

Using Dialogic Multimodal Feedback to Enhance University EFL Students' Writing: Affordances for Language Learning Styles

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of dialogic multimodal feedback (DMF) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction at a Vietnamese university. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research investigated stakeholder perceptions of DMF affordances and their impact on students with diverse learning styles. Results revealed that DMF offers technical, pedagogical, and social affordances that enhance writing development across various learning preferences. While students and teachers showed positive attitudes toward DMF compared to conventional text feedback, the study highlighted the importance of individual differences in perceiving and engaging with feedback affordances. These findings suggest that DMF can effectively support inclusive writing pedagogy when implemented thoughtfully.

Keywords: Dialogic multimodal feedback, EFL writing, affordances, learning styles

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Background

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction faces ongoing challenges in providing effective feedback that accommodates diverse learner needs and preferences. Conventional text feedback, while valuable, often fails to engage students meaningfully or address different learning styles comprehensively (possibly due to the potential lack of clarity (Penn & Brown, 2022) and unimodal approach).

Despite growing interest in video feedback (Pachuashvili, 2024), most implementations remain monologic, treating students as passive recipients rather than active participants in knowledge construction (Mahoney et al., 2019). This limitation has created a research gap for the emergence of dialogic multimodal feedback (DMF) that combines multiple information sources while enabling student-teacher dialogue and discussion.

Additionally, limited research exists on how students with different learning styles perceive and benefit from multimodal feedback approaches.

The current study addresses these gaps by investigating DMF implementation in Vietnamese EFL contexts, where cultural factors such as Confucian ideals may influence student participation in feedback processes.

The research aims to understand both the affordances (learning opportunities [Williams & Mercer, 2016]) that DMF provides and how learners with varying learning styles experience and benefit from this feedback modality through the lens of Affordance Theory (Gibson, 1979) Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- *What perceived affordances does DMF offer for supporting EFL university students' writing development across various learning styles?*
- *How do learners with different learning styles perceive the impacts of DMF on their writing skills?*

Methodology

This mixed-methods action research study employed a pragmatism paradigm to investigate DMF implementation in an EFL writing course at a Vietnamese university. The study involved 39 EFL students enrolled in a writing-focused English course during one semester. The research design nested quantitative survey data within a larger qualitative framework to provide comprehensive insights into participant experiences and perceptions.

Loom was chosen as the main platform for recording and delivering DMF. The lecturer recorded multimodal video feedback in Loom, sent the video links

to students so that the students could interact with the feedback by directly commenting on the videos, and receiving lecture responses in Loom platform.

The primary data collection instruments included student surveys measuring perceptions of DMF affordances and effectiveness, semi-structured interviews exploring students' experiences in depth, and reflective teaching journals maintained by the instructor throughout the implementation period.

Qualitative data from interviews and teaching journals underwent thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes, while quantitative survey data received descriptive statistical analysis. This triangulated approach ensured a robust investigation of the research questions from multiple perspectives and data sources.

Results

Perceived Affordances of DMF

The students' survey revealed a comprehensive range of perceived important affordances that students and teachers attributed to DMF implementation (Table 1). These affordances clustered into three main categories: technical, pedagogical, and social opportunities for learning enhancement.

Technical affordances included replay functionality and transcript availability that enabled personalized learning experiences. Students particularly valued the ability to watch feedback videos multiple times at their preferred pace and location, with scores indicating high importance (Mean: 4.97; SD: 1.02).

Pedagogical affordances encompassed the multimodal nature of feedback that could accommodate different learning style preferences through varied information sources including audio, visual, and textual elements. Interviewees reported that this combination helped avoid misunderstandings common with brief text-only feedback, where unclear symbols or minimal comments often left learners confused about instructors' intentions.

Social affordances emerged as equally significant (Mean: 4.83; SD: 1.04), particularly the discussion function that enabled students to ask clarifying questions and engage in dialogue with instructors. This dialogic feature received high importance ratings from students and was consistently emphasized during interviews as transformative for their learning experience.

Learning Style Accommodation and Flexibility

Analysis revealed that over 93% of students agreed that DMF provided learning opportunities that either matched their preferred learning styles or stretched

