



*Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi*

## **An Examination of the Psychology of the Feedback Receiver: The Case of EFL Students**

### **Geribildirim Alanların Psikolojisinin İncelenmesi: Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrenen Kişiler Örneği\***

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**ABSTRACT:** The shift to a constructive feedback culture requires a thorough examination of the impact of feedback practices. However, a great many studies conducted on feedback in EFL or ESL contexts focus mainly on the effectiveness of feedback practices with reference to feedback receivers' achievement or improvement in subsequent writing practices. Thus, the psychological aspects of the feedback provision processes are not adequately investigated. In an effort to address this gap, this study attempts to elicit the perspectives of 8 EFL learners who are taking writing classes in a preparatory programme. Stimulated-recall protocols conducted for three drafts and semi-structured interviews were used to gather data, and Kohut's terminologies with reference to his Self-Psychology were used in the interpretation of the data. The study offers some insights into our understanding of the impact of the feedback practices and helps us identify which aspects of feedback practices prove to be "self-regulating" or "traumatic." The study offers a psychological perspective on feedback practices.

**Keywords:** writing, feedback, motivation, learner psychology, EFL learners

**ÖZ:** Yapıcı bir geribildirim kültürüne geçiş, geribildirim uygulamalarının etkisinin kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alınmasını gerektirir. Ancak İkinci veya Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce bağlamlarında geri bildirim üzerine yapılan çok sayıda çalışma çoğunlukla geri bildirim alan kişilerin geribildirimden sonraki yazma uygulamalarındaki başarılarına veya gelişmelerine yönelik olup bu geri bildirim uygulamalarının verimliliğine odaklanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, geri bildirim süreçlerinin psikolojik yönleri yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu boşluğu gidermek amacıyla yapılan bu çalışma, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce bağlamında bir hazırlık programında yazma dersleri alan 8 öğrencinin geri bildirimine olan bakış açılarını ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Veri toplamak için üç taslak üzerinde uygulanan çağrışım tekniği protokolleri ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullanılmıştır ve verilerin yorumlanmasında Kohut'un kendilik psikolojisi ile ilgili terminolojilerden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışma, geri bildirim uygulamalarının etkisine ilişkin bazı görüşler sunmaktadır ve geri bildirim uygulamalarının hangi yönlerinin "öz-düzenleyici" ya da "travmatik" olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, geri bildirim uygulamalarına psikolojik bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** yazma, geribildirim, motivasyon, öğrenme psikolojisi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenenler

\* The researchers obtained data during 2018-2019 educational period. With regard to the issued statements on compliance with ethical standards, I/we did not use any unlawful method or material during the research. The researchers initiated the research after permissions (i. e. voluntary and individual written consents) pertaining to the study, and the preliminary findings were presented at the Third International Conference on Research in Applied Linguistics - ICRAL 2019.

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## Introduction

Given that feedback provision does not take place in a vacuum and that the feedback receivers are human beings with unique mental and emotional health needs, understanding the feedback receivers' psychology requires a great deal of attention. However, the effectiveness of the feedback sessions is usually approached from "language gains" perspective, and, as a result, feedback receivers' emotional make-up has largely been underresearched. Thus, there is pressing need to capture how feedback receivers feel in feedback sessions.

That there is a close connection between language and behaviour, or to put it more specifically, feedback and behaviour, is well-established, and what really goes on in teacher-student feedback encounters is subject to thorough examination. "In the right context, a casual remark by a teacher, or even a raised eyebrow or tone of voice can set you on a lifelong journey of discovery or put you off taking even the first step." said Sir Ken Robinson (2011, p. 267), whose TED talk performance has gone massively viral. The complexity of the input in feedback situations makes it a growing necessity to elicit feedback receivers' voices. Understanding the psychology of the feedback receivers could play a significant role in understanding the desired feedback practices or feedback provision strategies.

In line with the changes in writing pedagogy, feedback practices have witnessed several shifts. Feedback with teacher comments, peer feedback, computer-delivered feedback and conferences have all become popular (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Especially with the increased implementation of process-based writing pedagogy, the focus on summative feedback has been replaced by a focus on formative aspects of feedback. However, process-based writing pedagogy was not free from criticism, and integration of sociocultural dimension has brought mediated feedback implementations (Lee, 2014). There is increased attention on feedback practices with reference achievement or improvement in subsequent writing practices (Ruegg, 2018); however, it could be argued that the psychological aspects of the feedback provision processes not adequately investigated. The need to capture the emotional investment of the learners (Zhang, 1995) remains as a salient requirement as what predicts the learner achievement is closely linked to their affect.

