

Feedback as a tool for academic independence: A study on EFL students' research project writing at NUBTK

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates feedback as a scaffolded, mediational process within the framework of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), examining its role in the research writing development of EFL students at the Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna (NUBTK). A cross-sectional survey was administered to 30 students who had completed EFL research projects in 2024, utilizing a 15-item online questionnaire. Descriptive analysis of the data reveals that feedback serves a dual mediational function: it scaffolds both structural coherence and linguistic accuracy while simultaneously facilitating the internalization of complex academic concepts, thereby fostering critical thinking and argumentation skills consistent with SCT's concept of guided cognitive challenge. The findings further indicate that verbal feedback is perceived as the most effective modality for synchronous, interactive mediation, whereas written feedback demonstrates greater variability in its perceived impact. Feedback also functions as a significant motivational and affective catalyst, bolstering student confidence and supporting their progression toward autonomous academic writing. The timeliness and individualization of feedback were identified as critical moderators of its perceived effectiveness. While this study offers insights into student perceptions, its generalizability is constrained by the cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and single-institution sample. The implications suggest the need for a balanced, multi-modal feedback regimen—integrating verbal, written, and technology-mediated approaches—aligned with SCT principles of scaffolding and gradual internalization. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and incorporate triangulated data

from feedback providers to develop a more comprehensive understanding and to inform effective pedagogical policies and practices.

Keywords: *Academic independence; EFL students; Feedback; Research writing; Scaffolding*

1. Introduction

Feedback is one of the fundamental pillars of learning, especially in regards to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) where students are faced with numerous restrictions such as linguistic, cultural and cognitive limitations. In the academic settings, the element of feedback seems to be inflated in that it is considered a link of what students have achieved so far and what they are expected to achieve particularly in many intricate activities (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) such as writing of research projects. The ability to write in a research format is not only coupled with the mastery of the language but also demanding skills in analysis, planning, and time management which facilitate the learning process as a whole (Ferris, 2006). The current study investigates the use of feedback as a pedagogical approach designed to enhance the level of academic independence in learners of English as a Foreign Language at Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna (NUBTK) which is one of the established higher education institutions in the southern part of Bangladesh characterized with different educational trends.

To be self-sufficient in learners' engagement with academic tasks is a goal that higher education across the World strives to achieve and is an important facet of academic independence. Such learners are good at self-regulation, critical thinking, and problem-solving and can perform competently in both academic and professional settings (Zimmerman, 2002). In EFL settings, where students often encounter additional challenges such as limited access to resources, restricted opportunities for English language use, and varying levels of instructor support, fostering academic independence becomes both a priority and a challenge (Hyland, 2000).

This is particularly important for NUBT Khulna students who have to deal with the problem of learning a new language and at the same time have to write original pieces of work. In the process of researching, students have to research, pull together information, develop a logical line of reasoning, and express the results in academic English—a skill that is often underdeveloped in EFL learners (Lee, 2008). However, feedback can help with these issues, since it is an integral part of teaching and aims at helping students through the stages of drafting while encouraging them to have confidence in their ability to work independently (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Unfortunately, many students do not fully appreciate the importance of feedback, which results in them losing a more interactive angle with the information given in class. Feedback, however, is essential since it underscores the learner's weak points and proposes measures to enhance performance. In terms of writing instruction, feedback is mainly about content, organization, language, and argumentation weaknesses and/or

strengths (Hyland, 2000). But that is not all, it can change the entire process that surrounds the writing task. Research shows that metacognitive awareness can also be stimulated with the right feedback, which in turn allows the learners to know what to accomplish with a specific writing task (Sadler, 1989). This distinction is especially useful in the EFL setting, where students have to negotiate between linguistic and cultural barriers. Studies have suggested that there is a transfer of competencies as well as the acquisition of language skills through feedback (Yang & Carless, 2013). For example, feedback aims at shifting students more autonomy and self-regulated learning as they learn from 'scaffolded feedback' adjusting support in response to the learner's level of skill and development (Vygotsky, 1978). Conversely, overly direct or poorly timed feedback can undermine students' confidence and inhibit their ability to work autonomously (Carless, 2006).

In the context of NUBTK, where many students lack access to extensive language resources and experienced instructors, feedback serves as a critical support mechanism. However, the effectiveness of feedback depends on several factors, including the type of feedback provided, the timing and frequency of feedback, and students' perceptions of its usefulness (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Therefore, this study asks the following questions:

1. What types of feedback do EFL students receive during their research project writing at NUBTK, and from what sources?
2. How do students perceive this feedback in terms of its role in their development as autonomous academic writers?
3. To what extent does the feedback process contribute to the development of students' critical thinking, self-regulation, and academic independence?

2. Literature review

As a factor for maximizing writing and encouraging learner autonomy, feedback emerges as a significant way in EFL contexts. Much of the literature suggests that feedback enhances the writing skills and also allows students to develop self-regulation and critical thinking.

