

Exploring Pre-Service English Teachers' Feedback Literacy in Continuation Writing: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: Recent years have witnessed increasing interest in teacher feedback literacy, yet little research has investigated the feedback literacy of pre-service teachers (PSTs). Given that pre-service training can serve as the foundation for their future feedback practice in educational settings, this paper fills this research gap based on a qualitative study of the characteristics of pre-service English teachers' feedback on student writing and their feedback literacy changes. Drawing upon data from ten PSTs' written feedback on 96 continuation writing drafts and three focal participants' responses from three rounds of open-ended surveys and retrospective interviews, findings show that the PSTs tended to provide language-error-focused feedback and supplement it with positive and suggestive comments. Data analysis of the three focal participants revealed that individual PSTs' feedback literacy was manifested in three dimensions (i.e., design, relational, and pragmatic), and it could progress, fluctuate, or decline in practice. Findings are discussed regarding PSTs' feedback characteristics in continuation writing, and how their feedback literacy would change on a multi-dimensional continuum. This study concludes with implications for initial teacher education and research on teacher feedback literacy.

Keywords: feedback literacy; pre-service teachers; continuation writing; EFL writing; initial teacher education

1. Introduction

Feedback can be a powerful contributor to student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), yet providing effective feedback on student writing remains one of the most challenging jobs for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers (e.g., Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2008; Yu, 2021). This job can be more challenging for EFL teachers who need to assess integrated writing tasks, such as continuation writing (Wang, 2012), an integrated writing task that requires students to read a piece of source material (usually a story without an ending) before they write to complete the story. Compared with assessing independent essays, assessing integrated tasks like continuation writing requires EFL teachers to evaluate not only more lexically and syntactically sophisticated language (Cumming et al., 2005), but also students'

comprehension of the source materials given as prompts (Cho et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2017). The complexity of such writing tasks underscores the importance of teacher feedback in improving student writing, yet many teachers are found to have limited understandings of its assessment criteria (Chen, 2022; Xu et al., 2026) or fail to engage students in their feedback (Jiang & Lu, 2023), indicating their lack of literacy for productive writing feedback (Lee, 2021). It is thus essential for EFL teachers to possess "teacher feedback literacy", i.e., their "knowledge, expertise, and dispositions" (Carless & Winstone, 2023, p. 153) to conduct effective feedback processes in EFL writing.

Despite a growing body of conceptualization of feedback literacy, empirical research on teacher feedback literacy is still in its infancy (see a review, Xu et al., 2023). Most empirical studies have shed light on how school and



university teachers with years of teaching experience fostered their feedback literacy by participating in professional development programs (To et al., 2023) or integrating technology-enhanced feedback into their instructions (Wu et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2026). However, conclusions derived from research on in-service teachers' feedback literacy may not be transferable to pre-service teachers (PSTs), as feedback literacy is dynamic and evolving over time (Zhan, 2022). Worse still, little research has explored the feedback literacy of PSTs (e.g., Xu & Zhang, 2026; Zhan, 2024, 2026), despite the important role of initial teacher education in fostering teachers' conceptions and practice of assessment (Buck et al., 2010; Gotwals & Birmingham, 2016).

Given that most extant studies on teacher feedback literacy have focused on in-service teachers, we particularly need evidence from PSTs who are embarking on their careers, in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of teacher feedback literacy (Dong & Gao, 2022; Istencioglu et al., 2026). This study thus addresses this research gap by exploring English PSTs' feedback literacy in continuation writing. Although this study was situated in China, it can offer implications to international readers who share the common concern about how to equip PSTs with feedback literacy (e.g., Máñez et al., 2024; Peck & Kavanagh, 2024; Ropohl & Rönnebeck, 2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Feedback in EFL Writing

Teacher feedback is a complex process involving considerations of varying factors (Chong, 2018). In the context of EFL writing, teacher feedback is expected to be concrete and text-specific (Hyland & Hyland, 2001), and to have a balanced focus on all important dimensions of writing (Ferris, 2014). EFL writing teachers are also recommended to adopt a focused approach to corrective feedback (Lee, 2019) with potential benefits to students' writing (Ellis et al., 2008). In addition, they need to consider students' emotional responses (Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020) and self-regulation (Yang & Zhang, 2023), both of which can further impact feedback engagement.

Notwithstanding these advised practices, EFL teachers' actual feedback practice seemed not satisfactory. First, it has a narrow focus. EFL teachers' feedback on student writing predominantly focuses on language, paying less attention to content or organization (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee, 2008). Second, it has contextual constraints. Offering specific comments to a large class seems unfeasible despite EFL teachers' preferences for detailed feedback (Carless, 2006; Xu & Harfitt, 2019). Third, there are always discrepancies between teachers' intended focus and their actual feedback practice (Lee, 2009), a complex but common phenomenon influenced by various factors such as institutional constraints, insufficient professional

training, and students' negative attitudes towards feedback (Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2016). Among these influential factors, the lack of feedback training in teacher education programs can be an important contributor to EFL teachers' struggles in feedback (Lee, 2008). In fact, in many educational settings including China where this study was situated, PSTs are not trained in courses or practicum regarding how to deliver writing instruction or how to provide feedback on writing (Lam, 2015; Peck & Kavanagh, 2024; Yu, 2021). This reality underscores the urgency and necessity of preparing PSTs to engage in effective writing feedback.

2.2. Teacher Feedback in Integrated Writing Tasks

As one of the major EFL writing genres, integrated writing tasks require learners to compose texts drawing on information from source reading materials (Plakans, 2010). In China, the most important integrated writing task is continuation writing (Wang, 2012) which has been incorporated into the English section of *Gaokao* (Chinese entrance exams to colleges) since 2021 (National Education Examinations Authority, 2021).

Performance on integrated writing tasks is usually assessed against two criteria: (1) complete and accurate comprehension of the source materials; and (2) quality of language use (Cho et al., 2013). To assess whether or not students understand the source materials, teachers as assessors need to judge by reading the content of student writing (Kim & Kim, 2017). The assessment criteria of continuation writing in *Gaokao* thus consist of four dimensions, namely content, language, organization, and writing conventions (Chen, 2019), which is widely used by many school EFL teachers in China (Chen, 2022). The presence of assessment criteria, however, may not guarantee that these teachers possess necessary expertise to provide effective feedback on students' continuation writing (Jiang & Lu, 2023). Given that the cognitive and linguistic demands inherent to integrated writing tasks can pose challenges to novice writers (Uludag et al., 2019), students are in urgent need of effective teacher feedback from teachers. Although research investigating feedback on students' continuation writing performance is highly demanded, such work remains regrettably in its infancy (Chen & Cui, 2022). This further underscores the urgency and necessity for exploring effective feedback in continuation writing.

2.3. Teacher Feedback Literacy

Scholarship to date has explored the constructs of teacher feedback literacy from theoretical and empirical perspectives (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Carless & Winstone, 2023; Lee, 2021; Xu et al., 2023). This study operationalizes teacher feedback literacy based on Carless and Winstone's (2023) model by breaking it down into three dimensions: design, relational, and pragmatic.

The design dimension focuses on teachers' ability to skillfully design their feedback. Feedback-literate teachers are expected to model feedback in authentic disciplinary processes (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Xu et al., 2023). This entails not only teachers' ability to design effective feedback but also their knowledge of the subject discipline. In the context of EFL writing, for instance, feedback-literate teachers are expected to possess knowledge of writing and processes of feedback (Lee, 2021). Moreover, they should aim to foster students' writing competence rather than merely doing the corrections (Lee, 2021). They should also support learners to make self-evaluations, foster learner agency, and encourage virtuous feedback cycles (Boud & Dawson, 2023). More importantly, feedback-literate writing teachers are expected to promote learner-focused feedback (Lee, 2021), making feedback a two-way dialogic process (Huot, 2002).

The relational dimension refers to teachers' competency to build trust with students to support the feedback process. Feedback-literate teachers are expected to establish rapport with students and stay sharp in their communication (Carless & Winstone, 2023). For example, teachers may show empathy for students by using hedges and personal attribution in feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). They can improve the teacher-student relationship by including emoticons, which can improve student perceptions of teachers' accessibility (Padgett et al., 2021). Feedback-literate teachers should also consider the affective function of feedback (Chan & Luo, 2022). This includes balancing positive and negative feedback since too much criticism can overwhelm students by eliciting their anxiety and reducing their confidence (Yu, Geng et al., 2021).

