

# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH PEER FEEDBACK IN EFL WRITING: A CASE STUDY AT AN ENGLISH CLASS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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(Received: 02/07/2024; Revised: 14/08/2024; Accepted: 30/08/2024)

**Abstract:** This study was conducted with the intention of exploring how EFL learners engage with peer feedback in their revisions. To this end, the research seeks to answer two research questions: 1) What is the main focus of feedback generated by students on their peers' writing?; 2) How do EFL students behaviorally engage with peer feedback when revising their texts? With the involvement of 12 EFL 11th-grade students from a high school in Hue, this qualitative study was conducted over an 8-week period. There were two data collection tools, each intended to address a particular research question. The first tool comprised 72 recordings of six weeks of peer feedback conferences. The second tool was made up of 144 writing texts (72 first and 72 revised drafts respectively). The findings indicated that students primarily provided evaluative feedback, followed by form-focused feedback, with content-focused feedback being the least frequently given. Furthermore, students' behavioral engagement with the feedback was discovered. They generally corrected their errors although there were some instances where the received feedback was not addressed at all. Furthermore, students attended to the vast majority of direct form-focused feedback and had lower rates of implementation related to indirect form-focused and content-focused feedback.

*Keywords:* Peer feedback; engagement; feedback focus; EFL learners

## 1. Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the use of peer feedback in teaching and learning English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) has been increasing, which has given rise to a wide range of studies on its effectiveness in enhancing ESL/EFL students' writing skills. Previous research has suggested that it helps students improve their ability to evaluate writing and fosters autonomy in learning (Yu & Lee, 2016, as cited in Zhang & Hyland, 2023); enhances readers' awareness (Rollinson, 2005); lowers their writing anxiety (Zhang & Hyland, 2022); and provides more opportunities for language-related discussion (Yu & Hu, 2017). Considering the advantages associated with peer feedback, teachers might anticipate high levels of student involvement in this activity. Nonetheless, such expectations are not always fulfilled as student engagement with peer feedback can be limited. Additionally, learners often express skepticism toward their peers' suggestions and infrequently integrate these comments into their revisions (Yoshida, 2008; Yu et al., 2019, as cited in Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Research on peer feedback within the context of academic writing has not adequately addressed the aspect of engagement during the revision process. The majority of existing studies have concentrated on students' perceptions and attitudes, lacking a detailed examination of how revisions are undertaken (Wu, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of student engagement is essential for a thorough insight into the dynamics of student writing and the revision process.

Moreover, it is not enough, as many studies on peer feedback do, to merely investigate peer interactions (Zheng, 2012) without considering the changes made across different drafts. It remains open to question whether student engagement with peer feedback is conducive to better writing skills. It is, therefore, the aim of the current research to explore how L2 learners of English engage with peer feedback in their revisions and which focus of feedback they generate on their peers' writing.

## **2. Objectives**

This study aimed to investigate the engagement of EFL students with peer feedback within their writing revision process. By examining how students interact with, utilize, and perceive peer feedback, the research sought to uncover the role of peer feedback in facilitating the improvement of writing competencies and to provide an understanding of peer feedback's potential as a pedagogical tool in EFL writing instruction. Accordingly, two objectives were determined: 1) to discover the focus of the feedback provided by the students to their peers, and 2) to examine the students' behavioral engagement with the feedback that they received. In accordance with these aims, the following research questions were created:

1. What is the main focus of feedback generated by students on their peers' writing?
2. How do EFL students behaviorally engage with peer feedback when revising their texts?

## **3. Literature review**

### **3.1 Peer feedback in L2 writing**

A key component of the writing process that involves collaboration is peer feedback – also referred to as peer review. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), peer feedback is an activity in the revision stage of writing in which students give and review feedback about their writing. Vorobel and Kim (2014) also defined it as an activity that involves the reading, critiquing, and provision of feedback by a student on another student's writing. Patchan and Schunn (2015) remarked that peer feedback encompasses an evaluation of a student's performance by a peer of similar status. Through peer feedback, students have the opportunity to discuss their texts and gain insights into how others interpret their texts (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). It is supported by various theoretical frameworks, including sociocultural theory, notably the concept of ZPD, the social cognitive theory, and the interaction hypothesis in the context of SLA (Long, 1996).

When giving peer feedback, there are numerous aspects of the writing that reviewers can focus on, as well as different ways (types) in which the feedback can be delivered. Various researchers have attempted to provide a framework for the focus and type of feedback. For instance, Ferris (2006) explained the focus of feedback in terms of the errors that are identified, mainly related to the linguistic elements of the text. These included elements such as word, choice, verb tense, verb form, pronouns, etc. In addition, Ferris described the types of feedback that can be given. These types were a combination of direct, indirect, correct, incorrect, coded, and uncoded feedback. Furthermore, Ellis (2009) explained that feedback could be either focused (correcting all or most of the errors) or unfocused (correcting some of the errors). In terms of feedback types, Ellis described three main types. The first is direct feedback, which is used when the reviewer provides the correct form of the error. The second is indirect feedback which is used when the reviewer indicates that an error exists without providing the correct form. The last type

of feedback is metalinguistic feedback which is used when the reviewer provides metalinguistic clues about the error by writing a code in the margin or indicating the quantity of specific errors.

