

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

**TEACHERS'S FEEDBACKS ON WRITING SKILL
OF NON-ENGLISH MAJOR FRESHMAN
AT HANOI UNIVERSITY OF INDUSTRY
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ABSTRACT: Writing skill is a critical skill for achieving high language proficiency. However, it poses significant challenges for non-English major students. The development of writing skill is a challenging process that requires teachers' effective feedbacks and instructions. Throughout feedbacks, teachers play an important role in shaping students' writing style and improving their writing abilities. Hence, this study was conducted to explore students' perceptions and their preferences on regard of teachers' written feedbacks on their paragraph writing. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected by a three-part questionnaire. The results show that students have varied opinion on their teacher's written feedback, with general satisfaction but concerns about feedback complexity and focus on negative aspects. Furthermore, they showed stronger preferences toward direct, comprehensive corrective feedback in their native language, alongside with encouragement to boost motivation, though preferences for high-order feedback.

KEY WORDS: corrective feedback; non-corrective feedback; direct feedback; indirect feedback; writing skill; non-English major students.

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1. Introduction

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills that requires readers to understand and interpret what has been written. Therefore, proper feedback and consistent practice are necessary for students to achieve good writing skill. Feedback can be defined as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.81). Feedback from teachers plays an important role in students' writing learning process as it reflects their performance and progress towards learning goals. Also, it can be useful in formative assessment and provision of guidance, correction and encouragement for students (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Having said that, not every feedback is valued and appreciated by students. Furthermore, giving feedback can be complicated as its diverse in types. In addition, the quality and frequency of feedback may vary depending on the students' and teachers' preferences, beliefs, and practices.

There is a relative scarcity of research on written feedback in Vietnam, specifically in a context where non English-majored students are investigated. This is because English non-majored students usually focus on their oral communication skills rather than written communication. On the other hand, research tends to focus on English-majored students as these students present the need to be competent in this language component. Having said that, the English non-majored still needs to learn and improve their writing as the raising needs in written communication in globalization. Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap by investigating teachers' written feedback on the writing skills of freshmen English non-majored students at a Vietnamese university. Two questions would be answered:

1/How do freshman English non-majored students at a university in Vietnam perceive teachers' written feedback on paragraphs?

2/What types of teachers' written feedback are most preferred among freshman English non-majored students?

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2. Literature review

2.1. *Corrective feedback*

Corrective feedback refers to responses provided by teachers that address errors in students' writing, aiming to improve accuracy and overall quality (Ellis, 2009). This type of feedback is particularly crucial for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, who often struggle with grammatical accuracy, vocabulary choice, and sentence structure (Lee, 2017). Corrective feedback can be direct, where errors are explicitly corrected by the teacher, or indirect, where errors are indicated but left for students to correct themselves (Ferris, 2010). Research suggests that corrective feedback is effective in reducing linguistic errors, particularly when it is clear and targeted (Chandler, 2003). However, an overemphasis on error correction may overwhelm students or discourage them if it focuses predominantly on negative aspects of their performance (Truscott, 1996). For English non-major students, who may have lower proficiency levels (e.g., A2/B1), corrective feedback needs to be carefully designed to be comprehensible and actionable to support their learning process effectively.

2.2. *Non-corrective feedback*

Non-corrective feedback focuses on aspects beyond error correction, such as praise, encouragement, or suggestions for improving content, coherence, and organization (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). This type of feedback is valuable for fostering motivation and confidence, particularly for EFL learners who may feel anxious about their writing abilities. Non-corrective feedback can include comments on the strengths of a student's work, suggestions for expanding ideas, or guidance on improving the logical flow of a text. Studies indicate that combining corrective and non-corrective feedback creates a balanced approach that enhances both linguistic accuracy and students' engagement with the writing process (Hyland, 2006). For non-English-major students, non-corrective feedback can play a critical role in building confidence and encouraging them to focus on higher-order writing skills, such as developing ideas and structuring arguments, which are essential for effective communication in a globalized context.

