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The Effectiveness of Generic and Individualized Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners' Grammatical Accuracy: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of written corrective feedback (CF), particularly in the form of metalinguistic explanations (ME), for improving the grammatical accuracy of low-intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has been relatively underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by investigating and comparing the impact of generic versus individualized metalinguistic explanations on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in writing. A total of 85 low-intermediate EFL learners participated in the study, divided into three groups: two experimental groups (receiving either generic or individualized ME) and a control group (receiving no written CF). The effectiveness of the interventions was assessed using a pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. Data were analyzed using a two-way repeated measures ANOVA and a series of ANOVAs with post hoc comparisons. The results indicated that both types of ME significantly improved learners' grammatical accuracy in the short term. However, generic ME produced more sustained improvements in grammatical accuracy over the long term compared to individualized ME. These findings suggest that generic metalinguistic feedback is an effective and efficient strategy for enhancing grammatical accuracy in EFL contexts, offering a practical solution for teachers seeking to optimize their feedback practices while supporting learners' linguistic development.

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1-Introduction

Classroom interaction remains central to second language (L2) acquisition, as it creates opportunities for learners to produce the target language, negotiate meaning, and receive contingent feedback—processes that support both accuracy and fluency development. Recent research confirms the pedagogical potential of peer and teacher-mediated interaction for fostering form-focused attention in classroom settings (Sato & Ballinger, 2016; Li, 2020). Among the various forms of feedback available to learners, written corrective feedback (WCF) has received considerable attention as a mechanism for promoting grammatical accuracy in L2 writing (Ellis, 2005; Bitchener & Storch, 2016).

Although interaction is undeniably important, there is growing recognition that it may be insufficient on its own for solving persistent problems in learners' written grammatical accuracy. Targeted WCF, however, can guide learners' attention to specific forms and support long-term accuracy gains. Contemporary studies demonstrate that combining interactional practice with systematic written feedback improves the uptake and retention of grammatical forms more reliably than either practice or feedback alone (Shintani & Aubrey, 2016; Suzuki, 2021).

Debate about the effectiveness of written CF has matured significantly over the past decade. While early critics (e.g., Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2007) argued that corrective marking is either ineffective or harmful, more recent meta-analyses provide robust evidence of its positive impact when implemented systematically (Kang & Han, 2015; Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Brown et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the key question is not whether WCF works, but rather which types of WCF are most effective, for whom, and under what conditions.

In response to concerns about teacher workload and learners' engagement with feedback, metalinguistic written feedback has attracted renewed interest. This approach provides explicit cues or explanations that promote self-correction and metalinguistic awareness, and it can be delivered in scalable ways across entire classes. Recent studies indicate that metalinguistic cues often lead to stronger revision performance and better transfer to new writing, particularly when follow-up revision tasks are included (El Ebyary & Windeatt, 2017; Zhang & Hyland, 2018).

Despite these advances, critical gaps remain. Large-scale meta-analyses highlight heterogeneity across studies—differences in error types, feedback scope, learner profiles, and EFL versus ESL contexts—which limits the generalizability of findings. Moreover, much of the experimental WCF literature is short-term or conducted under laboratory-like conditions. Comparatively fewer rigorous, classroom-based trials have examined generic versus individualized metalinguistic WCF in authentic EFL settings. Questions about scalability and time efficiency remain underexplored,

making a focused investigation of these approaches both timely and relevant.

Building on this literature, the present study investigates whether generic (class-level) versus individualized (learner-specific) metalinguistic written CF differentially enhance EFL learners' grammatical accuracy in written production, while also examining teacher time cost and learner engagement. By situating the study within current empirical and review literature and using ecologically valid classroom procedures, this research aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the optimization of feedback practices in EFL writing instruction

2- Literature Review

A growing body of recent research has examined the role of written corrective feedback (WCF) in improving grammatical accuracy among second language (L2) learners, both in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The ongoing debate in this field focuses on identifying the most effective types of WCF and the specific instructional conditions that facilitate L2 writing development (e.g., Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2019; Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Sheen, 2007, 2010; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a, 2008b; Ferris, 2006). Although substantial progress has been made, findings remain inconclusive regarding the overall efficacy of WCF. This lack of consensus can be attributed to persistent methodological issues, including inconsistent operational definitions, limited longitudinal evidence, and an overreliance on text revision tasks as the primary measure of improvement (Li & Vuono, 2019; Shintani, 2015; Truscott, 1996). These limitations underscore the need for more rigorous, context-sensitive research designs that can provide stronger empirical evidence on the role of WCF in promoting grammatical accuracy.

