



# What works may hurt: The negative side of feedback in second language writing

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Critical incidents  
Feedback impact  
Negative influence  
Writing assessment  
Teacher feedback

## ABSTRACT

Informed by a learner-centered and socio-constructive approach to the impact of feedback and drawing upon critical incidents from 1,075 Chinese EFL university students and semi-structured interviews with 29 of them, the present study aims to reveal the negative side of feedback by examining its negative influences on L2 student writers and their responses to such influences. Findings reveal seven feedback attributes that could elicit negative impacts on writers: lack of specification, low quality, superficial feedback, unclear feedback criteria, inconsistent feedback, one-way communication, and unclosed loop. Feedback of these attributes could negatively impact students' writing practices, learning emotions and motivation, and social relationships. This study has also found that in response to such negative influences, students would pay selective attention to feedback, accept/reject all the feedback, or seek external help. Based on the findings, a multi-dimensional model concerning the negative side of feedback is proposed, and how writing teachers could alleviate the negative impact of feedback is discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past decades, there is a surge of research interest on feedback concerning its impact and critical role in promoting L2 writing (Ferris, 2007; Ferris et al., 2011; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2017; Riazi et al., 2018). Investigations of the feedback impact help to reveal how feedback could lead to positive influences on student writing, and to understand students' experiences, practices, challenges, and difficulties in responding to feedback. However, most of the previous studies on the impact of feedback are of the "how to do it better" kind and focus on how feedback can benefit students, downplaying or overlooking the possible negative influences of feedback in L2 writing (Henderson et al., 2019). Thus, much less attention has been paid to the negative side of feedback in L2 writing and how to avoid the negative impact of inappropriate feedback and improper feedback strategies during the writing process.

In addition, although the cognitive and socio-cultural nature of feedback has been recognized in the extant literature (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2017), previous studies on the impact of feedback in L2 writing still focus on text revisions and writing quality. In spite of the strong evidence indicating that feedback may have cognitive, motivational, affective, relational impact and may change learners' values, beliefs, and identity in higher education (Carless, 2013; Ryan & Henderson, 2018; Tai et al., 2018), we know little

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about the multi-dimensional impact of feedback on student development as L2 writers. To fill these research gaps, the present study aims to reveal the negative side of feedback by examining the negative influences of feedback on students as L2 learners and writers as well as their responses to such influences from a Critical Incident (CI) perspective.

## 2. Conceptual framework

### 2.1. Feedback and its impact: a conceptualization

Feedback has been conceptualized from teacher-centered to student-oriented learning and from monologue to dialogue. The traditional feedback approach focuses on its instructional value, namely features of feedback practices that contribute to the improvement in student performance (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Storch, 2018; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010). Research of this line has simply treated students as passive recipients of feedback information and tested the effectiveness of such information, mainly through experimental designs (Liu & Brown, 2015). The student-centered approach to feedback values learners' beliefs, judgment, and appropriations in interpreting as well as using feedback from various sources (e.g., teachers, peer students, automated writing evaluation programs, family members, or friends). This conception is fully reflected in recent studies on student feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Yu & Liu, 2021), which concerns the way in which students perceive, evaluate, and use feedback as a learning facilitator. Thus, the dialogical nature of feedback has been emphasized in recent discussions on feedback processes. Feedback can work as "an interactive exchange in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified" (Carless et al., 2011, p. 397). From the socio-cultural approach, feedback givers and receivers negotiate the meaning of feedback through dialogue and co-construct a shared understanding as part of the emerging communities of practice (Evans, 2013).

Feedback in this study is defined as learning-oriented processes by which learners make sense of, evaluate, and use the information to improve their current and/or future performance. Feedback thus includes a series of cognitive and social interactive processes since it is more than a one-way information transmission (Henderson et al., 2019). Accordingly, we approach the impact of feedback from a multi-dimensional perspective. From a learner-centered and socio-constructive conceptualization, feedback could be internal processes influenced by individual characteristics such as the way students appropriate and interpret the feedback information; it also involves interactive processes shaped by socio-cultural intricacy, as manifested in its dialogical feature.

The impact of feedback can be understood from a more holistic dynamic view concerning its role at the information level, the individual level, and the socio-cultural level. When positioned as information, feedback could lead to students' adjustment of their learning to meet others' expectations. For example, learners' revisions could be somehow a response to the visible information on their compositions (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Feedback could also be perceived as individual processing. It functions by shaping students' motivation and engagement in learning (Yu et al., 2020), self-efficacy (Ruegg, 2018), and emotions (Mahfoodh, 2017), among other factors that influence their attitudes towards and perceptions of feedback. At the socio-cultural level, feedback impact could be observed in the student-teacher relationship (Skipper & Douglas, 2015) and peer relationship (Yu & Lee, 2016). Therefore, the impact is an indispensable feature of feedback (see also Henderson et al., 2019). The impact of feedback, be it at the information level, the individual level, or the socio-cultural level, leads to changes in student learning.

### 2.2. The negative side of feedback in L2 writing

Some early studies in L1 and L2 contexts have reminded us that certain types of feedback may not necessarily lead to substantive revisions, and that unclear and illegible feedback may lead to students' frustration (Ferris, 1997; Sommer, 1982; Zamel, 1985). As Zhao (2017, p. 3) has argued, "educational research seems to be exclusively interested in what works, but ignores the possibility that what works may hurt at the same time." In writing feedback research, the situation is similarly prominent, with substantial scholarship focusing on proving the effectiveness of feedback in improving students' writing performance. The negative side of feedback has been largely ignored, and only a few studies have touched upon this issue and treated it as peripheral (e.g., Xu & Yu, 2018; Zacharias, 2007; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). In this study, the negative side of feedback refers to the unintended results that were brought by feedback practices and generated little chances for writing improvement and writer development. To present a complete picture of its negative side in learning, we focus on the possible negative impact of feedback in L2 writing at the information level, the individual level, and the socio-cultural level.

At the information dimension, the impact of feedback centers around whether it could enhance students' performance on a specific task. Two characterizations of feedback are prominent: feedback quality and feedback scope. Intuitively, if feedback on students' compositions contains no useful information for further improvement, students might make fewer revisions to their work, thus indicating slim chances for learning. For example, Sommers (1982) found that vague comments from teachers would pose difficulties for L1 writing learners in enacting feedback, a phenomenon also observed in Zamel's (1985) study on the features of teacher feedback to L2 writers. Ferris (1997) examined L2 students' writing revisions in line with teacher comments and found two problematic types of teacher feedback: questions and information-presenting statements, both of which led to little positive revisions. However, several empirical inquiries have found that even feedback of high quality cannot ensure improvement in students' writing proficiency (Huisman et al., 2017).

The feedback scope, comprehensive or focused, is another frequently researched topic concerning the tangible effects of feedback, written corrective feedback in particular, on learning (Mao & Lee, 2020), as evidenced by improvement in writing products. Although some scholars have developed their manageable framework in providing comprehensive feedback (e.g., the Dynamic Written

Corrective Feedback proposed by Hartshorn et al., 2010), such feedback might be, as argued by Truscott and Hsu (2008), ineffective due to its high level of cognitive processing and the arbitrary, inconsistent way of correction. The focused feedback has been supported by an array of studies (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ferris, 2002), which identified its benefits in increasing students' writing scores. However, Ekiert and di Gennaro (2019) found that the impact of focused corrective feedback was inconsistent and partial, and focused feedback might inadvertently hinder L2 students from improving accuracy on the linguistic rules which receive less attention.