2.3. *Direct feedback*

Direct feedback involves the teacher explicitly identifying and correcting errors in students' writing, providing the correct form or structure (Ferris, 2010). This approach is particularly beneficial for lower-proficiency EFL learners, such as A2/B1-level students, who may lack the linguistic knowledge to self-correct (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Research shows that direct feedback is effective in improving accuracy in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, as it provides clear guidance and reduces ambiguity (Chandler, 2003). However, over-reliance on direct feedback may limit students' opportunities to develop problem-solving skills or autonomy in writing (Liao & Zhang, 2022). In the context of English non-major students, direct feedback can address immediate linguistic challenges but should be balanced with strategies that encourage independent learning over time.

2.4. *Indirect feedback*

Indirect feedback involves indicating errors without providing the correct form, encouraging students to self-correct (Ferris, 2010). This can be done by underlining errors, using error codes, or providing comments that prompt revision. Indirect feedback is thought to promote deeper cognitive engagement, as students must analyze their mistakes and find solutions (Bitchener, 2008). However, its effectiveness depends on students' proficiency levels and their ability to understand and act on the feedback. For English non-major students with limited linguistic competence, indirect feedback may be less effective unless accompanied by clear explanations or support in their native language (Lee, 2017). Research suggests that a combination of direct and indirect feedback tailored to students' needs and proficiency levels can optimize learning outcomes (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). The existing literature highlights the importance of tailoring feedback to the specific needs of EFL learners, particularly non-English-major students who may prioritize linguistic accuracy over

advanced writing skills due to their developmental stage. However, there is limited research on how these students perceive and prefer feedback in the Vietnamese context, where English is often a secondary focus compared to oral communication skills. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the perceptions and preferences of freshman English non-majored students regarding teachers' written feedback, with a focus on its role in improving their writing skills.

2.5. Previous Studies on Teachers' Written Feedback

Numerous studies have explored the role of teachers' written feedback in enhancing students' writing skills, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. These studies provide a foundation for understanding how feedback is perceived and its impact on learners, including non-English-majored students.

Hyland (2006) investigated the perceptions of EFL students regarding written feedback and found that students generally value feedback that is clear, specific, and actionable. However, the study noted that students often prefer direct corrective feedback over indirect methods, especially at lower proficiency levels, as it provides immediate clarity on errors. This aligns with Bitchener and Ferris (2012), who conducted a meta-analysis on corrective feedback and concluded that direct feedback significantly improves grammatical accuracy for beginner and intermediate EFL learners, though its long-term impact on writing development remains debated.

In the context of non-English-majored students, Lee (2008) examined feedback practices in Hong Kong universities and found that students often perceive feedback as overly focused on surface-level errors (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) rather than higher-order concerns like coherence and argumentation. This focus can limit students' ability to develop advanced writing skills, which are increasingly important in globalized academic and professional settings. Similarly, Chandler (2003) highlighted that while corrective feedback reduces errors, its effectiveness depends on students' ability to understand and apply it, which can be challenging for non-majored students with limited English proficiency.

In Vietnam, research on written feedback for non-English-majored students is scarce. A study by Nguyen (2015) explored feedback preferences among Vietnamese EFL learners and found a strong preference for feedback in the native language (Vietnamese) to enhance comprehension, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. This suggests that linguistic accessibility is critical in contexts where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Additionally, Tran and Duong (2018) investigated feedback practices in Vietnamese universities and noted that inconsistent feedback delivery and an overemphasis on error correction can lead to student frustration and disengagement, particularly among non-English majors who prioritize oral communication over writing.

Cross-cultural studies, such as those by Hyland and Hyland (2006), emphasize the importance of culturally responsive feedback practices. They argue that feedback must align with students' cultural and educational backgrounds to be effective. For instance, Vietnamese students, who often operate in teacher-centered educational systems, may expect more directive and explicit feedback compared to learners in more autonomous learning environments. This cultural dimension is particularly relevant for non-English-majored students, who may lack the motivation or confidence to engage with complex feedback due to their focus on other academic disciplines.

