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Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Written Feedback on EFL Writing in a Vietnamese Tertiary Context

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Abstract

Teacher written feedback (TWF) has received growing attention from researchers and teachers. Although TWF arguably targets multiple dimensions of students' writing, research to date has largely focused on the relationship between written corrective feedback and language development. More research is needed to understand TWF more holistically and as a two-way social process (Storch, 2018). As such, it is important to understand students' perspectives on TWF in different instructional contexts. The present study explores Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of TWF practices and their preferences for TWF. Data was collected from 97 English-major students in a Vietnamese tertiary setting by means of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The findings show that while TWF tended to weigh more on the linguistic end of the form-meaning continuum, students preferred TWF to target both form and global issues of content/idea development and writing style. However, students were divided in their preferences for comprehensive/selective feedback and for direct/indirect feedback. Although students were aware of the necessity of revising their writing upon reception of feedback, they reported different post-feedback actions. Above all, students' preferences and expectations were underpinned by their own beliefs about the values of TWF that encompass both cognitive/non-cognitive and affective dimensions. The study offers important pedagogical implications for planning written feedback in writing instruction.

Keywords: teacher written feedback (TWF), Vietnamese EFL students, perceptions, preferences

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1. Introduction

Teacher written feedback (henceforth TWF) enquiry tends to focus on teachers' practices with ample research into different feedback provision strategies and the efficacy of different types of feedback (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Esmaeeli & Sadeghi, 2020; Kim & Bowles, 2020; Lim & Renandya, 2020). Lee (2014) proposed that feedback provision should be more comprehensively viewed as a two-way activity where "feedback is 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). Simply put, "feedback is a social act" (Lee, 2008, p. 146). Therefore, research on TWF should take into account both sides of the coin, one being teachers' stances and feedback practices and the other being students' perceptions and use of the feedback they receive.

Ferris (2011) further emphasized that the expectations and preferences of student writers should not be taken lightly if the aim is to assist students to make use of TWF. Many scholars argue that a needs-driven approach to feedback that responds to the needs of the learners in different contexts is urgent (e.g., Chong, 2020; Storch, 2018). While it takes serious research efforts to inform such a needs-based approach, understanding students' perceptions and preferences for TWF is one necessary step that provides insights towards shaping such an approach. To this end, the present research aims to explore Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback practice in a tertiary context in Vietnam.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Written Feedback (TWF)

TWF refers to the feedback teachers provide on students' writing and it is an integral part of writing courses (Ferris, 2014). TWF can be broadly divided into (a) written corrective feedback (i.e., form-focused feedback targeting grammatical, word choice, spelling, and punctuation errors) and (b) feedback on higher order skills of writing, including content, organisation (cohesion and coherence), and style. This coverage of written feedback is referred to as the scope of TWF in the present study.

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2.1.1. Written corrective feedback (WCF) and its benefits

WCF refers to feedback that deals with linguistic aspects of the writing (e.g., Lee, 2020; Storch, 2018) and it is believed to improve the accuracy of language use in writing (e.g., Abalkheel & Brandenburg, 2020; Ene & Kosobucki, 2016). Depending on writing teachers' strategies of corrective feedback provision, WCF can be divided into different types based on (a) the focus of the feedback and (b) its level of explicitness.

2.1.1.1. Feedback focus

There are two categories of feedback based on its focus: comprehensive/ unfocused feedback and selective/focused feedback (Lee, 2020). The former refers to feedback that addresses all errors while the latter targets just a selected number of errors which is usually related to specific language forms. The question of whether focused or unfocused feedback is beneficial to language development has been sought with mixed answers. Some studies (e.g., Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Rahimi, 2019) have provided empirical evidence for the value of focused feedback over unfocused feedback for targeted grammatical forms. The advantage of focused feedback lies in its ability to help learners more easily recognize the gaps between their output and the target forms (Ellis, 2009), as it allows learners to attend to specific linguistic features that are most relevant to their developmental stage. While comprehensive feedback has been criticised for "overloading students' attentional capacity" (Rahimi, 2019, p. 690), some research (e.g., Frear & Chiu, 2015; Kassim & Ng, 2014) found no distinctive effects of the two types of feedback on accuracy gains in writing.

2.1.1.2. Feedback explicitness

Feedback explicitness refers to how explicit WCF is. Following this definition, WCF falls into two types: direct and indirect feedback. Direct feedback involves pointing out the error and providing the correct form; indirect feedback means indicating the committed error without providing a target-like form to use alternatively (see Lee, 2020). A distinction is further made between indirect feedback with codes or no codes. Coded or labelled feedback indicates instances in which the type of error such as *spelling* or *punctuation* is clearly pointed out in specific codes (e.g., *SP* for spelling or *PU* for punctuation) whereas uncoded feedback refers to the situations in which the teacher circles or underlines an error,

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but leaves it to the student to correct it (Ferris, 2011).

