Research Article

Vietnamese First-Year Students' Perceptions of Cultural Issues in Peer Feedback in Writing Classrooms

Thi Gia Dinh Nguyen[1]

[1]Faculty of Law and Foreign Languages, University of Finance - Marketing, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Abstract

Cultural issues should be considered when doing peer feedback in writing classrooms. However, there have been very few studies on these issues because researchers mainly focus on the effectiveness of peer feedback in writing teaching and learning. From this gap, the current study aims to explore the perceptions of Vietnamese first-year students about cultural issues in peer feedback in writing classrooms. The participants of the study were 178 first-year students at the University of Finance-Marketing, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. They are non-English major students from four classes, two classes majoring in "Business Administration", and the other two majoring in "Finance-Banking". The researcher implemented peer feedback in these classes and then collected data by questionnaire and interview. The findings revealed that most of the students had encountered some cultural issues during peer feedback activity, such as collectivism, high power distance and the concept of face. However, most of them asserted that although collectivism and the concept of face had a great influence on their thinking, they generally did not constrain much on peer feedback in their writing classes, and they could overcome these issues and benefit from peer feedback in learning writing.

Keywords

Cultural issues, Peer feedback, Writing classrooms

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Peer feedback is considered a helpful activity for supporting learners in practicing English writing skills. This activity is similar to group work in which learners give feedback and share ideas for each other's writing and vice versa. As Ferris and Hedgecock (1998) affirmed, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is one of the theories supporting peer feedback activity. In ZPD, it is believed that what a person can do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow. This proved that after working with peers to receive comments, students can gradually recognize their own mistakes and be better in their own way

of writing in the future.

Since the 2000s, some researchers have been interested in peer feedback and have tried to find out its value in writing teaching and learning, and they affirmed that peer feedback offers many benefits in enhancing students' writing (Zainurrahman, 2010). Nguyen (2022) has found that peer feedback helps students realize whether they can communicate their ideas effectively or not during peer editing and encourages them to revise and improve their writing. Nguyen and Khau (2022) also affirmed the value of peer feedback as a powerful way to improve students' thinking and evaluate writing assignments more critically.

Peer feedback has been confirmed for its practical value to learners through research papers from many countries. However, there are also obstacles in the process of learners implementing peer feedback (Nguyen, 2022). Among them are cultural issues in doing peer feedback. Cultural issues in peer feedback have not been mentioned much in most peer feedback research articles, but they are one of the issues that significantly affect the peer feedback implementation process. In Vietnam, peer feedback has been studied a lot recently, but it has not been widely applied in writing classes. Vietnamese students often think that if they are at the same level, how can they give each other feedback and help each other improve, whether a better person listens to the opinion of a less good person or not. Moreover, Vietnamese students, from the bottom of their minds, do not want to lose harmony and even more do not want to cause displeasure by criticizing others. They are shy and do not dare to give real feedback. This greatly affects the effectiveness of peer feedback in writing learning (Nguyen, 2022).

At the University of Finance – Marketing (UFM) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the research context of the current study, peer feedback in writing classrooms for non-English major students, seems to be very limited. Non-English major students focus more on their own major, such as Finance, Marketing, Banking, etc. When they learn the English subject, they usually focus more on communication; writing skill is only a small part of this subject, so teachers do not often spend much time focusing on writing skills. Therefore, peer feedback has not been applied much to this group, and if it is applied, students are often hesitant to correct or give feedback to their friends due to cultural reasons. This motivates the author of the study to implement peer feedback in non-English major students' writing classes in order to explore how they think about cultural issues when doing peer feedback in learning writing.

1.1. The Purpose of the Study

Based on the above issues, the current study is thus carried out in order to achieve a twofold purpose:

- To examine what cultural issues first-year students encounter when doing peer feedback in writing classrooms

- To explore first-year students' perceptions of these cultural issues

1.2. Research Questions

To achieve the purpose above, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

- Research question 1 (RQ1): What cultural issues do Vietnamese first-year students encounter when doing peer feedback in writing classrooms?

- Research question 2 (RQ2): What are Vietnamese first-year students' perceptions of these cultural issues?

