



## Formative Feedback Mechanisms in the EFL Classroom: A Literature Review of Students' Perceptions and Uptake

آليات الملاحظات التكوينية في فصل اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية:  
مراجعة أدبية لتصورات الطلاب واستيعابهم

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### ملخص

تُعتبر أساليب الملاحظات التكوينية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أدوات أساسية لتعزيز تعلم الطلاب. تشمل الاستراتيجيات الفعالة التقييم الذاتي، وملاحظات المعلم، والزملاء، مما يساعد المتعلمين على تحديد نقاط قوتهم وضعفهم، متابعة تقدمهم، ووضع أهداف واقعية. في حين أثبتت الأبحاث أن ملاحظات المعلم والزملاء تلعب دورًا هامًا في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، إلا أن فهم كيفية إدراك المتعلمين لها وتفاعلهم معها يعتبر محدودًا. وبالتالي، من المهم استكشاف استجابات الطلاب لمصادر مختلفة من الملاحظات التكوينية، للحصول على فهم شامل لمدى فعاليتها. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى مراجعة نقدية للأدبيات المتعلقة بتطبيق ملاحظات المعلم والزملاء في عملية التعليم والتعلم، وتصورات المتعلمين وردود أفعالهم تجاه هذه الممارسات. تدرس الورقة الأدبيات والأبحاث الحالية المتعلقة بهذا الموضوع، وتقدم تحليلًا نقديًا للنتائج الرئيسية. كما تتناول بعض الآثار التربوية والتوصيات لمساعدة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية على تبني استراتيجيات الملاحظات التكوينية للمعلم والزملاء بشكل مناسب لتحقيق أقصى فائدة.

الكلمات الدالة: آليات الملاحظات التكوينية؛ استيعاب المتعلمين؛ تصورات المتعلمين؛ تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ ملاحظات الأقران؛ ملاحظات المعلمين.

### Abstract

Formative feedback strategies in English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning have increasingly been recognized as essential tools for enhancing students' learning. Effective strategies include self-assessment, teacher and peer feedback which help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, monitor progress, and set realistic goals. While research has established that both teacher and peer feedback play significant roles in EFL classrooms, there is limited understanding of how learners perceive and uptake them. It is, therefore, important to explore students' responses to different sources of feedback to gain a thorough understanding of their

effectiveness. The purpose of the present paper is to critically review the literature on the implementation of teacher and peer feedback in the teaching-learning process, and learners' perceptions and responses to such practices. The paper examines the existing literature and research related to the topic and provides a critical analysis of the main findings. It also considers some pedagogical implications to help English instructors adequately adopt teacher and peer feedback strategies for maximum benefit.

**Keywords:** EFL learning; formative feedback mechanisms; learners' perceptions; learners' uptake; peer feedback; teacher feedback.

## Introduction

Decades ago, formative assessment was established as a valuable method implemented in educational processes to maximize and facilitate students' learning. Amongst an array of innovative formative strategies, researchers acknowledge teacher and peer feedback as key elements of formative assessment. Although teacher and peer feedback have both been integrated into EFL pedagogy, current research tends to evaluate their effectiveness in broad terms, without describing how learners respond to different types of feedback and manners of delivery. As a result, the field lacks clarity on how feedback from these sources is internalized and used by learners to improve their learning strategies. The effectiveness of feedback depends significantly on how students perceive and uptake it. There is, therefore, a need to investigate how teacher and peer feedback are practiced in the classroom and how learners react to and act upon them. Without this knowledge, instructional practices may rely on one feedback source or apply them interchangeably, potentially limiting their pedagogical value.

This paper attempts to gain insights into the main themes, key findings, and different perspectives in the literature on teacher and peer feedback practices, and learners' responses to them. A corpus of selected empirical studies on learners' different perceptions and responses to teacher and peer feedback in EFL classrooms across different countries is collected and examined by the researcher, main findings discussed and synthesized, and implications considered for informed and guided teaching, learning, and assessment procedures. The choice of the selected studies is based on a number of criteria: firstly, the studies address the same learning context which is EFL in higher education. Secondly and in line with the present paper objective, the focus was mainly on studies investigating two sources of feedback: the teachers and the peers. Thirdly, selecting studies with opposing perspectives on learners' perceptions and uptake of feedback

would help us capture the complexity of the phenomenon under study and get a complete and unbiased understanding. In addition, for representative coverage purposes, studies addressing different types of feedback were selected. Finally, it is worth noting that a number of studies from the Algerian context form part of the selected corpus because we believe it will help us target pedagogical implications applicable to the local context.