Research results have been inconclusive as to which form of feedback is more effective. While some studies have found an advantage of direct feedback in promoting learners' accuracy (e.g., Benson & DeKeyser, 2019; Kim & Bowles, 2020; Lim & Renandya, 2020), contradicting findings were reported in Eslami's (2014) study of low-intermediate Iranian EFL learners with the indirect WCF group experiencing more sustained improvement in simple past tense usage compared to the direct WCF group. A plausible explanation for different research findings about the effectiveness of direct/indirect feedback was proficiency. Kang and Han (2015) suggested that direct feedback might be more useful for lower proficiency learners. Esmaeeli and Sadeghi (2020) also found that indirect feedback led to greater accuracy for upper-intermediate students than their pre-intermediate counterparts.

2.1.2. Feedback on higher order skills of writing

Feedback on higher order skills of writing indicates TWF on dimensions of students' writing other than linguistic errors such as content, organisation, and writing style. Writing is a complex process of meaning-making which is not only subject to the writer's linguistic resources but also governed by his or her intentions (Frear & Bitchener, 2015) and bounded by the requirements of a given writing task. Content or the focus of ideas and how ideas are organised in a piece of writing is commonly seen as an equally important component in writing marking criteria. Depending on the genres and purposes pertinent to specific writing tasks, the amount of attention to different aspects of the writing skills may vary, and the scope and focus of teacher feedback vary accordingly. In practice, teachers have been found to focus more on local issues, though they believed in the importance of feedback on the global dimensions of content and ideas (e.g., Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sakrak-Ekin & Balçikanli, 2019; Wiboolyasarin, 2021). This incongruence points to the need to ask the additional question of what students' perceptions of TWF are, and how they respond to TWF – the focus of the present study.

2.2. Students' Perceptions and Revisions Following TWF

2.2.1. Students' perceptions of TWF and their preferences for TWF practice

In the backdrop of contemporary TWF research which has tended to largely focus

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on the efficacy of WCF, students' perceptions of TWF have received attention in different ESL and EFL contexts. Leki (1991) surveyed 100 ESL students in a university in the USA found that the students expected teachers to correct all errors in their writing. The adult ESL students in Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) study also believed in the usefulness of comprehensive WCF, thus desiring a large quantity of feedback from teachers on every error committed.

TWF research in EFL contexts has also shown some mixed results. Students' preferences were recorded for comprehensive and direct feedback with repair solutions (Diab, 2005; Jodaie, Farrokhi & Zoghi, 2011; Saeli, 2019). Trabelsi's (2019) research through focus group interviews with 75 EFL learners (Omani, Sudanese, and Egyptian), however, shows that students preferred unfocused yet indirect feedback for its value in helping them avoid repeating mistakes in later compositions.

A few studies have explored student perceptions TWF from a broader perspective and they have also shown inconsistent findings. For example, Chen, Nassaji, and Liu (2016) focused on Chinese EFL students in Mainland China and found that students prioritized feedback on content and organisation over grammar and accuracy. Yet Elwood and Bode (2014), in their survey with 410 Japanese tertiary EFL students, reported students' preferences for feedback on both content and linguistic errors. In contrast, by surveying 50 Vietnamese EFL students majoring in different academic disciplines, Nguyen and Ramnath (2016) found that students preferred feedback on language rather than content of their writing, though they wanted direct comprehensive feedback as in some other studies (e.g., Diab, 2005; Jodaie et al., 2011; Saeli, 2019).

Some other research on students' perceptions has drawn attention to the affective aspect involved in TWF. Mahfoodh and Pandian's (2011) study found that their Yemeni EFL university students wished to be praised on their written drafts as such an appreciation helped them build confidence and write more. These students also showed negative emotional reactions when their papers were filled with red-ink marks. Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) warn that too much correction might be emotionally taxing for students. Mahfoodh's (2017) follow-up study further revealed that 'harsh' written comments caused strong emotional responses such as frustration and dissatisfaction, which affected how students used TWF. The studies here point to the importance of attending to students' emotional responses in TWF practice.

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2.2.2. Students' self-reported revisions in response to TWF

Although revision has been conceptualised differently by different scholars, it generally refers to any changes students make to their writing in response to TWF in terms of content and language use or any other aspects (Mahfoodh, 2017). Some recent research has investigated whether post-feedback revision assists language development and generally shown that revision resulted in greater accuracy in subsequent writing (e.g., Shintani et al., 2014; Ekanayaka & Ellis, 2020). Despite this benefit of revision, Jodaie et al. (2011) found that students reported to rarely revise or ask follow-up questions about their received feedback. South African EFL students in Harran's (2011) study also reported making revisions to a limited extent. Instead, they asked teachers and peers for assistance, consulted dictionaries, and some (10%) reported doing nothing to follow up.

