

# A STUDY ON PEERS' POSITIVE FEEDBACK IN GROUP WORK BY VIETNAMESE EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Nguyen Le Quynh My; Le Pham Hoai Huong

University of Foreign Languages, Hue University

*Received: 28/08/2020; Revised: 20/10/2020; Accepted: 28/12/2020*

**Abstract:** This study was conducted to find out Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of peers' positive feedback in group work and their actual practice of giving positive feedback. The participants included 100 third-year English majors at a university in central Vietnam. Questionnaire, interview, and recorded group observation were used for data collection. The findings show that most EFL university students had awareness of the significance of peers' positive feedback in group work. With regards to positive feedback, peers resorted to various strategies, including giving some simple phrases such as "Good!", "Nice!", "Excellent!", "Well done!", some expressions, including adjective + noun, pronoun + is + (really) + (a) + adjective + noun phrase", and "What + (a/an) + adjective + noun phrase. Besides, they reported using compliments containing the modal verb *should* in their utterances. From the findings, suggestions were made for students to deliver positive feedback to peers in group work.

**Key words:** Peer, positive feedback, groupwork

## 1. Introduction

Peer feedback in general and oral compliments in particular is part of classroom interactions and has been researched in different contexts of English teaching and learning. Given in the right way, feedback made by peers is considered to engage other participants into the tasks at hand as well as to motivate them. Undoubtedly, conducting a study on this topic will shed more light on how peer feedback occurs and how to help students to give and receive feedback effectively.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Peer feedback

Peer feedback is performed by equal-status learners and can be both a form of formative assessment and collaborative learning (Topping, 2003). In some cases, peer feedback can be equivalent and a substitute for teacher feedback. Tsui and Ng (2000) state that peer feedback can raise learners' awareness of their strengths and weakness, enhance a feeling of recipients, stimulate cooperative learning, and foster ownership.

Peer feedback is considered to be beneficial in the EFL classroom. First, peer feedback can motivate learners to perform well. Tsui and Ng (2000) stated that students try to avoid being embarrassed in front of their peers rather than their teachers in doing their assignments. Thus, they make efforts to learn and show their performances better. Second, Topping (2003) proved that students found it easy to get feedback from their peers because of their understandable, helpful, and useful responses. The main point here is that students are on the same wavelength (Topping, 2003). This is the reason why they know what the main problems their peers face and

how to deal with them in effective ways. Another advantage is that peer feedback can enhance the students' ability to understand the feedback. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) state that students can give feedback to peers immediately whereas teachers' feedback is given after finishing teaching a topic, or at the end of the course. Lastly, peer feedback is regarded as replacement for teachers' feedback in the EFL classroom. Specifically, if teachers are unable to give feedback frequently, students can regularly receive the amount of peers' feedback during their learning process so that they can gain experience to improve their performances. In sum, peer feedback is obviously beneficial to language learners.

## 2.2. Positive feedback

There are two kinds of peer feedback: positive and negative; however, due to scope of the paper, this study only focuses on investigating positive feedback which is identified as three strategies presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Categorization of oral positive feedback (adapted from Reigel, 2005)

Positive feedback strategy	Explanation
1. Paralinguistic strategy	Nonverbal cues (gesture and facial expression) that show affirmation such as nodding and laughter.
2. Linguistic strategy	Verbal responses that show affirmation of student's utterance
3. Praise markers	Verbal responses of praising student's utterance such as "fine," "good," "excellent".

Reigel (2005) pointed out that paralinguistic strategy is nonverbal feedback by gestures and facial expressions that show affirmation such as nodding and laughter. However, this strategy will not be discussed in the current study because the aim of this study is to investigate verbal positive feedback only. The second type is linguistic strategy to display agreement to student's responses. The last one is praise markers which are comments to motivate, encourage, and prompt the recipient such as "Good!", "Excellent!", "Good job!". Therefore, in this research, positive feedback is one of the meaningful tools including linguistic strategy and praise markers.

## 2.3. Strategies to give peer positive feedback

In fact, there are a lot of the strategies of giving peers' positive feedback in group work in the EFL classroom. Giving peers' positive feedback depends on many factors such as the strategy of giving compliments, the use of the modal verb *should*, and the types of feedback. First, verbal positive feedback is considered to be verbal compliments or verbal praises (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999) They show a cognitive evaluation theory which states that verbal rewards are mostly expected to be significant and outstanding, and thus, verbal rewards are believed to increase intrinsic motivation.