The pragmatic dimension addresses teachers' competency in conducting feedback practically. Feedback-literate teachers are expected to grapple with the tensions between different functions of feedback (Carless & Winstone, 2023). It is also imperative for teachers to discuss, negotiate, and share feedback practices with colleagues (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Lee, 2021). To manage feedback pressures, teachers need to balance the workload allocated to feedback with what is valuable to students (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Carless & Winstone, 2023).

The foregoing review shows that feedback-literate teachers must be able to design their feedback skillfully, build trusting relationships with students, and attend to practical considerations within feedback processes. The reviewed literature, comprising a teacher feedback literacy framework spanning design, relational, and pragmatic dimensions, provides a valuable foundation for analyzing of PSTs' feedback literacy.

2.4. PSTs' Feedback Literacy

The limited existing research on PSTs' feedback suggests that their performance is generally unsatisfactory.

PSTs may struggle to provide high-quality, effective feedback (Kong et al., 2022; Ropohl & Rönnebeck, 2019) or tend to give positive but irrelevant feedback on students' tasks (Xu & He, 2019). Compared to their counterparts from other disciplines, pre-service language teachers appear to place greater emphasis on writing mechanics (Máñez et al., 2024). In EFL writing, PSTs were found to rely excessively on direct corrections, even when their professors encouraged them to foster students' self-correction (Guénette & Lyster, 2013). Their overreliance on local corrective feedback also conflicts with their belief that feedback should de-emphasize local linguistic issues (Junqueira & Payant, 2015).

Given that teacher development is a gradual process (Huberman, 1989), PSTs need to be trained to become more feedback-literate in initial teacher education. In contrast with this necessity, systematic assessment training for PSTs remains inadequate (Lam, 2015; Schelling & Rubenstein, 2023). The main source for assessment training is assessment-related courses. Although formal courses were proven to influence PSTs' feedback literacy (Zhan, 2024), they are also criticized for predominantly focusing on theories but little on practices (Xie, 2021), or for not providing adequate opportunities for skill practice and instructors' feedback (Peck & Kavanagh, 2024). This may partly explain why PSTs do not feel prepared for the complex assessment requirements in schools (Xie & Tan, 2019). PSTs' unsatisfactory performance in feedback (Guénette & Lyster, 2013; Ropohl & Rönnebeck, 2019) observed in previous studies also suggest that their feedback literacy warrants further attention. Hence, this qualitative study explores English PSTs' feedback literacy by focusing on their feedback practice in two rounds of continuation writing in an educational support project. It aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1. What were the characteristics of the PSTs' feedback provided in the first (Round 1) and second rounds (Round 2) of continuation writing, respectively?

RQ2. Did the three focal PSTs' feedback literacy change in their feedback practice in the two rounds of continuation tasks? If so, how?

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Context

This study was part of a larger research project embedded in an educational support initiative launched by a public university specializing in teacher education in China. The university offers four-year undergraduate and three-year postgraduate EFL teacher education programs. During the first two years of the undergraduate program and the first year of the graduate program, PSTs complete coursework covering English literature, applied linguistics, and language teaching approaches. In the third

year in the undergraduate program and the second year of the graduate program, they undertake micro-teaching courses to gain practical instructional experience. In the final year of undergraduate program and the second year of the graduate program, PSTs complete a four-month practicum in local middle and senior high schools.

The educational support initiative, aiming at promoting English education and ensuring educational equity, consisted of many smaller projects. One of them was a writing tutoring project that intended to help students from underdeveloped areas improve their writing performance in continuation writing. To achieve this, it recruited 52 PSTs from both graduate and undergraduate English education programs to provide tutoring. This project lasted for one month in January 2022, during which we conducted our study.

Altogether 735 students from 16 senior-three classes of a middle school participated in this project. The voluntary PSTs were called on and later randomly assigned to one of the classes, working either independently or collaboratively with peers, depending on the number of students in the particular class. They were required to provide feedback on the continuation writing in an assessment form after students submitted their drafts via an online platform.

A five-day training and briefing session was provided by three university professors to the PSTs before the project started, including what continuation writing was and how to evaluate student writing based on the preset assessment form. The assessment form was crafted by two professors based on the assessment criteria of *Gaokao* (Chen, 2019). During the first day, the PSTs were instructed regarding how to assess student writing against the criteria (i.e., content, language, and organization),

and how to provide commentary based on student performance. They were advised to write at least two sentences as feedback: one to recognize strengths of student writing, and the other to pinpoint areas for improvement. Exemplars of essays of different grades, together with teacher feedback, were also provided to the PSTs as part of the training package. In the following days, the PSTs were required to review and reflect on what they had learned and familiarize themselves with continuation writing along with its assessment criteria.

The subsequent feedback task was composed of two rounds lasting for four weeks. During each round, the high school students were required to complete the story by writing approximately 150 words based upon the source materials (see Appendix A), with the opening sentence of each paragraph given. After they submitted their scanned hand-written writing to the online platform, the participating PSTs graded and provided feedback. Students were reminded to revise their work upon receipt of feedback, and encouraged to submit their revised drafts which would receive further feedback from PSTs.

3.2. Participants

The case study approach was employed to gain an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its natural and authentic context (Yin, 2018). Among the volunteers who responded to our call for participation, ten PSTs (see Table 1) were selected based on purposeful sampling (Cohen et al., 2017). They were chosen because they (1) had already taken courses about EFL pedagogy; (2) had some teaching experiences in practicum and/or tutoring; and (3) delivered feedback in both two rounds of continuation writing.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants.

Participants (Pseudonym)	Gender	Academic Stage	Number of Students in the Class in Charge	Number of Peers Co-Working with the Participant	Number of Writing Drafts Submitted for Feedback (Identified Feedback Points)	
					Round 1	Round 2
Amy	F	Postgraduate	55	2	6 (53)	2 (21)
Bella	F	Postgraduate	40	1	5 (96)	1 (17)
Cindy	F	Postgraduate	60	3	5 (100)	1 (13)
Jim	M	Postgraduate	53	2	6 (98)	4 (49)
Sherry	F	Postgraduate	43	1	5 (59)	5 (47)
Krystal	F	Undergraduate	30	0	13 (264)	2 (17)
Lilian	F	Undergraduate	55	2	7 (135)	4 (61)
Tina	F	Undergraduate	57	2	9 (142)	6 (92)
Yasmine	F	Undergraduate	20	0	7 (123)	4 (52)
Zoe	F	Undergraduate	40	1	2 (22)	2 (22)

Informed consent was obtained from all ten participating teachers after they had been fully briefed on the study procedures. The students were also informed in advance that their writing drafts would be used for research purposes, and verbal consent was secured. The consent authorized the authors to collect multiple forms of data, including the students' writing drafts annotated with teacher feedback and audio recordings of the interviews

with the participating teachers. After data collection, all writing drafts were anonymized and re-labelled.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

To answer RQ1, we collected all of the 96 compositions on which the ten participants had provided feedback. Analysis started from our identifying feedback points, which refer to any comment, underlining, or correction made on student drafts (Lee, 2008). Then, the PSTs' feedback was

coded using Lee's (2008) framework that codes feedback into two dimensions: (1) feedback foci, including content, language, and organization (Lee, 2008), and (2) feedback types, including praise, criticism, imperative, advice, question, and mechanics (adapted from Hamp-Lyons & Chen, 1999). Table 2 summarizes the coding scheme.

To answer RQ2, due to space limitations, this study only reported three focal participants (i.e., Yasmine, Lilian, and Sherry, all pseudonyms). They are all information-rich cases with great individual variations (Patton, 2015) in prior feedback experience and assessment training to showcase

how PSTs' feedback literacy might change in their practice. These three cases were considered as information-rich, as they represented distinct starting points and developmental trajectories of pre-service teachers' feedback literacy. Specifically, Yasmine, Lilian, and Sherry varied in their prior engagement with educational support initiatives, prior knowledge of continuation writing, and prior feedback experiences (see Table 3). Such heterogeneity supported cross-case comparisons and allowed the study to capture the complexity and diversity of feedback literacy development, rather than assuming a singular developmental trajectory.

Table 2. The coding scheme for pre-service teachers' feedback.