The review of literature has shown mixed results in learner perceptions of TWF in such aspects as the scope of TWF or the focus and explicitness of WCF. This inconclusiveness may be explained by the very different instructional settings where the feedback was given and by the different groups of learners themselves. For this reason, to effectively inform teacher feedback practice, more contextualised studies on learner perceptions of TWF and their responses to TWF in specific instructional contexts are needed (Lee, 2020). Therefore, the present study responds to this call by focusing on Vietnamese EFL students, an underexplored group in TWF research, to investigate their TWF perceptions and preferences. More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of the scope of TWF they received and their expectations about the scope of TWF?
2. What are their perceptions of the focus and explicitness of the WCF they received and their expectations about WCF focus and explicitness?
3. What are their perceived revision practices following teacher feedback provision?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A total of 97 English-majored students at a university in central Vietnam volunteered to complete the questionnaire survey. Among these students were 49 (50.5%) fourth-year students, 36 (36.1%) second-year students, 11 (13.9%) third-

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year students and two (2.1%) first-year students. There were 87 female (89.7%) and 10 male (10.3%) students, showing that female students dominate in English-major courses at this university. The English proficiency levels for third/fourth-, second-, and first-year students were high intermediate/advanced, intermediate, and low intermediate, respectively. These were judged by the passing scores set for the end-of-term writing tests pertinent to the year levels which the participants all had passed at the time of data collection.

Twelve students who had already completed the questionnaire were willing to be interviewed and most of them (11) were fourth-year students and one third-year. As described above, these students were of a high intermediate/advanced level. Two were trained in the field of Linguistics and ten in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

3.2. Data Collection and Instruments

3.2.1. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Leki (1991), Lee (2004), and Diab (2005). It consists of three parts. Part 1 is about participants' background information. Part 2 addresses the question of students' perceptions of TWF practice and is composed of six closed-ended items. Part 3 aims to explore students' preferences for TWF and it has 13 multiple choice items. The questionnaire was in the Vietnamese language to reduce misunderstanding that might occur due to English proficiency.

The questionnaire was created using Google Form, which allowed the participants to complete it online. This format was logistically suitable at the time of data collection due to extended periods of university closure in the Covid-19 pandemic. Prior to official administration, the questionnaire was piloted with six volunteer students.

The students were accessed through the Facebook page of the respective faculty and informed of the purpose of the study. With students' consent, the link of the survey was sent to them via Facebook. The link was active for two weeks before conclusion. It took the participants roughly 5 to 7 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

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3.2.2 Interviews

In this study, a semi-structured interview format was employed to complement the questionnaire results and elicit the personal explanations and beliefs behind students' preferences.

After the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual students via Facebook voice calls and recorded for later data analysis with their prior permission. Notes were also taken to provide supplementary data. Each participant was interviewed in Vietnamese separately at their convenience; each call lasted from approximately 25 to 30 minutes. The use of Vietnamese was to provide comfort and prevent any misunderstanding to enhance the accuracy of student responses.

3.3. Data Analysis

For the questionnaire data, Google Form automatically collected, categorized and provided frequencies and percentages, as well as visual representations (figures).

The interview data were analyzed in an iterative manner. First, the interview responses were transcribed and double-checked for accuracy. To retain the interviewees' intended message (Casanave, 2010), the transcripts were analyzed in the original Vietnamese language for emerging themes. These themes were initially treated as "provisional" (Silverman, 2010) and subsequently confirmed after an iterative process of analysis. Yin (2011) posits that the reader has the right to interpret the interview data, and thus calls for documenting both original and translated excerpts. Due to space constraints, only translated interview quotes are presented and again de-identified as S1, S2, etc. An undergraduate in the field of TEFL reviewed and checked the accuracy of the English quotes used. She had prior experience of doing interview-based research for her graduation thesis paper and her student university-level research project.

4. Findings

The findings are organized with regards to the three research questions which are themed into i) scope of teacher feedback, ii) focus and explicitness of teachers' written corrective feedback, and iii) students' perceived post-feedback actions.

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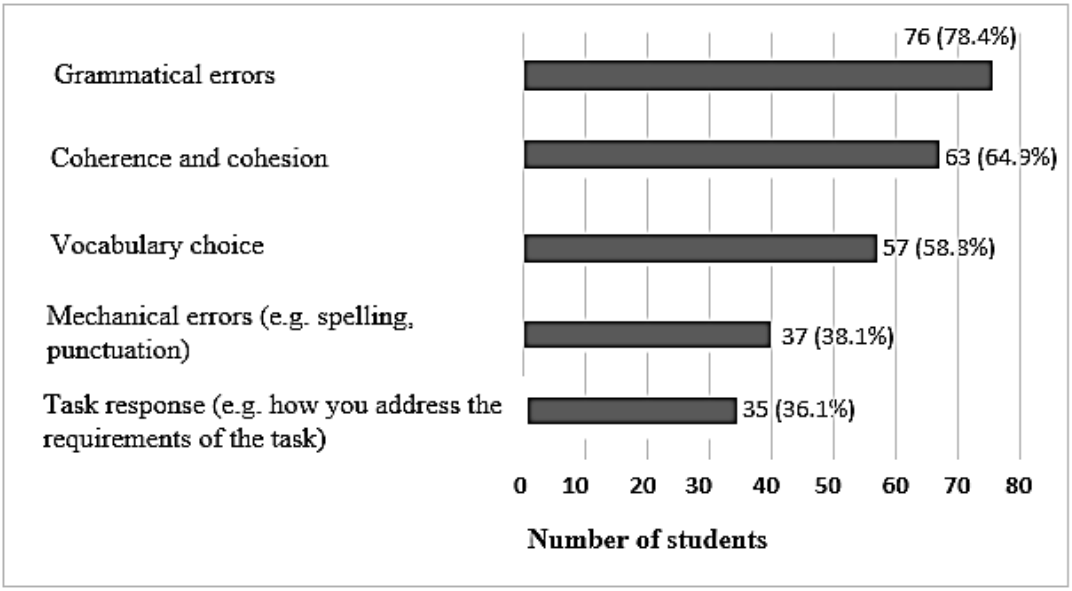
4.1. Scope of TWF