It is undeniable that students should have appropriate strategies in giving verbal positive feedback as verbal compliments to their peers. Wolfson (1984) stated that compliments tend to follow the formulaic system as follows:

1. NP is/looks (really) ADJ. (e.g. "Your opinion is great")
2. I (really) like/love NP. (e.g. "I really like your idea")

3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP. (e.g. “That is really a nice suggestion”)
4. You V (a) (really) ADJ NP. (e.g. “You did a good job”)
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV (e.g. “You handled that situation really well”)
6. You have (a) ADJ NP! (e.g. “You have such a wonderful performance”)
7. What (a) ADJ NP! (e.g. “What a lovely answer you have!”)
8. ADJ NP! (e.g. “Nice voice!”)
9. Isn’t NP ADJ? (Isn’t your idea?)

Therefore, it can be said that verbal positive feedback is based on a limited variety of lexical items. Besides, Wolfson (1984) affirms that 80% of the positive feedback used as compliments depend on adjectives conveying positive meanings. In Wolfson’s research, two-thirds of all adjectival compliments use only five words such as *nice*, *good*, *beautiful*, *pretty*, and *great*. Furthermore, some verbs are used to give positive feedback with positive semantic meanings such as *like*, *love*, *enjoy*, *admire*, and *be impressed by* which account for 86% praises. Furthermore, the majority of the compliments (70%) utilized second-person pronouns (You look great) or demonstratives (That’s a nice idea). Therefore, in group work, students may find it easy to give verbal positive feedback to their peers via the use of lexical items.

Apart from its function as verbal compliments, Ryan (1982) holds that positive feedback can include the modal verb *should* (e.g. Well done! You should keep up the good work.). In that way, recipients may feel as good as pressured and are stimulated to perform their work well. Therefore, when giving positive feedback to peers, learners should put the word *should* in their statements to enhance their peers’ learning reinforcement.

Finally, Tunstall and Gipps (1996) indicate that there are three categories of feedback: peers’ corrective feedback, peers’ evaluative feedback, and peers’ strategic feedback. Peers’ corrective feedback helps learners avoid making mistakes and correct their language use in a positive way. Peers’ evaluative feedback includes a judgment on peers’ performance as in this example: Student A: “That was very good. I like the way you develop your ideas.” Peers’ strategic feedback offers advice on what to do to improve performance. For example, the teacher asks students to work in groups and practice how to pronounce /ð/ sound. The group members can practice and help one another pronounce correctly. There is some peers’ strategic feedback that they can use in this case like this: “Look at my mouth, put your tongue between your upper and lower teeth, let’s say “the, the, the”.

Therefore, it is evident that the three types of peers’ feedback have an impact on the way peers’ positive feedback is given. In other words, this study will take into account all of the strategies of giving positive feedback such as the strategy of giving compliments, the use of the modal verb *should*, and the three types of feedback.

#### 2.4. Previous studies

Empirical research on peer feedback has been documented in the literature. For example, Gielen et al.’s study (2009) aimed to analyze the role of the characteristics of good peers’

feedback and the effectiveness of peer feedback to support students' learning. The data was collected from 43 seventh-grade students who were in the same first-year secondary school. The researchers concluded that. However, this effect diminished for students with better pretest performance.

Jin and Lim (2019) investigated the effects of peer feedback types and feedback acceptance levels on academic achievement in project-based learning and noticed that receiving "justified" comments in feedback improved performance. The participants were 70 middle-school students taking an English course. It was found that there were significant differences in academic achievement in accordance with peer feedback types (corrective vs. suggestive) and feedback acceptance levels (high vs. low). Therefore, it contributed practical implications for the design and implementation of peer feedback activities in project-based learning.

Allen and Mills (2013) explored students' perceptions towards factors which affected peer feedback and provided practical suggestions for managing peer feedback activities with 47 students who were in a first-year academic writing course. The result illustrated the fact that some factors such as age and gender did not influence the peer feedback process whereas language proficiency and topic knowledge were influential factors. Additionally, the study pointed out that peers' proficiencies differed greatly, the lower proficiency peer was more likely to feel less able to provide adequate feedback.