Dimensions	Categories	Definition	Examples
Focus (Lee, 2008)	Content	Completeness of the continuation and accuracy of the comprehension regarding the source material and the given opening phrase	The first paragraph is well written, describing the details of the water battle.
	Language	Richness, accuracy and appropriateness of the applied vocabulary and grammar	Good use of a variety of vocabulary like "frustration" and "encounter".
	Organization	Coherence within the context and integrity throughout the text	Your essay works in its overall structure.
Types (Adapted from Hamp-Lyons & Chen, 1999)	Praise	Positive comments, non-controlling	Good understanding of the source material!
	Criticism	Negative comments or evaluations, authoritative	Too much Chinglish!
	Imperative	Comments that tell the student writer to do or change something, usually starting with a verb in the imperative form	Keep your verb tense in agreement.
	Advice	Suggestive comments often in conditional mode	Maybe you could add some details here.
	Question	Open questions, close questions or no comments except a "?", usually meaning "don't understand"	Why were we "in all-out water fight"? Do you mean "selling ice cream"?
	Mechanics	Comments that deal with grammar, punctuation, spelling, word choice, etc.	caught
			I <u>got</u> him and threw the water balloons at him. verb tense Since I started working, I <u>have</u> no spare time...

Table 3. Background characteristics of the three focal participants.

Participant	Prior Engagement with Educational Support Initiatives	Prior Knowledge of Continuation Writing	Prior Feedback Experiences
Yasmine	Third participation	Limited	No relevant experience
Lilian	Second participation	Limited	Some experiences of feedback on junior school students' writing
Sherry	First participation	Relatively high	Rich experiences of feedback on high school students' writing

In addition to the feedback data, data were collected from three rounds of open-ended surveys (Q0, Q1, and Q2) and retrospective interviews (RI). The open-ended surveys (see Appendix B), responded by all the volunteering PSTs in the feedback project, were conducted to gain a timely and dynamic understanding of their feedback experiences and to monitor the dynamic interplay between their feedback beliefs and feedback practices (as observed in their written feedback). Specifically, Q0 was obtained after the briefing session, gathering the PSTs' feedback experiences, prior knowledge about continuation writing, understanding of the training contents, and expectations of participating in this educational support project. Q1 and Q2, collected

respectively after each round of continuation writing, were completed with participants describing their feedback workflow, the challenges they encountered, and their feelings in feedback practice.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the focal PSTs retrospectively due to personal availability issues (e.g., job hunting, teaching practicum, volunteer teaching). Although we wished to interview them immediately after the program, they did not accept our invitation for interviews until they were available. The interviews (see interview protocol in Appendix C), conducted in Chinese and later transcribed verbatim, aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the PSTs'

feedback attitudes and beliefs, and to facilitate their reflections on their feedback practices during the project (as observed in their written feedback and open-ended survey responses). The triangulation of multiple data sources can enhance the reliability of our study and elicit a holistic understanding of the participants' feedback literacy in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Responses from the three-round surveys and the interviews were examined and coded through content analysis (Patton, 2015) in Nvivo. The data were coded by both inductive and deductive approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The coding scheme was developed and refined with reference to the three-dimensional teacher feedback literacy (see Section 2.3), and then employed as initial guides for coding. The data were first read and reread, and divided into meaningful units with a variety of themes and categories related to the participants' feedback practice and the potential causes. The emergent categories were then reassembled with reference to prior literature, while new codes and categories were also saved. Cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) was also conducted to juxtapose, integrate, and adjust the themes and categories across the data from the participants. Finally, all the categories were summarized to explore their feedback literacy in practice.

Data extraction, coding, and categorization were collaborated between the authors. In the first round of analysis, the first author conducted the initial data coding and categorization, which was subsequently reviewed by

the second author. In the second round, a research assistant specializing in feedback literacy independently coded 10% of the dataset. The initial inter-rater reliability reached 87.2%. Discrepancies identified during the coding process were discussed among the research team until a consensus was reached. More details of coding will be presented in Section 4.2.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of PSTs' Feedback

Findings reveal the PSTs' feedback characteristics in Round 1 and Round 2 during the educational support project. In sum, there were 1483 feedback points in the 96 essays, of which 1092 points belonged to Round 1 and 391 points belonged to Round 2. The features of the PSTs' feedback will be presented in two dimensions: foci and types.

4.1.1. Foci of Feedback

Table 4 shows that over 50% of the PSTs' feedback was language-related feedback. Among the ten participants, the ratio of six PSTs' language-related feedback (i.e., Bella, Cindy, Jim, Tina, Yasmine, Zoe) was close to or exceeding 80%. This indicates that the PSTs had a strong preference for language-related feedback in Round 1. Content-related feedback is the second concern of the participants, yet organization-related feedback was the least offered.

Table 4. Foci of the pre-service teachers' feedback in two rounds.

	Content		Language		Organization	
	R1	R2	R1	R2	R1	R2
Amy	17 (32.08%)	6 (28.57%)	31 (58.49%)	12 (57.14%)	5 (9.43%)	3 (14.29%)
Bella	13 (13.54%)	2 (11.76%)	77 (80.21%)	14 (82.35%)	6 (6.25%)	1 (5.88%)
Cindy	5 (5.00%)	1 (7.69%)	92 (92.00%)	12 (92.31%)	3 (3.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Jim	14 (14.29%)	6 (12.24%)	78 (79.59%)	39 (79.59%)	6 (6.12%)	4 (8.16%)
Sherry	23 (38.98%)	11 (23.40%)	34 (57.63%)	35 (74.47%)	2 (3.39%)	1 (2.13%)
Krystal	79 (29.92%)	8 (47.06%)	161 (60.98%)	4 (23.53%)	24 (9.09%)	5 (29.41%)
Lilian	35 (25.93%)	14 (22.95%)	83 (61.48%)	40 (65.57%)	17 (12.59%)	7 (11.48%)
Tina	21 (14.79%)	16 (17.39%)	118 (83.10%)	67 (72.83%)	3 (2.11%)	9 (9.78%)
Yasmine	17 (13.82%)	16 (30.77%)	98 (79.67%)	33 (63.46%)	8 (6.50%)	3 (5.77%)
Zoe	1 (4.55%)	8 (36.36%)	19 (86.36%)	13 (59.09%)	2 (9.09%)	1 (4.55%)

In Round 2, although the overall volume of feedback decreased, language-related feedback remained the most prevalent category, with the exception of Krystal, who only supplied feedback on two drafts during this round. Meanwhile, five participants (Cindy, Krystal, Tina, Yasmine, Zoe) demonstrated an increased focus on content-related feedback. Organization-related feedback continued to be the least frequent category relative to other foci except for one teacher (i.e., Krystal).

4.1.2. Types of Feedback

Table 5 shows that the most frequent type of feedback among the PSTs was mechanics in Round 1, which is consistent with the dominance of language-related feedback.

There were some praise and advice, yet little criticism, and few questions and imperatives were found in the PSTs' feedback.

In Round 2, most PSTs reduced their feedback on mechanics, with the exceptions of Jim and Sherry. Nevertheless, mechanical feedback still dominated the comments of five PSTs' comments (i.e., Bella, Cindy, Jim, Sherry, Tina). Eight PSTs offered more praise, six of whom also supplied an increased number of advice, whereas five PSTs offered fewer critical comments. A notable exception was Krystal, whose share of critical feedback increased substantially from 10.23% in Round 1 to 29.41% in Round 2. Questions and imperatives remained rare in the feedback produced by all PSTs.

Table 5. Types of the pre-service teachers' feedback in two rounds.