2.1. Fostering autonomy and metacognition

In regards to feedback, Tran and Duong (2020) argue about the feedback's role in fostering learner autonomy in the writing classes. In their view, autonomy is not passive. It shows the learner's ability to actively manage their learning with the help of portfolios. The portfolio approach with feedback and self-evaluations helps learners set individual learning objectives and makes them think about their performance. Similarly, Kayacan and Razi (2017) considered the approach of digital self-review and peer review in writing assignments, noting its benefits for students' metacognitive skills such as awareness of organization and content. It also promotes feedback in learning as students have to learn to prepare and submit drafts which are critiqued and returned for further work.

2.2. Peer feedback as a collaborative tool for critical thinking

Peer feedback is yet another critical element that has been established to improve the collaborative nature of learning as well as the quality of learning outcomes. Alsehibany (2024) illustrates the positive influence of peer review practices within the context of structured checklist instruments on writing performance and learner self-efficacy. The learners reported that peer feedback enabled them to analyze their work, identify areas of weakness, and make adjustments to their work, thus increasing their autonomy and critical thinking ability. Trust in peer evaluation, for instance, and language skills are barriers that need to be dismantled, in order for feedback evaluation to be beneficial. However, learners often face difficulties in effectively integrating multiple peer feedback (Hsiao & Rajagopal, 2023; Casinto, 2024). Additionally, Goldstein (2006) focuses on the relationship between feedback and rewrites in second language writing, stating the factors contexts, teachers, and the students are critical for the understanding of this problem. This means that feedback will be effective if it is tailored to the learner's competencies, the teacher's objectives, and the particular conditions of instruction. Feedback encourages action in such a way that promotes dialogue, as a result, students' critical thinking and independence is fostered. This process is especially important in helping EFL learners develop writing skills and self-regulated learning.

2.3. Technological transformation of feedback delivery

Feedback in EFL writing has gone one step further with the intervention of technology. Ebadi and Rahimi (2019) studied online dynamic assessment via Google Docs. It showed that both synchronous and asynchronous feedback mechanisms supported the development of academic writing skills. The digital platforms were underlined for providing individualized feedback and autonomous learning.

Hojeij and Ayber (2022) explored screen-recorded video applications to deliver digital feedback for EFL writing classes. Their findings indicated that this digital tool creates a warm and appealing learning environment that supports learner independence to revise their work on their own and at their pace. Personalized feedback can also make the mistakes of students more comprehensible, thereby making it easier to improve their writing ability. Similarly, Starfield (2019) reinforces the role of supervisory feedback in guiding students, especially at advanced levels of academic work, through constructing writing scaffolds to assist them in their development. This research demonstrates the collaborative and cyclic nature of feedback as supervisors continue to engage their learners in discussions about their research writing and intervene with specific changes.

2.4. Feedback for self-regulation, motivation, and linguistic accuracy

In the research work of Ratminingsih et al. (2018), the strategy for enhancing the independence and competency in writing by the students was through self-assessment. Self-assessment has been done via reflective practices which enable the student to gauge his/her works against explicit criteria and identify areas needing improvements, whereby

one takes responsibility for learning. This chimes with the authentic assessment that nurtures critical thinking and self-regulation competencies highly desired in the settings of higher education.

Aslam and Khan (2020) further emphasized that constructive feedback plays a significant role in enhancing students' self-efficacy and motivation. They suggested that feedback should answer three questions—current performance, progress, and next steps—to guide learners effectively. Constructive feedback promotes self-regulation that enables students to bridge the gaps in their current and desired performance levels.

Research on feedback within second language writing identifies it as important for improvement in accuracy, promoting independence, and enhancing reflective thinking. The emphasis by Bitchener and Knoch (2008) is that written corrective feedback (WCF) makes a significant difference to the improvement of ESL writers in terms of accuracy, which also holds over time when they show that direct feedback combined with meta-linguistic explanations proves to be of most value for linguistic accuracy, recommending its use in writing pedagogy. Complementing this, Pham et al. (2020) further examine electronic peer feedback as a transformative tool for EFL learners, specifically those from Confucian Heritage Culture backgrounds, and find that e-PF can have both global and local advantages for writing improvement, thus encouraging students to develop a more critical engagement with their peers' work and their own learning. This study underlines the potential of e-PF to create an inclusive, non-threatening environment that nurtures collaborative learning and reflective thinking by overcoming traditional cultural barriers.

Douglas' (2016) examination of task-induced feedback mechanisms and their role in vocabulary retention and writing improvement demonstrated that feedback, particularly when combined with high-involvement tasks, enhances both immediate learning outcomes and long-term retention. By incorporating challenging tasks with feedback, educators can stimulate deeper cognitive processing and promote sustained academic growth.