When feedback functions at the intrapersonal level, its impact is mainly manifested in these individual factors that shape learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards writing and/or feedback. Four of these individual factors should be noted: motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, and emotions. Feedback could potentially discourage students and then reduce their learning motivation. Lee (2008) argued that EFL learners, especially those of low proficiency, are most vulnerable and can easily be discouraged by teacher feedback that points out a large number of weaknesses in their writing. Feedback practices could also influence the extent to which learners devote themselves to tasks. For example, Zhang and Hyland (2018) found that AWE systems directly pointing out writing mistakes would possibly embarrass L2 writing students and thus discourage their engagement, and the bulk of AWE feedback research has focused on its impact at the information level, with little attention paid to the revising process at the individual or socio-cultural level. Teacher feedback that was less timely and flexible may lead to uncertainty for students regarding how to behaviorally engage in revising. There is also evidence supporting the effects of feedback on students' self-efficacy in learning (Lee & Evans, 2019; Ruegg, 2018; Zacharias, 2007). Previous studies generally found that an excessive amount of teacher feedback could reduce students' confidence in learning (e.g., Zacharias, 2007). It has also been suggested that negative feedback would lead to a loss of self-confidence (Lee & Evans, 2019).

Feedback could also elicit learners' emotional responses. The current research on the emotional dimension of writing feedback is rather limited (Han & Hyland, 2019; Mahfoodh, 2017), while a group of studies noticed students' emotions to writing feedback through the lenses of engagement (e.g., Ellis, 2010; Han & Hyland, 2015; Zheng & Yu, 2018), perception (e.g., Zacharias, 2007; Zumbunn et al., 2016), or response (e.g., Hyland, 1998; Lee, 2008). It has been found that feedback could elicit negative emotions and some emotions like frustration, disappointment, and anxiety are frequently reported by students (Han & Hyland, 2019; Mahfoodh, 2017; Zheng & Yu, 2018; Zacharias, 2007; Zumbunn et al., 2016). Such negative emotions generally occur when there is a miscommunication between providers and receivers regarding the amount and the way in which writing feedback is delivered. It was found that too much teacher feedback would lead to students' feelings of disappointment as they might interpret it as an unfavorable evaluation of their writing proficiency (Zacharias, 2007). Certain feedback-giving practices like crossing out mistakes and using a red pen could also elicit a sense of anxiety among students (Mahfoodh, 2017).

Feedback, at the socio-cultural dimension of learning, could shape the relational landscape in which L2 writers interpret and use feedback. Skipper and Douglas (2015) designed an experiment composed of imaginary scenarios in which primary school students from the UK were exposed to different types of feedback (praise on personal traits, praise on process, criticism on personal traits, and criticism on process) and found that when students failed at their L1 writing assignment, person forms of criticism (i.e., attributing learning outcome to stable individual factors such as intelligence quotient) would be interpreted as teachers' negative evaluation of learners themselves and damage the student-teacher relationship. The null effect of praise is also identified in Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study in which students considered positive but empty remarks as a waste of time and hence viewed the teacher as insincere. Besides, other features of feedback can shape learners' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship. Hyland (2013) found that oversimplified feedback, delayed comments, or a lack of two-way interaction would construct an aloof and uninterested stance of teachers towards students' performance and thus deteriorate the interpersonal ties between learners and their instructors.

Although there are theoretical and empirical discussions of the possible influences of feedback on student writing development, to the best of our knowledge, little research has focused on the negative impact of feedback on L2 student writers. We still know little regarding the attributes of feedback that may bring negative influences to L2 student writers and students' responses to such negative influences. Informed by the multi-dimensional perspective of feedback and its impact on L2 writing, this study aims to advance our knowledge of the negative influences of feedback on L2 writing and writers. A focus on the negative side of feedback can generate useful insights into the impact of feedback and complexities involved in L2 writers' learning to write. Such insights can provide practical implications for current L2 writing programs on how to avoid the negative impact and maximize the effectiveness of feedback practice in promoting L2 writing performance and the development of students as L2 writers. This study aims to address the following two research questions:

- (1) What attributes of feedback may bring negative influences to Chinese EFL student writers?
- (2) What were the negative influences on Chinese EFL student writers and how did they respond to such negative influences of feedback?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Context and participants

This study was conducted at 11 universities in the Chinese mainland, a typical EFL context where the teaching and learning of English writing are included in the curricula of primary, secondary, and higher education systems. The participants were 386 English major and 689 non-English major undergraduate students ( $N = 1,075$ ) enrolled in various programs (English language and literature, Education, Engineering, Accounting, and Physics) at different academic levels (beginner, intermediate, and advanced), who had been

studying English for 6–10 years. The participants at the selected universities came from different parts of China, and their feedback experiences in English writing classes varied due to the unequal development of English education across the country. Therefore, we could expect diversified critical incidents and individual differences among students in terms of their English language proficiency, writing experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward feedback in L2 writing.

In the Chinese EFL context, students are instructed to write various types of essays to prepare for several high-stakes examinations: The National College Entrance Examination at the secondary level, the College English Test Bands 4 and 6 at the university level, and other international language tests (e.g., IELTS, TOFEL). In addition, although Chinese students are subject to strong assessment culture (Zhao, 2010), feedback has been a primary and critical resource to help students diagnose the problems and improve their writing skills thanks to the implementation of a process-based writing approach and formative classroom assessment in L2 writing classes (the Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020; the National Higher Education Steering Committee for College English Teaching, 2020).

### 3.2. Data collection

#### 3.2.1. Critical incident technique

The critical incident technique was originally utilized by social work trainers to help trainees learn from their prior practice and experience through reflections (Flanagan, 1954). In the educational context, critical incident, which refers to any unplanned event occurring during class, has been used by teachers and teacher-educators as a means of improving teaching through teacher reflections on the events of classroom instruction (Farrell, 2008; Kılıç & Cinkara, 2020; Tripp, 2011). The current study employs critical incident as a technique of eliciting students' perceived impact of feedback by recalling any expected event that occurs in feedback situations and significantly affects the student.

A Critical Incident Form was developed for this study as an instrument to elicit students' experiences with the feedback that had cast a negative impact on their learning of EFL writing. The form was formulated through rounds of discussion among the researchers in accordance with the two research questions. It involved three sections: 1) demographic data, such as major and years of learning English, 2) a Yes/No question that asked "do you think feedback sometimes would cast a negative impact on your English writing and yourself as a writer," and 3) an open-ended question (if yes) that asked the student to describe the critical incident in which he/she felt the negative impact. Table 1 below provides statistics on the data collection of the Critical Incident Form.

It was administrated to 1,075 undergraduates in 11 Chinese universities. The majority of participants (912, 84.8 %) did not report critical incidents related to writing feedback, which could be attributed to the design of the form where participants could simply select "No" to the first question, and then the questionnaire would be automatically terminated and recorded as such. 163 (15.2 %) reported their critical incidents. The researchers carefully examined and discussed the critical incident described in each form and further excluded 128 (78.5 %) reports as they contained incidents not related to writing. Therefore, 35 reports of critical incidents were focused as they provided complete and sufficient information for further analysis.

