

The Role of Feedback in the Development of EFL Learners' Writing skills

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Abstract:

Feedback is a crucial factor in the development of learners' writing proficiency. It plays a central role, contributing to both the quality of written output and the processes involved in the acquisition of the competence of writing. This paper explores the impact of feedback on the development of EFL learners' writing proficiency. Furthermore, the study examines the mechanisms through which feedback facilitates the development of writing, emphasizing its forms, timing, and pedagogical effectiveness. To achieve the objectives of this paper, the study employed multiple data collection instruments: two questionnaires – one for teachers and one for students – and student interviews. The questionnaires gathered teachers' evaluations of the impact of feedback on the quality of students' writing proficiency. Finally, interviews with a subset of students provided deeper insights into the influence of feedback on their written performance and whether it helps them improve their writing or not. The findings indicate that teacher feedback is generally effective and supportive, particularly in promoting writing development over time. However, the results also highlight the need for more student-centered approaches, such as structured peer interaction and feedback that prioritizes meaning and rhetorical quality over mechanical accuracy.

Key Words: writing competence, supportive feedback, corrective feedback, peer correction

دور التغذية المرتدة في تطوير مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلاب الدارسين للغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية
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المستخلص:

تعتبر التغذية المرتدة عامل ضروري في تطوير مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الانجليزية وتلعب دورا اساسيا في جودة مخرجات الكتابة وعملية اكتساب قدرات الكتابة و تهدف هذه الورقة لمعرفة اثر التغذية المرتدة علي تطوير مهارات الكتابة و ايضا معرفة الليات التي تسهل تطوير مهارة الكتابة مؤكدة علي شكلها ووقتها وفعاليتها التربوية ولتحقيق اهداف الدراسة استخدمت الدراسة عدة ادوات لجمع البيانات. استبيانين احدهما للأساتذة و الاخر للطلاب ومقابلات مع الطلاب والاستبيان تضمن تقويم الاساتذة لأثر التغذية المرتدة علي جودة مهارة الكتابة و مقابلات الطلاب اعطت نظرة اعمق على تأثير التغذية المرتدة علي ادائهم في الكتابة من حيث المساعدة او عدمها و اشارت نتائج البحث ان التغذية المرتدة من الاستاذ فعالة وداعمة قي ترقية مهارة الكتابة بمرور الزمن و لكن ايضا اشارت النتائج الي الحاجة علي التركيز علي التغذية المرتدة من قبل الطالب مثل التفاعل مع الزملاء و التغذية التي تعطي اولوية للمعني وجودة الاسلوب أكثر من الدقة
كلمات مفتاحية: قدرة الكتابة، تغذية مرتدة داعمة، تغذية مرتدة تصويبية، تصويبية الزملاء.

1. Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill in modern literate societies, often more essential than is commonly recognized. Writing is a powerful mechanism through which we express our thoughts and emotions. Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p.3) note that writing occurs in various forms daily—ranging from routine messages and letters to more structured tasks—demonstrating people’s ability to control the written medium. Reid (1989) further emphasizes that people write not only for practical purposes but also to explore ideas, express emotions, recount experiences, imagine possibilities, and for sheer pleasure. Writing is thus both a personal and social activity. In real-life situations, writers receive feedback from their readers through those readers’ reactions, which provide real feedback for writers. For students, however, the primary audience is the teacher; therefore, teachers’ responses to students’ writing should be immediate, regular, and informative.

2.Literature Review

Writing as a Social and Cognitive Process

Writing is deeply embedded in social contexts, shaping and reflecting worldviews influenced by social problems and group norms (Hyland, 1997; Kuhn, 1970; MacDonald, 1994). Academic writing, in particular, involves engaging with colleagues through methodologies, arguments, and rhetorical strategies to persuade or inform, drawing on both rhetorical skills and objective reasoning. Zemach and Islam (2006) stress the importance of writing as a means of communication in daily life and especially in educational settings, noting that it is one of the most challenging skills to master in both first and second languages. Cultural conventions also shape how ideas are organized and presented in academic writing. Writing is a complex cognitive process requiring both linguistic competence and strategic thinking. Hazel (2005) argues that writing does not emerge spontaneously but through a process requiring knowledge and skill. Deane et al. (2008) suggest that writing involves producing texts for diverse purposes across varied social contexts. Kellogg (2008) highlights that writing extended texts is cognitively demanding, requiring memory, organization, and critical thinking. Elbow (1981) points out that writing demands the integration of creativity (generating ideas) and critical evaluation (selecting and refining ideas), which often conflict. EFL learners often struggle with this dual demand, producing texts that are less informative and sophisticated (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Challenges for EFL Learners