2-1 The Dichotomy between Direct and Indirect Written Corrective Feedback

Written corrective feedback is typically classified into two broad categories: direct and indirect. Direct feedback involves the teacher providing the correct linguistic form for the learner's error, while indirect feedback simply indicates the presence of an error, leaving it to the learner to identify and correct it (Ellis, 2009). The effectiveness of these two types of feedback has been the subject of extensive empirical investigation, yet the findings remain inconclusive.

Some studies (e.g., Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982) have suggested that indirect feedback is more beneficial for promoting deeper cognitive engagement with language forms, as it encourages learners to reflect on their errors and actively participate in the correction process. This deeper engagement is believed to facilitate longer-term retention and internalization of grammatical rules. Conversely, other studies (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a) have found that direct feedback is more effective, particularly for lower-proficiency learners who may lack the linguistic resources or metalinguistic awareness to identify and correct their errors. Direct

feedback provides immediate and explicit information, which can be especially helpful for learners at the early stages of language development.

However, the debate is far from settled. For example, Chandler (2003) and Van Beuningen et al. (2008) reported no significant difference between direct and indirect feedback in terms of their impact on grammatical accuracy. These conflicting findings suggest that the effectiveness of WCF may be mediated by a range of factors, including learner proficiency, the complexity of the writing task, the type of error, and the instructional context. Some researchers (Bitchener, 2012) have argued that a combination of both direct and indirect feedback may yield optimal results, as it allows for both explicit correction and opportunities for learner engagement and self-correction.

2-2 Metalinguistic Feedback (ME)

Metalinguistic feedback (ME) is another widely researched form of WCF, which involves providing learners with explicit information about the nature of their errors, either through the use of error codes or brief explanations of grammatical rules. ME can be delivered in two main forms: individualized, which targets specific errors in a learner's work, and generic, which offers general explanations applicable to all learners in the class (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009).

The use of ME is grounded in the belief that explicit information about errors can enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness and facilitate the development of both explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge. Research has shown that both individualized and generic ME can lead to improvements in grammatical accuracy, but there are important differences in terms of their practicality and efficiency. Shintani and Ellis (2013) conducted a study comparing the two forms of ME and found that individualized feedback required significantly more time to provide—on average, 15–20 minutes per student—whereas generic feedback, delivered through class-wide explanations or handouts, took only 5–7 minutes per class. This discrepancy highlights the labor-intensive nature of individualized ME, which may not be feasible for teachers in large classes or in contexts with limited instructional time.

Despite the greater time investment, individualized ME was found to produce greater short-term gains in learners' explicit grammatical knowledge. However, these gains were not always sustained in delayed post-tests, suggesting that while individualized ME may offer immediate benefits, its long-term effects on implicit knowledge and overall language development remain uncertain. This finding underscores the need for further research to explore the durability of the effects of different types of ME.

2-3 Generic vs. Individualized Metalinguistic Feedback

The comparison between individualized and generic ME is particularly relevant in EFL contexts, where teachers often face logistical challenges such as large class

sizes and limited time for providing individualized attention. While individualized ME offers more tailored and specific feedback, it comes at a high cost in terms of time and effort. Generic ME, on the other hand, is more time-efficient and can be delivered to the entire class, but may not address the specific needs of individual learners.

Research comparing the two forms of ME is still limited, but some studies suggest that the choice between individualized and generic ME should be informed by factors such as class size, learner proficiency, and the specific goals of the writing task. For example, Shintani and Ellis (2013) argue that individualized feedback may be more appropriate for advanced learners who are capable of engaging with specific errors and applying metalinguistic knowledge, while generic ME may be more beneficial for less proficient learners who need broad, foundational guidance on grammatical structures. Additionally, the nature of the writing task and the types of errors being targeted may also influence the relative effectiveness of each approach.

