

Optimizing Writing Development in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) Contexts through Strategic Feedback

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Abstract

Feedback is a central component in second language (L2) writing instruction, influencing both learner development and teacher practice. This paper synthesizes research on teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and corrective feedback to examine their effectiveness, challenges, and pedagogical implications in English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) contexts. Drawing on sociocultural theory and cognitive learning principles, feedback is conceptualized as a social and cognitive tool that mediates learner development. Through a qualitative synthesis of empirical studies from 1990 to 2025, this paper highlights the interplay between feedback mode, learner engagement, and contextual factors. Findings suggest that while each feedback mode has unique advantages and limitations, effective feedback requires alignment with learner proficiency, motivational levels, and classroom contexts. Pedagogical implications emphasize the strategic combination of feedback modes, learner-centered practices, and ongoing teacher reflection to optimize writing development.

Keywords: L2 writing instruction, Teacher feedback, Peer feedback, Corrective feedback, EFL pedagogy

1. Introduction

Feedback is widely recognized as an essential component in language education, particularly in the development of second language writing skills. Anderson (1982) notes that feedback functions as a critical mechanism to encourage and facilitate learning by providing learners with targeted guidance. In the context of L2 writing, feedback serves multiple purposes: for learners, it highlights areas of strength and identifies errors, allowing them to revise and refine their written work; for teachers, feedback reflects their pedagogical investment and provides a documented record of students' learning progress. The growing interest in feedback stems from the recognition that writing, unlike oral communication, requires extended opportunities for reflection, revision, and iterative improvement.

Feedback in L2 writing manifests in various forms, including teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, and teacher-student conferencing, each of which carries distinct benefits and challenges. Teacher-written feedback remains the most traditional and widely utilized mode, offering detailed guidance on both language form and content organization. Hyland (2023) categorizes common teacher-written feedback methods into commentary, rubrics, minimal marking, taped commentary, and electronic feedback. These methods enable teachers to address grammatical, lexical, and structural issues, while also providing evaluative and constructive commentary that supports learners' metacognitive awareness. However, the effectiveness of teacher-written feedback is contingent upon learners' capacity to understand, internalize, and act on the guidance provided. Research by Hyland (1998) suggests that while feedback can facilitate writing improvement, discrepancies often arise between teachers' intentions and students' actual engagement with feedback.

Peer feedback represents an alternative approach that promotes collaborative learning and learner autonomy. By reviewing and responding to peers' writing, students develop critical reading skills and heighten their awareness of linguistic and rhetorical conventions. This interactive mode creates a social context for writing evaluation, allowing learners to experiment with different perspectives and engage in dialogic negotiation of meaning (Hyland, 2023). While peer feedback offers valuable opportunities for cognitive and social development, its efficacy is moderated by students' proficiency, motivation, and cultural norms, as observed in studies where students hesitate to critique peers due to concerns about maintaining group harmony (Rollinson, 2015).

Teacher-student conferencing, another interactive mode, provides direct, individualized guidance and immediate clarification. Such face-to-face interactions support scaffolding within learners' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling teachers to model effective strategies, address misconceptions, and foster reflective revision processes. Research demonstrates that conferencing can enhance learners' writing proficiency, particularly for lower-proficiency students who benefit from immediate feedback and personalized guidance (Sui, 2008). Despite these advantages, conferencing is time-intensive and may be less feasible in large classes, necessitating careful planning to optimize its pedagogical impact.

Error correction represents another fundamental aspect of L2 feedback, encompassing both direct correction - where teachers provide explicit corrections - and indirect correction - where learners identify and amend errors themselves. Debate persists regarding the relative effectiveness of these approaches. Some studies suggest that direct correction may hinder self-regulated learning by promoting dependency, whereas indirect correction encourages learners to engage in metacognitive problem-solving and long-term skill development (Ferris, 2016). Consequently, effective feedback strategies often integrate multiple modalities to balance accuracy-focused guidance with opportunities for autonomous learning.

The complexity of feedback in L2 writing is further compounded by learner variables, such as proficiency level, motivation, and learning preferences, as well as contextual factors, including class size, instructional goals, and cultural norms. Students' differential responses to feedback highlight the importance of adaptive and responsive instructional design. Positive feedback can motivate learners to revise and engage with their writing, while negative or unclear feedback may undermine confidence and impede learning. Research underscores that effective feedback not only addresses linguistic accuracy but also fosters cognitive and affective development, enabling students to become reflective, autonomous writers.