#### 3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

To form a nuanced understanding of their feedback experiences, an interview invitation was sent to the 35 students who reported valid critical incidents. 29 of them agreed to participate in the interview session, which focused on the self-reported incidents concerning feedback in L2 writing. The 29 participants were from 6 different universities located in five provinces or municipalities of the Chinese mainland (i.e., Chongqing, Guangdong, Shandong, Sichuan, and Tianjin). 18 of them were females and 11 were males. 7 were English majors and 22 non-English majors. The 29 participants were also representative with different backgrounds in higher education (e.g., educational and language levels, L2 writing experiences, and courses learned). In the interview, the Critical Incident Form was presented to the students and they were asked to describe the critical incident in detail. Follow-up questions were asked about the impact of the incidents. Some of the sample questions are: What had happened? How did you feel at that time? What feedback would create difficulties in your revisions? Could you use an example to illustrate the difficulties? All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese (the students' L1) and lasted 30–60 min.

**Table 1**  
Participants' critical incidents concerning writing feedback.

|   | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Participants' reports of critical incidents (Total = 1075)</b>       |                       |                           |
| Reports without critical incidents                                      | 912                   | 84.8 %                    |
| Reports with critical incidents   | 163                   | 15.2 %                    |
| <b>Participants' reports of valid critical incidents (Number = 163)</b> |                       |                           |
| Reports with invalid critical incidents                                 | 128                   | 78.5 %                    |
| Reports with valid critical incidents                                   | 35                    | 21.5 %                    |

### 3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach aiming to identify, analyze, and report patterns particular to the current research (Miles et al., 2013). It went through two stages: the Critical Incident Forms were first examined to develop an initial analyzing scheme, which was then elaborated and validated through interview data coding. Two of the researchers were responsible for the coding and had frequent communication with the other researchers when difficulties occurred.

First, the two coders independently examined the 35 valid Critical Incident Forms. Before the coding, a meeting was held among all the researchers concerning the research questions, previous empirical, and theoretical discussion of feedback, thereby ensuring a proper understanding of the data on the coders (Kuckartz, 2014). The two coders used open codes and focused on descriptions that concerned each of the two research questions: the attributes of negative-impact-generating feedback; the subsequent negative impact; and students' responses. To offer more descriptive information, the two coders also counted the number of students who mentioned something that could be coded for the specific features, which is referred to as the "number of occurrences." This round of coding generated a list of codes and familiarized coders with the data. The two coders then constantly compared their coding and modified codes where necessary (Kuckartz, 2014). Where they failed to reach a consensus, they discussed with the first author until an agreement, a process called consensual coding where coding reliability could be enhanced with a group of coders resolving their discrepancies in data analysis and coming to an agreement (Kuckartz, 2014). Based on the mutually agreed coding results, the two coders integrated each code and inductively formulated three frameworks.

Second, the initial analysis of critical incident data was employed to feed into the coding of interview data so that the preliminary coding results were tested, evaluated, and expanded with more data from the interviews (Miles et al., 2013). The two coders followed the initial analyzing scheme and analyzed the interview data using NVivo 12 (<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software>). They independently coded the interview transcripts and focused on the semantic or explicit meanings of the data. Take participants' responses to AWE feedback for example, 1) "This feedback is of little use to me because the system could not understand the real intentions in my writing." 2) "After several submissions, I found the feedback offered by the system was similar and lack of specification." These two interview excerpts share a similar semantic meaning and could be coded as the homogeneous manner of AWE feedback. Following the tentative coding framework, they attributed relevant interview excerpts into the pre-defined categories. New nodes were created where data failed to fit into the scheme. To minimize coding differences, the two coders discussed their coding results and modified certain codes if necessary. They then integrated codes, especially those newly created ones, into different levels (features of feedback), themes (impact of feedback), and responses (learners' responses to the impact), and they further strengthened and elaborated the initial coding frameworks. All the researchers discussed the coding results and made relevant modifications (mainly, renaming some categories). The finalized coding results illustrated three broad levels together with seven specific feedback features that could elicit a negative impact on learners, eight themes concerning the negative impact of such feedback, and four general responses of learners towards these negative influences.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. What attributes of feedback may bring negative influences to chinese EFL student writers?

As shown in Table 2, the attributes of negative-impact-associated feedback can be approached from three general levels of feedback: content, criteria, and process, each of which further consists of several specific feedback features identified in both Critical Incident Forms and interviews.

At the content level, students reported three occasions in which feedback generated a negative impact on their learning. A lack of specification and customization ( $n = 34$ ) was the most frequently mentioned attribute of feedback. As revealed in critical incidents and

**Table 2**  
Attributes of feedback eliciting negative impact.

| Level of feedback | Design attribute   | Mode of feedback                | Number of occurrences |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Feedback content  | 1. Feedback is provided in a homogeneous manner, not specific or customized                          | AWE feedback                    | 34                    |
|                   | 2. Feedback is of low quality, and primarily addresses superficial problems                          | AWE feedback, peer feedback     | 31                    |
|                   | 3. Minor/simple problems receive more feedback, while major/difficult problems receive less feedback | Peer feedback, AWE feedback     | 8                     |
| Feedback criteria | 4. Feedback criteria is unclear  | Teacher feedback, peer feedback | 22                    |
|                   | 5. Feedback is inconsistent among different providers  | AWE feedback, Peer feedback     | 12                    |
| Feedback process  | 6. Feedback is not in a dialogic form, but one-way information transmission                          | Teacher feedback                | 15                    |
|                   | 7. Feedback loop is not closed   | AWE feedback, Peer feedback     | 3                     |
|                   |  | Teacher feedback, AWE feedback  |                       |

interviews, students had encountered difficulties when the received feedback was similar, that is the content of feedback being almost the same to all students. Such negative evaluation was primarily targeted at AWE feedback. For example, student #9 complained that:

我觉得就是我每篇作文提交上去给的意见都差不多。The comments were similar every time a piece of writing was submitted. (student #9).

Specifically, as reported by student #3:

电脑反馈系统只能给我推荐一些词汇, 但是不能理解我真正想表达的意思。Computer-based scoring systems simply generate a list of recommended vocabularies and failed to understand what I want to express in writing. (Student #3).

This is probably because existing AWE systems are well developed to analyze written texts at lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels, and offer automated scores, but not well-trained to respond to content and other aspects of students' writings. Therefore, despite the usefulness of AWE feedback, it would produce a harmful effect when it was used inappropriately. This explains why students hold negative views towards the homogeneous manner of AWE feedback, especially in the Chinese EFL context where AWE feedback is widely used as supplement resources to teacher feedback.

