

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM AND PRAISE: EXPLORING STUDENT RECEPTION OF TEACHERS' FEEDBACK STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING THEIR WRITTEN OUTPUT

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Abstract

Feedback is a central element of English language teaching, shaping learners' writing skills and academic engagement. Although constructive, timely, and consistent feedback is known to improve performance, many students disregard written comments, limiting their developmental impact. This study explores how senior high school students respond to constructive criticism and praise in their written outputs, addressing a gap in existing literature that often treats feedback in general terms rather than focusing on writing-specific strategies. Grounded in Self-Regulated Learning Theory and Feedback Intervention Theory, the research employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design. Quantitative data were collected from 128 Grade 12 students at LCC Silvercrest Senior High School, selected through random sampling across ABM, HUMSS, STEM, ICT, and HE strands, to examine perceptions of feedback clarity, quality, timeliness, and their effects on motivation, writing performance, and self-efficacy. Qualitative interviews and open-ended responses provided deeper insights. Findings revealed that students viewed feedback positively, describing it as clear, organized, detailed, and timely. Statistical analysis confirmed significant relationships between clarity, quality, timeliness, and improved learning, motivation, and writing performance, though no significant correlation emerged with self-efficacy. The study recommends clear, specific comments, balanced use of criticism and praise, and prompt delivery to strengthen writing skills and prepare students for advanced academic tasks.

Keywords – *constructive criticism, feedback strategies, students' perception*

Introduction

Feedback has long been acknowledged as a cornerstone of effective teaching, guiding learners through the uncertainties of improvement and the possibilities of success. Its influence, however, depends on how students receive and act upon it. Studies emphasize that constructive, consistent, and timely feedback enhances academic performance and engagement, yet many learners skim or disregard written comments, limiting its potential to drive meaningful growth (Victoria State Government, 2022; University of South Carolina, 2021). This study seeks to examine how students respond to both criticism and praise in their written work, asking whether active engagement with feedback truly shapes academic development.

Writing itself is a demanding metacognitive process that requires coordination of multiple skills. It fosters vocabulary, grammar, and critical thinking (Huy, 2015; Facullo, 2022), but

students often encounter persistent difficulties in punctuation, spelling, and content that hinder the production of quality outputs (Alfaki, 2015). Without meaningful feedback, revisions tend to remain superficial, focusing only on mechanics rather than deeper issues of content and organization. Research suggests that effective feedback motivates learners to engage in substantial rewriting, thereby improving both confidence and performance (Bouwer, 2023; Camacho et al., 2021).

The clarity of feedback plays a decisive role in its effectiveness. Clear, specific comments help students understand expectations and apply insights to future tasks, while vague or overly critical remarks reduce motivation and confidence (Eriksson, 2021; Haughney et al., 2020). Transparent feedback environments have been shown to boost comprehension, engagement, and performance across educational settings (Bolkan, 2016; Muamaroh & Pratiwi, 2022). Students consistently value feedback that is detailed and actionable, as it enables them to revisit comments, reflect, and implement improvements in subsequent assignments (Holt et al., 2024).

Equally important is the quality of feedback. High-quality feedback is constructive, task-focused, and detailed, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement (Williams, 2024; Musril Zahari et al., 2025). Poorly written feedback, in contrast, often relies on vague judgments or personal qualities, which can discourage learners and hinder progress (Banihashem et al., 2024). Research shows that students respond most positively to feedback that is supportive, specific, and easy to implement, underscoring the need for educators to craft comments that are both encouraging and practical (Voelkel et al., 2020; Wang & Han, 2022).

Timeliness is another critical dimension. Feedback delivered promptly allows students to reflect, revise, and sustain momentum, whereas delays weaken its effectiveness and lead to dissatisfaction (Voelkel et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2025). Immediate feedback fosters engagement and motivation, while excessive waiting diminishes interest in revision and lowers confidence (Lip et al., 2023; Jansen et al., 2024). Studies suggest that feedback provided within a week of submission is most effective, balancing the need for detail with the urgency of reinforcement (Fisher et al., 2025).

This study employs a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, combining quantitative analysis of feedback engagement with qualitative insights from interviews to provide a fuller picture of student perspectives (Ahmed et al., 2024). The integration of statistical data with contextual narratives ensures a holistic understanding of how learners perceive and respond to feedback strategies. Such triangulation strengthens the reliability of findings and highlights the diverse ways students internalize feedback in their writing processes.

