

**EFL INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS AND  
PRACTICES OF FEEDBACK IN A UNIVERSITY  
EFL PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

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**Abstract**

There is an increasing worldwide positive attitude towards feedback. There is a direct link between feedback and learning process. Feedback gives information about the gap between actual and desired levels. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of EFL instructors about the use of feedback and their feedback practices at a preparatory school. For the purpose of the study, a qualitative research was carried out. The study utilized purposeful sampling. Three EFL instructors participated in this study. Data were collected by means of checklists, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The study results reveal that EFL instructors' perceptions about the use of feedback are strongly related to growth of learning rather than students' well being and grading construction, and EFL instructors' feedback practices gathered under the teacher formative feedback practices are congruent with their perceptions in preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey. By investigating the perceptions of EFL instructors about feedback and their feedback practices, this study will add one more brick onto the present construction of research on feedback. The results of this study might also have practical effects. It can also give ideas to institutions about setting feedback policies to support their course instructors. This study might make an important contribution to research on the use of feedback in preparatory schools. It might have implications for contributing to feedback perceptions of EFL instructors in Turkey.

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**Introduction**

Feedback is considered as an important element of different fields. It is used in psychology, literature, and especially in education and training. In learning area, there has been lots of information reviewed on feedback throughout the years. By the help of the recent studies, it has been understood that 'feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement' (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p. 81).

It is obvious that in the learning process, the place of assessment is inevitable because it is an integral part of education. Assessment can be roughly divided into two categories: summative assessment, or assessment of learning and formative assessment, or assessment for learning. Summative assessment is usually undertaken at the end of the unit, period or term. Formative assessment is used to promote student learning more effectively, to share a framework included educational objectives with students, and to help teachers to realize learners' needs by the feedback information.

There is an increasing worldwide positive attitude towards feedback. There is a direct link between feedback and learning process. Feedback gives information about the gap between actual and desired levels. It has been discussed that when successful students seem to respond positively and benefit from teacher feedback, unsuccessful students respond poorly and constantly need to be encouraged to comprehend the teacher's comments (Gu enette, 2007).

The failure of teacher while giving feedback may result in students' inattention and negative attitudes toward feedback. Therefore teachers' effectiveness on feedback is important. Students may be affected as soon as they take feedback. Ferris and Roberts (2001) highlighted that there were significant differences between students who had received feedback and who had not, after students revised their papers.

No matter how much students believe that they do perfectly, there comes the time when they need feedback. A literature review on feedback reveals lots of studies all around the world. The study of Harris and Brown (2012) is a considerable one. Their study investigates the beliefs of teachers about feedback. It reports the results of a large-scale questionnaire survey of New Zealand 1492 teachers' conceptions of feedback. Their understandings of feedback focus on improving learning instead of enhancing student well being. Therefore, there is a need for other studies to examine what the feedback perceptions of EFL instructors are in other contexts and what the EFL instructors' feedback practices are.

In Turkey, English is an important subject in all schools from primary school to university. It means it is initial foreign language for Turkish students to be learned. There is also a need to investigate the feedback as a vital factor of effective teaching. This study, in this respect, aims to shed light on the importance of feedback in learning process.

By investigating the perceptions of EFL instructors about feedback and their feedback practices, this study will add one more brick onto the present construction of research on feedback. It may also encourage new studies to apply more extensive research about using feedback to improve learning process.

The results of this study might also have practical effects. It can also give ideas to institutions about setting feedback policies to support their course instructors. This

university will also benefit from the findings of this study to improve their existing feedback policy. This study will make an important contribution to research on the use of feedback in preparatory schools. It has implications for contributing to feedback perceptions of EFL instructors in Turkey.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What perceptions of feedback do EFL instructors hold in a university preparatory school?
2. What are the EFL instructors' feedback practices in a university preparatory school?

### **Literature Review**

#### Defining Feedback

Preferably, it might be beneficial to start feedback definitions with a dictionary survey. Feedback in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English takes place as 'advice, criticism etc. about how successful or useful something is' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary, 1992, p. 510).

In respect of assessment, the literature makes it clear that formative assessment is shaped by the type and quality of feedback. It is strongly believed that feedback makes a difference to student achievement. Furthermore, research on feedback has revealed by experimenting feedback quality.