1.3. The Significance of the Study

This paper is expected to be a valuable contribution to the field of research on teaching and learning writing skills. Theoretically, this paper is expected to be an important contribution to the theory to support future research on literature review. Practically, this paper suggests cultural issues in peer feedback in writing classrooms and what learners' views are on these issues. This will help teachers and learners have better orientations to support teaching and learning writing with peer feedback activities more effectively. Hopefully, this will be a good basis for future research on peer feedback in writing teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Peer Feedback in Writing Teaching and Learning

Peer feedback basically means feedback given by peers (Yang, 2006). It is a process in which learners read, evaluate, and comment on their peers' writing. Learners can give feedback in written or oral form, depending on the situation and whether the mistake should be noted down or explained further through conversation (Yang, 2006). This is a process in which the feedback givers have a chance to read a lot to recognize and help their peers correct mistakes, and the feedback receivers have a chance to improve their own writing based on their peers' feedback. Students have a great opportunity to share and learn from each other when doing peer feedback.

In writing teaching and learning, peer feedback brings many benefits to teachers and learners as well. For teachers, teaching writing requires a lot of time in guiding, correcting and grading students' papers. With large classes, teachers have to evaluate and comment on a large number of papers (Pham

et al., 2020). This is great pressure and sometimes makes teachers overloaded and unable to accurately evaluate all student's writing papers after each lesson (Pham, 2016). Peer feedback helps to reduce teachers' burden in correcting and evaluating students' writing papers. When peer feedback is applied in a writing classroom, students work together to edit each other's writing paper before submitting it to teachers (Nguyen, 2022). If students are carefully trained in peer feedback, this can help teachers reduce time and effort in reading and editing students' work since most minor errors have already been corrected by students themselves. For students, thanks to peer feedback, they have a valuable chance to practice critical reading, recognize their friends' mistakes, and afterward recognize their own mistakes. They learn from each other and help each other be better together (Nguyen, 2022).

Besides the benefits mentioned above, peer feedback also brings some drawbacks in writing teaching and learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). In order to do peer feedback in writing classroom, it really takes time to train students and time for students to read and discuss together in class. Thus, teachers have to prepare a careful lesson plan to ensure everything runs smoothly in their writing classroom. Moreover, students in some cases think that their peers are on the same level as them, so they do not believe much in their peers' comments and suggestions. Some other students are afraid of showing their own mistakes to their peers. Students themselves are also afraid of giving negative feedback to their peers, so sometimes they just give comments like "good", "interesting", etc. Hence, this leads to ineffective peer feedback in writing learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). These things are related to cultural issues in peer feedback, which are analyzed in the next part. .

2.2. Cultural Issues in Peer Feedback

When applying peer feedback in a writing classroom, cultural issues should be considered because these issues have an important influence on its effectiveness. The main cultural issues that affect Asian students, especially Vietnamese students, are collectivism, power distance, and the concept of "face".

- Collectivism

Biddle (2012) stated that collectivism is a cultural concept identifying a person's life belongs to a group or society that he or she is a part of. In collectivism, it is believed that each individual needs to sacrifice his or her own values for the common values of the group. Most people live, work, and behave according to the group's or society's customary views, and they do not want to do anything that negatively affects the relationship within the group (Nelson, 1997).

Charoensuk (2010) states that, in collectivism, people tend to go along with their group's opinion in order to keep the

group in harmony and maintain good relationships with the others in their group. Consequently, people who are influenced by collectivism are usually uncomfortable when giving negative comments to their peers in group work. They fear that negative comments or feedback might hurt their peers, and break their relationship and the group's harmony. As a result, they try to avoid giving any negative things to their peers because, in their mind, a good relationship in a group is more important than other things. When doing peer feedback in writing classrooms, especially in Vietnam, because of the influence of collectivism, students tend to avoid negative feedback or use more pleasant feedback instead. They fear that when receiving negative comments, their peers might feel ashamed or even angry with them. In some cases, negative feedback is really more useful than positive feedback. If students avoid giving negative feedback, their peers will miss a chance to know the real problems and accordingly miss a chance to benefit from correcting these problems. As a result, peer feedback cannot help students improve as much as it can (Charoensuk, 2010).