Findings of this critical review could improve our knowledge of teacher and peer feedback as perceived by the learners, potentially guide instructors when designing formative feedback tools, and help them choose the right strategy that triggers learners' uptake of feedback to yield the desired outcomes.

## 1. Literature Review

This section is devoted to the definitions of the key concepts that will be used throughout this research paper.

### 1.1 Formative feedback: definition and mechanisms

In the field of education, formative feedback is a significant technique to support learning. Its main objective is to identify the gap existing between a learner's present performance and the required level. Effective feedback, according to Sadler (1989), should not only draw attention to the discrepancies between intended and actual performance, but also give students the resources they require to bridge this gap. In order to improve teaching and learning outcomes, Black and Wiliam (1998) positioned formative feedback within the framework of formative assessment, highlighting its function in directing changes to both teaching and learning. They describe it as "...all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (p.7). Further observations by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) emphasize how crucial feedback is for improving students' self-regulation. They assert that good feedback should engage students in reflection, autonomous evaluations, and goal-setting. Carless (2006) focuses on the crucial socio-constructivist and dialogic aspects of formative feedback. For him, formative feedback is an interactive, not one-directional, process where students engage in dialogues and conversations to co-construct meaning with both the teacher and peers. In sum, formative feedback goes beyond mere corrective information; it is a dynamic, learner-centered method that fosters long-term self-regulated learning.



### 1.1.1 Teacher feedback

Most scholars define teacher feedback as information provided by the teacher to learners with the aim of reducing the gap between their current performance and the desired learning goals. Black and Wiliam (1998) note that effective teacher feedback is not a mere grade or mark; it should be diagnostic and offer specific and clear information on the learner's current level and guide them on how to improve their learning to reach the target level. Further explanation is provided by Shute (2008) who frames teacher feedback as "information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning" (p.154). She adds that for feedback to be effective, attributes including timeliness, clarity, and specificity are essential. These viewpoints emphasize that teacher feedback is not solely corrective but also formative, fostering students' self-regulation, motivation, and active participation in the learning process.

### 1.1.2 Peer feedback

Peer feedback and peer assessment are characterized by Black and Wiliam (2018) as powerful formative strategies; for them, peer feedback is a collaborative process whereby learners engage in interactive activities of evaluating each other's work. In the peer assessment process, learners become active participants applying and exchanging information on quality assessment criteria. Peer feedback enhances learners' metacognition and self-regulation which leads them to take ownership of their learning, develop self-assessment skills, and become less teacher-dependent. In line with Sadler's (1989) argument that students have to develop their evaluation expertise, Carless and Boud (2018) in their discussion of peer feedback, consider the practice as key for developing students' feedback literacy. Feedback literate students, they assert, are mature learners able to interpret, engage with, and take action to use feedback efficiently.

## 1.2 Students' perceptions and uptake of feedback

Questions on how feedback is practiced and whether it is used for learning improvement depend greatly on students' perceptions. Carless (2006) and Weaver (2006) explain that while teachers view feedback as just a pedagogical tool, students interpret it in terms of credibility, clarity, and usability. Carless (2006) asserts that feedback provision is not just delivering information, but a social process, a relationship governed by trust and that results in feedback receptivity.



Effective feedback that is timely, focused and delivered in a supportive tone is valued and positively perceived by students as they can act upon it, while feedback that lacks guidance, clarity, and focus often generates frustration, demotivation, and uncertainty (Hattie; Timperley, 2007).

Carless and Boud (2018) point out to the fact that perception alone does not guarantee feedback uptake and students' feedback literacy plays a pivotal role in determining students' capacity to process feedback, assess its relevance, and make a decision to act upon it. It is, therefore, important for teachers to deliver feedback that students can understand, accept and appreciate, so that they act upon it.

Many empirical studies indicate that teacher and peer feedback have been implemented in EFL classes for a variety of purposes; however, little is known about how students deal with feedback from both sources. Therefore, this paper aims at investigating teacher and peer formative feedback as perceived and acted upon by learners. Different empirical studies addressing this issue are reviewed to gain further insights, and the main findings are discussed. This would lead to a better use of feedback with learners and a more informed teaching and learning.

## **2. Presentation of Previous Studies Results**

Pedagogical benefits from teacher and peer feedback practices have become beyond doubt. Still, feedback practices in the EFL context may not directly lead to learners' satisfaction, as they may respond differently to different types of feedback. Despite the existence of a rich body of literature and empirical studies on EFL learners' reactions to teacher and peer feedback, findings remain divergent.