This paper aims to explore the challenges faced by teachers in providing feedback on L2 writing and to synthesize lessons drawn from research on different feedback modes and contexts. By examining teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and corrective feedback, this study seeks to illuminate the interplay between feedback modality, learner engagement, and pedagogical effectiveness. The discussion integrates insights from sociocultural theory and cognitive learning principles, conceptualizing feedback as both a social and cognitive tool that mediates writing development. This study further considers implications for EFL classrooms, emphasizing practical strategies for aligning feedback with learner needs, promoting active engagement, and optimizing writing outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Feedback is widely recognized as a critical component in the development of second language (L2) writing, serving both as a corrective tool and as a mechanism to foster learner autonomy. The concept of feedback in L2 education encompasses a broad range of practices and theoretical perspectives, highlighting its multidimensional role in shaping learners' linguistic competence, cognitive strategies, and motivation. According to Hyland (2023), feedback is central to the process of learning to write in a second language, providing learners with the necessary guidance to identify and address linguistic, rhetorical, and organizational issues in their writing. Feedback, therefore, is not merely a mechanism for error correction; it functions as an integral pedagogical strategy that contributes to the ongoing development of learners' writing skills, their metacognitive awareness, and their capacity for self-directed learning.

2.1 Teacher-Written Feedback

Teacher written feedback is perhaps the most widely studied and implemented form of feedback in L2 writing classrooms. This type of feedback typically involves written commentary on students' texts, highlighting errors and offering suggestions for improvement. Hyland (1998) emphasizes the importance of written feedback for L2 learners, as it provides specific and tangible guidance on areas that require attention, enabling learners to understand the gaps in their linguistic knowledge and writing strategies. Teacher written feedback can take multiple forms, including marginal comments, end comments, rubrics, minimal marking, taped commentary, and electronic feedback.

Each of these methods has distinct pedagogical functions and varying degrees of effectiveness depending on the learners' proficiency level, learning preferences, and the instructional context (Hyland, 2003).

Marginal comments, positioned directly adjacent to the identified errors, allow learners to see the exact location of their mistakes, providing immediate and context-specific guidance. End comments, in contrast, offer a broader overview of the text's strengths and weaknesses, often summarizing major issues and suggesting strategies for future improvement. Rubrics provide structured criteria for assessment, clarifying the expectations for different genres and helping learners understand the standards against which their work is evaluated. Minimal marking, which focuses on form-based corrections such as grammar or spelling, encourages learners to develop self-correction skills, promoting active engagement with the text and fostering autonomous learning. Taped or electronic feedback, increasingly popular in contemporary classrooms, offers the advantages of convenience, multimodal engagement, and the ability to integrate external resources such as dictionaries or grammar references, thereby enhancing the learners' understanding and revision process (Hyland, 2023).

Despite the benefits of teacher written feedback, challenges persist. Research has consistently shown mismatches between teachers' intended feedback strategies and students' actual reception and use of feedback. For instance, Lee (2009) identifies ten key mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices in secondary school classrooms in Hong Kong, including overemphasis on linguistic form, reliance on comprehensive error correction despite a preference for selective marking, and the limited opportunities for students to exercise autonomy in responding to feedback. These discrepancies suggest that while teacher written feedback can facilitate immediate error correction, its effectiveness in promoting long-term writing development may be constrained by learners' ability to interpret, internalize, and apply the feedback. Furthermore, individual differences among learners - including proficiency level, motivation, cultural background, and prior educational experiences - can significantly influence how feedback is perceived and utilized (Hyland, 2023; Lee, 2018).

2.2 Peer Feedback

Peer feedback has emerged as a complementary approach to teacher written feedback, particularly in large classes where individualized teacher feedback may be impractical. Peer feedback involves learners reviewing and commenting on each other's work, creating opportunities for collaborative learning, critical engagement, and the development of evaluative skills. This form of feedback is rooted in social constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the importance of interaction, negotiation, and shared responsibility in the construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). By engaging in peer review, learners are encouraged to assume an active role in the writing process, enhancing their awareness of textual features, linguistic structures, and rhetorical conventions.

