A Qualitative Study into How Non-English Major Students Emotionally Respond to Teacher-Written Feedback

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ABSTRACT

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Despite extant literature on the interplay between pedagogical practices and emotional impact, the emotional responses of non-English major undergraduates to teacher-written feedback in L2 writing classrooms remain underexplored. This research, employing semi-structured interviews and document analysis as primary data collection tools, aims to explore how different functions of feedback, including praise, criticism, and suggestions, evoke students' emotions in higher education settings. The study, conducted in the context of a single university's L2 writing courses, involved 88 undergraduates for document analysis and 5 for semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that personalized feedback significantly impacts students' self-perception, learning motivation, and engagement, underscoring the importance of empathy and clarity in feedback delivery. This paper highlights tailored feedback's crucial role in enhancing academic growth and emotional well-being, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of feedback dynamics in language education.

Introduction

It is indisputable that feedback plays a pedagogically significant role in language teaching and learning (Leng, 2014; Ryan & Henderson, 2017), as it is a two-way interaction (Agbayahoun, 2016; Lee, 2014) and "not simply a disembodied reference to student texts but an interactive part of the whole context of learning, helping to create a productive interpersonal relationship between the teacher and individual students" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 86). Due to the interpersonal nature of feedback, it is considered as "a social act" (Lee, 2008, p. 146).

Although a wide range of studies have been conducted on teacher-written feedback, they mainly concentrate on its effectiveness, utilizing quantitative research methods, and results related to

students' emotional responses remain mixed. Meanwhile, little research in the field of language education focuses on what functions are present in a teacher's feedback and their influence on emotions experienced by non-English major students.

As a result, there is a need to examine how non-English major students emotionally respond to teacher-written feedback, especially in the context of higher education where non-English major students participate in general English language courses to fulfill language proficiency requirements. This imperative stems from the widespread concern over the inadequate writing skills exhibited by this heterogeneous student population on a national scale and multiple challenges in developing writing skills faced by this group of students, underscoring the importance of gathering comprehensive data and devising tailored feedback strategies to address their diverse needs (Do & Tran, 2020; Le & Nguyen, 2022).

This study, therefore, seeks to shed light on the nuanced ways in which feedback influences students' emotions and subsequent engagement with it. Understanding how non-English major students emotionally react to teacher-written feedback can make significant theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of language education, enhancing the practical aspects of teaching and feedback in academic settings.

Literature Review

Teacher-Written Feedback

In the context of an L2 writing classroom, teacher-written feedback, referring to written responses offered by teachers on students' written work, is the indispensable component of a teacher's instruction (Ferris, 2018; Leng, 2014; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). As a pedagogical form, teacher-written feedback conveys substantial information to facilitate writing improvement and consolidate students' learning by offering commentary on a text's form and content (Hyland, 2019). It also acts as a constructive evaluation of students' texts, bridging the gap between current writing performance and desired improvement of writing skills via the students' implementation of feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Leng, 2014; Värlander, 2008). Providing this form of feedback is essential for the enhancement of students' writing abilities, as it constructively directs individuals to re-examine and rebuild their pre-existent ideas and beliefs, calling for one's constant development of flexible strategies for properly and holistically understanding the world (Han & Hyland, 2019; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Beyond the information transmission feature of teacher-written feedback, teacher-written feedback also serves social purposes beyond the "stimulus-and-response routine" and transmission of information (Gan et al., 2021). Värlander (2008) argues that teacher-written feedback should be viewed and conceptualized as an ongoing teacher-student dialogue rather than a tool passively received by the students without meaning negotiations. For teacher-written feedback to truly facilitate learning development, teachers should meticulously choose collaborative, dialogic and student-centered approaches to optimally induce students' engagement in the feedback (Ferris, 2018).

