

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS' FEEDBACK ON THEIR WRITING SKILLS AT TRA VINH UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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**Abstract** – *In the context of language learning, students' perceptions of teachers' feedback on their writing skills play a crucial role in their overall development. Understanding how students perceive and apply feedback can provide valuable insights into effective teaching strategies and help educators tailor their approach to better support students' learning. This study aims to explore various ways in which students perceive feedback from teachers on their writing skills, with a focus on the importance of feedback and students' preferences for types of feedback. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and descriptive technique will be used to gather and analyze data on students' perceptions of feedback. The findings show that students realize how feedback from teachers plays a part in their writing assignments since it can help them enhance their writing performance. When instructors give students feedback, especially direct feedback and written notes to help them make fewer mistakes, they are tremendously satisfied. Indirect feedback is believed to be a useful technique. The findings help teachers understand more about how students perceive feedback on their writing skills, enabling teachers to tailor their teaching methodology in teaching practices to suit their students' needs. As a result, students can improve their writing performance as well as their academic achievement.*

**Keywords:** *Likert scale questionnaire, teaching practices, writing skills.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today, English is one of the fundamental factors that help our country make faster progress on the path of global integration. For this significant reason, many people choose English as a major to study at university. Therefore, the demand to use English fluently as well as to master the four basic skills is becoming essential among all students who learn English in general and English major students at Tra Vinh University (TVU) in particular. According to the students, they find that writing seems to be the most challenging, but they must acquire EFL lessons in their essay writing term. Because writing skills require a hard-working process and continuous practice, the role of teachers' feedback on students' performance is indispensable. Klimova [1] stated that feedback plays an essential role in any scholastic movement since it can significantly advance both teachers' and students' performance and indicate some mistakes in students' performance that can be improved. Likewise, feedback is a crucial aspect of any English language writing course [2]. Following the reasons above, it could be seen that feedback is intrinsic to the development of learning.

This research used a survey approach with the aim to investigate students' perceptions of teachers' feedback on their writing skills in general and especially essay writing. The participants were third-year English majors at TVU. After that, the researchers suggested some recommendations to promote students' perceptions of feedback from teachers. With that aim, the research question is: What are students' perceptions of teachers' feedback on their writing skills? The study focuses on students' opinions on the importance and benefits of teachers' feedback; students' attitudes toward teachers' feedback as well as their preferences for

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the kinds of feedback they would like to receive from teachers.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Definition and types of feedback*

To define feedback, Ramaprasad [3] wrote that feedback was information given by some people to describe the gap between the actual level and the required level, and feedback could change the gap in some ways. In addition, Hattie et al. [4] stated that feedback was considered a useful method to make the receiver understand clearly.

To complete the definition of feedback, Gielen et al. [5] assert that feedback is knowledge of presentation, consequence, and an accurate reply. Similarly, Hattie et al. [4] affirmed that an agent, including teachers, classmates, and experience, gave feedback to students based on their performances and understanding.

In general, feedback is an essential part of education programs. It helps learners maximize their potential at different stages of training, raise their awareness of strengths and areas for improvement, and identify actions to be taken to improve performance. Winne and Butler, cited by Hattie et al. [4], provided a review in their statement that ‘feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies.’

For this research, the researchers use the definition of feedback by Ramaprasad [3] because this concept of feedback is extremely relevant to writing education. It reflects the fundamental idea of feedback, which is to let students know where they are in relation to their objectives and provide them with guidance on how to narrow the gap. Students can consistently advance to higher levels of proficiency in writing by receiving and responding to feedback. In addition, the researchers agree that feedback is vital in guiding students toward achieving their goals and improving their learning outcomes. Feedback can serve as a useful tool for not only showing

students their progress but also providing them with the necessary insights to make meaningful adjustments and improvements in their learning performance.

Although feedback was defined in various ways, almost all researchers admitted it had a strong influence on learning. It can be seen from the study of Hattie et al. [4] that they considered feedback as a necessary element to develop the teaching and learning process. It was agreed upon by many other thinkers, such as Carless et al. [6]. According to Price et al. [7], the teacher may act as an expert, providing ‘knowledge’ and feedback that can help develop students’ thinking skills and learning process. These researchers found that feedback was a foundation for developing learning.