2.5. Conceptual framework

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of social interaction and mediated learning in cognitive development. The concept of the Zone Proximal Development (ZPD), or the distance between a learner's independent problem-solving ability and his potential development with guidance or collaboration, is central to SCT (Vygotsky, 1978). However, SCT emphasizes several key variables critical for mediated learning. The core of the ZPD is the developmental trajectory of a learner; it places emphasis on tailored support, mediation through means such as tools, language, feedback, or even digital technologies as facilitation means, and another important variable within this concept involves

scaffolding-instructionally temporary guidance by teachers, peers, or resources. Lastly, internalization refers to the process by which learners transform external assistance independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The mentioned variables theoretically explain the basis through which feedback enhances the proficiency of writing in EFL settings.

In this work, SCT is combined where feedback is considered a form of mediated learning within the ZPD. Scaffolding by teachers and peers is done through giving constructive comments on the drafts of students in terms of linguistic accuracy, argumentation, and coherence. For instance, the instructor may point out repetitive grammatical mistakes in a series of suggested edits and in such a way that the student can then identify and correct similar errors on their own. Furthermore, technology-mediated feedback, in the form of computer software to provide automated feedback or video feedback from instructors, also end up demonstrating SCT's mediated learning principle. These programs provide asynchronous support, where students tend to interact with feedback at their own convenience and absorb conventions of academic writing effectively.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), developed initially in the early 20th century, has witnessed spectacular development due to its adaptation in a large range of educational contexts over the decades. Initially, the theory was interpreted within the context of child development, with particular focus being laid on the important role of cultural and linguistic tools in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Subsequently, the theory was further evolved to incorporate adult learning and second language learning as well, thus proving to be phenomenal in its flexibility and applicability in diverse educational contexts (Lantolf, 2000). The introduction of scaffolding by Wood et al. (1976) further operationalized SCT by providing practical means of implementing the ZPD in instructional design. Therefore, this is the appropriate theoretical lens for this study. The following is the conceptual framework that guided the discussion of this study.

