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Office Hours as Dialogic Pedagogy: A Reflective Study of Mentoring International Students in First-Year Composition

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ABSTRACT
This reflective practitioner study examines the role of office hours as a site of pedagogical mentoring for international students in First-Year Composition at U.S. universities. Drawing on five years of experience as a domestic PhD student and Graduate Teaching Assistant at Wayne State University, the study responds to an initial instructional challenge in which written and peer feedback alone failed to support international students' rhetorical development, despite their strong grammatical proficiency. Grounded in scholarship on written feedback, grading, and culturally responsive pedagogy, the paper argues that feedback is not inherently transparent and must be mediated through dialogue to become meaningful. Using reflective journals, student performance trends, office-hour interactions, and anonymized student feedback as data, the study demonstrates how intentional mentoring during office hours functioned as a dialogic space for translating feedback, clarifying genre expectations, and building trust. Findings show substantial improvement in students' writing performance, confidence, and engagement. The study highlights office hours as an equity-oriented pedagogical practice and offers implications for composition pedagogy and GTA training.

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INTRODUCTION

First-Year Composition (FYC) courses in U.S. higher education are increasingly characterized by linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity, particularly through the growing enrollment of international students. Research indicates that many international students enter composition classrooms with strong grammatical knowledge of English but limited familiarity with the rhetorical conventions, genre expectations, and feedback practices that structure academic writing in U.S. academic contexts (Leki, 2007; Matsuda, 2006). Composition scholarship has long emphasized process-oriented pedagogy, revision, and written feedback as central mechanisms for supporting writing development (Ferris, 2014; Sommers, 1982). Written instructor feedback and peer review are widely regarded as essential tools for fostering rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and revision practices. However, the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies depends not only on their design but also on students' ability to interpret and apply them within unfamiliar academic cultures.

Studies in second-language writing and translingual composition further suggest that multilingual writers bring diverse rhetorical resources shaped by prior educational experiences (Canagarajah, 2013; Horner et al., 2011). These experiences influence how students perceive instructor authority, revision practices, and evaluative criteria. As a result, feedback is not universally transparent but culturally situated, requiring learners to develop what has been described as feedback literacy—the capacity to understand, evaluate, and act on instructional commentary (Ferris, 2014). Without adequate mediation, written feedback may fail to function as intended, particularly for students educated in exam-oriented or product-focused systems. Consequently, supporting international students' writing development requires pedagogical approaches that attend to both linguistic competence and rhetorical socialization.

Despite extensive research on written feedback and peer review, relatively little attention has been given to how international students interpret and negotiate feedback in everyday instructional contexts. Existing scholarship has primarily focused on the content and form of written comments (Ferris, 2014; Sommers, 1982) or on classroom-based peer interaction (Keating, 2019), while understudying the informal, relational spaces in which feedback is clarified and contextualized. In particular, office hours have traditionally been framed as optional or remedial support mechanisms rather than as central sites of learning. Although emerging research suggests that office hours contribute to student engagement, belonging, and academic confidence (Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014), their pedagogical role in writing instruction remains underexamined. Moreover, few studies have explored office hours as sustained mentoring spaces for international students navigating unfamiliar rhetorical and institutional expectations. While comparative research highlights the cultural situatedness of feedback practices (Ferris, 2014; Thapa, 2025), limited empirical work has examined how dialogue outside the classroom mediates students' engagement with feedback over time. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how informal instructor–student interactions function as sites for translating abstract written comments into actionable revision strategies. This gap is particularly significant in contexts where Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) serve as primary instructors but receive limited training in mentoring linguistically diverse students (Park, 2004).

