9. Students' engagement with feedback: Current understanding and future directions

Jessica To (National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0264-3160

Anastasiya A. Lipnevich (Queens College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA)
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0190-8689

Kelvin Tan Heng Kiat (National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0282-4225

Introduction

In this final chapter of our edited volume on instructional feedback, we take the opportunity to reflect upon the distinctive qualities that set our book apart from the existing literature in the field. While acknowledging the wealth of knowledge already available, we invite readers to explore the journey we have undertaken. One of the key aspects that sets our work apart is the unique context from which it emerges, specifically the examination-based culture of Singapore. This unique backdrop shapes our exploration, offering insights into feedback practices within this context and fostering a rich understanding of the interplay between assessment and learning. With this chapter, we aim to highlight the significance and relevance of our book, providing a compelling case for why it deserves the attention of scholars, practitioners, and researchers seeking to enhance feedback practices in educational settings. We also take the time to reflect upon our future goals as both researchers and practitioners of feedback.

In recent feedback literature, there has been a growing call for a shift from transmission-focused approaches to more learning-oriented practices (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Winstone & Carless, 2019). However, despite this theoretical transition, the practical implications for both

teachers and students remain largely unexplored. For teachers, this shift challenges their traditional approach of focusing on error identification and correction, raising questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of such practices (Lee, 2017). It also calls for a reconceptualization of students as active agents in the feedback process, promoting their understanding of success criteria and their ability to make sense of and apply feedback (Wiliam, 2018). Teachers' concerns revolve around transforming their individual feedback practices into a coherent feedback pedagogy. On the other hand, for students, this shift underscores the importance of their active involvement in seeking, interpreting, and using feedback to regulate their own learning (Nicol, 2022). Notably, students' engagement with feedback is influenced by factors such as motivation, affect, and agency (Winstone et al., 2017; Lipnevich and colleagues, 2016; 2022).

In order to effectively navigate the shift towards a new way of construing feedback, it is essential to explore some of the critical aspects of this transition: the components of a feedback pedagogy, the role of students' emotions and their general receptivity to feedback, and the unique perspectives of both students and teachers on feedback. In the forthcoming sections, we will provide a summary of findings in each of these areas and present key insights for educators to consider and reflect upon. By delving into these topics, we aim to equip teachers and students with valuable knowledge and practical implications that can enhance their engagement with feedback and contribute to more meaningful learning experiences.

Feedback pedagogy

By conceptualising feedback as a pedagogy, feedback is not simply post-task information about level of performance but a process that develops students' capabilities to understand and utilise feedback for performance enhancement and academic regulation. Chapter 5 discusses the three main phases of a feedback pedagogy and illustrates the pedagogy with school examples. These three phases echo Sadler's (1989) key conditions for effective feedback and Hattie and Timperley's (2007) feedback model. Particularly, the pre-feedback phase acquaints students with task requirements and assessment standards to aid students' goal-setting and self-monitoring of performance. The process phase gives them an opportunity to identify performance gaps and

generate internal feedback for self-regulation. The post-feedback phase involves students in different reinforcement activities to derive reflective insights from teacher feedback.

With this approach, the bulk of teachers' effort is dedicated to offering pre-task guidance to adequately prepare students for the forthcoming feedback and to facilitate post-feedback activities that encourage students' thoughtful reflection on their performance. Some teachers may express apprehension regarding the increased workload associated with providing additional support before and after delivering feedback. However, it is crucial to recognize that these three phases of instruction are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The pre-task guidance serves as a catalyst for students' active engagement during the feedback phase, whereas the post-feedback activities serve to solidify students' learning from the feedback. As subject teams accumulate more experience with the feedback pedagogy, the resources utilised in the pre- and post-feedback phases can be shared among teachers, potentially reducing their individual preparation time.

Although Chapter 5 places emphasis on teachers' pedagogical actions in different phases, students' voice is indispensable for a productive feedback pedagogy. Given large class sizes and tight curriculum, some teachers may lack strategies to incorporate students' voice in the feedback pedagogy. The two classroom cases of student-centred feedback pedagogy in Chapter 8 exemplify how careful feedback designs could address this concern. The feedback design implemented by the Malay Language team showcased the significance of learner agency in feedback exchanges, as students were empowered to choose the specific aspect they wished to improve. This approach not only enhanced students' engagement with the feedback process but also fostered their motivation to actively incorporate the feedback received. This arrangement also turned the teaching team's attention to the aspects valued by students and helped to customise feedback in accordance with individual students' needs. Similarly, the feedback design implemented by the Chinese Language team took a proactive approach by prompting students to provide their opinions on the sufficiency of teacher feedback through a self-reflection form. This practice not only facilitated metacognitive monitoring among students, leading to heightened cognitive engagement, but also provided valuable input for the teaching team to refine their feedback design and instructional planning in subsequent feedback cycles. These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of well-crafted feedback designs in enabling teachers to capture students' perspectives without requiring significant time investment.