Teacher-written feedback is primarily examined in this paper in terms of its three functions:

praise, criticism, and suggestion, as proposed by Hyland and Hyland (2001). In their study, Hyland and Hyland interpreted praise as recognizing and commending another's positively valued trait, skill, and characteristic. Praise, in this context, is seen as more detailed and intense than mere agreement. They described the criticism as an expression of dissatisfaction or a negative remark, often focusing on mistakes in a student's work (Ferris, 2018). As per Hyland & Hyland (2001), suggestions are differentiated from criticism by their explicit remediation recommendations, providing a clear, achievable course of action for improvement. Although it may contain elements of criticism, Suggestion is considered more expansive and possibly less explicitly critical (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Student Emotions

Historically, emotion was viewed as a construct separate from and inferior to intellect, a perspective that prevailed until the twentieth century when such a rational understanding was criticized and eventually relinquished, making room for the re-examination of affective factors, with emotions included as a crucial element, and the recognition of the intricate relationship between emotion and cognition (Richards, 2020; Rothermund & Koole, 2018, White, 2018).

Emotion, beyond reasoning and decision-making capacity, is a dynamic and context-dependent social phenomenon emerging from meaningful interpersonal interactions within a particular sociocultural setting (Swain, 2013). Owing to its social complexity, emotion exerts a significant influence on one's learning progress and personal behavior within a particular context, encompassing a student's reactions during their learning process, as Carless and Boud (2018) define: "the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies" (p.1316).

Emotions significantly shape how students perceive learning activities in a classroom and their personal approach to the activities, especially those that necessitate active collaboration and co-construction of knowledge (Hill et al., 2021). The research evidence and findings from second language education have shown that student learning cannot occur without meaningful teacher-student interactions (Swain, 2013; Wu et al., 2019).

Emotional Responses to Teacher-Written Feedback

Students' emotional responses to the three functions of feedback - praise, criticism, and suggestions - often significantly vary and are generally complex (Ferris, 2018; Mahfoodh, 2017; Ryan & Henderson, 2018).

Praise in teacher-written feedback is associated with positive emotions such as happiness, confidence, and pride, boosting motivation to improve writing performance (Leng, 2014). However, it may not emotionally trigger students to take action for improvement in multiple cases, and completely positive feedback might not facilitate skill development due to neglect of weaknesses and errors (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Razali & Jupri, 2014).

Criticism of teacher-written feedback can cause negative emotions, including guilt, sadness, and disappointment, in students (Ryan & Henderson, 2017; Silver & Lee, 2007). Nevertheless, criticism, while sometimes undermining a student's confidence and motivation to fully perceive feedback, can also spur positive emotions and introspective thoughts if delivered appropriately and supplemented with clear instruction (Leng, 2014). Too many critical comments on a writing

text can emotionally damage students and demotivate them to make improvements in the future (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Suggestions used by teachers with an intention to recommend certain ways to enhancement in their written feedback can give rise to a sense of satisfaction and feedback acceptance of emotional responses from their students (Mahfoodh, 2017). One unique feature of suggestions in teacher-written feedback is its respect for students' decisions regarding whether they should use their teachers' comments, and suggestions make room for students' reflections on writing expectations, criteria, and conventions (Värlander, 2008). Therefore, suggestions can lower anxiety and insecurity in students as they are conducive to teacher-student interactions.

The three functions are often utilized in harmony rather than separately, which is crucial for arousing students' emotions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Mahfoodh, 2017). It is suggested that teachers combine the three functions, resulting in a host of feedback patterns such as praise-criticism, criticism-suggestion, and praise-criticism-suggestion, with hedges, question forms, and their own attributions, as this feedback-giving practice can contribute to developing teacher-student relationships, minimizing effects of judgments and mitigating criticism and suggestions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Addressing students' emotions evoked by teacher-written feedback often entails a mindful, strategic, and reflexive approach to adopting feedback functions (Värlander, 2008).