Empirical studies have highlighted several benefits of peer feedback. Rollinson (1998) reports that approximately eighty percent of peer comments in intermediate and advanced EFL classes are considered valid and useful, suggesting that students are capable of providing constructive feedback. Peer feedback can also enhance learners' critical thinking skills, as they must analyze their peers' writing and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, peer review fosters a sense of audience awareness, motivating learners to consider the clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of their writing. Importantly, peer feedback offers a two-way interaction, in contrast to the often one-sided nature of teacher written feedback, allowing learners to discuss ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and negotiate meaning (Hyland, 2023).

However, the efficacy of peer feedback is contingent upon several factors. The learners' proficiency level, cultural background, and interpersonal dynamics can affect the quality and usefulness of feedback. For example, low-level learners may focus primarily on surface errors, such as grammar or spelling, while failing to address higher-order issues like argument structure or coherence. Cultural norms may also influence learners' willingness to provide critical comments, as observed among Chinese students who may prioritize maintaining group harmony over offering direct criticism (Rollinson, 2005). Teachers face challenges in structuring peer feedback effectively, including forming appropriate groups, providing guidance and training, and monitoring interactions to ensure that feedback is constructive and accurate. Research by Berggren (2014) in Swedish EFL classrooms suggests that while peer feedback may have limited impact on grammatical accuracy, it effectively promotes critical awareness, engagement, and motivation, highlighting its potential as a pedagogical tool when used in conjunction with teacher feedback.

2.3 Teacher-Student Conferencing

Teacher-student conferencing represents another key mode of feedback, characterized by direct, face-to-face interaction between teacher and learner. This approach allows for individualized guidance, real-time clarification, and dynamic discussion of both content and form. Research indicates that conferencing can provide focused, comprehensible, and actionable feedback, particularly benefiting learners who struggle with written comments alone (Zamel, 1985; Patthey & Ferris, 1997). Conferencing offers opportunities for immediate negotiation of meaning, targeted error correction, and the co-construction of strategies for revision and future writing tasks.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of conferencing in enhancing learners' writing skills. Sui (2008) conducted a study with secondary school students in Hong Kong, comparing the outcomes of teacher written feedback and conferencing feedback. The results indicated that students who received feedback through conferencing demonstrated significantly greater improvement in writing performance, with qualitative data suggesting higher motivation and engagement. Conferencing allows teachers to tailor their feedback to the individual learner's needs, taking into account factors such as proficiency level, learning style, and affective responses.

However, this mode of feedback is time-intensive and may not be feasible in large classes, and students with limited oral skills or cultural inhibitions may not fully benefit from the interaction (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990).

2.4 Corrective Feedback: Direct and Indirect

Corrective feedback is a fundamental aspect of feedback in L2 writing, focusing specifically on learners' errors in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. It can be categorized into direct and indirect forms. Direct corrective feedback involves explicitly providing the correct form, while indirect corrective feedback highlights the error without supplying the solution, often using codes or symbols to indicate the nature of the mistake. The effectiveness of corrective feedback has been widely debated. Some studies argue that error correction facilitates accuracy development, while others suggest it has limited impact or may even be detrimental to writing competence (Sheppard, 1992; Ferris, 2016).

Research by Ferris (2016) provides evidence supporting the efficacy of corrective feedback when applied strategically. Her findings suggest that indirect feedback is particularly effective, as it encourages learners to engage in self-correction and fosters deeper cognitive processing. Additionally, she recommends prioritizing treatable errors, limiting the number of error categories, and providing clear indications of error locations to optimize learning outcomes. This research underscores the importance of balancing the amount and type of feedback to avoid cognitive overload and ensure that learners can internalize corrective guidance effectively.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present study situates feedback in L2 writing within the intersecting paradigms of sociocultural theory and cognitive learning principles, reflecting the dual social and cognitive dimensions of language development. Sociocultural theory, as conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978), foregrounds the socially mediated nature of learning and posits that cognitive development occurs primarily through interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD represents the range of tasks that learners can perform with guidance and support, but not yet independently. Feedback, particularly in its interactive forms such as teacher-student conferencing and peer review, serves as a scaffolding mechanism that enables learners to navigate the ZPD, gradually internalizing the skills and strategies necessary for autonomous writing. In this sense, feedback is not merely corrective but fundamentally developmental, facilitating the co-construction of knowledge through guided engagement.