Despite the wealth of research on written feedback, there remains a gap in understanding how non-English-majored students in Vietnam perceive and prefer feedback on their writing. Most studies focus on English-majored students or general EFL populations, overlooking the unique needs of non-majors who face increasing demands for written communication in globalized contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining the perceptions and preferences of freshman English non-majored students at a Vietnamese university, contributing to the limited body of research on this specific population.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method design

The research employed a tailored questionnaire to investigate first-year students' opinions and their preferences on teachers' written feedbacks which give comments on students' short paragraphs of familiar topics such as houses or hobbies. The questionnaire was delivered to students to collect qualitative and quantitative data, which was analyzed and presented in graphs to bring on a perspective on the research topic and generate meaning data for further study on a broader context.

3.2. Participants

This study was conducted in year 2025. It involved 100 freshmen non-English major students from three faculties including Information Technology, Business Administration, and Mechanical Engineering (percentage of students from each major is 35, 35 and 30 respectively) who were equivalent to A2 or B1 level of English proficiency from as determined by the university's placement test aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). They had completed Basic English Course 1 and were on course 2, a 10-week course designed to develop grammar, vocabulary, and paragraph-writing skill on topics relevant to daily life such as technology or hobbies.

3.3. Research instruments

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected by a questionnaire whose results indicated students' insights and preferences on their teachers' written feedbacks. The research tool comprised three parts. Part A consisted of 10 statements with a tick-box format gauging students' overall perceptions and their responses toward teachers' written feedbacks. Participants were required to put a tick next to the statements that reflected their experience. Part B featured 10 Likert-scale statements assessing students' preferences on their teachers' feedback types (e.g., direct vs indirect, corrective vs non-corrective). Part C included two open-ended questions (e.g., "What aspects of your teacher's feedback do you find most helpful and why?) to capture qualitative insights. The questionnaire was presented in both Vietnamese and English to make sure that every student can easily provide valid data.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Students' perceptions toward teachers' written feedbacks

Statements	Percentage
1. I feel satisfied with my teacher's feedbacks	60%
2. Teachers' written feedback helps me improve my writing skills	35%
3. I find it easy to understand and follow written feedbacks from my teacher	55%
4. My teachers always give feedback timely	90%
5. My teacher's feedback usually focuses on negative sides of my performance	75%
6. I feel lost reading my teacher feedbacks	4%
7. I feel frustrated reading my teacher feedbacks	8%
8. Teachers' feedback comes in no use as it offers no corrections other than pointing the errors	15%
9. Teachers' feedback usually contains too many points, which overwhelms me.	47%
10. Teachers' feedback is inconsistent	10%

The data from Part A of the questionnaire reveals a generally positive perception of teachers' written feedback among the participants, with 60% expressing satisfaction and 90% acknowledging the timeliness of the feedback. This suggests that teachers are successful in delivering feedback promptly, which is critical for supporting students' learning processes (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). However, only 35% of students reported that the feedback significantly improved their writing skills, indicating a gap between the provision of feedback and its perceived effectiveness in fostering writing development. Qualitative responses from part C provide deeper insight, with 65% of students noting that clear, specific feedback with examples (e.g., "My teacher explains why my sentence is

wrong and gives a correct example”) enhances understanding and application, particularly for low-proficiency learners (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Also, the finding matches concerns raised by Lee (2008), who noted that feedback may not always translate into meaningful improvements due to factors such as students’ ability to process it or its alignment with their learning needs. A notable concern is that 75% of students felt that teachers’ feedback predominantly focused on the negative aspects of their performance, and 47% found the feedback overwhelming due to its complexity or volume. Qualitative data reinforce this, with 55% of respondents criticizing vague comments (e.g., not clear) that lack actionable guidance. This aligns with Truscott’s (1996) critique of corrective feedback, which suggests that an overemphasis on error correction can lead to student frustration and disengagement. The fact that 15% of students found feedback unhelpful when it merely pointed out errors without offering corrections further supports Ferris’s (2012) argument that feedback lacking clear guidance may fail to support student learning effectively. Additionally, the reported inconsistency of feedback (10%) highlights practical challenges in feedback delivery, such as variability in teachers’ approaches, which can undermine its effectiveness (Truscott, 1996). Interestingly, only a small minority of students reported feeling lost (4%) or frustrated (8%) when reading feedback, suggesting that while negative perceptions exist, they are not widespread. This could be attributed to the clarity and accessibility of the feedback, as 55% of students found it easy to understand. The use of both Vietnamese and English in the feedback process likely contributed to this clarity, addressing potential language barriers for A2/B1-level learners.