In Vietnam, Trinh Quoc Lap and Cao Hoang Yen (2013) explored the types of feedback used by competent and less competent learners and measured the extent to which giving feedback affected peers' ability to write argumentative paragraphs. The researchers obtained data from 24 English learners at a foreign language center in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. This research identified that the learners did not employ all types of feedback equally and they produced praise to respond to their peers' writing most frequently. In some cases, Vietnamese students did not want to hurt their peers, so they avoided making many negative comments on peers' writing. Moreover, some learners were probably unsure whether a certain part of peers' writing was problematic or not, then they generated general praises instead of specific identification of weak points in peers' writing accordingly.

Nguyen Thi Que Phuong (2016) explored the effects of peer feedback on social media on EFL students by conducting a study aiming at discovering the effect of peer feedback on Facebook on high school students' writing performance and attitudes. The findings showed that students' writing performance increased after the study and that the majority of them had positive attitudes towards the use of Facebook for peer feedback.

In summary, it is evident that the majority of those previous researches have concentrated on the effectiveness of peer feedback in English language skills classes. However, there is a dearth of studies on students' perceptions and on how students can make the best use of positive feedback in group work so that they can create significant learning progress in language classes. It, therefore, creates a research gap for this current study which was set out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Vietnamese EFL university students' perceptions of peers' positive feedback in group work?

2. How do Vietnamese EFL university students give positive feedback to peers in group work?

### 3. Research design

In this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The quantitative approach was adopted to collect the statistical data to analyze participants' responses to the questionnaire using close-ended questions. The qualitative approach was employed to describe and analyze language expressions from recorded group observation and student participants' responses to the interview to explore their perceptions towards peers' positive feedback in group work and their actual practice of giving and receiving peer feedback.

One hundred third-year students at a university in central Vietnam participated in this study. Ten students out of these 100 students were invited for interviews. Additionally, group observations were recorded with 8 group discussions taking place in 8 periods of English speaking skill classes, given the fact that group work and peer interactions take place more in speaking classes.

The questionnaire used in this study included 21 close-ended questions arranged into five-point scales for students to rate: 1: *strongly disagree*, 2: *disagree*, 3: *neutral*, 4: *agree*, 5: *strongly agree*. The first cluster of questions in the questionnaire focuses on the EFL university students' perceptions towards peers' positive feedback in group work (items 1-4). The second one explores EFL university students' practice of giving positive feedback to peers in group work activities. It contains 17 items for the purpose of finding when and how peers' positive feedback in group work is given (items 5-21). All the questionnaire items were written in English and translated into Vietnamese for the students to understand. The interview includes 6 open-ended questions about how the students can give positive feedback to peers in group work, students' attitudes towards peers' positive feedback and their problems of giving peers' positive feedback in group work. Observation was applied in the current study to find out more about the ways positive feedback was delivered by students and students' evaluation of peers' positive feedback in group work at university. The researcher conducted 8 group observations in English speaking classes at the research site. With the participants' permission, their responses were recorded by a mobile phone for detailed analysis.

The analysis was carried out with statistical frequency and percentages using the software SPSS for data from the questionnaire. Interviews were transcribed and searched for themes that answered the research questions. Moreover, group work recordings were extracted for data related to positive feedback given by students to peers. The next section presents the results.

### 4. Findings

In order to investigate EFL university students' perceptions towards peers' positive feedback in group work, their practice of giving positive feedback to peers in group work, the questionnaire was designed and delivered to 100 EFL university students. The reliability of the questionnaire was processed with the SPSS software version 20.0. The result reveals the Cronbach alpha coefficient of .845. Therefore, the reliability of the questionnaire was .845, larger than .7, indicating good reliability.

***EFL university students' perceptions of peers' positive feedback in group work***

The data of EFL university students' perceptions towards peers' positive feedback in group work were analyzed using Descriptive Statistic Test. The results of the test are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Cluster 1	100	2.25	5.00	4.1425	.56436
Cluster 2	100	2.53	4.88	3.8835	.45710
Valid N (listwise)	100				

The results in Table 2 show that the first cluster has the higher mean score (M=4.14) whereas cluster 2 has the lower mean value (M=3.88). Furthermore, a One-sample T-test was conducted on Cluster 1 to evaluate whether the mean score was significantly different from 3.0, the accepted mean for a high level of agreement of the study. The results of the test are demonstrated in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4.