Teacher-written feedback, when strategically implemented, aligns with this sociocultural perspective by offering targeted guidance that learners can act upon in subsequent revisions. For example, marginal comments, end comments, and rubric-based evaluations provide structured scaffolds, indicating areas of linguistic, rhetorical, or organizational weakness, thereby supporting learners' development beyond immediate text improvement. Similarly, peer feedback embodies the

social-interactive dimension of learning, as students negotiate meaning, exchange perspectives, and evaluate one another's writing. Research indicates that collaborative engagement in peer review enhances learners' metalinguistic awareness, critical thinking, and understanding of genre conventions, highlighting the interplay between social interaction and cognitive processing (Hyland, 2023; Rollinson, 2015).

Cognitive learning theories complement the sociocultural lens by emphasizing the role of self-regulation, metacognition, and active processing in L2 writing development. Self-regulated learning (SRL) frameworks, such as those outlined by Zimmerman (2002), posit that effective learning requires the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's cognitive and affective processes. Feedback functions as a cognitive tool within this framework, providing learners with external cues to recognize errors, assess the quality of their output, and implement targeted revisions. For example, indirect corrective feedback encourages learners to identify and correct their own errors, fostering metacognitive reflection and the development of autonomous editing strategies. By contrast, direct feedback may offer immediate solutions but limits opportunities for active engagement, suggesting that feedback design must balance guidance with learner responsibility (Ferris, 2016).

Integrating sociocultural and cognitive perspectives provides a comprehensive lens for understanding feedback as both a social and cognitive mediator of L2 writing development. On the one hand, feedback is embedded in the interactive, socially constructed context of classrooms, enabling learners to access expert knowledge and peer insights within collaborative environments. On the other hand, feedback functions as a cognitive tool that enhances learners' self-monitoring, error recognition, and strategy application. The dual theoretical framing underscores the importance of feedback design that considers both the social context and the cognitive demands placed on learners, emphasizing that effective feedback should be scaffolded, contextually sensitive, and aligned with learners' developmental needs. Furthermore, this framework accounts for learner differences, recognizing that proficiency level, motivation, cultural background, and prior learning experience influence how learners interpret and utilize feedback. Research in EFL settings demonstrates that when feedback is attuned to both social and cognitive dimensions, learners exhibit improved engagement, increased revision quality, and enhanced writing performance over time (Lee, 2018; Berggren, 2014).

The theoretical lens also illuminates the differential roles of various feedback modalities. Teacher-written feedback provides structured, content-focused guidance, serving as a scaffold for learners' future writing within their ZPD. Peer feedback, as a collaborative activity, simultaneously engages learners in social negotiation and metacognitive evaluation, enhancing both awareness and autonomy. Teacher-student conferencing combines personalized guidance with interactive dialogue, allowing for real-time problem-solving and individualized scaffolding. These modes collectively

demonstrate the multifaceted nature of feedback as both a social interaction and a cognitive tool. Consequently, the theoretical framework adopted in this study supports the argument that feedback should not be conceived as a unidimensional corrective measure but as a strategically integrated pedagogical practice that bridges social mediation and cognitive development in L2 writing.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative synthesis methodology to examine empirical research on feedback in EFL and ESL writing contexts. Given the breadth of literature on teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and corrective feedback, a qualitative synthesis allows for the integration of findings from diverse studies, highlighting patterns, convergences, and contradictions. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex educational phenomena, such as feedback, which involve multifaceted interactions among teacher practice, learner characteristics, and contextual variables.

4.1 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The review draws on peer-reviewed studies published between 1990 and 2025, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research. Inclusion criteria were established to ensure that selected studies provide empirical evidence on at least one of the following dimensions: (1) the effectiveness of feedback in improving L2 writing performance, (2) challenges associated with implementing feedback strategies, and (3) learner responses and perceptions of feedback. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on oral language development, reading, or grammar instruction without a direct connection to writing feedback.

A comprehensive search was conducted in academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using keywords such as “L2 writing feedback,” “teacher written feedback,” “peer review in EFL,” “teacher-student conferencing,” “corrective feedback,” and “EFL writing classroom.” Additional articles were identified through citation tracking and examination of reference lists from key studies, ensuring comprehensive coverage of influential research.