4.2. Students’ preferences of teachers’ written feedbacks

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I would like my teacher to indicate all of my errors	5%	85%	10%	0%	0%
I would like my teachers to identify my errors with explanation	10%	10%	60%	5%	0%
I would like my teachers to identify my errors and suggest me alternative solutions	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
I would like my teachers to identify my errors and let me correct my won errors	4%	34%	20%	26%	16%
I would like my teachers to focus on grammatical errors (verb tense, articles, etc.)	55%	40%	5%	0%	0%
I would like my teachers to focus on coherence/logic order (meaning, logic, etc.)	10%	15%	55%	12%	8%
I would like my teacher to focus on vocabulary errors (word choice, spelling, etc.)	15%	80%	5%	0%	0%
I would like my teacher to focus on content/idea (details for support, comments of your ideas, etc.)	3%	57%	30%	9%	1%
I would like my teacher to add general comments (word of praise or encouragement)	10%	55%	35%	0%	0%
I would like my teacher to provide comments in Vietnamese	50%	30%	12%	6%	2%

The results from Part B of the questionnaire reveal a strong preference for comprehensive corrective feedback, with 90% of students wanting all errors identified. This preference for comprehensive feedback aligns with Chandler's (2003) findings that students value detailed error correction to enhance accuracy. Also, qualitative data align with this, as 65% of students highlighted the value of direct feedback with specific corrections (e.g., "I like when my teacher gives me right sentence so I can learn from it"), reflecting the need of low-proficiency English learners who benefit from explicit guidance (Chandler, 2003). However, only 20% desired explanations alongside error identification, while 95% preferred teachers to provide alternative solutions. This indicates a reliance on direct corrective feedback, where teachers supply corrected forms rather than encouraging students to self-correct (Ferris, 2010). Such a preference may reflect the students' relatively low English proficiency (A2/B1) and their need for explicit guidance, as opposed to indirect feedback that requires greater autonomy and linguistic competence (Liao & Zhang, 2022). Students also prioritized feedback on grammatical errors (95%) and vocabulary (95%) over coherence/logic (25%) and content/ideas (60%), a trend qualitative data contextualizes: 30% of students found grammar-focused feedback less helpful when it neglected higher-order skills. One respondent noted, "I want to know if my ideas are good, not just my grammar." This finding emphasis on surface-level corrections (grammar and vocabulary) over higher-order concerns (coherence and content) is consistent with Lee's (2017) observation that EFL learners often focus on linguistic accuracy due to their developmental stage and limited proficiency. However, this preference may limit opportunities for developing more advanced writing skills, such as organizing ideas logically or supporting arguments effectively, which are critical for academic and professional communication in a globalized context. The desire for feedback in Vietnamese (80%) underscores the importance of linguistic accessibility for non-English-majored students. Providing feedback in the students' native language likely reduces comprehension barriers and enhances the feedback's utility, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Additionally, 65% of students expressed a preference for general comments, such as praise or encouragement, which aligns with Hyland and Hyland's (2006) assertion that non-corrective feedback can boost motivation and confidence. This was supported by qualitative findings where 40% reported that positive remarks (e.g., "nice try") boost their confidence. Linguistic accessibility was critical, as 80% preferred feedback in Vietnamese, and 50% of qualitative responses emphasized its role in reducing comprehension barriers (e.g., "Vietnamese feedback is easier for me to understand"). However, 55% of students qualitatively criticized feedback that was overly general or voluminous, with one stating, "Too many red marks make me feel bad at writing," reinforcing the quantitative concern about overwhelming feedback (47%) and Truscott's (1996) critique of excessive correction.