Teaching and counselling, or, putting it for the specific case of feedback and therapy, are closely linked (McDonough & McDonough, 2014). We see the instances of the counselling in Curran's Counselling learning model as well as (see for example Stevick's (1980) discussion of Curran's model of Counselling Learning) Suggestopedia. However, unlike a conventional counselling, the objective is "not to 'cure' by changing behaviour but 'to leave a residue of results rather than a posse of cured souls'" (p. 326, quoting Madge).

In several studies, the impact of teacher feedback did not produce favourable outcomes. Zhang (1995), for instance, argued that teacher feedback was confidence-lowering, while Truscott (1996) called for the abandonment of teacher corrections as it could even "harm" students. Moreover, according to Hyland and Hyland (2006), traditional

feedback practices were usually ambiguous, lacked systematicity and domineering. However, the picture for current practices does not seem to be bleak, and there are many studies that report the effectiveness of the feedback practices. This study examines the role of mediated-feedback sessions on the feedback receivers' psychology. To this end, it will benefit from Kohut's terminology.

A considerable number of educational settings have so far infected with failure in that it does not provide the learners (children and adolescents) with empathic mirroring. Çıraklı figuratively states that "in a tragic lesson/classroom setting there is no blood, but murder" (2018, p. 134). Particularly those who have an ill experience with EFL settings can be healed through the integration of Self Psychology into feedback processes with suggestive and corrective responses causing 'optimal frustration' instead of 'traumatic interference.' Since Kohut's Self Psychology is not based on a model of pathological development of self this study argues that feedback processes can be re-examined in light of Self Psychology. Even though the clinical terminology of "treatment" can be used in some cases, mostly we have a strong inclination to use "therapy" rather than "treatment", and this paper attempts to compare the 'therapy' process to that of 'feedback' process. Thus, considering Self Psychology concerns itself with 'normal' (not pathological) individuals, the paper argues that its use of the strategies of correction, empathy and suggestion can be applied to teacher-student feedback sessions, which seeks to fulfil a therapeutic experience.

Having involved in the Freudian tradition and practiced for some considerable time in psychotherapy circles, Heinz Kohut developed his well-known model of "Self Psychology". His works (1971, 1977, 1982, 1984) are all devoted to raise, explicate and elaborate on the concept, which draws on the differences from classical psychoanalysis. Freud's influential psychoanalysis deals with neurotic patients, who had essentially experienced certain conflicts through the initial developmental stages of the self. What Freud calls Oedipal phase is associated more of such 'internalised conflicts.' Psychoanalytic approaches are aimed at construing 'libidinal energy,' 'aggressive drives' and interpreting 'neurotic responses' based on the crippled images created during childhood period. Kohut, however, focuses on the 'narcissistic development' of a person, which projects a positive, humanistic psychology of continuity conceiving the individual through his/her self-development from an affirmative stance, rather than foregrounding 'bio-psychological' distortions (Tobin, 1991). Thus, Kohut's Self Psychology considers intergenerational 'permanence and harmony' rather than 'struggle and conflict'. In other words, Self-Psychology is based upon the idea that "the child is born strong, not helpless, and has innate, hardwired ability to relate in natural empathic self-object (anything the individual experiences as part of her or his self) milieu and able to fit harmoniously into his or her surrounding of birth" (Ornstein & Ornstein, 1996, p. 94).

Feedback sessions can have a role to insinuate the two important concepts in the development of a cohesive, integrated self: Care and protection. A learner needs care and protection throughout the feedback sessions, particularly during the stages of foreign language learning. However, any technique or strategy used in feedback may distort the development of a cohesive self of the learner as well as help them feel a valued persona.

Kohut carefully distinguishes between “narcissistic development” (with positive associations) and narcissistic disorder (with negative prosody). Early caregiving experiences are predictors of a cohesive sense as Kohut suggests, and from the perspective of Kohut’s “Self Psychology”, feedback sessions may retain a significant potential to consolidate the development<sup>1</sup> of the self in the form of “care” and “protection” or these sessions may distort the development of the self, resulting in feedback trauma. In fact, the learner’s self-development can be nurtured by feedback (within optimal boundaries) as well as obstructed by traumatic feedback (with neglect or abuse). The learner’s psychological being, whose development characterizes a major step to be taken for an integrated (healthy, mature and integrated) personality, is therefore should be reconsidered from the perspective of learner psychology.

