



A Review of Student Feedback Literacy in Higher Education: Theoretical Foundations, Challenges, and the Role of Training and Technology in Improving Learning Quality

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Abstract

Background: Feedback is essential for advancing learning, educational quality, and student achievement. As higher education continues to expand, students' ability to interpret and apply feedback—referred to as Student Feedback Literacy (SFL)—has become increasingly critical. This study reviews and synthesizes national and international research on SFL, examining its theoretical foundations, key challenges, and implications for enhancing learning quality through training and technology.

Materials and Methods: This narrative review synthesizes studies on student feedback literacy in higher education. Relevant literature published up to April 2025 was searched in Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, covering both English and Persian sources. Data collection and screening were independently performed by two researchers in two stages. Empirical studies with full-text availability were selected for qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis.

Results: Findings demonstrate that student feedback literacy (SFL) integrates interrelated knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower learners to interpret, evaluate, and apply feedback effectively for continuous improvement. Four core dimensions—valuing feedback, critical judgment, emotional regulation, and purposeful action—collectively foster learner autonomy and engagement. Consistent, dialogic, and formative feedback enhances self-regulation, motivation, and academic achievement. Yet, inadequate training, inconsistent quality, and cultural or institutional constraints limit full development. Strengthening teachers' feedback literacy, employing digital tools that support interactive and traceable feedback, and implementing structured peer-feedback systems are critical strategies for advancing sustainable feedback cultures in higher education.

Conclusion: Feedback literacy enhances students' ability to interpret and utilize feedback, leading to improved learning outcomes. Integrating targeted training programs, institutional support, and digital technologies—alongside teacher and peer contributions—can cultivate a robust feedback culture that supports continuous learning improvement across higher education contexts.

Key Words: Challenges, Educational Technology, Learning, Student Feedback Literacy.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Feedback is widely regarded as a pivotal and influential element in the learning process, contributing substantially to the quality of education and the advancement of student performance (1). With the rapid expansion of higher education and the growing complexity of learning environments, students' capacity to interpret and apply feedback effectively has become increasingly critical. This competence is captured by the concept of Student Feedback Literacy (SFL)—a composite of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable learners to engage with feedback actively, critically, and constructively (2, 3).

Cultural diversity, varying educational backgrounds, and emotional factors underscore the need to examine the determinants influencing feedback literacy in depth. Emotional components such as anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy, as well as cultural attitudes toward feedback, play key roles in how students perceive, accept, and utilize feedback (4–7). Well-designed feedback practices can foster self-regulation, enhance lifelong learning skills, and increase learner satisfaction. Conversely, the absence of sufficient training in feedback engagement may hinder students from fully benefiting from these opportunities (8–11).

Recent pedagogical shifts from one-way feedback transmission toward more interactive and dialogic processes call for the development of updated frameworks and models of feedback literacy (12–14). Within high-stakes disciplines such as medicine and health sciences, cultivating strong feedback literacy among students is vital to improving learning outcomes, professional competence, and ultimately, patient safety (14–18). Furthermore, evidence-based frameworks have been proposed to improve feedback literacy in academic writing (19), and strategies that focus on designing effective feedback

processes highlight the importance of learning-focused approaches (20). Recent validation of feedback literacy instruments supports nuanced and multilingual assessment of student feedback literacy (21).

This study reviews and synthesizes research up to April 2025 on student feedback literacy, integrating national and international evidence. It examines the theoretical foundations of feedback literacy, the impact of feedback on learning, key challenges hindering its effective use, and the roles of educators and technology. The findings aim to inform the development of evidence-based strategies to strengthen feedback literacy and enhance learning quality in higher education.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a structured narrative review approach to comprehensively examine the existing body of literature on student feedback literacy in higher education.

2-1. Literature Search and Databases

A literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including ISI (Web of Science), ERIC, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. Both Persian and English studies were targeted, covering the period from the inception of each database to April 2025. To minimize selection bias and enhance coverage, two independent researchers executed the search procedures separately using different web browsers. Any disagreements arising during the screening or selection stages were resolved through in-depth discussion, with a third reviewer consulted as needed to reach consensus.