Feedback of low quality was the second most frequently reported attribute of writing feedback ( $n = 31$ ). It concerned feedback that was not specific and with the lack of actionable information. Such feedback could be about a writing task, such as whether the use of a certain word is correct or not, and it could also aim at the writing process, such as how to improve the writing by processing the feedback information. Feedback with this attribute caused uneasiness since students felt their incapability to further revise their writing. Such low-quality feedback was generally observed in peer evaluation, where the peer students' ability to provide feedback was questioned. Some students even felt their peers provided the wrong feedback information. Eight student participants complained about the "superficial" feedback they had received. This design attribute of feedback was identified across various sources where much feedback focused on minor or simple problems, while fewer comments were targeted at in-depth issues. Such feedback was limited in diagnosing substantial problems in students' writing, as well as their difficulties in revising these problems. Feedback focusing on spelling and grammatical mistakes, for example, was argued by student #11 to be "not enough":

说实话, 我感觉收到的反馈不够, 我真正的困难是不知道如何在议论文写作中提出和证明观点。Frankly, I have not received enough useful feedback. My real difficulty in writing is how to create and extend arguments in argumentative writings. (Student #11)

34 participants reported how feedback criteria had negatively influenced their learning. 22 of them had encountered such situations where they could not understand or had little knowledge of the standard for giving feedback. The unclear feedback criteria were observed mostly in AWE feedback and peer feedback (9 out of 22 occurrences). For example, student #1 said:

我不懂它(批改网)是以一种怎样的标准来批改的。我记得有一次作文交上去以后分数不高, 然后按照它的意见改了之后也没有提高。虽然系统指出了我的错误, 但还是没有得到直接、清楚的评价。I don't know its criteria in evaluating my writing. I once submitted my composition but got a low score. The score almost remained unchanged even after I revised my writing according to the suggestions offered by the system. It can point out my mistakes, but I just cannot get a direct and clear assessment of my writing performance. (Student #1)

Another situation associated with ill-defined feedback criteria was peer evaluation. Several students expressed their doubts about peer feedback and argued that a systematic scoring rubric should be instructed. Student #12 admitted that when he read his peer's writing:

改作文的话, 一般就按照自己的感觉和第一印象吧。I followed the free flow of my thoughts and evaluated the draft based on the first impression. (Student #12)

12 participants reported having received inconsistent feedback comments from different sources or at different learning stages. For one thing, feedback providers, due to their roles or expertise, might focus on various aspects of writing. When they examined the same writing, students might feel at a loss, especially when feedback information was in conflict. For example, student #3 obtained highly positive comments from an AWE system; however, when she presented her writing in class, the teacher was critical and gave substantial negative comments, thereby making the student feel "embarrassed and humiliated." For the other, student participants identified the differences between the feedback they received in high school and university. Teachers in high school employed a product approach to teaching English writing and thus focused on the form of texts such as grammar and spelling. When students entered university, they found English writing teachers followed a different approach and emphasized the organization, the content, and the flow of ideas of compositions. As stated by student #7:

高中老师不怎么强调文章的结构, 他说一篇好的文章应该使用“高级表达”。即使有错误, 分数也会比较高。但是大学的英语老师完全不一样, 他要求我们少出错, 尽量使用简单的语言和常见的结构。My high school teacher didn't pay much attention to the structure of writing; instead, he insisted that students should have "advanced expressions" in writing. It would not hurt our grades even when we made mistakes. However, in university, the teacher seemed to follow an opposite way of instruction. He told us to reduce our writing errors, use simple language, and follow conventional structures. (Student #7)

18 students reported their negative learning experiences associated with the feedback process. 15 of them were disturbed by feedback of one-way information transmission, which created limited opportunities for them to negotiate the comments with the providers. Feedback of this attribute was frequently identified in a large-size class where teachers were under a heavy workload and thus provided little opportunity for feedback dialogues. As reported by student #11:



如果老师很忙的话, 会要求我们把作文提交到批改网, 我们就根据电脑反馈修改作文, 然后他也不会再点评了[...]我有时候看不懂系统给的反馈, 但是没有办法跟电脑交流, 也没有办法得到更多的解释。When the teacher was busy, he would directly ask us [students] to submit our writing to the AWE system, and we then revised it according to the computer-generated feedback. That's it. The teacher would not provide any feedback [...] When I was confused by or disagreed with the feedback, I could not communicate with the system and ask for further clarification of the feedback. (Student #11)

Another attribute of the feedback process concerned the feedback loop, that was, whether students could deploy what they learned from one feedback session in future assignments. To close the loop requires actionable information and an iterative way of assessment. Three participants admitted their limited opportunities to feed forward and were unable to use the feedback to inform their subsequent writing tasks, thus having no clue for “where to next” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The major reason behind this was the lack of multiple-drafting. For example, one student expressed disagreement with her teacher's writing instruction in which only the first draft would be evaluated, and no comments or assessment would be provided to their subsequent revisions.

#### 4.2. What were the negative influences on chinese EFL student writers and how did the student writers respond to such negative influences?

The impact of feedback was identified along three dimensions: writing, learning emotions and motivation, and interpersonal relationships, with the consideration of both immediate and long-term influences (see Table 3).

##### 4.2.1. Impact on writing

15 participants reported that feedback molded and shaped their writing practices. The impact of feedback was generated on students' word choices, revising difficulties, and writing creativity. For example, because AWE feedback provided by systems such as *Pigai* (popular in China), emphasized the use of “advanced vocabulary” to secure a high score, some students tended to use low-frequency words in their compositions. Student #17 described his “blind adaptation” in following the AWE-generated feedback:

批改网能直接指出错误。它能告诉我哪些单词用的“一般”，可以替换成更高级的表达。我按照它的意见修改后再提交，就会得到更高的分数[...]现在我都会习惯性地记下好词好句，用在我的作文中。*Pigai* will directly point out my mistakes. It will tell me which word in my writing is “normal,” and how I can replace it with a more advanced expression. I always follow its advice since I want to achieve a higher score [students can resubmit their writing, and the computer will re-evaluate it]... Now, I have formed the habit of memorizing these advanced vocabularies and using them in my writing. (Student #17)

Such molding effect was obvious when students had restricted access to feedback dialogue and when they had limited ability to evaluate the quality of feedback. Some students reported their negative experience of non-dialogical feedback, and they could not feed forward to test whether their understanding of the feedback or the following revision was accurate. As argued by student #2:

我最后使用了批改网推荐的好词，因为我没有办法跟它交流，只有这样修改(使用系统推荐的单词)才能提高分数。She finally succumbed to AWE and used the recommended “fancy words” in her revision because “[she] cannot talk to the computer and this [using suggested vocabularies] is the only way to please it [AWE]. (Student #2)

Besides, some students might have low feedback literacy and could not evaluate the feedback information. For example, student #6

**Table 3**  
Negative impact of writing feedback and number of critical incidents eliciting the impact.

| Category of impact   | Code of negative impact   | Mode of feedback                                   | Number of occurrences |
|--|---|--|-----------------------|
| Impact on writing (Information level)                        | 1. Writing feedback may mislead students' writing practices   | Peer feedback<br>AWE feedback<br>Peer feedback     | 15                    |
|  | 2. Writing feedback may increase difficulties in revising writings                                  | Teacher feedback<br>AWE feedback                   | 16                    |
|  | 3. Writing feedback may force students to produce formulaic writings                                | Teacher feedback<br>AWE feedback                   | 12                    |
|  | 4. Writing feedback may cause students' resistance to accept feedback                               | AWE feedback<br>Peer feedback<br>Peer feedback     | 17                    |
| Impact on learning emotion and motivation (individual level) | 5. Writing feedback may elicit students' negative emotions  | Teacher feedback<br>AWE feedback                   | 24                    |
|  | 6. Writing feedback may destroy students' confidence in writing                                     | Teacher feedback<br>AWE feedback<br>Peer feedback  | 11                    |
| Impact on social relationships (socio-cultural level)        | 7. Writing feedback may lead to negative evaluation of peers, teachers, or even the writing courses | Peer feedback<br>Teacher feedback<br>Peer feedback | 23                    |
|  | 8. Writing feedback may hurt the relationship between providers and receivers                       | Teacher feedback                                   | 5                     |

followed his teacher's advice and used more advanced vocabularies:

我没有完全理解老师的意思[在作文中多使用高级表达]。所以我就听老师的意见，在作文里用了一些高级词汇。I cannot fully understand the teacher's intention of giving this feedback [employing advanced expressions in writing]. Therefore, I just followed her suggestion and filled my writing with more advanced vocabularies. (Student # 6)