4.2 Study Characteristics

The selected studies vary in methodology, sample size, educational context, and feedback mode. Qualitative studies typically employed classroom observations, interviews, and student reflections to explore learners’ engagement with feedback and their perceptions of its usefulness. Quantitative studies often measured writing performance through pre- and post-tests, analyzing the impact of different feedback types on error reduction, content quality, and overall writing proficiency. Mixed-method studies provided complementary insights by combining performance data with learner and teacher perspectives, facilitating a richer understanding of feedback processes.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data from the selected studies were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns related to feedback modes, learner responses, instructional contexts, and challenges faced by teachers. Themes were refined through iterative coding, ensuring that findings accurately reflected the complexity and diversity of feedback practices in L2 writing classrooms. Particular attention was given to discrepancies between teacher beliefs and practices, differences in learner responses across proficiency levels, and the interaction between feedback mode and classroom context.

Thematic categories included: (1) the cognitive and metacognitive impact of feedback, (2) motivational and affective factors influencing learner engagement, (3) challenges in implementing feedback effectively, and (4) pedagogical strategies recommended by empirical research. By synthesizing findings across these themes, the study provides an integrative account of how feedback functions in diverse L2 writing contexts and offers evidence-based recommendations for teaching practice.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Although this study is a review rather than primary research, ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring accurate representation of the findings of original studies, proper citation of all sources, and critical engagement with contrasting evidence. The synthesis prioritizes transparency, acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of existing research, and situates findings within a broader theoretical framework to provide responsible and contextually grounded interpretations.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Teacher-Written Feedback

Teacher-written feedback remains one of the most widely adopted methods in EFL writing classrooms due to its direct guidance and authority. Findings from multiple studies indicate that teacher-written feedback provides learners with explicit information on language use, organization, and content, helping them identify weaknesses and areas for improvement. Hyland (2023) identifies five common techniques for providing written feedback: commentary, rubrics, minimal marking, taped commentary, and electronic feedback. Each of these methods demonstrates varying degrees of effectiveness depending on the learners' proficiency level, cognitive capacity, and motivation.

Commentary, both marginal and end-of-text, is particularly valued for its specificity. Marginal comments allow learners to pinpoint the exact location of errors or inconsistencies, while end comments provide holistic evaluation and guidance on broader issues such as coherence and argumentation. Studies suggest that when commentary is combined with clear explanations, learners are more likely to engage with the feedback and produce revisions that reflect a deeper

understanding of the writing process (Ferris, 2017). Rubrics, on the other hand, offer evaluative criteria that clarify performance standards, promoting transparency and helping students align their writing with expected outcomes. However, research also highlights potential drawbacks. Minimal marking, for example, although less threatening and encouraging learner autonomy, may fail to provide sufficient scaffolding for low-proficiency students who struggle to interpret error codes or grammatical notations (Lee, 2009).

Electronic feedback, including online annotations and multimedia comments, offers flexibility and immediacy, yet its effectiveness is contingent upon learners' digital literacy and motivation to interact with the platform. Studies demonstrate that learners often appreciate the convenience of electronic feedback but may be distracted or disengaged if guidance is overly technical or impersonal (Hyland, 2023). Taped commentary can address some of these limitations by providing a more personal, oral dimension, combining the benefits of direct instruction with auditory reinforcement. Despite these advantages, teacher-written feedback poses significant challenges, particularly in large classes where time constraints limit the depth and frequency of feedback. Teachers may inadvertently focus on surface-level errors, neglecting content and stylistic aspects, which can constrain learners' holistic development.

Research by Icy Lee (2009) illuminates the complexity of teacher-written feedback by revealing mismatches between teachers' beliefs and actual practice. Teachers often intend to foster self-regulated learning and comprehensive skill development, yet in practice they may overemphasize error correction, provide insufficient explanatory feedback, or grade students in ways that diminish engagement. These findings underscore the necessity of aligning teacher intentions with practices, emphasizing clarity, consistency, and strategic prioritization of feedback that balances accuracy with content and style.