Search terms combined keywords and related phrases pertinent to feedback literacy, educational feedback, student engagement with feedback, and associated constructs. Boolean operators (AND, OR)

were used to refine and optimize the search output.

2-2. Screening and Article Selection Process

Two independent reviewers conducted the screening process in three stages: title, abstract, and full-text review. In cases of disagreement or uncertainty regarding article selection, a third reviewer was consulted to ensure accuracy and validity in the selection process.

2-3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

2-3-1. Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed empirical studies published up to April 2025
- Research explicitly focused on student feedback literacy in higher education settings
- Full-text availability in Persian or English.

2-3-2. Exclusion criteria:

- Studies unrelated to feedback literacy or educational feedback
- Conference abstracts, editorials, and commentaries lacking empirical data
- Duplicate publications or inaccessible full-text articles.

2-4. Data Synthesis and Analysis

All pertinent data were systematically extracted from the included studies, covering research objectives, theoretical and conceptual foundations, methodological designs, participant and contextual characteristics, feedback literacy assessment methods, and primary findings related to learning outcomes. To maintain consistency and transparency, all records were imported into EndNote (Version 21, Clarivate Analytics) for structured organization, duplicate removal, and preparation for synthesis. An iterative narrative synthesis was conducted to interpret and integrate the evidence.

Through inductive coding and thematic comparison, conceptual patterns and recurring trends were identified, a process grounded in the widely accepted qualitative method of thematic analysis (22). For analytical clarity, the literature was organized into four primary domains reflecting key research foci: (1) theoretical and conceptual frameworks, (2) impact on learners' self-regulation and motivation, (3) challenges and barriers to feedback practice, and (4) the role of educators and technology in developing feedback literacy. Due to methodological heterogeneity among studies, a quantitative meta-analysis was not feasible.

2-5. Ethical Considerations

This study is a literature review based solely on publicly available data; thus, formal ethical approval was not required. Throughout all stages, strict adherence to scientific integrity, respect for intellectual property rights, and ethical use of published materials were maintained. The review followed established ethical guidelines emphasizing transparency, accurate citation, and responsible representation of original authors' work. As no new data involving human participants were collected and analyses relied on secondary sources, institutional ethical review was waived. The authors remain committed to upholding ethical scholarship, avoiding plagiarism, and fairly acknowledging all sources.

3- RESULTS

This review encompasses a broad range of reputable national and international studies on student feedback literacy conducted up to April 2025. These investigations addressed the theoretical foundations of feedback literacy, its influence on learning processes, major challenges in effective feedback utilization, and the pivotal roles of educators and technology in fostering this

competence. The synthesized evidence offers a multifaceted understanding of the current research landscape, forming a robust basis for advancing feedback literacy in higher education. A categorized summary of key findings is presented in **Table 1**, enhancing comprehension of feedback literacy's various dimensions and practical implications for educators and researchers.

3-1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Feedback Literacy

Feedback literacy integrates knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower learners to interpret, engage with, and apply feedback to improve learning (1). Its conceptual model typically involves four dimensions: valuing feedback, critical appraisal, emotional regulation, and purposeful action. These components transition learners from passive recipients to active agents in their educational journey. Furthermore, this framework emphasizes engagement, dialogue, and intercultural awareness across diverse educational settings (1, 8, 23). Alternative models broaden feedback literacy to include epistemological, ontological, and practical perspectives, encompassing awareness, identity formation, and behavioral engagement (24). Teacher feedback literacy, encompassing relational and pragmatic competencies, complements student engagement with feedback (25). Together, these perspectives highlight the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements crucial to feedback literacy across cultures (26–28).

3-2. Impact of Feedback on Self-Regulation and Motivation

Interactive and continuous feedback markedly enhances learners' self-regulation and metacognitive growth. Repeated feedback cycles refine cognitive and behavioral aspects of learning, establishing a direct link between satisfaction with feedback and academic

success (29). Timely, constructive feedback positively influences students' attitudes, intrinsic motivation, and performance (30–33). Theoretical frameworks, such as Zimmerman's social-cognitive model, clarify feedback's role in supporting forethought, performance, and reflection phases, ultimately boosting self-efficacy and motivation (34). Empirical studies also underscore affective and narrative feedback's role in sustaining learner engagement (35, 36).