Previous Studies

Hyland and Hyland (2001) conducted a detailed text analysis of teacher-written feedback to explore the combination of feedback functions - ranging from praise and criticism to suggestions - on ESL students' writing assignments over an English proficiency course at a university in New Zealand. The researchers indicated that praise was the most commonly used function among the teachers participating in the study, yet it was mainly utilized to mitigate the impact of criticism and suggestion instead of truly complimenting the students' assignments. They also claimed that indirectness inherent in the feedback delivery could bring about miscommunication and incomprehension, limiting student revision quality. The formation of three functions of feedback used by teachers in response to students' writing performance was also investigated in research conducted by Silver and Lee (2007) in a primary school in Singapore. The study's data were collected from student compositions, teacher-written feedback, and student questionnaires. The majority of the pupils demonstrated pre-intermediate and intermediate English language proficiency. Silver and Lee found that the students revised their narrative compositions primarily based on suggestions, while compliments were regarded as unnecessary. Criticism was not preferred by the majority of the students, even if it had been given constructively.

Agbayahoun (2016) examines teachers' feedback on students' paragraphs included in writing tests in a secondary school in the republic of Benin with the main purpose of identifying the nature of the teachers' feedback and rationale for feedback provision as well as the students' perspectives on the feedback. The research employs a mixed-method design, integrating data from students' written texts, close-ended questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. It was found that two-thirds of the students needed help understanding their teachers' feedback, and some admitted that they were overwhelmed with the feedback. Additionally, one-third of the

students paid almost no attention to the feedback from the teachers due to their emphasis on grades over writing revisions. Meanwhile, qualitative data from the feedback showed that the teachers in the study tended to focus on errors and weaknesses in the students' paragraphs, which resulted in strong negativity in their corrections and comments.

In another study conducted as a part of a larger project on teacher-written feedback in a state university in Yemen, which is one of the Arab countries, Mahfoodh (2017) investigates the emotional responses of undergraduates in the Department of English Language teacher-written feedback. From qualitative data collected from think-aloud protocols, students' written texts, and semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that the students expressed a wide range of positive emotional responses, including feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and acceptance of feedback. According to the researcher's explanations, this positive emotional pattern stemmed from learning encouragement, useful suggestions, and straightforward correction of linguistic features. However, the students also endured negative emotions arising in their learning experiences as a result of dissatisfaction, rejection of feedback, surprise, disappointment, and frustration. Such emotional responses were triggered due to their inability to comprehend the feedback, exposure to overwhelmingly large amounts of information and criticism in it, and their personal disagreement with their teachers' feedback. This resulted in the students' lack of readiness to revise their compositions with the feedback's guidance.

The extant literature shows that the interplay between students' emotional responses and teacher-written feedback remains multifaceted, calling for more information about the relationship between emotional experiences and educational outcomes. Furthermore, little information is available on the interplay between emotions and writing skills, entailing a notable scarcity of published research on how students' emotional responses to teacher-written feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017; Pilotti et al., 2023). As White (2018, p. 29) aptly notes, there is "an urgent need to develop and adopt more contextual and domain-specific approaches to understanding the nature and impact of complex emotional experiences." This call underscores the necessity of moving beyond generic models of emotional responses to tailor approaches that recognize the unique contexts in which feedback occurs.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, it is set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What patterns are observable in the functions of teacher-written feedback?

2. What are the emotional responses of students to the manner in which teachers provide feedback?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The research was conducted at a public multidisciplinary school located in the southern region of Vietnam. The school trains multiple non-English departments and majors, including Business Administration, Information Technology, and Accounting. The university is committed to teaching non-English major students English as a Foreign Language (EFL), equipping them

with essential communication skills in English and fulfilling language requirements for their career paths.

In this study, there were 88 non-English major undergraduates from two general English classes and one university lecturer at Sai Gon University. The students were enrolled in the English General III course, which is at the pre-intermediate level. The course covered four skills, reading, listening, writing, and speaking, across six units. The researchers' choice stemmed from the acknowledgment of the heterogeneous academic landscapes within higher education, aiming to yield a comprehensive understanding of feedback preferences discovered from multiple perspectives.