Kohut foregrounds the essential continuum of the self-development, which should not be obstructed or interrupted. Kohut calls it narcissistic development as a “normal” process in the development of a self and differentiates between “narcissistic development” and “narcissistic disorder”. If a feedback taker is traumatised during the feedback process, his/her narcissistic development is interrupted, distorted or broken and then the learner develops a “narcissistic disorder”. Therefore, a suggestive feedback giver should be corrective, inspiring and supportive in a manner of “care” and “protection” in case feedback sessions could turn out to be traumatising for the learner who is always vulnerable to be abused or neglected by the teacher. In other words, the students may be shocked or seriously disappointed (psychologically injured) by the lack of a good image or the reflection of a distorted image in the eyes (figuratively mirror) of the teacher. In fact, constant and consistent positive responses from the teachers have a crucial role to contribute to such personal development. Hence it can be argued that if educational settings do not turn into expressive maternal spaces (Çıraklı, 2018), feedback sessions can distort or contribute to the development of learners’ cohesive self. A feedback giver should restructure the sessions in a way that it can satisfy the learners’ essential need for “care” and “protection”. However, it can be observed that some of the students are very enthusiastic while some others are considerably reluctant or anxious to be involved in a feedback engagement. Those with a disordered self simply retreat and alienate themselves from the sources of feedback, which indicates anxiety. It implies that some of the learners may have become vulnerable to criticism during the educational experience. Therefore, feedback which is not given in a supportive (and suggestive) manner is likely to create pathological conditions rather than a conducive atmosphere or scaffolding effect. If there are symptoms of self-object deficits due to the feedback process, it may indicate a wounded memory of the persona who might have developed narcissistic disorder and difficulties in emotion regulation (Kohut, 1984).

Responses from significant others, particularly from feedback givers, are influential on the learners’ perceptions and emotional states. The terms optimal frustration and traumatic frustration can account for what really happens when learners receive feedback. Optimal frustration refers to disappointment of a tolerable degree. It is thought that such kind of disappointment is important for personal growth. Traumatic frustration, on the

other hand, includes disappointment which acts as “a protective barrier to be built up around these [instinctual] impulses” (Bacal, 1985, p. 203). People who experience traumatic frustration might place undue focus on their weaknesses and deficiencies, paving the way for feelings of insufficiency (Kohut, 1971).

The effects of optimal frustration and traumatic frustration are produced through the mirroring processes in which the learner perceives and accumulates experiential emotions. When Kohut’s terminologies of Self Psychology is reconsidered within the context of feedback experience, self-objects, mirroring self-objects, idealised teacher imago and self-imago (see Table 1) can be categorised as follows:

**Table 1.** Self-Objects and Idealised Imago

Self-Objects (We develop Self through the experience of.../entities and acts)		
<i>Mirroring self-objects</i>	Written product, act of writing, language learning, performance	Sense of importance, perfection, strength, integrity
<i>Idealized teacher imago / Idealised Self imago</i>	The student idealizes or looks up to the teacher as infallible, omnipotent, and calm The student wants to identify with the teacher and to see his/her idealised image in the eyes of the feedback giver	Sense of security, care, protection

As can be seen, the writing process itself and language learning turns out to be a positive, essential factor for the development of self. This study reconsiders feedback process beyond sense of inadequacy nurtured and reinforced so far by the traditional educational settings. The critical dividing line between a traumatic experience with the selfobjects and an improving frustration out of the experience can be achieved through an optimal interaction between the student (child and adult counselee) and the teacher (the idealised imago). In the feedback session, teacher’s role is two-fold: First, s/he acts as having parental role supposed to satisfy the self’s need of ‘care and protection’. Such a need to see his/her image in the eyes of the teacher is explicated by Marmarosh and Mann (2014, p. 298) as follows:

A healthy mirroring selfobject experience, such as being the gleam in the parent’s eye, facilitates self-esteem, ambitions, and the ability to assert oneself later in life. Unlike mirroring needs, idealizing selfobject needs stem from the desire to rely on or merge with an idealized other in times of stress, similar to a desire to seek the resources of a secure attachment figure. When idealizing selfobject needs are met, they foster a healthy sense of ideals and internal values and promote self-soothing and emotion regulation. Selfobject needs for twinship include our need to belong, to be acknowledged as a fellow human being, and to feel connected to a similar other. Twinship selfobject needs that are met facilitate a sense of connection to a larger group, intimacy, and feelings of belongingness.

