Towards More Power-Sensitive Teacher's Written Feedback: A Critical Review of Authority

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ABSTRACT

This review critically examines the role of teacher-written feedback in negotiating authority within higher education, focusing on its linguistic, rhetorical, and institutional dimensions. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Speech Act Theory, and Moves Analysis, it explores how feedback acts not only as instruction but also as a mechanism of power, shaping student agency, identity, and engagement. The article categorizes feedback into control-based, scaffolding-based, and empowerment-oriented types, analyzing how linguistic features imperatives, modal verbs, evaluative adjectives, and rhetorical questions shape perceptions of authority. Empirical studies and existing models, including the Feedback Literacy Behaviour Scale (FLBS), Socio-Constructivist Feedback Model, and Value-Added Modeling (VAM), are reviewed for their capacity to assess power dynamics in written feedback. Findings show that overly directive feedback can suppress autonomy, while dialogic, student-centered practices foster engagement and critical thinking. A mixed-methods framework is proposed to evaluate feedback authority, combining linguistic analysis with student perceptions and revision outcomes. The review concludes by highlighting pedagogical and theoretical implications, advocating culturally responsive practices and integration of power-sensitive strategies in teacher training and institutional policy, with future research aimed at empirical validation and cross-cultural adaptation.

Keywords: Equitable Feedback, Feedback Literacy, Inclusive Pedagogy, Power Dynamics, Student Agency, Teacher-written Feedback .

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

Written feedback in education functions as both an instructional tool and a means of reinforcing institutional authority. Hyland and Hyland (2019) highlight that teacher-written feedback conveys evaluative information while shaping students' perceptions and engagement. The way feedback is delivered significantly influences motivation and self-efficacy, with Zaky (2024) emphasizing its role in online power

dynamics in higher education. Effective feedback fosters equitable learning by balancing instructional guidance with student autonomy.

Teacher feedback plays a pivotal role in shaping engagement and motivation, particularly when it supports student autonomy (Yang et al. 2025). When students perceive feedback as constructive rather than controlling, their motivation and participation increase (Ryan & Deci 2017; Ceylan 2021). Conversely, authoritative or overly directive feedback can diminish agency and engagement (Reeve & Tseng 2011). Teaching practices that acknowledge students' perspectives and provide meaningful rationales enhance motivation and long-term academic growth (Deci et al. 1991).

Scholarly research in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis highlights how teacher discourse constructs and maintains power dynamics in education. Feedback strategies, including language choices and pragmatic approaches, shape student engagement and classroom hierarchies (Pendri, Singh & Sharma 2024). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals that teacher talk often sustains institutional authority (Fairclough 2015), though some educators balance authority with facilitation, promoting student agency (Zaky 2024). Given the evolving nature of teacher discourse, dialogic approaches to feedback can create more inclusive and student-centered learning environments (Tannen 2007). With feedback central to student engagement, academic performance, and power structures, this review explores higher education feedback practices, academic writing feedback in English Language Teaching (ELT), and emerging trends in feedback methodologies.

1.2 Scope of the Review

Feedback in higher education functions not only as a tool for academic development but also as a mechanism for constructing and negotiating power between teachers and students. Consequently, it influences motivation, engagement, and authority structures in the classroom (Winstone et al. 2016). However, its effectiveness depends on how it is framed, whether as directive, facilitative, or dialogic, and how it shapes student autonomy. More specifically, teacher-written feedback plays a crucial role in reinforcing institutional expectations and power relations. While well-structured feedback clarifies learning goals, a persistent challenge lies in ensuring that it fosters student agency rather than mere compliance (Williams, 2024). Building on these considerations, this review examines how teacher feedback constructs and negotiates power in academic discourse. By adopting

this perspective, it explores the role of feedback in shaping authority, autonomy, and institutional norms. Ultimately, this study aims to provide insights into developing equitable and student-centered feedback practices that empower students rather than reinforce hierarchical control.

1.3 Aim and Structure

This review critically examines the power dynamics in teacher-written feedback, focusing on how linguistic and rhetorical choices shape authority, student engagement, and academic identity. While existing models promote equitable feedback practices, they lack mechanisms to systematically assess power. Addressing this gap, the review proposes the need for a structured framework to measure power in feedback, ensuring a balance between teacher authority and student autonomy.

The Literature Review explores how feedback constructs or mitigates authority, drawing on different theories. It examines directive vs. facilitative feedback and theoretical perspectives such as Moves Analysis and Speech Act Theory. The Review of Existing Models, aiming to control power in feedback, evaluates models like the Feedback Literacy Behaviour Scale (FLBS), the Socio-Constructivist Feedback Model, and the Formative Assessment Framework, highlighting their limitations in addressing power relations. The Proposed Framework section advocates for a structured approach to measuring power in feedback, incorporating linguistic analysis, student perceptions, and revision effectiveness. Following this, implications discuss the role of power-sensitive teacher training and the importance of student-centered feedback in fostering engagement and autonomy. Finally, the study outlines directions for future research, emphasizing the need for empirical validation, cross-cultural studies, and policies that promote dialogic feedback.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Power, Authority, and Control in Teacher's Written Feedback

Teacher-written feedback shapes student learning by providing guidance while also reinforcing or challenging power structures. Feedback can exert varying levels of control, scaffolding, or empowerment, influencing student autonomy, motivation, and engagement (Carless & Winstone 2016). Ideally, feedback should encourage self-regulation and critical engagement rather than serve as a one-way authoritative correction (Winstone et al. 2016). However, overly

controlling feedback can have unintended negative consequences, as students may perceive it as punitive or directive, leading to disengagement (Hattie & Timperley 2007).