Feedback is considered one of the factors that had the strongest influence on learning and it was also seen as a primary component in formative assessment which is within more general pedagogical ideas, there is no obvious justification for defining and separating [4, 8, 9]. Similarly, Sadler [10] stated that feedback focuses on the development of effectiveness in studying. In addition, feedback also contributed to forming student’s behavior in the learning process. Furthermore, Gamlem et al. [11] discovered feedback was a ‘key strategy’ in learning and teaching. In short, feedback plays an important role in the study process. Especially, feedback is considered an effective tool to improve students’ thinking and correct errors in their English writing skills in a studying environment. Teachers could provide separate types of feedback depending on different situations and students. Oral and written feedback from teachers are modules that can be considered in writing courses. For instance, Rezazadeh et al. [12] stated that the selection of feedback for providing is a teacher’s task that could be applied to students’ associations to attain determined purposes.

Oral (verbal) feedback is one type of feedback that is provided orally by givers, which is a collaboration between teachers and students. Brookhart [13] wrote that oral feedback could be

given to one student or the whole class during all periods (before, during, and after) of writing tasks. There are many ways to classify the oral feedback that takes place in an EFL writing classroom. When students write something wrong, the teacher helps them with corrective feedback in various ways. According to Hadzic [14], the teacher can give feedback either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, explicit correction consists of grammatical explanation or clear correction, while implicit correction gives out incidental error correction in response. Most research focuses on feedback that validates a correct response by providing positive comments. Ellis [15] stated that positive feedback supports learners and creates motivation for their sustainable learning. Ellis asserted that giving positive comments such as ‘good,’ ‘ok,’ and ‘well done’ are correct responses for learners’ confidence. According to Weigle [16], the purpose of teachers’ oral feedback is to guide writing.

Written feedback is not dissimilar to oral feedback but is given through writing instead of speaking. For instance, a teacher can provide feedback that is related to the content and organization of students’ writing, as well as to the grammar and vocabulary. Positive comments or praise could be provided in writing. Hyland et al. [17] stated that assessment is another type of feedback that can be provided on students’ written processes. For instance, a positive or praise comment is not only a comment like ‘well done,’ but instead a comment such as ‘your grammar, content, or vocabulary is good’ will make a difference in a student’s writing. Nematzadeh et al. [18] quoted Ferris that direct feedback can be defined as a technique to give feedback to students to help them correct their errors by providing the correct answers or the correct linguistic forms of the target language. In contrast, Nematzadeh et al. [18] also discuss Lee’s research in their work, concluding that teachers can include the section about the clues that show incorrect parts, but direct feedback only includes the correct response and a specific change. Feedback to students has been identified

as a key strategy in learning and teaching, but we know less about how students understand feedback. In recent decades, several researchers have studied how feedback facilitates learning [4, 19, 20], but Hattie et al. [21] noticed that there is limited research examining how students perceive and use feedback. Perrenoud [22, p.87] compared the act of providing feedback to students by throwing bottles out to sea and explains the problem with this using the same metaphor: ‘No one can be sure that the message they contain will one day find a receiver.’ Feedback will only help students learn better if their thought processes are modified.

### *B. Related studies*

To improve students’ perceptions of teachers’ feedback, one of the things that teachers are most concerned about is the attitude of students toward the effects of feedback on their writing tasks. Therefore, many researchers have conducted a lot of studies that are related to this topic. One study by Lizzio et al. [23] investigated students’ perceptions of written assignment feedback at Griffith University, Australia. Participants were 277 recruited from a range of levels at the university. The research findings displayed that students’ perceptions of assessment feedback can be meaningfully understood in terms of a range of personal, academic, or affective variables that did not significantly influence students’ perceptions of assessment feedback, and developmental feedback was most strongly associated with students’ evaluations of effective assessment feedback.

Le [24] investigated the role of corrective feedback in Vietnamese high school students’ writing. 48 gifted high school students at Experimental High School participated in this study. The instruments were a background questionnaire and two drafts of writing tests, with teacher feedback and peer feedback in the first draft. The results showed the general effect of corrective feedback on students’ attention to their learning in writing. This study also gave some recommendations to efficiently combine teacher feedback and peer feedback, indicating the overall effect

of corrective feedback on Vietnamese high school students' attitudes towards their learning English.

Pearson [25] carried out a study called *Written Corrective Feedback in IELTS Writing Task 2: Teachers' priorities, practices, and beliefs in the United Arab Emirates*. A mixed-methods design was adopted to investigate three aspects of teacher response to 104 Writing Task 2 practice compositions: (1) the textual features that teachers focused on; (2) error treatment and commentary techniques; and (3) the perceptions and motivations underlying the practices identified.