### **2.1 Learners' perceptions and uptake of teacher formative feedback**

Teachers have always commented on their students' performances. Research has shown that teachers' comments, whether written, oral, corrective, or motivational, have a positive impact on teaching and learning. These studies indicate that teacher feedback not only helps identify students' strengths and weaknesses, but also fosters self-regulated learning and motivation. In this sense, Putri et al. (2021) found that teacher's feedback is viewed positively by the learners as it encourages them to engage in self-regulated learning practices such as goal setting and self-evaluation. They also reported an increase in students' motivation and comprehension. Likewise, Alamri's (2018) study revealed that Saudi EFL learners perceive

teacher feedback positively as it enhances their learning, fosters assessment transparency, and establishes a positive cooperative learning environment. They also reported the importance of varying feedback types and delivery modes for progress.

It is worth noting that teacher feedback is particularly valued and positively perceived in the teaching-learning of the writing skill. A significant number of studies have investigated this particular area in the Algerian context; they report that teacher feedback facilitates the writing process and EFL higher education learners hold positive views and attitudes towards the practice: Azib and Allouani (2023), for instance, assert that students positively perceived teacher Written Corrective Feedback (WCF). Over 90% considered it useful, clear, and encouraging for improvement, especially regarding grammar, vocabulary, structure, and academic style. They preferred direct, focused feedback. In the same line of thought, Azzioui (2022) found that students showed genuine interest in their teachers' feedback that positively impacted their texts, motivation, and made them realize their weaknesses as well as progress. Students highlighted the fact that for teacher feedback to be effective, it should be readable, clear, and detailed. In another study conducted by Sebbah (2021), students showed positive perceptions of continuous formative assessment in writing, which included teacher feedback alongside peer e-feedback; they linked it to better monitoring, scaffolding, and engagement.

Overall, EFL learners show positive perceptions of teacher feedback which makes them uptake it and, consequently, improve their performances. Students regularly express positive attitudes towards WCF, frequently highlighting clarity, focus, and motivational tone. They especially prefer direct and focused WCF to enhance language accuracy and academic style. Teacher feedback was used for an array of purposes such as helping students identify strengths and weaknesses, engaging in self-regulated practices and fostering cooperative learning.

Although teacher formative feedback is widely recognized as a tool to scaffold learning, empirical evidence shows that EFL university students often respond with negative perceptions that hinder engagement. In a case study of Arab EFL undergraduates, Mahfoodh (2017) reported that teacher written feedback frequently elicited disappointment, anger, and discouragement, particularly when phrasing was perceived as controlling rather than supportive. Similar findings were observed by Mahfoodh and

Pandian (2011), who noted students' frustration with illegible handwriting, and critical tone. Additionally, Do and Nguyen's (2025) study revealed Vietnamese learners' disappointment, discouragement, and reduced anger when teacher's written feedback was critical, lacking explanations and more corrective than supportive as shown in the following excerpts: "At first, when I received feedback, I felt that she [the teacher] was very strict with me. So, I was sad and disappointed.", "Although I tried to write, when I read the feedback, which included many mistakes and errors, I also felt a bit angry because she pointed out many errors and writing problems.", "She circled a lot of places in my paper without clear explanations; some parts I did not understand, so it caused me feelings of disappointment and anger at the same time." (p.56)

In summary, these studies conclude that teacher feedback perceived as unclear, harsh, or misaligned with learner expectations, impacts negatively learning which counteracts the intended formative function of feedback.

## **2.2 Learners' perceptions and uptake of their peers' formative feedback**

A significant body of empirical research demonstrates that EFL learners in higher education contexts generally hold favorable perceptions of peer feedback, especially when it is structured and scaffolded. In effect, the use of rubrics in peer assessment of writing helps students make sound judgements as they follow clear and precise assessment criteria. In this context, Wang (2014) indicates that learners value rubric-referenced peer review as a means of receiving explicit, actionable guidance. In addition, when students are well trained on how to assess and provide feedback, their motivation and self-efficacy increase; Schunn et al. (2021), for instance, found that trained peer feedback was not only comparable to teacher feedback in enhancing competence and self-efficacy, but also more effective in fostering autonomous motivation. Dang (2024) too reported that Vietnamese undergraduates perceived peer feedback as highly beneficial for clarifying task requirements, generating ideas, improving language use, and sustaining motivation. In short, learners view peer feedback as an important strategy to work collaboratively and co-construct meaning, they gain in self-efficacy and motivation, especially when they are supported by appropriate training, explicit assessment criteria including rubrics, and opportunities for dialogues and discussions.



