

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK IN WRITING INSTRUCTION FROM EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Nguyen Thi Ngan
Nha Trang University

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 14/01/2025 Revised: 27/3/2025 Published: 28/3/2025	Feedback plays a crucial role in the development of second language writing skills. This study investigates the experiences of English major students at a university in Vietnam with feedback from writing classes. It aims to seek a better understanding of various types of feedback that students receive in their writing courses, assessing their quality, effectiveness, and how they align with students' needs and expectations. Surveys of 101 students following up by in-depth interviews with 10 informants who are juniors and seniors of the English major at a university were designed to collect data. Findings revealed a strong preference for more targeted, detailed, personalized teacher feedback while acknowledging the value of feedback from other sources such as peers or AI tools. They also proposed the implementation of more state-of-the-art feedback delivery schemes, emphasizing the importance of incorporating tools such as digital platforms, real-time feedback systems, and AI-driven solutions that allow for more personalized, efficient and interactive dialogues. Providing feedback tailored to students' expectations can greatly enhance their effectiveness and contribute to the overall success of L2 writing instruction.
KEYWORDS Feedback Writing instruction English language learning Writing skill development EFL	

PHẢN HỒI HIỆU QUẢ TRONG GIẢNG DẠY KỸ NĂNG VIẾT DƯỚI GÓC NHÌN SINH VIÊN NGOẠI NGỮ

Nguyễn Thị Ngân
Trường Đại học Nha Trang

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 14/01/2025 Ngày hoàn thiện: 27/3/2025 Ngày đăng: 28/3/2025	Phản hồi đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc phát triển kỹ năng viết khi học ngoại ngữ hoặc ngôn ngữ thứ hai. Nghiên cứu này điều tra trải nghiệm của sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh đối với phản hồi họ nhận được trong các lớp học môn viết nhằm giải đáp câu hỏi về các loại phản hồi phổ biến, đánh giá chất lượng, hiệu quả và tính đáp ứng của phản hồi với nhu cầu và kỳ vọng của sinh viên. Thông qua khảo sát và phỏng vấn chuyên sâu với 101 sinh viên, các phát hiện cho thấy sinh viên đặc biệt mong muốn giảng viên của họ đưa ra những phản hồi có mục đích rõ ràng, chi tiết và được cá nhân hóa hơn. Họ cũng thừa nhận giá trị của phản hồi đến từ đồng môn hay các công cụ trí tuệ nhân tạo. Đồng thời, kết quả nghiên cứu còn cho thấy sinh viên đánh giá cao phương pháp phản hồi phù hợp với xu hướng học tập trong thời đại ngày nay, nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc kết hợp nền tảng kỹ thuật số và ứng dụng trí tuệ nhân tạo nhằm gia tăng chất lượng và cường độ tương tác. Việc cung cấp phản hồi phù hợp với kỳ vọng của sinh viên có thể nâng cao đáng kể hiệu quả của phản hồi và góp phần vào thành công chung trong giảng dạy kỹ năng viết ngôn ngữ hai.
TỪ KHÓA Phản hồi Dạy học môn viết Học tiếng Anh Phát triển kỹ năng viết EFL	

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.11891>

Email: ngannt@ntu.edu.vn

<http://jst.tnu.edu.vn>

1. Introduction

Feedback, especially informative one, is a key contributor that helps students build the skills needed to excel in their studies [1]. With respect to writing, feedback provides scaffolding that allows students to bridge the gap between their current abilities and higher levels of writing proficiency. In second language (L2) acquisition, feedback, particularly through negotiation of meaning, facilitates noticing and promotes learners' cognitive development, directly contributing to enhancement of language competency [2]. Henceforth, feedback plays a crucial role in L2 writing instruction [3].

Indeed, Harmer [4] underscored that teachers always respond to student work, whether to praise when they do well or to offer correction when they make mistakes. The bottom line of responding or giving feedback is to help students do better in the future. Traditionally, teachers have served as the primary source of feedback, and teacher feedback has commonly been regarded as a pivotal agent in writing development due to its authoritative and well-informed nature [5]. As the “process approach” in writing instruction grows into popularity, feedback is necessitated at multiple stages to promote revision and improvement [4]. Given this process, a final writing piece could be influenced by a range of feedback sources, not only from teachers, but also from classmates, and the writers themselves. These forms of feedback are usually complementary to each other [6], hence providing students with a range of feedback uptake options. Whereas teacher feedback is normally valued for its expertise on aspects such as linguistic accuracy, organizational structure, and adherence to genre conventions, peer feedback exposes students to multiple perspectives on their writing, and self-feedback makes them reflect more critically on their own work [7]-[11].