The scope covered by TWF as perceived by the surveyed students is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Students' Perceptions of Scope of TWF



It can be seen that teacher feedback was reported to focus more on grammatical errors (78.4%) than coherence and cohesion (64.9%) and lexical choice (58.8%). Under 40% of the students reported their teachers' feedback to be on mechanical errors (38%) and task response (36%).

When asked in the questionnaire what they attended to most in the feedback from their writing teachers, students responded in different ways (Figure 2). The majority of the students prioritized their attention to feedback in four main dimensions in order of frequencies: i) word choice (66%), ii) ideas and content (62.9%), iii) grammar (58.8%), iv) organization (57.7%), and writing style (48.5%). Spelling (23.7%) and punctuation (8.2%) were less of concern to students. It is interesting that while grammar tops the list of the foci of TWF followed by coherence and vocabulary choice (Figure 1), it comes third after word choice and content in students' perceptions of importance. Although writing style was not a

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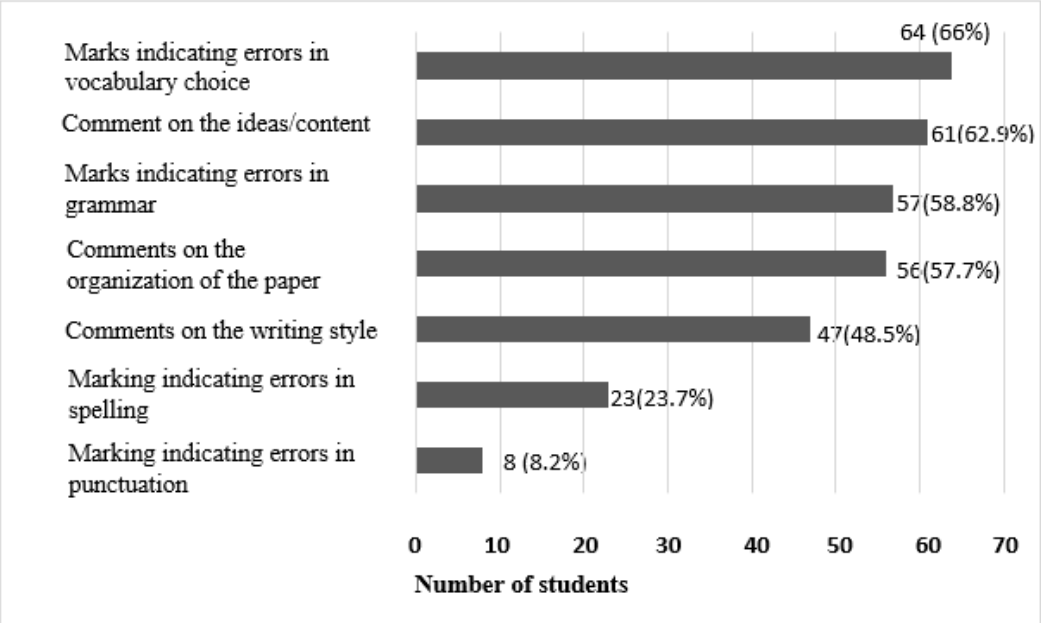
target of teacher feedback in students' perceptions, it was considered important by nearly half of them.

Figure 2
Students' Reported Attention to Different Aspects of TWF



Similar to questionnaire data, eight of the 12 interviewees felt that content and organization were more important than grammar and mechanic issues in their writing while the other four thought that the two major aspects were of equal importance. In students' beliefs, the content and organization of an essay was key to making it compelling. Many students also remarked that as English was their specialisation, they could address the grammar issue independently:

I can always improve my grammar by myself since I am already an English major. (S10)

In fact, many students emphasized the interrelationship between content and language. The following is representative among several similar ideas expressed during the interviews:

Content and organization of a paper are important but its grammar should be at least decent to an extent. I think these two aspects have an interconnected relationship. A person's grammar and vocabulary source must be at a certain high

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level to write good content. (S12)

In line with a focus on content, five students were more concerned about writing as a process rather than as a product delineated through the sole outcome of a paper (i.e., grades). A third-year student continues, *"It's important to teach students about the purpose of writing, how to express their thoughts, develop and deliver ideas, not just about getting good grades"* (S12).

