

INVESTIGATING EFL STUDENTS' FEEDBACK LITERACY BEHAVIOURS: WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DO?

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Abstract

Feedback literacy plays a crucial role in the language learning process. It bridges the instruction and the student's development. Despite growing interest in feedback literacy research, no study has been conducted about this topic in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts in Jambi. Therefore, this study explores the feedback literacy behaviours of EFL students, focusing on their actual practices and engagement with feedback processes. Data were collected using a self-report feedback literacy behaviour scale (FLBS) administered via Google Forms to 117 English Education students at a public university in Jambi, Indonesia. Among the five aspects of feedback literacy, the highest mean is for using feedback information (4.87), and the lowest is for providing feedback information (4.51). The findings reveal that the majority of students demonstrate a high level of feedback literacy, particularly in seeking feedback information, making sense of it, and managing its effects. Nevertheless, they rarely provide feedback, especially to peers. This discrepancy highlights a gap between students' conceptual awareness and their active participation in feedback dialogues. The study highlights the need for pedagogical strategies that not only cultivate feedback comprehension but also encourage reciprocal feedback practices to enhance learning outcomes in EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL, Feedback Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Feedback plays a significant role in the learning process, serving as a bridge between instruction and student development. In educational settings, especially in language learning, feedback helps students identify gaps in understanding, refine their skills, and become more autonomous in their academic journey (Dmitrenko & Budas, 2021). The ability to engage meaningfully with feedback has become a critical component of effective education, as classrooms increasingly emphasize a student-centred approach.

The concept of feedback has shifted from one-way teacher transmission of information to student-centred processes. In this context, students make sense of information from different sources (Henderson et al., 2019) through comparisons (Nicol, 2021) and knowledge construction strategies. The emphasis of 'new feedback paradigm' (Carless, 2015) is students' engagement through eliciting and acting on feedback information to enhance future work. Given the centrality of the student's role in engaging with feedback (N. Winstone & Carless, 2019), students' feedback literacy frameworks place individual students at the core of the feedback process (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020). Students' understandings and capacities determine their meaningful engagement with feedback processes and information to enhance learning.

Students' feedback literacy encompasses not only receiving feedback but also seeking, evaluating, providing, and managing it. For EFL students, feedback literacy is particularly important as it supports language acquisition and learning, fosters self-regulation, and enhances communication skills. However,

despite its importance, feedback literacy remains underexplored in EFL contexts, especially regarding what students actually do with feedback in practice—how they actively engage with it (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Dominant feedback literacy frameworks emphasize that feedback is an active process. It involves ‘taking action (Carless & Boud, 2018) and eliciting, processing, enacting, and providing feedback information (Molloy et al., 2020). Therefore, to measure students' practice in feedback literacy, the focus must be on what students do—not just what they think they should or can do. Recent studies have highlighted a disconnect between students’ awareness of feedback and their active engagement with it. Students recognize the value of feedback, but they often struggle to contribute to feedback exchanges. Much of the existing study focuses on teacher-provided feedback, leaving a gap in understanding how students themselves participate in feedback processes, particularly in providing feedback to peers or instructors. Expecting teachers to provide more comments to large numbers of students is unrealistic and ineffective (Carless & Boud, 2018).

This study seeks to address that gap by investigating the feedback literacy behaviour of English Education students in a higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia. Situated in a region where English is taught as a foreign language, these students represent a critical population for examining how feedback literacy manifests in real classroom behaviour. Using the self-report feedback literacy behaviour scale (FLBS) (Dawson et al., 2024), this study investigates both students' conceptual understanding of feedback and their actual practices.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to uncover what EFL students actually do with feedback. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. How are student literacy behaviours in the aspects of 1) seeking feedback information, 2) making sense of information, 3) using feedback information, 4) providing information, and 5) managing effects?
2. What pedagogical implications do the findings have for students' learning

By investigating these questions, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of feedback literacy in the EFL education context and offer insight for enhancing pedagogical strategies that promote active feedback engagement.

METHODS

Research Design

This survey study was conducted to investigate students’ feedback literacy behaviours, so that the educator can understand students' feedback behaviours and potentially inform teaching practices.

The participants were fifth- and seventh- semester students of the English education study program at a higher education institution in Jambi, Indonesia and they voluntarily participated in the study. These students are regarded as having enough experience in seeking and providing feedback during their academic journey. One hundred seventeen students responded to the questionnaire when it was distributed.