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the quality of feedback can vary significantly, since providing and receiving accurate, constructive feedback requires skill and training [12]. Also, learners may have different attitudes toward the sources of feedback they receive. Cultural backgrounds, classroom dynamics, and individual preferences can influence how feedback is perceived, processed, and acted upon [13]-[15]. Furthermore, given the advancement of technology in today education context, AI-driven softwares capable of generating, editing, and analyzing texts with increasing sophistication, are presenting new challenges for the traditional human feedback providers. This emergent agent in the learning process compels us to rethink our feedback strategies and how we can best support students. It is worthwhile reinvestigating their thinking on writing feedback, such as how they respond to feedback and in what ways they believe feedback should be given in this new educational landscape.

In light of this, the present study aims to examine the various types of feedback that students receive in their writing courses, assessing their quality, effectiveness, and the contexts in which they are delivered. Additionally, it seeks to explore how these feedback types align with students' needs and expectations. The study intends to identify which feedback types have the most significant impact on students' writing development, with the goal of facilitating more effective use of feedback by learners. Furthermore, it aims to provide educators with insights into how to enhance their feedback practices and engage students as active participants in the feedback process.

2. Methodology

The study employed surveys and in-depth interviews to collect data. 101 English major students who have taken writing courses at a university in Vietnam participated in the surveys, and 10 from them were selected for follow-up in-depth interviews. These included juniors and seniors as these students had substantial exposure to writing assignments and various feedback practices within their language courses. Their insights and experiences were likely to be nuanced, hence especially valuable for understanding the questions of the research. They consented to provide information about the types of feedbacks they typically received, how they perceived the influence of these feedbacks on their writing skills, and their preferences regarding feedback sources and methods.

A questionnaire administered online via Google form consisted of both closed and open-ended questions. It collected information about students' feedback experiences, including frequency of receiving feedback from different sources (teachers, peers, self), the types of feedback received, the methods of delivery, and challenges associated with feedback uptake. After the survey, 10 respondents were randomly selected (every 10th on an alphabetically listed informants) and contacted for interviewing. The interviews lasted between 10 to 12 minutes delving deeper into questions about students' experiences and preferences for feedback types and delivery schemes. The data collection process took place during the second semester of 2022-2023 academic year.

3. Findings and discussions

Data from the survey reveal that the most common source of feedback comes from their teachers, with 86.1% frequency. Peer feedback accounts for 53.5% and self-assessment takes up 47.5%. It is noticeable that online feedback is increasingly important with 59.4% of students acknowledging that they frequently used online tools such as Grammarly to improve their writing (Figure 1). Indeed, teachers's feedback is the most prevalent as previous research has pointed out [4], [5]. Of the feedback they received, it was reported that feedback either lacked clarity (45.5%) or posed challenges for understanding (23.8%). These challenges highlight the need for clear, comprehensible, and actionable feedback to facilitate effective writing skill development.