The descriptive analysis of written corrective feedback in IELTS Writing Task 2 revealed that feedback techniques varied noticeably in nature and scope, with a preference for 'appropriating' techniques such as direct correction of errors and prescriptive comments. It was concluded that teachers adopted idiosyncratic techniques and methods based on their experience, personal beliefs, and theories about feedback [25].

In a qualitative case study by Mahfoodh et al. [26], EFL students were investigated to find out their affective reactions and perceptions towards their teachers' written feedback. Multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, teachers' written feedback, and students' written essays, were used in the study. The findings revealed the students had a highly positive perception of their teachers' written feedback since they found it useful and significant for the improvement of their writing skills. The students wanted to have comments and corrections in their writing papers; however, they had some negative reactions due to their lack of understanding of the comments or their papers being full of red marks.

In conclusion, a variety of researchers have investigated the effects of feedback on writing. Some researchers focused on the students' perceptions and types of feedback. Someone else carried on the effectiveness of feedback and types of feedback in academic writing. However, in the regional context, there have been a few studies on this topic. It is necessary to do more studies to support the findings of previous researches.

Besides that, understanding students' perceptions can be beneficial for instructors looking to improve writing instructions in specific regions. This can ultimately lead to more tailored feedback strategies that address the unique needs and preferences of students in different academic settings.

### III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the instrument is a questionnaire designed by researchers. We chose to adapt the existing literature-based questionnaire from Hadzic [14] in order to better suit this research setting and goals and its distinctive features, especially concerning students' perspectives in the educational setting. In the pilot phase, more attention was given to finding and fixing problems with the relevancy and clarity of the questions than doing in-depth statistical analysis. There were five participants in the pilot study. The pilot test was conducted to check the reliability, clarity, and relevance of the items in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, there are many types of questions. Questions 1–4 help to find out the frequency students receive feedback from teachers and students' difficulties in writing. The other questions address students' perceptions of teachers' feedback. These statements were designed by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly agree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5).

This study was carried out in 2019 and the participants of the study were 22 third-year English majors, course 2016 at TVU. They learn English as a foreign language. They had started the first semester with IELTS writing tasks. The researchers chose third-year English majors at Tra Vinh University as the participants because they may have enough awareness of their teachers' feedback which younger students might not have yet. Additionally, they might have more difficulties in writing skills than first-year or second-year students. With the current emphasis on enhancing English language instruction in Vietnam, the study's conclusions may be helpful to instructors who want to improve English majors' writing abilities in universities.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

**The frequency of giving feedback and students’ difficulties in writing essays**

Table 1: The frequency of giving feedback from teachers in the writing task

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	22	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 1 shows the frequency of feedback from teachers on the writing task. It could be seen that 100% of students express their opinion that teachers frequently provide feedback when they study writing skills.

Table 2: The frequency of difficulty in essay writing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	20	90.9	90.9	90.9
	no	2	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	22	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that a vast majority of the respondents said yes, which means they had difficulties in writing essays. Only two participants experienced no problems when writing essays.

Table 3: The difficulties in essay writing

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Valid	vocabulary	7	20.0%	31.8%
	grammar	10	28.6%	45.5%
	Complex - sentences	9	25.7%	40.9%
	ideas	9	25.7%	40.9%
Total		35	100.0%	159.1%

The above table shows what aspects of writing students encounter difficulties. It could be easy to see that 28.6% of students said that grammar is the deciding factor that directly influences essay writing skills of students. In addition, complex sentences and ideas are the two factors that have the same responses from students (25.7%). They agreed that these led them to find struggles

in essay writing. Finally, 20% of the samples expressed that vocabulary still has an effect when they start to study essay writing.

Table 4: Students’views on the importance of teachers’ feedback

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	22	100.0	100.0	100.0

As can be seen in Table 4, the importance of teachers’ feedback was reported by the participants. 100% of students agreed that feedback played a crucial role in enhancing their writing skills.

It could be concluded from the four questions above that teachers deeply comprehend the significant role of feedback in essay writing, so they frequently provide feedback to students to support students in realizing their weaknesses in essay writing.

