



Feedback as an Educational Approach: Pros and Cons

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Article information

Article history:

Received: 10 July 2025

Revised: 11 August 2025

Accepted: 21 August 2025

Keywords:

feedback;

educational settings;

advantages;

disadvantages.

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Abstract

The current research examines the role of feedback as a key educational tool, reveals its effectiveness, and associated strengths and limitations within pedagogical settings. It shows how feedback effectively supports student learning and analyzes its broader impact on educational outcomes. Framed by two primary research questions, how feedback facilitates learning and its primary benefits and drawbacks, the study utilizes a qualitative methodology grounded in an extensive literature review. Sources include scholarly books, journals, and empirical studies in education, psychology, and pedagogy, prioritizing publications from the last 20 years. Thematic analysis extracts key insights and recurring patterns. The analysis indicates that feedback significantly contributes to learning, enhances motivation, and fosters academic and linguistic competence. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of feedback is contingent upon several key factors, including the appropriateness of its timing, the method by which it is delivered, and the clarity with which it is conveyed. The study ultimately concludes that feedback fulfils both corrective and motivational functions; however, to achieve its full potential, it must be strategically employed and tailored to the specific educational context. When applied with deliberate intent and situational awareness, feedback emerges not only as a fundamental component of effective pedagogy but also as a powerful catalyst of continuous, lifelong learning.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69513/jnfh.v4.i2.a7> © Authors, 2026, College of Education, Alnoor University.

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التغذية الراجعة كمنهج تعليمي: الإيجابيات والسلبيات

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الخلاصة

تبحث هذه الدراسة في دور التغذية الراجعة بوصفها أداة تعليمية أساسية، وتكشف عن فعاليتها وما يرتبط بها من جوانب قوة وحدود داخل البيئات التربوية. وتبين كيف تسهم التغذية الراجعة بفاعلية في دعم تعلم الطلبة، كما تحلل أثرها الأوسع على المخرجات التعليمية. وقد صيغت هذه الدراسة في إطار سؤالين بحثيين رئيسيين: كيف تسهل التغذية الراجعة عملية التعلم، وما أبرز فوائدها وسلبياتها. وتعتمد الدراسة منهجية نوعية قائمة على مراجعة شاملة للأدبيات، استندت إلى كتب علمية ومجلات ودراسات تجريبية في مجالات التربية وعلم النفس والبيداغوجيا، مع إعطاء الأولوية للمنشورات الصادرة خلال العشرين سنة الأخيرة. وقد أجري تحليل موضوعي لاستخلاص أبرز النتائج والأنماط المتكررة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التغذية الراجعة تسهم بدرجة كبيرة في عملية التعلم، وتعزز الدافعية، وتنمي الكفاءة الأكاديمية واللغوية. ومع ذلك، فإن فاعلية التغذية الراجعة تظل مرهونة بعدة عوامل أساسية، منها مدى ملاءمة توقيت تقديمها، والطريقة التي تُقدّم بها، ووضوح صياغتها. وتخلص الدراسة في النهاية إلى أن التغذية الراجعة تؤدي وظيفتين رئيسيتين، هما التصحيح والتحفيز؛ غير أن بلوغها كامل إمكاناتها يقتضي توظيفها بطريقة استراتيجية ومراعاة خصوصية السياق التعليمي. وعندما تُطبّق بوعي مقصود وإدراك للسياق، تبرز التغذية الراجعة ليس فقط كعنصر جوهري في البيداغوجيا الفعّالة، بل أيضاً كمحفّز قوي للتعلم المستمر مدى الحياة..

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغذية الراجعة، السياقات التعليمية، الإيجابيات، السلبيات.

1. Introduction

Feedback plays a central role in educational contexts, significantly influencing students' learning outcomes and overall academic performance. It serves as both a way to recognize a student's strengths and a diagnostic tool for identifying areas that still need development. It is widely accepted that feedback is a purposeful and strategic tool that can be used to guide instructional practices, support comprehension, and motivate learners.

There is general agreement on the definition of feedback; yet it is also acknowledged as one of the most essential components of proficiency. Black and Wiliam (1998) (1), as cited in (2) support this view and stress the crucial role of feedback in developing a learner's language use. As a formative mechanism, feedback can be used to assess and monitor students' progress over time. Likewise, Brookhart (2008) (3) describes feedback as a precious commodity that allows teachers and students to see whether or not learning has been achieved. Yet, a gap persists in comprehending feedback's effectiveness and consequences.