	Praise		Criticism		Imperative	
	R1	R2	R1	R2	R1	R2
Amy	20 (37.74%)	9 (42.86%)	5 (9.43%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Bella	14 (14.58%)	3 (17.65%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Cindy	10 (10.00%)	1 (7.69%)	4 (4.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Jim	14 (14.29%)	10 (20.41%)	12 (12.24%)	1 (2.04%)	1 (1.02%)	0 (0.00%)
Sherry	9 (15.25%)	3 (6.38%)	4 (6.78%)	1 (2.13%)	1 (1.69%)	1 (2.13%)
Krystal	64 (24.24%)	6 (35.29%)	27 (10.23%)	5 (29.41%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Lilian	33 (24.44%)	21 (34.43%)	5 (3.70%)	3 (4.92%)	1 (0.74%)	0 (0.00%)
Tina	5 (3.52%)	5 (5.43%)	3 (2.11%)	3 (3.26%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Yasmine	34 (27.64%)	29 (55.77%)	6 (4.88%)	1 (1.92%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Zoe	3 (13.64%)	10 (45.45%)	1 (4.55%)	1 (4.55%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

	Advice		Question		Mechanics	
	R1	R2	R1	R2	R1	R2
Amy	1 (1.89%)	3 (14.29%)	3 (5.66%)	0 (0.00%)	24 (45.28%)	9 (42.86%)
Bella	11 (11.46%)	2 (11.76%)	2 (2.08%)	1 (5.88%)	69 (71.88%)	11 (64.71%)
Cindy	9 (9.00%)	1 (7.69%)	1 (1.00%)	2 (15.38%)	76 (76.00%)	9 (69.23%)
Jim	6 (6.12%)	4 (8.16%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	65 (66.33%)	34 (69.39%)
Sherry	17 (28.81%)	9 (19.15%)	2 (3.39%)	3 (6.38%)	26 (44.07%)	30 (63.83%)
Krystal	40 (15.15%)	3 (17.65%)	8 (3.03%)	1 (5.88%)	125 (47.35%)	2 (11.76%)
Lilian	25 (18.52%)	7 (11.48%)	4 (2.96%)	3 (4.92%)	67 (49.63%)	27 (44.26%)
Tina	26 (18.31%)	21 (22.83%)	8 (5.63%)	7 (7.61%)	100 (70.42%)	56 (60.87%)
Yasmine	12 (9.76%)	9 (17.31%)	5 (4.06%)	0 (0.00%)	66 (53.66%)	13 (25.00%)
Zoe	3 (13.64%)	1 (4.55%)	4 (18.19%)	2 (9.10%)	11 (50.00%)	8 (36.36%)

4.2. PSTs' Feedback Literacy in the Educational Support Project

Findings reveal that the focal PSTs conducted various feedback practices during the project, and their feedback literacy has changed in three dimensions (i.e., design, relational, pragmatic) in practice. Appendix D presents the coding table for the three focal PSTs

The findings will be presented case by case, with each case beginning with a narrative portrait of the participant to contextualize the findings. To show our findings more clearly, a summary of the focal participants' feedback literacy in three dimensions will be presented first, and each dimension will be elaborated based on the comparison of feedback characteristics in Round 1 and Round 2 along with feedback and interview excerpts to balance the breadth and depth of data presentation.

4.2.1. Yasmine: Progress in Feedback Literacy

Yasmine, in her third participation in the educational support project, initially worried about her ability to perform well due to her unfamiliarity with continuation writing and her lack of experience in writing assessment. To tackle the upcoming challenge, she thoroughly reviewed the training materials, hoping to try her utmost to help the students. During the project, Yasmine's feedback literacy progressed in all the design, relational, and pragmatic dimensions.

Design Dimension

While Yasmine attempted to provide "all-inclusive" (Yasmine-Q1) feedback in Round 1, her feedback predominantly focused on language issues (79.67%). She

tended to give direct and comprehensive feedback on students' language errors, with only a few vague positive comments on content and organization. Although students could successfully correct grammatical mistakes according to her feedback, she noticed that they seemed to "only notice the existence of grammatical errors" (Yasmine-R1) in revision but neglected content and organization. To address this, Yasmine shifted her approach in Round 2. She provided more balanced feedback (Ferris, 2014) on content (30.77%) and language (63.46%), as well as more nuanced feedback including specific guidance on improving content.

The description of the details needs to be more specific... In the original text, the torchbearer could not come, and the task we need to complete in continuation writing is to highlight the character of the protagonist. Therefore, we can continue to write something like Amy's taking the initiative to take over the task, and then you can portray an active and well-trained Amy. In this way, your writing will be more vivid and interesting.

([1], Yasmine-FB-R2)

Excerpt [1] illustrates not only what constitutes good continuation writing (e.g., "vivid and interesting"), but descriptive and diagnostic information that helps the student narrow the gap between his current and desired performance (Carless et al., 2006). By providing more content-related and specific feedback, Yasmine managed to support students in making judgments about their work (Carless & Winstone, 2023), instead of mechanically correcting grammar mistakes (Lee, 2021).

Relational Dimension

In Round 1, Yasmine had already stayed sensitive in her communication with students, even when dealing with poor-quality writing. With a firm belief in the importance of encouragement to students, she ended every piece of feedback with some vague praise. When pointing out mistakes, she would soften the tone of her feedback by adding sentence-final particles. Excerpt [2] is an example of her usage of “o(哦)”, a sentence-final particle in Mandarin that helped turn the feedback into a friendly warning (Cheung, 2016).

That's what a support runner does, you know. [这是 support runner 做的事哦。]

[[2], Yasmine-FB-R1)

In Round 2, Yasmine placed greater emphasis on nurturing a positive teacher-student relationship and attending to student emotions. She continued to moderate her tone in feedback by adding sentence-final particles and introduced more frequent strong compliments, which were rare in Round 1. She also improved the specificity of her praise by citing examples and explaining the motives or purposes of feedback to students (see Excerpt [3]). This made her praise more sincere (Bader et al., 2019) and thus more likely to promote writing motivation (Busse, 2013) and feedback interactions (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

You use a lot of time adverbials, such as “since then”, “that day” and so on. That makes your writing very coherent!

[[3], Yasmine-FB-R2)

Surprisingly, Yasmine started using emoticons in Round 2 as a way to “establish good relationships with students” (Yasmine-RI), as indicated by Excerpt [4] below.

The meaning here is a bit confusing. I don't quite understand ☹️.

[[4], Yasmine-FB-R2)

The emoticon “☹️” presents a confused face, facilitating Yasmine's expression of her confusion induced by the student's ambiguity in writing. Including emoticons in online feedback can enhance its social presence (Padgett et al., 2021), and make teachers appear more extroverted and agreeable (Grieve et al., 2019). This may help students develop a more trusting relationship with teachers, further promoting their engagement with feedback (Zheng et al., 2020).

Pragmatic Dimension

Since Yasmine was solely responsible for providing feedback to an entire class, she felt pressured to provide

comprehensive feedback in Round 1, worrying about “falling behind other teachers” (Yasmine-Q1). Although she insisted on offering comprehensive feedback in Round 1, she encountered unexpected difficulty in Round 2, as illustrated in Excerpt [5].

In Round Two, we didn't have enough time and it was right after the Chinese New Year, so I just looked at the problems they had in their writing in Round One, and then focused on those problems to see if they improved.

[[5], Yasmine-RI)

Yasmine's decision to focus on earlier problems in Round 2 out of time constraints seems to echo what prior studies argued about the pragmatic dimension of feedback literacy. That is, teachers would have to reach a compromise between what would be ideal, what seems justifiable, and what they believe students want (Carless & Winstone, 2023). In many cases like Yasmine's, teachers need to manage their workload efficiently while prioritizing effectiveness in their feedback practice (Boud & Dawson, 2023).

In summary, Yasmine's feedback literacy progressed in all three dimensions, which is evidenced by her: (1) more balanced feedback foci and increased feedback specificity (design); (2) more sincere praise, use of sentence-final particles, and inclusion of emoticons (relational); (3) adjustment of feedback priorities because of time constraints (pragmatic).

4.2.2. Lilian: Fluctuation in Feedback Literacy

Lilian's prior experiences in the educational support project left her with the impression that student essays were “not so informative” (Lilian-Q0), thereby focusing her feedback on grammatical accuracy. Given that the prior task was to provide feedback on students' letter writing, it was Lilian's first encounter with feedback on students' performance in continuation writing. During the project, her feedback literacy experienced some fluctuation, with varying ups or downs in the three dimensions.

Design Dimension

Similar to Yasmine's, Lilian's feedback primarily focused on language in Round 1 (61.48%). She delivered not only comprehensive but detailed language-related feedback, supplementing feedback with metalinguistic explanations with example phrases and/or sentences. Her preference for comprehensive corrective feedback continued in Round 2 (65.57%). While she admitted that this approach was time-consuming, she felt obliged to give as much feedback as possible due to the “educational support” project she was involved in, and she perceived it as a process of learning as well (see Excerpt [6]).

You must support to the end if you are serious about “educational support” ... I just felt I must point [the errors] out, otherwise students would not know, and I would change nothing. Actually, when I was looking for the mistakes, I could also find that there were a lot of things that I didn't know about until I looked them up.

[[6], Lilian-RI]

Lilian also confessed that she was less confident in providing organization-related feedback, considering it potentially “counterproductive” (Lilian-RI) due to her uncertainty about the expected structure of continuation writing.

