

Feedback Practices and Their Impact on Student Motivation

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ABSTRACT— Feedback is one of the most powerful yet inconsistently applied levers for enhancing student motivation and achievement. This manuscript examines how different feedback practices—timing, specificity, tone, modality, and opportunities for learner agency—shape intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in school-aged learners. Drawing on established motivational theories (Self-Determination Theory, Expectancy–Value Theory, Goal Orientation Theory) and classroom-based empirical studies, the paper synthesizes what is known about effective feedback and identifies common pitfalls that undermine motivational gains. A mixed-methods survey of 240 secondary students and 32 teachers explores perceived usefulness, emotional responses, and behavioral changes associated with four feedback types: grades-only, comments-only, dialogic feedback, and digital automated feedback.

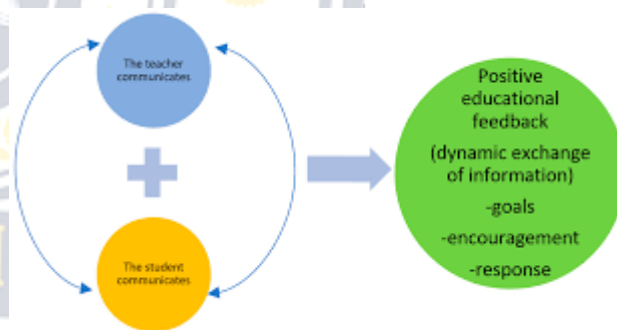


Fig.1 Impact on Student Motivation, [Source\(\[1\]\)](#)

Quantitative analysis (ANOVA and thematic coding) reveals that dialogic and comments-only feedback correlate with significantly higher autonomy, competence beliefs, and task persistence, whereas grades-only feedback often produces performance avoidance and surface-level compliance. The manuscript concludes with a praxis-oriented model—the MOTIVE Framework (Meaningful, Ongoing, Timely, Individualized, Voice-

Enabled)—and provides implementation guidelines for schools seeking to cultivate motivationally rich feedback ecosystems. Implications for policy, professional development, and EdTech design are discussed, along with limitations and directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

feedback practices; student motivation; intrinsic motivation; self-determination theory; dialogic feedback; formative assessment; autonomy support; expectancy-value; goal orientation; secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Feedback sits at the nexus of assessment, instruction, and motivation. Teachers offer feedback to close learning gaps, clarify success criteria, and guide next steps; students receive it through the filter of their beliefs, emotions, and goals. When feedback is attuned to learners' needs and contexts, it can ignite curiosity, persistence, and self-regulation. When misaligned—overly judgmental, late, or vague—it can discourage effort and promote disengagement.

The concept of “impact” in this manuscript is twofold: psychological (changes in interest, self-efficacy, goal orientations) and behavioral (time on task, strategy use, completion of revisions). This study emerged from recurring observations in secondary classrooms where elaborate comments on essays went unread, yet short, dialogic conferences sparked renewed commitment. We therefore pose the central research question: **How do distinct feedback practices influence secondary students' motivation?** Subsidiary questions include: (1) Which features of feedback do students perceive as most motivating? (2) How do teachers' intentions align or misalign with students' interpretations? (3) What patterns emerge between feedback types and motivational constructs across different subjects?



Fig.2 Feedback Practices, [Source\(\[2\]\)](#)

After situating the study in the broader theoretical landscape, we describe a mixed-method methodology, present quantitative and qualitative findings, and propose a framework to guide practitioner decision-making. Ultimately, the manuscript argues that motivation-sensitive feedback requires design, dialogue, and differentiation—more than mere delivery of information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT posits that motivation flourishes when three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are supported. Feedback that offers choice (autonomy), provides clear pathways to improvement (competence), and signals care and respect (relatedness) is more likely to spark intrinsic motivation.

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). Students' motivation depends on their expectations of success and the value they attach to the task. Feedback can recalibrate expectancy by

clarifying progress and can heighten value by explaining relevance and praising strategic effort rather than innate ability.

Goal Orientation Theory. Learners adopt mastery or performance goals. Grades-centric or norm-referenced feedback may strengthen performance goals (often performance-avoidance), whereas process-focused feedback fosters mastery orientations and persistence in the face of challenge.