1.1 Research Questions

This research aims to explore the following questions:

1. How can feedback effectively support students' learning?
2. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of using feedback in educational settings?

1.2 Research Aims

This research aims to:

1. Examine the effectiveness of feedback as a pedagogical strategy in educational settings.
2. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages linked with the implementation of feedback within the learning process.

1.3 Procedure

This study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in an extensive literature review, drawing on a wide range of academic sources, including journal articles, scholarly books, and empirical studies within the disciplines of education, psychology, and pedagogy. The literature selection prioritizes sources published within the past twenty years to ensure the information's relevance and up-to-dateness. The collected material is subjected to thematic analysis to extract and synthesize recurring patterns and critical insights concerning the advantages and disadvantages of feedback in educational contexts.

2. Literature review

The following subsections provide an overview of key theoretical perspectives on feedback, including its definitions, roles, types, principles, and criteria, as well as its pros and cons.

2.1 The Concept of Feedback

Feedback is widely acknowledged as a fundamental element in the educational process, particularly in

the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, feedback is defined as information concerning reactions to a product, a person's performance of a task, and so forth, which is utilized as a basis for improvement. This definition underscores the developmental function of feedback, namely, its place in cultivating learner development and supporting lifelong learning. Feedback as Process Askew (2000) (4) cited in (5) views feedback as an evaluative judgment about another person's performance, providing information about what was done right and what was done wrong, and how to improve.

Alternatively, Hattie and Timperley (2007) (6) define feedback as descriptive information from an external source, for instance, a teacher, peer, or system, provided to prompt a learner to reflect on their performance or comprehension. The two definitions share the central meaning of using feedback constructively. Feedback is a potent educational tool that assists learners in identifying the gap between their current performance and the optimal performance (learning target) and to take targeted action to close that gap.

2.2 The Role of Feedback in Education

In the EFL context, feedback is recognized as an important, indispensable tool that can help direct learners' attention to the quality of their language performance and prompt them to make the adjustments required to upgrade their language output. As per Ur (1999) (7), feedback consists of two essential elements, namely assessment (where a user is told that s/he has made an error) and correction (where an explicit correction is made to learners' linguistic output). In the same context, Pica (1994, as cited in Tabatabaei & Birjandi, 2009) (8) also emphasizes the importance of feedback in promoting learner reflection and enabling learners to make changes in their language use, which in turn helps them perform better than in the past. Thus, feedback goes beyond being a corrective tool: it becomes an essential and integral feature of the learning process, closely connected to learners' overall linguistic development and educational progression.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) (9) describe it as an essential element of formative assessment that supports self-regulation by helping learners evaluate their progress and refine their learning strategies. This dynamic function of feedback fosters informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and the development of a growth mindset. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007) (6), feedback is "one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement," particularly when it is specific, timely, and focused on closing the gap between current performance and intended goals.

Moreover, feedback is not a monolithic concept. (3,6). Underline its dual role, addressing both cognitive and motivational dimensions. When effectively delivered, feedback enhances learners' self-awareness and influences affective responses, thereby improving motivation and achievement. (1

2) Also consider feedback among the most influential tools in the development of foreign language proficiency.

Shute (2008) (10) categorizes feedback into formative and summative types, arguing that formative feedback, being continuous and developmental, provides greater benefits compared to summative feedback, which is evaluative and final. Sadler (1989) (11) supports this perspective by stating that effective feedback should be comprehensible, actionable, and aligned with explicit learning criteria.

To maximize its effectiveness, feedback must be adapted to the learner's proficiency level. Krashen (1982) (12) stresses the need for comprehensible input, while Spolsky (1998) (13) highlights the importance of tailoring feedback to individual learner needs. This adaptability reinforces the formative role of feedback by increasing learner motivation and encouraging mindful learning. Sheen (2011) (14) emphasizes this by asserting that feedback fosters learner autonomy and promotes active involvement in the learning process.

From a structural perspective, Tunstall and Gipps (1996) (15) classify feedback strategies into verbal, non-verbal, and written forms. Verbal feedback is often immediate and interactive; non-verbal feedback involves gestures and body language; and written feedback tends to be more detailed and typically follows an activity. Furthermore, Hargreaves, McCallum, and Gipps (2004) (16) distinguish between evaluative feedback, used to motivate or discourage through praise or criticism, and descriptive feedback, which provides specific, actionable guidance for improvement.