Control-based feedback, characterized by prescriptive corrections and rigid authority, often manifests through direct commands (e.g., "Revise this sentence structure immediately"), leaving little room for student agency (Nicol 2010). While such feedback ensures compliance, it does not necessarily foster deep learning or independent writing skills (Carless 2019). Research indicates that students disengage when feedback is overly authoritative or critical, as it diminishes motivation and self-efficacy (Kharlamenko & Vonog 2020).

In contrast, scaffolding-based feedback provides structured support while maintaining student autonomy. Grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural theory, this approach uses questioning, prompts, and modeling to guide students through their zone of proximal development (Saye & Brush 2002). When feedback is framed as interactive rather than directive, students respond more positively, gaining confidence and ownership over their learning (De Smet et al. 2018; Hyland & Hyland 2019). Effective scaffolding not only enhances writing skills but also promotes engagement and long-term learning.

Empowerment-oriented feedback extends scaffolding by fostering student autonomy, reflection, and critical engagement. Rather than merely providing corrections, this approach encourages students to assess their work, identify areas for growth, and set learning goals (Winstone et al. 2016). It transforms feedback into a collaborative dialogue, shifting from a top-down assessment to a reciprocal learning process (Carless & Winstone 2020). Effective empowerment-based feedback relies on strong feedback literacy, equipping students with the skills to interpret and apply feedback constructively (Boud & Molloy 2013). Studies indicate that this approach enhances engagement, intrinsic motivation, and long-term academic resilience (Evans 2013).

Teacher-written feedback significantly impacts student motivation and learning. While control-based feedback provides immediate direction, it risks undermining autonomy if overly rigid. Scaffolding offers structured support, helping students build competence and confidence, while empowerment-oriented strategies promote independent learning and critical thinking. Future research should examine how these feedback approaches affect diverse student populations, particularly in digital and multilingual contexts.

Foucault (1977) and Bourdieu (1991) offer critical frameworks for understanding how teacher-written feedback operates at the intersection of language, power, and education. Foucault conceptualizes power as relational and embedded in discourse, arguing that feedback functions as a disciplinary mechanism that both enables intellectual growth and enforces institutional norms (Gore 2020). From this perspective, written feedback is never neutral; it plays an active role in maintaining academic standards and potentially reinforcing hierarchical structures (MacLure 2013). In addition, Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital reveals how language serves as a gatekeeper to academic legitimacy. Feedback can either affirm or marginalize students depending on their familiarity with dominant linguistic codes, reflecting broader social inequalities (Lareau & Weininger 2003). This process, which Bourdieu describes as symbolic violence, naturalizes linguistic hierarchies through seemingly objective academic practices (Grenfell 2011; Blommaert 2010). Together, these perspectives illustrate that feedback is both an instructional act and a site of power negotiation. By critically engaging with discourse and linguistic capital, educators can design feedback that challenges rather than reproduces systemic inequalities, fostering more equitable and empowering learning environments.

Building on these theoretical perspectives and applying them to teacher-written feedback in higher education highlights its dual role as both a pedagogical tool and a mechanism of power. Feedback that rigidly enforces institutional norms without acknowledging students' diverse linguistic and epistemological backgrounds can perpetuate social inequalities (Pennycook 2021). In contrast, feedback that encourages critical engagement and dialogue can empower students by validating their linguistic identities and enabling them to challenge dominant discourses (Tuck 2012). Educators must be mindful of these implicit power dynamics and adopt inclusive, formative feedback practices that allow students to develop their academic voices without rigid constraints (Canagarajah, 2013). As higher education becomes increasingly globalized and diverse, critically examining feedback through Foucault's discourse-power framework and Bourdieu's linguistic capital theory helps educators understand their role in shaping knowledge production. This perspective also offers pathways to reconceptualize feedback as a more equitable, student-centered practice.

Understanding the different types of authority in feedback is essential for refining strategies that support student learning. Feedback varies in its degree of authority and engagement, with scholars distinguishing between directive and facilitative feedback as well as

authoritative and mitigated correction (Nicol 2010). The framing of feedback significantly influences student motivation, engagement, and ability to integrate it into learning (Carless & Boud 2018). While directive feedback provides explicit guidance, facilitative feedback encourages self-reflection and autonomy. Similarly, authoritative correction is direct and unambiguous, whereas mitigated correction softens feedback through suggestions or indirect phrasing, shaping how students perceive and act upon it (Hyland & Hyland 2019).