Unlike Yasmine who enhanced feedback specificity, Lilian provided less specific feedback in Round 2 to “avoid repetition” (Lilian-RI) if she had explained the same issue in Round 1. For instance, in Round 1 Lilian tended to include some examples in praise; whereas in Round 2, her wording turned more general, as Excerpts [7] and [8] show.

Your writing is complete, and you have consciously echoed the source material in your continuation. For example, in your last paragraph, a sentence echoes the main conflict in the source material: “I” was frustrated and disillusioned by the difficulties “I” encountered at work. That's a good one!

[[7], Lilian-FB-R1]

Your writing is complete and smooth, with a conscious use of different sentence patterns. Very good!!

[[8], Lilian-FB-R2]

Compared with Excerpt [8] given in Round 2, Excerpt [7] not only applauds the student's conscious response to the source material, but also pinpoints which sentence achieves the echoing. This can assist students in understanding what constitutes quality writing, thereby fulfilling the key function of feedback–feedforward (Price et al., 2010). While Lilian delivered less specific feedback with the intention of avoiding feedback duplicates, it is shown that whether the feedback is positive or negative, students seem to respect long and specific feedback rather than the general one (Bader et al., 2019).

Relational Dimension

Despite the decline in feedback specificity, Lilian displayed an increased awareness of teacher-student relationships in Round 2. She delivered more praise, often with intensifiers and exclamation marks (see the underlined part in Excerpt [8]) to make it more encouraging, which can evoke positive emotions

contributing to students' engagement with feedback (Li & Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). Particularly, Lilian considered more non-achievement factors such as motivation and effort when grading students, emphasizing student growth over strictly adhering to the assessment rubric (Brookhart, 2013), as indicated in Excerpt [9].

I did not want to discourage them... I wanted to tell everyone that “your hard work will pay off”, so I scored them at least one point higher in Round 2.

[[9], Lilian-RI]

Similar to Yasmine's practice, Lilian employed sentence-final particles to tone down her language in feedback throughout the project. She also added these particles to the end of imperative clauses to indicate a tone of intimacy (Zhang, 2013), as stated in the following invitation for a feedback dialogue.

*If you do not understand any of the feedback, feel free to talk to me, **you know**. [如反馈有不懂的地方，欢迎和老师交流哦。]*

[[10], FB-II-Lilian]

The addition of the sentence-final particle “o(哦)” seems to work as an invitation that can bring Lilian closer to the student and permit meaning entailed in feedback to be jointly constructed by both parties to avoid unfavorable reactions (Heron et al., 2023). However, it is worth noting that Lilian's concern about teacher-student relationships in feedback might stem from her uncertainty about her identity as a “real” teacher:

I participated in this project as a “volunteer teacher”, so I somehow felt like I was not a real teacher ... I dared not to give feedback so directly in case students would get defensive.

[[11], Lilian-RI]

Because of the perception of being “not a real teacher”, Lilian adopted strategies like softening her feedback tone to avoid the potential risks of facing hostile reactions from students. Her under-constructed teacher identity in this educational support project, together with her current identity as an undergraduate student, appears to nudge her feedback in a more conservative way.

Pragmatic Dimension

Lilian's feedback literacy in the pragmatic dimension evolved smoothly. When she delivered feedback on the problems of Chinglish, she often had no idea how to clarify them to students. When confronting these confusions, Lilian sought help from her peers in both Round 1 and Round 2.

When there were some expressions that I couldn't understand, some of my peers would explain them to me straight away, and others would look them up on the Internet.

[[12], Lilian-RI).

Lilian found interactions with her peers not only helped clarify feedback issues but also alleviated her feedback workload. That is, she successfully managed her feedback pressure (Boud & Dawson, 2023) through dialogic interactions with her colleagues in the community of practice (Lee, 2021; Wu et al., 2023).

To sum up, Lilian's feedback literacy fluctuated during her feedback practice with slight improvement in the relational dimension, steady performance in the pragmatic dimension, and some declines in the design dimension. These changes can be evidenced by her: (1) more frequent use of encouraging words, prioritized consideration of students' motivation in scoring, and extensive use of sentence-final particles (relational); (2) communication with colleagues within the community of practice (pragmatic); (3) clinging to comprehensive language-related feedback and less feedback specificity (design).

4.2.3. Sherry: Decline in Feedback Literacy

In contrast to Yasmine and Lilian who had no prior knowledge about continuation writing, Sherry reported learning about this writing task through coursework and seminars, indicating a comparable stronger starting point. Nevertheless, assessing continuation writing remained a novel practice for her. A comparison of her feedback across Round 1 and Round 2 revealed declines in her feedback literacy along both design and relational dimensions. Notably, minimal data relevant to the pragmatic dimension of feedback literacy emerged from Sherry's case. She experienced little pressure regarding her feedback workload and reported limited peer communication throughout the project.

Design Dimension

Compared with Yasmine's and Lilian's, Sherry's feedback had a more balanced foci on content, language, and organization in Round 1. Her feedback contained sufficient information and intended to guide students to analyze the content (see Excerpt [13]).

There is some disconnection between the source material and your continuation. Please read my feedback and the source material again carefully: It's unfortunate for the author to experience many depressing things... You may draw this information from words like "horrible, left alone, hell" in the first paragraph ... The continuation begins with "And he got me, behind my ear, before he ran toward his exit." This

sentence indicates that a water fight is about to begin. So in this paragraph, you may describe...

[[13], Sherry-FB-R1)

Excerpt [13] showcases how Sherry guided the student to interpret the source material by identifying crucial information from keywords and the opening sentence, as evidenced in the underlined parts. Surprisingly, Sherry shifted her feedback foci from content to language in Round 2. This could be attributed to her altered strategy from selective to comprehensive language-related feedback. While comprehensive feedback on linguistic errors can overwhelm students in revision (Bitchener, 2008), it can also distract teachers from addressing other critical aspects like content and organization. Language teachers can thus be at risk of becoming "marking machines" (Lee, 2010, p. 148) since they are always repeating the same boring job.

Regarding content, Excerpt [14] records how Sherry opted to directly tell students how to write the subsequent plots in Round 2, which is different from her practice in Round 1 (i.e., guiding students towards understanding the source materials).

You do not understand the original text well enough, which results in the disconnection between the original text and your continuation. The story development should be as follows: At the beginning, Amy was chosen as a support runner. She felt a little lost, but she still insisted on practicing. The second paragraph says that "today's torchbearers can't run her part". Then Amy [can] seize this opportunity to become a torchbearer, completing this task successfully with a beating heart.

[[14], Sherry-FB-R2)

Although Sherry's feedback can be directly acted upon by students, students should not be viewed as passive recipients of feedback information. Instead, they are active agents who draw on feedback to establish links between current performance and expected future attainment (Carless, 2016). Accordingly, feedback-literate teachers should support students to internalize knowledge through self-regulated learning strategies instead of offering straightforward answers.

Relational Dimension

In Round 1, Sherry frequently employed interpersonal strategies to establish relationships with students, consistent with what she recalled in Excerpt [15].

Although the student's writing was not so good, and was even off-topic, I would still say that your writing is okay, and I didn't say anything like "it's awful" ... I would say a little bit more about what

the source material is about, followed by some encouraging words to motivate him to write a second draft.

([15], Sherry-RI)

However, in Round 2, evidence of Sherry's efforts to build rapport with students was limited, and general encouraging remarks were absent in her feedback. Although she could perceive students' negative emotions (e.g., remorse and anger) stemming from her substantial language-related feedback, she "did not think too much" (Sherry-RI) about adjusting feedback strategies to mitigate these negative emotions. This can be partly explained by her belief that experiencing negative emotions in response to teacher feedback constitutes "a natural process" of learning (Sherry-RI).

In addition to diminished sensitivity to student emotions in feedback, Sherry appeared to struggle with regulating her own emotions as the project advanced. While she still "held a firm belief in" (Q1) the merit of providing feedback on student writing in Round 1, Excerpt [16] showcases how students' passive participation in the project affected her emotions in Round 2.

I felt disappointed. Many students who had signed up for this project were not serious about handing in their assignments. They just wasted the opportunity. Some students just wrote only one draft and did not pay attention to the revision, reflection, and feedback process.