The negative impact of feedback on writing was also manifested in students' difficulties in revision. Sixteen participants reported that feedback did not bring its intended effect, that was, to scaffold student writing; rather feedback information generated more difficulties in revision. This negative impact was closely associated with two attributes of feedback: the unclear criteria and the inconsistency of feedback information. For instance, student #12 was confused by teacher feedback and said,

其实我也不知道老师到底想说什么。她让我修改这一段，但是我不明白她给的建议是什么意思。I wondered what the teacher meant by saying this. She wanted me to revise this paragraph, but I didn't understand her comments. (Student #12)

Such feedback failed to convey its intended message and thus became less "actionable" as students had difficulties in decoding and using the comments. Student participants also encountered dilemmas when they received feedback from various sources (e.g., teachers, AWE, or peers). The inconsistent feedback had the chance of generating difficulties for students who had to assess the quality of multiple-sourced feedback and decide how to incorporate it in revision. This process of information evaluation and appropriation could be challenging for students, especially those new starters to university. For example, student #21 had a hard time adapting herself to a new feedback style after she graduated from high school, where her teacher only gave summative writing scores:

高中的时候，英语老师不会给详细的建议。一般只给作文打一个分数，我们只能背作文模版提高写作能力[...]上了大学后，我发现自己的英语水平不行[...]大学的写作老师强调思辨能力，要求我们通过写作表达想法。When I was in high school, the teacher wouldn't give you detailed comments on your writing. You would only receive a score. The way for us to improve our writing is to memorize these writing templates [...] However, when I entered university, I found my English writing proficiency was far from satisfactory. [...] In university, the writing teacher emphasized critical thinking, so I have to express my own thinking through writing. (Student #21)

Another negative impact of feedback concerned the way it forced students to produce formulaic language. Such impact was observed in situations where the feedback was provided by a more authoritative agent (i.e., teachers or AWE). Students might blindly accept these feedback comments without considering the reasons why such suggestions were provided. 12 participants reported that to gain high scores in tests, they had to follow certain "conventions" in writing such as templatic writing structures. As reported by participants, writing practices, especially when they were in high school, strictly followed teacher instruction to receive a satisfactory score in high-stake examinations like the National College Entrance Examination or *Gaokao*. For example, student #13 expressed how she followed teacher instruction and produced "one-size-fits-all" writing:

高中的时候，我的写作很差，老师就让我们背范文和作文模版，这样我在考试的时候就能写出正确的句子了。I was not good at English writing in high school, and the teacher told me to memorize exemplar essays and template languages so that I could write correct sentences in tests. (Student #13)

Similar experiences were also reported by participants who adopted the formulaic writing style as a "makeshift" in tests. Students may become accustomed to filling their compositions with stereotyped expressions or cliché content, thus limiting their creativity and critical thinking in writing that was seen as competence to express and communicate one's ideas. Such situations were more obvious when students encountered negative comments on their "unorthodox" writing. In this case, feedback might force learners to resume to their "comfort zone" by repeating the "safe" writing practices. For example, student #8 recalled how his teacher criticized his use of new sentence patterns:

老师说我在作文中没有使用上课讲到的基本句型，还有大量的错误。我感觉老师当时已经生气了，因为我没有把学到的内容写下来[...]其实我只是想在作文中使用一些新的表达，做出一些变化[...]不过我很快就把错误的句型改过来了，也没有在其它作文中出现过类似的错误。从那之后，我变得比较谨慎，避免在作文中使用新的单词和句型。When the teacher marked my writing, he commented that I failed to remember and use these basic sentence structures, and there were so many errors in my writing. He was angry because he thought I did not pay attention to these things we had learned [...] I just wanted to try some changes and used these new expressions [...] I then reviewed the sentence structures he emphasized and did not make similar mistakes in other writing assignments. Ever since that day, I have become more cautious and avoided using new expressions or structures in my English writing. (Student #8)

#### 4.2.2. Impact on emotion and motivation

17 participants reported how writing feedback triggered their resistance to using it. Such negative impact was frequently identified in incidents related to peer feedback (11 out of 17 occurrences), where students' lack of experience and capability of producing effective comments could reduce their peers' willingness to accept the feedback. For instance, student #22 had a discouraging experience of peer feedback, and it became a critical moment leading to his negative evaluation and resistance to accepting peer feedback:

我不太相信他(同伴)给的反馈。他没有把反馈太当回事，也没有认真读我的作文[...]所以我不怎么想看(同伴反馈)。I doubt the quality of his [peer student's] feedback. He didn't seem to treat this assignment [peer evaluation] seriously. [...] I even don't want to take a look at it [peer feedback]. (Student #22)

24 participants reported their emotional struggle elicited by feedback. In specific, feedback, especially negatively framed, could cause learners' negative emotions like confusion, doubt, anxiety, and disappointment. For example, student #22 was depressed when



his teacher said his writing was “a piece of garbage.” He was overwhelmed by such negative emotions and developed a sense of self-deprecation in his following revision of his writing. Student #15 reported how he had experienced extremely different emotions elicited by two opposite evaluations of his writing:

说实话, 同学们都认为我的作文写的不错。可是当老师选中我的作文, 当着同学们的面读完后, 却认为我写的不好, 还挑出了很多错误。我当时都懵了, 又怕同学们笑话我, 难受了一整天。Actually, the feedback from my peer student is quite positive. However, when my writing was chosen as an example and evaluated in class, the teacher seemed to hold a negative view and pointed out several problems. I felt terrible, and I could not let others sense my uneasiness during the class. I just could not get over it for the whole day. (Student #15)

In student #15's critical incident, the teacher's negative comments not only denied the previous peer evaluation but also elicited a series of negative emotions (e.g., terribleness and uneasiness). Besides, such negative emotions were overwhelming and lasted for the whole day. Other negative emotions were also mentioned by student participants such as doubt, frustration, and disappointment. These emotions were associated with a miscommunication between feedback providers and receivers. For example, student #21 expected her teacher to improve the writing content :

老师总是关注一些表面的问题, 例如我的书写, 我有点失望。However, his [the teacher's] comments focused on superficial writing problems like my handwriting, and I felt disappointed.

Pertinent to learners' negative emotions, writing feedback featuring negative critiques or “harsh” comments could reduce writing confidence. 11 students reported how feedback diminished their writing confidence. Student #10 reported his lack of confidence and self-assumed incapability to address the negative comments he received:

我其实没有信心能改好作文。我的英语不好, 很多负面的意见我也不知道该怎么改。I didn't have enough confidence in revising my writing. I doubted my own English writing proficiency and didn't think I could revise the draft in line with the negative comments. I just felt I couldn't do it. (Student #10)

In this case, learners could be overwhelmed by the negative comments and encounter difficulties in engaging with the feedback. Furthermore, such comments would reduce their confidence in revising the submitted writing and even completing subsequent compositions.