Brookhart (2008) (6) elaborates on the significance of feedback timing, quantity, and mode. Timely feedback delivered shortly after performance is more effective, especially when the amount of information is manageable. While feedback can be provided to groups, individualized feedback tends to be more impactful. The chosen mode, whether verbal or non-verbal, should be compatible with the nature of the task, learners' characteristics, and instructional goals.

Nevertheless, not all feedback leads to positive outcomes. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) (17), find that in over a third of the cases, feedback interventions reduce performance, often due to ambiguous messages or negative emotional responses from learners. Zamel (1985) (18), similarly warns that overemphasis on error correction may undermine

learner confidence and suggests placing more focus on meaning rather than form.

Cultural and contextual variables also shape the way feedback is perceived and utilized. Carless (2006) (19) reports that in some educational settings, learners may not actively engage with feedback due to a lack of clarity, perceived irrelevance, or anxiety associated with criticism. Crystal (2008) (20) adds that feedback also functions as a mechanism for evaluating the success of communication through response signals during interaction.

In conclusion, feedback in EFL contexts is a complex, multi-dimensional construct that supports assessment, promotes learning, and encourages motivation and autonomy. However, its impact depends on how it is delivered, the learner's willingness, and the broader educational context.

2.3 Types of Feedback

Feedback in educational settings is a complex phenomenon that educators classify in numerous ways based on its objectives, timing, origins, and formats. Hattie and Timperley (2007) (6) emphasize that feedback is an indispensable component of the learning process, as it offers insights that help learners bridge the gap between their current performance and the goals they aspire to achieve.

A common classification separates feedback into formative and summative types. Formative feedback is provided throughout the learning experience to facilitate improvement and guide learning efforts (Black & Wiliam, 1998) (1). Conversely, summative feedback is usually administered after the completion of a task or assessment to evaluate overall performance (Sadler, 1989) (11).

Another notable classification differentiates between oral and written feedback. Oral feedback tends to be immediate and engaging, enabling real-time clarifications (Brookhart, 2008) (3), while written feedback offers a permanent record that learners refer to for reflection (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) (9).

Moreover, feedback is further categorized by its source, including teacher feedback, peer feedback, and self-assessment. Peer feedback promotes collaborative learning experiences and enhances critical thinking skills (Topping, 2009) (21), whereas self-feedback cultivates learner independence and supports metacognitive understanding (Boud & Molloy, 2013) (22).

Additionally, feedback is classified as directive, which involves explicit corrections or recommendations, or facilitative, which encourages learners to engage in self-reflection and explore their own solutions (Ellis, 2009) (23). The effectiveness of each feedback type is influenced by various contextual factors, including the learner's level, the learning environment, and the specific educational objectives.

2.4 Feedback Principles

According to Hart (2012) (24), the first fundamental principle of feedback is that the recipient determines how they respond to it. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the individual receiving feedback interprets the message through their own perspective and reacts accordingly. It is impossible to “force” someone to appreciate or reject feedback. The same feedback, conveyed with the same wording and tone, may be interpreted as constructive by one individual and detrimental by another. Certain individuals accept blunt, direct, and critical feedback and immediately use it for self-improvement; their mental frameworks enable them to process it productively.

Conversely, others respond negatively to the same bluntness and criticism, interpreting it as hostile, poorly intended, or damaging, thereby rendering it ineffective. To provide feedback effectively, one must aim to ensure the message is received positively

rather than dismissed. In other words, a crucial element of effective feedback is increasing the likelihood that the recipient is in a receptive psychological state and, upon receiving the feedback, feels positive about themselves and the person providing it, gains clarity, feels motivated, and understands the necessary next steps.

This leads to the second principle of feedback: the recipient is more inclined to accept feedback constructively if it is not delivered in an authoritarian manner. This principle concerns the contrast between authority and autonomy, condescension and respect, and domination and collaboration. If the recipient perceives the feedback as coming from an authoritative stance, defined by positional power, a commanding or arrogant demeanor, or self-centered reasoning, they are more likely to respond defensively, engage in argumentation, shift blame, challenge the validity of the information, or exhibit excessive compliance without genuine commitment. Such reactions may include internalizing negative emotions that later manifest as unproductive behavior. On the other hand, when feedback is conveyed in a non-authoritative, collaborative manner, it is more likely to foster a productive dialogue. The recipient then engages, consciously or unconsciously, with the feedback positively. Consequently, the message becomes more effective in reinforcing desirable behavior, encouraging change, or advancing the conversation in a constructive direction.