EFL students face particular difficulties in writing, including generating ideas, organizing content, and applying critical evaluation. They may not fully recognize the complexity of the writing process or employ their cognitive abilities effectively to refine their texts. Mastering writing requires significant practice, guidance, and feedback to develop fluency, accuracy, and coherence (Zemach & Islam, 2006). It is the role of the teacher to monitor such practice and play the role of audience by providing guidance and feedback during and after the process of writing.

Feedback in Writing Instruction:

Feedback plays a crucial role in supporting learners' writing development, particularly within process-oriented approaches. Hyland and Hyland (2006). The importance of feedback emerged with the development of learner-centered approaches to writing instruction in North American L1 composition classes during the 1970s. The "process approach" gave greater attention to teacher-student encounters around texts and encouraged teachers to support writers through multiple drafts by providing feedback and suggesting revisions during the process of writing itself, rather than at the end of it. The form feedback took was extended beyond the teacher's marginal notes to include oral interaction involving the teacher or the students themselves. The focus moved from a concern with mechanical accuracy and control of language to a greater emphasis on the development and discovery of meaning through the experience of writing and rewriting. Providing learners with feedback helps bridge the gap between their interlanguage and target language (Furnborough & Truman, 2009). Corrective feedback may identify errors and provide suggestions for improvement (Li, Link, & Hegelheimer, 2015; Wilson & Czik, 2016). Effective feedback supports grammatical accuracy, long-term proficiency, and metalinguistic awareness (Ferris, 2006; Ellis, 2009), with its impact influenced by learner proficiency, feedback type, and opportunities for revision. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that task-focused feedback is more relevant and effective than general praise, as it helps students regulate their own learning. Cohen (1987) notes that unclear or inconsistent feedback can demotivate learners. Ferris (1995) and Nation (2009) emphasize that multiple sources of feedback—including peers, teachers, and other readers—are most effective when repeated throughout the writing process and when delivered in ways students can act upon. Positive feedback on content enhances learners' motivation and engage-

ment, not just grammatical accuracy. Hyland (2003) highlights the importance of developing students' metacognitive awareness of writing strategies. Teacher responses, including individual attention, peer review, conferences, and audio feedback, are crucial in motivating learners, guiding revisions, and facilitating language development. Such responses represent key intervention points in the writing process, fostering both skill development and learner autonomy.

3. Research Method:

3.1 Participants:

The participant pool consisted of Sixty-five Sudanese teachers and 240 undergraduate English majors from five Sudanese universities. The students are from Kassala University, Gadaref University, the Red Sea University, Omdurman Islamic University and Omdurman Ahlia University. Teachers are chosen due to the fact that they play a crucial role in developing students' writing skills and due to the fact that they are the intended audience for students' writing, providing feedback and guidance. The students represent the future practitioners of the English language in the Sudanese society. Investigating their learning habits is believed to be with great value in the field of education.

3.2 Instruments:

The data of this research were collected through two questionnaires, and an interview. One of the two questionnaires was designed for the teachers and the other for EFL learners. The procedures through which the research data have been obtained are as follows:

3.3 Procedures:

240 questionnaires were collected from the students and 65 from the teachers. Finally, an interview was conducted to 20 of the students.

3.3.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

The primary objective of the questionnaire was to explore the effect of their response to their students' writing. The questionnaire also seeks to find out the nature of the feedback the teachers provide for the students during their writing process.in developing learners' communicative competence.

3-3-2- Students' Questionnaire

The rationale for the students' questionnaire was to make sure that the data collected for the current study are valid; leading to reliable results. This procedure is drawn from the fact that a students' questionnaire can provide immediate qualitative data, which could lead to a reliable and effective study. The two questionnaires and the interview will complement each other in eliciting data for the present study.

3.3.3 Students' Interview

The rationale behind the interview conducted with some of the participants is to uncover aspects of students' experiences and responses to feedback that could not be captured through questionnaires alone. Considering this fact, a decision was made to conduct an interview with at least half of the student participants.