Despite the fact that peer feedback is acknowledged as an effective formative strategy to foster learner autonomy and collaborative learning, research often highlights negative perceptions among EFL students in higher education. A number of studies reveal that learners are often skeptical about the credibility and reliability of their peers' comments compared to teacher feedback. In this context, Saeli and Cheng (2021) note that students valued peer feedback, yet they preferred teacher validation and raised concerns about the reliability of their peers' assessments. In addition to credibility concerns, students expressed negative affective episodes. Zhu, Yu and Zheng (2023) found that Chinese university students during peer feedback discussions, experienced anxiety, indifference, and disappointment; they also noted that many students expressed hesitation to provide critical comments. Similarly, Azarnoosh (2013) found that a number of Iranian learners displayed discomfort and uneasiness when asked to "take the role of the teacher," highlighting concerns about fairness and subjectivity even after training.

Overall, these studies reveal that several factors lie behind students' negative perceptions of peer feedback, namely issues with credibility and fairness, anxiety and stress related to the peer-assessment role, disappointment with feedback quality, and limited self-efficacy in giving feedback.

### **3. Discussion of Results of Previous Studies**

The review of empirical studies on the use of teacher and peer feedback, as well as how EFL students responded to it, revealed conflicting perspectives. These insights may enhance our understanding of the various uses of teacher and peer feedback, and how to make them effective to improve the teaching and learning processes.

#### **3.1 Learners' perceptions and uptake of teacher feedback**

This paper sheds light on EFL learners' perceptions of their teachers' feedback. From the reviewed literature, it appears that learners perceive their teachers' feedback practices both positively and negatively, and that these perceptions are shaped not only by the nature of feedback and its content, but also by the delivery method.

Learners' positive perceptions were mainly focused on the usefulness of teacher feedback in identifying areas of weakness, strategies to improve, and guiding future performance which indicates that teacher feedback was delivered in the right time (timeliness), providing the learners with clear and focused instructions (actionable), and supportive, which made them receive

it positively and take action upon it. Indeed, many participants expressed appreciation for timely, focused, and constructive feedback that provided them with clear and explicit guidance on what to do for next steps. This aligns with Shute's (2008) and Hattie and Timperley's (2007) argument that effective feedback should be timely, clear, and specific. It is also consistent with Sadler's (1989) claim that effective feedback should not only help learners identify current and target levels and the gap in between, but also provide them with the strategies to reduce that gap. Such feedback was perceived as essential in promoting self-regulation, increasing confidence, sustaining motivation, and fostering a collaborative approach to language learning. This would help teachers consider factors of timeliness, focus, and positive tone when practicing feedback; it also suggests for feedback to be dialogic allowing teacher-students interaction to clarify feedback and negotiate meaning.

A number of negative perceptions also emerged which demonstrates the complexity of feedback practices and their challenging implementation in the EFL classroom. Some learners reported that hypercritical or fuzzy feedback impacted negatively their confidence and motivation, and, thus, their engagement which prevents improvement. Others reported that delayed and inconsistent feedback loses its value and effectiveness as learners feel uncertain about what to do and how to respond to that type of comments. These phenomena echo Shute's (2008) and Hattie and Timperley's (2007) views when they stressed the issue of feedback clarity, timeliness, and supportive nature.

Another aspect highlighted by learners is that feedback focused on errors and delivered in a more controlling than supportive manner engendered students' disappointment, frustration and anxiety; which is consistent with Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Carless and Boud (2018) who insist on the fact that feedback should trigger students' appreciation first, to encourage and invite them to act upon it. Feedback is intended to enhance learning not to undermine it; it is important, then, for teachers to be careful with feedback content and manner, if framed in a critical and harsh tone, feedback will be a threat to teacher-student relationship and student self-efficacy. Thus, it is suggested that feedback that is unclear, Imbalanced, and neglects students' affect is more likely to miss its intended pedagogical purpose.

In summary, learners express diverse opinions and display different character traits. The presence of positive and negative perceptions implies

that teachers need to adapt their feedback strategies. Findings revealed that teacher feedback is beneficial and generally receives learners' appreciation and validation. Its effectiveness, however, depends significantly on how it is shaped and delivered. Therefore, there is a need to balance corrective feedback with supportive and guiding manners to address not only learners' cognitive needs but also their affective ones for a maximum pedagogical benefit.