2-4 The Role of Error Codes in Metalinguistic Feedback

A common feature of both individualized and generic ME is the use of error codes, which provide learners with brief labels for specific types of errors (e.g., "sp" for spelling, "art" for article usage). The use of error codes is intended to help learners identify and correct their mistakes independently, thereby promoting greater learner autonomy and engagement with the correction process (Ellis, 2009).

Studies on the effectiveness of error codes have produced mixed results. Some researchers (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003) have found that error codes are an efficient way to guide learners' attention to errors without providing explicit corrections, which can foster deeper processing and retention of grammatical forms. However, other studies (e.g., Robb et al., 1986) have reported no significant difference between the use of error codes and more explicit forms of CF. The effectiveness of error codes may also depend on the learners' level of proficiency and their familiarity with the codes being used. For lower-proficiency learners, error codes may be confusing or difficult to interpret without sufficient linguistic knowledge, and explicit corrections may be more beneficial (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008a).

Overall, the use of error codes has been associated with greater learner engagement and deeper processing of grammatical forms, but their effectiveness is likely to be influenced by a range of individual and contextual factors.

2-5 Need for Further Research

While existing studies have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of various forms of WCF, significant gaps remain in the literature. In particular, there is a need for more research comparing the relative effectiveness of individualized and generic ME, especially in EFL contexts where teachers often face constraints

related to time and resources. Furthermore, future research should explore the long-term effects of ME on both explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge, as well as its impact on learner motivation, engagement, and autonomy in the writing process. Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how different forms of WCF can be optimized to support L2 learners' grammatical development in diverse instructional contexts.

3- Method

3-1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, utilizing a pre-test, treatment, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test with three intact EFL classes. The design included two experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups received different types of metalinguistic feedback (ME): one group received generic ME, and the other received individualized ME. The control group did not receive any written corrective feedback (WCF) during the study period. All three groups completed a pre-test, an immediate post-test, and a delayed post-test.

The dependent variable in this study was grammatical accuracy, while the independent variables included the feedback type (generic ME vs. individualized ME) and the period (pre-test, immediate post-test, delayed post-test).

3-2 Participants

The participants were low-intermediate EFL learners from three intact classes in a junior high school in Ilam, Iran. Unlike many studies that focus on upper-intermediate or advanced learners, the current study aimed to address a gap in the literature by focusing on low-intermediate EFL learners, who are often neglected in written corrective feedback studies. Most Iranian EFL learners fall within this proficiency range, and it is assumed that they face unique challenges due to limited exposure to English.

The participants consisted of 30 learners in the generic ME group, 27 in the individualized ME group, and 28 in the control group, all of whom were female and aged between 12 and 14. The teacher was a young, experienced EFL instructor with a Master's degree in TEFL. The sample was selected from a public junior high school in Ilam, as the study aimed to address the learning needs of low-intermediate EFL learners in a typical Iranian educational context.

While language institutes could have been another suitable venue for this study, public schools were selected because they provide a more accurate representation of typical EFL learners in Iran. These learners often face limited opportunities for exposure to English outside of the classroom, and it is essential to investigate how written corrective feedback can aid their development in such contexts. Schools also provide a more controlled and accessible environment for research, especially considering the sample's age range.

3-3 Research Instruments and Scoring Scheme

Three tests were developed to measure grammatical accuracy at three time points: pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. These tests aimed to assess EFL learners' knowledge of English grammar, covering a range of item types, including transformational sentences, error recognition, gapped sentences, picture description, and productive writing tasks. The tests were specifically designed for low-intermediate EFL learners and required them to produce relatively short texts, consistent with their proficiency level.

The tests were constructed following a peer-review process involving two other experienced EFL teachers, which ensured that the test items were appropriate for the target group. The tests were also pilot-tested on a similar sample of EFL learners before the actual data collection. Minor revisions were made based on the results of the pilot test to enhance the clarity and appropriateness of the items.

The scoring scheme was straightforward: learners' scores were based on the number of correct answers for each test item, with no negative marking for errors. This was in line with the premise that no inhibitive factors should discourage EFL learners from practicing writing. The scores for each of the tests were independently scored by one of the researchers, with a secondary scorer involved in validating 20% of the data for inter-rater reliability.

3-4 Procedure

1. Pre-test: On day one, a pre-test was administered to ensure that the three groups were equivalent in terms of language proficiency. The pre-test assessed participants' grammatical knowledge and was used to establish baseline accuracy levels.