- Power distance

As Bui (2009) mentioned, power distance is one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This is a measurement of the degree of interpersonal power between people. It consists of 'high power distance culture' and 'low power distance culture' (Hofstede et al., 2010). In high power distance cultures, there is a great difference in power distance between people. It is believed that authority should be given higher respect, so people usually put great trust in authority, almost absolutely. In low power distance cultures, equal treatment for everyone is highly valued. It seems that there is no distinction in treatment between people in lower and higher positions. Everyone has the right to share ideas, and their opinions are respected equally (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Regarding power distance in a classroom, it refers to the distance between teachers and students. Charoensuk (2010) pointed out that teachers in low power distance cultures have less power than in high power distance cultures. In countries with low power distance cultures, like in Western countries, the teacher's role is not the most powerful in the classroom. He or she is the person who imparts knowledge and guides learners in practice. The learners can even challenge their teachers and boldly discuss with them. In countries with high power distance cultures, such as Asian ones, teachers are highly respected, almost absolutely in the classroom. The teacher in a class is the authority, and students usually believe him or her only. Hence, when doing peer feedback in a writing classroom, students only trust their teacher's feedback and have little trust in their peers' feedback. They think their peers cannot give feedback as well as teachers, so they might ignore feedback from their peers and wait for teachers' comments only. In some cases, students just do peer feedback because their teachers want them to do, so they themselves do not pay

attention to giving or receiving feedback. As a result, this negatively affects peer feedback activity in the writing classroom (Charoensuk, 2010).

- The concept of "face"

The concept of face is closely related to collectivist cultures in which people are very concerned about their faces and always try to maintain good relationships with others by saving each other's faces (Hu & Grove, 1991). Someone's face, in this case, refers to a person's integrity, dignity, and self-respect. The concept of face here can be seen as representing a person's dignity and integrity, which is something that others are not allowed to offend. Charoensuk (2010) also commented that the concept of face is related to "saving face" and "losing face". In countries like Asian ones, which are influenced by collectivism, people usually try to save others' faces in order to keep good relationships with everyone. Moreover, people do not like to lose their own face. It means that people also try to save their own faces. Obviously, saving face and losing face are two terms that should be carefully considered in communication and behavior because they affect someone's integrity and dignity.

In EFL classrooms, particularly in writing classrooms, when the concept of face influences the use of peer feedback, it is quite difficult for students to give negative feedback to their peers' writing even though it is really helpful for their peers to improve their writing skills (Charoensuk, 2010). They are afraid that negative comments will make their peers lose face and, even worse, make their peers feel angry and not want to talk together anymore in some situations. This may lead to conflict and really hurt their relationship. Therefore, although both positive and negative feedback are useful for improving writing proficiency, students still prefer giving and receiving positive feedback. Additionally, students themselves do not really want others to read their own writing because they are afraid of showing their mistakes to others and losing their face (Bui, 2009). In this situation, students might not like doing peer feedback in the writing classroom and prefer receiving teacher feedback only. Consequently, peer feedback might not be as effective as expected.

In brief, the three cultural issues presented above have a certain influence on peer feedback in a writing classroom. It is very important to consider these cultural issues when applying peer feedback to writing classes at Vietnamese schools in order to help students learn English writing skills effectively.

2.3. Previous Studies

Hong (2006) conducted a study about students' perceptions of peer response in English writing instruction. His research collected data from advanced English major students' perceptions over one semester through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The findings showed that most of the students do not highly value peer feedback for

some reasons: students feel skeptical about their peers' feedback, and they fear being far lower than their peers. Thus, students feel demotivated when doing peer feedback in their writing class.

Fraser and David (2014) conducted a study about the perceptions of marketing students in China and the United Kingdom towards peer feedback and peer assessment. The theoretical framework for the study was related to elements of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. A survey and interview were used to collect data for the study. The results presented that there are some cultural barriers to peer assessment of group work, particularly for groups pertaining to collectivist or individualist backgrounds.

Yu et al. (2015) carried out a case study to investigate the role of traditional cultural issues in peer feedback. The study addressed what EFL students think about cultural issues like 'collectivism and group harmony', 'face-saving', and 'power distance'. The instruments used to collect data were video recordings, interviews, and stimulated recalls. The findings showed that the cultural issues did not significantly affect students' peer feedback activity. During peer feedback, students only focused on reading and giving comments to their peers' writing but did not pay attention so much on how to save face, whether they should give positive or negative feedback, etc. The effectiveness of peer feedback depends so much on how students work together, not on cultural issues.