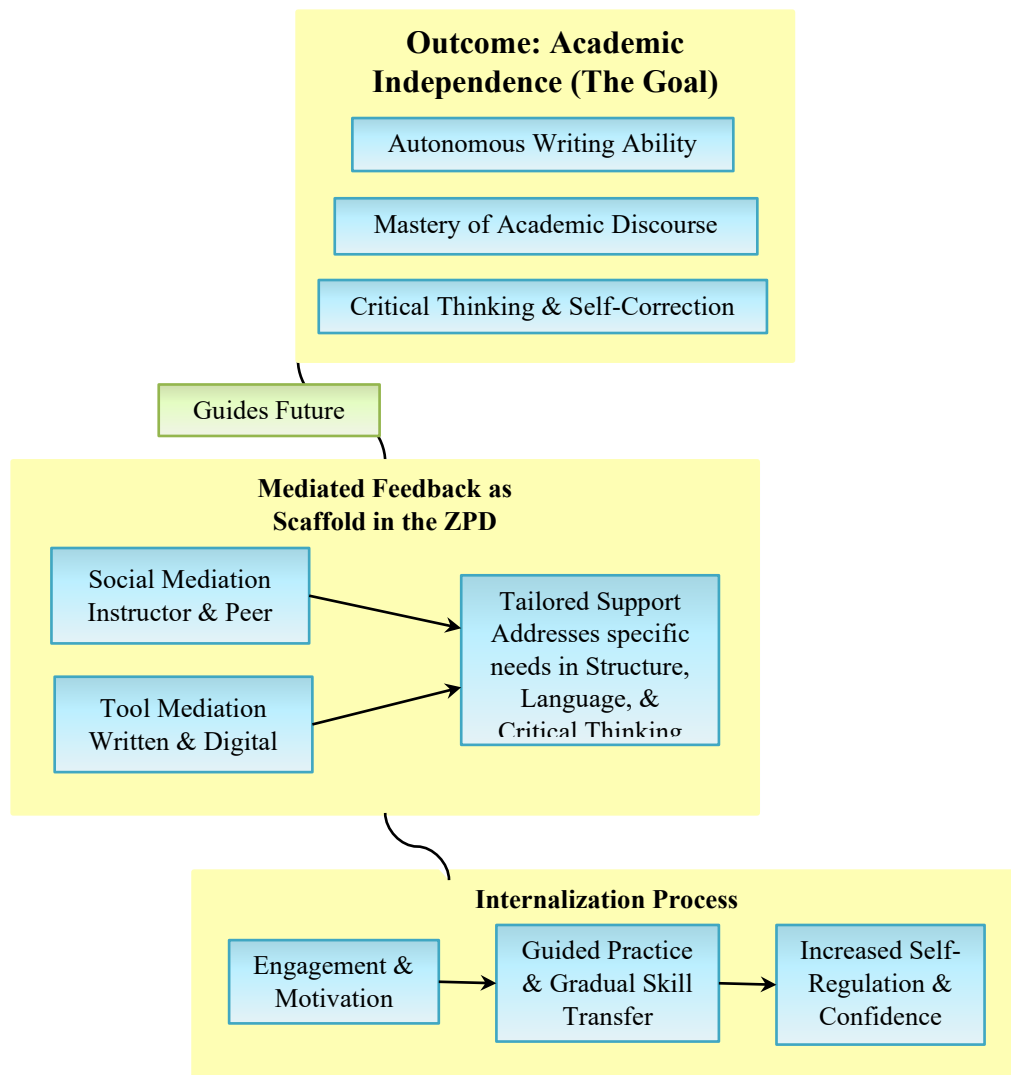


Figure 1. The iterative fading of scaffolding

Therefore, after analyzing and reviewing the above literature, it is clear that no study has specifically examined the types of feedback provided to EFL students during their research writing process at NUBTK, nor explored how students perceive this feedback and its role in their academic development. As a result, this study seeks to fill these gaps. In doing so, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of feedback as a tool for fostering academic independence and enhancing the quality of research writing in EFL education.

3. Method

The research is conducted using a survey-based methodology, efficient and accessible in nature, on the role of feedback in fostering academic independence among EFL learners. A 15-item questionnaire on five-point Likert scale was designed to capture participants' comprehensive perceptions of the structure, delivery, and impact of feedback practices on the enhancement of academic writing skills. The link to the scale

was forward using Google Forms for the convenience of digital technology in participation and for streamlined data handling.

Respondents, a total of 30 students within the Department of English, NUBTK, who have completed their research projects in 2024, were taken into account in the sampling size. Three semester participants were selected in order to include various data, using simple random sampling that ensures the actual sample is taken as representative. This reduced selection bias, as the randomization gave each of the eligible students an equal opportunity to express their perceptions. The fact that only students from the Department of English were targeted reflects the emphasis of the study on EFL learners, who do face specific problems with academic writing and thus need certain feedback strategies tailored to these needs.

Collected data were analyzed using the SPSS robust statistical software package, which allowed a very precise and reliable analysis of the response patterns. This level of rigor at the level of analysis was complemented with data visualization in Microsoft Excel, which helped present statistical results through accessible and interpretable visualizations, including figures. These graphically presented results contributed to further clarity and insight into the actionability of findings on how feedback practices bear relevance to academic independence.

3.1. Data analysis

The analysis reveals significant insights into the impact of feedback on fostering academic independence among EFL students at NUBTK. The findings highlight the multifaceted role of feedback across quality, delivery, and learner autonomy.

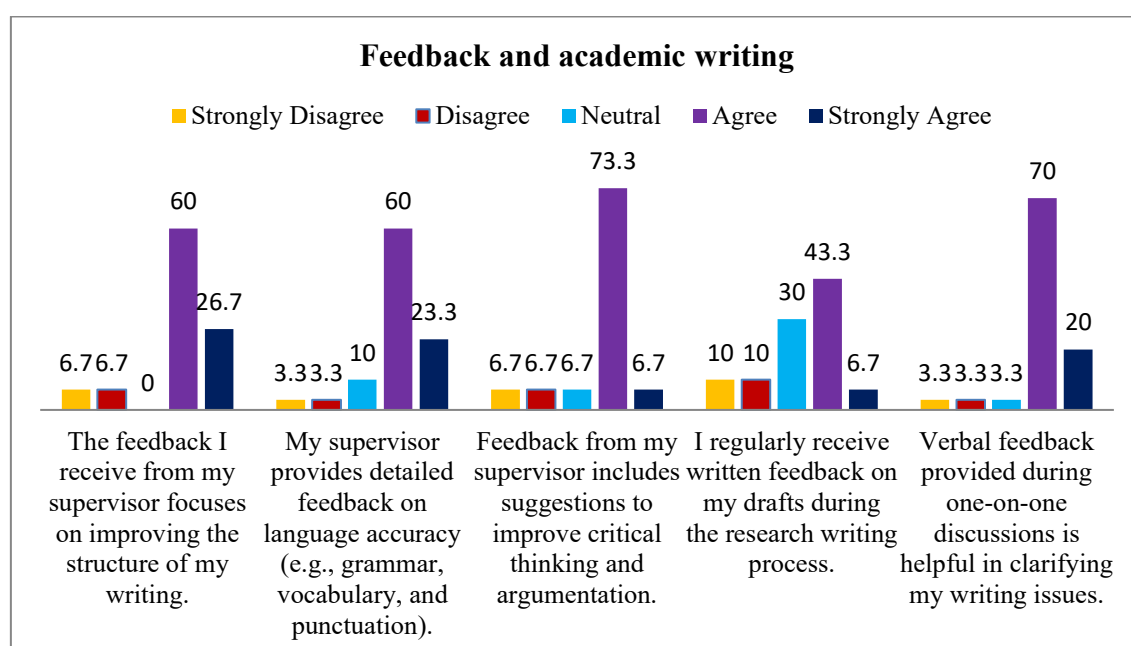


Figure 2. Feedback and academic writing

The majority of participants (86.7%) expressed agreement (60% agree, 26.7% strongly agree) that the feedback received from their supervisors focused on improving the structure of their writing. A negligible minority (13.4%, combining “strongly disagree” and “disagree”) felt otherwise, with no neutral responses recorded. This overwhelming positive response underscores the critical emphasis placed on structural coherence by supervisors, a foundational skill essential for academic independence. The absence of neutral responses indicates clear perceptions about this aspect of feedback among the participants.