Ideas have become central in students' conceptualisations of writing as a meaning-driven process. The students in the present study appeared "demanding" in regard to feedback that should be grounded in what is entailed in writing. Interestingly, critical thinking was mentioned as an additional focus of desirable teacher feedback, "*Teachers should teach us critical thinking, how to look at a problem instead of just teaching the structure of an essay*" (S9).

In brief, students' expectations about the scope of teacher feedback differ from the feedback features that their teachers targeted. The key mismatch lies in the grammar-content continuum where students' preferences were more towards content, idea development and argumentation.

4.2. Focus and Explicitness of Teacher Feedback

4.2.1. Focus of teacher feedback

Eight out of the 12 interviewees narrated that their writing teachers often used comprehensive marking strategies; four reported TWF to address errors selectively. The questionnaire probed students' preferences for how errors should be addressed and their opinions were divided (Table 1). More than one third of them (35.1%) wanted feedback on all types of errors (i.e., comprehensive feedback). Students also preferred feedback on most or all major errors (32%) and on only some major errors (6.2%). Slightly more than one fifth elected feedback on errors that hinder comprehension. A small percentage (5.2%) believed that feedback on form was not necessary.

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Table 1
Students' Preferences for Focus of Teacher Feedback

If there are many errors in your writing, what do you think your English teacher should do?	**Responses**	
	N	**Percentage**
Teacher should mark all errors.	34	35.1
Teacher should mark only the errors that interfere with communicating your ideas.	21	21.6
Teacher should mark most of the major errors, but not necessarily all of them.	19	19.6
Teacher should mark all major errors but not the minor ones.	12	12.4
Teacher should mark only a few of the major errors.	6	6.2
Teacher should mark no errors and respond only to the ideas and content.	5	5.2
Total	*97*	*100*

In the interviews, students provided different reasons for their preference for comprehensive feedback. One reason was related to teacher feedback as a model for them to imitate in the future when they would become an English teacher:

If one is a student who majors in TEFL, he or she would want their teachers to give thorough feedback so that he or she can imitate how to give feedback to their future students. (S1)

Besides, seven students expressed a need for comprehensive feedback and corrections due to their perceived inability to detect or correct errors without teachers' help:

I hope to get comprehensive marking because sometimes I make mistakes but I'm not aware of that, so if they didn't give corrections on that, I wouldn't know about it or reread it. (S4)

Here comprehensive corrections were considered a checker to both alert and guide students through improvement. Other students' liking for comprehensive feedback strategy resulted from their great concern over accuracy in writing*: "If it is academic writing, then it should be highly accurate so they should correct all"* (S8).

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In these students' beliefs, accuracy was equated with good writing, and in this regard comprehensive feedback was advantageous. At the same time, recommendations for selective feedback were informed by students' awareness of how draining and exhausting feedback giving could be for their teachers: "*Comprehensive error correction is a pretty tough task, almost impractical when correcting for a whole class*" (S5). This is an interesting finding as it shows how metacognitively aware students were of the time- and energy-consuming nature of feedback giving.

Two students suggested that teachers could adopt a selective feedback approach because they believed in the role of self-correction for long-term learning: *If teachers corrected an error every time it appeared, students would become lazy and dependent. As a result, they would not pay attention to or remember their mistakes* (S3).

A preference for selective feedback was expressed by the two interviewed students trained in the field of Linguistics and six students in TEFL, but all from an affective perspective. One student (S10) expressed, *"When I saw red markings all over my paper, I felt so sad because I have put so much effort in my writing".* Students were expecting their invested time and effort to pay off and excessive correction could be disheartening and counterproductive. Clearly, students' beliefs in the potential value of TWF for language development were grounded both cognitively and affectively.

4.2.2. Explicitness of teacher feedback

Figure 3 shows that the most preferred form of feedback was indirect feedback with clues (67%), followed by direct feedback in which teachers both indicate what is incorrect and provide the correct form (58%). Less explicit feedback where teachers only indicate errors received the least interest from 3% of those surveyed.