Directive feedback ensures clarity by using imperative structures (e.g., "Revise this paragraph") and is particularly useful for novice learners needing explicit guidance (Shute 2008; Sarie 2013). However, while effective for addressing immediate learning gaps, it may discourage deep learning and independent problem-solving (Carless 2019), positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge (Boud & Molloy 2013). In contrast, facilitative feedback fosters student engagement by using questions and prompts rather than direct corrections (Hyland & Hyland 2019). For example, instead of stating, "Your thesis statement is unclear," a facilitative approach might ask, "How might you make your thesis statement more precise?" This method aligns with constructivist learning theories, promoting critical thinking and self-regulation (Nicol 2010; Winstone et al. 2016). However, its effectiveness depends on students' metacognitive abilities, as some may require additional scaffolding to engage meaningfully with open-ended prompts (Saye & Brush 2002).

Beyond directive and facilitative feedback, the tone and delivery of corrections significantly impact student engagement. Authoritative correction uses direct statements like, "This section is too vague; restate your argument more clearly," ensuring clarity but sometimes discouraging students if perceived as overly controlling (Straub 1997; Carless 2019). In contrast, mitigated correction softens feedback through modal verbs and indirect phrasing, fostering a more supportive environment (Hyland & Hyland 2019). A mitigated comment, such as "You might consider clarifying your argument here," encourages collaboration but risks ambiguity if not specific enough (Boud & Molloy 2013; Hadden & Frisby 2019).

The effectiveness of directive vs. facilitative feedback and mitigated vs. authoritative correction depends on factors like student proficiency, task complexity, and learning objectives (Carless & Boud, 2018). Novice learners often benefit from directive and authoritative feedback, which provides clear guidance, while advanced students engage more deeply with facilitative and mitigated feedback, promoting self-regulation and critical thinking (Nicol 2010). Hybrid feedback strategies blending directive and facilitative elements offer a balanced approach, optimizing clarity while fostering autonomy (Winstone et al. 2016).

Table 1 categorizes teacher-written feedback into control-based, scaffolding-based, and empowerment-oriented approaches, outlining their characteristics, impact on student engagement, and implementation examples. This structured typology highlights how feedback strategies shape student autonomy, motivation, and learning outcomes.

TABLE 1. Typology of Teacher-Written Feedback

Feedback Type	Characteristics	Impact on Students	Example Statements	Key References
Control-Based Feedback	Emphasizes prescriptive corrections and rigid instructional authority; uses direct commands.	It can reduce student agency and engagement and may lead to passive compliance rather than deep learning.	"Revise this sentence structure immediately."	Nicol 2010; Carless 2019; Kharlamenko and Vonog 2020
Scaffolding-Based Feedback	Provides structured support while maintaining student autonomy; utilizes questioning and modeling	Encourages active learning, builds confidence, and fosters incremental skill development	"How can you clarify your argument here?"	Saye and Brush 2002; De Smet et al. 2018; Hyland and Hyland 2019
Empowerment-Oriented Feedback	Promotes autonomy, self-regulation, and evaluative judgment; shifts focus from correction to student reflection.	Enhances engagement, intrinsic motivation, and long-term academic resilience	"What revisions do you think would strengthen your thesis?"	Evans 2013; Winstone et al. 2016; Carless and Winstone 2020

Directive Feedback	Provides clear, authoritative instructions for correction; uses imperatives.	Effective for novice learners but may inhibit deep engagement with feedback	"Use a more precise verb in this sentence."	Shute 2008; Sarie 2013; Carless 2019
Facilitative Feedback	Encourages self-reflection and problem-solving through open-ended prompts	Promotes autonomy, critical engagement, and higher-order thinking skills	"How might you make your thesis statement more precise?"	Nicol 2010; Winstone et al. 2016; Hyland and Hyland 2019
Authoritative Correction	Direct and unambiguous statements with little room for negotiation	Ensures clarity but may be perceived as controlling or discouraging	"This section is too vague; restate your argument more clearly."	Straub 1997; Carless 2019
Mitigated Correction	Uses modal verbs, hedging, and indirect phrasing to encourage collaboration	Creates a supportive learning environment but may lead to ambiguity	"You might consider clarifying your argument here to strengthen your position."	Boud and Molloy 2013; Hyland and Hyland 2019

To strengthen the practical relevance of the feedback typology, the following are illustrative examples drawn from real-world educational settings. For instance, in a first-year academic writing course, an instructor using control-based feedback commented, "Remove all personal pronouns from this section," whereas scaffolding-based feedback in the same context took the form, "How might shifting to the third person enhance your argument's objectivity?" In a graduate thesis seminar, empowerment-oriented feedback was exemplified by: "Which parts of your analysis do you find most convincing, and why?" Such examples underscore how feedback tone and phrasing influence student autonomy and cognitive engagement.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Feedback Studies

2.2.1 The Role of CDA and Textual Features in Feedback Power

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a structured framework for examining how teacher-written feedback reinforces power dynamics through language. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model (textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural context) helps deconstruct feedback interactions by analyzing how linguistic choices, institutional discourse patterns, and broader social influences shape educational practices (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Feedback serves a dual function: as a pedagogical tool guiding student learning and as a mechanism for maintaining institutional authority. At the textual level, the specific word choice, modality, and structure of feedback significantly shape student perception and engagement. Directive feedback, such as "You need to clarify your argument," asserts teacher authority, while suggestive phrasing, like

"Consider how you might clarify your argument," fosters student agency and reflection (Kang & Dykema 2017; Schmidt, Smith & Stewart 2024). Similarly, mitigated language and hedging strategies encourage collaboration, whereas overly directive or ambiguous feedback may discourage participation (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Additionally, evaluative adjectives and intensifiers (e.g., "strong argument" vs. "weak thesis") influence student confidence and engagement with revisions (Williams 2024). These linguistic features determine whether feedback is perceived as empowering or controlling, highlighting the critical role of textual analysis in understanding how feedback shapes student-teacher power relations.