As regards empathy, it is one of the most critical terms offered by Kohut. The term is in want of keen insight for application since it differs from its conventional reception. As the therapist is supposed to treat the counselee with empathy, a feedback giver is obliged to exert feedback empathy that appropriately corresponds to the notion of “feeling the pulse” of the learner. Empathy is necessary for a corrective and suggestive feedback that is also a therapeutic experience for the student as long as healthy mirroring and feedback empathy are fulfilled. It is therapeutic because it heals, on the one hand, past traumatic experience,

and, on the other, helps regulate anxiety and tension for the present and future performances. The teacher's interactive and empathic mode is so vital here: Like a therapist, s/he is supposed to be reliable, responsive, responsible, caring and concerned (Kohut, 1982). If there are negative internalisations due to traumatic past, the student may avoid the process, keep reluctant in responding. Furthermore, the student may be anxious to re-experience trauma or doubt empathy or understanding of the teacher. In such cases the teacher should be tolerant and show (not tell) s/he understands him/her: "The state of the self is profoundly affected by feeling understood and explaining generates insight which can only be derived by the patient, *it is not something that can be given*" (Ornstein & Ornstein, 1996, p. 94). As the teacher and student create a shared medium of empathy, the student internalises a mutually experienced reality. The result is a therapeutic change, not a psychopathological treatment. Even though the nexus between the psychoanalysis and education is well established, few studies were conducted to develop and understanding of teachers from a psychoanalytic perspective (Pajak, 1981). The current study is a response to a call for an exploration of feedback receivers' psychology, and how learners' psychology is affected in feedback sessions will be explicated.

In a nutshell, feedback processes can be designed in a way that provides the students with an alternative chance for beneficial internalization. Kohut's concept of "transmuting internalization" explicates the process (Tolpin, 1971), which has to do with "inherent, inborn, innate, promising and latent potential" (Ornstein & Ornstein, 1996, p. 94). Kohut suggests that this potential is likely to "come out and come true in the course of self-development" (p. 94). This process is closely related with optimum *gratification* and optimum *frustration*. Kohut additionally suggests that "minor empathic failures" and "delayed or ill responses" to the individual [i.e. infant, adolescent, even adult; learner or student in this context] breaks his/her relationship with the self-objects, which stimulates anxiety. With the help of a soothing writing coach, anxiety is alleviated and self-cohesion develops.

### Methodology

This study aims to elicit the perceptions of students towards teacher feedback. To this end, a qualitative study in which semi-structured interviews were used to gather data was chosen to capture the respondents' feelings about feedback sessions in detail. The opt for a qualitative study seems to be a viable choice because as McDonough and McDonough (2014, p. 190) argued, "Studying language learning, or anything else, by using verbal report methods sits fairly firmly in a long tradition of individual psychology studies." The participants include 8 EFL students majoring in an undergraduate English language and literature program in north-eastern Turkey. They all submitted their tasks and received teacher feedback. The feedback sessions were held either with the course lecturer in a face-to-face interaction or written feedback was provided by the course lecturer. The sessions were attuned to the learners' zone of proximal development (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). One participant was male while the remaining 7 were female, and their ages ranged from 18 to 40. They submitted a total of 5 paragraphs each of which required them to write well-developed paragraphs of 200-250 words. Those five paragraphs were in different genres. The selection of the participants was done on a voluntary basis, and convenient

sampling procedure was used as the selection criteria. A convenience sampling strategy was employed because such a strategy helps “represent sites or individuals from which researchers can access and easily collect data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). The easy access to individuals at the department was the main motive for such a selection. As for the research instrument, semi-structured interviews were used. During the interviews, the participants were provided with their papers. Such a move stimulated the learners to recall their feedback experiences. Those interviews took between 11-19 minutes and an average of ten questions were addressed to the respondents. Based on the respondents’ oral consent, the interviews were recorded, and then they were transcribed verbatim. Next, the transcriptions were analysed using inductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To achieve trustworthiness, a colleague who has qualitative research experience was asked to go through the transcribed data and develop codes and themes. Moreover, the participants were asked to go through the data given.