#### 4.2.3. Impact on social relationships

23 participants reported how feedback they received influenced their evaluation of peers, teachers, or the overall writing course. Student #17, for example, reported a negative evaluation of the process of peer feedback activities held in his class:

我们平均一个学期要进行好几次同伴互评, 不过都比较“随意。”我感觉老师对我们也没有特别的要求, 一般就让我们两人一组互相提意见。但是我们基本上讨论一会儿就结束了, 没有太多交流。对我而言, 我感觉同伴反馈对写作的帮助不大, 尤其是在课堂上反馈, 有点浪费时间, 我在写作课上没有学到太多的东西。We conducted peer feedback in writing courses several times a semester, but mostly in a “casual” manner. I felt like the teacher did not expect much from us, and she only asked us to do pair work and give comments to each other. However, our pair discussion always finished in a short time with limited information-sharing. Since I am not good at writing, I think peer feedback is a waste of class time, and I did not learn much from the course. (Student #17)

As reviewed in this case, the “casual” manner of feedback process not only diminished the student's perception of the usefulness of feedback, but also negatively affect his evaluation of the feedback providers, leading to his discontent with and reluctance to engage with feedback.

5 participants reported that their feedback experience deteriorated their relationship with feedback providers. Feedback in this situation became a social-relational process by which information providers and receivers interact through dialogues. If the dialogue failed to target the writing tasks, or it included learners' individual differences, learners would feel being neglected or disrespected. Therefore, it was less likely to build a trusting atmosphere and might hurt the relationship between feedback providers and receivers. In this study, some students took feedback personally and regarded negative evaluation as a criticism of their personalities and capabilities. This phenomenon was especially observed among high-achievement students. For example, student #11, a top student regarding English writing proficiency, felt that the teacher might dislike her when she received negative feedback that focused on her handwriting rather than the content of the writing:

有一次作文我写的不是很认真, 老师说我的书写太糟糕, 都不想看我的作文了[...]后来我想自己的书写其实没那么糟糕, 可能就是老师不喜欢我。He [the teacher] told me that my handwriting was terrible, and he even didn't want to take a closer look at my writing [...] I didn't think my handwriting was that bad, I thought he just didn't like me. (Student #11)

In the Chinese EFL context, the quality of handwriting has been considered an important

**Table 4**  
Response strategies to the negative impact of feedback.

| Response Strategies to feedback                     | Number of occurrences |
|---|-----------------------|
| Selectively using writing feedback                  | 26                    |
| Absolutely agreeing with and accepting the feedback | 13                    |
| Putting aside and withdrawing from the feedback     | 15                    |
| Seeking external assistance                         | 23                    |

criterion for evaluating students' writing. However, the student, in this case, was disappointed about the teacher's negative feedback, which led to his disagreement and negative evaluation of the relationship with the teacher.

#### 4.2.4. Students' responses to the negative influences

Table 4 illustrates the frequency of the four response strategies adopted by student participants.

The most frequently used strategy was to selectively use writing feedback ( $n = 26$ ). It was generally observed in peer feedback scenarios. Learners may take a skeptical attitude towards peer feedback and selectively use the information. In this case, the student writers doubted the correctness and usefulness of the feedback, and, therefore, took a "look-before-you-leap" attitude towards the comments. The usefulness of feedback was associated with learners' assumptions of their peers' English writing proficiency and their attitudes in performing the peer-reviewing task. For example, students #19 adopted a skeptical view of the feedback from his peers:

我很少会接受所有的同伴反馈。通常我会把自己的作文跟范文做比较, 然后再看反馈。如果反馈能说服我, 我会采纳; 如果不能的话, 我就不管了。I seldom accept all the peer feedback in my revisions. I usually compare my writing with an exemplar before deciding how to deal with the feedback. If the feedback convinced me, I would consider using it in revision; if not, I would just ignore the comments. (Student #19)

Student #13 also selectively accepted peer feedback as she believed that the feedback quality was associated with the English language ability of her peers. She was more likely to consider comments from high-proficiency peer students than those under-achieving in English writing:

这要看同学的英语水平了。如果同学的英语比我好, 他提的意见也会很好, 我就愿意接受他们的意见。如果同学的写作能力不高, 我就不太愿意接受他的建议了, 即使他的建议是对的。It really depends on the language proficiency of peer students who evaluate my writing. If my partner's English was better than mine, his or her comments could be of high quality, and I would probably accept the suggestions. If my partner was not good at writing, I would be reluctant to accept his comments, even if the comments might be correct. (Student #13)

The second strategy was to absolutely accept the feedback ( $n = 13$ ). It took place in two feedback situations: teacher feedback and AWE feedback. First, teachers were regarded as powerful and authoritative, and learners had to be obedient and trust their teachers. Besides, to obtain a positive evaluation and satisfactory score, learners were subject to the teachers' comments. For example, student #21 was used to accepting all the feedback from her teacher without doubting or reflecting on the information:

我记得老师让我们进行过一次合作写作, 题目是论述“校园垃圾分类的好处”。我们组在网上搜了一些国外的做法, 然后写到了作文里面, 但是老师说这些例子跟文章的主题不符。我们不是很同意老师的说法, 不过为了得高分, 最后还是改了。It was a collaborative writing task, and the writing topic was "Advantages of Garbage Classification on Campus." We searched for some practices in foreign countries and put them in the article, but the teacher thought these practices were irrelevant to the topic. Though we were not convinced, we finally accepted her comments in the revision to ensure a high score. (Student #21)

Some student participants reported their direct employment of computer-mediated corrective feedback. They relied on AWE for diagnosing language problems, such as spelling and grammar. They accepted the automated feedback simply for a higher score. For instance, student #6 held a positive attitude towards the feedback provided by *Pigai*, which could be further interpreted as a way of "taking-a-shortcut." Another plausible interpretation was that student #6 and other students alike were deprived of instances of making a judgment by the online feedback that was readily available:

批改网基本上能把所有的语言错误指出来, 还可以告诉我怎么改, 也省的我再去查字典了[...]我比较信任批改网的建议, 每次修改后, 分数都能提高。I think *Pigai* is a powerful feedback system as it can point out nearly all the mistakes in my writing. Besides, it saves my effort in looking up the words in the dictionary [...] I trust it also because I could have a higher score after each of the revisions. (Student #6)

The third strategy was to put aside the feedback that elicited a negative impact ( $n = 15$ ). This strategy was observed in two situations. When learners felt their inability to handle criticism in their writing, they would simply ignore these negative comments. For example, student #23 received a computer-generated evaluation which suggested him to revise the structure and the content of his writing. However, the scoring system did not provide how-to's; student #23 thus ignored the harsh comments and focused on those easier to tackle:

批改网总是告诉我要修改作文的内容和结构, 但是又不告诉我怎么修改。我也没办法跟它交流, 所以我感觉每个文章的反馈都好像是模板一样的, 不知道怎么改。通常我只修改明显的语言错误, 比较容易改。The *Pigai* system always told me to improve the content and structure, but it never told me how. Since I could not interact with the system, I felt like these comments are cliché and are not actionable. In most cases, I just focused on the feedback on language problems that is easier to revise.