2. Group Assignment: Following the pre-test, the participants were assigned to three homogeneous groups: two experimental groups (generic ME and individualized ME) and one control group. This was done to ensure comparability among the groups in terms of their pre-test scores.

3. Treatment: Over eight sessions, the experimental groups received different types of metalinguistic feedback. The generic ME group received explicit, class-wide explanations of common grammatical errors identified in their written work. These explanations were delivered via handouts, which were provided to all learners in the group, regardless of their errors. The individualized ME group received feedback tailored to their specific errors. The feedback involved numbering the errors in their writing and providing brief explanations for each one at the end of their work. In both experimental groups, EFL learners were asked to read the feedback and self-correct their errors. The control group received no written corrective feedback during the treatment period.

4. Post-tests: Following the treatment sessions, an immediate post-test was administered to assess the short-term

effects of the feedback. An eight-week delayed post-test followed, to assess the long-term impact of the feedback on grammatical accuracy. The delayed post-test was designed to determine whether EFL learners retained the grammatical knowledge and internalized the correct forms of the errors they had previously made. During the period between the immediate post-test and the delayed post-test, all three groups received no additional corrective feedback.

3-5 Choice of Target Structures

The study adopted a comprehensive error correction approach, addressing a range of grammatical features that are challenging for Iranian EFL learners. These included prepositions, articles, past tense (both regular and irregular forms), past continuous tense, future tense, and modal verbs such as may, can, and should. This decision was based on previous research (e.g., Shintani & Ellis, 2013), which suggests that a comprehensive approach is both ecologically valid and effective for EFL learners with limited exposure to English, as it mirrors the range of errors they are likely to encounter in real-world writing tasks. By addressing multiple error categories, the study aimed to provide a broader understanding of how different feedback types impact EFL learners' grammatical accuracy.

3-6 Data Analysis and Reliability

The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 21). First, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were any significant differences in the pre-test scores of the three groups. Following this, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to assess the interaction between the two independent variables: time (pre-test, immediate post-test, delayed post-test) and feedback type (generic ME, individualized ME). The dependent variable was the total score on each test. If the two-way ANOVA revealed statistical significance, Tukey's post-hoc comparisons were used to further investigate differences between the means of the groups.

To assess the reliability of the scoring process, inter-rater reliability was evaluated by having another experienced EFL teacher re-score 20% of the data. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (r) between the original and re-scored data was .96, indicating a high level of consistency. Additionally, intra-rater reliability was tested by having the same teacher re-score 20% of the data two months later, resulting in a correlation of .98.

Regarding sample size, it is acknowledged that factor analysis typically requires a larger sample size (at least 200 participants). Given the constraints of the study, this was not feasible, and thus, the two-way repeated measures ANOVA was chosen as a more appropriate statistical test.

4. Results

This section presents the study's findings on how generic and individualized metalinguistic explanations (ME) impact the grammatical accuracy of EFL learners. The results are detailed for each group and testing period, followed by the outcomes of the statistical analyses used to determine

the significance of the observed differences.

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the three EFL groups—generic ME, individualized ME, and control—across the three testing periods: pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. As shown in the table, the mean scores for all groups at the pre-test stage were relatively similar, indicating that the groups were comparable in terms of their initial grammatical proficiency. Specifically, the generic ME group had a mean score of 24.78 (SD = 6.37), the individualized ME group had a mean of 24.52 (SD = 8.32), and the control group had a mean of 22.48 (SD = 6.26).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for mean test scores by group type and testing period

Group	Pre-test		Post-test 1		Post-test 2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Generic ME	(N=30)	24.78	6.37	30.36	7.04	33.22	6.31
Individualized ME	(N=27)	24.52	8.32	28.90	7.55	28.83	7.46
Control	(N=28)	22.48	6.26	22.78	6.59	24.28	6.94

Note: ME stands for metalinguistic explanation.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences among the three groups at the pre-test stage. The results indicated that there were no significant differences, $F(2, 82) = 0.91$, $p = .40$, $\eta p^2 = .02$. This finding confirms that the groups were equivalent in terms of their initial grammatical knowledge, and any subsequent differences observed in the post-tests can be attributed to the effects of the treatments rather than pre-existing disparities.

