

## Barriers to Giving Effective Summative Feedback on EFL Writing of the HSC Level Students: Teacher Perspectives

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### Abstract

*This study examined the barriers perceived by college teachers in providing effective summative feedback on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing to Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level students in Bangladesh. A quantitative survey was administered to 20 teachers (10 government college teachers, 10 non-government college teachers) who rated their agreement with 13 potential barriers across institutional, student-related, curricular, and teacher-related domains. Descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-tests were used to compare perceptions between the two groups. Results indicated that both government and non-government teachers commonly endorsed barriers related to large class sizes, inadequate institutional resources, and students' primary interest in grades over developmental feedback. However, significant differences emerged: non-government college teachers reported significantly greater barriers related to inadequate training on providing summative feedback ( $p = .015$ ) and an institutional culture that prioritizes syllabus coverage over meaningful feedback ( $p = .003$ ). These findings suggest that while systemic challenges are widespread, non-government teachers face distinct professional development and cultural pressures that impede effective feedback practices. The study underscores the need for equitable training opportunities, investment in feedback resources, and a cultural shift within institutions toward valuing process-oriented feedback over examination-driven syllabus completion.*

**Keywords:** Summative feedback, EFL writing, HSC, teacher perspectives, Bangladesh, institutional barriers

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, writing is often considered the most challenging skill to master and, consequently, the most demanding to teach (Hyland, 2019). For students at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level, which is a critical juncture that determines university admission and future career paths in countries like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, proficiency in EFL writing is paramount (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Summative feedback, which provides evaluative judgments on a final product (e.g., a term paper, final exam essay), plays a crucial role in this process. It is intended not only to justify a grade but also to offer a final, comprehensive commentary that can guide future learning (Brookhart, 2017; Shute, 2008). However, despite its importance, there is a growing concern that the summative feedback provided on EFL writing at the HSC level is often ineffective. Teachers spend countless hours marking scripts, yet students frequently fail to understand, engage with, or learn from the feedback provided (Carless, 2006; Lee, 2008). This gap between the intent of feedback and its actual impact points to a complex web of barriers. While much research has focused on student perspectives or the technical aspects of feedback (e.g., coded vs. narrative feedback), the teacher's perspective, the lived experience of those who design and deliver this feedback, remains underexplored (Lee, 2009; Uddin & Hamid, 2020). Understanding the barriers teachers face is a critical first step towards creating more effective feedback practices (Hyland & Hyland, 2019).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Feedback is viewed as a form of mediation within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Effective feedback should bridge the gap between a student's current performance and their potential. Barriers that prevent teachers from providing timely, specific, and comprehensible feedback hinder this crucial mediational process. Borg (2003) posits that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and thinking profoundly shape their classroom practices. The study will explore how teachers' personal theories about writing, feedback, and their professional identity influence how they perceive and overcome (or succumb to) the barriers they face. Feedback is provided after completing a learning task, primarily to evaluate learning outcomes and assign a grade. In this study, it specifically refers to written comments on final drafts of HSC-level essays, reports, and other writing tasks. Existing research highlights that large class sizes and heavy workloads are consistently cited as primary obstacles, leading to feedback that is superficial and grade-focused rather than developmental (Lee, 2008; Hyland, 2003). Time constraints force teachers to resort to perfunctory marking. Besides, many EFL teachers lack pre-service or in-service training specifically on how to provide effective feedback on writing (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). This can lead to inconsistent, unclear, or overly negative feedback. In many EFL contexts, a deeply entrenched exam-oriented culture dictates that the primary purpose of feedback is to justify a grade for a high-stakes exam. This shifts the focus from learning to evaluation (Carless, 2006). Moreover, teachers may feel that students do not value or read feedback, creating a sense of futility that demotivates teachers from investing effort in it (Duncan, 2007). Literature shows that summative feedback plays a crucial role in teaching and learning EFL writing at any level of education. Previous literature also demonstrates that there are numerous challenges that the teachers face while giving summative feedback on students' writing. However, there exists an acute lack of systematic research on this specific field of EFL assessment. This research work aims to fill a gap by investigating the challenges specifically from the teacher's perspective within the unique, high-pressure context of HSC-level education in Bangladesh.

### III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to identify the key barriers that HSC-level EFL teachers perceive as hindering the delivery of effective summative feedback on student writing and to explore the contextual, institutional, and pedagogical factors that contribute to these barriers.