Detailed feedback concerning language accuracy (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation) was also highly appreciated and expressed by 83.3% of the respondents who either agreed, 60%, or strongly agreed, 23.3%. A minority of the students were dissatisfied while some 6.6% chose “strongly disagree” and/ or “disagree”, and another 10% gave a neutral response. From the findings, it is stated that supervisors put more emphasis on linguistic precision, though a small gap in perception may indicate that more personalized methods are needed for identifying the particular language problems.

The feedback that included suggestions for improving critical thinking and argumentation received the highest consensus, with a remarkable 80% agreement (73.3% agree, 6.7% strongly agree). A small fraction (13.4%) disagreed, and 6.7% were neutral. This strong inclination towards agreement highlights the role of feedback in advancing higher-order thinking skills, essential for independent research writing. The high percentage of agreement is indicative of the supervisors’ efforts to equip students with analytical capabilities, a cornerstone of academic self-sufficiency.

The regularity of written feedback showed a more mixed response. While 50% of participants acknowledged receiving written feedback frequently (43.3% agree, 6.7% strongly agree), 30% expressed neutrality, and 20% disagreed (10% strongly disagree, 10% disagree). This distribution suggests some inconsistency in the provision of written feedback, potentially reflecting variations in supervisory practices or challenges in managing feedback timelines. The relatively high neutral response rate warrants further investigation into whether the neutrality stems from indifference or actual irregularity in written feedback.

Verbal feedback provided during one-on-one discussions was overwhelmingly appreciated, with 90% agreeing (70% agree, 20% strongly agree) that it clarified writing issues. Only a minor segment of respondents (6.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and an even smaller percentage (3.3%) remained neutral. These findings underscore the effectiveness of verbal interactions in addressing students’ specific concerns and fostering a dialogic approach to learning, enhancing clarity and understanding in the writing process.

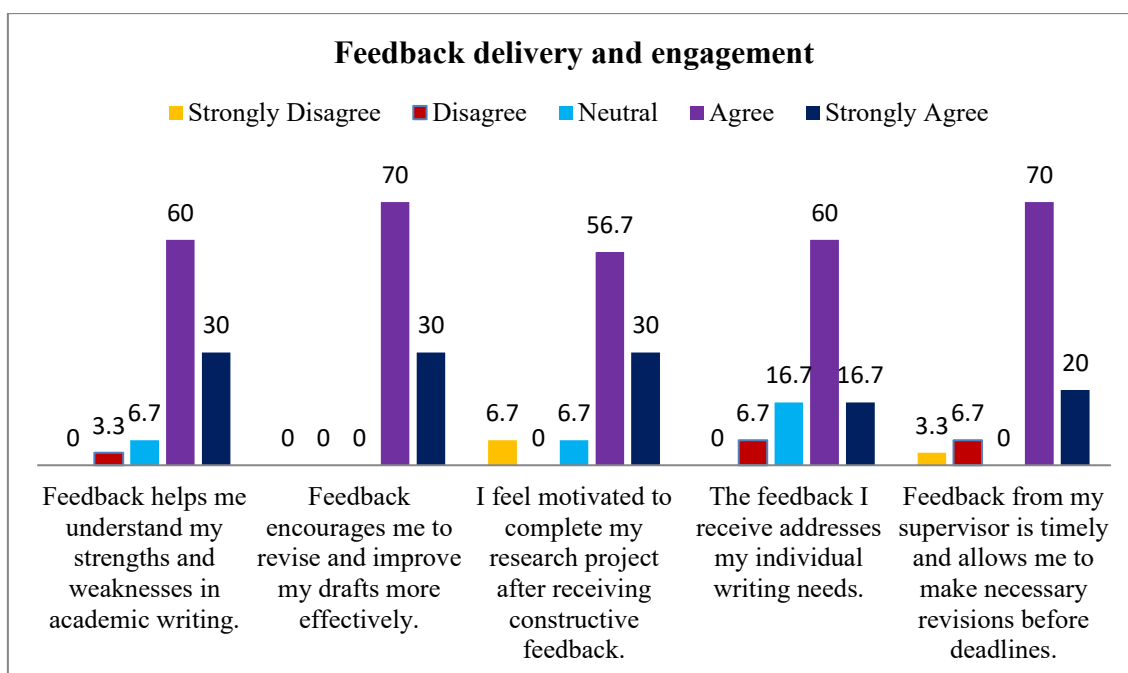


Figure 3. Feedback delivery and engagement

Feedback as a mechanism for understanding personal strengths and weaknesses in academic writing received a positive reception. An overwhelming 90% of respondents agreed (60% agree, 30% strongly agree), while only a small minority (3.3%) disagreed, and 6.7% were neutral. The absence of “strongly disagree” responses indicates near-universal acknowledgment of feedback’s diagnostic role. This suggests that students perceive feedback as a key tool for self-awareness, enabling targeted improvements in their academic work.

