwin, 2017; Bastola & Hu, 2020). Data collection methods have similarly varied, including interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, document analysis of students' drafts, or combinations of these methods (Derham et al., 2021; Hakini, 2020; Lucero et al., 2018; Nurie, 2018; Razali & Jupri, 2016; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Gul et al., 2016; Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020; Saidon et al., 2018; Suci et al., 2021; Agbayahoun, 2016; Stracke & Kumar, 2016; Azkah et al., 2016). Despite these contributions, relatively few studies have simultaneously examined both the focus and language functions of supervisors' written comments on undergraduate EFL theses, particularly in the Indonesian context (Musyarofah et al., 2021; Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020; Supriyadi & Kholid, 2020).

Despite these contributions, an important explanatory gap remains. Existing studies have generally examined feedback focus (what supervisors address) and language function (how supervisors communicate their comments) as separate dimensions. Consequently, the literature provides limited insight into how these two dimensions operate together in undergraduate EFL thesis supervision. For example, a study may establish that supervisors prioritize content or genre, or that they predominantly use directive comments, but these separate findings do not show whether content- and genre-related concerns are typically communicated through directive clarification and instruction, nor how limited expressive feedback is distributed across supervisory concerns. Examining the two dimensions within the same set of authentic supervisory comments therefore makes it possible to interpret supervisory feedback as a coordinated pedagogical practice rather than as isolated categories. This issue is particularly relevant in Indonesian EFL universities, where undergraduate theses are written in English and students must simultaneously demonstrate disciplinary knowledge, research competence, and academic language proficiency.

This study addresses this gap by investigating supervisors' written feedback on undergraduate EFL theses in three Indonesian universities through two complementary dimensions: feedback focus and language functions. The study asks: (1) What aspects of undergraduate EFL theses are most frequently addressed in supervisors' written feedback? and (2) What language functions do supervisors employ in communicating those comments? By examining authentic written comments alongside supervisees' perceptions and supervisors' interview accounts, the study provides an integrated account of what supervisors prioritize and how they communicate those priorities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Written Feedback in Thesis Supervision

Written feedback refers to supervisors' written comments intended to help students improve their academic writing through revision and reflection. Within thesis supervision, written feedback

serves not merely as error correction but also as pedagogical scaffolding that supports students' development of disciplinary knowledge, academic writing competence, and research skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Razali & Jupri, 2016). Effective written feedback should motivate supervisees, acknowledge their achievements, communicate constructive criticism in supportive language, and provide specific suggestions for revision (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2010; Bitchener et al., 2011; Razali & Jupri, 2016). Since written feedback represents a form of interpersonal communication between supervisors and supervisees, both the content of feedback and the way it is linguistically expressed influence students' interpretation and subsequent revisions.

2.2. Feedback Focus

Feedback focus refers to the aspects of students' writing addressed by supervisors. Previous studies have identified several dimensions of feedback focus, including content, genre organization, topic understanding, language accuracy, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Nurie (2018) reported that supervisors most frequently commented on genre, topic understanding, and linguistic accuracy. In contrast, Lucero et al. (2018), Gul et al. (2016), and Saeed et al. (2021) found that supervisors mainly focused on grammar and spelling errors. Meanwhile, Ghazal et al. (2014), Bitchener et al. (2011), Stracke and Kumar (2016), Rizqiyah and Prianty (2020), Saidon et al. (2018), and Basturkmen et al. (2014) demonstrated that supervisors primarily emphasized content development and idea elaboration. These contrasting findings indicate that supervisory priorities differ across institutional and educational contexts.

2.3. Language Functions of Written Feedback

Besides determining what aspects should be revised, supervisors also decide how their comments are linguistically communicated. Language functions describe the communicative purposes underlying written feedback, such as directing revisions, providing information, clarifying issues, expressing approval, or encouraging students. Previous studies consistently reported that directive comments constitute the dominant language function in supervisory feedback (Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020; Musyarofah et al., 2021; Qunayeer & Suleiman, 2020). Nurie (2018) similarly found that directive and clarifying functions predominated, whereas expressive functions were rarely used. Consequently, supervisory feedback tended to emphasize criticism rather than encouragement. Ghazal et al. (2014) and Lee (2009) likewise observed that supervisors offered more criticism than praise or suggestions. However, Hyland and Hyland (2001) argued that effective written feedback should balance constructive criticism with encouragement and explicit suggestions to facilitate students' motivation and revision. Furthermore, Atefinia and Alavinia (2019) demonstrated that supervisors' teaching experience significantly influences the distribution of criticism, suggestions, and compliments in written feedback.