The third principle asserts that a feedback recipient does not govern the thoughts, emotions, or actions of others in response to their behavior. This principle rests on the belief that individuals possess autonomy in how they choose to react.

However, it is important to distinguish this from the tangible outcomes resulting from one’s actions. For example, if an irate manager physically pushes an employee, causing the employee to fall and break an

arm, the manager is responsible for the injury. Nevertheless, the emotional and psychological reactions of the employee, such as their thoughts, feelings, and subsequent behaviors, remain within the employee’s control, shaped by their personal mindset and life perspective. One individual experiences humiliation, while another perceives an opportunity to manipulate the incident and retaliate against the manager.

Additionally, different individuals who provide feedback perceive and respond to the same behavior in distinct ways, which influences the nature of their feedback. For instance, if three colleagues provide feedback to a newly appointed team leader regarding her facilitation of a meeting, one comments, “I feel free to bring anything up”; another states, “I am frustrated by the lack of structure”; while a third remarks, “I am fully engaged.” Despite the team leader exhibiting identical behavior toward all three, their perceptions and reactions vary considerably.

2.5 Criteria for Good Feedback

There are several criteria that educators consider when they provide learners with feedback. Black and William (1998) (1) assert that feedback focuses on the specific qualities of a student’s work, offers guidance on how to improve, and avoids comparisons with the work of other students. This implies that teachers identify errors in a student’s individual work without drawing comparisons to others. Consistent with this view, Black and William (2002) (25) argue that the quality of feedback, rather than the quantity, is crucial when giving students feedback. Therefore, educators carefully select their language, ensuring that the goal is to correct errors systematically and consistently.

2.6 Pros and Cons of Feedback

Providing feedback in educational settings presents both advantages and disadvantages. The following sections outline the main pros and cons associated with its use:

a. Pros of Feedback

Feedback serves as an essential instructional tool because it:

1. Offers Explicit and Constructive Direction:

Feedback that is descriptive in nature elucidates for students both the strengths and weaknesses of their work, simultaneously offering practical suggestions for enhancement (Hargreaves et al., 2000) (16).

2. Promotes Skill Acquisition and Learning:

By highlighting areas for correction, feedback enables students to recognize their mistakes and subsequently refine their work, thereby optimizing the learning process (Westberg & Hilliard, 2001) (26)

3. Augments Personalization and Accessibility:

The provision of diverse digital resources through feedback mechanisms significantly influencing learning environment, catering to individual student needs (Ally, 2004) (27).

4. Exerts a Significant Impact on Achievement and Learning: Feedback is recognized as a critical determinant in academic success, exerting a substantial influence on student outcomes (6).

5. Stimulates Engagement Through Diverse Methodologies: The utilization of varied feedback strategies, encompassing verbal, written, and non-verbal approaches, accommodates different learning styles (3).

6. Cultivates 21st-Century Competencies: The integration of feedback mechanisms fosters the development of essential skills, including digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities (28).

7. Aids in Language Acquisition: In the context of EFL instruction, oral feedback plays a pivotal role in enhancing language proficiency among students (23).

8. Encourages Autonomy and Collaboration: Feedback supports both independent learning and interaction among peers and instructors through digital platforms (14, 29, 30-32).

b. Cons of Feedback

Despite the well-documented advantages of feedback in educational contexts, several disadvantages can hinder its effectiveness:

1. Potential for Misinterpretation: When feedback lacks clarity or disproportionately emphasizes errors, it may lead to learner confusion and diminished motivation (Zamel, 1985) (18).

2. Inequitable Access to Feedback Resources: Disparities in access to technology can create inequitable learning opportunities for students to benefit from feedback tools and platforms (33).

3. Absence of Reflective Teaching Practices: Some educators may not critically reflect on the impact of their feedback strategies, thereby reducing their instructional value to support meaningful learning (1).

4. Overemphasis on Assessment: Feedback that is predominantly linked to punitive or reward-based evaluation may fail to support omission, deep learning processes (16).