Students would also put aside negative comments when the feedback dialogue did not lead to a satisfactory result. Some student participants reported that they did not agree with the comments from peer students but could not persuade their partners in the dialogue. Ultimately, they chose to resolve the conflict simply by ignoring the feedback. For example, student #24 had a discussion with his peer when he received the feedback. The dialogue, though effective in communicating their views, failed to convince the student participant of the usefulness of the feedback:

我在同伴反馈的时候更多的是自由讨论, 不是那种正式的讨论。我们喜欢围绕一个话题的展开讨论, 不过只是口头讨论(用汉语, 不是英语)。因为很难说服对方, 所以不会写到作文里。My experience of peer feedback was more of a free talk than a formal discussion. You can imagine, we like to express our views about a topic, but only in the form of oral discussion (not in English, but in Chinese). Since we seldom persuaded each other, it was difficult to transfer the discussion into writing. (Student #24)

The fourth response strategy involved seeking external assistance before deciding how to use the feedback ( $n = 23$ ). This strategy was typically adopted when students received unclear or controversial feedback. The help-seeking among student participants could be a self-reflective process that involves understanding feedback purposes, reflecting on and making a judgment on the received feedback, and exercising learner agency and willingness to communicate with people. In this case, learners realized the importance of seeking, processing, and using information for the benefit of their future work. The external assistance scaffolded learners in responding to feedback and alleviated the negativity of the critical incidents. For example, student #25 would actively ask for external help when he encountered difficulties in using computer-generated feedback:

如果我看不懂批改网的反馈, 首先会去问我的同学, 他的作文写的比我好。比如, 他会让我用翻译软件检查一遍。如果还是不行, 我还会去搜范文帮助修改。When I was confused by the feedback given by Pigai system, I would first turn to my friend who was good at writing. For example, he suggested proofreading the wrong sentences in an online translation App. If it did not work, I would search for an exemplar to guide the revision. (Student #25)

## 5. Discussion

This study examined the negative influences of feedback on Chinese EFL student writers and their responses to such influences. The findings shed light on students' perceptions of what feedback may bring negative influences to their L2 writing development. While students' experiences with various feedback are well documented in the existing literature (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ellis et al., 2008; Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2017; Yu & Lee, 2016), in the current study students' evaluation of feedback was teased out systematically at the information, individual, and socio-cultural levels. The identified attributes of feedback eliciting negative impact echo our multi-dimensional conceptualization of feedback impact. They are also possible conditions reported by the students for "what works may hurt at the same time" in L2 writing feedback (Zhao, 2017, p.3).

Findings concerning the impact of feedback could be further interpreted regarding the differences of L2 writers. On the information dimension of feedback, our findings further revealed that feedback could impact students' overall writing practices, that is, word choice, revising difficulties, and writing creativity. Findings of this study suggest that the impact of feedback as information could deteriorate when students believed that incorporating feedback could improve their writing scores. For example, students would follow their teachers' or AWE systems' advice to use advanced vocabularies. They were also forced to write in a formulaic way. Their intention behind such practices was to please the feedback providers and thus secure a higher score. When feedback is approached as an intrapersonal activity, the current study found feedback could cause students' resistance to using the information, generate negative learning emotions, and reduce confidence in writing. Particularly, negative feedback could have multiple impacts on student emotions and confidence, echoing Busse's (2013) and Lee's (2008) observation that learners could be vulnerable in the face of negative evaluation. Besides, the current study also identified students' low engagement and resistance towards "superficial" peer feedback when they found the feedback was below expectation and contained little actionable information (Busse, 2013). At the interactional dimension, findings of this study showed that feedback could influence students' judgment of information givers and even the writing course, and shape the relationship between feedback providers and receivers. As revealed by our findings, students' evaluation of peers, teachers, or the overall writing course was associated with their perception of the feedback they received, thereby suggesting that feedback could help construct the voice or stance of its providers (Hyland, 2013). Furthermore, feedback could also hurt the social ties when the receivers treated negative evaluations as personal criticism (Skipper & Douglas, 2015). For example, students might attribute criticism in writing to stable individual factors like personality.

While this study focuses on the negative impact of feedback on L2 writers, it should be noticed that any kind of feedback, even very positive and supportive feedback, can lead to misunderstandings and poor revisions (Ferris, 1997; Sommer, 1982). As argued by Ferris (1997), the very response options that lead to negative revisions in some cases also lead to positive revisions in other cases. This underscores the reality that there is some interaction among student, teacher, and context that affects the positivity or negativity of feedback, not just the feedback itself. As ineffective feedback should not be framed as a static entity, this study has advanced our knowledge of student agency in learning second language writing. It reveals the different response strategies adopted by students to tackle these negative impacts of writing feedback. The findings demonstrate that the student participants would pay selective attention to feedback information, accept/ignore all the feedback, or seek external help. In a learner-centered feedback mode (Carless & Boud, 2018; Han & Hyland, 2015; Lee, 2008; Molloy et al., 2020), students should take the initiative and exercise their agency in evaluating and using the feedback information. Echoing studies on student responses and the use of peer feedback (Yu & Lee, 2016), this study also found that students might doubt the reliability of the peer comments and thus selectively use the feedback. However, their partial employment of peer feedback was based on an active evaluation of the feedback content and their peers' English writing proficiency. Likewise, their help-seeking also evidences their proactivity in solving learning difficulties. This study found that student participants were likely to ask for help when they received unclear or controversial feedback, thus speaking to the tenet that the meaning of feedback is generated through sense-making (Papi et al., 2020).

Besides, this study revealed that the student participants tended to accept or reject feedback when they felt their incapability of challenging/persuading feedback providers. This phenomenon suggests students' lack of critical consideration in using feedback and portrays the image of a passive learner with reduced agency. It thereby provides further evidence of the central role of student agency in making use of feedback in writing. The amount of feedback students incorporate into their revision only reflects one aspect of their learning from feedback; what matters should be their attitudes towards and proactive judgment of the feedback information (Carless & Boud, 2018; Malecka, Boud, & Carless, 2020; Molloy et al., 2020). Therefore, as Flower and her colleagues (1986) have revealed, students' uptake and use of feedback concern their agency in information selection and evaluation; the feedback content, be it of high

quality or low quality, bears more significance for the givers than the receivers.

Based on the findings of this study and the existing literature that conceptualizes feedback and its impact (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020), this study presents a conceptual model on the negative side of feedback on L2 writing and the relationship of the three interrelated themes: attributes of writing feedback eliciting negative impact; the negative impact of writing feedback; and student responses to the negative impact of writing feedback (see Fig. 1). As shown in this model, the three themes are linked by reciprocal causation in a dynamic circle. It is noteworthy that the attributes of feedback that cause negative influences are multi-dimensional and cumulative, and they not only affect L2 writing development but also serve as antecedents that negatively influence learner emotions and confidences in using feedback and hurt learners' relational landscapes. This model also tries to illustrate possible forms of feedback impact, including the cognitive, affective, motivational, relational, and social impact, and highlight the multifarious nature of the impact of feedback on L2 student writers. In addition, learners' responses to feedback are complex and subject to various factors, such as the difficulty and requirement of the writing task, students' writing skills, and feedback literacy. The model indicates that the negative impact of feedback discourages learners from using feedback information successfully, thus reversely adding to their negative perception and evaluation of feedback. Besides, learners' responses to feedback also vary as a result of different individual and contextual factors such as individual beliefs and learning attitudes and the specific context of feedback activities. This model extends our understanding of the impact of feedback on L2 writing as it focuses on its negative side and reveals the multi-dimensional impact of feedback on L2 student writers.