Overall, previous research has established the importance of feedback focus and language function as two complementary dimensions of effective supervisory feedback. Nevertheless, limited evidence is available regarding how these dimensions interact in the context of Indonesian undergraduate EFL thesis supervision. Therefore, this study examines both dimensions simultaneously to provide a more comprehensive understanding of supervisors' written feedback practices.

Overall, previous research establishes feedback focus and language function as complementary dimensions of supervisory feedback, but most studies have examined them independently. This separation limits understanding of the pedagogical relationship between the content of feedback and the communicative form through which it is delivered. The present study addresses this

limitation by analyzing both dimensions within the same supervisory context and by integrating evidence from written comments, supervisee questionnaires, and supervisor interviews.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to analyze the focus and language functions of written feedback provided by supervisors on undergraduate EFL theses. The study was conducted at three universities in Surabaya, Indonesia. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed because the research questions required both quantitative evidence of the distribution of feedback categories and qualitative evidence explaining supervisors' intentions and practices. The quantitative and qualitative strands were assigned equal priority and were collected during the same phase of the study.

The quantitative strand comprised the coding of written comments and supervisees' questionnaire responses, whereas the qualitative strand comprised semi-structured interviews with supervisors. Each strand was analyzed separately using procedures appropriate to the data. Integration occurred after the separate analyses through side-by-side comparison and joint interpretation: numerical patterns from the written comments and questionnaire were compared with supervisors' interview accounts to identify convergence, complementarity, or divergence. Thus, the study did not statistically merge the two datasets; instead, integration occurred at the interpretation stage, where findings from both strands were brought together to explain what supervisors focused on and how they communicated their feedback.

3.2. Participants and Data Collection

Data were collected from three sources: supervisors' written comments on six undergraduate thesis drafts, questionnaire responses from 46 supervisees, and semi-structured interviews with three supervisors. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to always (5) and contained 15 items covering linguistic accuracy and appropriateness (six items), content knowledge (five items), and genre knowledge (four items). The questionnaire had acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .86 for linguistic accuracy and appropriateness, .91 for content knowledge, and .82 for genre knowledge. Each supervisor interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. The six thesis drafts were selected from the three participating universities, and the on-script comments, including margin comments when available, were treated as the primary documentary data. A feedback unit was defined as a word, phrase, sentence, or question intended to communicate a supervisory response to the supervisee's text.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The written feedback was coded in three focus categories adapted from Bitchener et al. (2010): content knowledge, genre knowledge, and linguistic accuracy and appropriateness. Content-focused comments addressed literature gaps, theoretical grounding, argumentation, relevance, and significance. Genre-focused comments addressed the organization, purpose, rhetorical function, and content of thesis sections. Linguistic comments addressed grammar, vocabulary, writing style, mechanics, and voice. For language function, the coding framework was based on the directive and expressive functions described by Hyland and Hyland (2001) and Kumar and Stracke (2007). Directive comments were further classified as questions or instructions, while expressive comments were classified as praise, criticism, or opinion/suggestion. Written comments were

independently coded in two rounds and then compared to check coding consistency. Quantitative data from the coded comments and questionnaire were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Interview data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis to identify supervisors' explanations of their feedback priorities and language choices. The final stage involved comparing the quantitative patterns with the qualitative themes in a joint interpretation.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Supervisors' Written Feedback Focus

In regard to the focus of supervisors' written feedback, the quantitative analysis of supervisors' on-script comments and a questionnaire to the supervisees were conducted. The written comments made by the supervisors on the student theses were taken from their in-text comments. The information gathered was organized into the following categories: content knowledge, genre, and language accuracy and appropriateness. Table 1 shows that 53.5% of written comments focusing on content knowledge that demanded conceptual clarity, precision, relevance, and completeness. Here are some of the remarks provided by the supervisors: this an example of an explanation, "explain how your study is different from the previous ones," "clarify how the participants were selected," and "add more detail in the theories."