2.2.2 Feedback as an Iterative and Institutionalized Practice

Teacher-written feedback operates within a cyclical and institutionally influenced framework, where teacher comments shape student revisions, yet interpretations often diverge from instructor intent, leading to miscommunication and resistance (Patocka et al. 2024; Kanchana et al. 2022). Institutional norms and disciplinary conventions further influence feedback practices, affecting student engagement and autonomy (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Instead of being a one-time assessment, feedback should be seen as an ongoing dialogic exchange, allowing students to negotiate meaning rather than passively comply with corrections (Tuck 2012; Winstone et al. 2016).

Beyond its iterative nature, sociocultural and institutional structures deeply shape feedback practices. Academic discourse tends to privilege certain linguistic and epistemological norms, reinforcing dominant power structures (Pennycook 2021).

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital explains why students from diverse backgrounds may struggle to align with academic expectations, particularly when feedback prioritizes linguistic accuracy over conceptual development (Lareau & Weininger 2003; Canagarajah 2013). Institutional factors such as grading rubrics and policy constraints may further limit teacher flexibility, reinforcing hierarchical academic expectations (Hyland & Hyland 2019).

Additionally, institutional ideologies influence how feedback is framed and perceived. Standard language policies often marginalize linguistic diversity, while an overemphasis on error correction may promote compliance over critical thinking (To & Tan, 2023; Khattak & Saad, 2024). Highly evaluative feedback can discourage student participation, reinforcing traditional power structures in academia (Yong, Yap & Nimehchisalem 2024). To foster inclusive, student-centered learning, educators must challenge these norms by adopting dialogic feedback strategies that validate diverse perspectives and promote critical engagement rather than rigid compliance.

2.2.3 The Ideological and Social Functions of Feedback

Teacher-written feedback is not just an instructional tool but a socially embedded practice that reflects and reinforces institutional power structures. It is inherently ideological, shaped by pedagogical traditions, cultural expectations, and dominant norms (Winstone 2022). Teacher comments influence student agency, guiding academic development while also reinforcing knowledge hierarchies (Pennycook 2021). This aligns with critical education theories, which argue that feedback perpetuates dominant ideologies and positions students within institutional frameworks (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Recognizing feedback as socially constructed allows educators to reflect on its impact beyond technical corrections and consider how it shapes academic identity and power relations.

Additionally, feedback functions as a mechanism of socialization, reinforcing hierarchical teacher-student dynamics. Traditional teacher-centered feedback positions educators as authoritative figures, while students are often passive recipients, limiting their ability to engage critically with revisions (Winstone et al. 2016). This power imbalance disproportionately affects marginalized students, such as multilingual learners and first-generation college students, whose contributions may be undervalued within dominant academic norms (Pennycook 2021). In contrast, dialogic feedback fosters student agency and

inclusivity, allowing students to actively participate in the feedback process and challenge hierarchical norms (Hyland & Hyland 2019). To create equitable learning environments, educators must adopt empowering feedback strategies that validate diverse perspectives, ensuring feedback is not merely a tool for correction but a means of promoting equity and critical engagement in learning.

2.2.4 Dialogic and Inclusive Feedback Practices

Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model to teacher feedback highlights its impact on student learning, engagement, and power relations. Researchers advocate for a dialogic feedback model that encourages students to critically engage with teacher comments, reducing hierarchical power dynamics (Winstone et al. 2016). Instead of dictating revisions, instructors should use linguistic choices that guide students, fostering agency and self-regulated learning. Addressing institutional biases in assessment practices is also crucial for ensuring inclusivity and accommodating diverse student voices (Canagarajah 2013).

To achieve more equitable feedback, educators must critically reflect on their pedagogical assumptions and adopt participatory approaches that empower students to interpret and apply feedback rather than passively receive it (Winstone et al. 2016). Scholars emphasize the need for collaborative feedback models that move beyond prescriptive correction, encouraging students to challenge dominant academic norms and develop their individual voices (Nieminen et al. 2021). Additionally, linguistically responsive feedback acknowledges cultural and linguistic diversity, validating multiple forms of knowledge (Canagarajah 2013). By reframing feedback as a negotiation rather than an authoritative directive, educators can promote student participation, agency, and a more socially just learning environment.

2.3 Authority Indicators in Feedback: Lexical and Structural Features

2.3.1 The Role of Linguistic Features in Signaling Authority

Written feedback serves as a site of authority negotiation, shaping student interpretation and revision behavior (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Lexical and grammatical choices, such as imperatives, modal verbs, evaluative adjectives, and rhetorical questions, signal authority, and influence student agency (Winstone et al. 2016). These elements can either reinforce hierarchy or foster a dialogic,

student-centered approach (Carless & Boud 2018). Educators should critically reflect on their linguistic choices to balance authority with collaboration, promoting student engagement and agency in the learning process.