Fan and Xu (2020) also described the focus of feedback, which was adapted from Ferris (2006). The authors categorized feedback focus into three principal types: form-focused, content-focused, and evaluative. Form-focused feedback targets learners’ mechanical, lexical, and grammatical inaccuracies. Content-focused feedback addresses aspects such as cohesion and coherence. Evaluative feedback comprises both positive affirmations and constructive criticisms. The authors also described the types of feedback, based on work done by Ellis (2009) and Han and Hyland (2015). The types were restricted to form-focused feedback and included direct and indirect feedback. Direct feedback was described as the provision of the correct form of feedback, whereas indirect feedback was associated with the indication that an error was made.

**3.2 Student engagement with peer feedback**

Student engagement, according to Bond and Bedenlier (2019), is the product of students’ energy and effort applied to their learning. Schindler et al. (2017) explained that engagement is an outcome of a student’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about learning. Lam et al. (2014) proposed a tripartite framework, related to the domains of affect (students’ emotional responses to learning), behavior (students’ participation and effort in their school activities), and cognition (mental strategies implemented by students during learning), to conceptualize student engagement.

In order to explain students’ engagement with peer feedback specifically, researchers have proposed engagement frameworks that are relevant to peer feedback learning environments. Ellis (2010) extended the tripartite conceptualization framework to describe how students react to both written and spoken corrective feedback. Similar to the tripartite framework, the divided engagement into three dimensions: (1) cognitive, examining students’ attention to feedback, (2) behavioral, assessing if and how students apply feedback to their work, and (3) affective, exploring students’ emotional reactions to feedback. This approach presents engagement as a complex concept, designed to analyze and understand the distinct aspects of learning through intentional task engagement. Nonetheless, Ellis places a greater emphasis on correcting errors rather than on the broader utilization of feedback in students’ writing. Zhang and Hyland (2018) developed a framework to study how students interact with feedback in second language (L2) writing. Similar to the tripartite framework, their model consisted of affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Han and Hyland (2015) also presented a conceptual framework based on the dimensions of affect, behavior, and cognition. They emphasized the interconnected natures of these dimensions and provided a list of components for each as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Three-dimensional engagement framework (Han & Hyland, 2015)

| <b>Component</b>            | <b>Description</b>  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Affective dimension</b>  |   |
| Emotional response          | Feelings and emotions associated with the received feedback         |
| Attitudinal response        | Overall attitudes towards peer feedback as a result of the feedback |
| <b>Behavioral dimension</b> |   |
| Revision operations         | How feedback is integrated into revised writing.                    |
| Strategies                  | Methods and techniques used to revise writing                       |
| <b>Cognitive dimension</b>  |   |

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Awareness: Noticing      | Detecting and recognizing the intention of the correction.   |
| Awareness: Understanding | Comprehending the nature of the error.                       |
| Metacognitive operations | Strategies used to monitor and evaluate the revision process |

In this study, the focus of the behavioral dimension was on the students' revision operations. These refer to the actions students take in response to the feedback that they receive. Han and Hyland (2015) based their classification of revision operations on Ferris' (2006) taxonomy in their own five-type framework. The first type is correct revision, which occurs when the error is corrected as intended by the reviewer. The second is incorrect revision which happens when the error is incorrectly addressed. The third revision type, deletion, occurs when the marked text is deleted to address the error. The fourth type, substitution, happens when the marked text is substituted for a correction not suggested by the reviewer. Lastly, no revision takes place when the student offers no response to the marked correction. In this research, Han and Hyland's (2015) framework of engagement was adopted to explore students' behavioral engagement with peer feedback in their L2 writing tasks.

### 3.3 Previous studies

#### 3.3.1 *Feedback focus and types*

Several studies have explored the focus of feedback in peer feedback activities. Vorobel and Kim (2014) found that three advanced ESL students primarily focused on organization, clarity, vocabulary, use of L1 sources in L2 writing, and mechanics during peer feedback. Patchan and Schunn (2015) analyzed feedback from 186 undergraduate students and discovered that low-ability reviewers offered more praise, while high-ability reviewers provided more critical feedback, including problem explanations and solutions. High prose errors were flagged more frequently than low prose errors. Fan and Xu (2020), studying 21 non-English majors in China, found that form-focused feedback was the most common, with direct feedback being more frequent than indirect feedback. He and Gao (2023) found that 110 Chinese graduate students gave significantly more surface-level feedback (e.g., grammar) than meaning-level feedback (e.g., thesis or argument), often focusing on identifying problems and offering solutions. In Vietnam, Nguyen (2012) observed that 11 EFL students provided numerous surface-level comments (vocabulary and grammar) but rarely commented on content or organization. Pham and Nguyen (2014) analyzed peer comments from 37 graduate students and found that alteration (correcting errors), particularly form-focused errors like grammar and word choice, was the most common feedback type.