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest several implications for teachers providing written feedback to English non-majored students. First, while comprehensive corrective feedback is highly valued (90% in Section 4.2), the qualitative insights from Part C emphasize that students find specific, example-based corrections most helpful, particularly when delivered in Vietnamese to enhance accessibility. Teachers should therefore balance error correction with clear, actionable guidance to address students' linguistic challenges effectively (Chandler, 2003). Second, the perception that feedback focuses excessively on negative aspects (75% in Section 4.1) and the qualitative reports of frustration with vague or overwhelming feedback highlight the need for a selective feedback approach that prioritizes key errors and avoids overloading students (Truscott, 1996). Third, incorporating non-corrective feedback, such as praise or encouragement, is critical, as both quantitative (65% in Section 4.2) and qualitative data (40% in Section 4.3.1) indicate that positive reinforcement boosts motivation and confidence (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Fourth, the strong preference for feedback in Vietnamese (80% in Section 4.2, 50% in Section 4.3.1) underscores the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive feedback practices, particularly for A2/B1-level learners who face comprehension barriers (Nguyen, 2015). Finally, to address issues of

inconsistency (10% in Section 4.1) and vague feedback 55% in Section 4.3.2), teachers could benefit from professional development to standardize feedback delivery and focus on both linguistic accuracy and higher-order writing skills, such as coherence and idea development, which students noted as underemphasized (30% in Section 4.3.2; Lee, 2017).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that freshman non-English major students at a Vietnamese university generally view teachers' written feedback positively, with 60% expressing satisfaction and 90% appreciating its timeliness. However, its effectiveness in improving writing skills is limited by its focus on negative aspects (75%), complexity (47%), and lack of actionable guidance, as evidenced by both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative insights from Part C highlight that students value clear, specific, and example-based feedback, particularly in Vietnamese, and appreciate encouragement to boost motivation. Conversely, vague, overly general, or grammar-focused feedback was deemed least helpful, as it failed to address higher-order skills like coherence and content development. Students' strong preference for comprehensive, direct corrective feedback in their native language (80% in Section 4.2, 50% in Section 4.3.1) reflects their developmental needs and A2/B1 proficiency levels but may hinder the development of advanced writing skills critical for globalized communication (Lee, 2017). These findings underscore the importance of tailoring feedback to students' linguistic and academic needs while balancing corrective and non-corrective approaches to maximize its impact.

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Phản hồi của giáo viên về kỹ năng viết của sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh năm thứ nhất tại Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội

Tóm tắt: Kỹ năng viết là một kỹ năng quan trọng để đạt được trình độ ngôn ngữ cao. Vậy nên nó đặt ra những thách thức đáng kể cho sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh. Việc phát triển kỹ năng viết là một quá trình đầy thách thức, đòi hỏi sự phản hồi và hướng dẫn hiệu quả từ giáo viên. Trong suốt quá trình phản hồi, giáo viên đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc định hình phong cách viết và cải thiện khả năng viết của học sinh. Do đó, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện để tìm hiểu nhận thức và sở thích của học sinh về phản hồi bằng văn bản của giáo viên đối với bài viết của các em. Dữ liệu định tính và định lượng được thu thập bằng bảng câu hỏi ba phần. Kết quả cho thấy học sinh có nhiều ý kiến khác nhau về phản hồi bằng văn bản của giáo viên, với sự hài lòng chung nhưng lo ngại về tính phức tạp của phản hồi và tập trung vào các khía cạnh tiêu cực. Hơn nữa, các em thể hiện sự ưa thích mạnh mẽ hơn đối với phản hồi sửa lỗi trực tiếp, toàn diện bằng tiếng mẹ đẻ của mình, cùng với sự khuyến khích để tăng cường động lực, mặc dù các em thích phản hồi bậc cao.

Từ khóa: phản hồi sửa lỗi; phản hồi không sửa lỗi; phản hồi trực tiếp; phản hồi gián tiếp; kỹ năng viết; sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh.