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FEEDBACK CULTURE IN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS: A FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION AND STUDENT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Van Thao Nguyen *

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University of Education – Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam.

* Corresponding Author

ORCID Details

Van Thao Nguyen: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3958-6639>

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ABSTRACT

Feedback is an important component of teaching and learning in higher education. However, feedback should not be understood merely as one-way transmission of information; rather, it should be viewed as a dialogic process embedded in the culture of the educational institution. This article approaches feedback culture as a system of collective values, norms, and practices that shape how feedback is provided and used in the classroom. Based on a synthesis of international studies, the article argues that a positive feedback culture can promote student engagement, develop critical thinking and self-regulation, and foster essential 21st-century skills. Studies in Vietnam indicate that feedback practices remain largely instructor-led and summative, focusing more on evaluating final outcomes than on guiding the learning process. In addition, the use of technology to support feedback remains limited, while encouraging and empathetic forms of feedback have not yet received sufficient attention.

To build a feedback culture in higher education, the article proposes multi-level solutions: training instructors in dialogic and empathetic feedback skills; developing students' capacity to receive, interpret, and act on feedback; establishing two-way evaluation mechanisms; and using digital platforms to sustain continuous feedback. These analyses emphasize that building a sustainable feedback culture is not only a prerequisite for innovation in teaching and learning but also a means of equipping students with essential skills in the context of globalization and digital transformation.

Keywords: Feedback Culture, Higher Education, Innovation, Feedback Literacy, Vietnam

1 INTRODUCTION

In the process of teaching and learning at university, feedback is widely recognized as one of the factors that strongly influence students' learning effectiveness. Recent studies indicate that feedback culture is often limited to instructors providing information to students, rather than establishing a two-way interactive foundation that promotes learner autonomy [1].

Building on this perspective, many studies have recommended developing feedback literacy—the ability to understand, use, and respond to information effectively—as a key factor in enhancing students’ awareness and active engagement in learning [2].

In the context of digital transformation and the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, recent studies suggest that AI-supported feedback can improve students’ emotional experiences, reduce negative feelings when receiving feedback, and increase satisfaction, although it does not directly change the quality of learning products [3]. At the same time, the latest research indicates that feedback combining AI and instructor input is often rated more highly by students in terms of usefulness and objectivity, particularly when the role of AI in the process is transparent [4].

Against the backdrop of current higher education reform, building a multidirectional feedback culture that combines traditional approaches with modern technology has become more urgent than ever. This is not only an inevitable trend for improving educational quality but also an opportunity to develop students’ 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, communication, independent learning, and adaptability to digital learning environments [5].

For these reasons, this review pursues two main objectives:

- To analyze the role of feedback culture in university classrooms and clarify its impacts in the contemporary context, where feedback does not occur solely between humans.
- To propose a model and practical solutions for effective feedback by combining traditional approaches with advanced technology in order to promote teaching innovation and student skill development.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Concept of Feedback

Feedback is a central concept in education; however, scholars differ considerably in their approaches to and definitions of it. According to Hattie and Timperley [6], feedback is “information provided to a learner about the effectiveness of his or her performance of a learning task,” which helps the learner adjust cognition and future action. This definition emphasizes the regulatory function of feedback, viewing it as a tool for guiding the learning process. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [7], from the perspective of self-regulated learning, argue that formative feedback motivates learners to develop the capacity to monitor and regulate their learning activities. Carless and Boud [8], meanwhile, broaden the concept by emphasizing dialogue, viewing feedback not simply as one-way transmission of information from instructor to student, but as an exchange and dialogue between teachers and learners through which knowledge is co-constructed.

Across these definitions, a common point is that feedback is regarded as information that influences learner progress. The differences, however, lie in the degree of emphasis: some definitions focus on the function of regulating learning outcomes [6], whereas others highlight feedback as an interactive process of knowledge construction [8]. Recent research has also expanded the definition to include technology, such as AI-mediated feedback, in which feedback comes not only from humans but also from intelligent systems that contribute to personalization and improved learning experiences [4].

On the basis of this analysis, the present study defines feedback as follows: In higher education, feedback is the process of providing, receiving, and using information about learning activities to promote learner progress, in which feedback is understood as a multidirectional, dialogic activity that is increasingly extended through technology. This definition both builds on traditional approaches and incorporates new dimensions appropriate to the context of digital transformation and contemporary educational culture.

2.2 The Concept of “Feedback Culture”

If feedback is viewed as an action or process of exchanging information, feedback culture extends beyond individual behavior to encompass the collective values, norms, and practices related to feedback within a learning community. Carless [9] emphasizes that an effective feedback culture should be built on three pillars: trust, dialogue, and action. This definition shows that feedback culture is not merely a product of individuals but an environment constructed through teacher–student relationships and relationships among classroom members.

Winstone and Carless [10], meanwhile, approach feedback culture from the perspective of cognitive transformation: rather than viewing feedback simply as “feedback as telling,” feedback should be understood as a dialogic process in which learners and teachers jointly participate in knowledge construction (“feedback as dialogue”). The emphasis here is on feedback as a collaborative relationship in which students play an active role alongside instructors.

More recently, scholars have connected feedback culture with feedback literacy—the ability of both instructors and students to understand, analyze, and use feedback effectively [2,8]. This perspective argues that without feedback literacy, efforts to build a feedback culture are unlikely to be effective, because students may receive information without knowing how to reflect on it or act upon it.

Analysis of these definitions indicates that the common feature of feedback culture is its systemic and communal nature. Differences, however, concern the aspect emphasized: Carless [9] focuses on foundational conditions (trust, dialogue, and action); Winstone and Carless [10] focus on the shift from telling to dialogue; while recent studies emphasize feedback literacy as a core component.

2.3 Previous Studies

2.3.1 International Studies

Many international studies have confirmed the pivotal role of feedback in improving learning quality and developing students' skills. Hattie and Timperley [6] argue that feedback is one of the factors with the strongest influence on academic achievement, even exceeding many traditional factors such as learning time or teaching methods. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [7], from the perspective of self-regulated learning, emphasize that formative feedback helps students not only adjust their learning during the process but also develop lifelong learning capacity.

At the same time, scholars have increasingly shifted the concept of feedback from a “one-way” action to a “multidirectional” and dialogic process. Carless [9] and Winstone and Carless [10] both argue that effective feedback can only be achieved when embedded in an open academic culture in which students are encouraged to engage in dialogue and act on feedback. Carless and Boud's [8] work on feedback literacy further expands this scope by emphasizing that students themselves need to develop the ability to receive, interpret, and use feedback; otherwise, feedback is unlikely to have practical impact.

More recent work has connected feedback with digital transformation and technology. Winstone et al. [1] indicate that in online learning environments, feedback plays an increasingly important role in maintaining student engagement. Zhang et al. (2025) [4] further show that feedback combining instructor input and AI-supported feedback (human-AI co-produced feedback) is highly valued by students in terms of usefulness and objectivity. This opens a new line of research into how technology shapes feedback culture in higher education.

2.3.2 Studies in Vietnam

Alongside international studies, recent research in Vietnam has begun to examine feedback in higher education, although this body of work remains limited. Nguyen [11], in a study of English-major students, found that written instructor feedback remains largely summative, meaning that students do not fully exploit it to improve the learning process. Similarly, Le [12] argues that peer feedback remains underused in Vietnamese higher education because of traditional teaching environments and a stronger focus on final products than on the learning process. Another study by Pham Vu Phi Ho et al. [13] in an academic writing class found that both instructors and students viewed the benefits of peer feedback positively, while still expressing concerns about the accuracy and quality of such feedback.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tran et al. [14] found a close relationship between feedback and students' self-regulated learning in online environments. This suggests that feedback affects not only immediate learning outcomes but also the development of sustainable learning skills, particularly independent learning and self-monitoring. Complementing this perspective, Ha and Ho [15] demonstrated that integrating writing-support tools such as Grammarly with peer feedback significantly improved postgraduate students' academic writing competence while also increasing their learning autonomy. Meanwhile, Le Thanh Thao et al. [16] highlighted the psychological effects of feedback, showing that empathetic feedback can serve as a source of encouragement, helping students maintain learning motivation, particularly at universities in the Mekong Delta. More broadly, Luong [17] places feedback within the context of higher education reform in Vietnam, considering it an essential component in the transition from traditional teaching approaches to constructivist models and, consequently, in the development of students' thinking and creativity. Overall, these studies suggest that feedback should be viewed not only from an academic perspective but also in technological, psychosocial, and policy dimensions, providing an important foundation for building a feedback culture in Vietnamese higher education.