5. Over-Dependence on Feedback Tools: Excessive reliance on technological feedback mechanisms can at times diminish the value of personal teacher-student interaction (34).

6. Distraction from Learning: Digital platforms used to deliver feedback may unintentionally distract learners, reducing their focus and engagement (35).

7. Cognitive Overload and Inappropriate Timing: When feedback is overwhelming in volume or poorly timed, students may experience cognitive overload, leading to decreased processing and retention (3).

3. Discussion

Building upon the foundational insights from the literature review, it becomes clear that feedback within educational environments, particularly in the

context of EFL instruction, is not a monolithic concept. Rather, it represents a complex and dynamic pedagogical instrument shaped by theoretical frameworks, contextual realities, and learners' psychological dynamics. This section seeks to synthesize key theoretical positions, assess their practical significance, and draw meaningful thematic linkages that align with the study's core aims and research questions.

The literature consistently highlights feedback as a dual-function mechanism, both cognitive and motivational, that assists learners in bridging the gap between their current performance and the desired learning outcomes (6). Feedback emerges not only as a tool for correction but also as a driving force for learner autonomy learning process. Effective feedback transcends the mere identification of errors; it encourages learner autonomy by inviting active participation in academic growth. Ideally, it should be descriptive and dialogic, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere rather than placing learners in a passive role.

Another recurrent theme concerns the necessity of individualizing feedback and being attuned to learners' specific contexts. As demonstrated in the works of Brookhart (2008) (3), Sheen (2011) (14), and Hart (2012) (24), the effectiveness of feedback is contingent on its psychological and cultural resonance with the learner. The same comment may uplift one student while discouraging another. This inherent subjectivity means educators must approach feedback with flexibility, modulating tone, timing, and delivery style to align with the learner's cognitive development and emotional state. Hart's (2012) (24) principles highlight that the effectiveness of feedback lies not only in its content, but also in its manner and delivery style and timing. Additionally, the literature draws attention to the various forms of feedback, formative versus summative, oral versus written, teacher-led versus peer-delivered, underscoring the importance of employing a balanced and strategic mix. Formative feedback, which is continuous and focused on progression, is especially valued for maintaining student motivation and reinforcing positive learning behaviors. This is particularly critical in EFL settings, where feedback goes beyond grammatical precision to encompass the development of communicative competence. Both teacher and peer feedback, when applied constructively, contribute to a rich dialogic learning space that supports reflection, meaning negotiation, and learner independence (9, 21)

The benefits of feedback are widely recognized. It promotes skill acquisition, deepens engagement, and supports personalized learning pathways, particularly when integrated through interactive and multimodal approaches (3, 28). Moreover, it helps develop crucial 21st-century competencies, such as critical thinking and digital literacy. However, the

literature also cautions against the drawbacks of feedback. When delivered poorly, whether overly critical or poorly timed, it can cause cognitive strain and diminish learner confidence (17,18). Over-reliance on digital tools or inconsistent feedback practices can further undermine its instructional value and contribute to inequitable learning experiences.

Finally, the criteria for effective feedback proposed by Black & Wiliam (1998, 2002) (1, 25) offer a useful framework for maintaining both quality and impact. These guidelines stress the importance of clarity, specifically, transparency, and avoiding comparisons that may damage intrinsic motivation or self-esteem.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, feedback constitutes an essential pillar of the educational process, playing a crucial role in facilitating student learning, maintaining motivation, and fostering both academic and linguistic development. However, its effectiveness is influenced by a range of critical variables, including the clarity and relevance of its content, the

timing of its delivery, and the modality of its communication. To fully realize the pedagogical value of feedback, educators must remain mindful of contextual challenges such as time constraints, cultural sensitivities, and varying degrees of learner receptivity. Proactively addressing these considerations through informed and reflective instructional practices enhances the positive impact of feedback on students' academic growth and overall learning trajectories.

Furthermore, feedback operates across multiple dimensions, not only as a mechanism for correction and as a powerful motivational tool. While its capacity to shape learner outcomes and maintain engagement is well-established, optimizing its influence necessitates a strategic and deliberate approach that takes into account its qualitative attributes, frequency, temporal placement, and delivery method. When systematically integrated into the instructional framework, feedback emerges foundational elements of effective teaching and a key driver for sustained, lifelong learning.

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