All the undergraduates were required to write a review about their favorite TV program. Students then submitted their review assignments on Padlet to receive feedback. The lecturer provided feedback on 88 essays. After receiving the lecturer's feedback, the students revised their essays accordingly. Out of all the students, seven were invited to participate in the interviews to share how they emotionally reacted to the feedback on their essays with purposive sampling. However, only five students participated in the interviews, while others could not due to hectic schedules and personal issues. Consent forms were sent to and signed by the participants before each interview session was conducted. The selection criteria were determined on the basis of the participants' varied academic background, course enrollment, and willingness to participate in the research to share their experiences and emotions related to feedback on their written essays. This sampling technique was chosen due to the need to gain an emergent, in-depth understanding that is important to grasp the context or phenomenon under investigation, fitting the purpose of the research (Silverman, 2022). Table 1 depicts more details about these interview participants.

Table 1

Profiles of participants in semi-structured interviews

Name	Gender	Major	University year	Learning experience (years)	English language qualifications
Tony	Male	Information Technology	4	16	None
Daisy	Female	Finance - Accounting.	3	13	None
Adele	Female	Office Administration - Library	3	13	None
Terry	Male	Literature Teacher Education	4	11	None
Hayley	Female	Law	4	14	None

In addition, the study involved only one lecturer from the classes, possessing a Master's degree in education, overseeing the teaching of each class individually, drawing from extensive experience in instructing writing skills to learners at the corresponding proficiency level. to provide written feedback to the students' essays. She was instructed to give feedback while assuring the three functions, with attention to four writing skill assessment criteria: Task Fulfillment, Organization, Vocabulary, and Grammar. This decision was made deliberately to facilitate the examination of consistent patterns and variations in feedback practices within a particular context and their impact on student emotional responses, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the dynamics between the lecturer's feedback style and the emotional reactions elicited from students.

Design of the Study

In this study, the researchers employ qualitative methodology to answer the research questions. Qualitative research, context-dependent in nature, is designed to collect and analyze in-depth data in multiple forms, mainly non-numeric. It identifies themes, patterns and causal relationships underlying lived experiences of research participants, thereby exploring as much depth as possible (Silverman, 2022). The nature of qualitative methodology will guide the researchers to have an in-depth exploration of emotional responses to teacher-written feedback and the feedback itself in a particular setting by gathering rich subjective data.

Data Collection & Analysis

The research employs two primary data collection tools. The first research question is answered using document analysis, utilized to systematically examine feedback functions in feedback on 88 essays to identify patterns and characteristics of the feedback. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the five students' emotional responses to teacher-written feedback attached to their essays, answering the second research question. This method aims to collect rich data on how students perceive and react to feedback provided by their lecturer.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis, the researchers adopted inter-coder reliability checks, resolving any coding discrepancies through discussion and consensus. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of the interview data was enhanced by employing member-checking techniques, allowing research participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts.

Qualitative content analysis with inductive category application was utilized to code data of teacher-written feedback on essays. Using this technique, researchers systematically classify and count text units to condense them into categories or themes using subjective interpretation and inference (Silverman, 2022). In other words, what distinguishes it from other typical qualitative data analysis techniques is the transformation of words into numbers, representing the process of quantification in a qualitative procedure (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). This method is conducive to identifying the frequency, characteristics, and distribution of feedback functions, and the data analysis method also enables the researchers to explore in depth the feedback functions the lecturer applied within comments, enabling the researchers to gain meaningful insights into how the lecturer uses feedback to mediate students' writing skill development.

Additionally, the data from semi-structured interviews and students' comments in response to the feedback on their essays were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. At the basic level, thematic analysis is "a method for developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 4). Comprehending the experiences, thoughts, and actions of research participants is valuable, requiring researchers using reflexive thematic analysis to critically reflect upon their own role, practice, and process, becoming subjective, conscious, questioning, and situated in a particular context (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized in this research to flexibly and critically explore the nuanced emotions of non-English major undergraduates resulting from the written feedback given by their lecturer.