2.3.2 Imperatives as Directives in Feedback

Imperatives are a direct way for teachers to assert authority, instructing students on specific revisions (Wirawan, Chojimah & Sugiharyanti 2022). Commands like "Revise this section" or "Clarify your argument" ensure clarity but can limit student ownership over the revision process (Nicol 2010). Overuse of imperatives may discourage critical engagement, as students feel compelled to comply rather than reflect (Cowan et al. 2021). To foster self-regulation, educators should balance imperatives with student-directed strategies that promote active learning.

2.3.3 Modal Verbs and Their Influence on Student Autonomy

Modal verbs (e.g., should, could, might) shape the balance between teacher authority and student autonomy in feedback (Winstone et al. 2016). Phrases like "You might consider expanding this argument" offer guidance while allowing flexibility, whereas stronger modals (must, have to) reinforce authority (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Research suggests that the strategic use of modals fosters student engagement and independence, especially in contexts where self-regulation is a key learning goal. Educators should carefully moderate modality to maintain clarity while promoting active participation in the revision process.

2.3.4 Role of Evaluative Adjectives in Feedback Interpretation

Evaluative adjectives assess student work by providing qualitative judgments (Boud & Molloy 2013). Phrases like "strong argument" or "unclear structure" guide improvement, but negative adjectives (e.g., weak, vague) can discourage students if not paired with constructive guidance (Ağçam & Özkan 2015). Research suggests that feedback should combine evaluation with revision strategies for clarity and support (Vytasek, Patzak & Winne 2019). For example, instead of "your argument is weak," a more effective comment is "Your argument lacks clarity. Consider restructuring your main points to improve coherence."

2.3.5 Rhetorical Questions and Engagement

Rhetorical questions serve as indirect feedback strategies that prompt students to critically engage

with their writing (Winstone et al. 2016). Questions like "How does this evidence support your argument?" or "Can you clarify your main claim?" shift feedback from teacher-centered correction to student-led revision, fostering ownership of learning (Hyland & Hyland 2019). This approach enhances metacognitive skills and deeper engagement (Nicol 2010), but excessive or unclear use may create confusion (Boud & Molloy 2013). Effective feedback balances directive and facilitative language. While imperatives and strong evaluative adjectives provide clarity, they should be combined with modal verbs and rhetorical questions to encourage student agency (Alisoy, 2024). A hybrid approach, blending authoritative clarity with open-ended guidance, yields the greatest learning gains (Winstone et al. 2016).

Figure 1 illustrates how linguistic features in teacher feedback range from authoritative control to facilitative guidance, shaping student autonomy and engagement.
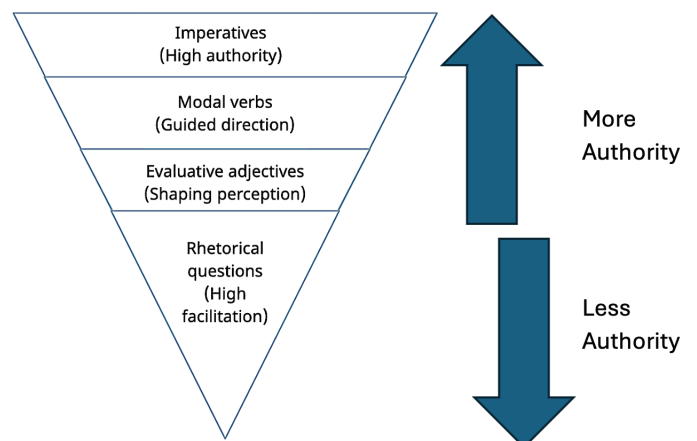

Figure 1: Teacher Feedback Hierarchy of Authority

2.4 Empirical Studies on CDA in Teacher-Written Feedback

Empirical research utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals that teacher-written feedback is not merely instructional but a key site of power negotiation, influencing student identity, engagement, and perceptions of authority (Hyland & Hyland 2019). This body of research marks a pedagogical shift from hierarchical feedback models toward collaborative, student-centered approaches that position feedback as a shared, dialogic process (Ketonen et al., 2022). Encouraging student-generated feedback enhances learner autonomy and reduces dependence on teacher authority, reinforcing participatory learning environments (Nicol & Kushwah, 2023). Linguistic choices in feedback, whether directive or dialogic,

directly impact whether feedback reinforces traditional power structures or fosters student agency.

Studies examining student responses to feedback further underscore this complexity. Kang and Dykema (2017), through CDA of first-year composition students, found varied reactions: while some students conformed to teacher directives, others resisted corrections, challenging perceived authority. These responses are shaped by students' academic literacy development and confidence, illustrating that engagement with feedback is not passive but negotiated. Similarly, Tran (2020) found that while ESL students valued corrective feedback, its authoritative delivery often led to compliance over critical engagement, limiting student autonomy. The study advocates for feedback that supports dialogue, self-assessment, and learner participation to dismantle hierarchical dynamics and empower students.

This negotiation extends to academic socialization, where students internalize feedback language and academic norms during revision, often adopting teacher terminology in their own discourse (Canagarajah 2013). Feedback thus becomes a tool for both instruction and identity formation. Gao and Fan (2024) further show that learners' acceptance or contestation of feedback depends on prior experiences, linguistic backgrounds, and academic self-efficacy.