To examine the development of grammatical accuracy over time within each group, a series of one-way repeated measures ANOVA tests were performed. The results revealed that the generic ME group showed significant improvement in grammatical accuracy across the three testing periods, $F(1, 29) = 12.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .22$. This large effect size, according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, suggests that the generic ME intervention had a substantial impact on the learners' grammatical development. In contrast, the individualized ME group did not show statistically significant improvement over time, $F(1, 26) = 2.79$, $p = .067$, $\eta p^2 = .06$, although the effect size was moderate. Similarly, the control group did not exhibit significant progress, $F(1, 27) = 0.60$, $p = .552$, $\eta p^2 = .01$, indicating that the absence

of corrective feedback did not lead to notable gains in grammatical accuracy.

To further investigate the effects of feedback type and time, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with test scores as the dependent variable, and time (pre-test, immediate post-test, delayed post-test) and feedback type (generic ME, individualized ME, control) as independent variables. The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between time and feedback type, $F(4, 82) = 3.68$, $p = .029$, $\eta p^2 = .08$. This interaction indicates that the three EFL groups developed differently throughout the study, depending on the type of feedback they received. In addition, there were significant main effects for time, $F(2, 82) = 22.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .21$, and for feedback type, $F(2, 82) = 11.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .22$. These results demonstrate that both the passage of time and the type of written corrective feedback had significant effects on the grammatical accuracy of EFL learners.

To identify where the significant differences lie, post-hoc Tukey's pairwise comparisons were conducted. The results showed that at the immediate post-test, both treatment groups (generic ME and individualized ME) significantly outperformed the control group, $F(2, 82) = 9.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .18$. However, there was no significant difference between the two treatment groups at this stage, suggesting that both forms of metalinguistic feedback were effective in the short term. At the delayed post-test, the generic ME group not only maintained its gains but also outperformed both the individualized ME group and the control group, $F(2, 82) = 12.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .23$. Furthermore, the individualized ME group continued to perform better than the control group, although the difference was less pronounced than that observed for the generic ME group.

Table 2: Repeated Measures ANOVA Analysis

Time	Test scores
Immediate post-test	Generic ME > Control*
	Individualized ME > Control*
	Generic ME > Individualized ME*
Delayed post-test	Generic ME > Control*
	Individualized ME > Control*

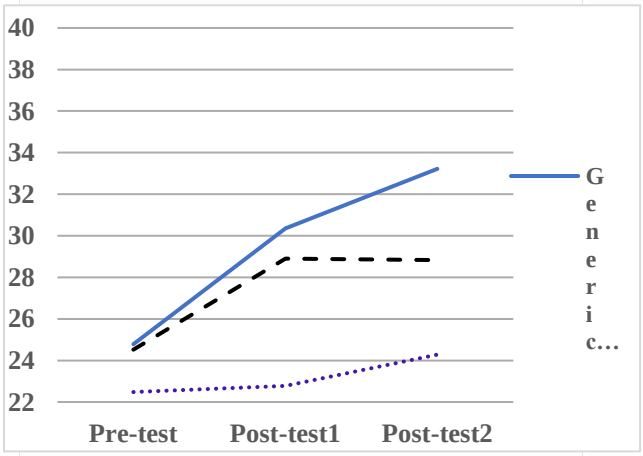
Note: The asterisk indicates that $p < .05$, and the symbol > corresponds to better than.

Table 3: Summary of statistically significant group differences in test scores

Source	df	F	P
Between subjects			
CF treatment	2	11.56	<.001
Within subjects			
Time	2	22.48	<.001
Time × CF treatment	43.68	.029	

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the mean test scores for each EFL group across the three testing periods. As illustrated in the figure, both treatment groups receiving metalinguistic explanation showed marked improvement in grammatical accuracy at the immediate post-test, while the control group's performance remained largely unchanged. Notably, in the delayed post-test, only the generic ME group continued to improve, demonstrating not only retention but also further development of grammatical accuracy over time. The individualized ME group, while showing some improvement, did not sustain the same level of progress as the generic ME group. The control group, which did not receive any written corrective feedback, showed minimal change across all three testing periods, underscoring the importance of feedback in facilitating grammatical development in EFL contexts.

