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THE ROLE OF TEACHER FEEDBACK IN STUDENT MOTIVATION

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Abstract: Despite extensive research on feedback in language learning, its effectiveness in real classrooms is not always consistent, especially when it comes to student motivation and engagement. This study explores how structured and targeted teacher feedback affects students' ability to understand, use, and respond to feedback in an English language classroom.

A mixed-method approach was used, involving 14 B1–B1+ level students in a language learning center. Data were collected through student surveys, reflective journaling, and peer observation. The focus of the study was on introducing clear and practical feedback strategies, including feed-forward techniques and guided self-reflection.

The findings show that most students were able to identify areas for improvement and felt more confident when revising their work. In addition, students became more engaged, independent, and active in the learning process. However, not all students benefited in the same way, which suggests that feedback needs to be adapted to individual learners.

These results show that structured feedback can support both motivation and learning, especially when it is clear and easy for students to understand and apply.

Keywords: teacher feedback, student motivation, classroom engagement, structured feedback, student confidence, learning outcomes, classroom interaction, learner engagement, mixed-method research, self-reflection, student participation, learner behavior

INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the role of feedback in the classroom has long attracted the attention of educators. Previous research has produced different findings, especially regarding the conditions under which feedback is most effective, which is why this topic is widely discussed among scholars and teachers. John Hattie and Helen Timperley (2007) argue that feedback is one of the strongest influences on learning when it clearly shows students how to improve. In other words, teacher feedback is most effective when it goes beyond simple praise or correction and instead provides guidance that helps learners develop their understanding.

Likewise, Carol Dweck (2006) explains that feedback focused on effort rather than ability can increase motivation and encourage students to continue working even when tasks are difficult. However, some researchers suggest that feedback is only effective when students actively engage with it. For example, Mohammad Nemati and Seyed Azizi (2013) found that targeted feedback significantly improved students' writing performance. This shows that feedback alone is not enough — its success also depends on how students respond to it and the context in which it is given. This idea is also supported by Black and



Date: 17th May-2026

Wiliam (1998), who emphasize that effective feedback is a key part of formative assessment and plays an important role in improving student learning.

However, there is still limited research on how students themselves understand different types of feedback and how this affects their motivation in real classroom situations. This gap led this study to explore how teacher feedback influences student behavior and engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a small-scale classroom-based research design to explore how teacher feedback affects student motivation and engagement. The research was carried out in a real classroom setting, which made it possible to observe how students respond to feedback during regular learning activities. A mixed-method approach was chosen in order to combine qualitative insights with some quantitative data, allowing for a more complete and balanced understanding of students' responses. While quantitative data helped identify general patterns, qualitative data provided deeper insight into students' behaviour and attitudes. The use of multiple data sources also helped improve the reliability of the findings through triangulation, as highlighted by John Creswell (2014).

The participants were 14 students at a B1–B1+ level studying in a language learning center. These learners were selected because they represent a typical intermediate group that is expected to engage more actively with feedback, but may still face challenges in understanding and applying it effectively. The group included students with different levels of confidence and participation, which allowed the study to observe how feedback works across a range of learner types.

Data were collected using three main tools: a reflective journal, student surveys, and peer observation. The reflective journal was used throughout the study to record classroom experiences, teaching decisions, and changes in student behaviour over time. This made it possible to track patterns and notice gradual developments in student engagement. Student surveys were used to gather learners' perceptions of the feedback they received, particularly in terms of clarity, usefulness, and its effect on their confidence and motivation. The surveys included both direct and slightly open-ended questions, allowing students to express their opinions more freely. In addition, a colleague observed several lessons and provided an external perspective on the implementation of feedback strategies. This helped ensure that the observations were not limited to the teacher's own interpretation.

During the study, a more structured approach to feedback was introduced and applied consistently across classroom tasks. Instead of general or brief comments, students received clear and specific feedback that focused on guiding improvement. This included feed-forward suggestions, where students were told what steps to take next, as well as opportunities for self-reflection, where they were encouraged to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Feedback was provided regularly after tasks and was closely



Date: 17th May-2026

connected to learning objectives, which helped students better understand what was expected from them.

The data were analyzed by identifying patterns and trends in both student responses and classroom behavior. Quantitative data from the surveys were used to support general findings, such as levels of confidence and understanding among students. At the same time, qualitative data from the reflective journal and peer observation provided more detailed insight into how students interacted with feedback, how their participation changed, and how their attitudes towards learning developed over time. This combination of methods allowed for a more complete and reliable interpretation of the results.

RESULTS

The findings of the study show that structured and targeted feedback had a noticeable positive impact on students' motivation, confidence, and engagement. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that clearer and more actionable feedback helped students better understand their mistakes and take a more active role in improving their work.

The main results obtained from the student survey are presented in Table 1 below.

Indicator	Yes / Agree	Partial / Neutral	No / Disagree
Identified areas for improvement	10 (71%)	3 (21%)	1 (7%)
Increased confidence in revising work	12 (86%)	—	2 (14%)
Felt less confused about mistakes	11 (79%)	—	3 (21%)
Preferred structured feedback	9 (64%)	4 (29%)	1 (7%)
Active participation during feedback	10–11 (~75%)	—	—

As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of students responded positively to structured feedback across several key areas. In particular, a high percentage of students (71%) were able to clearly identify their areas for improvement after receiving feedback, which indicates that structured feedback helped make learning objectives more transparent. At the same time, 21% of students demonstrated only partial understanding, suggesting that some learners may still require additional support in interpreting feedback effectively.