We would like to further stress the importance of integrating feedback into pedagogy and making it an integral part of all levels of instruction. It is critical for teachers to proactively incorporate feedback into their instructional planning and to create opportunities for students to actively participate in the feedback process. By doing so, students become more engaged and take ownership of their learning. Through the examples shared in this volume, we hope to inspire educators to embed feedback into their pedagogy and to embrace feedback as a powerful tool for enhancing student learning and development.

Students' emotions in the assessment process

The black box metaphor in Chapter 2 draws our attention to the intricacy of students' affect, cognition, and behaviour in feedback processes. While recognizing the significance of behavior and cognition in the processing of feedback, we wish to draw particular attention to the role of emotions in this dynamic process. Emotions play a crucial part in shaping students' responses to feedback, influencing their motivation, self-perception, and subsequent learning behaviors. By acknowledging and understanding the emotional dimensions of feedback, educators can create a supportive and conducive learning environment that fosters students' emotional well-being and enhances their receptivity to feedback.

The aim of Chapter 3 was to shed light on the interplay between emotions and feedback, providing valuable insights that contribute to a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of effective feedback practices. Situated in a context where scores or grades are used to define proficiency levels in high-stakes examinations, students' feelings about assessment results impact their engagement, particularly when they receive their results and teacher feedback concurrently. Interestingly, although there are reports that disappointing results discourage feedback enactment (e.g., Lipnevich & Smith, 2009; Koenka et al., 2021), Chapter 3 demonstrates that students with achievement orientation were able to leverage unsatisfactory results to identify the aspects to be improved for exam preparation. This finding suggests that fostering students' coping skills in the face of adversity is beneficial for promoting active engagement with feedback. By equipping students with effective strategies to navigate challenges and setbacks, they are better equipped to approach feedback with resilience and a growth mindset. Developing these emotion regulation

skills not only facilitates their ability to process feedback constructively but also empowers them to view feedback as an opportunity for growth and improvement. Consequently, expanding students' arsenal of self-regulatory skills becomes a valuable aspect of supporting their feedback engagement and academic development in general. Chapter 3 presents a range of strategies that students can use to regulate their feedback-related affect that we hope educators may find useful.

These considerations bring up a few questions for educators' consideration of their existing practices. First, in what ways could young adolescents be nurtured with an achievement-oriented mindset to strengthen their academic resilience? Second, what is the rationale behind the concurrent provision of marks and feedback? Third, is it possible to make students reflect on feedback prior to presenting marks, like the adaptive release of feedback and marks in Irwin et al.'s (2013) study? What guidelines would be effective in prompting their reflection?

Another topic of interest to teachers is how to use praise in feedback interaction. The frequently adopted 'feedback sandwich' model (i.e., beginning a feedback message with praise followed by criticism and improvement suggestions) is claimed to increase students' confidence and receptivity of negative feedback (Molloy et al., 2013). However, empirical findings in higher education show that anchoring learners in praise may not enhance their motivation and performance because the need for improvement could have been masked (Lipnevich et al., 2023). The non-alignment between praise and assessment results also weakens their communication trust in teacher feedback (To, 2016). Chapter 3 unravels the complexity of praise in the school context and reports students' mixed feelings of positive feedback. General praise such as 'Well done' and 'Decent attempt, keep it up' on written assignments failed to motivate their continuation of good efforts because the compliments were not linked to specific aspects of performance or mastery of task strategies. Interestingly, their attitude changed when such praise was given in a plenary session where peers could hear teacher evaluation of their work.

In sum, research evidence suggests that the impact of praise on student performance is more complex than initially assumed. While praise can be motivating and boost self-esteem, excessive or generic praise that focuses solely on students' abilities or outcomes can have negative effects (Brummelman, 2020). Simply layering praise before and after feedback advice in the form of a feedback sandwich may not be palatable for all students, let alone enhance their receptivity to advice. Additionally, students' preferences and what they perceive as enjoyable may not always

align with what is best for their long-term development. Given these findings, teachers could approach feedback with caution, considering the potential unintended consequences of excessive praise or solely focusing on students' preferences. Striking a balance between acknowledging students' efforts and achievements while also challenging them to expand their skills and knowledge is essential. By being aware of these paradoxical patterns of feedback, educators can create a supportive learning environment that fosters students' long-term academic success and personal development. We hope Chapter 3 provided useful context for these considerations.