In response to these gaps, this paper examines how intentional mentoring during office hours supports international students' writing development in First-Year Composition. Drawing on five years of reflective teaching practice as a domestic Graduate Teaching Assistant, this qualitative practitioner inquiry investigates how office-hour interactions

function as dialogic spaces for interpreting feedback, clarifying genre expectations, and fostering rhetorical confidence. Using reflective journals, longitudinal observations of student writing, office-hour interaction records, and anonymized student feedback, the study traces the pedagogical shift from reliance on written comments to sustained dialogic mentoring. Specifically, this research addresses the following research question: How does intentional office-hour mentoring mediate international students' engagement with written feedback and support their development as academic writers? By foregrounding the lived experience of an instructor working with linguistically diverse students, this research contributes to scholarship on feedback literacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and GTA development. The findings position office hours not as peripheral support structures but as central pedagogical sites that promote equity, access, and meaningful learning in composition classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing presence of international students in U.S. higher education has significantly reshaped First-Year Composition (FYC) classrooms, challenging long-standing assumptions about language proficiency, rhetorical knowledge, and writing pedagogy. Research consistently shows that international students often enter composition courses with strong grammatical accuracy but limited familiarity with the rhetorical conventions, genre expectations, and epistemological assumptions that govern academic writing in U.S. contexts (Leki, 2007; Matsuda, 2006). This mismatch frequently leads instructors to misinterpret students' writing difficulties as linguistic deficits rather than as issues of rhetorical socialization and genre knowledge.

Matsuda (2006) argues that composition pedagogy in the United States has historically been designed with an implicit "native speaker" student in mind, marginalizing multilingual writers whose prior educational experiences differ from those of domestic students. Similarly, Leki (2007) emphasizes that international students often struggle not because they lack language proficiency, but because they are unfamiliar with disciplinary expectations regarding argumentation, stance, and audience. These findings complicate deficit-based narratives and call for pedagogical approaches that recognize international students' existing literacies while explicitly teaching U.S. academic conventions.

From a translingual perspective, scholars further contend that multilingual writers bring valuable rhetorical resources that are often overlooked in monolingual composition frameworks (Canagarajah, 2013; Horner et al., 2011). However, while translingual theory advocates for valuing linguistic diversity, it also acknowledges the material realities of institutional expectations, grading practices, and genre norms. For international students, navigating this tension requires not only exposure to writing tasks but also guided interpretation of expectations—particularly through feedback and instructor interaction.

Written feedback has long been positioned as a cornerstone of composition pedagogy, with scholars emphasizing its role in guiding revision, fostering metacognition, and supporting writing development (Ferris, 2014; Sommers, 1982). Sommers's (1982) foundational critique of teacher comments highlighted how vague, abstract, or contradictory feedback often fails to guide meaningful revision. Subsequent research has expanded this critique, showing that feedback effectiveness depends not only on what instructors write but on how students interpret and use those comments. Ferris (2014) underscores that feedback is not inherently transparent; rather, students must develop what has been termed *feedback literacy*—the ability to understand, evaluate, and act on feedback. For international students, this challenge is intensified by cultural differences in educational traditions, teacher authority,

and expectations surrounding revision. Peer feedback, often celebrated in composition pedagogy as collaborative and student-centered, can further complicate this process when students lack shared understandings of genre and evaluation criteria (Keating, 2019).

Comparative research highlights the cultural situatedness of feedback practices. In a comparative study of U.S. and Nepali ESL writing contexts, Thapa (2025) demonstrates that students from exam-oriented educational systems tend to value explicit instruction, structural guidance, and model texts, while perceiving idea-focused or indirect feedback as ambiguous. Such students may interpret feedback not as an invitation to revise but as an evaluative judgment that is difficult to operationalize. These findings align with broader ESL research suggesting that written feedback, when detached from dialogue, may obscure rather than clarify instructor expectations (Ferris, 2014).These studies suggest that written feedback alone is insufficient for supporting international students' writing development. Without explicit explanation and contextualization, feedback risks functioning as unmediated authority rather than as pedagogical guidance.

Genre theory provides an important lens for understanding why international students may struggle with writing tasks despite linguistic competence. Genre scholars argue that genres are not merely formal structures but socially situated responses to recurring rhetorical situations (Devitt, 2004; Swales, 1990). Mastery of genre thus requires familiarity with audience expectations, disciplinary values, and institutional norms—knowledge that is often tacit for domestic students but opaque to international writers. Johns (2008) emphasizes that novice writers benefit from explicit genre instruction, including modeling, analysis of sample texts, and guided practice. For students educated in systems that emphasize imitation and model-based learning, such approaches can serve as bridges between prior literacy practices and new academic contexts. Thapa and Putra's (2025) study on acronym-based instructional strategies in ESL storytelling further supports the value of structured scaffolding, demonstrating that explicit, step-by-step guidance can enhance students' confidence and conceptual clarity. Within FYC, however, genre instruction is sometimes underemphasized in favor of abstract notions of "critical thinking" or "voice," which may remain inaccessible without concrete exemplars. For international students, genre awareness must be taught rather than assumed, and feedback must be situated within explicit discussions of purpose, audience, and evaluation criteria.