The participants were assigned a code name from S1 to S8 protect their anonymity. Moreover, they were told that the data gathered would only be used for research purposes.

The following questions were explored throughout the study:

1. How do students view teacher feedback?

a) Which forms of teacher feedback is associated with “traumatic experience”?

b) Which forms of teacher feedback is associated with “optimal frustration”?

### Findings and Discussion

In order to find out the participants’ feedback history, they were asked to elaborate on their previous feedback and writing history. The following excerpts are taken from the participants’ answers: S1 stated that she had never received feedback from a teacher before. She was checking the paragraphs she wrote using programs like Grammarly. Another participant drew attention to feedback reduced to grades. Another learner reported that she had never written before. One report of feedback came from a student who received feedback in her English Literature class: “*Last year, I had 12th grade English Literature class, two hours, we read short stories and wrote about them. I liked writing in that lesson, and our teacher gave feedback* (S4). For another learner, feedback was not provided in a professional way. “*Before here, I was studying Interior Design, we had English classes. They gave us some feedback in our mother tongue, but not about our English performance* (S5)” It is evident from the respondents’ excerpts that they had limited or no feedback experience. Since they are undergraduate students majoring in an English language and literature department, they are actually expected to have a great deal of experience in L2 writing as well as other language skills. In this manner, their limited feedback experience could be interpreted as a weakness. On the other hand, the researchers take it as an opportunity to benefit from the experiences of learners whose previous feedback experience is less likely to affect their decisions and feelings. Apart from the learner’s feedback history, their characterization of and reaction to good feedback needs examination (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Students Representation of Good Feedback

Student	Excerpt
(S3)	<i>"The feedback that teaches me my error in a good way is a good feedback."</i>
(S4)	<i>"I shouldn't make that mistake again after receiving feedback. The feedback error should be presented to me in such a way that I should not understand it and repeat it."</i>
(S2)	<i>"When I'm told about the points I've accomplished as well as my mistakes, I can see whether I'm making progress on the way I go, and that makes me feel good."</i>
(S3)	<i>"Generally, I feel good if I am wrong, but feedback makes me feel good."</i>
(S6)	<i>"I know that I cannot write an essay in a perfect way. However, if the lecture thinks it is near to good or academic, then it is good for me."</i>
(S7)	<i>"In my opinion, good feedback should of course focus on mistakes. However, it should also include encouraging feedback which is more than mere "good" or "bad". A content-based evaluation makes a feedback good."</i>
(S8)	<i>"Feedback that shows my mistakes and how to fix them can always be called useful."</i>

When the respondents were asked about their descriptions of "good feedback" they referred to improved accuracy in subsequent drafts (S2; S3; S4; S5); comprehensibility (S1; S2; S4) and sustained motivation (S1; S5) repeatedly. For many respondents, good feedback is associated with more correct forms of writing. Therefore, the words mistakes and errors were frequently used in their responses (see S2; S3; S4; S7; S8). However, as S7 reported, feedback including content as well as form is welcomed more. It is worth noting here that good feedback is usually associated with teacher/s. As S6 notes, such a teacher-based obsession could amount to limiting one's learning pace to that of the teachers'. Even though a teacher-led writing development help gauge the learners' agency, it could also suppress it. For some learners, negotiations throughout the feedback process were the driving force. That is, learners desire feedback process as a mutual interaction. Therefore, interaction that results in comprehension is likely to be forward moving for learners. S2 provides a clarification for this issue pointing to the necessity of face-to-face sessions. *"For example, as another teacher says, I am not sure whether the feedback the student receives and puts in the portfolio ... is sufficient. This makes it better for me to hold face-to-face feedback sessions. Even if I learn and understand the coding for errors, I may not understand why there is a mistake. Therefore, I need to negotiate throughout the process (S2)."* To put this in Kohut's terms, when learners negotiate in the feedback process, they become part of the decision-making. However, not all feedback experiences are welcomed by the learners. Table 3 provides a list of excerpts from students on their negative experience of feedback.