### **3.2 Learners' perceptions and uptake of peer feedback**

In addition to teacher feedback, this study also investigated learners' perceptions of their peers' comments. The reviewed studies revealed that learners displayed opposing attitudes towards peer feedback; in some studies, they appreciated it while in others they were skeptical about it. On the positive side, learners' positive perceptions were mainly linked to the timeliness and availability of peer feedback as well as its collaborative dimension; qualities highlighted by Shute (2008) and Hattie and Timperley (2007), while Carless (2006) and Black and Wiliam (2018) focused on the socio-constructivist and dialogic nature of effective feedback to foster collaborative learning.

Many participants revealed that peer assessment sessions helped them study peers' perspectives which contributed to enrich their own; they also recognized its usefulness in enhancing their understanding of language use and assessment criteria. Peer feedback, learners reported, made them develop a sense of responsibility and autonomy. Peer interactions were valued by learners as they established a positive and supportive learning environment that fostered their critical thinking and self-reflection.

Despite the positive feedback on peer feedback, negative attitudes among learners were also noticed. Some learners questioned peer feedback credibility and reliability expressing doubts about their peers' fairness and objectivity; they also raised concerns over peers' proficiency levels and lack of expertise. Others, experienced uneasiness and hesitation to imitate the teacher and provide critical comments, anticipating social tensions, peer judgment, and misunderstandings. Such perceptions suggest that, although peer feedback can encourage learner engagement, its effectiveness may be undermined by issues of trust, confidence, and interpersonal considerations.

Overall, we can conclude that though feedback is a good learning strategy, it can also be a source of tension in the classroom. Even though learners expressed concerns about credibility, fairness, and emotional aspects, they

did not deny the role of peer feedback in enhancing collaboration and reflection. Following Sadler's (1989) claim that learners have to develop their evaluation expertise, and Carless and Boud (2018) who insist on implementing peer assessment/feedback to develop students' feedback literacy, there is, consequently, a need for careful scaffolding. It is suggested that peer feedback is powerful when supported by thorough training, structured guidelines, and teacher moderation to ensure clarity, accuracy, and a positive learning atmosphere.

#### **4. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the studies reviewed and the main findings, a number of pedagogical implications emerged. Perceptions about timely, clear, and constructive feedback indicate that teachers need to:

- Prioritize feedback that is actionable and directly linked to learners' performance and instead of providing general comments; teachers should target individual observations that guide students in recognizing both their strengths and specific areas for development (Shute, 2008).
- Balance correction with encouragement; teachers are advised to avoid overwhelming learners with excessive error marking or criticism that may diminish self-confidence. Instead, they should adopt a supportive tone and frame feedback as an opportunity for growth (Mahfoodh; Pandian, 2011; Shute, 2008).
- Adopt dialogic feedback (inviting learners to respond to feedback) instead of unidirectional judgment; this strategy helps learners negotiate meaning and build trust as well as promoting assessment transparency (Carless; Boud, 2018).
- Consider students' individual needs and preferences; some learners may prefer detailed, corrective input, while others may benefit more from general guidance and
- encouragement. Teachers can address this diversity by integrating different modes of feedback, such as written annotations, oral explanations, and peer feedback activities.
- Train learners to interpret and use feedback effectively; this could enhance its impact and reduce misunderstandings.
- Integrate peer feedback as a regular component of classroom activities, using it not only as a corrective tool but also as a means of encouraging



learners to critically evaluate language use and share responsibility for improvement. (Carless; Boud, 2018).

- Provide explicit training on how to give constructive, respectful, and language-focused feedback. Structured guidelines, such as checklists or rubrics, can help learners move beyond vague comments and provide more accurate, actionable suggestions.
- Monitor the process of peer feedback, model effective feedback practices, and intervene where necessary to ensure accuracy and fairness. By positioning themselves as facilitators, teachers can maintain the credibility of peer feedback while empowering learners to develop assessment skills.

Overall, further research and insights are needed on embedding teacher and peer feedback strategies into learning frameworks. Training teachers to scaffold, mediate peer interactions, and develop students' feedback literacy would maximize the benefits.

## Conclusion

In summary, the review of the selected studies revealed that EFL learners perceive teacher and peer feedback as both a powerful catalyst for improvement, a collaborative learning opportunity and, at times, a source of frustration and uncertainty when delivered insensitively or without clarity. The coexistence of positive and negative perceptions calls for the importance of adopting feedback practices that balance accuracy with encouragement and adapt to learners' diverse needs. Additionally, the effectiveness of peer feedback depends on the extent to which learners are guided, trained, and supported throughout the process. These insights lay the foundation for refining pedagogical approaches and strengthening the role of feedback as a supportive, motivating force in language learning.

When carefully scaffolded and combined with teacher input, peer feedback can enrich the feedback culture of the classroom and contribute meaningfully to learners' linguistic and reflective development.

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