4. Data Analysis or Discussion

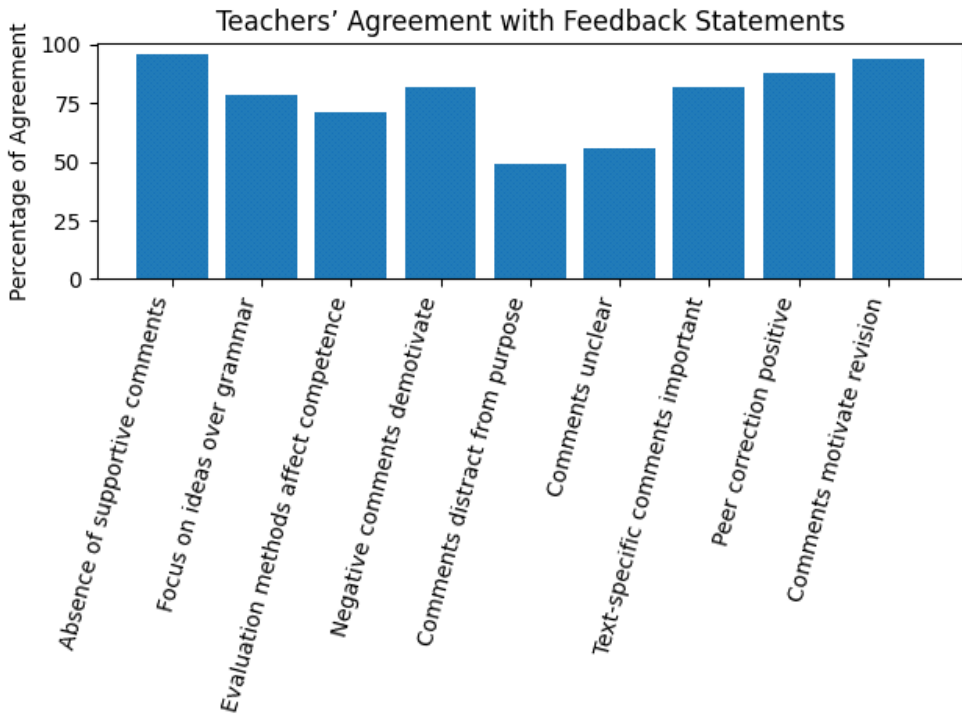
To discuss the results of this study, statistical results of the tables (1, 2) and the result obtained from the students' actual spoken performance were thoroughly examined and discussed. The following table gives the teachers' evaluation of the feedback the students receive on their writing.

Table (1) Teachers' Feedback

No	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Median
1	The absence of the instructive and supportive teacher's comments is one of the factors that affect students' writing negatively.	% 49.2	% 46.2	% 1.5	% 3.1	-	2
		32	30	1	2	-	
2	The feedback provided for the students should focus on idea development, clarity and coherence rather than grammar	% 29.2	% 49.2	% 1.5	% 20	-	2
		19	32	1	13	-	
3	The methods and purpose of evaluators and evaluation procedures negatively affect the students' written communicative competence	% 20	% 50.8	% 6.2	% 21.5	% 1.5	2
		13	33	4	14	1	
4	Teachers' negative comments demotivate students and make them reluctant in their writing	% 47.7	% 33.8	% 7.7	% 7.7	% 3.1	2
		31	22	5	5	2	
5	Teachers' comments distract students and lead them away from the purpose of writing a particular text in their voices	% 13.8	% 35.4	% 13.8	% 30.8	% 6.2	3
		9	23	5	20	4	
6	Teachers' comments are worded in such a way that it is difficult for students to know exactly what they need to revise or correct	% 15.4	% 40.0	% 15.4	% 27.7	% 1.5	2
		10	26	10	18	4	
7	Text-specific comment is such a factor that plays a very important role in developing students' written communicative competence	% 27.7	% 53.8	% 15.4	% 3.1	-	2
		18	35	10	2	-	
8	Peer correction can positively influence students writing	% 33.8	% 53.8	% 7.7	% 3.1	% 1.5	2
		22	35	5	2	1	
9	The comments provided by teachers should create motive for editing and promoting students' final versions	% 60.0	% 33.8	% 4.6	% 1.5	-	2
		39	22	3	1	-	