Rithriani (2018), in his study about written peer feedback, tried to address the impact of cultural factors on students' perceptions of written feedback in L2 writing. The study was conducted in Indonesian EFL context, and its qualitative data was collected through writing drafts, questionnaires, and interviews. The results showed that students valued teacher feedback much higher than peer feedback, which indicated the important influence of hierarchical culture. In addition, students did not pay much attention to the factor of saving face to maintain group harmony and unity.

Domysheva and Kopylova (2019) wrote a research paper to address the cultural factors in peer review in EFL writing classrooms at Russian universities. The research aims to find out how often peer review is used in writing classes, teacher's and students' attitudes toward peer review, and whether inherent cultural characteristics influence these attitudes. The data was collected via online and offline surveys from random samples of teachers and students. The findings showed that peer review was not often used in EFL writing classrooms, and there were some limitations on using peer review due to some inherent cultural characteristics like collectivism and high power distance.

Collett et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine cultural influences on engagement in peer review at a transnational university in China. This study used Deci and Rian's (1985) theory of self-determination as a framework to find out postgraduate students' engagement with peer review training

program. The result indicated that although peer review training program helped to improve students' engagement, cultural issues contributed to limiting the opportunities for using and extending the use of peer review in students' master program.

2.4. Research Gaps

Most previous studies on peer feedback in writing teaching and learning have not focused much on cultural issues but mainly on how peer feedback helps to improve students' writing skills. In Vietnam, recently, peer feedback in writing classrooms has received more attention from researchers and teachers as well. Although there are many research papers in this field, almost none of them have explored the impact of cultural factors on the process of implementing peer feedback in Vietnamese writing classrooms, especially at a university. Actually, in an English writing classroom for Vietnamese students at a university, what cultural issues affect the effectiveness of peer feedback in writing classrooms, and how students think about the cultural issues' influence. These are the issues that the researcher of the current study wants to explore in order to help teachers and learners achieve the best result with peer feedback activity in writing classrooms.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study was carried out at the University of Finance – Marketing (UFM), during the second semester of the academic year 2024-2025. The participants were non-English major students from four classes, two of the faculty of Business Administration, and the other two of the faculty of Finance-Banking.

The convenience sampling technique was used to choose the participants of the current study. This sampling method is a non-probability sampling technique where the participants were selected based on the researcher's easy availability and proximity (Andrade, 2021). It means that a researcher can select participants according to his or her convenience of place and time. The students from the four classes mentioned above were chosen as the current study's participants because the researcher was assigned to teach these classes in the second semester of the academic year 2024-2025.

The two classes of the faculty of Business Administration consisted of 88 students (44 students in each class), and the two classes of the faculty of Finance-Banking consisted of 90 students (45 students in each class). Totally, the participants of the study were 178 students. They all learned the subject "English for Business" during the first semester. The main textbook for this subject is "Business Partner A2+", written by

O'Keeffe, M., Landford, L., & Wright, R. (2019), published by Pearson.

The participants were all first-year students at UFM, and they had 7 to 10 years of learning English in their high schools. With the subject English for Business during the first semester, they had ten weeks to practice all four skills, and at least 4 weeks practicing with writing skills. They had practiced writing skills in various types of emails, such as emails for confirming information, informing price increases, making requests, etc. The researcher was the lecturer of the four classes mentioned above. She directly taught the students, guided and trained them on how to do peer feedback in writing lessons. She had over ten-years of experience in teaching English, and was qualified to conduct this research.

3.2. Instruments

The two instruments used to collect data for the study were the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview.

The questionnaire obtains information about students' perceptions of cultural issues when doing peer feedback. It is developed based on the literature review presented above. The questionnaire has two main sections. The first section is about students' personal information, which asks students some information, such as age, gender, and years of learning English. The second section focuses on exploring what cultural issues students cope with when doing peer feedback and their perceptions towards these issues. This section mainly consists of one question about what cultural issues and nine statements using a Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree). These statements present students' opinions about cultural issues in peer feedback.

The interview was designed as a semi-structured interview with three questions that deeply explore students' thinking and remarks about cultural issues when doing peer feedback. The first question aims to find out what cultural issues students often encounter in peer feedback. It includes some options for students to choose. The second question is to explore their perceptions towards these issues. The third question is to obtain students' general evaluation of the influence of cultural issues on the effectiveness of peer feedback in writing learning. The interview was conducted online and offline with a few students from each class.