**Students’ perceptions of feedback**

Table 5: Students perceive the usefulness of feedback

Feedback helps me to...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Improve my writing performance	13.6%	86.4%	0%	0%	0%
Formulate my learning objectives	13.6%	86.4%	0%	0%	0%
Identify my language strengths and weaknesses	18.2%	77.3%	4.5%	0%	0%
Take responsibility for my own learning	27.3%	68.2%	0%	4.5%	0%

Table 5 illustrates students’ perceptions of the positive effects of feedback in general. It could be seen that almost 86.4% of students agreed that feedback allowed them to improve their writing performance and formulate their learning targets. Moreover, 77.3% of these also showed their agreement that feedback could be able to help them identify their language strengths and weaknesses, while 68.2% of students expressed that feedback aids them in being responsible for their learning. It could be concluded that feed-

back would bring them the benefit of improving their weaknesses in writing.

Table 6: Student’s views on written feedback

Written feedback helps me to...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
correct my outline and content better than oral feedback	27.3%	63.6%	9.1%	0%	0%
correct different types of mistakes (tenses, vocabulary, spelling, grammar)	54.5%	45.5%	0%	0%	0%
find out specific errors	36.4%	63.6%	0%	0%	0%

Table 6 reports the students’ views on how written feedback can help them in their writing skills. It could be easy to see that 63.6% of students described that writing feedback could facilitate students’ ability to correct their outline and content better than oral feedback and allow them to realize specific errors. 54.5% of students agreed that writing feedback supported them in correcting different types of mistakes, such as tenses, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. To sum up, written feedback could allow students to find out their mistakes in writing.

Table 7: Student’s attitude towards Direct & Indirect feedback

I believe that...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Direct feedback helps me to know how to correct my errors	27.3%	59.1%	0%	13.6%	0%
Indirect feedback allows me to do my own correction	54.5%	4.5%	4.5%	31.8%	0%
Direct feedback is more efficient than Indirect feedback	27.3%	68.2%	4.5%	0%	0%

Table 7 compares students’ views on direct and indirect feedback. 59.1% of participants agreed that direct feedback helped them to realize and correct their errors, while 54.5% of students highly agreed that indirect feedback supported them to complete the correction by themselves. When comparing the benefits of direct and indirect feedback, 68.2% of these showed their positive views on direct feedback, which was more efficient than indirect feedback. In conclusion,

most students had a clear perception of teachers’ aims in using direct and indirect feedback.

Table 8: Types of feedback students would like to receive in their writing draft

In my writing draft, I would like to receive....	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Direct feedback	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	0%	0%
Indirect feedback	27.3%	63.6%	9.1%	0%	0%
Written comments	31.8%	59.1%	0%	9.1%	0%
No feedback	0%	0%	9.1%	63.6%	27.3%

Table 8 indicates students’ preferences about feedback. While 63.6% of students wanted teachers to provide direct feedback to them, 59.1% of students chose writing comments as preferred feedback for their writing drafts. On the other hand, 54.5% of students said that teachers should give them direct feedback. More than half of the group said that feedback was necessary for them. In conclusion, most students wanted to get feedback from teachers, and interestingly, indirect feedback was preferred to direct feedback for their drafts.

Table 9: Types of feedback that students find useful for their essay writing

What I find useful for my essay writing is...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Direct feedback	27.3%	72.7%	0%	0%	0%
Indirect feedback	0%	0%	31.8%	50%	18.2%
Writing comments	18.2%	72.7%	9.1%	0%	0%
No feedback	0%	0%	0%	59.1%	40.9%

The students’ views on types of feedback to improve their essay writing are shown in Table 9. It could be seen that direct feedback and writing comments contributed to 72.7% of students’ agreement to enhance their writing, while 59.1% of students said that when teachers did not give them feedback, they could not find an improvement in their writing. Finally, 50% of participants expressed that indirect feedback could not be suitable for advancing their writing. In conclusion, most students reported that direct feedback was better than other types of feedback

mentioned above, and they frequently wanted to get feedback from teachers.

Table 10: Types of feedback students would like to have in the next writing course

In my next writing course, I would like to have ....	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Direct feedback	27.3%	63.6%	9.1%	0%	0%
Indirect feedback	0%	50%	9.1%	40.9%	0%
Writing comments	27.3%	72.7%	0%	0%	0%
No feedback	0%	0%	4.5%	50%	45.5%

The above table indicates students' views about the feedback they would like to receive in the future. The percentage of students who want to get a writing comment is 72.7%, while 63.6% of students continually hope teachers will provide direct feedback. In addition, a half percentage of students also require that teachers add indirect feedback. Finally, 50% of participants want the teacher to give them frequent feedback.