**Table 3.** Students' Representation of Poor Feedback

Student	Excerpt
(S1)	<i>"A feedback which I do not really understand is bad for me. Because I might do the same mistakes over and over."</i>
(S2)	<i>"If the teacher giving feedback only gives a feedback on paper instead of one-on-one help, I think that feedback is not enough."</i>
(S3)	<i>"Poor feedback is the one which I didn't understand."</i>
(S6)	<i>When a lecturer writes only down "bad", "not good". I need to know what I made wrong</i>

(S7) *It is the feedback given just for the sake of it; feedback reduced to the comments such as “good” or “bad”.*

Poor feedback was linked to lack of comprehension (S1; S3; S4), overemphasis on details (S2); lack of improved accuracy in subsequent drafts (S3; S4), lack of genuine dialogue (S6; S7; S8) and demotivating feedback (S3; S5). What counts as poor feedback to a considerable number of learners (n=3) has much to do with comprehension. If learners fail to understand what is going on in feedback sessions, then it might be cited as a poor feedback. Therefore, feedback sessions should be designed in a way there is a mutual negotiated practice. *“If the teacher giving feedback only gives a feedback on paper instead of one-on-one help, I think that feedback is not enough.”* said S2, suggesting the futility of error codes which do not make sense. Another respondent (S1) reported that *“A feedback which I do not really understand is bad for me. Because I might do the same mistakes over and over.”* A similar sentiment echoes in S3’s following words: *“Poor feedback is the one which I didn't understand. (S3)”*

Apart from comprehensibility, demotivating feedback was highlighted as a discouraging factor. One respondent argued that the need for suggestive rather than corrective feedback was the desirable form. She put it as follows: *“[if someone says] This is wrong, this is also wrong, why did you do it like this...” Such imperative feedback is a bad feedback, I think. (S4)”* Another respondent used the following words to describe poor feedback: *“It is demotivating feedback... If a teacher says, “you should stop writing,” that is bad feedback for me (S5)”*. Moreover, a disproportionate share of effort and outcomes could be frustrating for learners. This is put by a respondent as follows: *“It hurts me to get a feedback full of mistakes from a homework or exam I've worked hard. On the other hand, if it is something with poor effort, I do not get hurt because I didn't do well, so the result came.” (S2).* *“The feedback I received with the brutal criticism of the essay I wrote in the writing lesson upset me and caused me not to want to write any more”* said S7 pointing to the underappreciation of his work. Developing a genuine communication with the learners is a necessity through the feedback sessions. Feedback reduced to “good” or “bad” (S6; S7) may not reflect what learners desire. Specification and elaboration are necessary for communicating feedback. Therefore, emphatic feedback should be given by devoting a particular time to appreciate the learners’ effort, which suggests that what they have done is an attempt on the way to learn. The absence of such care might result in a lack in learner’s development just as it is the case for child’s development:

By failing to provide appropriate empathic feedback during critical times in a child's development, the child does not develop the ability to regulate self esteem, and so the adult vacillates between an irrational overestimation of the self and feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, the adult relies on others to regulate his self esteem and give him a sense of value, essentially looking for empathic feedback not received during development. (McLean, 2007, p. 41)

Feedback provision is part of communication, and for learners to develop feedback-seeking behaviour, people should not make others lose their face. Sentences such as *“You have done it completely wrong, it will not be, absolutely delete the place, scratch, remove”* might not do any good because *“Such comments containing the suggestions rather than*

*imperatives are welcome.* (S3)” The communication in question is usually achieved between two equal parties. When the feedback provider is domineering, then it would be a top-down imposition. Such an act may not be desirable or fruitful. Similarly, when the learners were describing the unfavourable situations, one (S8) reported that she experienced a great deal of stress when someone was commenting on her paper. It appears from the learners’ accounts that traumatic experience is usually associated with mistakes. Therefore, the onus falls much on teachers to gently tackle with mistakes.

Feedback serves as a tool to consolidate learning. Therefore, feedback practices should be aligned with instruction. If the feedback is attuned to the participants’ learning pace and current learning agenda, it might result in greater gains. When the participants were asked to highlight the gains, if any, they told about increased awareness (S1), increased grammar self-efficacy (S1; S2; S3; S6), paragraph unity (S2); increased motivation (S3), more long-lasting outcomes (S4), and increased awareness of word choice (S5). Learner voices here could substantiate the suggested remarks. S1 stated that she had greater esteem not to commit mistakes. This is evident in her following description:

*“When I wrote these papers, we were at the beginning of the writing lesson. We were not adequately familiar with the introduction, development, conclusion, major, minor... When I wrote all these, I did not know some of them well. After receiving feedback, I understood the subjects I saw in class better and understood them through my own mistakes. Since I see my mistakes more clearly, I think it will be easier to write more. What I realize is that this is the beginning for me not to make these mistakes in the future.”*