While prior research has examined feedback broadly as a predictor of success, fewer studies have focused on how students respond to specific strategies in writing tasks. Existing literature highlights gaps in clarity, quality, and timeliness that directly affect learners' motivation, confidence, and performance. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to evidence-based recommendations for improving feedback practices, particularly in the context of written outputs where revision and reflection are essential.

Beyond its local significance, the research advances global educational priorities. It supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 17 on Partnerships, by promoting inclusive and collaborative feedback systems. Overall, the study puts a huge emphasis on the urgent need to make feedback more engaging, constructive, timely, and transformative, empowering

educators to deliver comments that enhance students' writing performance and enrich their overall learning experience.

Research Questions

This study, entitled "Constructive Criticism and Praise: Exploring Students' Reception of Teachers' Feedback Strategies in Improving Their Written Output," aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do students perceive teachers' feedback strategies in terms of:
 - 1.1. clarity,
 - 1.2. length and composition,
 - 1.3. quality, and
 - 1.4. timeliness?
2. What is the influence of characteristics of constructive criticism and types of praise on students in terms of:
 - 2.1. learning,
 - 2.2. motivation,
 - 2.3. writing performance, and
 - 2.4. self-efficacy?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' perceptions of teachers' feedback strategies and the influence of constructive criticism and types of praise?
4. What action plan may be proposed to enhance the use of feedback for the betterment of students' academic performance?

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method sequential explanatory design to investigate students' reception of teachers' feedback strategies. The design consisted of two phases: a quantitative survey to capture general perceptions of feedback in terms of clarity, length and composition, quality, and timeliness, followed by qualitative interviews to explain and enrich the statistical findings. This approach provided both breadth and depth, ensuring that numerical trends were supported by contextual insights.

The participants were Grade 12 students of LCC Silvercrest Senior High School, selected through stratified random sampling to represent different academic strands. A total of 128 respondents were included: 16 from ABM, 30 from HUMSS, 69 from STEM, 4 from ICT, and 9 from HE. The Raosoft calculator determined this sample size from a population of 359, with a 7% margin of error and 95% confidence level. For the qualitative phase, 10 students voluntarily participated in interviews, offering detailed perspectives on their experiences with feedback.

The core research instrument was an adapted survey questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of feedback strategies and their effects on learning, motivation, writing performance, and self-efficacy. Responses were rated using a four-point Likert scale (4–Strongly Agree to 1–Strongly Disagree). Semi-structured interviews complemented the survey, allowing students to elaborate on how constructive criticism and praise influenced their engagement and writing development.

Prior to data collection, the instruments were validated by experts and approved by the research adviser, professor, and dean. Formal permission was also secured from the Senior High School department. Students were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical safeguards,

and informed consent was obtained. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured throughout the process.

Surveys were administered first, and the results were analyzed with the assistance of a statistician. Interviews were then conducted with selected students, whose responses were transcribed and examined to clarify and expand upon the quantitative findings. This sequence ensured that statistical patterns were supported by lived experiences, strengthening the reliability of the conclusions.

Further, the ethical standards were also strictly observed. Anonymity was maintained by excluding personal identifiers, and participants' dignity and perspectives were respected at all times. Data were used solely for academic purposes, and findings were reported with transparency and accuracy to reflect genuine student experiences.

In terms of data analysis, percentages, ranking, and weighted mean were used to summarize survey responses. Pearson's R was applied to determine correlations between perceptions of feedback strategies and their reported effects on learning, motivation, writing performance, and self-efficacy. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring ideas and categories that explained the quantitative results.

Through the use of a sequential explanatory design, stratified sampling, validated instruments, and both statistical and thematic analysis, the study was able to generate comprehensive findings on how students perceive and respond to feedback. This methodology ensured that both measurable outcomes and personal insights were considered in understanding the role of feedback in improving written outputs.

Finding and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the survey and interviews conducted with Grade 12 students of LCC Silvercrest Senior High School. The discussion focuses on how teachers' feedback strategies—particularly constructive criticism and praise—shape students' perceptions and influence their learning, motivation, writing performance, and self-efficacy. Through statistical analysis, theoretical grounding, and thematic interpretation, several recurring insights emerged, reflecting the central role of feedback in academic growth and personal development.