While feedback scholarship has focused primarily on written comments and peer review, less attention has been given to office hours as a pedagogical space. Traditionally framed as optional or remedial, office hours have often been underutilized in discussions of writing pedagogy. However, emerging research suggests that office hours function as relational spaces where students can negotiate expectations, seek clarification, and build academic confidence (Cox et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2014). Cox et al. (2010) argue that office hours are not merely sites for answering questions but are central to students' sense of belonging and access to institutional knowledge. For international students, who may be unfamiliar with the cultural norms surrounding office-hour use, explicit invitation and encouragement from instructors are critical. Griffin et al. (2014) further emphasize that mentoring interactions during office hours can demystify academic expectations and foster trust, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds.

From a pedagogical standpoint, office hours offer opportunities for dialogic engagement that written feedback cannot provide. Through conversation, instructors can translate abstract comments into concrete strategies, address misunderstandings, and tailor explanations to students' needs. Such dialogue aligns with sociocultural theories of learning,

which emphasize mediation, scaffolding, and interaction as central to development (Vygotsky, 1978). The importance of dialogue in learning has been widely theorized in critical pedagogy. Freire (1970) argues that education becomes transformative when learners are treated as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of authority. This perspective is particularly relevant for feedback practices that risk reproducing hierarchical power relations between instructor and student. Conceptually, Thapa's (2025) cultural analysis of James Baldwin's *Sonny's Blues* offers a useful metaphor for understanding mentoring as dialogic meaning-making. In Baldwin's narrative, understanding and reconciliation emerge not through authoritative instruction but through listening, shared experience, and dialogue. Applied pedagogically, this framework suggests that students' engagement with feedback deepens when instructors create spaces for conversation rather than relying solely on textual authority.

In the context of composition pedagogy, office hours can thus be understood as sites where students resist passive reception of feedback and instead actively negotiate meaning. Such spaces allow international students to question, reinterpret, and internalize expectations in ways that written comments alone rarely permit.

Graduate Teaching Assistants play a central role in delivering composition instruction at many U.S. universities, yet their pedagogical labor is often underexamined. Park (2004) notes that GTAs frequently learn to teach through experience rather than formal training, particularly when working with linguistically diverse students. As a result, GTAs may initially rely on standardized pedagogical practices that do not adequately address students' varied needs. Research on GTA development suggests that reflective practice is essential for pedagogical growth (Schön, 1983). By critically examining classroom outcomes and adapting instructional strategies, GTAs can move toward more responsive and equitable teaching practices. However, institutional support for such reflection—particularly around mentoring and office-hour pedagogy—remains limited.

The reviewed scholarship highlights several key insights: international students face challenges rooted in rhetorical socialization rather than linguistic deficiency; written feedback is culturally situated and requires mediation; genre awareness and modeling are critical for writing development; and office hours hold untapped pedagogical potential. Yet, despite these insights, few studies examine office hours as a sustained mentoring practice within First-Year Composition, particularly from the perspective of a domestic Graduate Teaching Assistant working with international students. Thus, this study addresses that gap by examining how intentional, dialogic mentoring during office hours reshapes international students' engagement with feedback and supports their writing development over time. Guided by this purpose, the study asks how intentional mentoring mediates international students' interpretation and use of written feedback, in what ways dialogic instructor–student interaction fosters genre awareness, rhetorical confidence, and revision practices, and how sustained office-hour mentoring informs the pedagogical development of a GTA working with linguistically diverse learners. By integrating scholarship on feedback literacy, genre pedagogy, dialogue, and GTA development, the study contributes to ongoing conversations about equity and access in composition pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study has employed a qualitative reflective practitioner research design to examine how intentional mentoring during office hours supported international students' writing development in First-Year Composition (FYC). Reflective practitioner inquiry positions

teaching practice as a legitimate site of knowledge production and emphasizes systematic reflection on professional experience as a rigorous qualitative method (Schön, 1983). The research was longitudinal, drawing on five years of teaching experience as a domestic doctoral student and Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) at a large public research university in the Midwestern United States.