Results/Findings

Research Question 1: Patterns of Teacher-Written Feedback

The findings of the first research question from document analysis and qualitative content analysis are presented in this section. In order to analyze teachers' feedback patterns (praise, suggestion, and criticism) in the 88 essays, the theories of Hyland and Hyland (2001) were used. Table 2 identifies patterns of teacher-written feedback by examining the frequency of praise, suggestion, and criticism across four assessment criteria of writing, including Task Fulfillment, Organization, Vocabulary, and Grammar.

Table 2

Feedback functions in relation to four writing assessment criteria

Criteria	Praise	Criticism	Suggestion
Task Fulfillment	110	2	30
Organization	49	0	21
Vocabulary	21	3	67
Grammar	29	5	99

Praise was most commonly awarded for Task Fulfillment, with 110 instances, compared to only 30 suggestions and two criticisms. This emphasis on Task Fulfillment suggests that the teacher prioritizes clarity and relevance in student arguments, with the high frequency of praise indicating that most students met these expectations. Consequently, fewer suggestions for improvement were needed in this area. In contrast, considerably less praise was directed to Vocabulary and Grammar, with 21 and 29 instances, respectively, highlighting potentially challenging areas and suggesting a need for increased support in improving their vocabulary and grammatical precision.

Suggestions were primarily allocated to Grammar, where the lecturer offered 99 pieces of feedback, significantly higher than any other area. This focus emphasis underscores the priority placed on grammatical competence, aiming to guide students to pay more attention to precision and clarity in their essays. Vocabulary received the second-highest attention with 67 suggestions, indicating it as another critical area requiring improvement. This feedback pattern suggests that Grammar and Vocabulary are common challenges in student writing, with both being targeted for enhancement.

Less frequent than other feedback functions, criticism was mainly used to target Grammar, with five mentions, suggesting it as the primary area that students needed to improve. Meanwhile, Task Fulfillment and Vocabulary received notably fewer criticisms, with only 2 and 3 mentions, respectively, indicating that issues in these aspects were less prevalent or less severe in the evaluated submissions.

To conclude, the data suggests that the lecturer prioritized positive feedback content and constructive suggestions over negative comments. This strategy fosters a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to maximize their writing strengths while making use of guidance on areas for improvement, thereby enhancing their overall educational experience.

Research Question 2: Emotional Responses to Teacher-Written Feedback

The reflexive thematic analysis indicated that the five undergraduates participating in the interviews exhibited strong emotional reactions to the lecturer's feedback on their essays. According to the participants, such intense emotions were triggered by praises, criticisms, suggestions, and other aspects of the feedback, particularly highlighted errors, error explanations, suggested corrections, or interactive notes. Notably, the emotions intensified as they showed admiration for their lecturer and gratitude towards the lecturer's dedication, diligence, enthusiasm, and even personal characteristics implicitly manifested via the feedback. Moreover, while the participants found feedback that integrating the three feedback functions eye-opening and helpful, the lecturer's qualities and dedication to the feedback content profoundly evoked their emotions.

Theme 1: Respect for Teacher's Dedication (All)

All the participants cherished the lecturer's dedication and effort in providing detailed feedback, recognizing the significant investment of time and energy it entailed. The students expressed immense respect and gratitude, keenly aware of the tremendous undertaking. Notably, the undergraduates from disadvantaged English language learning backgrounds were deeply moved by the lecturer's unique determination in feedback delivery, a stark contrast to their past experiences with previous teachers. According to the undergraduates, the lecture was *"far too dedicated"* and *"paid attention to every single part and every single sentence."*

As the students received the feedback, their admiration and appreciation for the lecturer's efforts grew into a keen recognition of her dedication.

> *"It's like she is extremely dedicated to me."* (Daisy)
>
> *"The way she corrects is really heartfelt. She corrects with so much care."* (Hayley)
>
> *"[...] the way she does it makes you feel the care from her and the true dedication of a real educator. At that time, the teacher was like a kind mother to me."* (Terry)
>
> *"As long as she gives feedback, I'm already very happy."* (Adele)
>
> *"As I said, she was truly dedicated, [...]"* (Tony)

Further illustrating this theme, the quotes highlight the tangible impact of the teacher's dedication on the students, linking it to both academic improvement and increased emotional engagement. The undergraduates became more emotionally invested in the feedback since they felt the lecturer's care, enthusiasm, and devotion.