I. Figure 1: Mean test scores for each group across the three testing periods



In summary, the results of this study indicate that both generic and individualized metalinguistic feedback can have a positive impact on EFL learners' grammatical accuracy, particularly in the short term. However, the generic ME group demonstrated the most substantial and sustained improvement, both immediately after the intervention and in the delayed post-test. These findings suggest that generic metalinguistic feedback, which is less time-consuming and more practical for teachers to implement in large EFL classes, may be a more effective and efficient approach for error correction. The results also highlight the limited impact of individualized feedback in the long term, as well as the lack of significant progress in the absence of corrective feedback. Overall, the evidence supports the use of generic metalinguistic feedback as a promising strategy for enhancing grammatical accuracy among EFL learners, especially in contexts where teacher resources are limited and class sizes are large.

5. Discussion

The primary research question of this study focused on the relative effectiveness of generic versus individualized metalinguistic explanations (ME) in enhancing the grammatical accuracy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The pedagogical motivation behind this inquiry was to identify practical and efficient feedback strategies that could address the significant time and energy demands often associated with written corrective feedback (CF) in EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts where teachers face large class sizes and limited instructional resources. The findings of this study offer important insights into the

comparative impact of these two approaches, both in the short term and over a longer period, and contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the most effective forms of CF for EFL learners.

The results of the immediate post-test revealed that both treatment groups—those receiving generic ME and those receiving individualized ME—demonstrated significantly greater improvement in grammatical accuracy compared to the control group, which did not receive any written CF. This finding indicates that both forms of metalinguistic feedback were effective in facilitating short-term gains in grammatical accuracy among EFL learners. Notably, there was no statistically significant difference between the two treatment groups at this stage, suggesting that both generic and individualized ME were equally effective in the immediate aftermath of the intervention. This result is consistent with previous research, such as the study by Shintani and Ellis (2013), which also found that both types of ME could enhance written accuracy in the short term.

However, the results from the delayed post-test provided a more nuanced picture. While both treatment groups continued to outperform the control group, the generic ME group maintained and even increased its advantage over time, whereas the individualized ME group did not sustain the same level of improvement. The generic ME group's continued progress in the delayed post-test suggests that this form of feedback not only supports immediate learning but also contributes to the long-term retention and internalization of grammatical knowledge. In contrast, the individualized ME group, although still performing better than the control group, did not exhibit the same degree of sustained improvement. This pattern of results highlights the potential of generic ME as a more durable and effective approach for promoting grammatical accuracy in EFL contexts.

These findings align with and extend previous research in the field. For example, Bitchener and Knoch (2008a, 2010a, and 2010b) have demonstrated that explicit CF, particularly in the form of metalinguistic comments, can lead to both short-term and long-term improvements in learners' grammatical accuracy. The present study adds to this body of evidence by showing that generic ME, which is less labor-intensive and more practical for classroom implementation, can be at least as effective—and potentially more so—than individualized ME, especially in the long run.

Short-Term versus Long-Term Effects

A key contribution of this study is its distinction between the short-term and long-term effects of metalinguistic feedback. The immediate post-test results confirm the short-term benefits of both generic and individualized ME, echoing the findings of Shintani and Ellis (2013) and other researchers who have documented the positive impact of metalinguistic feedback on learners' grammatical accuracy over brief instructional periods. However, the

sustained improvement observed in the generic ME group at the delayed post-test suggests that this form of feedback may also enhance learners' implicit knowledge and support the long-term development of grammatical competence.

This finding is particularly noteworthy given the context of the study. EFL learners, especially those in environments with limited exposure to English outside the classroom, may benefit more from explicit metalinguistic information than their peers in ESL contexts, where opportunities for naturalistic language use are more abundant. The lasting effects of generic ME observed in this study may be attributed to the explicit focus on language rules and the repeated exposure to common error patterns, which help learners internalize grammatical structures over time.

It is also important to consider the role of learner engagement with feedback. As noted by Shintani and Ellis (2013), the extent to which learners interact with and reflect on metalinguistic comments can influence the effectiveness of feedback. In the present study, the EFL learners appeared to be more receptive to explicit instruction and more motivated to apply grammatical rules, which may have contributed to the enduring benefits of generic ME.