The instructional context included FYC taught between 2022 and 2026, with two sections of class each semester, with approximately 20-25 students in one section, where average 15-20% **were international students.** The international student population primarily originated from East and South Asian countries, including **China, India, South Korea, Nepal, Bangladesh etc., and average of** a 12-15% cohort of American students from first- or second-generation immigrant backgrounds who still consider English their second language (L2). They represented a range of academic majors such as engineering, business, and computer science. Most participants were first- or second-year undergraduate students enrolled in required composition courses.

Data analysis followed an iterative, inductive, and interpretive process consistent with qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflective journals and student artifacts were reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the dataset, after which open coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns related to feedback interpretation, mentoring practices, genre awareness, and writing development. These codes were then organized into broader thematic categories through constant comparison across cohorts and semesters. Longitudinal analysis enabled systematic comparison between early instructional practices and later mentoring-centered approaches. Analytic memoing was used throughout the process to document emerging interpretations and theoretical connections. To enhance trustworthiness, the research employed data triangulation, prolonged engagement in the research context, reflexive documentation, and thick contextual description. Although the findings are context-specific and not intended for statistical generalization, the methodological rigor and sustained reflective engagement support their analytical credibility and potential transferability to similar composition settings.

Ethical Consideration

All student-related materials were anonymized, and ethical standards for practitioner research were strictly observed throughout the study. Data were drawn from routine instructional practices, and no identifiable information was included to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy. The researcher remained attentive to the instructor–researcher role, representing student experiences with respect, integrity, and professional responsibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Early Teaching Experience: When Written Feedback Was Insufficient

The findings of this study indicate that the primary limitation of the initial instructional approach was not the quality of written feedback itself, but the assumption that feedback is inherently transparent and self-explanatory. In the early cohort, written comments and peer review functioned largely as **unmediated textual authority**, requiring students to infer both meaning and application without explicit pedagogical support. Although feedback aligned with dominant U.S. composition practices, it did not account for students' prior educational experiences, which emphasized explicit instruction, model-based learning, and examination-oriented assessment. As a result, feedback was frequently misinterpreted as evaluative judgment rather than as a formative learning resource.

The pedagogical shift toward intentional office-hour mentoring transformed feedback from a static artifact into a **dialogic learning process**. Office hours operated as sites of mediation where instructor comments were translated into rhetorical explanations, genre expectations were made explicit, and students were encouraged to negotiate meaning through questioning and reflection. This shift aligns with sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1970), which conceptualize learning as emerging through interaction rather than transmission. Importantly, this study demonstrates that office-hour mentoring did not merely supplement classroom instruction but **restructured the entire feedback ecology**. Written comments gained pedagogical value only after being contextualized through conversation. In this sense, office hours functioned as a form of ***feedback literacy training***, enabling students to develop the capacity to interpret, evaluate, and act on feedback independently over time (Ferris, 2014).

Comparative Interactional Features of Feedback Practices

Systematic analysis of reflective journals and student interactions revealed clear contrasts between the two instructional phases. Table 1 summarizes the dominant interactional features of feedback in the two models.

Table 1
Interactional Features of Feedback Practices

Dimension	Previous Model (Written Feedback Only)	Office-Hour Mentoring Model
Mode of feedback	Marginal written comments	Dialogue + written comments
Student role	Passive recipient	Active co-interpreter
Instructor role	Evaluator	Mentor/translator
Nature of authority	Unidirectional	Negotiated
Revision process	Surface-level edits	Conceptual restructuring
Feedback literacy	Implicit	Explicitly taught
Genre understanding	Assumed	Explicitly modeled

This comparison illustrates that the pedagogical difference was not merely procedural but **epistemological.** In the mentoring model, knowledge about writing was no longer transmitted but co-constructed. Feedback became a shared object of inquiry rather than a directive instrument of assessment.