Table 1. Supervisors' Feedback Focus on Students' Theses

Feedback Type	Number	Percent (%)
Content Knowledge	183	53.5
Genre Knowledge	112	32.8
Linguistics Accuracy	47	13.7
Total	342	100

The second most prevalent feedback issue was genre knowledge (32.8.5%) dealing with the functions of the substance presented in the various sections of the thesis. The examples of written feedback concerning the genre knowledge are "add the recommendation for future research in the conclusion," "the discussion should be put here," and "the limitation of the study is not clearly explained in the background." In addition, the third type of written feedback frequently emphasized was linguistic accuracy and appropriateness (13.7 %). Writing prompts included statements like "grammar check, please," "change this sentence into passive, avoid using 'I,'" and "use gerund (Ving) after the preposition" that directed students to modify their writing in a formal manner. In conclusion, it would seem to show that only a small number of contributions tend to target linguistic accuracy and appropriateness; the vast majority of the feedback forms appear to concentrate on content, followed by an understanding of the genre.

As shown in Table 2, a total of six indicators were used to measure supervisees' perceptions of the feedback emphasis provided by their thesis supervisors. The supervisees said that their supervisors placed a significant emphasis on linguistics accuracy and appropriateness as "often" (29.3%) and "often" (26.5%), accordingly. Significantly more supervisees reported that their supervisors were more focused on the other five criteria than on their usage of language and grammar. This is an illustration of how the thesis's content was impacted by the supervisors' comments.

Table 2. Linguistics Accuracy and Appropriateness

No	Items	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1	Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization	5 (10.9)	15 (32.6)	10 (21.7)	11 (23.9)	5 (10.9)
2	Appropriateness of word choice	15 (32.6)	18 (39.1)	10 (21.7)	3 (6.5)	-
3	Appropriateness of voice	13 (18.7)	20 (43.5)	9 (19.6)	4 (8.7)	-
4	Grammatical Accuracy	6 (13.0)	12 (26.1)	14 (30.4)	12 (26.1)	2 (4.3)
5	Coherence and cohesion	16 (34.8)	8 (17.4)	13 (28.3)	9 (19.6)	-
6	Development of ideas	18 (39.1)	8 (17.4)	13 (28.3)	7 (15.2)	-
Total		73 (26.5)	81 (29.3)	69 (25.0)	46 (16.7)	7 (2.5)

The five metrics used to assess supervisees' opinions of the supervisor's feedback to thesis-focused supervision are listed in the table 3 below. Supervised students reported that their supervisors frequently emphasized feedback on content with an average of 29.6% and 47.4% as 'always' and 'often', respectively. In addition, the findings revealed that a small percentage of supervisees regarded their supervisors as sometimes (15.6%) and rarely (7.4%) focused on the content of their thesis. Regarding specific components of feedback emphasizing content, most respondents reported that their supervisors primarily emphasized theoretical frameworks of the thesis, and gaps in coverage of new literature. However, it is obvious that a percentage of the respondents demonstrated that their supervisors pay little attention to the concerns of the irrelevance of issues in the research and gaps in the justification of arguments. The following were identified to be the precise indicators of content-focused feedback.