3.3. Design of the Study

The study was designed as a pre-experimental research design in which a single group of participants would experience the new treatment or intervention, then they completed a questionnaire and interview to show their evaluation related to the new treatment or intervention. Specifically, the single group of participants was all the

students of the four classes mentioned above, and the new treatment was the implementation of peer feedback in the writing classroom. After the four-week intervention, all students completed a survey questionnaire, and some students from each class participated in an interview with the researcher.

3.4. Procedures

All four classes learned "English for Business" in ten weeks. This subject included all four skills, and the lecturer taught writing skills in four weeks of the course. During these weeks, the procedure was designed as follows.

Firstly, the lecturer (also the researcher of the current study) put students into groups of two or three members and trained them on how to do peer feedback during writing lessons. Specifically, she gave them a sample checklist with writing criteria for a certain type of writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content. Students would use the checklist to check their peers' writing and give feedback. If during peer feedback activity, students could find out more mistakes on their peers' writing, they can discuss more and learn together. The lecturer also mentioned some cultural issues that students might face when doing peer feedback, like collectivism, high power distance, and the concept of face.

Secondly, after training, for each writing lesson during four weeks, the lecturer guided students on how to write the different types of emails in the textbook, including emails for confirming information, informing price increases, and making requests. Students wrote their first draft after being guided to write. Then, they exchanged their writing papers with each other, and read their peers' writing and gave feedback. After receiving comments from peers and discussing with each other, they wrote and submitted the final papers to their lecturer. During four weeks learning writing skills with peer feedback, the lecturer emphasized that the important thing students should focus was how cultural factors affected their peer feedback.

Thirdly, after the four-week intervention, the lecturer sent the survey questionnaire via Google Forms to all students of four classes. The students completed the questionnaire within three days. In addition, the lecturer also contacted and invited about four to five students from each class to participate in the interview. The interview was conducted online via Microsoft Teams. After collecting data from the questionnaire and interview, the researcher analyzed the data.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey questionnaire was transferred to Google Forms and emailed to all the participants of the four classes. The researcher, who was also the lecturer of the four classes, often reminded and encouraged students to read and give their answers for the questionnaire within three days. In the situation that students forgot or could not give their answers via Google Forms, the researcher printed the questionnaire out and delivered it directly to the students. The data collected from the questionnaire would be transferred to an Excel spreadsheet in numerical form by the researcher. With the support of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, the numeric data was converted into Frequency and Descriptive statistics in order to get the results in Percentage, Mean, and Standard deviation. The researcher relied on the results of percentage, mean, and standard deviation to analyze, synthesize, and find out the answers to research questions of the current study.

After completing the survey questionnaire, the researcher invited four to five students from each class to participate in the semi-structured interview of the study. The arrangement of the interview would be suitable for the time of each class. For each class time of the interview, the researcher tried to create a friendly atmosphere, like a talk or a discussion between friends, and encouraged students to share their own feelings and thinking about the effect of cultural issues on peer feedback activity in their writing classrooms. The researcher also asked students for permission to record the interview of each class. After recording all students' answer, the researcher listened to the recording again and noted down the main ideas in a Word document for analysis. Then, she analyzed, synthesized the interview's data, and combined with the data from the questionnaire to finalize the answer for each research question of the current study.

4. Findings and Discussion

❖ *Demographic profile of the participants*

Table 1. The personal information of participants (Gender)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	105	59,0	59,0	59,0
Female	73	41,0	41,0	100,0
Total	178	100,0	100,0	

As stated in Table 1, of the total 178 participants, 59% were male and 41% were female. This shows that in the field of economic studies, such as Business Administration and Finance-Banking, most of the students are male, and the proportion of female students is usually lower.

Table 2. The personal information of participants (Ages)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ages	178	19	22	19,40	0,826
Valid N (listwise)	178				

Table 2 shows the ages of the participants. From the table, the average age is about 19 years old (mean = 19.40). Because of the small standard deviation (0.826), most of the participants' ages is close to the mean. This means that their ages do not vary much, and most of them are about the same age.