All participants affirmed the effectiveness of feedback in encouraging revisions, with 70% agreeing and 30% strongly agreeing. This unanimous approval, with no disagreement or neutrality, underscores feedback’s transformative role in driving iterative improvements. The data highlights the strong alignment between feedback delivery and students’ willingness to engage deeply with the drafting process, illustrating its motivational and practical value in academic development.

Constructive feedback emerged as a significant motivator, with 86.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it boosts their motivation to complete research projects (56.7% agree, 30% strongly agree). A small proportion (6.7%) reported “strongly disagree”, and another 6.7% remained neutral. The positive sentiment emphasizes the emotional and cognitive support that feedback provides, though the small percentage of “strongly disagree” responses might reflect isolated instances of unconstructive feedback or misaligned expectations.

Feedback tailored to individual writing needs received broad approval, with 76.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing (60% agree, 16.7% strongly agree). However, 6.7% disagreed, and 16.7% remained neutral, indicating some variability in the perception of personalized feedback. These findings suggest that while many supervisors strive for

individualized feedback, further attention to aligning feedback with unique student requirements could enhance its effectiveness and satisfaction levels.

The timeliness of feedback was well-received, with 90% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing (70% agree, 20% strongly agree) that it allowed them to revise their work before deadlines. Only a small minority (10%, combining “strongly disagree” and “disagree”) expressed dissatisfaction. The lack of neutral responses reinforces the centrality of timely feedback in maintaining the writing process’s momentum and mitigating stress related to time constraints.

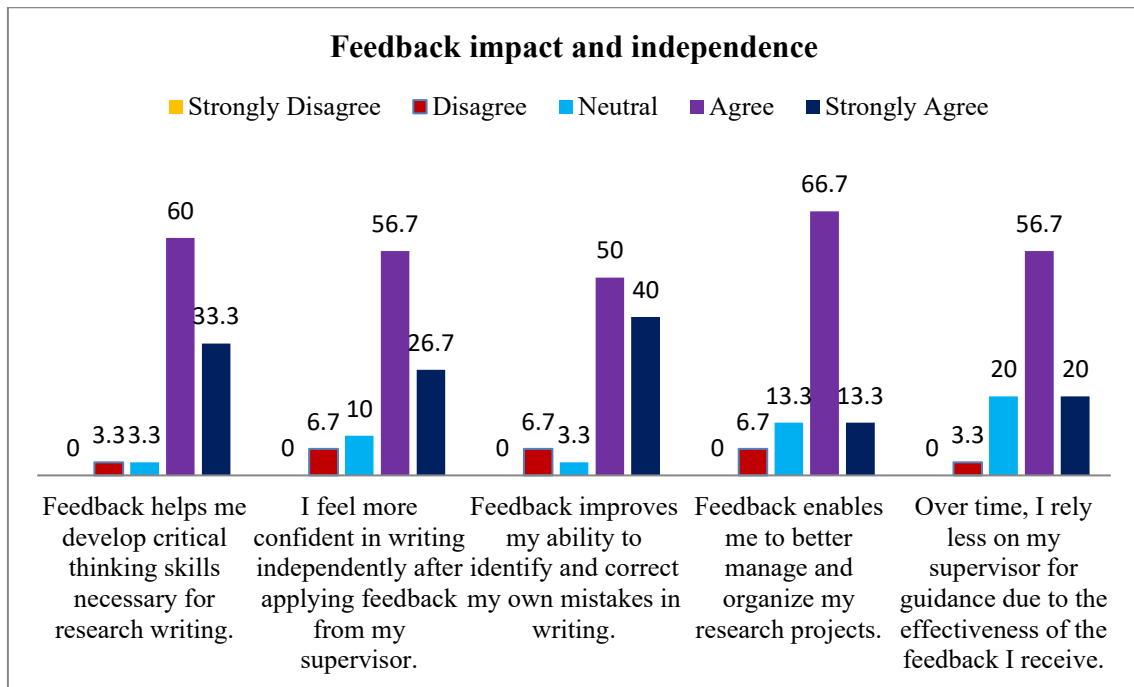


Figure 4. Feedback impact and independence

Feedback’s role in developing critical thinking skills for research writing received strong support, with 93.3% of respondents agreeing (60% agree, 33.3% strongly agree). Only 3.3% disagreed, and another 3.3% were neutral. The overwhelmingly positive reception highlights that feedback significantly contributes to cultivating higher-order thinking, enabling students to approach research writing with greater analytical depth and creativity.