#### 3.3.2 *Student engagement with peer feedback*

Studies on students' engagement with peer feedback have revealed several key findings. Nelson and Schunn (2008) found that students at an American university were more likely to implement feedback when they understood the problem being addressed (cognitive engagement) and when the feedback included solutions, a performance summary, and problem location (behavioral engagement). Similarly, Fan and Xu (2020) noted that students actively revised their work, especially in response to form-focused feedback, using strategies like consulting dictionaries or seeking teacher help. However, there was less engagement with content-focused feedback. Han and Hyland (2015) observed varied behavioral engagement among four Chinese EFL learners, with some students actively using feedback strategies, while others ignored certain

corrections. Zhou et al. (2024) found that Chinese EFL learners in their study demonstrated significant behavioral engagement with peer feedback.

### ***3.3.3 Revision operations following peer feedback***

Several studies have explored how peer feedback affects the implementation of solutions in revised writing. He and Gao (2023) found that mid-quality feedback had the highest implementation rates, while low-quality feedback had the lowest. Pham and Nguyen (2014) reported that peer feedback significantly impacted writing revisions, with a high percentage of mistakes corrected. Ruegg (2015) found that 67% of peer feedback led to revisions compared to 84% of teacher feedback in a study of Japanese university students. Dressler et al. (2019) revealed that graduate students in an online course integrated 83% of peer feedback, addressing surface-level issues more than meaning-level ones. Fan and Xu (2020) found students responded to 95% of form-focused feedback, with 77% of revisions being accurate, while only 38% of content-focused feedback was incorporated. Saeli and Cheng (2021) showed that content errors were revised 61% of the time, with word choice addressed frequently, but organization, grammar, and mechanics errors were rarely revised. Yu et al. (2018) also found that Macau students addressed form-focused feedback more than content-focused feedback, with high implementation rates for both types, especially in lexical choice, spelling, and plural forms.

## **3.4 Research gaps**

Previous research has advanced the understanding of students' engagement with peer feedback, but certain gaps remain. One notable gap is the lack of studies in non-tertiary contexts, despite evidence that young learners, specifically those in the later stages of secondary education can provide constructive feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Therefore, the negligence of young learners in research about students' engagement with peer feedback is hindering comprehensive insight into the implementation of peer feedback in such a context. Another gap is geographical. In the Asian context, most research has been done in China. While countries in Asia share certain similarities, the educational policies and state of education differ which limits the generalizability of findings in one country to the population of students in another. The researcher identified a lack of studies that have been conducted in Vietnam, which severely limits the valid data that educators and policy makers in Vietnam can rely on to make decisions about lesson planning and curriculum development. To address these gaps, the current study analyzes Vietnamese high school students' peer feedback, focusing on the aspects of writing they prioritize and their engagement with feedback during revisions. This fills both the upper secondary educational context and geographical research gaps by investigating high school students in Vietnam.

## **3.5 Theoretical framework**

The researcher identified and adopted theoretical frameworks to design the data collection tool in response to the two research questions. For the first research question about the aspects that EFL students prioritize when generating feedback, the researcher used Fan and Xu's (2020) framework which describes the foci and types of feedback (as described in Section 2.2) for two main reasons. Firstly, it is based on Ferris's (2006) framework which is reputable and has been used in numerous studies. However, it differs from Ferris's framework by extending the feedback focus to the domains of content and evaluation. Furthermore, this framework covers all the aspects mentioned in other frameworks in a clearly defined manner.

For the second research question about the ways in which EFL students engage behaviorally with peer feedback in their revisions, the researcher integrated two frameworks. First, the researcher relied on the behavioral component of Han and Hyland's (2015) multi-dimensional engagement framework to investigate the revision operations of the students. This framework has been used in other recent studies, such as Fan and Xu (2020) and Cheng and Zhang (2024). It clearly describes the subcomponents for behavioral engagement which can be used to develop measurement instruments. Furthermore, it is more detailed than other engagement frameworks (Ellis, 2010; Zhang & Hyland, 2018) in terms of the descriptions of indicators for measurement. Additionally, the researcher used Fan and Xu's (2020) feedback focus and type framework to examine students' attended feedback

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Context and participants**

This research was conducted at an English tutoring class located in Central Viet Nam. The sample comprised an English tutoring class with 12 students who are EFL 11th-grade students from a high-quality high school. These students were selected as part of the sample using non-probability purposive sampling. According to Berndt (2020), this sampling method involves the researcher's judgement for selecting participants who are appropriate for a specific study. At the time of data collection, the students had finished lessons according to the English curriculum as prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam for lower secondary students. At this point, they had also received instruction on writing paragraphs in English.

### **4.2 Research design**

The study employed qualitative methods to collect data over an 8-week period. The qualitative data in this study was collected through two instruments: peer feedback conferences and students' writing drafts.