Data collection

The data were collected using FLBS, a self-report instrument developed by Dawson et al., (2024). The instrument was selected based on some considerations. First, it is readily available, and second, the questionnaire items align with student characteristics in the Indonesian cultural context. The scales are organized into five factors: seek feedback information, make sense of feedback, use feedback information, provide feedback, and manage affect. To use the FLBS, students use the following scale to

rank how often they exhibit particular behaviours associated with each feedback factor: (1) never, (2) almost never, (3) rarely, (4) sometimes, (5) almost always, (6) always. To learn more about how the FLBS was developed and how the work progressed, visit feedbackliteracy.org. The FLBS is available free of charge under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license.

FLBS was used to assess EFL students' current levels of feedback literacy and their perceptions of feedback. This self-report instrument is intended to measure students' behaviours related to feedback rather than their perceptions or orientations.

Data analysis

Data were statistically analyzed to determine the mean and standard deviation. The mean scores for aspects of feedback literacy in this study reflect the extent to which students seek and use feedback for their learning. Standard deviations were calculated to evaluate the homogeneity or variability of students' responses. A lower standard deviation indicates more homogeneous student behavior, whereas a higher standard deviation suggests greater variability in responses to feedback

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students feedback literacy behaviour

The following table shows the mean of feedback literacy score reported by students.

Table 1. Mean and standar deviation of students' feedback literacy behavior

Aspect	Mean	Standard Deviation	General Interpretation
Seek feedback information	4.82	0.58	High mean + Low SD: students are consistent enough to seek feedback information
Make sense of information	4.79	0.60	High mean + medium SD: the majority of students can understand the feedback information, though there is some variation among individuals.
Use feedback information	4.87	0.63	Highest mean + medium SD: majority of students can use feedback information, though there is a little variation among individuals
Provide feedback information	4.51	0.66	Lowest mean + medium SD: students' ability to provide feedback is considered lower than that of other components, and there is variation in this among individuals.
Manage Effect	4.83	0.70	High mean + medium SD: The majority of students can manage their emotions when they receive feedback, though a minority of them still struggle to do so.

Data show that students have a strong ability to seek feedback and to understand the information it contains (\bar{x} =4.82 and 4.79, respectively). With low standard deviation, they frequently request feedback and use it effectively. It also implies they actively seek information and use it to improve their assignment. This result contrasts with some literature reviewed by N. E. Winstone et al., (2017), which found that students often do not read the comments given to them and, consequently, do not make changes to their work. Though it may seem correct, students in this case do not appear to do so, as they demonstrate proactive engagement with the feedback process. Their consistent effort in requesting, interpreting, and applying feedback suggests a reflective learning attitude that prioritizes improvement. These students value feedback as a critical tool for academic development, integrating it meaningfully into their revisions and future tasks. This behavior may be influenced by the classroom environment and by teacher support that encourage open dialogue between students and teachers.

The most challenging aspect of feedback literacy for students is providing feedback. The nature of teaching and learning, which relies mostly on teachers, students are accustomed to receiving feedback from their teachers. Students tend to feel inconfidence to provide feedback for their peers. Related to this, managing affect as one aspect of feedback literacy also poses a challenge, as it is considered high in standard deviation, indicating that some students still struggle to manage when receiving feedback. As is widely known, feedback is often used to criticise something that does not meet a standard, and for some students, receiving that kind of criticism can be uncomfortable. Thus, the same rationale would apply to providing feedback, where they feel uncomfortable criticizing their friends' work because they fear of hurting others' feelings.

Table 2. Comparison of mean and standard deviation of feedback literacy behavior of semester 5 and semester 7 students.

Aspect	Semester 5		Semester 7		General Interpretation
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Seek feedback information	4.82	0.58	4.81	0.61	Almost the same. Students' consistency in seeking feedback is relatively stable.
Make sense of information	4.76	0.60	4.91	0.63	A slight increase in semester 7. Students in semester 7 are more able to understand the information contained in feedback.
Use feedback information	4.86	0.62	4.94	0.68	A slight increase in semester 7. Students in semester 7 are more experienced and benefit more from the feedback.
Provide feedback information	4.45	0.66	4.70	0.64	Increase in semester 7. Senior students are more accustomed to providing feedback for peers, though there is a variation in response
Manage effect	4.82	0.71	4.88	0.71	Stable and high. The ability to manage emotion through the feedback process is slightly better in semester 7.

The strongest point in the data on feedback literacy components is the seeking and use of feedback. Students from both semesters are actively seeking feedback to improve their assignments to support their learning. After obtaining feedback, they make meaning of it, then apply the information from the feedback to improve their learning. Here, students in semester 7 possess better feedback literacy than those in semester 5. With their academic maturity, they are more likely to perform well in all aspects of feedback literacy. Students in semester 7 have more group work and academic evaluation experiences, two contexts in which feedback activities are possible.