As shown in table above, a significant majority of the teachers (95.4 %) asserted that the instructive and supportive teacher's comments are vital for developing writing skills. Teachers indicated that such feedback serves as a diagnostic tool, allowing students to identify weaknesses and improve future performance of their writing process. It also lets them know how well they perform during their process of writing. This in turn helps the students identify the areas of weakness in their performance and work hard to improve them. Result in the table above also suggests that most of the teachers agreed that the feedback should focus on idea development, clarity and coherence rather than grammar. That is, teachers' feedback should focus on meaning and rhetorical quality over mechanical accuracy. Teachers report that the methods and procedures used in evaluating students' writing are not effective. Students' success or failure in writing is judged in terms of their scores in the final exam rather than by the extent to which they have benefited from the course. This may have a negative impact on the students who feel that they perform well during writing sessions, but for some reasons fail to do the same in their final exam. Teachers also claim that negative comments on the students' writing demotivate the students making them reluctant to write. They contend that such negative comments distract students and lead them away from the purpose of writing a particular text in their own voice. Teachers state that sometimes their comments on students' writing are vague which makes it very difficult for the students to know exactly what is wrong with their writing. This result supports Cohen's (1987) opinion on teacher's feedback as often confusing, vague and inconsistent. When students feel that they do not know how well they perform in their writing task they will not be motivated to write in the future. So, text-specific comments are crucial because they help students be aware of the factors necessary to produce coherent and more informative texts. Teachers assert that peer correction is one of the factors that help the students produce

effective and thoroughly planned piece of writing. The students can go over the writing of each other before submitting the final draft to the teacher. This can promote students' ability to conduct fruitful discussion. They can benefit from one another by going through different personal thinking and writing styles. Most teachers agree that teachers' comments on the students' writing should promote the final version of the students' writing. Ferris (1995) maintained that there is some evidence that students do, in fact, find their teachers' feedback useful in helping them to improve their writing. The evidence indicates that the students pay more attention if it is provided on preliminary drafts rather than final drafts.



The following table shows students' view on the type of feedback they receive on their writing:

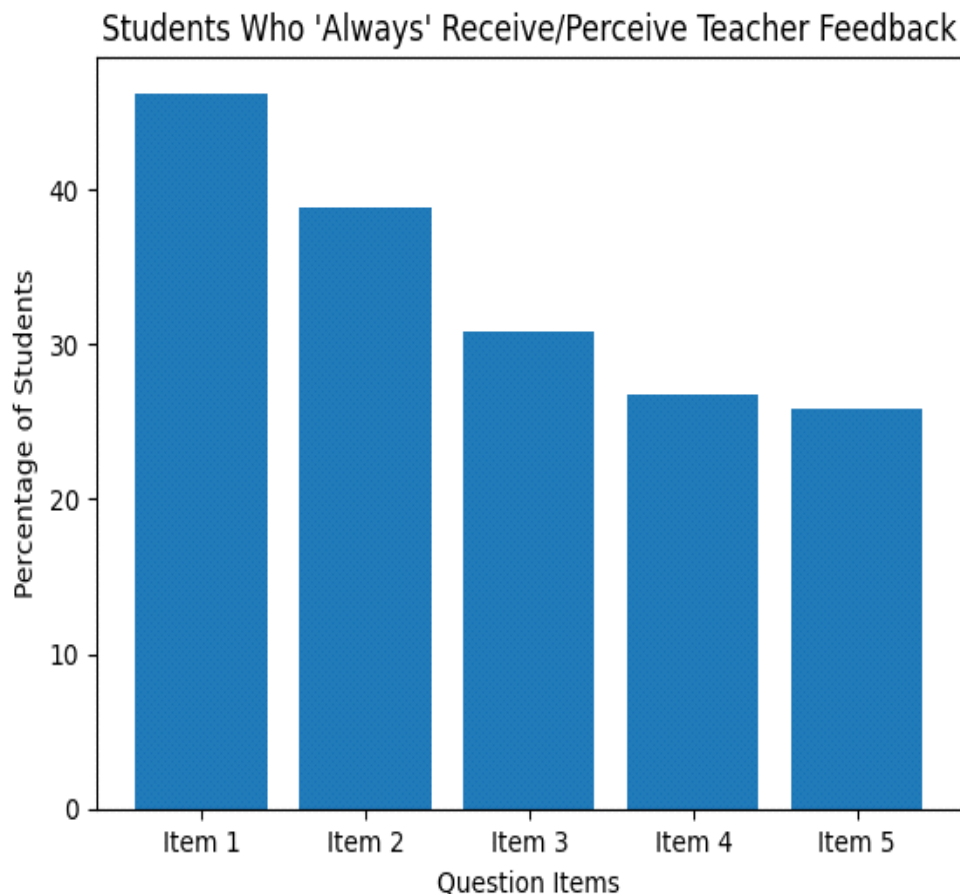
Table (2) Students' View on Teachers' Feedback