A substantial 83.4% of participants (56.7% agree, 26.7% strongly agree) reported feeling more confident in their ability to write independently after applying feedback from their supervisors. However, 6.7% disagreed, and 10% remained neutral. While the majority found feedback empowering, the presence of neutrality and disagreement suggests that not all students experience the same level of growth, potentially due to variations in feedback quality or personal learning styles.

Feedback’s impact on students’ ability to self-correct and identify their writing mistakes was highly regarded, with 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing (50% agree, 40% strongly agree). Only 6.7% disagreed, and 3.3% remained neutral. These results

underscore feedback's instrumental role in fostering self-editing skills, a critical aspect of academic independence and long-term writing competency.

A strong majority of respondents (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that feedback helps them better manage and organize their research projects (66.7% agree, 13.3% strongly agree). A smaller proportion expressed disagreement (6.7%), and 13.3% remained neutral. These findings suggest that while most students find feedback beneficial for structuring their research, a minority may require additional support in applying feedback to organizational tasks.

The effectiveness of feedback in reducing reliance on supervisors over time was acknowledged by 76.7% of participants (56.7% agree, 20% strongly agree). A notable 20% reported neutrality, and 3.3% disagreed. The data indicates that while feedback generally fosters independence, some students may still rely on their supervisors, pointing to varying levels of readiness or comfort in assuming full autonomy.

4. Findings and discussion

Feedback, as a scaffold is a dynamic process in the ZPD, allowing for the transition of students from reliance on direction to autonomous writing ability. The results of this study are closely consistent with the principles of SCT, illustrating how feedback acts as a mediator of intellectual and skill development in academic writing. The evidence points to the role of feedback as both social and change-producing mechanism, supporting the theoretical underpinnings of SCT in second language acquisition and research project writing.

The impact of feedback on structure, linguistic correctness, and critical thinking illustrates its function as an external mediator within the ZPD. Most of the participants, 86.7%, confirmed that feedback from their supervisors enhanced the structural organization of their writing. This evidence underscores the scaffolding function of feedback so that students will internalize higher academic structures in the long run. The mean score for structural feedback lies firmly in the positive range (mean = 4.0), with a mode of 4, indicating a consistent pattern of agreement. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs most effectively when external assistance is tailored to the learner's developmental level, and the data suggests that supervisors' interventions align well with students' ZPDs in this regard. This customized scaffolding enables the step-by-step internalization of structural rules among students, effectively converting external assistance into autonomous skills.

Feedback also reveals its ubiquitous impact in another area, that of linguistic correctness. The findings indicate that 83.3% of the students recognize the significance of overall feedback in relation to grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation, with a strong focus on linguistic correctness. The mode of 4 also illustrates the prevailing trend of concurrence, while the mean score of 4.0 confirms the reliability of the answers. The focus on language is an expression of the SCT principle of mediation, whereby linguistic resources are assumed to be at the core of cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Feedback

is a linguistic support for learners to detect and correct their own mistakes. This process increasingly facilitates internalization as students apply these linguistic standards on their own—a key characteristic of mediated learning in SCT. As Lantolf (2000) illustrates, this kind of scaffolding is especially useful in second language acquisition, where learners are guided by explicit, specific interventions.

Critical thinking and argumentation are higher-order skills that align closely with the upper limits of the ZPD, requiring sophisticated scaffolding. The data reveals a strong consensus (80% agreement) on the effectiveness of feedback in fostering these skills. The median response of 4 and the mode of 4 indicate a generally positive perception, with a mean of 3.8 suggesting slight variability. SCT posits that tasks within the ZPD are those that challenge learners yet remain achievable with appropriate support (Vygotsky, 1978). Feedback addressing critical thinking embodies this principle, guiding learners to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize ideas while gradually reducing reliance on external input. Wood et al.'s (1976) conceptualization of scaffolding emphasizes the importance of strategic intervention, and the data suggests that supervisors effectively apply this strategy to enhance students' analytical capabilities.

This is further underlined by the interaction of verbal and written feedback, as mediation with different tools is stated by SCT. While verbal feedback was endorsed by 90% to provide immediate, interactive scaffolding that matches closely with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction, the results for written feedback show larger variability with 50% agreement and a substantial neutral response of 30%. The mean score for written feedback stands at 3.3, showing less uniformity of perceptions. This dichotomy simultaneously shows the duality of feedback: synchronous (verbal) and asynchronous (written) serving different aspects of the ZPD. Verbal feedback provides instant clarification, thus enabling dynamic collaboration, while written feedback enables asynchronous engagement, allowing students to revisit internalized guidance at their own pace. These findings align with SCT on the principle that the use of multiple mediational tools enhances learning through accommodation for different learner needs (Lantolf, 2000).