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics of Cluster 1

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Cluster 1	100	2.25	5.00	4.1425	.56436

**Table 4** Mean score of each item in Cluster 1

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1. Peers' positive feedback in group work is useful and has helped me to enrich my vocabulary, correct my grammatical mistakes and improve my pronunciation	100	2.0	5.0	3.910	.8420
2. Peers' positive feedback should be used in group work in EFL classrooms	100	1.0	5.0	4.260	.8483
3. Peers' verbal positive feedback is directive and effective than peers' non-verbal positive feedback	100	2.0	5.0	4.110	.8027
4. I would like to have peers' verbal positive feedback in group work	100	2.0	5.0	4.290	.7823

**Table 5** One-sample T test of Cluster 1

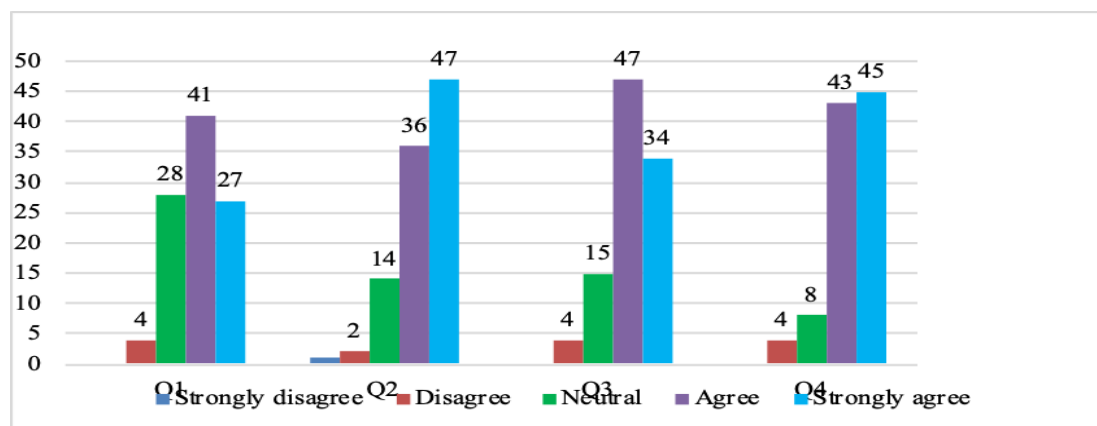
	<b>Test Value = 3</b>					
	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</b>	
					<b>Lower</b>	<b>Upper</b>
Mean of Cluster 1	20.244	99	.000	1.14250	1.0305	1.2545

The results in Table 2 show that the mean score of each statement in cluster 1 was fairly high (M=4.14). This mean is much higher than the accepted mean for the middle value of the five-point scale (M=3.00). The results, therefore, can be concluded that the EFL university students had positive perceptions towards peers' positive feedback in group work. Thus, it is obvious that peers' positive feedback is an effective way that can considerably have an impact on the process of the EFL university students' English learning.

Although most of the students supported all the 4 items in Cluster 1, it can be seen from the Table 3 that the means scores of q2, q3, q4 were higher than .4 (M=4.26, M=4.11,

M=4.29) while the q1 gets the lowest agreement of students (M=3,91). Therefore, the results proved that most of students expected to give and receive peers' positive feedback in group work in EFL classrooms because it is directive and effective than peers' non-verbal positive feedback. On the other hand, the use of peers' positive feedback in group work is *to enrich my vocabulary, correct my grammatical mistakes, and improve my pronunciation* is quite agreed by most of them.

In order to attain insights of these issues, students' responses to each item of Cluster 1 were presented as percentage through Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** EFL university students' perceptions of peers' positive feedback in group work

As can be seen from the chart, among 100 students, only one gave negative responses (strongly disagree) while 2 to 4 students disagreed to the items. Besides, the percentages of students who chose the middle of agreement (neutral) do not go beyond 28%. Therefore, it can be claimed that most students strongly agreed and agreed with the importance of using peers' positive feedback in group work. Specifically, 68% of the students thought that peers' positive feedback is actually necessary for their learning. Simultaneously, 83% of the respondents supposed that it is essential to use peers' positive feedback in group work. In addition, the other two items selectively with the high percentages (81% and 88%) confirmed the ideas that peers' verbal positive feedback is directive and effective than peers' non-verbal positive feedback and they hoped to have peers' positive feedback in group work.