3-3. Challenges and Barriers in Utilizing Feedback

The principal obstacles in leveraging feedback effectively include inadequate feedback literacy training among students and educators, cultural and emotional resistance, uneven feedback quality, and absence of standardized assessment tools. Such barriers are pronounced in high-enrollment and resource-constrained contexts, where opaque feedback systems undermine learner comprehension and teaching efficacy. Overcoming these challenges necessitates integrated approaches like faculty development, institutional policy reform, and culturally sensitive feedback practices (37–41).

3-4. Role of Educators and Technology in Developing Feedback Literacy

Educators play a key role in shaping effective feedback experiences through detailed, supportive interactions that nurture learner motivation and confidence. Digital feedback platforms facilitate ongoing, interactive, and traceable feedback exchanges, enhancing accessibility and quality. Peer feedback complements instructor and technological feedback by fostering communication, reflection, and critical thinking skills. Emerging evidence reveals that the integration of these feedback modalities amplifies feedback engagement and learning outcomes (1, 8, 42–49).

Table-1: Summary of Key Research Findings.

Domain	Key Findings	References
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	Feedback literacy comprises behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions emphasizing active learner engagement. It includes valuing feedback, critical evaluation, emotional regulation, purposeful action, engagement, and intercultural communication.	1, 8, 23-28
Impact on Self-Regulation and Motivation	Continuous, interactive feedback supports self-regulation, metacognition, positive motivation, and academic achievement. Theoretical models illustrate feedback's role in guiding learning phases and self-efficacy development.	29-36
Challenges and Barriers	Common obstacles include lack of training, cultural and emotional variations in feedback reception, inconsistent quality, and absence of standardized assessment instruments. These challenges are intensified in high-density, resource-limited environments.	37-41
Role of Educators and Technology	Educators' constructive feedback enhances motivation, while digital platforms create continuous and traceable interactions. Peer feedback strengthens communication, critical thinking, and engagement.	1, 8, 42-49

4- DISCUSSION

This study aimed to review and synthesize research conducted up to April 2025 on students' feedback literacy. The findings reveal that feedback literacy encompasses a constellation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable students to interpret and apply feedback productively. Continuous and dialogic feedback processes were found to foster self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and motivation, leading to improved academic outcomes. Nevertheless, limited specialized training, cultural differences, and inadequate assessment frameworks continue to constrain the full development of this competence.

Feedback literacy transcends the mere receipt of comments. It embodies cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacities that empower learners to evaluate and use feedback proactively as a tool for improvement. Four interrelated dimensions underpin this concept: valuing feedback, openness to critique, emotional regulation, and constructive action based on received feedback (1, 23, 50, 51). Sustained and interactive feedback interaction supports self-regulation,

reflective practice, and engagement in learning (29, 52, 53).

Despite its demonstrable benefits, the development of feedback literacy faces notable challenges. The absence of structured training programs for both students and educators, emotional and cultural barriers influencing feedback interpretation, inconsistent feedback quality, and the lack of robust assessment instruments are recurring issues (38–40). These challenges are particularly acute in resource-limited and overcrowded educational environments, where fragmented feedback systems may cause confusion and impede learning effectiveness (53–56). Addressing these issues requires comprehensive institutional strategies such as targeted professional development, culturally responsive feedback protocols, and coherent feedback infrastructures spanning academic programs (1, 21).

Teachers play a central role in delivering feedback that is constructive, empathetic, and actionable—key attributes that promote student uptake and development (57–59). Digital technologies, including electronic feedback systems, enable more continuous, traceable, and interactive

exchanges, improving both the quality and responsiveness of feedback processes (8). Furthermore, peer feedback complements instructor input by encouraging student collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (60, 61).

Future research should focus on developing multidimensional and psychometrically validated tools that capture cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of feedback literacy (21, 62–64). Interdisciplinary approaches—including psychological, cultural, and educational perspectives—can deepen understanding and strengthen the practical implementation of effective feedback strategies (20).