### **4.3 Data collection tools**

Data for the study was collected through peer feedback sessions and students' writing drafts. Peer feedback sessions, recorded on students' mobile devices, were held after the completion of first drafts. The feedback, guided by a teacher-provided feedback form and training session, took place in separate rooms to minimize distractions, with each session lasting around 15 minutes. Both verbal and written feedback were provided, with the focus on verbal feedback uploaded to a Google Drive folder for analysis. The researcher also collected and analyzed students' first and revised drafts to assess their behavioral engagement with the feedback and identify which aspects of their writing were revised. After a two-week training period, students participated in in-class writing sessions, producing 120 to 150-word paragraphs on predetermined topics, and submitting both drafts to their teacher for further analysis.

### **4.4 Data collection procedure**

This study involved two main stages: the training stage (two weeks) and the data-gathering stage (six weeks). During the training stage, students learned how to write complete paragraphs and emails in English and were trained to engage in peer feedback sessions. In the first week, they were introduced to a peer feedback form, taught how to use editing symbols for

error correction, and shown how to record feedback on their phones and upload the recordings to Google Drive. Students were paired and trained with sample paragraphs. A pilot test, involving two non-participants, was conducted in the second week to identify any inefficiencies in the process.

The six-week data-gathering stage began after training. Each week, students wrote a paragraph on a topic from the textbook “Tieng Anh 10 Global Success,” ensuring familiarity with the material. For the last two weeks, they wrote emails instead of paragraphs, aligning with the grade 10 curriculum. Each session included 20 minutes to write a first draft, 30 minutes for peer feedback conferences (15 minutes per student), and 20 minutes to revise their work. This process was repeated weekly throughout the data collection period.

**4.5 Data analysis**

Before analyzing the recordings, the researcher had to transcribe and translate the Vietnamese audio files. After translation, the transcripts were uploaded to QDA Miner, where the researcher qualitatively analyzed the contents by assigning codes to relevant information. These codes related to the focus of the feedback generated by the students and were determined by the feedback framework of Fan and Xu (2020). The codes are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Coding categories for peer feedback focus

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Description</b>  |
|-------------|---|
| FFD         | Form-Focused – Direct: Indicated mechanical, lexical, or grammatical errors by giving the correct form                  |
| FFI         | Form-Focused – Indirect: Indicated mechanical, lexical, or grammatical errors by only indicated that the error was made |
| CF          | Content-Focused: Indicated cohesion or coherence error  |
| EV          | Evaluative: Gave positive affirmation or constructive criticism   |

The writing texts were analyzed to discover the participants’ behavioral engagement with the feedback (RQ2). This analysis involved reading through the drafts several times and coding relevant content. The coding scheme was based on the theoretical framework and is described in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Behavioral engagement analysis coding scheme

| <b>Code</b>  | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Behavioral engagement in revisions (Han &amp; Hyland, 2015)</b> |  |
| BE-CR  | Behavioral Engagement – Correct revision                       |
| BE-IR  | Behavioral Engagement – Incorrect revision                     |
| BE-D   | Behavioral Engagement – Deletion                               |
| BE-S   | Behavioral Engagement – Substitution                           |
| BE-NR  | Behavioral Engagement – No revision                            |
| <b>Aspects of writing (Fan &amp; Xu, 2020)</b>                     |  |
| WA-F   | Writing Aspect – Form: Includes mechanics, vocabulary, grammar |
| WA-C   | Writing Aspect – Content: Includes cohesion and coherence      |

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Feedback focus

#### 5.1.1 Overview of all feedback given

Table 4 shows the number of times the students provided specific types of feedback during the six-week period.

**Table 4.** Overall feedback frequency

| Feedback focus          | Frequency | Percentage of all feedback given |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| Form-focused (direct)   | 147       | 22%                              |
| Form-focused (indirect) | 116       | 17%                              |
| Content-focused         | 65        | 10%                              |
| Evaluative              | 352       | 52%                              |

According to Table 4, the majority of feedback provided by the students was evaluative, making up 52% of all feedback given, with 352 instances of feedback. This was followed by form-focused feedback, which made up 39% of all feedback given. In this group, direct feedback was given 147 times whereas indirect feedback was given 116 times. Lastly, content-focused feedback was given 65 times, making up 10% of all provided feedback.

#### 5.1.2 Form-focused feedback

The students gave a variety of feedback focused on form which totaled 263 instances. Among these feedback instances, comments were made about mechanics, vocabulary, and grammar. Table 5 provides excerpts of students' feedback of form-focused features related to mechanics.

**Table 5.** Sample comments of form-focused feedback related to mechanics

| Feedback on features related to mechanics   |
|---|
| <b>General punctuation</b>  |
| <i>"you need to pay attention to punctuation" (Student 3, Week 1)    "There are punctuation errors" (Student 9, Week 3)    "the punctuation is still misplaced, making the reading somewhat illogical and inconsistent" (Student 2, Week 4)</i> |
| <b>Use of periods</b>   |
| <i>"three sections lack periods to separate the arguments, evidence, and examples" (Student 3, Week 2)</i>  |
| <b>Use of semicolons</b>  |
| <i>"there are mistakes with semicolons" (Student 9, Week 3)</i>   |

According to Table 5, some of the students remarked on errors related to general punctuation, the use of periods, and the use of semicolons.