For S2, the gains were related to syntax and paragraph unity: *“I learnt a lot of grammatical issues like the sentence, paragraph integrity, and the transitions you just mentioned”* (S2). Feedback which triggers the learners to write further is pronounced in S3’s following words: *“I think I will not make these [similar] mistakes again, and I can say that I feel more eager to write. I’ve seen my mistakes and want to prepare myself for the better”* (S3). When the classroom learning is supported by feedback experience, it is more likely for learners to remember the things for an extended period: *“I think I’ll remember everything, and I don’t think I’ll forget what I’ve learned for a long time.”* (S4).

As a last question, the learners were asked to report on whether there were any things they would be doing differently in feedback sessions. A majority of the learners reported that they would be doing what the teacher was doing. The remaining respondents (S1; S8) expressed the responsibility writing teachers or feedback providers shoulder. Pointing to the difficulty of having face-to-face feedback sessions in overpopulated classrooms, S1 said: *“I think that face-to-face feedback is very useful, but considering the number of students, I’m not sure how possible this model could be achieved. Leaving this aside, I think it is very useful to do feedback with a student face-to-face.”* Another student (S8) voiced a similar concern saying that *“I would talk to every student face to face alone. I wouldn’t like it when my students feel uncomfortable. Saying around 40 students that he or she made stupid mistakes are not very nice.”* Learners’ reactions to feedback practices tell much about their psychology indeed.

### Conclusion

An examination of the learners' responses provides a great deal of insight for feedback providers. These insights help practitioners make more informed decisions about the good and poor feedback practices as well as learners' needs, lacks and wants. It appears from the study that the respondents had limited or no exposure to feedback before the feedback sessions. The limited exposure of the participants helped the researchers to attribute the participants' feelings to the feedback sessions held throughout the study. The findings gathered from the study reveal that one needs to revisit the long-term goal in L2 writing which encourages learners to write better. In line with the findings, emotional investment through healthy mirroring and feedback empathy could be equally important for teachers or feedback providers to consider. If learners are going to see feedback as an opportunity for their self-development, then they should be convinced that teachers' suggestions for repair open up new avenues for their ongoing narcissistic development in Kohut's terms. This requires building mutual trust, that is, care and protection through healthy mirroring, and the teacher shoulders an enormous responsibility to attune his/her feedback to the learners' development of Self. To achieve mutual trust in question, learners should be assured that what is judged is the learners' work rather than their personality. Such assurance makes it easier to build rapport with the students and kept the experience within the boundaries of optimal frustration' rather than 'traumatic interference.

The study reveals that students' wellbeing or agency is somewhat disregarded throughout the conventional feedback contexts. Moreover, they state that they frequently face a stiff competition in which they are compelled to get higher grades, meet school-imposed goals, catch up with deadlines and demonstrate a decent performance in different walks of life. This is simply in conformity with the results of the previous research that learners' writing processes are to a great extent accompanied by motivation and anxiety problems and social-emotional development is a significant concern to help develop language skills as well as personalities (Diekstra, 2008). The present study, too, supports feedback attuned to learners' ZPD, and argues that it could make the learning contexts more engaging. For such feedback to appear, intrinsically motivated learners who invest in writing "for their own sake rather than for achieving some later external goal" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 117) should be targeted. Feedback providers who display an increased awareness of these realities in line with Kohut's Self Psychology (i.e., "empathy", "development of the learner's self", "self-image", "optimal frustration") are more likely to touch hearts as well as minds.

Seeking to achieve accuracy, a key dimension for conventional feedback contexts, can turn into an obstruction in the development of the learner's self. In some feedback procedures, since feedback practices are narrowed down to a traumatic error hunting procedure, in which case students might equate feedback with criticism and see it as a threat to their survival and watch mistakes and greater accuracy. Since most of the learners expect form-focused suggestions in their writing, reducing feedback to sheer content-focused practices may not be of great help for learners either. Therefore, a balanced treatment of form and content should be prioritized. To promote such a feedback culture, feedback from different circles, including peers, should be encouraged. In addition to

comprehensibility and increased accuracy, increased commitment to writing is another priority learners expect. Learners in general want to see feedback as a tool that ignites their intrinsic motivation. Such a desire for motivation could be achieved when there is a balanced treatment of errors and appreciation of good work (Valenzuela, 2005). Moreover, not surprisingly, when the learners were asked to describe “poor or demotivating feedback,” they pointed to the undue emphasis on corrections. Therefore, there is a need to introduce the idea that feedback provision should be a “suggestive reader response” rather than mere and sheer correction. Students whose papers are solely “corrected” might see such corrections as a threat to their self-cohesion, which may violate the limits of the optimal frustration. Therefore, the feedback providers should assure that they are judging the students’ work rather than their creative self.