A major contribution of this study lies in identifying office hours as a critical space for **genre socialization.** International students consistently reported difficulty interpreting abstract notions such as "argument," "analysis," and "critical thinking," despite high linguistic proficiency. During office-hour interactions, these concepts were unpacked through examples, modeling, and discussion of sample texts. This aligns with genre theory, which emphasizes that genre competence requires access to tacit disciplinary knowledge (Devitt, 2004; Johns, 2008). Office-hour mentoring thus functioned as a form of **hidden curriculum disclosure**, making institutional norms visible and negotiable. Rather than positioning students as deficient, this approach reframed their challenges as issues of access to implicit knowledge. This is a significant theoretical contribution, as it shifts the problem of international student writing from language deficit to **pedagogical transparency**.

Pedagogical Shift: Office Hours as Intentional Mentoring

The limitations observed during my early teaching experience prompted a deliberate pedagogical shift in subsequent semesters, centered on reimagining office hours as an intentional mentoring space rather than as an optional or remedial support mechanism. Rather than assuming that students would independently seek clarification, I began actively inviting international students to attend office hours and explicitly framing these meetings as an integral component of the writing process. This intervention was grounded in the recognition that access to feedback is not merely a matter of availability but of invitation and cultural legibility, particularly for students unfamiliar with U.S. academic norms surrounding instructor–student interaction (Cox et al., 2010).

During office-hour meetings, a primary focus was placed on explaining the purpose of written feedback within U.S. composition pedagogy. Students were introduced to feedback not as an evaluative judgment but as a formative tool designed to support revision, rhetorical awareness, and intellectual growth. This reframing was necessary because many international students, shaped by exam-oriented educational systems, interpreted instructor comments primarily as indicators of success or failure rather than as invitations to revise and rethink ideas (Ferris, 2014; Thapa, 2025). Through conversation, I clarified how marginal comments, questions, and suggestions were meant to guide revision choices rather than dictate singular "correct" answers.

Office hours also functioned as a space to demystify U.S. composition pedagogy more broadly. Concepts such as process writing, peer review, and revision as recursive practice were explicitly discussed, often for the first time. These discussions helped students understand why assignments required multiple drafts, how peer feedback complemented instructor comments, and how rhetorical effectiveness was evaluated alongside linguistic accuracy. Making these pedagogical assumptions visible allowed students to situate individual assignments within a larger framework of disciplinary expectations, reducing anxiety and increasing agency. Further, genre expectations and assessment criteria were similarly addressed through mentoring conversations. Rather than assuming students could infer genre conventions from assignment prompts alone, I used office hours to analyze sample papers, discuss organizational patterns, and unpack grading rubrics. This approach aligns with genre scholarship that emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction and modeling for novice writers navigating unfamiliar academic contexts (Devitt, 2004; Johns, 2008). By situating feedback within concrete genre expectations, students were better able to understand how their drafts aligned with or diverged from disciplinary norms.

Central to this pedagogical shift was the reconceptualization of mentoring as a process of translation. Written feedback, which had previously functioned as static text, was translated into dialogic explanation through conversation. Abstract comments such as "develop your analysis" or "clarify your claim" were unpacked into concrete revision strategies, including identifying analytical stakes, restructuring paragraphs, and integrating evidence more effectively. This dialogic mediation allowed students to ask clarifying questions, test interpretations, and negotiate meaning, transforming feedback from opaque authority into usable guidance. Similarly, equally important was the shift in the relational dynamics of feedback. Office-hour mentoring repositioned authority as partnership, fostering a collaborative rather than hierarchical learning environment. As students gained confidence in discussing their writing, they became more willing to challenge, question, and extend feedback rather than passively accept it. This shift echoes dialogic pedagogical frameworks that emphasize mutual engagement and shared meaning-making as central to learning

(Freire, 1970). Over time, office hours became not merely a site for troubleshooting drafts but a space for mentoring academic identity, rhetorical confidence, and writerly agency.

Comparative Writing Outcomes

Analysis of student writing across cohorts revealed consistent and measurable qualitative differences between the two instructional models. These outcomes were traced through longitudinal review of student drafts, grades, and reflective teaching notes. Table 2 summarizes the dominant patterns observed.