Apart from mechanics, various comments were given about lexical errors. These involved issues with the context in which certain words were used.

*"some words are not used correctly in context" (Student 7, Week 2)*

*"you should pay more attention to the use of verbs and adjectives and be a bit more careful with them" (Student 6, Week 4)*

*"using 'disappointing' instead of 'disappointed' for the movie description" (Student 6, Week 6)*

The students also gave feedback about the grammatical accuracy of their peers' works. Table 6 provides excerpts of students' feedback of form-focused features related to grammar.



**Table 6.** Sample comments of form-focused feedback related to grammar

|   |
|---|
| <b>Feedback on features related to grammar</b>  |
| <b>Incorrect verb tenses</b>  |
| <i>“verb tenses are not consistently used throughout the paragraph, as they switch between past and present” (Student 3, Week 1)    “One suggestion for improvement is to add ‘_ing’ to verbs used as subjects for better grammatical accuracy” (Student 5, Week 2)</i> |
| <b>Sentence structure</b>   |
| <i>“Sentence structure needs improvement in some places” (Student 3, Week 2)    “the opening sentence only has a subject and is not a complete sentence, and similar issues are present in other sentences” (Student 11, Week 3)</i>                                    |
| <b>Subject-verb agreement</b>   |
| <i>“subject-verb agreement is off, such as with ‘it’ and ‘reduce’ (which should be ‘reduces’)” (Student 3, Week 2)</i>  |
| <i>“need to fix the passive voice in the writing to make it complete” (Student 10, Week 2)    “there are errors in active and passive voice usage” (Student 2, Week 5)</i>  |
| <b>Superlative adjectives</b>   |
| <i>“there are still grammar mistakes, such as missing ‘the’ in superlative comparisons” (Student 7, Week 6)</i>   |

As seen in Table 6, comments were made on incorrect verb tenses, sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, the use of active and passive voice, and superlative adjectives.

### 5.1.3 Content-focused feedback

Content-focused feedback was given least frequently by the students with 65 instances across the six weeks. The comments provided by the students generally related to the cohesion, coherence, and arguments in their peers’ written works. Table 7 provides excerpts of students’ feedback of content-focused features related to cohesion.

**Table 7.** Sample comments of content-focused feedback related to cohesion

|   |
|---|
| <b>Feedback on features related to cohesion</b>   |
| <b>Lengthy sentences</b>  |
| <i>“quite lengthy, and the sentences don’t connect smoothly with each other” (Student 2, Week 1)</i>  |
| <b>Cohesive devices</b>   |
| <i>“There are no clear main points like ‘Firstly’ or ‘Secondly’” (Student 9, Week 1)    “there are few linking phrases to transition between ideas” (Student 11, Week 1)</i>  |
| <b>Ideas</b>  |
| <i>“for the conclusion, consider adding one or two more sentences to more effectively reinforce the main idea of the paragraph” (Student 12, Week 1)    “you don’t have a topic sentence. You only list ways to protect the environment without stating the main topic of the paragraph” (Student 12, Week 2)    “concluding sentence lacks a summary to reinforce the topic sentence” (Student 12, Week 3)    “missing conclusion” (Student 11, Week 5)    “paragraph lacks a second idea” (Student 9, Week 6)</i> |

In terms of cohesion, the students remarked on lengthy sentences, a lack of cohesive devices, and ideas. Table 8 provides excerpts of students’ feedback of content-focused features related to coherence.

**Table 8.** Sample comments of content-focused feedback related to coherence

|  |
|--|
| <b>Feedback on features related to coherence</b>   |
| <b>Idea placement</b>  |
| <i>“consider placing the ideas about ‘raising awareness’ towards the end of the paragraph for better flow” (Student 6, Week 2)</i> |
| <b>Lack of conclusion</b>  |
| <i>“lack of coherence, as well as a missing conclusion” (Student 11, Week 5)</i>   |

|   |
|---|
| <b>Use of supporting sentences</b>  |
| <i>"Your supporting sentences are missing; instead, you list various family activities without clearly developing them" (Student 9, Week 1)</i> |

With regard to coherence, some participants commented on the placement of specific ideas, the lack of a conclusion, and the use of supporting sentences.

Table 9 provides excerpts of students' feedback of content-focused features related to arguments.

**Table 9.** Sample comments of content-focused feedback related to arguments

|   |
|---|
| <b>Feedback on features related to arguments</b>  |
| <b>Further develop ideas</b>  |
| <i>"lacks sufficient points to fully develop the main idea" (Student 8, Week 1)    "you lack arguments and examples" (Student 9, Week 1)    "paragraph lacks sufficient arguments to fully develop the main idea" (Student 8, Week 2)</i> |
| <b>Argument clarity</b>   |
| <i>"Pay attention to making your arguments clearer" (Student 3, Week 2)    "need to add more explanation to clarify examples instead of shortening them" (Student 9, Week 3)</i>  |

As seen in Table 9, the students also gave feedback on the arguments of the writing, mentioning the need to further develop ideas and provide examples, as well as commenting on the clarity of the arguments.