2.2 Forms and Features of Feedback

Research differentiates feedback by **timing** (immediate vs. delayed), **focus** (process, product, or self), **specificity**, **valence**, **modality** (written, oral, digital), and **interactivity**. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model—"Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?"—remains widely cited, but critics note it underplays emotional and relational dimensions. More recent work examines dialogic feedback cycles, peer feedback, and technology-mediated feedback.

Grades vs. Comments. Butler's classic studies found that comments without grades can boost motivation, whereas grades alone often depress it. However, pragmatic constraints in schools make pure comment-based feedback rare. Integrative models combine symbolic scores with actionable guidance and revision opportunities.

Feedforward and Ongoing Dialogue. Carless and Boud argue that feedback must be understood as a process, not a product. Opportunities to apply guidance (feedforward) and to negotiate meaning are crucial for motivational impact.

Affective and Identity Dimensions. Studies in culturally diverse classrooms reveal that perceived fairness, teacher warmth, and acknowledgment of student voice strongly shape the emotional reception of feedback. Shame-inducing or public corrective feedback can damage motivation, especially among students with fragile academic identities.

2.3 Digital and Automated Feedback

Learning management systems, AI-based grading tools, and gamified dashboards provide instant feedback. While immediacy can enhance engagement, students often perceive automated comments as generic or inauthentic. The motivational effect thus hinges on personalization, transparency, and the teacher's mediating role.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Four gaps motivate this study:

1. Comparative analyses of multiple feedback types on motivation within the same cohort are limited.
2. Student voice in judging feedback usefulness is underrepresented.
3. Cross-subject differences (e.g., math vs. language arts) remain underexplored.
4. Practical frameworks translating theory into action are needed for busy practitioners.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A **convergent mixed-methods design** was adopted. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then merged for interpretation. This design allows numerical trends to be contextualized by student and teacher narratives.

3.2 Participants and Setting

The study involved **240 students (Grades 9–10) and 32 teachers** from four urban secondary schools. Schools were selected for diversity in instructional approaches and technological infrastructure. Student demographics included a balanced gender distribution and a range of achievement levels.

3.3 Instruments

1. **Student Motivation Survey (SMS):** A 36-item Likert-scale instrument adapted from validated SDT and EVT measures, capturing autonomy, competence, relatedness, expectancy, and task value after receiving specific feedback types.
2. **Feedback Perception Inventory (FPI):** A 16-item scale measuring clarity, usefulness, tone, and emotional response to the latest feedback instance.
3. **Teacher Feedback Practice Questionnaire (TFPQ):** Captures frequency, purpose, and perceived barriers in delivering different feedback forms.
4. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with 24 students and 10 teachers to probe interpretations, emotional reactions, and implementation constraints.
5. **Document Analysis:** Samples of marked assignments (essays, lab reports, problem sets) illustrating the four feedback conditions.

3.4 Feedback Conditions

Classes were randomly assigned to emphasize one of four feedback modes for a six-week instructional unit:

- **F1: Grades-Only** (numerical/letter grade, minimal comments)
- **F2: Comments-Only** (actionable written comments, no grades shown)
- **F3: Dialogic Feedback** (written comments plus a short one-to-one conference or digital chat allowing student questions)

- **F4: Automated Digital Feedback** (platform-generated comments or scores with teacher oversight)

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Surveys were administered immediately after students received unit feedback. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS: reliability checks (Cronbach's alpha), descriptive statistics, and one-way ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey tests to compare motivational scores across feedback conditions. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using an inductive coding approach, followed by mapping to SDT constructs.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Parental consent and student assent were obtained. Data were anonymized; teachers reviewed transcripts for accuracy. The study was approved by the institutional ethics board of the participating university.

RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Reliability. The SMS demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$). The FPI showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .82$).

ANOVA Results. There were significant differences in overall motivation scores across feedback conditions, $F(3, 236) = 14.72, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated:

- **F3 (Dialogic) > F2 (Comments) > F4 (Automated) > F1 (Grades)** for autonomy and competence subscales.
- The gap between F3 and F1 was largest for autonomy (mean difference = 0.78 on a 5-point scale).

- Task value scores were similar between F2 and F3 but significantly lower in F1.