CDA-informed research calls for feedback models that emphasize inclusivity, collaboration, and critical reflection (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Encouraging self-assessment and negotiated revision enhances student engagement and promotes self-efficacy (Luo, 2023; Taruna & Nidhi 2023). Especially in multilingual classrooms, culturally responsive feedback can reduce anxiety and support deeper learning (Huang, Wang & Hsu 2018). Collectively, these studies argue for a transformative shift from authoritative correction to dialogic interaction, framing feedback as a co-constructed process that empowers rather than evaluates.

2.5   Moves Analysis in Teacher Feedback and Power Construction

The structure and rhetorical language of teacher feedback play a pivotal role in shaping educational power dynamics, extending beyond simple evaluation to signal authority, exert control, and influence student agency (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Drawing from Swales' (1990) genre analysis and moves theory, feedback is conceptualized as a structured discourse composed of distinct rhetorical moves, such as assessment,

directive revision, and interactive engagement, that collectively shape how students interpret and respond to teacher comments (Carless & Boud 2018; Soysal & Radmard 2020). This analytical framework emphasizes that the sequencing and balance of these moves are not neutral but are instead shaped by institutional expectations and individual teaching styles, which in turn directly affect the distribution of power within the classroom (Winstone et al. 2016).

Directive moves typically employ imperatives like "Revise this argument" to establish teacher authority and clarify expectations, but their prescriptive nature can inhibit student autonomy and critical engagement (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Evaluative moves, which judge the quality of student work, such as "This is an insightful analysis" or "Your argument is too vague," can either encourage or discourage students, depending on tone, phrasing, and specificity (Winstone et al. 2016; Rabbani & Husain 2024). In contrast, interactive moves, such as rhetorical questions and reflective prompts like "How could you make this point clearer?" aim to increase student participation and transform feedback into a more dialogic and collaborative exchange (Carless & Boud 2018; Syting et al., 2023).

Empirical studies support this distinction. Bitchener and Storch (2016) found directive and evaluative moves often produce superficial revisions in L2 writing, while interactive strategies foster critical thinking. Similarly, Winstone et al. (2016) and Hyland (2019) report that dialogic feedback enhances student development and problem-solving. Moves analysis thus urges educators to balance speech acts to avoid reinforcing hierarchies and instead promote autonomy and inclusivity across cultural contexts (Hyland & Hyland 2019).

2.6   Speech Acts in Feedback and Power Manifestation

Speech Act Theory, originating from Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), offers a lens for understanding how teacher feedback language enacts authority and shapes student engagement. Central to this theory are illocutionary acts, like directives, evaluations, and suggestions, that define the communicative force of feedback and its role in establishing classroom power dynamics. In feedback, the strategic use of direct (e.g., "Correct this error") and indirect speech acts (e.g., "Have you considered this approach?") influences student autonomy and critical thinking. While direct acts provide clarity, they may constrain independent learning; indirect acts encourage reflection but risk ambiguity if not well-structured (Darong 2024).

The interplay between imperatives and mitigating

language further modulates perceived authority. Imperatives such as "Revise this section" establish clear expectations but can foster hierarchical relationships if overused, while hedging and modal verbs (e.g., "You might consider…") soften commands and promote collaboration (Zou & Yiye 2022). Darong (2024) emphasizes that balancing directive and mitigated language improves both comprehension and engagement, supporting a more dialogic and empowering feedback environment.

Evaluative speech acts also significantly impact student motivation and perceived power. Positive reinforcement, such as "This is a strong argument," encourages revision, while negative comments, such as "Your argument is weak," may discourage learners unless they are accompanied by constructive guidance (Zou & Yiye, 2022). These dynamics underscore the reciprocal nature of power in feedback; students actively interpret, negotiate, and respond to feedback rather than merely receiving it.

To foster equitable learning environments, educators must balance authority with empathy through the pragmatic use of speech acts. Training in linguistic strategies that blend clarity with collaboration can enhance student agency and ensure feedback serves as a constructive, inclusive educational tool. Future research should investigate these dynamics across cultural and disciplinary contexts to optimize feedback practices.

2.7   Identified Research Gaps

Despite increasing attention to power dynamics in teacher feedback, significant gaps remain in understanding how authority in written comments influences student engagement, motivation, and performance in higher education. Most existing research centers on primary and secondary education, leaving university-level feedback underexplored, particularly regarding its effect on student autonomy. Zaky (2024) emphasizes the need to examine online power dynamics in higher education, underscoring the importance of further investigation into how authoritative feedback shapes student learning at the tertiary level.

A second gap is the absence of longitudinal studies tracking how students adapt to power-laden feedback over time. Most research captures only snapshots, neglecting how perceptions and engagement evolve. Williams (2024) calls for longitudinal inquiry to identify best practices and monitor student development across academic terms.

Additionally, the field lacks standardized frameworks

to systematically assess authority in written feedback. Without common metrics, it is difficult to evaluate how feedback affects student-teacher dynamics. Developing such tools would enhance research rigor and promote equitable feedback practices. While Zaky (2024) lays the groundwork for digital learning contexts, broader application across disciplines is still needed.

Addressing these gaps will foster more inclusive, student-centered feedback strategies that empower rather than control learners in diverse academic environments.