#### 5.1.4 Evaluative feedback

Evaluative feedback comprised the majority of comments made by the students. They gave positive feedback on a wide range of features related to form and content in their peers' written works. In terms of form, the students gave positive comments on mechanics, vocabulary, and grammar. Table 10 provides excerpts of students' evaluative feedback on form.

**Table 10.** Sample comments of evaluative feedback on form

|  |
|--|
| <b>Features related to form</b>  |
| <b>Mechanics</b>   |
| <i>"Your punctuation is used correctly" (Student 1, Week 1)    "Most of the punctuation is correct" (Student 8, Week 3)    "You use punctuation correctly" (Student 8, Week 4)</i>                 |
| <b>Vocabulary</b>  |
| <i>"The vocabulary is appropriate and varied, and the meaning is conveyed accurately" (Student 3, Week 1)    "Your work has...rich choice of words" (Student 1, Week 5)</i>                        |
| <b>Grammar</b>   |
| <i>"subject and verb agree in number and person" (Student 4, Week 1)    "There are no grammatical errors in these sections" (Student 12, Week 3)    "tenses are accurate" (Student 10, Week 4)</i> |

On the topic of mechanics, praise was given for the correct use of punctuation. Furthermore, some students commented on the effective use of vocabulary in terms of vocabulary richness, and appropriacy. Moreover, positive feedback was delivered regarding the use of correct grammar, specifically in terms of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence construction.

Apart from praising the use of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary in their peers' writing, some students gave positive comments on the content. These comments can be divided based on coherence, cohesion, and arguments. Table 11 provides excerpts of students' evaluative feedback on content.

**Table 11. Sample comments of evaluative feedback on content**

|   |
|---|
| <b>Features related to content</b>  |
| <b>Coherence</b>  |
| <i>“The arguments, evidence, and examples are presented in a very logical order and align with the main idea of the prompt” (Student 4, Week 1)    “your topic sentence and introduction to the topic are very good” (Student 4, Week 4)</i>  |
| <b>Cohesion</b>   |
| <i>“I see that your topic sentence is clear and conveys the idea of the paragraph” (Student 1, Week 1)    “Supporting sentences are relevant to the topic, and all the necessary points to develop the main idea are included” (Student 5, Week 2)</i>  |
| <b>Arguments</b>  |
| <i>“you have provided enough examples” (Student 1, Week 1)    “You have clear arguments and evidence that fit the topic” (Student 1, Week 1)    “You include enough points to develop your ideas” (Student 4, Week 3)    “your ideas are very creative and excellent” (Student 6, Week 3)</i> |

As seen in Table 11, some of the students complimented the coherence in their peers’ works, mentioning effective introductions, a logical order, and a complete and adequate structure. Compliments were also given on the cohesion of the works, specifically in terms of the effective use of topic sentences and linking words. Lastly, some students commented on the quality of the arguments presented in their peers’ works, focusing on the provision of sufficient examples, the strength of the arguments, and the creativity of the ideas.

**5.2 Students’ behavioral engagement with peer feedback in their revisions**

**5.2.1 Revision operations**

Table 12 shows the revision operations of students’ behavioral engagement following the feedback they received.

**Table 12. Students’ revision operations**

| <b>Revision operation</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage of all engagement actions</b> |
|---------------------------|------------------|---|
| Correct revision          | 198              | 60%   |
| No revision               | 80               | 24%   |
| Incorrect revision        | 36               | 11%   |
| Deletion                  | 14               | 4%  |

As shown in Table 12, in most instances, the students corrected the errors according to the comments provided by their peers, making up 60% (198 revisions) of all engagement actions. These correct revisions were made for a variety of errors. For example, student 5 used the incorrect tense in week 1.

*My mom washes the dishes, cooks every meals, my dad will dust the furniture... (Week 1, Student 5)*

This student’s partner indicated that they made a tense error, which was successfully corrected in the draft version.

*My mom washes the dishes, cooks every meals; my dad dusts the furniture...*

Another example can be seen from student 3’s writing in week 2. This student misspelled the word *instead*.

*Insted of plastic bags we can use paper bags... (Week 2, student 3)*

The student's partner indicated this error, which was corrected in the updated version.

*Instead of plastic bags we can use paper bags...*

In week 3, student 10 made a punctuation mistake which was indirectly indicated by their partner.

*Firstly; blended learning via internet... (Week 3, student 10)*

This mistake was fixed in the student's revised writing by changing the semicolon to a comma.

*Firstly, blended learning via internet...*

In terms of making no revisions, 24% of the students' engagement actions involved no revision of the feedback that they received. This can be seen in student 5's week 5 writing which had the incorrect preposition.

*If you travel in Hue, you must try bun bo Hue... (Week 5, student 5)*

Their partner indirectly indicated the error which remained unrevised in the updated version. Furthermore, student 8 made several grammar mistakes in their writing in week 4.

*An ecotour is a place have many contribute of people about physical and mental.  
(Week 4, student 8)*

Their partner commented that "there are still grammatical errors", however, none of these errors were addressed in the revised writing.