([16], Sherry-Q2)

When delivering feedback on student writing, teachers can experience a spectrum of complex and dynamic emotions (Yao et al., 2025). These include positive emotions triggered by students' progress, as well as negative emotions such as disappointment caused by students' disengagement with teacher feedback (Yu, Zheng et al., 2021), as manifested in Excerpt [16]. This negative emotion could lower teachers' work engagement level (Burić & Macuka, 2018), which may further reduce the opportunities for dialogic feedback with students. To deliver feedback information more effectively, it is crucial for feedback-literate teachers to be aware of their own emotions, and willing and able to regulate their own emotions in time (Xu et al., 2023).

In conclusion, Sherry's feedback literacy declined to some degree in both design and relational dimensions, which is evidenced by her: (1) shifted feedback foci from content to language, and straightforward response instead of step-by-step guidance (design); (2) rare use of encouraging words, reduced efforts in establishing teacher-student relationship, and little awareness of regulating students' feedback-induced emotions (relational).

5. Discussion

The feedback data revealed that the PSTs focused predominantly on language issues, consistent with prior findings concerning the error-focused feedback practice among EFL writing teachers (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee, 2008). This finding implies that EFL teachers' preference for language-related feedback may have already existed during their pre-service training (Kong et al., 2022; Máñez et al., 2024). However, such preference for language-related feedback seems to contradict the principle that content evaluation should be prioritized for feedback on integrated writing tasks (Kim & Kim, 2017). Likewise, it is inconsistent with Ferris' (2014) suggestions that feedback during the early phases of the writing process should prioritize content and organization over language. Therefore, this tendency constitutes concrete evidence of these PSTs' insufficient feedback literacy.

Data also unveiled PSTs' lack of attention to organization-related feedback, echoing previous observations of EFL teachers' feedback practice (e.g., Cheng et al., 2021; Lee, 2008). It can be largely attributed to the PSTs' insufficient experience in providing feedback on continuation writing, as shown in Lilian's case. This current state of PSTs' feedback literacy responds to Peck and Kavanagh's (2024) call for supporting PSTs in rehearsing their feedback practices during teacher education programs.

Regarding feedback types, the PSTs were found to prefer praise and advice, but seldom use criticism, imperatives, and questions. Their preference for praise and advice resonated with prior findings that PSTs frequently gave positive feedback and delivered neutral comments (Máñez et al., 2024; Xu & He, 2019). Interestingly, criticism, imperatives, and questions that were rarely delivered in the PSTs' feedback were found to frequently occur in that of in-service teachers (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2017). This contradiction suggests that PSTs may be more inclined to give gentle and encouraging feedback, thereby avoiding criticism that may undermine students' self-esteem and motivation (Yu, Geng et al., 2021), imperatives that can be viewed as harsh commands, and questions that might be perceived "sarcastic and condescending" (Hamp-Lyons & Chen, 1999, p. 212). Another plausible explanation is that criticism, imperatives, and questions require critical analysis of student work, which places higher demands on EFL teachers' critical thinking skills that are generally lacking (Zhang et al., 2020).

It should be noted that there was a substantial decrease in the overall amount of feedback from Round 1 (1092 feedback points) to Round 2 (388 feedback points). This discrepancy was largely related to the timing of Round 2, which took place near the Spring Festival when students could have been occupied with travel, family-related commitments, and other holiday preparations. As shown in Table 1, most PSTs received substantially fewer student

drafts in Round 2. The timing of the project may therefore have constrained students' opportunities to participate, resulting in fewer drafts being available for feedback and, consequently, a lower overall volume of feedback.

Our findings, while echoing earlier conclusions about how EFL teachers provide feedback on student writing (e.g., Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2008), highlight how the PSTs' feedback literacy might progress, fluctuate, or decline at different pace across different dimensions.

In the design dimension, our study revealed how the PSTs generally managed to identify problems in students' writing, illustrate what constitutes good performance in continuation writing, and even offer descriptive and diagnostic information for improvement in feedback practice. That is, their feedback patterns are to assist students in knowing where and how they are going (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Consistent with the results of Yu (2021), our study also ascertained that feedback-giving practice could be potential learning opportunities for PSTs as it would stimulate them to improve their feedback strategies (e.g., Yasmine) and develop their language proficiency (e.g., Lilian). While the above findings showcase how providing feedback can contribute to the PSTs' feedback literacy, their preference for language-related feedback indicates their insufficient feedback literacy, as discussed in Section 5.1. Such practice may reflect their intention to achieve short-term goals, i.e., resolving students' immediate problems such as grammar errors, yet it may impede the cultivation of learner agency (Lee, 2021). This suggests the urgency of offering support to PSTs in developing learner-centered feedback approaches (Lee, 2021; To et al., 2023).

In the relational dimension, findings unveiled how the PSTs attended to building teacher-student partnerships and staying sensitive in their communication with students in feedback with varying strategies. Some of the strategies echo prior conclusions, for example, the use of sentence-final particles and the delivery of praise support prior findings that EFL teachers carefully construct their feedback by softening the directness of their comments (Hyland & Hyland, 2019) and providing emotional support to students (Chan & Luo, 2022). Notably, our study revealed more interpersonal strategies employed by PSTs in their feedback practice. For example, Yasmine's case suggests that emoticons were used to facilitate her bonds of trust with students. Particularly in the context of online feedback, the inclusion of emoticons can help reinforce teachers' personal accessibility (Padgett et al., 2021). Lilian's case indicates how she prioritized acknowledging students' efforts and promoting their writing motivation over keeping strict alignment with the assessment criteria. This strategy seems to be supported by earlier conclusions about how Chinese EFL teachers valued non-achievement factors in assessment (Cheng & Sun, 2015).

In the pragmatic dimension, the PSTs' feedback literacy was manifested in flexible adjustment of feedback priority

facing time constraints (Yasmine) and communication with peers (Lilian). However, Lilian's case also indicates that the communication among PSTs was limited in scope and depth (i.e., helping each other make sense of students' obscure language expressions). This finding suggests that PSTs may have not recognized the value of sharing productive feedback strategies within their community, although such sharing can be a useful device for enhancing feedback practice (Lee, 2021; To et al., 2023). Despite the evidence presented above, this study yielded comparatively limited data pertaining to the pragmatic dimension of the PSTs' feedback literacy, especially evident in Sherry's case. For one thing, this pattern may stem from the relatively small workload of feedback compared to that of in-service EFL teachers, as numerous students failed to submit their drafts over the winter break. Consequently, the PSTs could manage their work comfortably and faced little pressure to negotiate trade-offs between time constraints and their ideal feedback practices. For another, it might also indicate PSTs' limited awareness of pragmatic concerns: they tended to concentrate more on "what feedback to provide" than on "how feedback is practically implemented" within the classroom community. This observation highlights an area warranting greater attention in teacher education to foster the growth of PSTs' feedback literacy.

While the above discussion has demonstrated how PSTs' feedback literacy can be interpreted as a multi-dimensional construct, our findings also reveal that PSTs seem to display different levels of feedback literacy on different dimensions. For example, Lilian performed well in the relational dimension but less satisfactorily in the design dimension. Meanwhile, PSTs' feedback literacy may progress (Yasmine), fluctuate (Lilian), or decline (Sherry) in feedback practice. These findings support Xu et al.'s (2023) proposal of a multi-dimensional continuum-based framework of teacher feedback literacy, arguing that it can be unbalanced in different dimensions but keeps changing on a continuum. In addition, our findings suggest how teachers' feedback literacy can be scaffolded with incremental guidance if their strengths and weaknesses in different dimensions are carefully analyzed.

Based on the findings, this study highlights the need for ongoing initiatives that target English PSTs' improvement in feedback literacy across multiple dimensions. In particular, their feedback literacy in writing instruction merits further attention given the crucial role of teacher feedback in promoting EFL students' writing performance (e.g., Lee et al., 2015). One helpful model to guide such endeavors is the pedagogical framework of writing teacher feedback literacy (Lee, 2021). This framework delineates how feedback literacy can be operationalized by writing teachers in terms of "what underlies feedback, and what happens before, during, after, throughout, and beyond feedback" (Lee, 2021, p. 1053). Thus, if a training program on feedback

literacy can be guided by this framework, PSTs may be able to better design and implement their feedback practice. Notably, a one-size-fits-all approach to such training programs may not suffice, as indicated by the observed fluctuating levels of feedback literacy among the focal PSTs. Instead, tailored interventions addressing specific dimensions of feedback literacy may be more effective in satisfying the diverse needs of PSTs.