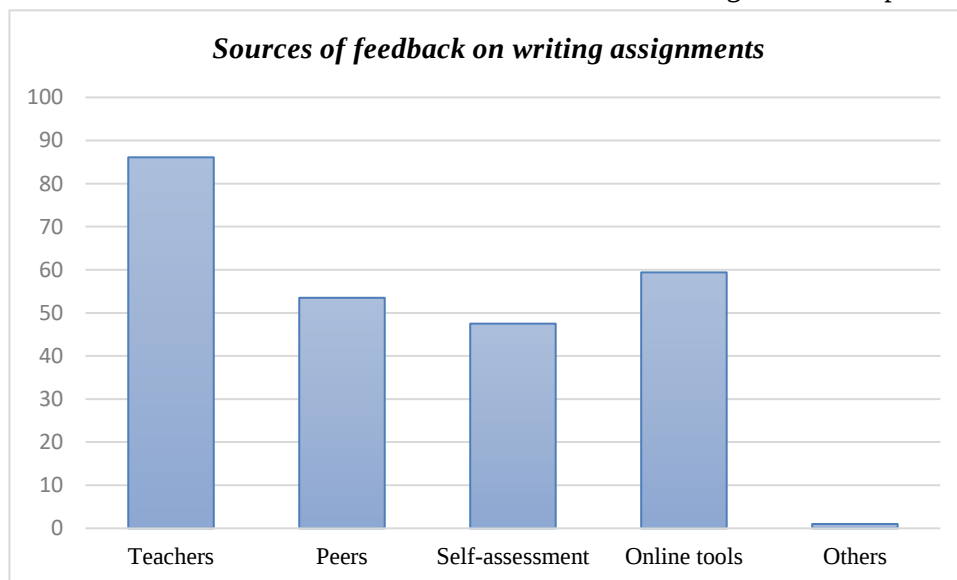


Figure 1. Sources of feedback on writing assignment

When being asked about the types of feedback, students would like to receive more in their writing courses. They emphasize the importance of comments that focus on improving the organization and structure of their essays. They express a clear desire for feedback that can enhance the clarity and logical flow of their writing. The interviewees state that they need *“more feedback on the organization and structure of my essays to help me improve the coherence and flow of my writing,”* (S1) and *“feedback on my grammar and sentence structure would be valuable for refining my writing skills”* (S2). This suggests that students are looking for guidance that will not only refine their language but also develop a clearer, more logical approach to presenting their ideas.

The next most common feedback requests are related to grammar usage, sentence structure, and writing style. Students sought specific advice on the writing process itself, including strategies for brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising their work (interviewees S5, S8, and S10). They reiterate the need for targeted feedback to address recurring mistakes (interviewee S10) and improve the precision of their writing (interviewee S5), suggesting they are seeking comprehensive support

that goes beyond final product, extending critical steps involved in developing and refining their essays. This matches well with the popular process approach in teaching writing [4] where students receive feedback at different stages and enhance their work accordingly.

Feedback on argumentation skills, critical thinking, and the effective use of transitional phrases (interviewees S2, S1, S10), and ensuring the overall coherence of their writing is also highly valued (interviewees S6, S1). Many students appreciate detailed and clear written feedback from their instructors (interviewees S1, S3, S9), and some express a desire for guidance on how to use rhetorical devices (interviewees S10, S5) and evidence more effectively to strengthen their arguments (interviewee S9). The need for feedback on these aspects of writing reflects a wish for deeper understanding of structure and reasoning in academic writing. This also shows that students recognize the importance of effective transitions and logical connections between ideas in enhancing readability. Similarly, they are concerned about how to use evidence and rhetorical devices more effectively to strengthen their arguments, making their writing more engaging and persuasive. Previous research [6], [12], [13] has also discussed feedback of various types that have complimentary effect and give students more options to uptake actions to improve their writing.

Overall, the feedback students seek encompasses a broad range of writing skills, from technical aspects like structure and grammar to critical thinking and more effective argumentation. This indicates that they are not only interested in mastering basic writing skills but also in developing their critical thinking and communication abilities through constructive and thoughtful feedback. These insights indicate that students are not only looking for simple corrections but also for the tools to improve their writing holistically.

Upon the discussions on how feedback should be provided, the respondents offer a range of suggestions aimed at improving its effectiveness. Many emphasize the importance of regular face-to-face feedback sessions with lecturers, believing that direct interaction would significantly enhance the quality of feedback (interviewees S1, S6, S8, S10). Some students recommend implementing guided peer assessment sessions (interviewees S1, S6), while others call for more detailed grading rubrics or clearer instructions on assessment criteria (interviewees S1, S3), to help them better understand expectations. Additionally, a number of students propose using multimedia formats, such as audio or video recordings (interviewees S5, S6, S7), to deliver feedback in a more personalized and engaging way. Beyond individual feedback, students also express interest in fostering ongoing communication with instructors through email or online forums, as well as creating dedicated online platforms (interviewee S7) where feedback can be easily accessed and progress tracked. Several students also suggest organizing group discussions to address common challenges and share effective learning strategies, creating a collaborative space for peer support and growth (interviewees S1, S4, S8).

These recommendations reflect students' desire for a more interactive learning environment, where they can receive targeted, timely, and actionable feedback that supports their ongoing development as writers. Students emphasize the importance of clarity, specificity, and opportunities for revision and dialogue in the feedback process. Ultimately, their suggestions highlight the need for a feedback system that not only helps them improve their writing but also encourages them to take an active role in their learning. By implementing these improvements, educators can foster a more supportive and effective learning environment that better meets students' needs and helps them grow as writers.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

First, the informants of the study underscore several key challenges, including a lack of clarity that can induce struggles with comprehending the feedback, and a timing limitation (usually associated with delays in feedback delivery) which can reduce feedback effectiveness. These obstacles emphasize the importance for instructors to offer feedback that is both thorough and presented in a way that is easily understood and can be acted upon at appropriate timing [3]. Clear

comprehension of feedback facilitates effective revision roadmaps. In addition, prioritizing feedback within the workload of both students and teachers, or streamlining the feedback process will allow meaningful and timely reflection and revision.