Table 3. Content Knowledge

No	Items	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1	Gaps in the content and coverage	13 (28.3)	22 (47.8)	9 (19.6)	2 (4.3)	-
2	Irrelevance of issues in the research	10 (21.7)	20 (43.5)	8 (17.4)	8 (17.4)	-
3	Gaps in the justification of arguments	13 (28.3)	18 (39.1)	10 (21.7)	5 (10.9)	-
4	Theoretical frameworks of the thesis	15 (32.6)	26 (56.5)	5 (10.9)	-	-
5	Gaps in coverage of new literature	17 (37.0)	23 (50.0)	4 (8.7)	2 (4.3)	-
Total		68 (29.6)	109 (47.4)	36 (15.6)	17 (7.4)	0

The thoughts of the supervisees regarding the genre knowledge-focused supervision comments are shown in Table 4. These things were evaluated based on four different criteria. The genre was cited frequently in the supervisors' feedback as "always" and "often" according to 33.7 % and 27.7% of supervisees. Despite this, the majority of those who were supervised rated the influence that their supervisors had on their knowledge of the genre as occurring "occasionally" (27.2%) or "rarely" (8.7%). Supervisors have demonstrated that their supervisors' attention to the justification for adding certain content in a particular part-genre, as well as the functions and contents of distinct portions of the thesis, occurs both frequently and infrequently based on indicators of feedback

focus on genre. In addition, supervisors have shown that their attention to the justification for adding certain content in a specific part-genre also occurs in distinct portions of the thesis. This was proved by the supervisees' data, which showed that both frequently and intermittently, their supervisors paid attention to the justification for including particular information in a given subgenre. The majority of the people being supervised stated that the most important thing to their supervisors was for them to use accurate and proper language, followed by the genre and the topic. The supervisees' assessment that these supervisors gave these matters the most consideration confirms this.

Table 4. Genre Knowledge

No	Items	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1	Placement of units or topics of contents in the thesis	10 (21.8)	18 (39.1)	12 (26.1)	3 (6.5)	3 (6.5)
2	The rationale for including particular content in a particular part-genre	17 (37.0)	12 (26.1)	14 (30.4)	3 (6.5)	-
3	Functions and contents of different parts of the thesis	11 (23.9)	20 (43.5)	13 (28.3)	2 (4.3)	-
4	The use of other samples for contents of different parts of the thesis	13 (28.3)	12 (26.1)	11 (23.9)	8 (17.4)	2 (4.3)
Total		51 (27.7)	62 (33.7)	50 (27.2)	16 (8.7)	5 (2.7)

On the linguistic elements and content of the comments made, the supervisors were questioned. Based on the findings of the interviews, it was determined that the focus on the thesis' content should be the most significant component of research, despite the supervisors' statements that they occasionally also take other factors into account. One of the supervisors under examination highlighted his attention to detail in this regard. He prioritizes the content more than other factors, although he also recognizes the importance of genre, grammatical accuracy, and appropriateness, among others.

My main focuses are on the format, organization, and topicality. I am occasionally responsible for assessing grammar and use. I typically stress the importance of the organization and the content as the two main pillars of a written research report.

The following subject was the main focus of the second respondent's comments on the supervisory advice he provided:

I look at how the research's title, problem statement, objectives, methods, and analysis sections relate to the main findings. As a result, concentrating on these elements gives me a picture of the research, how things relate to one another, and how the research endeavor has developed overall.

In the opinion of the third supervisor interviewed, He emphasizes that the content is fundamental. In addition, He also stresses the focus on the appropriateness and relevance of the content as well as issues with word choice, sentence structure, writing styles, and convention. The supervisor seems to have a variety of viewpoints on feedback and recommendations.

The interviewee also stresses the value of identifying problem areas and potential fixes in constructive comments. The written comments' goal is to help supervisees improve their work. Therefore, those under your supervision should utilize them frequently. He prioritizes content in his feedback comments over grammatical correctness and appropriateness, though. The interviewee also brought up the following issues:

I take into account every element of the thesis before giving assistance. In all honesty, the subject of my attention is the content. I do not rule out the idea of adding further components, though. For example, I highly encourage students to write their theses in compliance with my university's criteria. Additionally, I give the linguistic aspect enough thought while still focusing primarily on the subject at hand.