Additionally, the interview data support the results from the questionnaire. When giving answers to the first interview question, all the interviewees claimed that peers' positive feedback in group work played a crucial role in their learning. They all agreed that peers' positive feedback plays a significant role in students' learning. For examples, student 1 said that peers' positive feedback was one way to help her cooperate with other teammates better while student 4 thought a team was a group of individuals who had complementary skills and were committed to the responsibility of achieving a common goal. Besides, student 10 asserted that group members became more confident and encouraged due to peers' positive feedback. Besides, student 3's response illustrated the main obvious reasons why peers' positive feedback was necessary for group work in her own way.

*"I think it's very necessary for group work because positive feedback to other members'*

*ideas is also a good way to demonstrate engagement, cooperation, and interaction in learning. This will create a closer relationship between members, which helps the group work more effectively.” (Student 3)*

In the same vein, student 5 showed her positive attitude towards peers’ positive feedback in group work. She said positive feedback from peers absolutely could be used in group work:

*“From my perspective, the EFL University students’ attitudes towards peers’ positive feedback in group work is almost very good because giving positive feedback is very important and necessary for our learning.”*

Furthermore, student 2 pointed out the two sides of peers’ positive feedback in group work. From her experience, she saw students in her university had quite a positive outlook because everyone wanted to hear praises and good comments.

From the responses of all the interviewees, it can be concluded that although they expressed their ideas and their opinions in many different ways, all of them came to the common consent that peers’ positive feedback is useful and should be used in group work discussions. In general, from the results from questionnaire and interview data, it is evident that the majority of the EFL university students had very positive attitudes towards peers’ positive feedback in group work.

### ***EFL university students’ practice of giving positive feedback to peers in group work***

In order to find out the EFL university students’ practice of giving peers’ positive feedback, data from Cluster 2 including 17 items from 9 to 21 are presented via a Descriptive statistic test and a One-sample T-test with the following results.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of Cluster 2

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Cluster 2	100	2.53	4.88	3.8835	.45710

**Table 6.** Mean score of each item in Cluster 2

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
9. NP + is/looks (really) + ADJ	100	1.0	5.0	3.910	.9857
10. I + (really) + like/love + NP	100	2.0	5.0	4.160	.8495
11. PRO+ is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP	100	1.0	5.0	4.010	.9156
12. You + V + (a) + (really) + ADJ + NP	100	1.0	5.0	3.870	.9708
13. You + V + (NP) + (really) + ADV	100	2.0	5.0	4.030	.8097
14. You + have + (a) + ADJ + NP!	100	2.0	5.0	3.980	.8643
15. What + (a) + ADJ + NP!	100	1.0	5.0	3.800	1.0150
16. ADJ + NP!	100	1.0	5.0	4.040	.8980
17. Isn’t + NP + ADJ?	100	1.0	5.0	3.280	1.1289
18. Using the modal verb <i>should</i>	100	1.0	5.0	3.770	1.0036
19. Imitating the framework of teachers’ modeling feedback	100	1.0	5.0	3.940	1.0232
20. Using verbal positive phrases like <i>good, good job, excellent, very nice, that’s correct, that’s right</i> and repeating a correct answer.	100	1.0	5.0	3.920	.9606

21. Using repetition, reinforcement, praise, nodding, clapping and affirmation	100	1.0	5.0	3.960	1.1452
--	-----	-----	-----	-------	--------

As can be showed in Table 5, the mean score of Cluster 2 was 3.88. It is certain that the mean score was higher than 3, from which it can be inferred that the students used many ways to give positive feedback to their peers. However, students tended to use some structures (items 10, 11, 13, and 16) more often than other ways because the mean scores of these items were over 4 (M=4.16, M=4.01, M=4.03 and M=4.04). They usually use positive feedback based on some structures such as I + (really) + like/love + NP, PRO+ is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP, and You + V + (NP) + (really) + ADV, ADJ + NP!

Besides, the statistics of One-Sample T-test are shown in Table 7 below.

**Table 7.** One-sample T test of Cluster 2

	Test Value = 3					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
Cluster 2	19.329	99	.000	.88353	.7928	.9742

The One Sample T-test indicates that the mean score of Cluster 2 (M=3.88; SD=.45710) was meaningfully different from 3 (t= 19.329; df= 99; p= .000). Therefore, the results lead to the conclusion that EFL university students usually use peers’ positive feedback in group work.

Students’ responses to each item of Cluster 2 were illustrated as percentage through Table 8 below.