A similar pattern can be observed in relation to student confidence. A large majority of participants (86%) reported feeling more confident when revising their work, which shows that feedback had a strong positive effect not only on understanding but also on students' emotional response to learning. However, 14% of students did not report a noticeable change in confidence, which highlights the fact that feedback may not influence all learners in the same way.

Another important finding is related to students' clarity of understanding. Approximately 79% of students indicated that they felt less confused about their mistakes



Date: 17th May-2026

after receiving feedback. This suggests that structured feedback played a significant role in reducing uncertainty and helping students better understand what was expected of them in future tasks. At the same time, a smaller proportion of students still experienced confusion, which again points to the need for more individualized approaches.

In terms of feedback preference, the majority of students (64%) expressed a clear preference for structured and specific feedback, while 29% reported that both structured and general feedback could be useful depending on the task. Only one student (7%) indicated no strong preference. This finding suggests that most learners benefit more from feedback that is clear, detailed, and directly linked to improvement.

Classroom observation data further supported these findings. Over the course of the study, there was a noticeable increase in student participation during feedback sessions. By the end of the intervention, approximately 70–75% of students were actively engaged in feedback-related activities, compared to a significantly lower level at the beginning of the study. Students were more likely to ask questions, seek clarification, and participate in follow-up tasks.

In addition, qualitative observations revealed a shift in students' learning behavior. Several students began to reflect on their work independently before receiving teacher feedback, which indicates the development of learner autonomy. Peer observation also confirmed that students became more attentive and willing to take risks during classroom activities, such as attempting corrections or answering questions even when they were not fully confident.

However, despite these positive trends, the findings also highlight certain limitations. One student (approximately 7%) continued to experience difficulty in interpreting feedback, which suggests that even structured feedback may not be sufficient for all learners. This indicates that factors such as individual learning differences, language proficiency, and prior experience may influence how feedback is understood and applied.

Overall, the results suggest that structured feedback can significantly improve students' understanding, confidence, and engagement, while also encouraging more independent learning behavior. At the same time, the findings emphasize the importance of adapting feedback strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners in the classroom. These findings support the idea that feedback can have a measurable impact on learning outcomes, as suggested by Valerie Shute (2008).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that feedback is not effective simply because it is given, but because of how it is delivered. When feedback is clear, specific, and focused on improvement, students are more likely to understand it, engage with it, and apply it in their learning. This shows that the quality of feedback plays a more important role than the quantity, as students need guidance that helps them see what to do next rather than just what they did wrong. Similarly, Sadler (1989) argues that for feedback to be effective,



Date: 17th May-2026

students need to clearly understand the gap between their current performance and the expected standard.

This idea is supported by the work of John Hattie and Helen Timperley (2007), who highlight the importance of clear and actionable guidance in feedback. In this study, students responded more positively when feedback included feed-forward elements, meaning they were given specific directions for improvement. As a result, they became more active in their learning process, asking questions, reflecting on their work, and trying to apply the feedback in future tasks. This suggests that feedback can encourage a more active learning approach when it is delivered effectively.

The increase in students' confidence also shows that feedback has a strong motivational role. This finding can be linked to the work of Carol Dweck (2006), who explains that a growth mindset allows students to view mistakes as part of the learning process rather than as failure. When feedback focuses on improvement and effort, students are more likely to feel capable of progressing, which can increase their willingness to participate and take risks in the classroom.

At the same time, the results show that feedback does not affect all students in the same way. While most students benefited from structured feedback, some still struggled to interpret and apply it independently. This suggests that a single feedback approach may not be effective for all learners. Teachers may need to adjust their feedback depending on students' language level, learning style, and confidence, in order to ensure that it is accessible and meaningful for everyone.

Another important finding is that feedback supports the development of learner independence. As students became more familiar with structured feedback, they began to rely less on the teacher and more on their own understanding. They showed greater willingness to reflect on their work and identify areas for improvement on their own. This supports the view of Susan Brookhart (2008), who argues that effective feedback should guide improvement rather than simply evaluate performance. In this sense, feedback can play a key role not only in improving immediate performance but also in developing long-term learning skills. This is closely related to the concept of self-regulated learning, where students take more responsibility for their own progress, as discussed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006).

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how teacher feedback affects student motivation and engagement in a real classroom. The results show that feedback works much better when it is clear, structured, and focused on helping students understand what to do next, not just what they did wrong. Most students were able to see their mistakes more clearly and felt more confident when they revised their work. This suggests that feedback can support both learning and motivation at the same time, especially when it gives students a clear direction.



Date: 17th May-2026

At the same time, the results also show that feedback does not work equally for everyone. While most students improved, some still found it difficult to understand and use the feedback on their own. This means that teachers need to adjust feedback depending on students' needs, so that it is easier for all learners to understand and apply it. It also shows that simply giving feedback is not enough — it needs to be meaningful and accessible.

Another important point is that feedback helps students become more independent over time. When students understand feedback better, they rely less on the teacher and start thinking more about their own learning. They begin to reflect on their work and take more responsibility for improving it. For teachers, this means that the way feedback is given really matters. Clear, supportive, and well-structured feedback can make a big difference not only in how students perform, but also in how they feel about learning and how actively they participate in the process.

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