Broader Implications for EFL Instruction

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL instruction. First, they suggest that a comprehensive approach to CF—one that addresses a wide range of grammatical errors rather than focusing narrowly on specific structures—can be both effective and ecologically valid in EFL classrooms. This is particularly relevant in contexts where learners have limited exposure to English and may encounter a variety of error types in their writing. By providing feedback on multiple grammatical features, teachers can help learners develop a more robust and flexible command of the language.

Second, the results indicate that generic ME may be especially well-suited to EFL contexts, where teachers often face large classes and time constraints. Unlike individualized feedback, which requires significant time and effort to tailor comments to each student's errors, generic ME allows teachers to address common error patterns efficiently and provide explicit instruction to the entire class. This approach not only saves time but also ensures that all learners benefit from feedback on frequent grammatical issues.

Furthermore, the study's findings support the argument that the choice of CF strategy should be informed by the specific characteristics of the learning context. In EFL settings, where opportunities for authentic language use are limited, comprehensive and explicit feedback may be more beneficial than focused or implicit approaches. In contrast, in ESL contexts, where learners have greater access to the target language, more individualized or focused feedback may be appropriate for fostering implicit learning and communicative competence.

Practical Implications for Teachers

From a practical perspective, this study provides valuable guidance for EFL teachers aiming to improve the effectiveness of their written feedback while managing their workload. Both generic and individualized ME were shown to be effective in the short term, but generic ME proved to be the more efficient and sustainable choice. By offering class-wide explanations of common grammatical errors—through handouts, mini-lessons, or annotated examples—teachers can give clear, targeted feedback to all students at once. This approach not only saves instructional time but also promotes a collaborative learning environment where students can learn from each other's mistakes. Moreover, the use of generic ME allows teachers to allocate more time to other important aspects of writing instruction, such as content development, organization, and coherence. By streamlining the feedback process, teachers can better support students' overall writing development and create a more balanced and manageable classroom routine.

In summary, the evidence from this study suggests that generic metalinguistic feedback is a promising and practical approach for improving grammatical accuracy in EFL writing. Its effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability make it a valuable tool for teachers working in resource-constrained environments, and its positive impact on both short-term and long-term learning outcomes underscores its potential as a core component of EFL writing instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness and sustainability of generic metalinguistic explanations (ME) in enhancing grammatical accuracy among EFL learners. The results demonstrate that generic ME is not only effective in producing immediate improvements in learners' grammatical accuracy but also plays a significant role in supporting long-term retention and internalization of correct grammatical forms. These findings are particularly relevant for EFL contexts, where learners typically have limited opportunities for exposure to the target language outside the classroom and therefore benefit greatly from explicit, focused feedback.

The study's results underscore the pedagogical value of generic ME as a practical and efficient strategy for written corrective feedback (CF) in EFL classrooms. By providing class-wide explanations of common grammatical errors, teachers can address the needs of a diverse group of learners while managing the constraints of large class sizes and limited instructional time. The sustained improvement observed in the generic ME group highlights the potential of this approach to foster durable gains in grammatical accuracy, making it a valuable tool for EFL educators seeking to maximize the impact of their feedback practices.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that explicit feedback, delivered through

generic ME, can help bridge the gap created by limited language exposure in EFL settings. This approach not only supports learners' immediate writing development but also contributes to their long-term language proficiency by reinforcing essential grammatical structures.

Looking ahead, future research could build on these findings by exploring the effectiveness of generic ME with different learner populations, such as learners at varying proficiency levels, age groups, or educational backgrounds. Additionally, further studies could investigate the impact of generic ME on other dimensions of language proficiency, including speaking, listening, and reading skills, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its benefits across the four language skills. Research could also examine how learners perceive and engage with generic ME, as well as the potential for integrating technology to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of metalinguistic feedback in EFL classrooms.

In summary, this study highlights the promise of generic metalinguistic explanations as an efficient, effective, and sustainable approach to written corrective feedback in EFL contexts. By adopting this strategy, teachers can better support their students' grammatical development and contribute to more successful language learning outcomes.

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Note: The original manuscript was written by the author. Artificial intelligence tools were used solely for paraphrasing and minor grammatical corrections to enhance clarity and readability; all content and interpretations remain the responsibility of the author.