Technological advancements, especially artificial intelligence (AI), are increasingly transformative in shaping feedback practices. AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Copilot deliver instant, individualized feedback, offering significant opportunities to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (65). However, high levels of feedback literacy are essential for learners to critically interpret and apply AI-generated suggestions (57, 61). Moreover, AI can help reduce cognitive and emotional barriers often associated with traditional feedback by providing timely, non-judgmental responses that foster autonomy and motivation (61, 66). Nevertheless, sustaining human-centered feedback remains vital to preserve trust, empathy, and dialogue in the learning process (65).

Attention to students' mental well-being is increasingly recognized as integral to feedback literacy. Feedback practices that balance cognitive insight with emotional support improve learner resilience, confidence, and sustained motivation (20, 65, 66). Establishing a positive feedback culture—where feedback is normalized and mistakes are framed as learning opportunities—is foundational for quality education (66–68). Empowering teachers

to deliver feedback that is empathetic and actionable further enhances students' motivation and self-efficacy (8, 54, 69, 70). Likewise, incorporating structured peer feedback nurtures critical analysis and communication skills (59, 71, 72).

The literature consistently emphasizes that effective feedback should be specific, timely, and understandable, strengthening students' academic rigor and resilience (73, 74). A feedback-rich culture requires embedding regular, constructive feedback within everyday learning activities rather than treating it as an episodic occurrence (68, 75). Psychological safety and trust between students and teachers underpin learners' openness to both giving and receiving feedback (76, 77). Educational and workplace environments alike benefit from promoting an open-feedback culture that drives continual learning and growth (77–79).

Expanding such feedback cultures demands institutional commitment to structured feedback models, professional development, and the use of digital platforms that foster reflective and dialogic learning conversations (58, 76). A supportive feedback culture not only advances academic accomplishments but also reinforces emotional well-being and long-term motivation across diverse learning contexts (20, 77–80).

Based on the synthesized evidence, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen students' feedback literacy:

- **Design comprehensive educational programs:** Develop training modules addressing conceptual understanding, analytical skills, and positive attitudes toward feedback (1).
- **Train educators in constructive feedback:** Implement faculty development programs emphasizing clarity, goal orientation, empathy, and actionable guidance to enhance student engagement (8).

- **Leverage digital and AI technologies:** Utilize electronic and AI-based platforms to create interactive, continuous, and traceable feedback cycles (36, 81).
- **Foster a positive feedback culture:** Build psychologically safe, supportive spaces that normalize open and constructive feedback exchange (82, 83).
- **Enhance peer feedback opportunities:** Integrate peer-review mechanisms to promote communication, evaluative judgment, and critical reflection (63, 84, 85).
- **Advance interdisciplinary research and assessment:** Develop validated assessment tools and explore cultural, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of feedback literacy (61, 86).
- **Prioritize student mental well-being:** Implement feedback-related interventions that enhance emotional resilience and intrinsic motivation (20, 87, 88).

Implementing these evidence-informed strategies will strengthen institutional capacity for cultivating feedback literacy, advancing both instructional quality and learners' academic growth in higher education.

5- CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that feedback literacy is a multidimensional construct integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that empower learners to use feedback as an instrument for continuous learning improvement. The reviewed literature underscores that feedback literacy frameworks highlight learners' abilities to value, interpret, and act on feedback while effectively regulating emotional responses and engaging critically with evaluative information. Evidence indicates that

structured, dialogic, and timely feedback supports self-regulation, motivation, and academic achievement, and that mutual engagement of both students and educators deepens the understanding of feedback as a reciprocal, co-constructed process.

However, persistent challenges remain, including variability in feedback practices, insufficient institutional support, and the moderating influence of cultural and contextual factors that limit effective feedback use. Addressing these barriers requires the development of targeted training programs and the implementation of coherent institutional policies that emphasize feedback literacy as a core educational competency. Moreover, the integration of digital technologies and peer-feedback mechanisms can strengthen interactivity, reflection, and responsiveness, ultimately fostering a sustainable feedback culture that promotes ongoing learning enhancement across higher education contexts.

6- AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: RV, and MAA; Data analyzing and draft manuscript preparation: MA, and KS; Critical revision of the paper: RV; Supervision of the research: MAA; Final approval of the version to be published: RV, MA, KS, and MAA.

7- CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

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