**Table 8.** EFL university students’ practice of giving positive feedback to peers in group work

Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
9	1	8	23	35	33
10	0	5	14	41	40
11	3	1	20	44	32
12	1	9	21	40	29
13	0	3	22	44	31
14	0	6	20	44	30
15	1	13	18	41	27
16	1	4	20	40	35
17	7	16	35	26	16
18	1	13	19	42	25
19	2	8	19	36	35
20	2	5	23	39	31
21	6	5	16	33	40

As can be seen in Table 8, some (from 1% to 16 % of students) who chose “strongly disagree” and “disagree” level for each item, yet this made no difference to the overall result. It means that most students strongly agreed or agreed (with the highest percentage 44% and 40% successively) to the ways to use peers’ positive feedback which are shown in the questionnaire. The majority of students agreed and strongly disagreed to items 9 to 21. Specifically, 44% believed that the structures PRO + is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP, You + V + (NP) + (really) +

ADV, You + have + (a) + ADJ + NP!, ADJ + NP! are mostly used when they give positive feedback in group work. Additionally, the number of participants who adopted the expression I + (really) + like/love + NP and the modal verb *should* are quite high (41% and 42%).

Moreover, the data gained from the interviews and recorded group observations revealed EFL university students' practices of giving positive feedback to peers in group work. Most interviewees asserted that they usually used some simple sentences as well as simple words to praise their friends.

In the interviews, all the students (except students 2 and 4) agreed that they and their friends usually made use of the structure Adj + Noun! and positive phrases such as *good, good job, excellent, very nice, that's correct, that's right*. For example, student 1 said that she usually used positive phrases such as *well done, good job, awesome* to praise her friends. This is the way that students 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 used. Some examples can be taken from students 3 and 7's transcriptions as follows:

*"They also use some ways like me. In addition, some of them use exclamatory sentences. For instance, 'Well- done!', and so on"* (Student 3)

*"They give me just a simple sentence, simple words 'well', 'good', 'good job' to appreciate my responses."* (Student 7)

Some students said that they seemed to prefer short sentences to complex sentences in English. Moreover, half of the students expressed their agreement with their friends' ideas by frequently using some phrases of opinion expression level. For example, students 3 and 9 said: *"Besides, I will use some phrases of opinion expression level such as "I completely agree with you but ..." or " I feel the same but ..." to contribute a few more ideas politely"* (Student 3). *"In some other cases, they also said that "I totally agree with you that..., I am of the belief that..."* (Student 9).

It can be said that the use of some phrases of opinion expression level on a frequent basis is quite common among students. They considered the agreed expression level phrases to be a convenient way to praise peers because they help students feel safe and confident to receive others' approval. Furthermore, even if students failed to perform peers' positive feedback in the aforementioned ways, the structure PRO + is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP was also given. For example, student 2 claimed to use, *"If they have a good idea, I say 'your idea is great' or if I see that they put a lot of efforts into finding information, I'll say that 'the information that you found is very useful"*. In addition, students 3, 6 and 8 added that they gave exclamatory sentences of the type What + (a) + ADJ + NP! to their peers, which they regarded as the way to help their groupmates feel free when receiving positive feedback. Each student used different types of exclamatory sentences contingently. For instance, student 8 claimed to use: *"This exercise was solved by you easily! That's great"*.

The audio recordings were used as a data collection tool to examine the actual use of peers' positive feedback in group work. The students, who were studying Unit 5 "The Fat Tax" of the course-book North Start 2, were observed in 8 groups. Below are some parts of the transcript:

### Group 6

S1: I don't remember what the fat tax is. Can you tell me about this?

S2: Yes, the fat tax is the tax on unhealthy food that can make people be obese. Do you agree with me?

S3: **Oh, That sounds great.**

S2: **Yes, yes.**

S4: Can you tell me the country that has the high rate of people obese?

S1: I think Nauru, right?

S2: **Oh yes, excellent!**

### Group 7

S1: Chừ là bài mình sẽ chia ra 2 phần này, 1 phần là đồng ý với sự can thiệp của chính phủ về giảm béo, còn 1 bên là không đồng ý. Tau thuộc phe đồng ý háy

S2: Tau là chắc chắn tau không đồng ý rồi đó

S3: Y phải cần 1 người dẫn chuyện chứ chi nữa? Đóng 5 người mà, cần 1 người đứng giữa

S4: Cần chi người đứng giữa, 2 bên tranh luận cần chi người đứng giữa, người đứng giữa biết làm chi?