5.2 Peer Feedback

Peer feedback has emerged as an alternative or complementary approach, particularly in contexts where teacher resources are limited. The central advantage of peer feedback lies in its ability to create collaborative learning environments where learners engage critically with each other's writing. By reviewing peers' work, learners not only develop evaluative and analytical skills but also reflect on their own writing strategies, a process described by Rollinson (2005) as fostering metacognitive awareness. Berggren's (2014) study in a Swedish EFL classroom demonstrates that peer review encourages active participation and critical thinking, with learners benefiting from discussions about organization, clarity, and content development.

Nevertheless, peer feedback is not without limitations. Lower-level learners may lack the linguistic knowledge or confidence to provide substantive critiques, focusing primarily on surface-level errors rather than higher-order concerns such as argument coherence or rhetorical effectiveness. Cultural factors further influence the quality of peer feedback. In collectivist educational settings, learners

may avoid critiquing peers' work to maintain harmony, which reduces the feedback's usefulness (Hyland, 2023). Additionally, inconsistent peer abilities may result in inaccurate or conflicting feedback, requiring teacher mediation to ensure constructive outcomes.

From a pedagogical perspective, effective peer feedback necessitates careful preparation. Teachers must provide structured guidelines, train students in evaluative strategies, and monitor group dynamics to foster a supportive, productive environment. Studies indicate that when these measures are implemented, peer feedback can enhance motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes, particularly when combined with teacher-written feedback to address linguistic and conceptual gaps (Caulk, 2014; Rollinson, 1998).

5.3 Teacher-Student Conferencing

Teacher-student conferencing represents a more interactive and individualized feedback modality, combining the directive authority of teacher-written feedback with the dialogic engagement characteristic of peer feedback. This approach facilitates immediate clarification of misunderstandings, negotiation of meaning, and tailored guidance, aligning closely with Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD. Findings from Sui (2008) indicate that students receiving conferencing feedback demonstrate greater improvement in writing quality compared to those receiving only written feedback, highlighting the modality's effectiveness for both revision of current texts and development of future writing skills.

Conferencing is particularly beneficial for low-proficiency learners, who may struggle to interpret written comments independently. The face-to-face interaction provides opportunities to scaffold understanding, reinforce positive aspects of writing, and address affective barriers such as anxiety or low motivation. However, conferencing is resource-intensive, requiring significant teacher time and careful scheduling, which may limit its feasibility in large classes. Additionally, learner readiness and communication skills influence the effectiveness of conferences; students with low oral proficiency or limited confidence may fail to engage fully, reducing potential learning gains (Goldstein & Conrad, 1990).

Pedagogical implications from research suggest that teachers should provide orientation and training for students, clarifying the goals, processes, and expectations of conferencing. Structured approaches, such as guided questioning or agenda-setting for conferences, can optimize engagement and ensure that feedback addresses both linguistic accuracy and higher-order writing concerns. By combining conferencing with written or peer feedback, teachers can create a multi-modal feedback system that maximizes cognitive, social, and affective benefits.

5.4 Corrective Feedback: Direct and Indirect

Error correction represents a central focus of L2 writing feedback, particularly in contexts where learners expect accuracy and conformity to linguistic norms. Direct corrective feedback, where the correct form is explicitly provided, is often contrasted with indirect corrective feedback, which signals the error and requires the learner to infer or self-correct. Research findings reveal a nuanced picture: while direct correction ensures immediate clarity, it may discourage autonomous problem-solving and limit metacognitive engagement (Ferris, 2016). Conversely, indirect feedback promotes critical thinking, deeper engagement with linguistic rules, and long-term skill development, though it may be challenging for lower-level learners who require additional scaffolding.

Studies such as Sheppard (1992) indicate that content-focused feedback, emphasizing meaning and organization over error correction, is often more effective in improving overall writing quality. Ferris (2006) further supports this by demonstrating that learners can successfully utilize both direct and indirect feedback, with indirect feedback showing superior results in promoting accuracy over time. These findings reinforce the importance of differentiating error types: treatable errors (e.g., consistent grammatical mistakes) may be targeted with indirect strategies to encourage self-regulation, while untreatable errors may require direct correction to prevent entrenched mistakes.

The integration of corrective feedback into multi-modal strategies, including teacher-written feedback, peer review, and conferencing, allows for more comprehensive support. Indirect error marking in written feedback, followed by discussion in conferences or peer sessions, enables learners to internalize correction strategies while contextualizing them within authentic communicative and social interactions.