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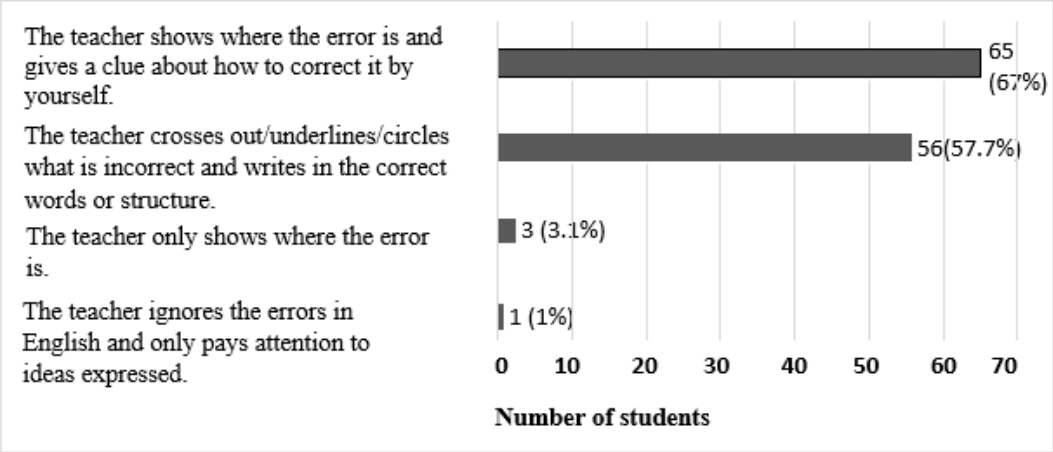
Figure 3
Students' Preferences for Level of Feedback Explicitness



The questionnaire also surveyed the students' perceptions of the use of error correction codes in their writing teachers' WCF. The majority of the students (74%) reported that their teachers did not use correction codes in correcting their paper, and only 26% recorded 'Yes.' However, only about one third of those having received correction codes reported understanding the majority of the codes provided by their teachers (Table 2).

Table 2
Students' Understanding Error Correction Codes

What percentage of your teacher's correction codes (e.g. V, Adj, Voc, Sp, etc.) are you able to follow and understand?	**Responses**	
	N	**Percentage**
76 - 100%	9	36
51 – 75%	12	48
26 – 50%	4	16
0 – 25%	0	0
Total	*25*	*100*

The interview data pinpoints the value of direct feedback in its potential benefits for improvement and learning: *"I like direct correction to know exactly what*

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mistakes I make and draw lessons for future assignments" (S8). Another reason is the *sense of insecurity* experienced by students who admitted having low proficiency and fearing that they would continue committing more errors if they had to correct errors by themselves. Clearly, preferences for explicit feedback sourced from students' belief in their teachers' *authority* as feedback providers.

On the other hand, those who preferred indirect WCF shared that this kind of feedback allowed for better retention and long-term learning as they had to be proactive in searching for ways to fix errors, *"I like indirect feedback because I have to use the brain to correct errors. Letting teachers correct everything won't help me to remember."* (S3)

Another student added that his choice of direct or indirect WCF should depend on the nature of errors, or whether they are difficult to remedy, *"With difficult errors that students can have a hard time figuring out, teachers should correct them directly. But with obvious errors like grammatical errors, teachers shouldn't provide corrected forms."* (S11)

Several students were well aware of the role of learner proficiency in TWF. They believed more explicit feedback should be given to low proficiency learners (e.g., first-year students) and indirect feedback to higher proficiency (senior) students to promote their use of metacognitive strategies in correcting errors and boost their learning autonomy.

Students also raised the issue of how teachers should mark errors. In their preferences, manners of error indication should also be 'friendlier': *"I hope teachers will use a friendlier way of correcting students' written work; for example, using green pens to make it less serious. They should underline errors instead of crossing out"* (S8).

The comment is indicative of students' emotional responses to their teachers' WCF. They narrated that receiving a corrected paper filled with glaring red marks and aggressive crossing was emotionally threatening or even devastating for them. Once again, affect was a central recurrent theme in students' conceptualisations of the *what* and the *how* of WCF efficacy.

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4.2.3. Perceptions about Revisions Following TWF

The questionnaire findings show that a large majority of students (81/97 or 91%) emphasized the necessity of revising their writing upon reception of teachers' feedback. Only a minority of the students (5%) had a neutral position and 4% did not see revising their writing upon feedback reception as necessary. Despite this, students' reported actions following the provision of TWF were quite diverse as seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' Reported Responses to TWF

What helps you most to learn from the errors marked on your paper and helps you avoid making those errors again?	**Responses**	
	N	**Percentage**
Rewriting only the sentence(s) in which an error/ error(s) appeared	28	28.9
Rewriting the whole paper	27	27.8
Just reading through the paper carefully without rewriting anything	27	27.9
Asking teachers questions about the feedback that you receive	14	14.4
Doing nothing because you know you'll probably just forget and make the same errors again no matter what you do	1	1
Total	*97*	*100*

More than half of the students (56%) reported making revisions to their writing after receiving TWF by rewriting either the respective erroneous part or the entire paper. Nearly one third of them (28%) were less receptive as they only read through their paper without doing any follow-up activities. "Laziness" was mentioned as an explanation by seven of the interviewed students , *"I read to learn lessons for the next assignment, but I was lazy to rewrite or correct them"* (S8). Others (14%) chose to follow up with their teachers. Only one student reported doing nothing in response to feedback.