Second, there is a signal of a growing awareness among the students regarding writing skills and a readiness to tackle more complex aspects of writing beyond basic grammatical accuracy. They express a desire for more diverse and targeted feedback, ranging from organization, structure, sentence variety, argumentation, to the use of rhetorical devices. This indicates that a feedback approach helping students critically analyze their own writing process is highly recommended. There can be a potential benefit to consider combining this approach with a greater integration of self-assessment elements. This integration can promote learner autonomy where students are actively encouraged to develop self-regulation skills, monitor their progress, and adjust strategies as needed. These considerations, ultimately, can lead to a more holistic and effective approach to improve students' writing abilities, fostering lifelong learning and personal growth.

Third, with respect to feedback delivery, a strong preference for regular one-on-one feedback sessions with instructors underlines the perceived value of individualized attention and dialogue. The students wish to engage in meaningful conversations with their instructors to receive specific, actionable guidance that helps them better understand how to improve their work. This personalized interaction not only promotes a deeper level of understanding but also fosters a stronger student-teacher relationship, which can enhance motivation and confidence in their learning process.

Notably, the GenZ students recommend their teachers to increase feedback delivery via technology mediated channels. They believe online platforms, such as online discussion forums, email exchanges, and video/audio conferences, conveniently provide tools for tracking progress, sharing resources, and engaging asynchronous discussion, thus supporting ongoing and dynamic feedback exchanges. As online platforms offer broader flexibility and accessibility, they are a great compliment to the traditional in-person feedback methods. Teachers, hence, are encouraged to incorporate diverse communication channels with their students, paying particular attention to the potential of technology tools. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that regular check-ins, whether online or offline, dedicated to discussing feedback in detail are indispensable for maximizing the effectiveness of the feedback process and ensuring continuous improvement in student performance.

All in all, this study provides valuable insights into the role of writing feedback within the current English learning context, specifically focusing on the writing development of English major students. By examining the perspectives of students, this research sheds light on the diverse needs, preferences, and expectations students have when it comes to receiving feedback on their writing. Such an understanding is crucial for teachers and curriculum developers, as it enables them to adapt and refine their feedback approaches in ways that align with student needs and contribute to more meaningful learning experiences.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Hattie and G. Yates, *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- [2] M. Long, "The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition," In R. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition*. San Diego, CA: Edward Arnold, 1996, 413–468.
- [3] K. Hyland and F. Hyland, (eds.) *Feedback in second language writing: Contexts and issues* (2nd edition). New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- [4] J. Harmer, *The practice of English language teaching* (5th edition). England: Pearson Education Ltd, 2015.
- [5] D. R. Ferris, *Response to student writing: Implications for second language students*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003, doi: 10.4324/9781410607201.

-
- [6] R. Niu, P. Shan, and X. You, "Complementation of multiple sources of feedback in EFL learners' writing," *Assessing Writing*, vol. 49, 2021, doi: 10.1016/j.asw.2021.100549.
- [7] A. Huynh, "A Vietnamese tertiary EFL students' practices on self-assessment in writing skill," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 132, no. 6B, 2023, doi: 10.26459/hueunijsssh.v132i6B.7232.
- [8] J. Liu and J. Hansen, *Peer response in second language writing classrooms*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- [9] H. Meihami and Z. Varmaghani, "The implementation of self-assessment in EFL writing classroom: An experimental study," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, vol. 9, pp. 39-48, 2013, doi: 10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.9.39
- [10] M. Yang, R. Badger, and Y. Zhen, "A comparative study of peer and teacher feedback in a Chinese EFL writing class," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 179-200, 2006, doi: 10.1016/j.jslw.2006.09.004.
- [11] S. Yun and I. Lee, "Peer feedback in second language writing," *Language Teaching*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 461-493, 2016.
- [12] E. C. Berg, "The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 215-241, 1999, doi: 10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80111-7.
- [13] K. Eriksson, J. Lindvall, O. Helenius, and A. Ryve, "Cultural variation in the effectiveness of feedback on students' mistakes," *Educational Psychology*, vol. 10, 2020, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.03053.
- [14] B. Harks, *et al.*, "The effects of feedback on achievement, interest and self-evaluation: The role of feedback's perceived usefulness," *Educational Psychology*, vol. 34, pp. 269-290, 2014, doi: 10.1080/01443410.2013.785384.
- [15] J. Hattie and H. Timperley, "The power of feedback," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 1, no. 77, pp. 81-112, 2007, doi: 10.3102/003465430298487.