Behavioral Indicators. Assignment resubmission rates were highest in F3 classes (78%) compared with F1 (32%). Time-on-task (self-reported study hours) rose by 22% in F3 and 15% in F2 classes, but only 6% in F1.

4.2 Qualitative Themes

1. **Voice and Dialogue Matter.** Students described dialogic sessions as “a chance to explain myself” and “feel heard,” which made them “want to fix things.”
2. **Clarity Over Judgment.** Comments that identified *why* an error occurred and *how* to improve boosted competence feelings; grades alone “told me nothing.”
3. **Emotionally Safe Spaces.** Public or sarcastic feedback evoked embarrassment and withdrawal. Private, respectful tone promoted risk-taking and persistence.
4. **Automation Ambivalence.** Students appreciated instant results but mistrusted generic automated comments. Teachers noted time savings but feared overreliance on algorithms.
5. **Teacher Constraints.** Time pressure, large classes, and grading policies limited dialogic opportunities. Some teachers felt untrained in crafting process-oriented comments.

4.3 Integration of Findings

Both strands converged on the superiority of dialogic and comment-rich feedback for enhancing motivation. Autonomy support emerged as the key mediator: when students perceived choices and could negotiate next steps, motivation rose. Automated feedback was moderately effective when

paired with teacher personalization. Grades alone consistently underperformed, particularly among lower-achieving students who interpreted low marks as fixed ability judgments.

DISCUSSION

The results reinforce and extend SDT and EVT predictions. Dialogic feedback satisfies autonomy (choice, voice), competence (clear guidance), and relatedness (personal interaction). Comments-only feedback supports competence but may lack the relational depth of dialogue. Grades-only feedback, by emphasizing performance comparison, undermines mastery goals and evokes defensive reactions.

This study advances the literature by contrasting four feedback modes simultaneously within comparable cohorts, highlighting that **how** feedback is delivered—not merely **that** it is delivered—determines motivational trajectories. The findings also underline the socio-emotional dimension: tone, privacy, and respect are as pivotal as technical accuracy.

5.1 The MOTIVE Framework

To translate insights into practice, we propose the **MOTIVE Framework**:

- **M – Meaningful:** Tie feedback to learning goals and real-world relevance.
- **O – Ongoing:** Provide iterative cycles with chances to act on feedback.
- **T – Timely:** Deliver feedback when students can still use it to improve.
- **I – Individualized:** Attend to student prior knowledge, culture, and goals.
- **V – Voice-Enabled:** Invite student questions, choices, and self-assessment.

- **E – Empowering Tone:** Use language that emphasizes growth, strategies, and encouragement.

5.2 Implications for Practice

- **Embed Mini-Conferences:** Short, structured check-ins can replace lengthy written critiques without sacrificing depth.
- **Design Feedforward Tasks:** Require application of feedback (revision checkpoints, reflective logs) to close the loop.
- **Leverage Technology Wisely:** Use AI or LMS tools for rapid diagnostics but layer teacher commentary for personalization.
- **Cultivate Student Self-Feedback Skills:** Teach rubric decoding, error analysis, and goal setting to internalize feedback processes.
- **Policy Shifts:** Schools should reconsider mandatory grading of every task; formative cycles can be ungraded yet rigorous.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study's six-week window may not capture long-term motivational shifts. The sample is limited to urban schools with moderate tech access; rural or resource-constrained contexts might yield different patterns. Future research could examine peer feedback dynamics, cross-cultural variations, and longitudinal impacts of MOTIVE-based interventions. Additionally, experimental designs manipulating tone and privacy could isolate affective factors more precisely.

CONCLUSION

Effective feedback is not an accessory to instruction—it is the engine of motivational growth. The evidence presented here shows that dialogic and comment-focused approaches elevate students' autonomy, competence, and task value, thereby

strengthening intrinsic motivation and productive academic behaviors. Grades alone, while administratively convenient, risk narrowing students' goals to performance metrics and eroding persistence. Schools aiming to boost motivation should reimagine feedback as an interactive, empathetic, and student-centered process. By adopting the MOTIVE framework, educators can craft feedback ecosystems that empower learners to own their progress, interpret mistakes as opportunities, and sustain engagement across diverse subjects. Ultimately, motivating feedback is less about telling students what is wrong and more about inviting them into a conversation about how to get it right—and why it matters.

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