On-script comments, supervisor interviews, and a questionnaire filled out by supervisees all contributed to the collection of data that was used to analyze the focus of supervisors' input on supervisees' theses. The supervisees consistently expressed the belief that they believed their supervisors were most concerned with content knowledge, genre knowledge, linguistic accuracy and appropriateness. The supervisee questionnaire provided further evidence in support of the findings. Similar results and data analysis from interviews and on-script feedback comments showed that the supervisors' comments to their supervisees placed the most emphasis on content knowledge, followed by knowledge of genre, and then writing conventions or linguistics accuracy and appropriateness in the appropriate context. Previous research in this field has indicated that comments with a content knowledge focus are more prevalent. The genre, linguistic accuracy, and significance of the thesis are then discussed.

4.2. The Language Functions of Supervisors' Written Feedback

As shown in Table 5, students receive both directive and expressive written feedback on their thesis drafts. There was a total of 417 supervisors' comments identified in their written drafts. 323 (77.4%) of the written comments are directives for immediate action, while 94 of the written feedback is expressive (25.4%). As a result, it would appear that supervisors make the most use of the directive function while giving feedback.

Table 5. Language functions in written comments

Function	Number	Percent
Directive	323	77.4
Expressive	94	22.6
Total	417	100

Table 6 presents the subsections of directive and expressive language functions in supervisors' written comments, it can be seen that directive-question comments 216 (52%) and directive-instruction comments 107 (25.2%) were the two most common forms of supervisor comments on student theses, followed by expressive criticism 48 (11.5 %). The directive-question prompts the supervisee to explain particular components of the thesis that required more reading and the addition of information to clarify and connect thoughts. The common questions as directive-questions comments are 'why?', 'what does it mean?', 'sources?', and 'is it important?'. Those questions allowed the supervisees to rethink the content and make it relevant to the argument.

Table 6. The options of language functions in written comments

Function	Number	Percent
Directive question	216	52
Directive instruction	107	25.5
Expressive praise	2	0.5
Expressive criticism	48	11.5
Expressive opinion/suggestion	44	10.5
Total	417	100

The second most common type of feedback given was directive instruction. It is obvious that supervisors instruct their supervisees on how to revise their writing in response to such direction. Some examples of directive-instruction feedback found on supervisees thesis drafts are "please clarify this," "follow the university thesis writing guidelines," "place the details in the research instruments section, not here," and "be consistent in using a certain term."

Dissatisfied expressions as expressive criticism made up 48 (11.5%) of all comments, placing this feedback category third in terms of frequency. Some unfavorable remarks made to the students are "the rationale of this study is not clear," "the literature reviews lack details," the citation is inappropriate, web address can't be put in the in-text citation," and "the significance of the study is not relevant to the objectives of the study."

The expressive suggestion placed fourth overall with 44 comments, representing 10.5 percent of the total. For instance, "You must tie the conclusions of your study to those of past research," "You should clearly show how the results of your study and those of previous studies differ from one another as well as how they are related," and "you should state specifically the design of the study." are some of the expressive suggestions provided in student theses.

Comparatively, only two written comments on students' theses —or 0.5 percent of the total— contained expressive-praise feedback. These include statements like "good, you provide a clear review of previous studies," and "the background is great, you present the gap of the previous studies clearly." This demonstrates that negative comments or criticisms are more common than advice or statements of awe for their achievements for the students to improve their work.

Despite the supervisors' assertions that they also use the different language functions while giving feedback, the data collected from the interviews showed that the most common issue was the directive question/ clarification. The supervisors who were interviewed stated that they aimed their feedback comments. They specifically found that guided clarification is the most widely used method, and they occasionally used specific instructions in their feedback comments. One participant said he preferred directive clarification to instruction:

I use more directive clarification than instruction when giving written feedback. This form of feedback comment is critical for motivating students to study more or improve their analytical abilities. Feedback comments with directive clarification are critical for discovering problem solutions. Furthermore, it allows the supervisee to evaluate their ideas based on my comments.