S3: Tao nghĩ là vô thảo luận sẽ cần người dẫn chuyện kiểu hôm nay sẽ...

S1: Hoặc là ri này, bây có coi Ielts face off không? Kiểu có 1 ông tiếng việt để đưa ra

S2: Cái conversation bên chỗ Ielts chi nữa?

S1: Ủ ừ, hấn cũng chia ra 2 phe, 1 bên đồng ý, 1 bên không đồng ý

S4: Nhưng ý mi là có thể 2 phe???

S1: Tức là mình sẽ đóng giả là mình đang làm chương trình có topic là như rứa bờ xong 2 phe sẽ tranh luận với nhau để phản biện với nhau đó

S2: **Cũng được (It's okay).**

### Group 8

S1: Nauru is the country with the highest obesity rate in 2019.

S2: **Yeah, that's good, great. That's good idea**

S3: We must eat some snacks like yogurt, raw snacks

S4: **That sounds great**

S1: Còn câu hỏi mô nữa không hè? Câu hỏi của cô tề, gluco với glucid, câu hỏi chi hè

S6: Some food in low protein is....., y thức ăn ít đạm là chi quên rồi, đáp án ấy.... cái loại thức ăn ít protein,... cao tinh bột là biết rồi...

The biggest part of pyramid are breads, corns and some food in high protein and so on.

**S5: You speak English very well**

**S4: Excellent!**

S2: A fat tax is a tax on unhealthy food that can make people obese

**S3: Yeah, I strongly agree with you.**

The recordings of group work show that student 3 (group 6) and student 2 (group 8) adopted the structures of item 11 (PRO+ is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP) and item 14 (You + have + (a) + ADJ + NP!) of the questionnaire. Besides, in groups 6 and 8, a compliment - *Oh. That sounds great.* - was found.

Through the recorded group work observations, it can be seen that students just used positive feedback in limited ways by means of some simple words and simple structures in group work practice. This result was somewhat different from the interview data which show that the majority of the students referred repeatedly to the benefits of peers' positive feedback and they exerted positive attitudes to use a wide range of strategies to give positive feedback to peers. Therefore, there is a mismatch between perception and practice of the use peers' positive feedback. This finding may come from the fact that the recordings were limited in quantity and does not represent a large population of participants actually delivering positive feedback to peers.

## **5. Discussion and implications**

The findings from the questionnaire, interview and recorded group observation show that most of EFL university students had positive perceptions of peers' positive feedback in group work. First, they all claimed that it is inevitable that encouraging is one of the important benefits of peers' positive feedback. Furthermore, it was reported by the students that peers' positive feedback could help them improve their English skills. These findings are in line with the suggestion made by Tsui and Ng (2000) that peer feedback could enhance students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, promote a feeling of recipients, stimulate cooperative learning, and foster ownership. Second, EFL students asserted that peers' positive feedback helps them build their confidence in working in groups besides teachers' feedback. The current finding corroborates the conclusion made by Tsui, Ng (2000). Tsui and Nguyen's study pointed out that students try to avoid being less embarrassed in front of their peers than their teachers in doing their assignments (2000). Therefore, they do their utmost to learn and have better performances. In addition, both the results from the questionnaire and interview data proved that peers' positive feedback in their group work helped most of the students enhance their English skills. The findings of the current study reiterated those achieved by Allen and Mill (2013) which showed the close connection between language proficiency and peers' positive feedback.

Moreover, it can be concluded from the questionnaire data that students considered peers' positive feedback to be as valuable as teacher's review. This finding is in agreement with that achieved by Gibbs and Simpson (2004) who indicated that peer feedback can substitute

teachers' feedback in EFL classrooms. It means that if teachers are unable to give feedback frequently, students can regularly receive the amount of peers' feedback during their learning process so that they can gain experience to improve their performance. Additionally, the recorded group observations revealed various strategies students used to give positive feedback to peers.

In general, the results obtained from the research showed that students tended to employ the language structures like Adj + Noun, Pro + is + (really) + (a) + ADJ + NP, exclamatory sentences What + (a) + ADJ + NP!, and some phrases like *good, good job, excellent, very nice, that's correct, that's right* to give peers' positive feedback. This finding seems to be consistent with that of Manes and Wolfson (1981) who found that compliments follow the formulaic system including the above structures. Besides, students used the modal verb *should*, which are in accord with Ryan's finding (1982).