Table 3. The personal information of participants (Years of learning English)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Years of learning English	178	7	10	8,92	1,402
Valid N (listwise)	178				

As presented in Table 3, the average years of learning English of the participants is about 9 years (mean = 8.92). The standard deviation is small (1.402). Thus, the participants' years of learning English do not vary so much.

❖ **Research question 1: What cultural issues do Vietnamese first-year students encounter when doing peer feedback in writing classrooms?**

⚜ *Findings from questionnaire:*

Table 4. Cultural issues that students encounter when doing peer feedback

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Collectivism	77	43,3	43,3
High power distance	15	8,4	8,4
The concept of face	86	48,3	48,3
Total	178	100,0	100,0

As presented in Table 4, when implementing peer feedback in writing classrooms, students often encountered some cultural issues such as collectivism, high power distance, and the concept of face. From the frequency and percentage, the concept of face is the cultural issue that students encountered most often (48.3%), 43.3% of students chose collectivism, and the lowest proportion is high power distance with 8.4%.

⚜ *Findings from the interview:*

From the semi-structured interview, the researcher also received the same results. Most students illustrated that the issues that made them feel most embarrassed and awkward were the concept of face and collectivism. They understood that if they gave too many negative comments, this would make their friends feel ashamed, bad, and even argue with them or not want to see each other anymore. Similarly, they themselves did not want the others to see their mistakes because they did not want to lose face. In some situations, although they knew that both negative and positive feedback were really vital for improving their writing ability, they were still sad when receiving negative comments. Some of the students in the interview said that "Giving and receiving negative feedback is not easy. That is an art that requires both the giver and the receiver to be delicate and skillful." The students affirmed that they can help each other to overcome these issues by discussing in a clear, understandable, and skillful way.

Regarding the issue of high power distance, from the interview, students stated that they always trusted in teachers' feedback, but it did not mean they denied peers' feedback; they still believed in their peers' feedback. They claimed that "Learning from friends is always still good because everyone has both advantages and disadvantages". Hence, according to most students in the interview, high power distance was not a big problem when doing peer feedback.

❖ **Research question 2: What are Vietnamese first-year students' perceptions of these cultural issues?**

⚜ *Findings from the questionnaire:*

The questionnaire includes the items that require students to choose one of the Likert scale response options: "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree". Thus, the researcher shows Table 5 with the interpretation "Disagree, Neutral, and Agree" for numeric ranges in order to make clear about the mean in the next Tables during the presentation of findings from the questionnaire.

Table 5. Interpreted the ranges of a five-point Likert scale

Numeric range	Interpretation
1.0 → 2.6	Disagree
2.7 → 3.4	Neutral
3.5 → 5.0	Agree

Table 6. Students' perceptions towards the cultural issue of collectivism

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collectivism	I tend to avoid negative feedback and use more pleasant feedback instead.	178	3,75	0,841
	I fear that negative comments will make my friends feel ashamed and even angry with me	178	4,06	0,865
	I think negative comments/feedback might hurt the relationship within a group	178	3,89	1,019

From Table 6, it is recognized that most students agreed with the items related to the issue "Collectivism". Specifically, for the first statement, "I tend to avoid negative feedback and use more pleasant feedback instead", the mean is 3.75 and the standard deviation is 0.841, which shows most students agreed with this opinion, and the students' choices were quite even. For the second statement, "I fear that negative comments will make my friends feel ashamed and even angry with me, with M = 4.06 and Std. deviation = 0.865, most students showed strong agreement with this opinion, and students' opinions did not deviate much. Students also agreed with the third statement, "I think negative comments/feedback might hurt the relationship within a group" (M = 3.89, Std. deviation = 1.019). Based on the standard deviation, there was a slight difference between students' opinions on this statement. In short, the cultural issue of collectivism had a certain influence on students' thinking when doing peer feedback activity.

Table 7. Students' perceptions towards the cultural issue of high power distance

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
High power distance	have little trust in peers' feedback	178	2,42	0,828
	believe in teachers' feedback only	178	3,40	0,917
	ignore peers' comments and wait for the teacher's feedback	178	2,12	0,900

As demonstrated in Table 7, most students only agreed with the statement "I believe in teachers' feedback only (M = 3.4, Std. deviation = 0.917), and did not agree with the two statements "I have little trust in peers' feedback" (M = 2.42, Std. deviation = 0.828), and "I ignore peers' comments and wait for the teacher's feedback" (M =2.12, Std. deviation = 0.900). This means that students always believed in teachers' feedback, and they trusted in their peers' feedback as well, and they did not ignore their peers' comments.