The majority of the supervisors' comments, according to one of the other supervisors who was interviewed, were directive explanations that prompted supervisees to elaborate and support their

work. He uses expressive comments rather than praise or criticism to give students the chance to enhance their work. He also mentioned the fact that on occasion he distributes resources in response to input received. Conversely, interviewees stated that they commonly use criticism rather than thanks or ideas in the comments section of feedback forms. One respondent stated that he rarely uses suggestions when recognizing a student who is bewildered when asked about his use of expressive suggestion feedback comments. This was a reference to his expressive language and thought-provoking comments in the feedback.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study examined supervisors' written feedback on undergraduate EFL theses through three interrelated dimensions: feedback focus, language functions, and their contribution to students' revisions and thesis quality. The findings demonstrate that supervisors' written feedback extends beyond correcting language errors, functioning instead as pedagogical scaffolding that supports students' academic writing development throughout the thesis supervision process.

Regarding feedback focus, the findings reveal that supervisors predominantly concentrated on content knowledge, followed by genre knowledge, whereas linguistic accuracy and appropriateness received considerably less attention. This pattern suggests that supervisors prioritized helping students construct meaningful academic arguments and justify their findings rather than merely correcting linguistic errors. Such a tendency reflects the nature of undergraduate thesis writing, in which demonstrating critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and disciplinary knowledge is considered more important than producing grammatically flawless texts. Since a thesis is expected to present original academic inquiry, supervisors appear to emphasize higher-order writing concerns before addressing lower-order language issues.

The predominance of content-related feedback corroborates previous studies reporting that supervisors generally focus on content development and idea construction in thesis supervision (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2010; Ghazal et al., 2014; Stracke & Kumar, 2016; Basturkmen et al., 2014; Rizqiyyah & Prianty, 2020; Saidon et al., 2018). Likewise, the substantial attention devoted to genre knowledge indicates that supervisors also guided students in understanding rhetorical organization, disciplinary conventions, and the communicative purposes of different thesis sections, consistent with Nurie (2018). However, unlike several studies that identified linguistic accuracy and grammar as the dominant focus of supervisory feedback (Gul et al., 2016; Agbayahoun, 2016; Hakimi, 2020), the present findings indicate that language-related comments constituted the smallest proportion of supervisors' feedback. This discrepancy may be attributed to contextual differences. In the present study, supervisors appeared to assume that grammatical accuracy could be refined after students had established coherent arguments and appropriate academic structures. Consequently, language issues were treated as secondary to content development and genre realization.

The findings further indicate that supervisors tailored their feedback according to students' writing needs. Rather than applying a uniform feedback strategy, supervisors provided comments that addressed specific weaknesses in each thesis draft. This supports Ghazal et al. (2014) and Nurie (2020), who argued that effective written feedback should correspond to students' learning needs and writing difficulties. Similarly, Supriyadi and Kholid (2020) emphasized that comments focusing on issues directly relevant to students' texts are more likely to facilitate meaningful revisions. Therefore, the effectiveness of supervisory feedback depends not only on the amount of feedback provided but also on its relevance to students' immediate writing problems.

Concerning language functions, the study found that directive feedback overwhelmingly dominated supervisors' written comments, whereas expressive feedback was rarely employed. This finding suggests that supervisors primarily perceived written feedback as a means of directing students' revisions rather than expressing personal evaluation or emotional support. Directive comments enabled supervisors to provide explicit instructions, clarify expectations, and indicate precisely how students should revise particular sections of their theses. Such findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating the predominance of directive feedback in supervisory contexts (Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Gul et al., 2016; Lei & Pramoolsook, 2020; Musyarofah et al., 2021; Nurie, 2018; Saeed et al., 2021). From a pedagogical perspective, directive feedback may be particularly effective in EFL thesis supervision because undergraduate students often require concrete guidance to revise complex academic texts and meet disciplinary expectations.