Regarding feedback, students from both semesters struggle to provide it. From the table, it can be seen that this aspect has the lowest score, indicating that students are still reluctant to provide feedback to their peers because they are most accustomed to receiving feedback rather than giving it. Thus, students need more knowledge, skills, and chances to provide feedback to others. Many students highlight the benefits of peer feedback, which are worth applying in the classroom, as it benefits both the provider and the recipient. If done well, feedback can serve as a learning medium for the feedback provider, enabling them to learn from others' assignments and engage in self-reflection. In the end, feedback can enhance critical thinking. For the feedback recipient, feedback will surely be beneficial, providing information on what can be done or revised for the assignment. Then, the last aspect of feedback literacy is managing affect. A wide range of management standards leads to uneven emotional responses to feedback among students. They might feel shy when their work is criticized, or students might be defensive when given feedback.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results and discussion above, several pedagogical implications emerge for EFL teaching and learning. Students from both semesters demonstrated high levels of literacy in the first three aspects of feedback: seeking feedback, making sense of information, and using feedback effectively. In the EFL context, such literacy can enhance students' performance in language skills such as speaking and writing. For instance, students may consult digital feedback platforms to review their assignments prior to submission, allowing them to revise errors and produce improved work for their lecturers. Overall, the teaching and learning process becomes more effective when students display strong feedback literacy behaviours.

However, since students have the lowest mean in providing feedback, they need more exposure to peer feedback. Peer feedback is feedback that is given by students to their peers. By designing classroom activities that encourage students to not only receive feedback, lecturers can also create learning situation in which students can provide feedback to one another. These peer feedback activities can foster students' critical thinking skills.

Some studies have already highlighted some activities for providing feedback (Chen et al., 2023; Er et al., 2021; Uymaz, 2019). Classroom discussions or simply assigning students to groups to work on similar topics can promote peer feedback. Since the members of other groups already gainge on a particular topic, they can provide feedback to their peers based on the knowledge they have. Another way is for lecturers to distribute a paper containing specific review points so that students can carefully evaluate each other's work (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). If the instruction of peer feedback is given in structured manner, this experience of providing feedback to one another can truly enrich learning, foster empathy, enhance critical thinking, promote reflective learning, and strengthen students' linguistic knowledge and skills. These are so relevant in the context of EFL, where collaboration and reflection are very important.

Next, regarding the proposed activities, it can be inferred that students need specialised training to develop the ability to provide constructive peer feedback. This is important because it helps students not only become confident in providing feedback but also competent at doing so. Some activities have been outlined above and can be made more detailed in a teaching plan. In addition to the benefits of peer feedback outlined above, participating in the training on peer feedback can help students become more accustomed to facing and managing their emotional responses. Students are to be more professional when giving peer feedback and not take things personally. They know how to handle feedback appropriately. Since the participants of this study are students in a teacher education program, this peer feedback experience can serve as a foundational practice for their future roles as educators. By engaging in structured peer feedback activities, they not only refine their communication and critical thinking skills but also cultivate empathy, resilience, and emotional intelligence, which are essential to classroom dynamics (Chen et al., 2023). In short, the discussion of providing feedback and managing affect as two aspects of feedback literacy clearly shows their reciprocal relationship in students' feedback behaviour.

Again, related to the emotional response to feedback, the common phenomenon of EFL learners' lack of confidence in performing in the target language raises an important issue: creating a conducive learning environment where students can learn in a peaceful, safe setting. Students support each other and feel comfortable sharing and receiving opinions. This approach makes students more competent in the language being learned and builds the skills necessary for academic success and future professional development.

CONCLUSION

Students under investigation are categorized as good in three main categories of feedback literacy behaviour. They have high scores in seeking feedback, making sense of feedback, and using feedback to improve their learning. Although the discussion here only based on responses given by students, and there is no actual proof for the response, the answers seem consistent from the two different semester students. Students from higher semester are reported to have better feedback literacy compared to the

lower semester students. For the other aspects — namely, providing feedback and managing affect — the mean score is lowest for the first, and the second shows a wide range of responses, which gives clue to uneven condition among students. To provide feedback, it is suggested that students receive more practice and experience to improve their ability to give feedback to each other, or, in other words, to do peer feedback. As many studies have suggested, peer feedback offers the advantage of mutual learning among students. Then, as the ability to give peer feedback improves, the emotional response to receiving feedback can be more stable, with the rationale that students are more aware that feedback is given for the sake of improvement, not just to criticise.

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