6. Implications for Teacher Feedback Literacy in Writing Tasks

Discussions surrounding findings provide teacher educators with implications for the development of teacher feedback literacy in writing tasks. Overall, the study demonstrates that it is essential to integrate feedback literacy modules based on three dimensions (i.e., design, relational, and pragmatic) into initial teacher education (Xu et al., 2023).

In the design dimension, given the language-error-focused feedback practice conducted by the PSTs in this study, we argue that PSTs' feedback literacy can be improved by cultivating their conceptions of feedback towards learner-focused (Lee, 2021) and dialogic (Huot, 2002) goals that promote learner agency (Lee, 2021). More importantly, it is crucial to provide rich opportunities (e.g., classroom practices, feedback training programs) for PSTs to rehearse their feedback skills (Peck & Kavanagh, 2024; Xu et al., 2023) within specific foci (e.g., content, language, organization) in different writing tasks. Taking continuation writing as an example, the study suggests an urgent need for English PSTs to implement selective feedback on language errors (Lee, 2019), thereby optimizing their feedback efforts towards content, the key feature of this writing task (Chen, 2022). For instance, during teaching practicums, teacher educators may encourage PSTs to identify the most frequent language errors that impede meaning-making or task achievement in students' continuation writing and provide feedback on only these errors, rather than correcting all linguistic errors. PSTs can then be guided to justify their feedback choices through post-feedback reflections or discussions, helping them develop a more strategic understanding of when and how to allocate feedback attention across different aspects of writing.

In the relational dimension, it is important for PSTs to realize the emotionally evocative nature of feedback for both teachers and students. Awareness of emotions can help PSTs keep calm for more productive feedback practice (Yu, Zheng et al., 2021). Strategies for regulating their own emotions in feedback such as showing empathy to students are also needed (Yao et al., 2025). In addition, to regulate students' potential feedback-induced emotions, PSTs are encouraged to equip themselves with a range of emotion regulation strategies, such as toning down feedback language (Hyland & Hyland, 2019) and using emoticons (Padgett et al., 2021).

Perhaps PSTs need to cultivate their conception of feedback as communication (Huot, 2002) because such a conception can orient them to consider students' emotions and others' needs "since effective communication can never be one-sided" (Huot, 2002, p. 135).

Regarding the pragmatic dimension, this study reveals the necessity of establishing a community of practice for PSTs' proactive and effective communication during their feedback processes. Given that critical reflection and sharing of feedback experience are two important driving forces in the development of teacher feedback literacy (Lee, 2021; To et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023), PSTs are encouraged to monitor their own feedback experiences (e.g., through writing reflective journals) (Huot, 2002; Zhan, 2026), and to share lessons (e.g., posting feedback exemplars in online forums) and develop expertise with peers (Lee, 2021). Meanwhile, it is crucial to consider sustained mentoring endeavors in supporting PSTs' reflections on their strengths and weaknesses in feedback. This may involve the supervision of teacher educators with feedback expertise, sharing their strategies and giving advice during teacher training programs to help PSTs "learn from trial and error" (To et al., 2023, p. 11). Without such mentoring from teacher educators, it is probable that PSTs "are just enacting and subsequently reifying their existing beliefs and practices" (Peck & Kavanagh, 2024, p. 9).

7. Conclusions

This study explored feedback literacy among English PSTs as they assessed student performance in continuation writing. Findings advance scholarship on PSTs' feedback in EFL writing through a detailed analysis of their feedback foci and feedback types. Furthermore, this study extends current understandings of teacher feedback literacy by unpacking the design, relational, and pragmatic dimensions of PSTs' feedback literacy, alongside how their feedback literacy may progress, fluctuate, or decline amid feedback practice. Conceptualizing PSTs' feedback literacy as a multi-dimensional continuum thus yields implications for teacher educators seeking to develop dimension-specific modules that fosters the on-going development and refinement of PSTs' feedback literacy.

This study has a few limitations to acknowledge. First, given that the study focused on ten PSTs' feedback yet only reported on the feedback literacy changes of three focal participants within a single research site. Caution should be taken when drawing claims about transferability. Nevertheless, we contend that the theoretical contributions arising from conceptualizing PSTs' feedback literacy as a multi-dimensional continuum offer valuable implications for researchers and teacher educators internationally. Second, the short four-week data collection window, from which only two rounds of feedback data were obtained, restricted our ability to explore the PSTs' feedback literacy

development longitudinally. Thus, future studies are recommended to adopt a longitudinal perspective to examine how PSTs may adjust their feedback strategies and develop their feedback literacy over time.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study yields several implications for future research. First, while our findings have illuminated three dimensions of PSTs' feedback literacy within the context of continuation writing, further empirical studies are expected to provide a fuller understanding of their feedback literacy across diverse writing tasks, educational settings and cultural contexts. Second, future research is needed to better understand the mechanisms that mediate PSTs' feedback literacy by delving into the intricate interplay between individual characteristics and relevant influential factors. Finally, we advocate more research exploring how various educational interventions can foster improvements in PSTs' feedback literacy. Such interventions may include, but are not limited to, targeted training programs, mentoring schemes, or the embedding of feedback literacy modules within established teacher education curricula.

Author Contributions

J.Z.: methodology, formal analysis, data curation, writing—original draft; Y.X.: conceptualization, methodology, writing—review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Appendix A

The Source Materials for Two Rounds of Continuation Writing

阅读下面材料，根据其内容和所给段落开头语续写两段，使之构成一篇完整的短文。(Read the following material and continue writing two paragraphs according to its content and the given paragraph starters so that they form a complete essay.)

My presentation was horrible. I lost the client. My boss wouldn't look me in the eye and the rest of my day was spent in relative silence-- I was left alone, in reality. Finally, I left my air-conditioned office and of course, outside it was hot as hell. I was hot literally and figuratively as three buses passed, too full to stop and then the one that did stop should have kept going because the air conditioning wasn't working.

I boarded the bus but was unable to stand it, so I squeezed my way off at the next stop. I would just walk the mile and a half to home. I annoyed further, as I continued my journey. I refused to take off my jacket, purposely, maximizing my frustration-- when it rains let it pour was my philosophy.

A block from my building, I heard the water splashing and kids screaming so I knew the fire hydrant had been turned on. Without even thinking about taking an alternate route, I turned the corner, sure enough, there was a group of children playing water. They were politely on the lookout to stop the water from spraying on any passer-by, so when they saw me they stopped the water and when they saw my mean look, they even got quiet. The younger ones in bathing suit, the girls wearing shower caps and the boys with water guns all stared at me as I started to pass by.

Then I noticed a little one, no older than five, holding a water gun down by his side, eyeing me a little harder than the others. I eyed him back. Then his brother, who I had seen around the neighborhood, nodded at him like he was saying, "I dare you". My eyes tightened a little further as I communicated my own "I dare you" to the five-year-old. Then his eyes moved, planning his escape route through the alley, and in that split second I knew I was going to get soaked.

注意: (Notes:)

1. 所续写短文的词数应为150左右; (The word count for your continuation is about 150 words;)
2. 续写部分分为两段，每段的开头语已为你写好。(The continuation is divided into two paragraphs, with the opening lines of each paragraph already given.)

And he got me, behind my ear, before he ran towards his exit. _____
I couldn't remember my last fight. _____

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted under the guidance of the Academic Committee of South China Normal University.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data that has been used is confidential. The raw data from this study cannot be shared publicly because they contain confidential participant data protected by ethical approval. Requests for anonymized data can be directed to the corresponding author and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis following institutional and ethical requirements.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

No AI tools were utilized for this paper.

Figure A1. The source material for R1.

阅读下面材料，根据其内容和所给段落开头语续写两段，使之构成一篇完整的短文。(Read the following material and continue writing two paragraphs according to its content and the given paragraph starters so that they form a complete essay.)

“Pick up the pace!” said Amy’s husband. “But I can’t!” Amy said, her heart beating quickly inside. “I can’t go any faster!” Her husband encouraged her, “Yes, you can! You’re making progress every day.”

To help Amy stay healthy, her husband had been running with her for over two years. Several years ago, Amy could barely walk down the stairs of her apartment building due to fatness caused by eating disorders. She realized the problem after a failed job interview and began walking to improve her ability to move. At first, she could walk for only 15 minutes at a time. But she pushed herself every day, walking 5 minutes longer than she did the day before until she walked for an hour and eventually two. For three years, Amy kept her walking habit, slowly and painstakingly building her body shape. Then she changed her walking shoes to running shoes about two years ago and became an excellent runner.