5.5 Integrative Discussion

Across the various feedback modes, several patterns emerge. First, feedback is most effective when it aligns with learners' cognitive, affective, and sociocultural contexts. Tailored, scaffolded approaches such as conferencing support both linguistic development and learner confidence, while peer feedback fosters collaboration and critical thinking. Teacher-written feedback provides clear guidance but requires careful calibration to avoid overwhelming or demotivating students.

Second, the interaction between feedback mode and learner proficiency is critical. Lower-level learners benefit more from guided, interactive feedback, whereas higher-level learners may gain more from autonomous engagement with peer or written feedback. Research also highlights the affective dimension of feedback: supportive, constructive responses enhance motivation and engagement, while overly critical or ambiguous feedback may generate resistance, particularly among weaker students.

Third, multi-modal feedback systems that integrate teacher-written comments, peer evaluation, and conferencing are most likely to produce sustained improvements in writing ability. By leveraging the strengths of each mode, teachers can provide comprehensive guidance that addresses errors, content, and stylistic concerns while fostering learner autonomy, collaboration, and metacognitive skill development.

Finally, effective feedback requires ongoing reflection and adaptation by teachers. Empirical studies consistently reveal gaps between intended and actual feedback practice, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development, awareness of learner needs, and responsiveness to classroom dynamics. Teachers who actively monitor and adjust feedback strategies, informed by both research and learner response, are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in L2 writing instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the multifaceted role of feedback in L2 writing, emphasizing its centrality in promoting learners' linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive development. Drawing on a synthesis of empirical research and theoretical perspectives from sociocultural and cognitive learning frameworks, the analysis highlights the strengths and limitations of various feedback modalities, including teacher-written feedback, peer feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and corrective feedback strategies. The findings indicate that no single feedback mode is sufficient to address the diverse needs of learners; instead, a strategically integrated approach is most effective in supporting both immediate revisions and long-term writing development.

Teacher-written feedback remains a foundational practice, offering precise guidance and explicit identification of errors. However, challenges such as mismatches between teacher intentions and student comprehension, workload constraints, and potential negative affective responses necessitate careful implementation and adaptation. Peer feedback provides opportunities for collaborative learning, critical reflection, and increased motivation, yet its effectiveness depends heavily on learners' proficiency, cultural background, and training in evaluative strategies. Teacher-student conferencing, while resource-intensive, affords personalized, scaffolded support that aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, facilitating deeper understanding and greater learner autonomy. Corrective feedback, whether direct or indirect, further underscores the need for differentiated approaches tailored to treatable and untreatable error types, promoting self-regulation and metacognitive engagement.

A key implication for EFL practitioners is that feedback should be learner-centered, flexible, and contextually sensitive. Teachers must consider learners' proficiency levels, affective responses, and prior experiences when selecting and sequencing feedback strategies. Multi-modal approaches that combine written, peer, and interactive feedback maximize benefits by leveraging the strengths of each method, creating opportunities for repeated engagement, reflection, and application across

writing tasks. Moreover, fostering learner awareness of the feedback process, providing training in interpreting and acting on feedback, and encouraging active participation are critical to enhancing efficacy.

Future research should continue to explore the interplay between feedback modalities, learner characteristics, and classroom contexts, with particular attention to longitudinal impacts on writing development. Investigations into technologically mediated feedback, such as automated systems and digital conferencing platforms, may offer insights into efficient practices for diverse educational settings. Additionally, further studies on cultural and motivational factors can deepen understanding of how learners respond to feedback, informing more inclusive and responsive pedagogical designs.

In conclusion, feedback in L2 writing is both a complex and indispensable pedagogical tool. When carefully designed, contextually attuned, and strategically integrated, feedback has the potential to enhance learners' writing accuracy, stylistic sophistication, and self-regulatory capacities. Teachers who reflect critically on their feedback practices, adapt strategies to learner needs, and foster collaborative and dialogic learning environments are most likely to facilitate meaningful, sustainable improvement in L2 writing outcomes. This study underscores the importance of viewing feedback not merely as error correction, but as an interactive, socially mediated, and cognitively enriching process central to second language development.

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