Students' conceptions and receptivity of feedback

Given the strong association of feedback conceptions and engagement, Chapter 6 discusses how students experience assessment feedback. Their conceptions of feedback fall into three categories, including (i) passive (reluctant to enact feedback), (ii) pragmatic (using feedback for marks improvement) and (iii) proactive (using feedback for self-regulation). A deeper analysis of their conceptions and engagement gives us insights into the design of feedback pedagogy.

Among the secondary schools in our project, a number of students had passive or pragmatic conception of feedback and negligible or superficial engagement with feedback. Those with the passive conception lacked motivation to engage with feedback as they faced challenges in understanding teacher comments and believed that feedback could not improve their work. This could be ascribed to their limited proficiency level to decipher feedback, prior unpleasant assessment experiences, or inadequate scaffolding in feedback processes. Those with the pragmatic conception engaged with feedback when they saw its potential for marks improvement. Driven by extrinsic motivation and instrumentalism, they selected to read the summary statement for a glimpse of teacher evaluation but seldom deeply reflected on the given feedback to self-regulate learning. Compared to their peers with the proactive conception, they used feedback to fulfil their short-term goals and lacked a sense of ownership in feedback processes.

In a class with students having the passive, pragmatic, and proactive conceptions, teachers may find it difficult to promote students' deep engagement. As suggested in Chapter 2 and 6 of this volume, in addition to providing pre-task guidance in the pre-feedback phase, it would be useful for teachers to explain how feedback could be used to achieve short-term goal (improvement

in results) and long-term goal (development of skills and judgement making ability for lifelong learning). During the process phase, a differentiated approach to feedback provision would be helpful. For example, students with the passive conception could benefit if feedback targets at a few critical issues they could be able to handle and is explained verbally to aid their understanding. During the post-feedback phase, reinforcement exercises or enrichment activities could be tailor-made to help this type of students attain success from feedback use. Questions or prompts could be given to those with the pragmatic conception for in-depth reflection on summary statement, for instance 'What are your major weaknesses in this task?', 'What are you going to do to overcome your weaknesses?' and 'Can the skills of this task be applied to other writing tasks?'. In doing so, students could appreciate the value of feedback and use feedback for academic regulation.

Chapter 4 echoes these ideas and discusses the concept of receptivity to instructional feedback. In it, the authors emphasise that it is critical for teachers to recognize and acknowledge that students have varying levels of this personality characteristic. Factors such as prior knowledge, self-efficacy, and motivation may influence students' receptivity to feedback. As educators, it is our responsibility to be cognizant of these differences and adapt our feedback strategies accordingly. Chapter 4 also suggests that by recognizing the diversity in students' receptivity to instructional feedback, teachers can tailor their feedback approaches to better meet the individual needs and preferences of their students. This may involve providing feedback in different formats, offering personalised guidance, or creating opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection and self-assessment. Moreover, fostering a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment can encourage students to be more receptive to feedback and view it as a valuable tool for growth and improvement. In sum, through ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional development, educators can continue to refine their understanding of feedback receptivity and implement strategies that support each student's unique learning journey.

Teachers' conceptions of feedback

Chapter 7 reports a nested hierarchy of teachers' conceptions of feedback: directive (focus on error corrections); interactive (focus on interaction to aid students' understanding); and reflective (focus on students' introspection for academic regulation). While the directive

conception seems to be prevalent in exam-oriented societies (To et al., 2023), the teacher participants in our project varied their conceptions according to instructional contexts and purposes as well as learners' needs and characteristics. For example, to reinforce students' learning in the post-feedback phase, the teachers held the directive conception and explained common writing errors in a plenary session. They adopted an interactive conception by providing additional scaffolding to support students with a passive understanding of teacher feedback, enabling them to develop improvement plans. The reflective conception emerged when they used question prompts and peer review or self-assessment to develop students' reflective capabilities and foster a sense of ownership towards feedback.

Understanding the dynamic nature of teacher conceptions of feedback holds significant potential for teacher professional development. In addition to providing pre- and in-service teachers with foundational knowledge of effective feedback principles and procedural strategies (e.g., error correction and student dialogue), it is crucial to enhance their awareness of the three conceptions and cultivate their decision-making abilities to transition between them for effective feedback.

Throughout the chapters in this volume, a recurring theme emerges: teachers are faced with numerous responsibilities, and being thoughtful and deliberate about feedback is a pivotal aspect of their work. Recognizing the various conceptions of feedback that teachers hold is of paramount importance in order to facilitate the transformation of pedagogy towards more impactful support for learners. By acknowledging and reflecting upon their own conceptions of feedback, teachers can gain valuable insights that will enable them to refine their instructional practices and deliver more effective feedback to their students.