Table 8. Students' perceptions towards the cultural issue of the concept of face

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The concept of face	I try not to give negative feedback because I want to save my peers' faces	178	4,09	0,776
	I do not want my friends to see my own mistakes because I want to save my face	178	4,15	0,755

As illustrated in Table 8, regarding the concept of face, most students showed their strong agreement with the two statements: "I try not to give negative feedback because I want to save my peers' faces" (M =4.09, Std. deviation = 0.776), and "I do not want my friends to see my own mistakes because I want to save my face" (M = 4.15, Std. deviation = 0.755). This means that the concept of face affected students' thoughts a lot during the process of implementing peer feedback.

Table 9. Students' perceptions of the cultural issues in peer feedback

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
In general, the above cultural issues greatly influence the effectiveness of peer feedback in learning writing skills	178	2,79	0,686
Valid N (listwise)	178		

As presented in Table 9, most students were unsure about the idea that the cultural issues mentioned above greatly influence the effectiveness of peer feedback in learning writing skills (M = 2.79, Std. deviation = 0.686). Students recognized that they had encountered the cultural issues of collectivism, high power distance, and the concept of face. However, they could not identify how these cultural issues affected peer feedback in learning writing skills.

🔸 *Findings from the interview:*

In order to further explore the answer to the second research question of the study, the researcher conducted interviews with some students from each class. The findings obtained were presented as follows.

Firstly, regarding the cultural issue of collectivism, most students admitted that they were Vietnamese who were greatly influenced by Eastern culture, so they were quite influenced by the view that it was necessary to always try to maintain relationships in a group, and live for the group. This more or less affected peer feedback in writing learning. They were very hesitant to give negative comments on their peers' writing because they feared that negative comments would make their friends sad, ashamed, and hurt. That would negatively affect the relationship between them and their friends. As a student said, "I'm afraid when I criticize my friend's writing, and point out too many mistakes, my friend will get angry and stop hanging out with me". That was why they tended to avoid negative feedback and used more pleasant feedback instead. However, the students in the interviews were confident that they could help each other to overcome this problem by explaining clearly and convincingly. When giving negative comments or even criticism, there must be reasonable reasons and evidence for the negative comments or criticism. Moreover, they could help each other understand that both positive and negative feedback will help them study better.

Secondly, concerning the cultural issue of high power distance, most of the students expressed that they always trusted their teachers' feedback, and also believed in their friends' feedback. One student explained, "My friends have their own advantages, they know something I've never known, I can learn from them." The other stated, "Usually, we cannot recognize our own mistakes, but others can see them". The students commented that if they were a little doubtful about their peers' feedback, they would check together through books or the Internet, or discuss with their lecturer to understand better. They never thought that they would ignore their peers' comments because they understood that their friends' time and effort to read and give feedback on their work was valuable and should be respected. Briefly, according to most of the students, the cultural issue of high power distance has a slight influence on peer feedback. They also did not take this issue too seriously.

Thirdly, with the cultural issue of the concept of face, most

students thought that saving someone's face was very important. When doing peer feedback, they often considered how to give feedback without embarrassing their friends. One student said, "I try not to give negative comments, and if I have to give this kind of feedback, it should be very tactful so as not to lose my friends' face". Furthermore, most students also expressed that saving their own faces was as important as saving others' faces. They themselves always felt shy when others recognized their mistakes because they were afraid that others would see their weaknesses, especially for students who are poor at writing English. Hence, the concept of face was an important cultural issue that most students cared about and considered when doing peer feedback in learning English writing skills.

Finally, when students were asked about the influence of the above cultural issues on the effectiveness of peer feedback in learning writing skills, most of them were unsure about this influence because they could not measure the effectiveness of peer feedback in learning writing, but they recognized that these cultural issues affected their thinking when doing peer feedback. It can be seen that, in the process of implementing peer feedback in writing classes, the above cultural issues had an impact and more or less hindered peer feedback activity. However, some of the students found themselves able to solve and overcome these problems together.