### IV. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach utilizing a cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for measuring the prevalence and perceived severity of various barriers across a large sample of teachers, and identifying statistically significant relationships between teacher characteristics (e.g., institution type) and their perceptions of barriers. The target population comprises all EFL teachers currently teaching English at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level in Bangladesh. This includes teachers from Government colleges and Non-government (private) colleges. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across key institutional strata. The strata will be:

Stratum	Description
Stratum 1	Teachers in public (government) colleges
Stratum 2	Teachers in MPO listed (non-government) colleges

Within each stratum, institutions were randomly selected from a sampling frame obtained from the Rangpur education board. Teachers within selected institutions were then purposively selected to participate. 10 English language teachers from five government colleges and 10 English teachers from five non-government colleges were selected purposively based on the experience of the teachers. The researchers selected experienced as well as novice teachers for the questionnaire survey. A structured, self-administered questionnaire will be developed. Data was entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 26 for analysis. The analysis was conducted following the stages of descriptive and inferential statistics. The researchers calculated the mean score and Std. Deviation for each barrier item and sub-scale, allowing identification of the most strongly perceived barriers. An independent samples t-test was also administered to compare mean barrier scores between two groups (e.g., government vs. non-government teachers).

### V. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The researchers conducted a questionnaire survey to elicit data related to the barriers to giving effective summative feedback on EFL writing of the HSC level students. The data were treated and analyzed using a proper statistical method. The results of the analysis have been discussed below:

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
My institution requires me to teach too many classes, leaving insufficient time for providing detailed feedback.	Government College Teachers	10	2.30	1.059	.335
	Non-government college teachers	10	3.10	1.101	.348
The number of students in my classes is too large to allow me to provide individualized feedback.	Government College Teachers	10	4.00	.943	.298
	Non-government college teachers	10	4.10	.994	.314
There are no clear institutional	Government College	10	4.00	.943	.298

guidelines on how to provide effective feedback on writing.	Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	4.10	.994	.314
My institution does not provide adequate resources (e.g., rubrics, exemplars, marking schemes) to support effective feedback.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	4.10	.876	.277
I have not received adequate training on how to provide effective summative feedback on EFL writing.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	2.30	1.160	.367
I lack knowledge of how to provide feedback that addresses both content and language issues effectively.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	2.00	.943	.298
Most of my students do not read or engage with the feedback I provide.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	2.80	.919	.291
Students' low proficiency in English makes it difficult for them to understand my written feedback.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	3.10	.738	.233
Students are primarily interested in the grade rather than the developmental comments I provide.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	3.60	.966	.306
The intense focus on HSC examination results discourages me from providing developmental feedback.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	3.10	.876	.277
The curriculum is too exam-focused, leaving little room for process-oriented writing and feedback.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	3.00	.816	.258
Feedback that does not directly contribute to exam performance is considered a waste of time by students.	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	4.20	.789	.249
The institutional culture prioritizes covering the	Government College Teachers Non-government college teachers	10	4.00	.667	.211
	Government College Teachers	10	3.80	1.135	.359
	Non-government college teachers	10	4.00	1.054	.333
	Government College Teachers	10	2.20	1.033	.327
	Non-government college teachers	10	2.90	.876	.277
	Government College Teachers	10	3.20	.632	.200
	Non-government college teachers	10	3.30	.823	.260
	Government College Teachers	10	2.70	.949	.300

syllabus over providing meaningful feedback.	Non-government college teachers	10	4.10	.876	.277
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To understand the barriers teachers, face in providing effective summative feedback on EFL writing, descriptive statistics were calculated for government and non-government college teachers. Means and standard deviations for each barrier, categorized by institution type, are presented in Table 1. The data were collected using a Likert scale, where higher scores indicate greater agreement with the statement as a barrier. For government college teachers, the strongest perceived barriers were related to student grade-orientation ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), institutional resource inadequacy ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), and large class sizes ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). The weakest barriers for this group were a lack of knowledge to address content and language issues ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) and a curriculum that is too exam-focused ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). For non-government college teachers, the strongest perceived barriers were institutional culture prioritizing syllabus coverage ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), lack of clear guidelines ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ), large class sizes ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ), and a focus on HSC exam results ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). Notably, non-government teachers reported a substantially higher mean for inadequate training ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) compared to their government college counterparts ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), as well as for institutional culture prioritizing syllabus coverage ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.88$  vs.  $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). These descriptive statistics suggest distinct patterns of barriers between the two groups of teachers, warranting further inferential analysis (e.g., independent-samples t-tests) to determine if these observed differences are statistically significant.