#### Source of Feedback

It is believed that for teachers, there has been endless debate about how to give feedback. Years of experience, gender, age, or characteristic features are some of the factors, which may play role in changing the method of how to give feedback from praise to harsh criticisms. It is generally accepted that teachers are responsible for giving feedback, but there has been an increasing agreement recently that students can also be responsible for feedback. It is emphasized that student feedback can be accepted as reliable as teacher feedback, yet students should train in these practices.

#### **Timing of Feedback**

Decision of feedback's timing is important during lesson with some "objectives" which have some "desired standards of performance" (Russell, 1998, p. 24). To begin with, the rapport with desired standards should be created; that is, the expectations from the elements of teaching-learning process.

Timing might be of great importance in the aspect of giving feedback in an effective way. In order to provide feedback, well-arranged time of feedback needs great care. It is suggested that feedback can be given during or after the performance. Then, it requires the question of 'when' Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasizes that it is much more preferable using feedback immediately, and the time may change according to the feedback's content.

**Manners of Feedback**

How feedback is delivered (e.g., written, spoken, graphical, behavioral, grades or scores) affects its influence on student learning. During teacher-student interactions, teachers notice, realize and react to student in a spontaneous manner. Nonetheless, written feedback is chosen rather than verbal comments so that students can reconsider them.

Written feedback may be met in speaking tasks, for instance; role-plays, presentations, and so on. This type of feedback may be delayed and there is no need to be in the same place for students and teachers who take feedback or give feedback. Written feedback includes very detailed information. Giving written feedback takes much more time than receiving feedback.

In verbal feedback, teachers and learners need to be in the same place or time. Verbal feedback is interactive, so it may be detailed and private except given to a group. It does not take too much time for preparation and it includes some elements of non-verbal communication such as body language. Giving the verbal feedback in the right time, it helps students to increase intrinsic motivation. Using students' names and eye contact may result in effective learning. It provides clear messages, so it exists motivating.

**Content of Feedback**

Types of feedback content may differ according to purposes and outcomes. Hattie and Timperley (2007) state four types of feedback:

- Feedback Task (how well tasks are understood or performed),
- Feedback Process (the main process needed to understand or perform tasks),
- Feedback Self-regulation (self-monitoring, directing, and regulating of actions),
- Feedback Self (personal evaluations and affect about the learner). (p. 90)

Hattie and Timperley (2007) find the self-regulation feedback as the most powerful type because this type of feedback leads the students to be more engaged and self-efficient during teaching-learning process.

In contrast, most frequently provided type is task feedback. However, task feedback is the type most frequently provided to students in the schools. Teachers are likely to give praise in feedback, which is controversial (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). On its own, praise may not have sufficient information to move students forward in their learning. Yet, the praise makes students motivated so as to overcome the difficulties easily. Moreover, Irving, Harris and Peterson (2011) present evidence that some teachers consider praise as a tool in improving students' self-esteem.

There are divergent reasons for providing feedback. In education field, the purpose of feedback is improving student learning, not the sense of personal well-being. Irving et al. (2011) found feedback 'as being about learning, grades and marks, or behavior and effort', and they deliberates that feedback is served with an encouragement purpose (p. 415). To be able to accomplish this purpose, students need teachers as a source of accurate information related to their performance.

In the aspects of teachers, there may be some external reasons such as administrators or

external stakeholders, so teachers are required to provide certain types of feedback like grades. Besides, there are several factors that influence the effectiveness of feedback. Sadler (1998) gives examples of these factors as students' ability of interpreting, using, and their motivation to do so.

#### Types of Feedback

Tunstall and Gipps (1996) developed a typology of teacher feedback by observing the feedback given by teachers to their students in primary schools. They classified feedback into two main types: descriptive and evaluative. Evaluative feedback is a result of summative assessment. This type of feedback is a summary for the student of how well he/she has done his/her work during a specific period (e.g. at the end of the term). It involves rewards, letter grades, numbers, check marks, symbols, general comments, general criticisms, punishments. Descriptive feedback is a significant part of formative assessment and it has a positive intention. This type of feedback provides specific information such as written comments or conversations that help the learner understand what he/she needs to do to improve.

#### Teachers' perceptions of feedback

Teachers' beliefs about the usage, nature, and purpose of feedback have been investigated in a number of studies. The scrutiny of O'Quin (2009) is among the pioneer studies in this area. 308 middle school teachers in Louisiana participated in the study. They stated that they use feedback to enhance student learning. The results of the study indicate that most participants (especially, teachers of alternative not regular classrooms) find that there is a relationship between feedback and students' improvement in teaching-learning process. Surprisingly, there is not statistically significant relationship between what the Louisiana teachers think about feedback and the usage of feedback because others require it. Namely, it means teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of feedback in learning structure their feedback practices.