5. Conclusion

In general, the findings of the study were seen as a valuable contribution to fill the gap from the previous studies. These findings helped the writing teacher or lecturer gain a better and deeper understanding of the barriers that Vietnamese learners encounter in implementing peer feedback in the writing classroom, specifically those related to cultural factors. Regarding the findings of research question 1, the findings helped the writing teachers and lecturers recognize the cultural issues students faced during peer feedback in learning writing. From the findings of research question 2, it is beneficial for writing teachers and lecturers to gain a more precise and detailed understanding of real and practical thoughts from students about these issues. From that, it should be recognized that further research is needed to identify effective solutions to better support students in overcoming cultural issues in peer feedback and in learning writing skills together effectively.

Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language
SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UFM: University of Finance - Marketing
ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

References

[1]. Andrade, C. (2021). The inconvenient truth about convenience and purposive samples. *Indian journal of psychological medicine, 43*(1), 86-88. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620977000.

[2]. Biddle, C. (2012). *Individualism versus collectivism: Our future, our choice*. http://www.theobjectivestandard.com/issues/2012-spring/individualism-collectivism.asp

[3]. Bui, T. K. N. (2009). *The effectiveness of peer written feedback on the freshmen's writing skill at English Department.* ULIS, VNU. http://www.slideshare.net/khoaanhmy/the-effectiveness-of-peer-written-feedback-on-first-year-students-writing-skill

[4]. Charoensuk, P. (2010). The relationship between an English writing classroom and Asian cultural issues when using peer feedback. *Executive Journal*, *15*(1), 154-159.

[5]. Collett et al. (2022). Exploring cultural issues on engagement in peer review through the lens of self-determination theory at a transnational university in China. *International Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 5*(2), 62-84.

[6]. Domysheva S.A., & Kopylova N.V. (2019). Peer review in EFL writing classrooms at Russian universities: cultural factors. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, 5*(2), 139-147.

[7]. Ferris, D. R., & Hedgecock, J. S. (1998). *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process and practice*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

[8]. Fithriani, R. (2018). Cultural Influences on Students' Perceptions of written feedback in L2 writing. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, 3*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.18196/ftl.3124

[9]. Fraser, M. & David, W. (2014). Chinese vs UK marketing students' perceptions of peer feedback and peer assessment. *The International Journal of Management Education, 12*(2), 142-150.

[10]. Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind, 3rd edition.* USA: McGraw-Hill.

[11]. Hong, F. (2006). Students' perceptions of peer response activity in English writing instruction. *CELEA Journal, 29*(4), 48-52.

[12]. Hu, W., & Grove, C. (1991). *Encountering the Chinese: A guide for Americans.* Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc.

[13]. Hyland, K. & Hyland, F. (2019). *Feedback in second language writing. Contexts and Issues, 2nd edition.* Cambridge University Press.

[14]. Nelson, G. L. (1997). How cultural differences affect written and oral communication: The case of peer response groups. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *70*(1), 77-84.

[15]. Nguyen, H. T. (2022). The effects of peer feedback on EFL students' writing performance. *Vietnam Journal of Education, 6*(2), 123-136.

[16]. Nguyen, H. T., & Khau, H. A. (2022). Effect of peer feedback on paragraph writing performance among High School students. *International Journal of Instruction, 15*(2), 189-206.

[17]. Pham et al. (2020). Should peer e-comments replace traditional peer comments? *International Journal of Instruction, 13*(1), 295-314.

[18]. Pham, V. P. H. (2016). The effects of collaborative writing on individual writing. *Journal of Science-Saigon University, 14*(39), 67-82.

[19]. Yang, Z. (2006). Peer feedback in the college SLW classroom. *Sino-US English Teaching*, *3*, 88-94.

[20]. Yu et al. (2015). Revisiting Chinese cultural issues in peer feedback in EFL writing: Insights from a multiple case study. *The Asia Pacific Education Researchers, 25*(2), 273-301.

[21]. Zainurrahman, Z. (2010). *Teaching writing through peer feedback*. Cambridge University Press.

Biography

Thi Gia Dinh Nguyen is a lecturer at University of Finance – Marketing (UFM), hold an M.A in TESOL. Her research interests include teaching methodology, Learning Strategies, Culture and Communication. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1768-0490