Table 1. Perceived importance of the affordances of DMF

Perceived Affordances of DMF	Proportion						Other Descriptive Statistics	
	Not Provided by IVF	Provided, But Not Important	Provided & Slightly Important	Provided & Important	Provided & Very Important	Provided & Extremely Important	Mean (Out of 6)	SD
1. Opportunities to absorb knowledge more deeply and easily from multimodal resources (with the aid of multiple types of information: audio, text, gestures, etc.)	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	40.00%	36.67%	6.67%	4.33	0.83
2. Learning opportunities that match learners' preferred language learning styles (with the aid of multiple types of information: audio, text, gestures, etc.)	0.00%	6.67%	6.67%	26.67%	46.67%	13.33%	4.53	1.02
3. Learning opportunities that stretch learners' language learning styles (with the aid of multiple types of information: audio, text, gestures, etc.), hence improving learning flexibility	0.00%	3.33%	16.67%	33.33%	26.67%	20.00%	4.43	1.09
4. Opportunities to improve memory retention by combining visual and auditory stimuli.	0.00%	3.33%	13.33%	30.00%	36.67%	16.67%	4.5	1.02
5. Opportunities to make the learning process more interactive and engaging compared to traditional written feedback	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	26.67%	30.00%	26.67%	4.67	1.04
6. Opportunities to ask questions and have discussions regarding lectures' comments to clarify information	0.00%	3.33%	10.00%	13.33%	46.67%	26.67%	4.83	1.04
7. Opportunities to connect with lectures emotionally (via reaction to the feedback video or engagement with teachers' voice, tone, or non-verbal language, etc.)	0.00%	3.33%	20.00%	36.67%	23.33%	16.67%	4.3	1.07
8. Opportunities to watch the feedback video as many times as possible, at any speed and space	0.00%	0.00%	10.00%	23.33%	26.67%	40.00%	4.97	1.02
9. Opportunities to use the script if needed	0.00%	6.67%	16.67%	23.33%	26.67%	26.67%	4.5	1.23
10. Opportunities to reflect and make revision on the first draft of the writing	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	23.33%	30.00%	30.00%	4.73	1.06
11. More time for reflection before having questions compared to face-to-face oral feedback	0.00%	3.33%	10.00%	20.00%	40.00%	26.67%	4.77	1.05

their capabilities to improve learning flexibility (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). Audio-visual learners specifically highlighted the significance of combining multiple information modalities to support their comprehension and retention.

Cultural and Emotional Considerations

An unexpected finding concerned the emotional support that DMF provided, particularly relevant in the Vietnamese cultural context. Students reported reduced anxiety compared to face-to-face feedback situations, attributing this to the private nature of online interactions that allowed them to process information calmly and ask questions without fear of public embarrassment.

This finding reflects the influence of collectivist culture and the lingering impacts of Confucian ideals on Vietnamese students. Despite recent cultural shifts towards student-centredness, open dialogue, and progressive changes in student-teacher power relations (Nguyen et al., 2025), to some Vietnamese students, questioning teachers publicly may be perceived as disrespectful (Bao & Nguyen, 2020). DMF provided a comfortable platform for active engagement while maintaining cultural sensitivity and encouraging student agency in the feedback process.

Comparative Effectiveness and Preferences

Figure 1 below shows that students strongly favoured DMF over conventional approaches, with 80% of participants selecting it as their preferred feedback modality. Comparative analysis revealed that students perceived DMF as more detailed, user-friendly, and effective than traditional text feedback, with particularly strong ratings for accommodating diverse learning style preferences.

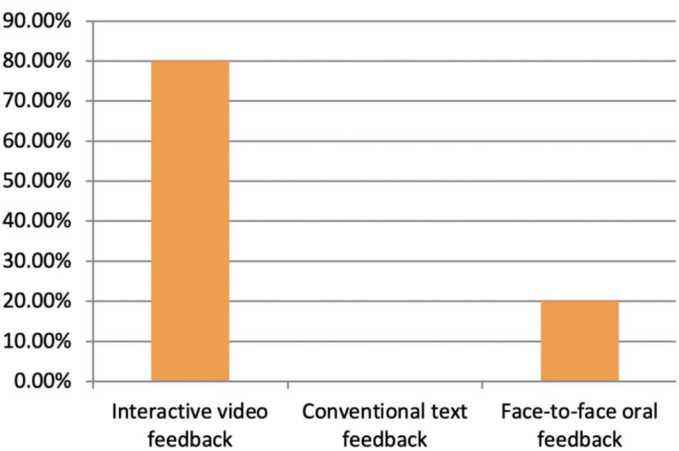


Figure 1. The most preferred feedback modality.

Student interview data and teaching journal provided additional insights into these preferences, highlighting DMF's capacity for personalized learning experiences, enhanced comprehension through multimodal information sources, and improved retention compared to single-mode feedback approaches. Students also appreciated the self-regulated learning opportunities that replay functionality provided.

Interestingly, teaching journals revealed that despite consistent preferences for DMF, dissimilar students may perceive and act upon the available affordances in dissimilar ways, showing different levels of engagement, and attributing to different perceived impacts on writing skill.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that DMF offers significant affordances for EFL writing instruction, particularly in accommodating diverse learning styles and fostering inclusive pedagogical practices. The technical, pedagogical, and social affordances identified suggest that DMF can enhance traditional feedback approaches while addressing limitations of monologic, text-only methods.

The strong student preference for DMF, coupled with positive teacher perceptions, indicates potential for broader implementation in EFL contexts. However, the study also reveals important considerations regarding individual differences in affordance perception and engagement. Some students demonstrated higher levels of interaction with DMF features, while others engaged more passively, suggesting that successful implementation requires careful attention to promoting active participation.

Cultural factors emerged as particularly significant in this Vietnamese context, where DMF provided mechanisms for overcoming traditional barriers to student-teacher interaction. The emotional support affordances of DMF may be especially valuable in collectivist educational environments where public questioning of authority may be culturally discouraged (Bao & Nguyen, 2020).

Future research should explore long-term effects on writing development and how varied cultural contexts influence DMF effectiveness and implementation strategies.

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