The study of Irving, Harris and Peterson (2011) is surveyed in New Zealand context. Participants of the study, New Zealand teachers explain three types of feedback:

- Spoken or written comments about learning,
- Grades or marks,
- Spoken or written comments about behavior or effort.

For these three types feedback, teachers have four main purposes. Teachers identified these purposes as followed:

- Improving student learning (e.g., providing information about weaknesses in student work and how to correct them),
- Reporting and compliance (e.g., giving grades, hinting to students about their final results),
- Encouraging students (e.g., praise, feedback about effort)
- Serving no function (e.g., narrative feedback)

The study of Harris and Brown (2012) is another considerable one about the same issue.

Their study investigates the beliefs of teachers about feedback. It reports the results of a large-scale questionnaire survey of New Zealand 1492 teachers' conceptions of feedback. There are several factors that influence teachers' beliefs. For instance; 'Assessment policies are also probable factors in shaping teacher conceptions of feedback' (p. 977). Their understandings of feedback focus on improving learning instead of enhancing student well being. Therefore, clearly, other studies with different teacher populations and in different contexts are required.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

After carefully considering the literature, a qualitative approach was used in this research study. It was determined that the most appropriate type of research for this study would be case study. Furthermore, designing a case study would provide rich information about teaching and learning processes.

#### Participants of the Study

The participants were selected by using purposive sampling since it was aimed to include EFL instructors who participated in the study voluntarily.

These three teachers of the study taught full-time (20-25 hours per week) in the university's preparatory program. The teaching context was a monolingual classroom setting in which most teachers and all students were non-native speakers of English.

In this study, the pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names to respect participants' right to anonymity. Their pseudo names were used as Mert, Fersu and Ela. Table 1. displays the characteristics of the participant teachers. The participant teachers were not homogenous in respect to age and teaching experience. All of them have been teaching A1 level at school of foreign languages.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the Participant Teachers

Participants	Age	Years of Experience	Institutions worked before	Education
Mert	32	9	Ministry of Education, Private School, State University	PhD student
Fersu	33	10	Ministry of Education, State University	PhD
Ela	27	5	State University	PhD student

#### Procedures

The participants got the detailed information, consent form and checklist (devised version of the Teachers' Conceptions of Feedback (TCoF) questionnaire by Hattie and Timperley (2007)) for interviews.

#### Data Collection

The study employed qualitative research methods, using checklists, semi-structured

interviews and classroom observations for getting information before these interviews with the participant teachers.

#### Checklists

The researchers sent the participants a checklist to get more information about their perceptions of feedback. This checklist was devised and derived from the Teachers' Conceptions of Feedback (TCofF) questionnaire by Hattie and Timperley (2007).

Items of the checklist were categorized. The first four factors were related to purposes of feedback such as irrelevance, improvement, reporting and compliance and encouragement. The next four factors were related to four feedback types as task, process, self-regulation and self. The last two factors were related to questions arising from the feedback literature. While Factor 9 was related to self and peer feedback, Factor 10 was related to timing of feedback. In Factors 4 and 8, the items were used simultaneously for both encouragement and self-type.

#### Semi-structured Interviews

Interviewing is known as one of the most powerful data collection techniques employed for understanding people's point of views, beliefs and attitudes. Interviews lasted for between 30 to 40 minutes.

All interviews were held in instructors' own offices. Since all of them shared their offices with another instructor, the researchers tried to create a silent atmosphere because the interviews took place face to face. Before interviews, all participants were informed that they were being recorded. The researchers audio-recorded and took notes during the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix A). The researchers interviewed all the participants in order to get a deeper understanding of about their perceptions about the use of feedback.