The follow-up interviews revealed that in addition to rewriting activities and consulting teachers, students sought help from the Internet and peers who they believed to be more able. One student said, *"I found more references on the Internet; for example, finding good vocabulary or reading sample essays"* (S2).

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Others took notes of important errors on their phones or notebooks for their own references without any revision. In other words, students reported using various reference sources apart from revision to help them make use of TWF.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to explore Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of their teachers' written feedback practice, their preferences for TWF and their reported follow-up acts upon feedback.

With regards to the scope of feedback, while TWF tended to weigh more on the linguistic end of the form-meaning cline, students' preferences were recorded for both form and global issues of content/idea development and writing style. Yet a focus of feedback on the latter aspects was particularly well desired by the interviewed students. This finding literally contradicts previous work which shows students mainly preferred form-focused feedback (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaj, 2010; Nguyen & Ramnath, 2016). It also stands in stark contrast to a predominance on the linguistic elements in feedback provided by many teachers in other contexts (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019; Sakrak-Ekin & Balçikanli, 2019; Wiboolyasarin, 2021). It is interesting that students' expectations reflected their particular needs tied to their subtle meta-awareness of the meaning-driven nature of the writing process (Frear & Bitchener, 2015) and of the interdependence between ideas and linguistic resources to encode such ideas. More interesting was their 'demands' for feedback on higher order skills such as logical and critical thinking in idea development. That TWF was reported to focus substantially on grammar was perhaps because it is " relatively easier to attend to … than responding to an idea or further development or support of a point" (Leki, 1991, p. 209). This could also be attributed to the fact that the interviewed students were fourth and third-year students who were somehow experienced writers through multiple writing courses in their Bachelor program and trained to become English teachers. The finding suggests different groups of students might wish TWF to cover different areas.

As for the focus and explicitness of WCF, the findings show that students were divided in their preferences for comprehensive/selective feedback and for direct/indirect feedback. These mixed responses are not consistent with findings of previous work (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Black & Nanni, 2016; Diab, 2005;

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Jodaie, et al, 2011; Nguyen & Ramnath, 2016; Saeli, 2019; Trabelsi, 2019) where students expressed more uniform preferences for comprehensive and direct feedback. The different instructional contexts and different learners in these studies could account for such varied results. The participants in the present study were Vietnamese English-majored students, and their perceptions differed from those in Nguyen and Ramnath (2016) cited above who were EFL Vietnamese students majoring in other non-English-majored disciplines. The latter, presumably of lower proficiency compared to their English-majored counterparts, may stress linguistic accuracy over higher order skills of writing through simpler language tasks.

It is important to observe that students' preferences in regard to feedback focus and explicitness differ from what they believed renders comprehensive/selective and direct/indirect feedback beneficial for them. Students in the present research wanted more comprehensive feedback for its greater potential to improve accuracy and its being a role model for their future feedback practice as EFL teachers. The findings show students' beliefs in the value of TWF that rest beyond the benefits for language development, but feedback for feedforward (Lee, 2020).

On the one hand, preferences for indirect feedback were explained to allow for self-correction that increases noticing retention. This is in line with empirical guidance gleaned from many studies which advocate the role of focused/indirect feedback (Ellis, 2009; Eslami, 2014; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Rahimi, 2019). On the other hand, desire for selective feedback by the students in the present study sourced from their concern for the "emotional burdens" (Carless, 2008, p. 229) that comprehensive feedback might cause for their teachers and emotional responses such as demotivation due to excessive corrections. This affective aspect, coupled with the reported students' negative emotional responses to teachers' unfriendly color markings and aggressive crossings of errors echoes some research that unveils the intense emotional feelings sparked by unconstructive feedback practices (Mahfoodh, 2017; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011). The finding is useful, given *affect* being still empirically limited in the backdrop of the predominant discourse on the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of feedback. This alludes to the necessity to recognise the important role of affect in students' cognitive development, as well-versed by Swain (2013), "The relationship between cognition and emotion is, minimally, interdependent; maximally, they are inseparable/integrated" (p. 196).

The finding that many students made references to the issue of language proficiency in teacher feedback giving is worth some discussion. Their belief in the

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role of explicit feedback for lower proficiency students could be legitimate, given that explicit WCF is less cognitively taxing for students (Ellis, 2009; Rahimi, 2019). Some research (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Esmaeeli & Sadeghi, 2020) shows a mediating role of learner proficiency in the efficacy of WCF. The fact that many students reported relying on their teachers as *authority* for what to improve in their writing because of their lower proficiency and inability to identify and correct errors might well indicate the need to accommodate TWF to students' needs (Chong, 2020).