A relatively small proportion of engagement actions, making up 11%, was associated with incorrect revisions. In week 1, student 3 incorrectly spelled the word *unfortunately*, as well as used the incorrect version of the word.

*In short, unfortenly, I have a family, I feel happy... (Week 1, student 3)*

In response to this, their partner directly indicated that the word should be written as *fortunately*. While student 3 attempted to make a correction, the result was still incorrect.

*In short, fortunetely, I have a family, I feel happy...*

Another example can be seen in week 3 when student 1 made a subject-verb agreement error and used an incorrect pronoun.

*Because it help we control and save time (Week 3, Student 1)*

Their partner indicated this error by underlining the incorrect words, however, student 1's revision was performed on unrelated words.

*Because it help we control between learning and relaxing...*

Deletion was used the least, making up only 4% of all engagement actions.

### **5.2.2 Attended feedback**

Table 13 shows the attended feedback of the students during the six-week period.

**Table 13.** Overall attended feedback

| <b>Feedback focus</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Form-focused (direct)   | 136              | 93%               |
| Form-focused (indirect) | 72               | 62%               |
| Content-focused         | 40               | 62%               |

The most common type of feedback that was attended to by the students in their revised written works was direct form-focused feedback, with a percentage of 93%, meaning that 93% of all direct form-focused was attended to. Furthermore, more than half of the feedback given on form (indirect) and content were attended to with a percentage of 62% respectively.

**6. Discussion**

**6.1 Main focus of feedback generated by students**

Most of the feedback given by the students was evaluative, with a focus on various features of peers’ writing. For instance, students gave evaluative feedback (primarily in the form of positive affirmations) on punctuation, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, cohesion, and arguments. This demonstrates both an awareness of the effective use of content and form in an essay, as well as the strategic use of positive comments to encourage and/or praise peers. The latter notion is supported by the way in which evaluative feedback was frequently delivered. In several instances, the participants would start their feedback with remarks on several positive features in their peers’ work. After delivering such praise, they would then proceed to criticize certain aspects of their peers’ work. In this way, they were able to assure their peers of the work’s merits and put them at ease before delivering critical information. This suggests a potential sensitivity among the students that might contribute to the effectiveness of peer feedback activities by potentially reducing negative emotions experienced by other participants. Notably, few studies have identified evaluative feedback as the predominant type provided, possibly due to limited emphasis on this particular focus in previous research. This finding may reflect a unique aspect of the current sample which could be worth further investigation.

After evaluative feedback, students commonly gave remarks on form in their peers’ writing. In fact, feedback on form was far more prevalent than feedback on content. This finding is similar to that of Fan and Xu (2020), Pham and Nguyen (2014), and Nguyen (2012). However, it differs from He and Gao (2023), Patchan and Schunn (2015), and Vorobel and Kim (2014). A possible explanation for these differences can be found in the contextual variations of the studies. This study and the studies conducted by Pham and Nguyen (2014) and Nguyen (2012) were conducted in Vietnam. However, the studies of Vorobel and Kim (2014) and Patchan and Schunn (2015) took place in American schools. The differences in the students’ familiarity with English, Vietnam being a non-native English-speaking country and English being spoken natively in America, might be a major factor leading to the contrasting findings. Regarding the form-focused feedback given in this study, the students gave direct feedback more than indirect feedback. A large bulk of direct feedback originated from explicit corrections made in the peers’ initial drafts. These corrections targeted various linguistic features, such as word choice, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation. Besides, the form-focused feedback in general addressed numerous aspects of writing, including vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

Content-focused feedback comprised the minority of feedback generated by the students. In spite of this, the students' comments on their peers' content addressed various aspects, such as transitions, supporting sentences, topic sentences, and concluding sentences. The students were generally accurate in identifying missing sections, such as the introduction or conclusion. Similarly, they generally paid careful attention to the existence of transition words, like 'firstly' and 'secondly'. Overall, the students commented on a wide range of aspects, guided by the peer feedback form, with the goal of helping their peers to improve their writing quality.

It should be noted that the students were trained by their teacher to give feedback and were given a peer feedback form from which they could evaluate their peers' writing. The analysis revealed that students relied on the peer feedback form in their evaluations. Therefore, the researcher believes that the form had a significant impact on the feedback that the students gave. This relates to the concept of teacher guidance in the peer feedback process. It is likely that students would have given feedback on fewer errors if they had not been provided with a peer feedback form. Hence, teacher guidance is an essential part of peer feedback practice, especially when students are unfamiliar with the process.

## **6.2 EFL students' behavioral engagement with peer feedback in their revisions**

The students' revised drafts showed that they generally corrected the indicated errors. This finding is similar to that of Fan and Xu (2020) who found that the participants actively revised their writing. This trend could be linked to the fact that most of the form-focused feedback was direct, which made it convenient for them to apply corrections. However, a fair proportion of comments were not addressed at all, leading to no changes in specific writing parts. These tended to be indirect form-focused and content-focused comments, suggesting that the students were uncertain about how to fix their errors. Yet, there were a few instances of incorrect changes or deleted texts. Similarly, the students did not attempt substitutions. Therefore, it can be seen that the students generally attempted to correct their errors but decided to ignore errors that they were uncertain about.