#### Classroom Observations

Particularly, observation was used as a means of focusing what the instructors were doing related to feedback and gaining an in-depth understanding of that issue. The study did not aim to evaluate the teacher, and two forty-minute observations of each participant's class were conducted. In total, approximately four hours of observation were held in the context. All of classroom visits were pre-arranged. The participants were informed that they did not have to make any special preparation. As a non-participant observer, the researcher only video recorded and filled the checklist of feedback practices taking place in the classroom. Table 2. illustrates that there were four parts including 16 items in the checklist.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the Observation Checklist Items

<b>Items no</b>	<b>Parts</b>
1, 2, 3	Non-teacher
4,5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Teacher Formative
10, 11, 12, 13, 14	Teacher Protective Evaluation
15, 16	Headmaster Reporting

### Data Analysis and Results

The data collected by checklists were classified under ten factors. Since Factor IV, *Encouragement* and Factor VIII, *Self* were investigated by using same items, so the two factors were combined under the same heading as Factor IV, *Encouragement and Self*. These nine factors are listed below with a sample item provided for each:

- I. *Irrelevance*: Students rarely make changes in their work in response to my feedback.
- II. *Improvement*: I can see progress in student work after I give feedback to students.
- III. *Reporting and compliance*: Feedback practices at my school are monitored by school leaders.
- IV. *Encouragement and Self*: Feedback should be full of encouraging and positive comments.
- V. *Task*: My feedback helps students decide what to include and/or exclude in their work.
- VI. *Process*: I organize time in class for students to revise, evaluate, and give themselves feedback about their own individual work.
- VII. *Self-regulation*: My feedback reminds each student to self-assess his or her own work.
- VIII. *Peer and self-feedback*: Students can be critical of their own work and can find their own mistakes.
- IX. *Timeliness*: Quality feedback happens interactively and immediately in the classroom when students are learning.

The data collected by classroom observations were classified under four parts. When the researcher observed the classroom, she used a checklist including these four parts:

1. The Non-teacher part consisted of practices in which students give feedback instead of the teacher.
2. The teacher formative part included practices associated with interaction between teachers and students about how to improve.
3. The teacher protective evaluation part integrated praise to the student within feedback.
4. The headmasters reporting part had the teacher communicating with headmasters about the student.

### The Participant Instructors' perceptions of Feedback

In checklists, all instructors defined feedback by using factors improvement, reporting and compliance, task, and encouragement.

The *Improvement* factor focused on items describing students using the feedback they received. Fersu believed that feedback was one of the main components of the success for her students. She responded to the question "How does feedback affect your students?" in the semi-structured interview:

*I think feedback affects my students in a positive manner because whenever I give*

*feedback to them, I can see that they are pleased to see their good sides or even mistakes. Actually, my motivated students are more interested in my feedback. They want me to give feedback to them as much as possible. They like to hear something about themselves from me. It is obvious that my every word is important for them.*

The *Task* factor focused on giving students information about aspects of their work that could be improved rather than on accuracy or specific error correction. Ela found her feedback played a manager role even in the details of her students' work. Ela commented feedback was a kind of source to feed students' self-esteem when she answered the question "What is the role of praise in feedback?" in the semi-structured interview:

*It is necessary to elicit students' activation in class time. I sometimes see some of my students just sit in the back of class and say no word during the lesson, and then I apply praise. That student would think he/she is considered important and the praise takes that student into the learning process. However, I try not to praise my students profusely since it loses its efficacy.*

Three other factors follow them as timeliness, process and self-regulation. Lastly, instructors do not prefer factors Irrelevance, and peer and self-feedback to define feedback.

The checklists and interview results showed that all of the study participants were familiar with the source, timing, manner, and content of the feedback. For example, the instructors focused less on the importance of peer feedback whereas they concentrated on self-feedback and teacher feedback essentially.

The *Peer and Self-feedback* factor focused on students actively giving themselves and each other feedback. Mert found self-feedback beneficial in certain situations, but the other statements he disagreed proved that he did not accept the peers as great sources of feedback.

In response to the question "What is the importance of your feedback in students' self-regulation?" asked in the semi-structured interview, Marvel expressed that:

*Mainly, my feedback aims to teach my students to be more autonomous learners, so they can learn from their mistakes, and they can correct themselves by the time. But, to be able to achieve this, they should show required interest in my feedback. For this reason, my feedback is important to facilitate my students to get the ability of self-regulation.*

Furthermore, interview results reveal that the instructors knew even small details about the content of feedback such as detailed written comments for revising.

### **Feedback practices of Participant Instructors**

The participant instructors reported using many feedback practices in their classrooms. Correspondingly, results showed that there was a convincing consistency between what they expressed and what they acted. Overall, in all classroom observations, feedback was observed as advice and comment that students give each other, spoken comment, hint, tip, and reminder, discussion with students about their work, and tick or cross on

student work. The teachers' focus was on involving students in using feedback to improve their work and develop self-sufficiency.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings about feedback are examined in terms of two aspects, perceptions of feedback and feedback practices during teaching and learning process. The results of the data analysis reveal that EFL instructors' perceptions about the use of feedback are strongly related to growth of learning rather than students' well being and grading construction, and EFL instructors' feedback practices gathered under the teacher formative feedback practices are congruent with their perceptions in preparatory classes at this state university.