The study additionally shows that feedback practices should be aligned with learner needs and wants, which concurs the idea that teacher-student relationship in feedback contexts is similar to the mother-child relationship (Pajak, 1981). Hence, applying the analogy to feedback situations, the findings highlighted that teachers as feedback providers shoulder several responsibilities. The teacher or the feedback provider has a responsibility to facilitate the normal narcissistic development (in Kohut’s sense) of the learner’s self, which helps learners discover their own potentials. Moreover, they provide socio-culturally attuned feedback. Therefore, they should consider feedback receivers as individuals who are provided space to think and produce divergently. Such considerations require the feedback providers to integrate “empathy” when giving feedback.

Nurturing empathy, feeling the pulse of the learner, plays a critical role to achieve optimal gratification and optimal frustration. The study shows that feedback sessions are vital in that the learners receive responses (mirroring needs) from a “feedback provider”, who are the significant others, in Kohut’s terms, and they are remarkably influential on the learners’ perceptions and emotional states. This “critical other” should be an empathic and caring figure “during” the process because feedback provision contexts are subject to praise and criticism even though teachers might opt for sugaring the pill by mitigating feedback. As the study indicates, learners desire to be part of the process in decision-making, which satisfies their selfobject needs and encourages them to be involved in feedback empathy, which brings about intrinsic motivation. Hence, to help promote a feedback-seeking culture, feedback should be considered a sustained engagement. Such engagement can be encouraged through the equity of the parties. Therefore, mediated feedback practices could fill the void of interaction in feedback sessions (Sağlamel, 2018), and educational and pedagogical perspectives need to be incorporated with a “look/feel from within” and cannot be evaluated regardless of the learner’s psychological experience.

When learner psychology is catered, frustration and gratification should be balanced and remain within optimal boundaries. It is sometimes mistakenly associated with a reduction to the mere compliments that feed the ego. However, what feedback providers are expected to do at this stage is tailoring feedback to the learners’ needs and capabilities. This might require the feedback providers to navigate along a continuum of unvarnished truth and sugar-coated criticism. Previous research suggests that, for learners, undue praise is unlikely to be effective (Brophy, 1981), and constructive criticism rather than platitudes

are more of a preference (Ferris, 1995). At the end of the day, a feedback session should be a face-saving compromise. Just the opposite scenario in which learners' performance is judged could also be tricky because learners do not desire face-threatening situations. Feedback could be approached from a broader perspective. What it means for the classroom should go beyond "corrections," and during the feedback sessions, affiliative interactional practices (e.g., empathy, compliment, playfulness) and tools (e.g., gesture, body movement, gaze, smile, intonation, facial expression) could be employed to soften the teacher feedback and help it become less traumatic. Such feedback practices might fill the void of lack of empathy, and maybe they should be taken as an opportunity for the personal development of new millennials who are characterized by narcissistic tendencies. A feedback provider, therefore, should be cautious enough with these learners' healthy narcissistic self-development, which is so vulnerable that it can be easily obstructed or broken in a way that causes trauma or, worse than that, the development of the disorder.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size is limited to 8 respondents, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger group of learners. Moreover, the participants were selected from English major students studying at an English Language and Literature Department. Selecting participants from different majors may help create a better picture to understand the psychology of learners with different motivations. Moreover, the participants received feedback for only five tasks. Longitudinal studies in which more feedback is provided could prove to be more enriching. An important variable to be noted is related to the type of feedback provided. The feedback sessions were mediated. That is, the respondents' zone of proximal development was taken into consideration. Feedback practices held irrespective of the learners' ZPD might help us understand and compare the psychology of learners who receive feedback in different modalities. Further research deploying different research designs could examine the relationship between perceived psychology and L2 writing performance. The focus of the study was the teacher and preparatory students. Future studies could be extended to the psychology of feedback providers (e.g., supervisors, peers).

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