To start with, clarity in feedback serves as the foundation for improvement. Students strongly agreed that they understood both constructive criticism and praise, with comments clearly showing which parts of their work needed revision. Specific markings and corrections helped them grasp mistakes more effectively, though some admitted occasional difficulty when instructions were vague. This finding supports Brandmo and Gamlem (2025), who emphasized that clarity and specificity in feedback strengthen engagement and improve academic tasks. Within the lens of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) Theory, clarity in feedback provides learners with the cognitive tools to monitor their progress, set goals, and revise effectively (Brown et al., 2024; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In addition, structured and well-composed feedback enhances comprehension but requires balance. Respondents agreed that feedback was generally organized and not confusing, yet some preferred shorter comments while others valued detailed explanations. This suggests that while structure is appreciated, delivery must be tailored to avoid overwhelming students. Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) similarly noted that focused, well-organized

feedback reduces confusion and promotes improvement. From the perspective of Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT), structure matters because feedback that is fragmented or overly complex can shift learners' attention away from the task, reducing its effectiveness (DeNisi, 2018).

Furthermore, quality feedback fosters confidence and motivation. Students strongly agreed that feedback was supportive, relevant, and useful, with specific suggestions directly applicable to their writing. Warm and constructive comments encouraged effort and revision, though some learners desired more targeted guidance. This aligns with Brookhart (2022), who argued that feedback must combine supportiveness, usefulness, and specificity to meaningfully influence performance. SRL Theory explains this by highlighting the role of feedback in reinforcing writing self-efficacy—students' belief in their ability to produce effective written work (Zumbrunn et al., 2016). When feedback validates effort and provides actionable steps, learners persist through challenges and regulate their learning more effectively.

Another point worth noting is that timely feedback strengthens future performance and satisfaction. Respondents reported that receiving feedback promptly helped them revise effectively and produce better outputs. Delays were understood but noted as limiting immediate improvement. This supports Muhammad Younis et al. (2021), who highlighted timeliness as a cornerstone of effective learning and student satisfaction. FIT reinforces this by emphasizing that feedback must be delivered close to the performance event to maximize its impact, ensuring that learners perceive it as relevant and actionable.

With respect to learning and motivation, constructive criticism and praise directly influence student engagement. Learners understood mistakes better when corrections were placed near errors, and they felt more motivated to revise when feedback balanced criticism with encouragement. This confirms Patra (2022) and Wulandari et al. (2021), who found that direct correction and constructive oral feedback enhance clarity and motivation. SRL Theory explains this dynamic: feedback provides external input that shapes internal cognitive processes, enabling learners to self-assess, plan, and revise (Wisniewski et al., 2020).

Consequently, feedback contributes to writing performance but error avoidance remains a challenge. Students agreed that they learned to locate and correct errors and could apply lessons into practice, yet struggled to consistently prevent repeated mistakes. This reflects Hapsari et al. (2022), who noted the difficulty of reducing errors among second-language learners. Still, targeted feedback improved autonomy and confidence in applying learned techniques. FIT cautions that poorly delivered feedback can sometimes hinder performance, underscoring the importance of specificity and task focus.

On the other hand, praise plays a vital role in building self-efficacy. Students strongly agreed that being praised for effort and achievement boosted their confidence and belief in their writing ability. However, some desired more consistent and specific praise to fully recognize their strengths. This finding supports Bandura (cited by Fong et al., 2021), who explained that positive verbal persuasion enhances self-efficacy, and Harks et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of supportive feedback in reinforcing competence. SRL Theory complements this by showing that praise encourages persistence and motivates learners to apply self-regulated strategies in writing.

All things considered, statistical analysis revealed that feedback strategies significantly correlate with learning, motivation, and writing performance, but less consistently with self-efficacy. Clarity, length, quality, and timeliness were all highly significant predictors of academic outcomes, yet only timeliness showed a notable relationship with self-efficacy. This underscores the nuanced role of feedback: while it enhances skills and motivation, confidence requires more authentic and targeted praise. Integrating SRL and FIT provides a comprehensive explanation—SRL highlights how feedback informs self-regulation, while FIT explains why certain feedback succeeds or fails in supporting those processes.

Despite these positive impacts, students also acknowledged existing challenges in the feedback process. Some reported that comments were occasionally vague or too general, making it difficult to translate them into concrete revisions. Others noted delays in receiving feedback, which limited their ability to improve outputs promptly. A few respondents expressed that while praise boosted confidence, it was sometimes inconsistent or too broad to fully strengthen their self-efficacy. These barriers continue to affect how effectively learners engage with feedback and apply it to their writing performance. This supports the findings of Hapsari et al. (2022), who emphasized that reducing repeated errors remains difficult for second-language learners, particularly when feedback lacks specificity. Similarly, Zaber et al. (2023) highlighted shortcomings in current feedback practices, while FIT reminds us that feedback can sometimes harm performance if not delivered carefully.