This study also looks at how feedback functions in the motivational dimension, a less-discussed yet equally effective component of SCT. Feedback was proved to be one of the strong motivators whereby 86.7% of the respondents claimed that helpful comments encouraged them to continue with their research project. The mean score of 4.1 and the mode "Agree" reflect emotional and cognitive scaffolding given through feedback that boosts the level of confidence and persistence of students. This finding aligns with Dörnyei's (2001) work on motivation in second language learning, which identifies feedback as a critical factor in sustaining learner effort and engagement (Jiang, 2025; Hafidhoh & Agus, 2025).

Confidence in independent writing, another SCT-derived outcome, was reported by 83.4% of participants. A mean score of 3.9 suggests that while most students feel empowered by feedback, a minority (6.7%) expressed dissatisfaction, and 10% remained

neutral. This variability could reflect differences in feedback quality or individual readiness to internalize external guidance. This finding suggests that “engagement with corrective feedback is shaped by efforts, beliefs, talents, and past experiences” (Sari et al., 2025, p. 1270). Supervisors may need to tailor their approaches to ensure that all students can transition from dependence to independence effectively.

However, personalized and timely feedback scores are all over the place, which raises some concerns about scaffolding consistency. For instance, though 76.7% agreed that feedback met individual needs, 16.7% remained neutral, while 6.7% of the participants disagreed. In the same way, while 90% agreed that feedback was timely, 10% were dissatisfied. That means that even though feedback is generally in line with the principles of SCT, inconsistencies in delivery may compromise its effectiveness for some learners. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the need for scaffolding that is differentiated and responsive; the data presented here indicate that supervisors may be in need of more systematic methods to ensure equity in feedback. Technology-mediated feedback—for instance, automated or asynchronous platforms can help fill such gaps by offering regular, individualized support to supplement traditional means (Luo & Yusuf, 2025).

The development of independence is the ultimate aim of feedback within the ZPD, and data supports this process. 76.7% agreed that effective feedback lessened their dependency on supervisors over time. The mean score is 3.8, and the mode is 4, showing a good trend, but the 20% neutrals may mean that sometimes students struggle in coming out totally independent. According to SCT, internalization should occur with the gradual withdrawal of scaffolding. The results indicate that there is considerable variation in learners’ development and how learners pass through the internalization process. Supervisors can thus explore using reflective approaches such as self-assessment or peer review to enhance the student’s process of becoming an independent learner. These findings also resonate with the claims by Lantolf and Poehner (2014), which identified feedback as constitutive for developing autonomous learning within the ZPD. In this respect, supervisors’ ability to offer focused, scaffolded support which is gradually withdrawn is crucial for achieving this outcome.

From the viewpoint of SCT, feedback ceases to appear as a corrective measure but rather as an interactive and collaborative process in bringing out academic identities among learners. The findings thus reaffirm Vygotsky’s vision of learning as a socially mediated process wherein interaction, guidance, and internalization merge into empowering learners within their ZPDs. With the continuous evolution of EFL education, this study has shown that SCT is very relevant in the design of feedback practices that are nurturing of both competence and independence so that learners will be prepared to tackle the challenges of academic writing with assurance and skill.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the complex interplay between theoretical principles and practical application in second language acquisition, focusing on feedback as a

mediational tool within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for EFL students at NUBTK. Findings demonstrate that feedback facilitates the transition from actual to potential developmental levels by enhancing structural coherence, linguistic accuracy, critical thinking, and self-editing abilities. Results confirm feedback's multidimensional role, with most participants recognizing its constructive impact—consistent with SCT's emphasis on social mediation and scaffolding. However, variability in feedback consistency and individualization revealed challenges in applying theoretical ideals to diverse learner contexts, aligning with prior research indicating that mediated learning outcomes depend heavily on instructional quality (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Feedback also exhibited motivational and organizational dimensions, supporting students' growing autonomy and confidence—key indicators of skill internalization. Nevertheless, neutral and negative responses regarding timeliness and individualization underscore the dynamic nature of the ZPD and the need for adaptive instructional strategies. These findings carry significant implications. Tutors should provide tailored, constructive feedback aligned with individual developmental trajectories. Blending written and verbal feedback—complemented by technology-mediated tools such as automated checkers or video commentary—can support diverse learning preferences and enable asynchronous scaffolding. Institutional policies should integrate cognitive and affective dimensions of feedback, supported by continuous professional development for supervisors. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, include qualitative methods, and explore peer feedback dynamics to further elucidate feedback's role in fostering long-term academic autonomy. In conclusion, this study reaffirms feedback's transformative potential within an SCT framework, positioning it as essential for EFL learners' academic development. By harmonizing theoretical insight with responsive pedagogy, educators can better support students in achieving advanced writing proficiency and intellectual independence.

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