This recurring sentiment of respect for the teacher's dedication illustrates its significant influence on the students' academic success and personal growth. The interviews revealed that this profound respect extended beyond mere appreciation, embodying a deeper acknowledgment of the teacher's role in shaping their educational journey.

Theme 2: Striving for Recognition (Hayley, Terry, Adele)

The data analysis showed that Hayley, Terry, and Adele strongly preferred praise and validation, as manifested in the lecturer's feedback. The compliments given in the feedback underscore the motivational role of positive recognition of written language in student engagement and

learning. A few undergraduates became emotionally attached to the content of each compliment since their output language performance has never or seldom received positive feedback, and some even said that only feedback focusing on errors or criticisms was present in their learning experiences.

According to Hayley, her previous teachers and tutors *"only focused on what was inaccurate"* or gave vague feedback such as *"finding something better"*, which caused desperation and distress in her past experiences. As a result, she was profoundly surprised and elated as she received compliments from the lecturer.

In addition, due to the strong emotional responses to the positive feedback, Hayley would make every attempt to memorize some portions of her essays with praise from the lecturer in the light of writing skill improvement.

> *"It's like when I read it, it's really profound! And then, I have to, like, memorize the line, like 'Wow', oh my goodness!"* (Hayley)

The compliments in the feedback also elicited a profound and significant emotional experience for Terry. Drawing on his background in Literature Teacher Education and past learning experiences, he highlighted that the lecturer stood out for her appreciation of the students' writing efforts and achievements, describing her as *"a co-author"* of the essays. According to Terry, the compliments differentiate the lecturer from other educators who only seek faults and offer criticisms.

> *"I felt a great uplift in spirits, like, yes, the effort I put in is seen by the teacher and acknowledged by the teacher, and not just that. The teacher also gives suggestions and even praises my strengths, not like other teachers who only seem to find faults to criticize all day. Because from the student's perspective, it always seems like teachers are always looking for something wrong to point out. That's what I think anyway."* (Terry)

While praise prompted Terry to compare the lecturers to other educators, Adele engaged in a personal comparison with her peers. Although she profoundly valued positive notes over her written language and constantly checked for further improvement, she felt somewhat dissatisfied with the distribution of praise in her essay, especially since a number of her peers in the same classroom received more compliments. She paid close attention to how the compliments were distributed to other essays: *"Oh my goodness, my friend even received praise for her good introduction!"*. Drawing on her own essay, she was not content with some feedback portions: *"She wrote 'quite good', which is not specific [...] I don't know whether 'quite good' means good or it just remains at the average level"*. In spite of the jealousy, the emotion reveals that she was highly attentive to and engaged with the lecturer's praise. Not only was she concerned about how the lecturer had given feedback to her peers, but she also desired to get positive, detailed, and helpful information.

Theme 3: Wholehearted Acceptance (Adele, Daisy, Tony, Terry)

Despite varying degrees of acceptance, Adele, Daisy, Tony, and Terry uniformly expressed strong or complete approval of their lecturer's praise, criticism, suggestions, and corrections. The differences were evident in how the undergraduate emotionally and cognitively responded

to the feedback, leveraging it to refine and develop their writing.

Having engaged in the feedback, Adele embraced much of the lecturer's advice on her essay. Despite initial slight confusion and resistance, she recognized the value of the feedback, influenced by factors such as future examinations and her esteem for the lecturer.