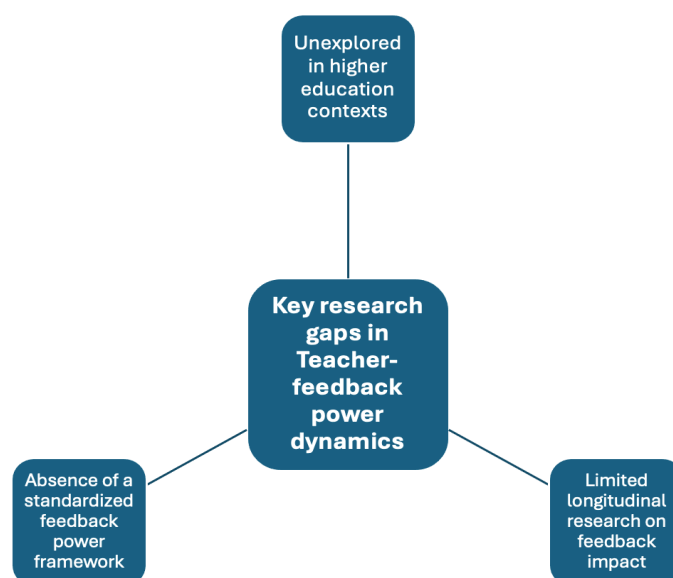Figure 2 summarizes key research gaps in feedback power dynamics that require further investigation.

Figure 2. Gaps in Feedback Power Dynamics Research

2.8   Existing Models for Controlling Power in Feedback

Teacher feedback significantly influences student engagement, motivation, and autonomy by either promoting dialogic learning or reinforcing hierarchical structures (Winstone et al. 2016). To address this, several models have been developed to assess and balance these power dynamics, offering structured frameworks for creating more empowering feedback practices. The Feedback Literacy Behaviour Scale (FLBS), for instance, measures student engagement with feedback and indicates whether feedback is perceived as directive, facilitative, or collaborative. Low engagement often reflects overly authoritative feedback, while high engagement suggests practices that support student autonomy and self-regulation (Winstone et al. 2016; Carless & Boud 2018; Hyland & Hyland 2019). Incorporating FLBS into teacher

training allows educators to evaluate and refine their language to promote student-centered learning.

The Socio-Constructivist Feedback Model (Evans 2013) complements FLBS by encouraging dialogic, co-constructed feedback based on Vygotskian learning principles. It employs open-ended prompts instead of directives, fostering deeper metacognitive engagement and shared responsibility (Winstone et al. 2016). Students are more likely to revise meaningfully when feedback feels collaborative (Nurkhamidah, Lustyantie & Chaeruman 2024). Similarly, the Formative Assessment Model emphasizes iterative, reflective feedback as a means to reduce top-down control and support student ownership (Madya & Putro, 2024; Botezatu, 2023; Vaughan & Uribe,

2024; Ndlovu, 2025).

Value-Added Modeling (VAM) applies feedback assessment to policy, tracking student progress statistically over time. However, it overlooks qualitative factors such as emotional responses and perceptions of authority (Winstone et al. 2016; Ilie 2024; Amrein-Beardsley et al. 2023). Combining VAM with discourse analysis provides a fuller picture of power in feedback. Collectively, these models inform both research and pedagogy, enabling feedback that fosters autonomy, reflection, and growth.

Table 2 outlines key models for controlling power in teacher feedback, analyzing their effectiveness in relation to power dynamics.

TABLE 2. Models for Controlling Power in Teacher Feedback

Model	Key Features	Merits	Limitations	References
Feedback Literacy Behaviour Scale (FLBS)	Measures student engagement with feedback	Helps assess whether feedback is perceived as authoritative, facilitative, or collaborative; Low engagement may indicate overly directive feedback.	More focused on student engagement, less focused on teacher authority\n\nLess universally applicable without adaptation	Winstone et al. 2016; Carless and Boud 2018; Hyland and Hyland 2019
Socio-Constructivist Feedback Model	Feedback as a dialogic, co-constructed process	Encourages participatory learning by shifting feedback from hierarchical to collaborative; Promotes student autonomy and critical thinking	Ineffective if students are not used to co-constructing knowledge	Evans 2013; Nurkhamidah, Lustyantie, and Chaeruman 2024
Formative Assessment Model	Feedback as an ongoing, iterative process	Reduces teacher-centered authority by promoting continuous reflection and goal setting; Encourages students to use feedback for long-term learning	It may not be feasible in large classes	Winstone et al. 2016, Madya and Putro 2024
Value-Added Modeling (VAM)	Uses statistical analysis to track student progress before and after feedback	Provides empirical evidence of feedback effectiveness; Overly rigid feedback may correlate with passive student compliance, while facilitative feedback enhances engagement	Neglects student interpretation and emotional responses to feedback\n\nIt may not account for variations in discipline-specific feedback practices.	Winstone et al. 2016; Ilie 2024

3. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING POWER IN FEEDBACK

Teacher feedback plays a vital role in student learning, yet current models fail to systematically evaluate its power dynamics. While frameworks like the Danielson Framework assess teaching effectiveness broadly, they neglect how written feedback in higher education reinforces or mitigates authority (Danielson 2021). Existing tools emphasize instructional quality but overlook how directive language, mitigation strategies, and student interpretations shape feedback authority (Winstone et al. 2016; Meidl et al. 2023; Williams 2024). Consequently, there is no standardized

method to determine when authoritative feedback supports student growth or constrains autonomy, highlighting the need for a structured framework that balances guidance with student agency.