A closer examination of directive feedback revealed that directive clarification and directive instruction were the two most frequently employed subcategories. Supervisors commonly requested clarification, additional evidence, stronger justification, or more detailed explanations before providing explicit instructions for revision. This finding differs from Stracke and Kumar (2016), who reported directive clarification as considerably more prevalent than directive instruction, and also contrasts with Leng (2014), whose study found directive instruction to be the dominant feedback function. These inconsistencies suggest that supervisors' communicative preferences may vary according to institutional contexts, disciplinary expectations, and students' writing proficiency. In the present study, supervisors appeared to combine clarification and instruction strategically, encouraging students to think critically while simultaneously providing sufficient guidance for revision.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the limited use of expressive feedback. Supervisors rarely provided praise or explicit expressions of approval, while criticism and suggestions occurred more frequently. Although supervisors explained during interviews that criticism was intended to encourage students to reconsider and strengthen their academic arguments, the overall distribution of expressive feedback remained heavily skewed toward corrective comments. This finding aligns with Nurie (2018), Leng (2014), and Ghazal et al. (2014), who similarly observed that supervisory feedback often contains considerably more criticism than encouragement. Consequently, students receive extensive guidance regarding weaknesses in their writing but comparatively little recognition of their successful achievements.

Interestingly, these findings contrast with Hyland and Hyland (2001), who argued that praise constitutes one of the most common forms of teacher feedback and that criticism is frequently mitigated through hedging strategies to preserve students' motivation. The discrepancy may reflect differences in educational contexts and supervisory purposes. Whereas classroom writing feedback often aims to maintain learners' confidence, thesis supervision places greater emphasis on ensuring academic rigor and improving research quality. Nevertheless, excessive reliance on criticism without balancing it with positive reinforcement may reduce students' confidence and motivation during the lengthy thesis writing process.

From the perspective of feedback effectiveness, the findings suggest that constructive written feedback should achieve an appropriate balance among directive guidance, informative explanation, and supportive evaluation. Directive comments help students identify concrete revision strategies and expressive comments contribute to students' motivation and confidence. As argued by Hyland and Hyland (2001), Azkah et al. (2016), Cheng and Zhang (2021), Ghazal et al.

(2014), Plaindaren and Shah (2019), and Raihany (2014), effective supervisory feedback should combine praise, constructive criticism, and explicit suggestions. Excessively critical comments may discourage students, whereas overly mitigated comments may obscure supervisors' intended meanings. Therefore, effective written feedback should be sufficiently explicit to guide revision while remaining supportive enough to sustain students' engagement throughout the thesis writing process.

Overall, the present findings reinforce the view that supervisory written feedback is not merely a mechanism for correcting students' writing but rather a form of instructional scaffolding that facilitates academic writing development. By prioritizing content and genre knowledge, employing predominantly directive language functions, and providing targeted revision guidance, supervisors support students in constructing stronger academic arguments and producing higher-quality undergraduate theses. These findings extend previous research by demonstrating that the interaction between feedback focus, language functions, and students' revision practices collectively contributes to the improvement of thesis quality in the Indonesian EFL context.

6. CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, the supervisors' feedback remarks to their supervisees focused primarily on the supervisees' content knowledge, genre knowledge, and linguistic accuracy and appropriateness. Regarding the language function of the feedback, the study's findings indicate that thesis advisors offer directive feedback more frequently than expressive feedback. The most dominant comments were directive clarifications, followed by directive instructions as the specific subcategories of feedback language functions. The second and third most common types of feedback comments were expressive-approval critiques and expressive-suggestions feedback comments. The second and third most common types of feedback comments were expressive-approval critiques and expressive-suggestions feedback comments. Contrarily, the written feedback comments the supervisees received were few in expressive-approval feedback remarks (praise). This demonstrates that the distribution of compliments, criticism, and ideas in the feedback comments is unbalanced.

Limitations and directions for future research. This study has several limitations. The participant group comprised only three supervisors, and the documentary analysis was based on six thesis drafts from three universities in one city. The quantitative analysis relied mainly on descriptive statistics, and the study did not follow students' revisions across multiple stages of thesis development. These constraints limit the generalizability of the findings and prevent causal claims about the effect of feedback on thesis quality. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample of supervisors and institutions, analyze feedback across multiple supervisory cycles, and examine students' uptake and revisions longitudinally.

The integrated findings suggest that supervisors primarily use written feedback to guide students' revision of content and genre-related aspects of thesis writing. The study therefore highlights the value of combining explicit revision guidance with constructive and supportive evaluation. However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the direct effect of particular feedback functions on thesis quality because students' subsequent revisions were not analyzed longitudinally.

7. REFERENCES

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