From the findings of the current study, several implications can be drawn. First, EFL teachers should be aware of how peers' positive feedback becomes meaningful to students. It is, therefore, necessary for teachers to create more opportunities for students to give positive feedback to peers in working in groups. To do this, teachers should design their teaching plans which allocate suitable time for group discussion, and peer feedback. Second, students' perceptions towards peers' positive feedback are regarded as the most important factor which contributes to their actual use of peers' positive feedback. Thus, students need to raise their awareness of the importance of the role of peers' positive feedback in group work. They should have positive attitudes towards giving and receiving peers' positive feedback. Realizing the advantages of peers' positive feedback also has a part in giving peers' compliments. In addition, students should learn how to give positive feedback to peers from their teachers and their teammates.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was set out to investigate EFL university students' perception and practice of positive peer feedback. The findings of the study confirm the significance of peer feedback, more specifically, positive peer feedback as it contributes to motivate other group members to talk more in group work and gain more confidence in speaking. Due to the scope of this paper, difficulties of giving positive feedback by peers were not reported. Future studies can focus on such issues as whether the feedback made by peers is retained and used in the following group work activities.

## References

- Allen, D., & Mills, A. (2013). Peer feedback in the academic English classroom: A pilot study. *Komaba Journal of English Education, 4*(27), 27-49.
- Deci, E.L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R.M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*, 627-668.
- Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004). Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 1*, 3-31.
- Gielen, S., Tops, L., Dochy, F., Onghena, P., & Smeets, S. (2009). Learning and instruction: Improving the effectiveness of peer feedback for learning. *Science Direct, 20*(4), 304-315. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2009.08.007>.

- Jin, M., & Lim, Y.K. (2019). Effects of peer feedback types and feedback acceptance levels on academic achievement in middle school project-based learning. *Educational Technology International*, 20(1), 57-81.
- Nguyen, T.Q.P. (2016). *The effects of peer feedback on Facebook on EFL students' writing performance: A case study at Can Tho University*. Can Tho University. Retrieved from <http://ilibserv.lrc.ctu.edu.vn/pages/opac/wpid-detailbib-id-201390.html>.
- Reigel, D. (2005). *Positive feedback loops in second language learning*. Portland State University, Oregon.
- Topping, K.J. (2003). Self- and peer assessment in school and university: Reliability, validity and utility, in M. Segers, F. Dochy & E. Cascallar (Eds), *Optimizing new modes of assessment: In search of qualities and standards* (pp. 55–87). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Trinh, Q.L., & Cao, H.Y. (2013). Vietnamese learners' ability to write English argumentative paragraphs: The role of peer feedback giving. *Journal on English Language Teaching*, 3(4), 12-20.
- Tsui, A.B.M., & Ng, M. (2000). Do secondary L2 writers benefit from peer comments? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9, 147-170.
- Tunstall, P., & Gipps, C. (1996). Teacher feedback to young children in formative assessment: A typology. *British Educational Research Journal*, 22(4), 389-404.
- Wolfson, N. (1984). Pretty is as pretty does. *Applied Linguistics*, 5, 236-244.

## NGHIÊN CỨU PHẢN HỒI TÍCH CỰC CỦA BẠN CÙNG LỚP KHI LÀM VIỆC THEO NHÓM CỦA SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM HỌC TIẾNG ANH BẬC ĐẠI HỌC

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu nhận thức và thực hành đưa phản hồi tích cực cho bạn cùng nhóm. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu bao gồm 100 sinh viên năm thứ ba chuyên tiếng Anh tại một trường đại học ở miền Trung Việt Nam. Kết quả cho thấy hầu hết sinh viên có nhận thức cao về ý nghĩa của phản hồi tích cực từ bạn học khi làm việc theo nhóm. Để đưa phản hồi tích cực, sinh viên đã dùng nhiều cách khác nhau bao gồm những cụm từ đơn giản như *good, nice, excellent, well-done*, một số cấu trúc như Adj + Noun, Pron + is + (really) + (a) + Adj + NP, câu cảm than, và câu với động từ *should*. Từ kết quả tìm được, nghiên cứu đã đưa ra kiến nghị cho sinh viên về cách đưa phản hồi tích cực cho bạn học khi làm việc theo nhóm.

**Từ khoá:** Bạn học, phản hồi tích cực, làm việc theo nhóm