Fostering feedback engagement

The central theme of this volume is enhancement of students' engagement with feedback. To many teachers in the exam-oriented context, the burning question is how to strengthen learner role in the realm of assessment and feedback. From the project findings, we discover that when students' focus is on assessment results, they tend to expect corrective feedback and suggestions from teachers to improve their marks or grades in examinations. They gradually become passive

recipients of information and use feedback for short-term learning. Nonetheless, their dependence on teachers weakens their feedback responsibility and self-regulation capabilities.

Drawing on recent feedback literature, we envisage engaging students as feedback partners of teachers as the direction for future development. As mentioned in Chapter 8, feedback partnerships increase students' participation by assigning them shared responsibilities and some decision-making power in feedback processes (Matthews et al., 2023; Nash & Winstone, 2017). This could be challenging to teachers when the teaching and learning community is structured around power hierarchy as they lack strategies to enhance students' involvement in feedback exchanges. This section provides recommendations to enable partnerships in the feedback pedagogy.

In the pre-feedback phase, teachers could consider co-constructing rubrics and checklists. Through discussing success criteria and items to be included in the checklists, students could acquire a richer understanding of assessment standards. When students have their say in the assessment process, it is easier for them to develop ownership and emotional investment into feedback.

In the process phase, making students articulate feedback needs gives them a sense of control in the feedback processes. Different from conventional practices in which teachers decide the content and focus of feedback, students are empowered to make feedback-related decisions on three fronts. First, they could choose their preferred medium of feedback communication such as written, verbal, audio or video feedback. Second, they could inform teachers about the aspects of performance they expect feedback, like the interactive cover sheet in Chapter 2 or its modified version 'A Letter to My Teacher' (see Keshavarz and Polat Köseoğlu (2021) for details). Third, upon receiving teacher feedback, they could select the aspects of performance they would like to improve in the enhanced version and state their improvement plan, for example the Malay Language students in Chapter 8. We believe all these instances are viable in the exam-oriented setting because students are granted power to co-create feedback and teacher assessment of performance is not negatively affected.

In the post-feedback phase, students could be allowed to express their perceived usefulness of teacher feedback and describe their way of using feedback for improvement on a self-reflection

form, like the case of the Chinese Language team in Chapter 8. We anticipate some resistance from teachers because inviting students to evaluate teacher feedback may challenge the authority role of teachers. However, if teachers perceive this initiative as an opportunity to understand students' problems with feedback utilisation and provide timely assistance, it could be a gateway to rapport building. Some teachers may have concerns about students' psychological and cognitive readiness to make judgements of teacher feedback. Explaining the rationale for this arrangement could relieve students' anxiety, and teacher modelling of how to make a response on the self-reflection form could guide them in doing so.

Furthermore, fostering feedback receptivity among students is a critical goal for educators seeking to optimise the learning process (see Chapter 4). There are several strategies that educators could employ to cultivate a positive attitude towards feedback and enhance students' willingness to engage with it. Firstly, emphasising the value of feedback is key. Teachers can communicate to students that feedback is not merely an evaluation of their performance but a valuable source of information that can guide their learning and growth. By highlighting the benefits of feedback in terms of improvement and progress, teachers can motivate students to view feedback as a valuable asset rather than a threat to their self-esteem.

Secondly, reframing feedback as a learning opportunity can significantly impact students' receptivity. Teachers can help students understand that receiving feedback is an integral part of the learning process and an opportunity for personal development. By shifting the focus from grades or evaluations to the potential for growth and learning, students are more likely to approach feedback with an eagerness to improve.

Another effective strategy is for teachers to model behaviours that demonstrate how to interact with feedback constructively. Teachers can openly discuss their own experiences with feedback, sharing how they have used it and grown from it. By showcasing the process of receiving, reflecting upon, and utilising feedback, teachers provide students with tangible examples of how to engage with feedback in a productive manner.

Lastly, explicitly teaching emotion regulation strategies can help students manage any negative emotions that may arise when receiving critical feedback (see Chapter 3). By equipping

students with these skills, they can approach feedback in a more balanced and adaptive way, fostering receptivity and resilience.

In sum, fostering feedback receptivity requires intentional efforts from teachers. By emphasising the value of feedback, reframing it as a learning opportunity, modelling constructive behaviours, and teaching emotion regulation strategies, educators can create an environment that promotes a positive and growth-oriented approach to feedback. Through these strategies, students are more likely to embrace feedback as a valuable tool for learning and personal development.