> *Interviewer:*
>
> *So generally, you don't really accept her feedback here, right? You think you are still right, don't you?*
>
> *Adele:*
>
> *Yes. But later I will use "are" because she corrected it already.*

Unlike Adele, Daisy and Terry accepted all the feedback despite their varied emotional reactions to it. On the one hand, as Daisy was immersed in the content of the feedback, she made significant attempts to understand and explain it so that she could better revise her essay. What is vital is the participant's ongoing engagement with the feedback, as she subjectively discerns the reasons for her mistakes and the lecturer's suggestions for different ways to convey similar thoughts. One prominent example is how she interpreted the lecturer's suggestions on her use of vocabulary:

> *"Yes, I think her approach would be better because it will reflect the meaning of 'contribute to the development of Vietnamese culture'. My previous sentence was just about development. Her sentence, saying it will contribute, implies something stronger, contributing to the foundation of Vietnamese culture."* (Daisy)

Meanwhile, Terry, an undergraduate who "absolutely trusts teachers", accepted every piece of feedback on his essay. Although he had used an online translation tool to write his essay, he acknowledged that the lecturer's feedback was significantly better than the software's assistance owing to the lecturer's comprehensive linguistic understanding, linguistic sensitivity and capacity to profoundly grasp his ideas expressed in the essay.

> *"Of course, I mean, like, I cannot understand why I made such small, minor mistakes."*
>
> *"I didn't think she would read my paper in detail and thoroughly enough to understand the issues I'm talking about like that!"* (Terry)

These strong emotions caused Terry to decide to evaluate his writing shortcomings consistently and remind himself not to depend excessively on translation software. The disillusion, resulting from his full recognition of the feedback's value, compelled Terry to truly learn the foreign language and enhance his writing skill accuracy with his own efforts.

> *"That point has to be etched in my mind, not just noted down! It's like I've ingrained it already. When I read it, I finally understood why I made such trivial mistakes and I should never… After all, I've learned not to trust Google Translate ever again, but rather to understand the grammar of what I'm writing; that will be more accurate than relying on it. If I trust Google Translate 100%, I keep thinking that whatever it produces must be mechanically correct and better than me, but that's not the case! Machines don't have emotions!"* (Terry)

In conclusion, the analysis of interview data reveals distinct patterns of emotional responses to teacher feedback. The data provided deep insights into participants' backgrounds and learning experiences shaped by varied emotional reactions. All participants expressed surprise at the volume of feedback received and held deep respect for the lecturer's linguistic expertise and pedagogical dedication, viewing the support provided as unparalleled in their academic journey. Some participants even described feeling rescued from previous negative learning experiences, leading to a more positive outlook on language improvement. Additionally, a subset of participants actively sought and valued compliments from the lecturer, experiencing a sense of pride and motivation to build upon their strengths. Importantly, most participants exhibited whole-hearted acceptance of feedback, demonstrating a willingness to engage with it constructively to further enhance their language skills.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore (a) the inclusion of feedback functions - praise, criticism, and suggestions - driven by writing skill assessment criteria, and (b) how non-English major undergraduates emotionally reacted to the three feedback functions.

The findings demonstrated a well-intended and constructive application of feedback functions, incorporating a flexible range of writing skill assessment criteria. Similarly, it was found that the undergraduates experienced an emotional nuance, predominantly positive, as they received feedback from their lecturer. The emotions not only heightened their awareness of language proficiency and motivated them to improve but also fostered dynamic teacher-student interactions and engaging learning experiences.

Our study reveals that the teacher predominantly used praise and suggestions rather than criticism to provide feedback to non-English major undergraduates. Praise was frequently allocated to aspects of Task Fulfillment. At the same time, suggestions primarily focused on enhancing Grammar and Vocabulary, with minimal instances of criticism noted (209 instances of praise, 217 instances of suggestions, and only 10 instances of criticism). This approach aligns with Hyland and Hyland's observation that praise is often the most common form of feedback, contrasting with Connors & Lunsford's (1993) observation of a rarity in positive comments. Additionally, our findings diverge from Hyland and Hyland's (2001) earlier observation that criticism comprised about a third of feedback. The considerable use of suggestions and minimal criticism in our study suggests a strategy to enhance student confidence and motivation by offering support rather than direct critique. Regarding the four test writing skill criteria, praise was most frequently directed at Task Fulfillment, indicating that most students met this criterion well. Conversely, Vocabulary and Grammar were identified as the main challenges, receiving the most suggestions, which is consistent with literature indicating that lower proficiency students often receive more feedback on form, such as grammar and vocabulary. This feedback strategy is appropriate for pre-intermediate level students, focusing on areas critical to their language development.