The students' revised drafts revealed their implementation of the feedback they received. Expectedly, the vast majority of direct form-focused feedback was attended to, similar to the studies of Dressler et al. (2019), Fan and Xu (2020), and Yu et al. (2018). This was expected due to the ease of applying direct feedback. Furthermore, more than half of the indirect form-focused and content-focused feedback was attended to. This relatively lower uptake rate, especially related to content-focused feedback, was also observed in Fan and Xu (2021), Ruegg (2015), and Saeli and Cheng's (2021) studies. Indirect feedback and content-focused feedback is generally more difficult to attend to than direct feedback due to the initiative required by the student. The lack of revision strategies, uncertainty about the indicated errors, and disagreements about the existence of errors likely contributed to the lack of uptake. Overall, the participants demonstrated a clear preference for attending to direct form-focused feedback while still attending to a moderate quantity of indirect form-focused and content-focused feedback.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate the engagement of EFL students with peer feedback during their writing revision process. By analyzing students' initial and revised drafts, as well as peer feedback conference recordings, the researcher addressed two research questions. For the

first question, data revealed that evaluative feedback was the most frequently given, often preceding criticism, and covered punctuation, vocabulary, grammar, coherence, cohesion, and arguments. Students frequently provided form-focused feedback on linguistic features like vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics, with direct feedback given more often than indirect, while content-focused feedback was the least frequent. However, content feedback did address transitions, supporting sentences, topic sentences, and conclusions. For the second question, behavioral engagement analysis showed that students generally corrected errors, though some feedback—particularly indirect form-focused and content-focused—was left unaddressed. The analysis of drafts revealed that most direct form-focused feedback was implemented, but there was lower uptake for indirect form-focused and content-focused feedback.

The following pedagogical suggestions are made by the researcher for teachers facilitating peer feedback activities. Firstly, teachers should provide students with a peer feedback form and train them to give effective feedback, as demonstrated in the study, where students successfully commented on a range of linguistic elements. Secondly, teachers should teach writing revision strategies, as the study found students primarily relied on asking for help or using a dictionary. Educating students on more advanced revision techniques will help them handle complex feedback. Lastly, teachers should encourage students to openly discuss and resolve disputes during peer feedback, as some students expressed negative emotions when disagreeing with their peers' feedback.

The researcher identified two key limitations in this study. First, the sample size was restricted to 12 students due to the resource- and time-intensive nature of the research method, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, the controlled environment, where students were informed about the procedures in advance, may have influenced their behavior compared to a typical classroom setting. To overcome these limitations, the researcher recommends future studies include larger sample sizes from diverse educational settings or conduct a meta-analysis to identify trends across contexts. Additionally, research could be conducted in a natural classroom setting to observe more authentic student behavior during feedback and revision processes.

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# SỰ THAM GIA CỦA HỌC SINH VÀO HOẠT ĐỘNG PHẢN HỒI ĐỒNG CẤP TRONG KỸ NĂNG VIẾT TIẾNG ANH: NGHIÊN CỨU TÌNH HUỐNG TẠI MỘT LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH CHO HỌC SINH TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện với mục đích tìm hiểu cách người học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ tương tác với phản hồi đồng cấp trong quá trình chỉnh sửa bài viết của họ. Với mục tiêu này, nhà nghiên cứu đã xác định hai câu hỏi nghiên cứu: 1) Người học tập trung phản hồi về phương diện nào trong bài viết của bạn học?; 2) Người học tương tác với các phản hồi đồng cấp như thế nào khi chỉnh sửa bài viết của họ? Nghiên cứu định tính này được tiến hành với sự tham gia của 12 học sinh lớp 11 tại một trường trung học phổ thông tại Huế, kéo dài trong 8 tuần. Có hai công cụ thu thập dữ liệu: Công cụ đầu tiên gồm 72 bản thu âm của các buổi người học đưa ra nhận xét đồng cấp trong bài viết của bạn mình, và công cụ thứ hai là 144 văn bản viết (72 bản thảo gốc và 72 bản thảo sau chỉnh sửa). Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy phản hồi đánh giá là loại phản hồi được học sinh tạo ra nhiều nhất, tiếp theo là phản hồi tập trung vào việc chính xác trong sử dụng ngôn ngữ. Phản hồi tập trung vào nội dung được đưa ra ít nhất. Về việc sử dụng phản hồi để chỉnh sửa bài viết, nhìn chung, người học thường sửa lỗi theo đề xuất của bạn học, mặc dù có một số trường hợp phản hồi nhận được bị bỏ qua. Thêm vào đó, học sinh thường chỉnh sửa các lỗi được bạn học đưa ra cách sửa lỗi trực tiếp liên quan đến sử dụng ngôn ngữ hơn là các phản hồi sửa lỗi ngôn ngữ gián tiếp và các nhận xét về nội dung.

**Từ khóa:** Phản hồi đồng cấp; sự tương tác; trọng tâm phản hồi; người học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