In March 2001, an advertisement invited people to nominate (提名) an ordinary person who inspired them to bring the Olympic flame to Salt Lake City as torch bearers (火炬手) or support runners. (Support runners serve as “guardians of the flame” and run with torch bearers along the journey.) Amy’s experiences touched her husband, so he nominated her to be a torch bearer. The possibility to be selected was low, but Amy wanted to try.

Running taught Amy the importance of training for a race. She pictured herself running a race and crossing the finish line. For months, she ran through her neighborhood carrying a broken-off broom handle, feeling the weight of the torch. She waved at her neighbors, pretending they were cheering crowds. She also printed a picture of a torch bearer wearing the white uniform, replaced the face with a picture of hers, and put it onto her refrigerator door.

Every day, Amy imagined herself as a torch bearer. She was training for a historic running event. On September 26th, while on her daily run through her neighborhood, an express package arrived.

注意: (Notes:)

1. 所续写短文的词数应为150左右; (The word count for your continuation is about 150 words;)
2. 续写部分分为两段，每段的开头语已为你写好。(The continuation is divided into two paragraphs, with the opening lines of each paragraph already given.)

Amy opened it and found a letter and a book on the Olympics.

“One of today’s torch bearers can’t run her part,” announced the relay organizer.

Figure A2. The source material for R2.

Appendix B

Three Rounds of Open-Ended Surveys

○ #Q0

- (1) How many times have you participated in educational support activities? What kind of support did you provide in the previous activity (or activities)? Did your previous experience provide you with any insights for the current activity? If so, what were they?
- (2) Have you ever assessed or provided feedback on secondary school students’ writing? If so, in what context did you do this (e.g., tutoring)? What were your experiences and how did you feel?
- (3) Are you familiar with the “continuation writing” task in the English examination of *Gaokao*? When and where did you first encounter this type of writing task?
- (4) Apart from the training session on the evening of January 21, have you received any previous training on “continuation writing”? If so, what form did the training take (e.g., lectures, workshops, courses)? What did you learn from the training?
- (5) Do you find the scoring criteria for the continuation writing task used in this activity easy to understand? In particular, how easy or difficult is it to understand the level descriptors and scoring for the three dimensions—content, language, and coherence? Why do you find them easy or difficult to understand?
- (6) What expectations and plans do you have for this activity? How are you feeling about participating in it?

○ #Q1

- (1) Could you describe your feedback process on a student’s continuation writing? Please describe in detail what you usually do.
- (2) Based on the quality of the students’ first drafts, what do you think were the main strengths and weaknesses of their writing?
- (3) Did the students’ revised drafts of the first writing task show any improvement compared with their first drafts? If so, in what aspects did they improve? If not, what do you think were the reasons?
- (4) By comparing the students’ first and revised drafts of the first writing task, do you think they revised their writing in response to the feedback you provided? Could you give an example?
- (5) When assigning scores for the different dimensions and determining the overall score, did you find the scoring criteria for the continuation writing task helpful in determining the level of the students’ writing? In particular, did the level descriptors and scoring criteria for the three dimensions—content, language, and coherence—help you make your judgments? Why or why not?

- (6) What aspects do you typically address in the feedback you provide to students? For example, do you focus on content, language, coherence, or other aspects? What do you find most challenging when providing feedback?
 - (7) What do you think was the biggest challenge in carrying out the continuation writing activity? Could you give an example?
 - (8) Based on the quantity and quality of the assignments submitted by the students, do you have any further suggestions for improving the educational support activity?
 - (9) If you could use three words to describe your experience of participating in this activity, what three words would you choose? Why?
- #Q2
- (1) Compared with your feedback process in Round 1, were there any similarities or differences in the way you assessed the second round of continuation writing? If so, what were they?
 - (2) Compared with the students' performance in Round 1, do you think they made any progress in Round 2? If so, in what aspects did they improve? If not, what do you think were the reasons?
 - (3) By comparing the students' writing in two rounds, do you think they took into account the feedback you provided in Round 2 when completing Round 2? Could you give an example?
 - (4) Do you think there are any aspects of the scoring criteria that could be improved? In particular, do you have any suggestions regarding the level descriptors and scoring criteria for the three dimensions—content, language, and coherence?
 - (5) Did you encounter any difficulties when providing feedback to students or determining their scores/levels? If so, how did you address these difficulties? Could you give an example?
 - (6) What do you think was the biggest gain from this activity? Since completing the previous questionnaire, have you encountered any new difficulties or challenges? Could you give an example?
 - (7) If you could use three words to describe your overall experience throughout the activity, what three words would you choose? Why?

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

- (1) What do you think of your feedback practice in the continuation tasks at that time in general?
- (2) How did you design your feedback in R1 and R2, respectively?
- (3) During the program, you are required to assess students' continuation writing in content, language, and organization dimensions. Are there dimensions to which you pay special attention in R1 and R2, respectively? Why do you think this/these dimensions is/are important?
- (4) In our research we found the following codes to describe feedback (i.e., praise, criticism, advice, imperative, questions, mechanics). Can you find any examples of these in your feedback, and what would you say is the purpose of that feedback?
- (5) What emotions do you think students would experience when they received your feedback? Did you do something special to regulate those possible feedback-induced emotions?
- (6) Did you encounter any difficulties when providing feedback in R1 and R2, respectively? How did you solve them?
- (7) You participated in this program with other pre-service teachers. How did you collaborate with them during the feedback processes? Did you receive any assistance from them?
- (8) What did you benefit from participating in the two rounds of feedback tasks?

Appendix D

Table A1. Coding table for the three focal PSTs.

Dimension	Category	Code	Quote
Design	Adaptive strategies leading to balanced feedback	Provide more feedback on content	"I guessed they only noticed the existence of grammatical errors [in R1], so I paid more attention to content in R2 ... to shift their focus on this dimension, which I thought was very important." (Yasmine-RI)
	Teacher difficulties in feedback provision	Feel obligated to give comprehensive corrective feedback	"I just felt I must point [the errors] out, otherwise students would not know, and I would change nothing." (Lilian-RI)
		Lack confidence	"Actually, I didn't know much about continuation tasks at that time, so I wasn't very specialized in how the structure should be laid out. I was worried that giving too much feedback would be counterproductive." (Lilian-RI)

Table A1. Cont.

Dimension	Category	Code	Quote
Design	Feedback as a process of learning	Learn from the process of feedback provision	“Actually, when I was looking for the mistakes, I could also find that there were a lot of things that I didn’t know about until I looked them up... language learning is a process of accumulation, so I can’t stop accumulating, otherwise it would take me a long time [to check] when providing feedback.” (Lilian-RI)
		Use sentence-final particles to tone down feedback wording	“I was worried that I might hurt the student if I talked too straight, and I actually very appreciated the students who participated in this project during the winter holiday, so ... it was just a matter of moderating the tone a little bit, but I did hope the students could be in a better mood.” (Lilian-RI)
Relational	Maintenance of teacher-student relationships in feedback	Use emoticons to enhance interaction	“Seeing an emoticon, students may have a more face-to-face feeling. It may enhance the interaction between teachers and students ... a way to establish good relationship with students” (Yasmine-RI)
		Unwilling to discourage students	“I didn’t want to discourage them. Holiday, task, low scores, and a lot of mistakes ... So I gave a higher score and I wanted to send a message to everyone that “your hard work will pay off”, so I scored them at least one point higher.” (Lilian-RI) “Although the student’s writing was not so good, and was even off-topic, I would still say that your writing is okay.” (Sherry-RI)
	Insufficient awareness of student and teacher emotions in feedback	Unaware of regulating student emotions in feedback	“They must have experienced some negative emotions... but at that time I didn’t think too much, since I thought that a natural process.” (Sherry-RI)
		Feel disappointed at students’ passive involvement	“I felt disappointed. Many students who had signed up for this project were not serious in handing in their assignments. They just wasted the opportunity...” (Sherry-Q2)
Pragmatic	Management of feedback pressure	Prioritize feedback on students’ earlier problems facing time constraints	“In R2, we didn’t have enough time, and it was right after the Chinese New Year, so I would just look at the problems they had in their writing in R1, and focused on those problems to see if they improved.” (Yasmine-RI)
	Communication with peers	Turn to peers for help	“When there were some expressions that I couldn’t understand, some of my peers would explain them to me straight away, and others would look them up on the Internet.” (Lilian-RI)

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