Overall, international studies have provided a strong foundation concerning the role of feedback in learning outcomes, self-regulation, and the development of 21st-century skills, while Vietnamese studies have begun to illuminate local cultural and contextual characteristics. However, most domestic studies have focused on feedback in foreign-language teaching and instructor feedback, paying limited attention to the construction of a “feedback culture” as a system of collective values in university classrooms.

This gap suggests a direction for further research: how can a sustainable, multidirectional feedback culture appropriate to the context of Vietnamese higher education be built in an era of international integration and digital transformation?

3 THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Feedback culture plays a foundational role in promoting innovation and improving the quality of higher education.

The first role is that a positive feedback culture promotes innovation in teaching. When feedback is regarded as a dialogic process rather than one-way transmission, instructors are more likely to design learner-centered classroom activities and adopt approaches such as the flipped classroom, project-based learning, or blended learning. This not only encourages active student participation but also creates a flexible learning environment aligned with digital transformation [4,10].

The second role that should be mentioned is that feedback culture is an important driver of students' holistic skill development. Studies indicate that multidirectional feedback (instructor–student, student–student, and student–technology) contributes to critical thinking, collaboration, and reflective skills [8]. In Vietnam, Tran et al. [14] demonstrated that written feedback orientation (WFO) has a clear influence on students' self-regulated learning competence in online environments. Similarly, Ha and Ho [15] confirmed that combining technology (Grammarly) with peer feedback not only improves the quality of academic products but also develops independent learning and self-assessment skills—essential 21st-century competencies.

Third, feedback culture contributes to building a democratic and humane learning environment. When instructors and students jointly participate in feedback processes, teacher–student relationships are redefined in terms of collaboration and mutual respect. This is particularly important in the Vietnamese educational culture, which has traditionally been influenced by hierarchical relationships, making students hesitant to provide feedback to instructors or peers [12,13]. Le Thanh Thao et al. [16] further emphasize that empathetic feedback can become a source of encouragement, helping students feel understood and supported, thereby increasing learning motivation and engagement with the institution.

Finally, feedback culture serves as a mechanism for quality assurance and sustainable innovation in universities. Luong [17] argues that, in the context of educational reform in Vietnam, feedback should be considered a core component of a constructivist model of knowledge creation, in which students not only receive information but also participate in generating new knowledge. Thus, building a feedback culture not only improves individual learning outcomes but also contributes to shaping academic identity and enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions in the era of international integration.

4 CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES IN BUILDING A FEEDBACK CULTURE IN VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Although the role of feedback has been widely established in international research, university classroom practices in Vietnam still reveal many limitations. First, feedback in the Vietnamese context is often one-way and summative. Nguyen [11] found that most university instructors continue to focus on written feedback after students complete assignments, primarily evaluating final outcomes rather than guiding improvement during the learning process. This makes it difficult for students to use feedback as a tool for continuous development.

Another challenge concerns limitations in peer feedback. Le [12] points out that traditional teaching environments, together with a hierarchical educational culture, make Vietnamese students less likely to provide direct feedback to peers. Even when peer-feedback activities are implemented, students may remain hesitant because they are concerned about affecting personal relationships [13]. Consequently, peer feedback—which is considered important for developing a feedback culture—has not yet been fully developed.

In addition, the transition to digital environments during and after the COVID-19 period has created both opportunities and new challenges. Tran et al. [14] show that in online learning environments, feedback has a strong impact on students' self-regulated learning. However, many instructors have not yet been adequately equipped with the skills and tools needed to implement digital feedback effectively, resulting in feedback that is fragmented and unsystematic.

There are also challenges concerning the quality and human dimension of feedback. Le Thanh Thao et al. [16] found that Vietnamese students want feedback not only to focus on errors but also to be encouraging and empathetic. However, in many cases, instructor feedback remains more critical than constructive, creating pressure and reducing students' learning motivation.