These data suggest that teachers endorsed feedback factors associated with assessment and feedback to improve learning. Furthermore, teachers provided largely equivalent responses to the checklist with in the semi-structured interview and classroom observation. The perceptions of feedback factors and the feedback practice definitions indicated that there were conceptually meaningful relations between teachers' conceptions of feedback and their practices.

The teachers' focus was on involving students in generating and using feedback to improve their work and develop autonomy. Encouragement and providing student self-esteem were considered as aspects of this learning-oriented conception of feedback. The most frequently provided type is task feedback. However, task feedback is the type most commonly delivered to students in the schools.

In terms of Tunstall and Gipps's (1996) feedback typology, both descriptive feedback and evaluative feedback were observed in the instructors' feedback practices. However, descriptive feedback was preferred more than evaluative feedback because the instructors believe that this type of feedback improves students' learning.

The detailed feedback seems more likely to be encouraging. This finding is congruent with the findings of the study by Brinko (1993) who argued that there is no distinction in the effect of oral or written feedback. The data analysis reveals that there is an aptitude to use general feedback as much as detailed feedback.

In terms of the research questions from the aspect of timing, the data analysis reveals that there is a high aptitude for immediate feedback after the performance while some of the teachers preferred to give feedback during the tasks (Bee and Bee, 1998; Brinko, 1993). In addition, it is good not to see that there is a preference for delayed feedback such as two or three weeks later.

It is concluded from the data analysis that as a result of feedback, learners find it easy to make links between what they learnt before in the class and what they have just learnt, they want to participate more in tasks, they find the opportunity to improve their performance, they can realize on which subjects they have the opportunity to reflect on their performance through the help of the feedback they receive.

Unsurprisingly, none of the feedback practice factors was predicted by the *Irrelevance* factor. It is only natural that feedback practices teachers used should not be related to any sense that feedback is irrelevant. When feedback is irrelevant, then it may not be

practiced at all.

As a final statement, it can be interpreted that feedback used in foreign language teaching classes as suggested, can clearly produce effective outcomes and helps the learners construct knowledge in an encouraging manner and increases their success as well.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Further Study**

First of all, for feedback to be effective, feedback may involve encouraging and positive comments. Second, the feedback given may be on behavior or performance rather than on the individual learner. Third, timing of feedback is important. Feedback might be better when given immediately after the learner's performance. Fourth, teacher's role is very important in giving feedback. Feedback can be effective if the teacher organizes lesson plan and give students opportunities to respond to feedback. Therefore, when giving feedback the teacher might encourage the learner for self-reflection.

The findings are worthwhile and might be used to reinforce teachers' learning to improve their understanding of feedback and its practices. When the teachers are aware of their perceptions about feedback, they may think more consciously about the subject and make or concern changes. The more they are given opportunities to share and discuss subjects around feedback, the easier they will apply formative feedback principles.

Learning oriented perception of feedback provides formative assessment because all learning is monitored (Vercauteren, 2005), but nothing is measured without learning. Feedback is essentially formative assessment for formative assessment becomes formative when 'it is immediately used to make adjustments so as to form new learning' (Shepard, 2008).

This study reveals that when learning is an complicated process of learning and involves teacher and student interaction as well as time and analysis of learning by both teachers and learners, 'it is important that the teachers pay attention to giving the right type of feedback and allowing time for learners to reflect on their own performance' (Atah, 2008).

In a lesson time, teachers may not enough time to provide effective feedback, it is a robust effect for teachers to eschew using feedback. Therefore, program developers should accept the time as a need for change. They should take 'time' into consideration at the planning stage when the classroom practice includes formative assessment strategies and tools.

The further studies might be conducted during a term or a year to get more reliable data. Future research can address more classroom observations and questionnaires. Future research could also address the language used in the feedback process.

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**Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. How does feedback affect your students?
2. How does feedback improve your students learning process?
3. What are your reasons for giving feedback? (Do you give it voluntarily or compulsorily)
4. What is the role of praise in feedback?
5. How do you know that your students understand feedback?
6. What process do you follow by providing feedback?
7. What is the importance of your feedback in students' self-regulation?
8. What do you think about peer-feedback and self-feedback?
9. When do you think feedback should be given?