The findings of the present research also reveal a limited extent of revision in response to TWF. While this finding corroborates Jodaie et al.'s (2011) study where students rarely revised their writing upon receiving TWF, it does not seem to align with Shintani et al.'s (2014) research that shows the benefits of revision to enhance the effectiveness of TWF. However, consistent with Harran's (2011) findings, students in the present study reported acting upon feedback in many non-revision manners (noting errors for themselves, seeking teacher/peer support and online sources). In addition to laziness as a common reason for non-revision, the decision on how to proceed with TWF may depend on the needs of individual students, the requirements of the writing tasks in play, and understandably the nature of the errors or writing issues in students' written texts.

What can be drawn from the discussion above is that both cognitive/non-cognitive and affective dimensions operate in students' beliefs and expectations about TWF, and their responses were quite mixed and less uniform than featured in existing literature. This shows the complexity inherent in feedback giving, as warned by some scholars (Chong, 2020; Storch, 2018) and further reiterates the need to view feedback as social in nature (Lee, 2008, 2014). The findings need to be interpreted with care, given that students in the present study were English majors and all interviewed participants were third or fourth-year students who were already at a higher level of English proficiency and who were more mature and experienced writers than other groups of EFL learners.

6. Implications and Conclusion

The study has some important pedagogical implications for planning TWF in writing instruction.

Firstly, the finding that students desired TWF to focus on both linguistic and

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content-related aspects of writing, especially more feedback on global content and idea development, needs pedagogical attention. This suggests teachers to reflect on and re-evaluate their feedback practice that shouldn't be too often shaped around grammar. The abstract nature of content and idea formation and expressions could be demanding for teachers to address (Leki, 1991), so feedback-training to familiarise teachers with feedback giving on macro levels of content and discourse organisation would be useful. A warning is noted that the covered scope of TWF could trigger biased perceptions among students of what is most valued in writing (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). For example, if TWF always targets linguistic forms, students might well equate good writing only with great accuracy, which could be misleading. A greater balance between form-focused and content-oriented feedback would therefore be useful.

The emotional responses of the students to TWF in the present study suggests that affect should not be underrated in TWF practice. Essentially TWF practices need to go beyond the cognitive dimension to accommodate students more socio-affectively. In the current research, though suggestive, affect emerged as an important factor in the students' beliefs about the effectiveness of TWF. Teachers might need to reconsider their TWF practice, since excessive correction and comprehensive WCF while draining for teachers, could be distressing for students (also see Mahfoodh, 2017; Mahfoodh & Pandian, 2011). Understanding students' needs is essential given the inconclusive results about the effectiveness of comprehensive/selective feedback as well as indirect/direct feedback (e.g., Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Frear & Chiu, 2015; Kassim & Ng, 2014; Lim & Renandya, 2020; Rahimi, 2019). This suggests teachers to provide feedback not just in what went wrong but also what students did well. In this regard, praise could be a useful pedagogical tool since it may "help reinforce appropriate language behaviours and foster students' self-esteem" (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 186).

Revision being not a common response to feedback provision as reported by the students in the present study suggests teachers might wish to adopt a feedback pedagogy that incorporates a revision component to improve the accuracy of students' writing or hone their self-editing skills in subsequent writing (Shintani et al., 2014). Lee (2014, p. 208) contends that students should "engage with, act on and reflect on" feedback to improve their writing. Revision could be one way of engaging students with TWF. That students did not often revise their writing in response to teacher WCF in the present study might suggest that teachers need to

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communicate their expectations of revision to students and training that familiarizes students to revise would be useful. Having said that, the different other non-revision acts upon feedback such as note-taking of errors and consulting external resources should not be downplayed. They show students' autonomy and resilience that should be encouraged in learning.

The issue of language proficiency was brought up by the students in the present study, suggesting TWF might need to provide differentiated feedback for students of different proficiency levels. This might be challenging for teachers in crowded classes, but it suggests care to be given in feedback delivery. Although students' needs and preferences "should not be idealised" (Amrhein & Nassaj, 2010, p. 117), they need to be understood properly and responded to appropriately (Lee, 2020). One way forward could be to adopt '*assessment dialogues'* (Carless, 2008) where teachers and students communicate their expectations or 'standards' to each other and their dialogues could usefully shape guidance or briefing on how students could utilise teachers' written annotations. In so doing, teachers could plan informed feedback that responds to students' needs and proficiency (Chong, 2020; Storch, 2018).

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, the study targets only a tertiary context in Vietnam and the quite small data sample prevented further statistical analyses; therefore, the results could not be generalized to other contexts. Secondly, the researchers only managed to interview third and fourth-year students who were more experienced in writing and of a higher proficiency level than first- and second-year students, thus possibly giving a biased perspective. The numbers of students from each year level were not sufficiently reliable to allow for between-group comparisons. Future research could plan a more balanced design to explore the issue of proficiency through segregation of data. Thirdly, the findings were based on the students' self-reported data, meaning that students' perceptions of TWF practices may differ from teachers' real-life practices. Future research could thus additionally analyse the actual feedback teachers provide on students' writing scripts. Moreover, teachers' perspectives, beliefs and practices regarding TWF in different Vietnamese EFL contexts could also be explored.

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