Table 2
Writing Outcomes Across Instructional Models

Outcome Category	Written Feedback Only	Office-Hour Mentoring
Thesis clarity	Often vague or descriptive	Clear, arguable, focused
Organization	Formulaic or fragmented	Coherent, rhetorically motivated
Use of evidence	Quoted without analysis	Integrated and interpreted
Revision depth	Surface-level	Conceptual and structural
Genre awareness	Low	High
Student confidence	Hesitant, dependent	Assertive, self-directed
Final performance	Predominantly B range	Predominantly A range

These results indicate that mentoring did not simply improve grades but transformed the quality of rhetorical engagement. Students moved from compliance-based writing to purpose-driven composition, demonstrating increased control over argumentation, audience awareness, and analytical depth.

The pedagogical shift toward intentional office-hour mentoring produced both immediate and sustained improvements in international students' writing development across subsequent semesters. Unlike the initial cohort, in which written feedback alone resulted in limited conceptual growth, later cohorts demonstrated marked improvement by the midpoint of each semester. By midterm, over 90 percent of international students showed clearer thesis articulation, improved paragraph organization, and greater alignment between claims and evidence. These changes were particularly evident in revised drafts, where students increasingly demonstrated the ability to respond to higher-order concerns rather than focusing exclusively on sentence-level correction.

Final writing outcomes further illustrate the impact of this intervention. In contrast to the earlier cohort's average final grade of B, the majority of international students in later semesters earned A-level grades on final projects. More importantly, these grades reflected substantive rhetorical development rather than superficial improvement. Student writing exhibited stronger argumentative coherence, clearer audience awareness, and more confident engagement with academic sources. These outcomes suggest that mentoring during office hours functioned as a critical mediating practice that enabled students to internalize feedback and apply it effectively across assignments. Beyond grades, qualitative indicators of student growth were equally significant. Students increasingly approached writing tasks with confidence and independence, often arriving at office hours with specific questions about structure, analysis, or genre rather than seeking validation of correctness. Email communication also shifted over time, moving from requests for clarification of

feedback to more reflective inquiries about revision strategies and rhetorical choices. This progression indicates growing feedback literacy, as students learned not only how to revise but how to interpret feedback as part of an ongoing learning process (Ferris, 2014).

The longitudinal nature of this study strengthens these findings. Across five years of teaching—excluding the initial cohort prior to the pedagogical shift—international students consistently demonstrated similar patterns of improvement. This consistency suggests that the observed outcomes were not incidental or cohort-specific but rather the result of sustained instructional change. Longitudinal reflection allowed for the identification of stable pedagogical patterns, revealing that intentional mentoring during office hours became increasingly effective as students recognized these interactions as integral to the course rather than as optional support. Student perceptions further corroborated these outcomes. Anonymized feedback from RateMyProfessor, while interpreted cautiously, consistently highlighted instructor accessibility, clarity of feedback, and supportive mentoring. Students frequently described office hours as spaces where expectations became understandable and manageable, reinforcing research that identifies mentoring relationships as central to student engagement and academic confidence (Griffin et al., 2014). Although such platforms are not formal research instruments, their recurring themes align with observed classroom outcomes and reflective teaching data.

Importantly, the impact of office-hour mentoring extended beyond individual writing assignments. Students demonstrated increased participation in peer-review sessions, offering more substantive feedback and engaging more critically with peers' work. This shift suggests that mentoring helped students internalize evaluative criteria, enabling them to participate more fully in collaborative learning activities. As peer feedback became more aligned with instructor expectations, the earlier issue of contradictory guidance diminished, creating a more coherent feedback ecology within the classroom. From an instructional perspective, this pedagogical shift also contributed to my development as a GTA. Reflective engagement with office-hour mentoring sharpened my awareness of how authority, language, and pedagogy intersect in composition classrooms. Rather than viewing feedback as a unidirectional transmission of expertise, I came to understand it as a dialogic process requiring translation, negotiation, and relational engagement. This insight aligns with reflective practice theory, which emphasizes learning through iterative cycles of action and reflection (Schön, 1983).

The outcomes demonstrate that office hours, when intentionally framed as mentoring spaces, can function as powerful sites of pedagogical intervention. By translating written feedback into dialogue, demystifying academic expectations, and fostering collaborative partnerships, office-hour mentoring supported international students' writing development in ways that written feedback alone could not. The sustained nature of these improvements underscores the importance of rethinking office hours not as peripheral support but as central to equitable composition pedagogy.