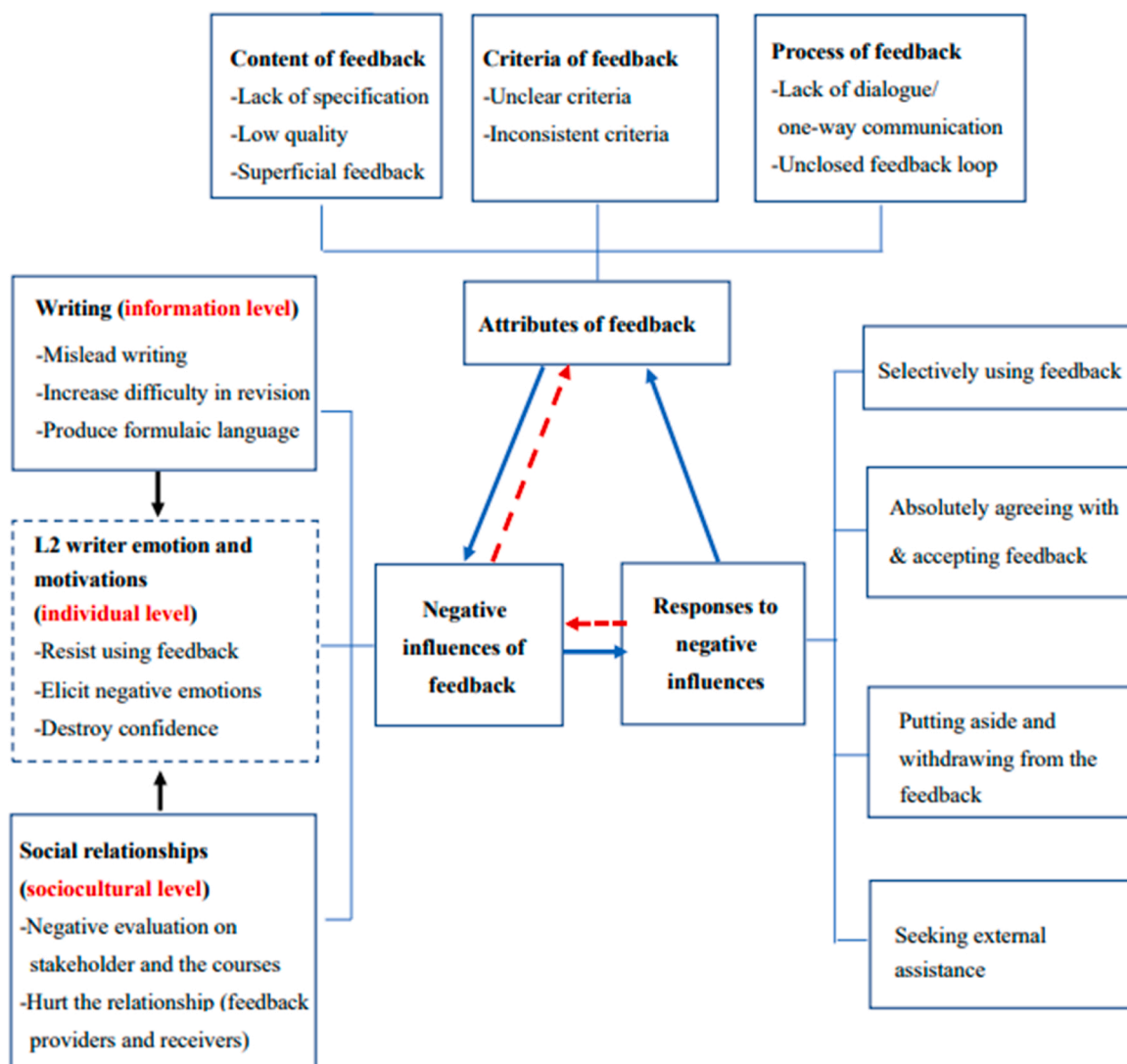


Fig. 1. A model of negative impact of writing feedback and students' responses.

## 6. Conclusion and implications

This study contributes to the theoretical discussions and empirical evidence of the impact of feedback on L2 writing by revealing the negative influences of feedback on student writing and student writers, thus providing insights into our understanding of feedback in L2 writing. As this study was conducted in university settings, future research could consider investigating the possible negative feedback experiences of students in other school contexts. The second limitation is that sample feedback and student assignments were not collected because this study relied on the critical incidents and the retrospective interviews and focused on eliciting students' previous feedback experiences in L2 writing. Future researchers may consider collecting sample feedback and student work to provide a more contextualized understanding of the negative influences of feedback in L2 writing.

Despite the limitations, several pedagogical implications can be generated from the findings of this study. First, L2 writing teachers and students need to be aware of the negative side of feedback in L2 writing. Although the negative impact of feedback is not intentional, L2 writing teachers should be aware of the possible negative influences of feedback on student writing processes, writing development, and the development of students as L2 writers and learners. While feedback is given to improve student writing, inappropriate feedback strategies and approaches may negatively influence student writing by misleading their writing practices, increasing difficulties in text revisions, and force students to produce formulaic writing. More importantly, it is possible that feedback may elicit students' negative emotions, and destroy students' writing confidence and writing motivation. It is also possible that writing feedback may lead to students' negative evaluation of peers, teachers, and the writing courses and hurt the relationship between feedback-providers and feedback-receivers.

Second, to reduce the negative influences of feedback, L2 writing teachers need to be familiar with the principles of providing feedback to student writing and enhance their feedback literacy. For instance, the findings of this study reinforce the importance of providing specific and customized feedback, which considers students' individual differences and writing needs, and the necessity of giving feedback on other aspects of writing such as content and genre (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Yu, 2020). The findings also suggest that clear criteria for feedback should be provided to students, especially when peer feedback is used in writing classes. Teachers also need to monitor the feedback and revising processes when there are multiple sources of feedback, such as peer feedback and computer-mediated feedback.

Third, the findings of this study call for a dialogic and learner-centered feedback approach in L2 writing classes so that feedback can work as an interactive communicative exchange activity in which teachers and students can share feelings and opinions, negotiate meanings, and discuss confusions and misunderstandings. Such an approach could reduce the possible negative influences of different types of feedback on student writers. In addition, L2 writers' agency is important in reducing the negative influences. L2 students should not be passive learners, and they do not need to accept all feedback and comments from their teachers and other sources. They can be selective and should learn how to seek help when there is inconsistent, inappropriate, and improper feedback. Such findings also highlight the crucial role of student feedback literacy in reducing the negative influences of feedback on student writers (Yu & Liu, 2021). To diminish the negative influences of feedback, L2 students need to learn to make sense of, evaluate, and use the received feedback from different sources to improve their current and/or future performance in L2 writing.

## Acknowledgements

This study is partially supported by Specialized Subsidy Scheme for Macao Higher Education Institutions in the Area of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences of Higher Education Fund (HSS-UMAC-2020-08). We would like to thank our participants for sharing their thoughts and experiences, and the reviewers and editors for their detailed and constructive comments.

## Appendix A

### Guide for the Interview

- 1 Could you tell me your experiences of learning L2 writing?
- 2 Here are the critical incidents provided by you. Would you please further elaborate on your experiences and feelings? What happened? How did you feel? How did you react?
- 3 How did your high school English teacher evaluate your writing? How did your college English teacher evaluate your writing? What are the differences between their ways of evaluating your writing?
- 4 To what extent would you accept / reject using the teacher feedback, and why?
- 5 Do you have any negative feedback experiences in high school and/or at university? What are they?
- 6 How do you feel about the negative experience and how do you respond to it?
- 7 What about your beliefs and experiences of peer feedback?
- 8 To what extent would you accept / reject using the peer feedback, and why?
- 9 Do you have any negative experiences in using the peer feedback? What are they?
- 10 How do you feel about the negative experience and how do you respond to it?
- 11 What about your beliefs and experiences of using the AWE?
- 12 To what extent would you accept / reject using the AWE, and why?
- 13 Do you have any negative experiences in using the AWE? What are they?
- 14 How do you feel about the negative experience and how do you respond to it?
- 15 What have you learned from these negative experiences?



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