In relation to institutional initiatives, the PENTA Project provides a structured action plan to refine feedback strategies and strengthen students' writing performance. Programs such as the Teacher Development Workshop and Voices of Learners Forum emphasize both teacher capacity-building and student empowerment. By equipping teachers with practical strategies and validating student perspectives, feedback becomes more actionable, balanced, and motivating. This directly responds to survey findings that highlighted the importance of clarity, detail, and constructive criticism in shaping student outcomes.

Moreover, the integration of Writing Clinics and the Timely Feedback Scheduling System ensures that refined feedback strategies are applied consistently in classroom practice. Writing clinics allow iterative opportunities for students to receive constructive criticism and praise, while the scheduling system institutionalizes timeliness by setting clear turnaround standards. Together, these initiatives foster resilience, confidence, and improved writing performance. Finally, the Teacher-Student Partnership Summit promotes collaboration and shared responsibility, ensuring that feedback strategies remain transformative, inclusive, and continuously refined. In this way, the PENTA Project bridges the gap between secondary education and higher learning, preparing students not only for academic tasks but also for the rigors of college-level writing and research.

In conclusion, the findings of the study reveal that constructive criticism and praise have a transformative impact on students' academic development. Clear, structured, supportive, and timely feedback improves learning, motivation, and writing performance, while praise strengthens self-efficacy. By integrating Self-Regulated Learning Theory and Feedback Intervention Theory, the study demonstrates that feedback is both a cognitive tool for self-regulation and a psychological mechanism that shapes motivation and confidence. The PENTA Project operationalizes these insights into concrete programs, ensuring that feedback practices evolve into a learner-centered framework that advances both academic performance and personal growth.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the present findings, the following conclusions were drawn: (1) Students perceive teachers' feedback strategies positively in terms of clarity, length, composition, quality, and timeliness. They reported that feedback was understandable, well-organized, sufficiently detailed to guide revision, and delivered on time, which helped them recognize areas for improvement and encouraged effective revisions. (2) Constructive criticism primarily enhanced students' learning and writing performance by making errors more noticeable through corrections placed near mistakes, provision of correct forms, and brief explanations that facilitated accurate revision. Praise, meanwhile, strengthened motivation and confidence by recognizing effort and progress. Together, constructive criticism provided concrete steps for improvement while praise sustained students' motivation to apply them. (3) The influence of feedback strategies extended to writing performance, as students reported being able to apply learned corrections in practice, though avoiding repeated errors remained a challenge. (4) Statistical analysis confirmed highly significant relationships between clarity, quality, timeliness, and students' learning, motivation, and writing performance, validating the central role of feedback in academic growth. However, the absence of significant correlation with self-efficacy suggests that feedback alone may not fully build confidence; consistent encouragement and balanced praise are necessary to sustain belief in one's writing ability. (5) Interviews revealed that students valued clear, specific, and timely feedback, noting that detailed comments and early guidance were more effective than vague or delayed responses. Both praise and constructive criticism motivated improvement, showing that positive perceptions of clarity, structure, and timeliness lead to stronger motivation and better use of feedback. (6) Based on these findings, an action plan is recommended for teachers that emphasizes clear, specific comments, a balance of constructive criticism and praise, and prompt feedback delivery. Teachers may also guide students in understanding and applying feedback to strengthen their writing. This action plan refines feedback strategies, empowers teachers, and prepares Grade 12 students for advanced writing tasks, research requirements, and eventual college entry.

On the other hand, based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations were provided: (1) Students should actively engage with feedback by revising their written outputs immediately after receiving comments to ensure that both constructive criticism and praise translate into measurable improvement. (2) Teachers must refine the clarity and specificity of their feedback, making comments student-friendly, actionable, and aligned with learning objectives. (3) Teachers should also commit to delivering timely feedback, ideally within one week, to maximize its relevance and allow students to apply corrections promptly. (4) Professional development workshops must be institutionalized to continuously update teachers on best practices in feedback strategies and to integrate research-based methods into classroom routines. (5) Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of feedback practices, using student surveys, rubric scores, and performance indicators as benchmarks. (6) Given the weaker correlations between feedback and self-efficacy, future studies are recommended to explore why feedback does not always translate into confidence. Variables such as personality, prior achievement, or cultural attitudes toward criticism may play a role, and

examining these factors will provide deeper insights into how feedback can better support students' belief in their writing ability.

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