### Inferential Statistics

**Table 2: Results from the t-test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
		F	Sig.					
q1	Equal variances assumed	.093	.764	-1.656	18	.115	-.800	.483
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.656	17.974	.115	-.800	.483
q2	Equal variances assumed	.160	.694	-.231	18	.820	-.100	.433
	Equal variances not assumed			-.231	17.949	.820	-.100	.433
q3	Equal variances assumed	.160	.694	-.231	18	.820	-.100	.433
	Equal variances not assumed			-.231	17.949	.820	-.100	.433
q4	Equal variances assumed	.788	.386	.000	18	1.000	.000	.362
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	17.497	1.000	.000	.362
q5	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	-2.700	18	.015	-1.400	.519
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.700	18.000	.015	-1.400	.519
q6	Equal variances assumed	.643	.433	-1.922	18	.071	-.800	.416

	Equal variances not assumed			-1.922	17.988	.071	-.800	.416
	Equal variances assumed	1.527	.232	-1.301	18	.210	-.500	.384
q7	Equal variances not assumed			-1.301	16.834	.211	-.500	.384
	Equal variances assumed	.315	.582	.264	18	.795	.100	.379
q8	Equal variances not assumed			.264	17.913	.795	.100	.379
	Equal variances assumed	1.328	.264	.612	18	.548	.200	.327
q9	Equal variances not assumed			.612	17.514	.548	.200	.327
	Equal variances assumed	.077	.784	-.408	18	.688	-.200	.490
q10	Equal variances not assumed			-.408	17.902	.688	-.200	.490
	Equal variances assumed	.304	.588	-1.635	18	.119	-.700	.428
q11	Equal variances not assumed			-1.635	17.531	.120	-.700	.428
	Equal variances assumed	1.745	.203	-.305	18	.764	-.100	.328
q12	Equal variances not assumed			-.305	16.879	.764	-.100	.328
	Equal variances assumed	.691	.417	-3.429	18	.003	-1.400	.408
q13	Equal variances not assumed			-3.429	17.886	.003	-1.400	.408

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean ratings of perceived barriers between government college teachers ( $n = 10$ ) and non-government college teachers ( $n = 10$ ). Levene's test for equality of variances was assessed for each barrier, and equal variances were assumed for all comparisons as none reached statistical significance (all  $p > .05$ ). The results are summarized in Table 2. Statistically significant differences between government and non-government college teachers were observed for two barriers. First, non-government college teachers ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) reported significantly higher agreement than government college teachers ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) with the statement "I have not received adequate training on how to provide effective summative feedback on EFL writing,"  $t(18) = -2.70$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $d = 1.21$ . The mean difference was  $-1.40$  (95% CI [-2.49, -0.31]). Second, non-government college teachers ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) reported significantly higher agreement than government college teachers ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) with the statement "The institutional culture prioritizes covering the syllabus over providing meaningful feedback,"  $t(18) = -3.43$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = 1.53$ . The mean difference was  $-1.40$  (95% CI [-2.26, -0.54]). No other barriers showed statistically significant differences between the two groups ( $p > .05$  for all remaining comparisons). However, several comparisons approached marginal significance, warranting consideration given the small sample size. However, descriptive statistics indicated that both groups commonly endorsed barriers related to large class sizes, student grade orientation, and inadequate institutional resources.

## VI. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the barriers perceived by government and non-government college teachers in providing effective summative feedback on EFL writing to HSC-level students. The findings revealed both common challenges shared across institution types and

distinct differences that highlight the unique contextual pressures faced by each group. This discussion interprets the key findings, situates them within the existing literature, and explores their implications for policy and practice. A striking finding was the high level of agreement among both government and non-government college teachers regarding several institutional and student-related barriers. Both groups reported that large class sizes ( $M = 4.00$  and  $4.10$ , respectively) and inadequate institutional resources, such as rubrics and exemplars ( $M = 4.10$  for both), severely impeded their ability to provide individualized, effective feedback. These findings align with the broader body of literature on feedback practices in large EFL classrooms (Hyland & Hyland, 2019; Lee, 2008), where logistical constraints often force teachers to prioritize efficiency over developmental quality. The consistency of these responses suggests that, regardless of institutional funding or management structures, the fundamental challenge of managing high student-to-teacher ratios with limited instructional support is a systemic issue within the HSC education context.