In summary, the current state of feedback in Vietnamese university classrooms reflects three major issues: (1) feedback is predominantly one-way and summative; (2) peer feedback is limited by cultural and psychological factors; and (3) tools and skills for implementing feedback in digital contexts remain insufficient. These challenges demonstrate the urgent need to build a multidirectional, humane, and digitalized feedback culture to improve educational quality and develop students' skills comprehensively.

5 SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To build a positive, multidirectional, and sustainable feedback culture in Vietnamese university classrooms, coordinated solutions are needed at multiple levels.

First, at the instructor level, there should be a shift from viewing feedback as an assessment tool to viewing it as a dialogic process. This requires instructors not only to provide comments but also to design classroom activities that encourage students to give and receive feedback from one another. Combining traditional feedback with real-time technology-supported feedback (e.g., online forums, LMS applications, or writing-support software such as Grammarly) can make feedback more flexible, timely, and interactive [15]. Instructors also need professional development in encouraging and empathetic feedback skills to avoid overly critical feedback, which can create pressure for students [11].

At the student level, feedback literacy—the ability to understand, interpret, and use feedback effectively—needs to be developed [8]. This can be achieved through training sessions or workshops on giving and receiving feedback, or by integrating such content into soft-skills courses. Domestic studies indicate that Vietnamese students remain hesitant to provide feedback to peers [12,13]. Therefore, creating a safe learning environment in which feedback is regarded as an opportunity for learning rather than criticism is extremely important.

At the institutional level, mechanisms should be established to encourage and support multidirectional feedback. Specifically, universities can create online forums where students and instructors exchange feedback openly, or integrate two-way teaching-evaluation tools (instructors evaluate students and students provide feedback on instructors). Technology-supported feedback should also be developed, for example through Learning Management Systems (LMS) to manage and monitor feedback processes, or by piloting AI tools for automated feedback [4]. In particular, in the context of digital transformation, combining human feedback with AI-supported feedback can personalize learning experiences while reducing instructors' workload.

Finally, at the policy level, changes are needed in approaches to teaching and learning assessment. Rather than focusing only on final outcomes, universities should pay greater attention to the learning process and student progress. This requires adjustments to assessment systems and greater encouragement for the use of formative feedback as part of course assessment. In addition, regular professional development programs should be provided for instructors on effective feedback methods, while students should be supported in developing self-assessment and feedback skills.

In summary, building a feedback culture in Vietnamese university classrooms requires coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders: instructors need to change their approaches, students need to strengthen their feedback literacy, institutions need to establish support mechanisms, and policies need to provide appropriate incentives. Only when feedback is regarded as an indispensable part of educational culture can it fully contribute to teaching innovation and improved educational quality.

6 CONCLUSION

Feedback culture in university classrooms is not merely a collection of isolated acts of information exchange; it is a system of collective values, norms, and practices that shapes academic relationships between instructors and students. International studies have shown that feedback strongly influences learning outcomes, self-regulation, and the development of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, reflection, and collaboration. In Vietnam, recent studies also clearly reflect cultural and organizational characteristics: feedback remains largely one-way, student participation is limited, and feedback has not yet been fully recognized as part of educational culture.

The analysis shows that building and sustaining a feedback culture is important in three respects. First, it promotes innovation in teaching methods, helping instructors move from traditional approaches toward dialogic models that encourage active student participation. Second, it contributes to students' holistic skill development, not only improving learning outcomes but also fostering self-regulated learning, creativity, and lifelong learning. Third, feedback culture provides a foundation for a democratic and humane learning environment, reducing one-way imposition and promoting collaboration within the learning community.

However, practice in Vietnam still presents several challenges: feedback remains primarily summative rather than formative, students are hesitant to participate in peer feedback, and mechanisms and tools supporting feedback in digital contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study proposes coordinated solutions at the levels of instructors, students, institutions, and educational policy to establish a multidirectional, humane, and digitally adaptive feedback culture.

From this perspective, the review contributes theoretically by clarifying the concept and role of feedback culture in higher education, and practically by identifying the current situation, challenges, and concrete solutions for the Vietnamese context. In the future, large-scale empirical studies are needed to verify the impact of feedback culture on learning outcomes and student skill development, while research should also be extended across different academic disciplines to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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