Avenues for future research

Despite the growing body of research on students' feedback engagement, there are still countless unanswered questions that warrant further exploration and investigation. These gaps in knowledge highlight the need for continued research in this area to deepen our understanding and inform educational practices.

One area of inquiry pertains to the factors that influence students' receptivity to feedback. Although existing research has identified some key determinants such as self-efficacy, motivation, and prior experiences, there is still a need to unravel the complex interplay of these factors and their impact on students' engagement with feedback. Additionally, exploring how cultural and contextual factors shape students' feedback perceptions and behaviors can provide valuable insights into designing culturally responsive feedback practices.

Another important question to address is the role of emotions in feedback engagement. Recent studies have started examining the emotional experiences associated with receiving feedback, there is much more to be explored. How do different emotional states influence students' actions? How can teachers effectively support students in managing and utilizing their emotions in the feedback process? Investigating these questions can contribute to the development of strategies that foster positive emotional experiences and enhance students' engagement with feedback.

Additionally, research should also explore the role of different feedback modalities and formats in engaging students. Although written feedback is the most commonly used form, the

potential of audio, video, or multimedia feedback in promoting student engagement and understanding remains largely unexplored. Investigating the effectiveness of various feedback modalities can inform educators' decisions on selecting the most appropriate formats to enhance students feedback receptivity.

One of the general assumptions in discussions of feedback receptivity is that the quality of feedback advice, whether from teachers or from peers, is actually useful and accurate. Given that teachers are not infallible in dispensing advice, and in extreme cases there may be teachers who lack subject matter expertise, how can students' ability to discern the quality and viability of feedback be developed? Hence, another possible area of research in students' engagement with feedback is in the context of "engaging" with poor feedback! This involves investigating feedup outcomes for students to compare relevance and utility of feedback against, power dynamics in assessment and feedback and how students may exercise (constructive) resistance, and possibly how students may engage with feedback preemptively with feedback seeking strategies.

All the above suggestions for further study are relevant and important to the need to explore the long-term impact of feedback engagement on students' learning outcomes and overall development. Studies have demonstrated the positive associations between feedback engagement and academic performance, but there is limited knowledge about the sustained effects of feedback on students' learning. Understanding the mechanisms through which feedback contributes to long-term learning and skill development can guide the design of effective feedback interventions.

Finally, an area of significance and of some urgency is understanding the implications of AI-generated feedback in educational settings. As the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms becomes more prevalent in assessment practices, it is crucial to examine how students perceive and engage with AI-generated feedback. Understanding the strengths and limitations of AI-generated feedback can help educators make informed decisions about its use and effectively support students' learning. Furthermore, exploring how assessments can be designed to leverage AI technologies can open up new possibilities for personalised and timely feedback, adaptive learning experiences, and efficient grading processes.

By leveraging AI in assessment design, we can harness its potential to enhance feedback provision, promote student engagement, and optimise the learning experience. However, it is

essential to approach AI-generated feedback with a critical lens and consider ethical considerations, such as fairness, bias, and privacy, to ensure its responsible and equitable implementation in educational contexts. It is equally important to equip students with critical thinking abilities or even tools to utilise generative AI facilities responsibly and intelligently. It is tempting for students to consult generative AI for feedback advice and improvement as the click of a button, with the benefit of detachment and anonymity, rather than wait for teachers to respond with feedback that may not be affectively perfect. Whilst this may yield students instant feedback advice improvements in the short term, there is unquestionably the risk of students being overly reliant on, and overly receptive to, machine generated feedback. Students' engagement with such persuasive instant feedback bears little resemblance to students engagement with teacher and peer feedback, and is worthy of a series of studies in itself.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, there are several unanswered questions regarding students' feedback engagement. Exploring the factors that influence receptivity, understanding the role of emotions, investigating the long-term impact, and exploring different feedback modalities are key areas for further research. By addressing these knowledge gaps, we can further inform the development of evidence-based feedback practices that promote effective learning and growth.

With this edited volume, we have presented a comprehensive summary of a program of research that delves into multiple components of feedback, including the perspectives of teachers, students, and contextual demands. By exploring these various dimensions, we have aimed to provide a holistic understanding of feedback processes and their implications for educational practice. Through the chapters in this volume, we have offered insights into the complexities and nuances of feedback, highlighting its dynamic nature and the interplay between different stakeholders. We sincerely hope that the readers will find this collection of research valuable and informative, offering practical guidance and thought-provoking ideas that can inform their own teaching practices and contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective feedback implementation.

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