Similarly, both groups of teachers strongly endorsed the barrier related to students' primary interest in grades over developmental comments (government:  $M = 4.20$ ; non-government:  $M = 4.00$ ). This finding is consistent with Carless's (2006) work on assessment literacy, which posits that in high-stakes examination cultures, students develop a "grade-oriented" mindset that devalues the learning potential of feedback. The data suggest that this phenomenon is pervasive across institution types, indicating a deep-seated cultural orientation toward summative assessment that undermines the intended benefits of formative and developmental feedback. While many barriers were commonly perceived, the independent-samples t-tests revealed two statistically significant differences, both indicating that non-government college teachers experienced greater barriers than their government college counterparts. First, non-government teachers reported significantly higher agreement with the statement regarding inadequate training on providing summative feedback ( $M = 3.70$ ) compared to government teachers ( $M = 2.30$ ). This finding is noteworthy and may reflect differences in professional development opportunities, hiring practices, or job security. Government college teachers in many contexts benefit from more structured, centralized training programs, regular pedagogical workshops, and long-term job stability that encourages professional growth (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). In contrast, non-government college teachers—particularly those in the private sector—often face precarious employment conditions, higher teaching loads, and fewer opportunities for systematic professional development. The significant difference ( $p = .015$ ) suggests that non-government institutions may need to prioritize targeted training initiatives to equip their teachers with the necessary skills for effective feedback provision.

Second, non-government teachers reported significantly higher agreement with the barrier that institutional culture prioritizes covering the syllabus over providing meaningful feedback ( $M = 4.10$ ) compared to government teachers ( $M = 2.70$ ). This finding was the most pronounced difference in the study ( $t = -3.43$ ,  $p = .003$ ). This result may reflect the competitive pressures faced by non-government colleges, where institutional reputation, student enrollment, and parental satisfaction are often tied to examination results. In such environments, administrative pressure to "complete the syllabus" rapidly may overshadow pedagogical best practices such as process-oriented writing and iterative feedback (Uddin & Hamid, 2020). Government colleges, while still examination-focused, may operate under different accountability structures that allow for slightly greater pedagogical flexibility. This finding underscores the need to examine how institutional culture—shaped by funding models and accountability mechanisms—directly impacts teaching practices. Several comparisons approached but did not reach statistical significance, likely due to the small sample size ( $n = 10$  per group) which limited statistical power. The barrier related to lack of knowledge in addressing both content and language issues approached significance ( $p = .071$ ), with non-government teachers again reporting higher mean scores. This pattern aligns with the training deficit

discussed above and suggests that non-government teachers may feel less confident in their pedagogical content knowledge for providing integrated feedback. The barrier concerning an exam-focused curriculum leaving no room for process-oriented writing also approached significance ( $p = .119$ ). While not statistically significant, the descriptive pattern (non-government:  $M = 2.90$ ; government:  $M = 2.20$ ) reinforces the broader theme that non-government teachers perceive greater curricular rigidity. Notably, no significant differences were found for barriers related to class size, student proficiency, or students' failure to engage with feedback. This suggests that these challenges are structural and student-related rather than institution-specific, and thus may require system-wide rather than institution-specific interventions.

## VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size ( $N = 20$ ) limits generalizability and statistical power, meaning that some meaningful differences may not have reached statistical significance. Future research should replicate this study with larger, more diverse samples across multiple districts and institution types. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported quantitative data; future research incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or classroom observations could provide deeper insight into how these barriers manifest in daily teaching practices. Finally, the study did not explore the perspectives of students or administrators, whose views on feedback barriers would provide a more holistic understanding of the issue.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that both government and non-government college teachers face substantial barriers to providing effective summative feedback on EFL writing, particularly related to large class sizes, resource limitations, and student grade-orientation. However, non-government college teachers reported significantly greater barriers related to inadequate training and institutional cultures that prioritize syllabus coverage over meaningful feedback. These findings suggest that while systemic challenges are common, non-government teachers operate under distinct pressures that warrant targeted support. Addressing these barriers will require a multifaceted approach involving institutional policy changes, equitable professional development, and a cultural shift toward valuing feedback as an integral component of the learning process.

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