### B. Discussion

From analyzing students' answers, all participants said that their teachers are always concerned about students' writing papers when their teachers respond to them. However, only 2 of 22 students did not have difficulties with their writing tasks, so writing is a challenging subject for English majors. Vocabulary, grammar, complex sentences, and ideas were the deciding factors affecting essay writing. This finding aligns with Hyland [27] who believes that an inadequate grasp of vocabulary and grammar are identified as L2 students' biggest challenges in writing. However, students could correct these elements through teachers' feedback. Because of these problems, all students joined the survey to understand the significance of teachers' feedback.

Regarding students' attitudes towards feedback, almost all agreed that feedback helped them with many things in writing tasks, such as improving their writing performance, formulating their learning objectives, finding out their strengths and weaknesses, and taking responsibility for their learning. Their answers showed that

participants' attitude toward feedback is really good. The results stated that students in writing class highly evaluate written feedback. The participants rely on the role of written feedback so that it is possible to solve problems in their writing, including outline, content, tense, vocabulary, spelling, and grammar. This is in line with Mahfoodh et al. [26], whose participants also had positive attitudes regarding teachers' feedback on their writing. In this research, the researchers focus deeply on written feedback, so types of written feedback will be listed in the next part.

What are students' perceptions of benefits from direct and indirect feedback? It is apparent that students value direct feedback on their writing, as evidenced by the large majority (90.9%) who either strongly agree or agree that they prefer it. Direct feedback helps students understand exactly what needs to be dealt with. Two-fifths of participants denied this statement. Why did they not believe that indirect feedback allows them to correct their mistakes? The reason seems to be that they thought direct feedback was more efficient than indirect feedback. Another reason is that, instead of thinking about what indirect feedback means, direct feedback points out specific mistakes and how to correct them. A vast majority (95.5%) strongly disagree or disagree with the idea of getting no feedback at all. This emphasizes how crucial feedback is to the writing process since students understand how important it is to their growth and development. In addition, they would also like to receive comments from teachers because it is a significant way to consider whether their writing is good. Although the participants agreed to receive indirect feedback in their writing drafts, it could be difficult for them to reap benefits from indirect feedback. This finding aligns with research by Ferris [28] who emphasizes that while indirect feedback can promote long-term learning, its effectiveness largely depends on the student's ability to interpret and apply the feedback correctly, which often requires a higher level of language proficiency and self-regulation skills. In contrast, participants were sure that direct feedback and comments were

really practical. As we can see, although most students spend time practicing writing, they still cannot recognize their errors from indirect feedback. Moreover, they do not know clearly how to correct writing mistakes when teachers just apply indirect feedback. One possible explanation for this could be that students may not have a clear understanding of the feedback given, leading to difficulty in applying it to their writing. Additionally, without specific guidance on how to address errors, students may struggle to make improvements. Furthermore, students may also lack the necessary skills to self-edit effectively, making it challenging for them to identify and correct their mistakes. This highlights the importance of providing students with not only detailed feedback but also strategies for error correction to enhance their writing skills.

## V. CONCLUSION

The results state that most TVU English majors highly perceive teachers' feedback on writing tasks, believing the role of teachers' feedback in enhancing their writing performance. They were really satisfied when teachers provided feedback, especially direct feedback and written comments to help them reduce mistakes. Indirect feedback was a good method of writing. However, teachers should explain more and more because students seem to find it hard to understand how they correct mistakes.

On the whole, the research could be considerably helpful for English writing teachers and third-year English majors, as well as researchers working in related fields. For teachers, the findings from the study can provide helpful information. They not only know how their students perceive teachers' feedback in writing tasks but also know which feedback students want to receive during the writing process. There are some suggested methods to consider for giving feedback when teaching writing courses. For example, teachers can consider combining written and verbal feedback to cater to various learning styles and preferences. In addition, providing examples or models of well-written papers can

further support students in understanding how to apply feedback effectively in their writing tasks.

For students, the researchers give them opportunities to reflect on the feedback received, encouraging them to take an active role in their own learning process. This can help students develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement in their writing skills. In addition, students could understand the role of teachers' feedback in their writing tasks.

A small sample size is one limitation of this study, leading to limited generalizability of the findings. Future studies could benefit from including a larger and more diverse sample to increase the external validity of the findings. Additionally, exploring the long-term effects of teachers' feedback on students' writing skills could provide valuable insights for educators.

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