In terms of the emotional reactions, the interview data analysis highlights distinct emotional reactions to teacher feedback, influenced by participants' backgrounds and previous learning

experiences. Some participants noted that the feedback significantly counteracted previous negative learning experiences, fostering a more positive attitude towards language improvement. Nonetheless, the connections between students' emotional reactions to teacher-written feedback and their past learning experiences were not clearly examined in previous studies, mainly focusing on the relationship and its effects on writing revisions. Furthermore, numerous participants showed profound respect for the lecturer's expertise and commitment, appreciating the support as a pivotal part of their educational experience. These positive emotional patterns are similar to the research findings of Ferris (2018), as the students in her research expressed appreciation and satisfaction with written feedback. Additionally, a group of participants particularly appreciated receiving compliments, which bolstered their pride and motivation to enhance their strengths. The participants' strong preferences for positive feedback contrasted with the results of research conducted by Mahfoodh (2017), who found that praises did not profoundly impact students' emotions, although they generally liked them. Most importantly, the majority of participants accepted the feedback with openness, demonstrating a readiness to use it constructively to advance their language skills, which is closely aligned with the findings of Mahfoodh's (2017) study, indicating that many students accepted their teacher's feedback and relied on it for writing skill improvement. However, while Ferris (2018) and Mahfoodh (2017) found negative emotions such as frustration, sadness, disappointment, and rejection primarily due to vague and critical feedback, the participants in this study experienced very few similar emotions due to predominantly positive and constructive feedback.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the crucial role of teacher-written feedback in cultivating student learning and emotional engagement within an educational setting. The findings demonstrate that when feedback is detailed, personalized, and includes elements of praise, it improves academic skills and significantly boosts students' motivation, respect for their educators, and meaningful interactions. Furthermore, the positive reception of feedback across the undergraduates, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, highlights the need for feedback practices that are culturally aware and tailored to meet diverse student needs. The study advocates adopting feedback strategies that are both corrective and supportive, fostering an environment where students feel valued and motivated, which is critical to maintaining learner motivation and cultivating engaging learning experiences in the context of language education.

This study has several limitations. Due to the nature of qualitative research studies, our findings may only be restrained in a particular context, not being able to be generalized elsewhere. Furthermore, owing to the complex nature of emotions, it is clear that the semi-structured interviews may only cover some emotional aspects or their entire impact on a student's learning process. The same can be judged regarding teacher-written feedback, as the study primarily focuses on the three functions of the teacher's feedback. In contrast, the corrections and other aspects, such as linguistic features, comment length, use of hedges, and text focus, were not analyzed. Therefore, it is still being determined whether the linguistic features of feedback, its place in the student's writing, and other facets influence the emotions of the students

participating in the study. Finally, the study emphasizes the students' emotional responses, which means there is a need to observe how emotions lead to actions, make changes to the compositions, and have participants write journals to reflect upon their emotions immediately after receiving feedback.

This study suggests several promising directions for future research that can enhance our understanding of the interplay between emotions and feedback in educational settings. Comparative analyses across different cultural backgrounds could shed light on how cultural norms influence emotional responses to feedback, aiding in the development of culturally adaptive strategies. Moreover, longitudinal studies are also valuable for understanding the lasting effects of feedback on academic achievement, emotional well-being, and motivation. Also, incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative insights could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of specific feedback strategies on student learning outcomes. Finally, investigating the relationship between teacher identity and feedback dynamics, including factors like gender, ethnicity, teaching style, and personal philosophy, could inform the development of professional identities that enhance feedback effectiveness and promote positive student interactions.

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