No	Item	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Median
1	I receive feedback from my teacher at several stages during the writing .process	% 46.2	% 18.3	% 19.2	% 10.8	% 5.4	2
		111	44	46	26	13	
2	I discover new ideas due to the feedback I receive .from teacher	% 38.8	% 19.2	% 25.8	% 10.4	% 5.8	2
		93	46	62	25	14	
3	I discuss my writing with my peers before submitting it to the .teacher	% 30.8	% 13.8	% 35.8	% 11.7	% 7.9	3
		74	33	86	28	19	
4	The feedback I receive from my teacher does not hinder me from expressing my thought in my .own voice	% 26.7	% 20.4	% 25.4	% 12.1	% 15.0	3
		64	49	61	29	36	
5	The feedback I receive focuses on the unity and coherence of the text I produce rather on error correction	% 25.8	% 15.8	% 28.8	% 15.4	% 14.2	3
		62	38	69	37	34	

Results in the table above states that most of the students receive feedback from their teachers at several stages during their writing. The students claim that this feedback helps them discover new ideas which help them improve their writing. The results also show that the students do not discuss their writing with peers before editing the final version. This may be due to the way writing

is treated in most of the EFL learning settings. In most EFL settings, students are asked to write about a particular topic and the instructor collects what they have written to be marked. Writing needs to be treated as a process in which students revise what they produce several times before they submit the final version. During this process, they discuss their writings with both the teacher and their peers. Unless teachers highlight the importance of peer discussion in writing, the students will not benefit from this issue of learning. Explicit instruction on the advantages of peer discussion may help the students recognize the sort of the benefit they get in this respect. The students assert that the feedback they get from the teacher does not hinder them from discussing their thoughts in their own voice. The students maintain that the feedback they receive from their teachers focuses on error correction rather than on the unity and coherence of the texts they produce. In the interview the students assumed that the feedback they receive from their teachers encourages them to exert more effort during their process of writing. They asserted that they feel more motivated to improve when they read the feedback. The students reported that the feedback is provided in a supportive and respectful way. They also admitted that the feedback they receive makes them feel confident about their ability to improve. They never feel discouraged when they receive feedback on their writing. However, some students state that their teachers only praise them when they perform well in writing. They never receive any written comments on how well they perform in writing tasks. A few students report that the teach-

ers are interested in grammatical and lexical accuracy of what they have written. The teachers do not focus on how students develop a particular idea into a meaningful thought. They ask students to be aware of the kind of words and sentence structures they use in writing. Only a few students state that the comments they receive focus on idea development and organization.



Across almost all items, teachers show strong agreement with the importance of feedback in shaping students' writing. Most medians are 2 (Agree), indicating a generally positive and consistent stance toward constructive, supportive, and purposeful feedback.

Only Item 5 shows a median of 3 (No opinion), suggesting some uncertainty or divided views there. Taken together, these patterns help contextualize how feedback is perceived and applied in instructional practice. The findings indicate that teacher feedback is generally effective and supportive, particularly in promoting writing development over time. However, the results also highlight the need for more student-centered approaches, such as structured peer interaction and feedback that prioritizes meaning and rhetorical quality over mechanical accuracy.

5. Findings

The findings of this study reveal the crucial role of instructive, supportive, and text-specific feedback in promoting students' writing proficiency. Results highlight the fact that feedback should focus on idea development, clarity, coherence, and organization rather than focusing narrowly on grammatical accuracy. Findings also reveal clearly that vague, negative, or exam-oriented evaluation practices have a negative impact on the students. Such practices demotivate learners and limit the effectiveness of feedback, particularly when students' writing development is judged only in terms of the final exam scores rather than by their performance during the course. Despite the fact that both teachers and students report that feedback is delivered at multiple stages and is generally supportive and motivating, some students reported that teachers focus primarily on the accuracy of the linguistic rules in their writing. Other students reported that teachers offer praise without providing feedback that has practical impact on their performance. Furthermore, lack of engagement in peer revision and discussion indicates that writing is still treated as a product rather than a process in many EFL contexts.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that for feedback to lead to meaningful improvement, it must be explicit, focused on higher-order writing skills, integrated into a process-oriented approach to writing, and accompanied by guidance on how students can apply comments through revision and peer collaboration.

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