Implications for Composition Programs and GTA Training

The findings of this study carry important implications for composition programs and Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training, particularly in institutions serving linguistically diverse student populations. Most centrally, the results call for a reframing of office hours as pedagogical labor rather than as peripheral or remedial support. Traditional conceptions of office hours often position them as optional spaces for troubleshooting or clarification, implicitly marginalizing the relational and instructional work that occurs within them.

However, the sustained improvements observed in this study demonstrate that office hours can function as core pedagogical sites where feedback is interpreted, genre expectations are clarified, and students develop confidence as academic writers. Composition programs should therefore recognize office-hour mentoring as an integral component of writing instruction and account for this labor in curricular design, workload expectations, and teaching evaluations.

A second implication concerns the preparation and ongoing support of GTAs, who frequently serve as primary instructors in First-Year Composition. Research suggests that GTAs often enter the classroom with strong disciplinary knowledge but limited training in working with international and multilingual students (Park, 2004). As this study illustrates, reliance on standard composition practices—such as written feedback and peer review—may be insufficient without explicit mentoring strategies that address students' diverse educational backgrounds. GTA training programs should therefore incorporate targeted preparation on mentoring international students, including guidance on inviting students to office hours, explaining U.S. academic norms, and mediating feedback through dialogue. Such training can equip GTAs to respond more effectively to linguistic and cultural diversity while also supporting their professional development as reflective instructors.

Explicit instruction in feedback literacy represents a third critical implication for composition pedagogy. The findings indicate that international students benefit from learning not only *what* feedback says but *how* to interpret and use it. Composition programs should consider integrating feedback literacy instruction into course curricula, explicitly teaching students the purposes of written comments, the role of revision, and strategies for responding to both instructor and peer feedback. This instruction may include modeling how to read comments, opportunities to discuss feedback in class or during conferences, and transparent explanation of grading criteria. By making feedback practices visible and discussable, instructors can reduce confusion and empower students to engage more actively in the revision process (Ferris, 2014).Lastly, these implications point toward a more equity-oriented approach to composition instruction and GTA preparation. Reframing office hours as pedagogical labor, equipping GTAs with mentoring strategies, and foregrounding feedback literacy can help bridge gaps between institutional expectations and students' prior literacy experiences. Such changes require institutional commitment but offer meaningful pathways for supporting international students' success while strengthening the pedagogical effectiveness of composition programs.

CONCLUSION

This reflective practitioner study examined how intentional mentoring during office hours supported international students' writing development in First-Year Composition (FYC) courses at a U.S. public university. Drawing on five years of teaching experience as a domestic Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), the study demonstrated that written feedback alone was insufficient when it functioned without dialogic mediation. Although international students entered the classroom with strong grammatical proficiency, they often struggled with rhetorical expectations, genre awareness, and feedback interpretation. Reframing office hours as mentoring spaces allowed feedback to be translated into dialogue, abstract comments into concrete revision strategies, and authority into collaborative partnership, resulting in sustained improvement in students' writing performance, confidence, and engagement.

The study contributes to composition scholarship by foregrounding office hours as an underexamined but central pedagogical site for equity-oriented instruction. It highlights the importance of mentoring in developing feedback literacy and rhetorical awareness, particularly for international students navigating unfamiliar academic cultures. While the findings are context-specific, they offer transferable insights for composition programs and GTA training, emphasizing the need to recognize office-hour mentoring as pedagogical labor rather than peripheral support. Moreover, this study calls for a reconceptualization of office hours as integral to inclusive writing pedagogy and to the professional development of GTAs working in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative reflective practitioner inquiry, the findings are context-specific and grounded in the experiences of a single Graduate Teaching Assistant at one U.S. institution; therefore, they are not intended to be statistically generalizable. Second, the analysis relies primarily on instructor-generated data, including reflective journals and observations, which may introduce interpretive bias despite efforts toward reflexivity and data triangulation. Additionally, student perspectives were inferred through written work, emails, and anonymized public feedback rather than through formal interviews or surveys. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating student voices more directly, employing cross-institutional designs, or using mixed-methods approaches to further examine the pedagogical role of office-hour mentoring in composition classrooms.

Disclosure statement

I declare that there is no conflict of interest, and also confirm that the study was conducted without any financial or personal relationships that could bias the findings.

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