A mixed-methods approach is essential to develop this framework. Quantitative methods, such as structured surveys and corpus linguistics, can measure directive versus mitigated language and identify markers of authority like imperatives, modal verbs, and evaluative adjectives (Winstone et al. 2016; Surjowati et al. 2024). These data offer empirical grounding for assessing linguistic features tied to power. Complementing this, qualitative approaches, including interviews, focus

groups, and discourse analysis, explore how students perceive feedback authority and its effects on engagement (Carless & Boud 2018). Together, these methods provide a comprehensive view of power in feedback, advancing a nuanced understanding of how written evaluations function as tools of both control and empowerment (Hyland & Hyland 2019).

Figure 3 presents the key dimensions of the proposed framework for measuring power in teacher feedback, highlighting linguistic indicators, student perceptions, and feedback effectiveness as essential components for assessing authority dynamics and their impact on learning outcomes.
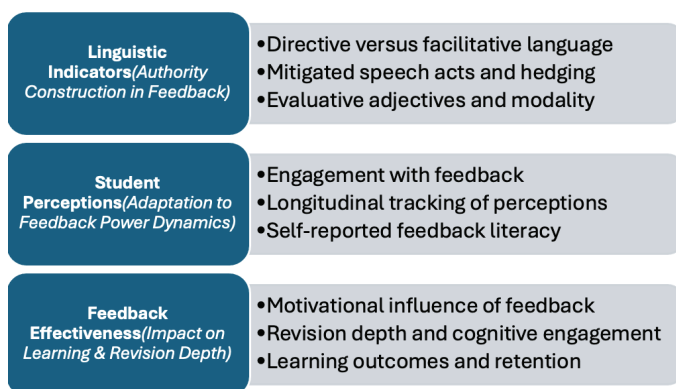
Linguistic Indicators *(Authority Construction in Feedback)*	• Directive versus facilitative language • Mitigated speech acts and hedging • Evaluative adjectives and modality
Student Perceptions *(Adaptation to Feedback Power Dynamics)*	• Engagement with feedback • Longitudinal tracking of perceptions • Self-reported feedback literacy
Feedback Effectiveness *(Impact on Learning & Revision Depth)*	• Motivational influence of feedback • Revision depth and cognitive engagement • Learning outcomes and retention

Figure 3. Key Dimensions of Measuring Power in Teacher Feedback

3.1 Merits of Developing a Framework for Measuring Power in Teacher-Written Feedback

A framework for assessing power in teacher-written feedback offers multifaceted benefits, particularly in enhancing student engagement, fostering reflective teaching, promoting autonomy, and informing educational policy. Central to student engagement is the influence of feedback tone and structure: overly directive comments often suppress motivation and willingness to revise, while facilitative and collaborative feedback boosts learner confidence, autonomy, and active participation (Hyland & Hyland 2019; Winstone et al. 2016; Rose, Bunce & Jones 2024). Balanced feedback ensures instructional clarity without undermining agency, thereby reducing stress and promoting deeper learning (Liu & Carless 2020; Yang, Chiu & Yan 2021).

Concurrently, power-sensitive feedback frameworks provide tools for reflective teaching. They help educators examine how their language and tone may unintentionally reinforce hierarchical dynamics that hinder learning (Carless & Boud 2018; Winstone

et al. 2016). A shift toward facilitative strategies encourages critical thinking, independence, and problem-solving (Hyland & Hyland 2019; Weaver, Matangula & Matney 2024). Structured reflection through feedback supports cognitive growth while advancing student-centered pedagogy by minimizing anxiety and fostering idea development (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

These frameworks are also vital for cultivating student autonomy. While directive feedback may create dependency, self-reflective and empowering comments promote goal-setting and metacognitive growth (Winstone et al. 2016; Carless & Boud 2018; Wood & Pitt 2025). Tools like the FLBS and Socio-Constructivist Feedback Model help teachers assess and adjust their strategies to foster independent learning (Carless & Young 2024; Winstone et al. 2016).

At the institutional level, frameworks such as Value-Added Modeling (VAM) offer empirical insights into teacher effectiveness (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2023). Embedding these models into teacher education and policy ensures equitable, student-centered practices (Hyland & Hyland 2019; Winstone et al. 2016) while aligning broader standards with learner autonomy (Carless & Boud 2018).

3.2 Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications of Power-Sensitive Feedback

A power-sensitive framework in teacher feedback holds transformative potential for applied linguistics and discourse research, where feedback is recognized not merely as a corrective mechanism but as a complex act of communication shaping identity and authority (Hyland & Hyland 2019). Such frameworks facilitate systematic analysis of how teacher comments reinforce or redistribute power, thus advancing empirical approaches in discourse studies and supporting pedagogical equity (Winstone et al. 2016). They contribute significantly to applied linguistics by operationalizing feedback as a site of linguistic negotiation, authority expression, and identity construction, fostering more nuanced analyses of classroom discourse.

When integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the power framework enables a deeper understanding of how feedback enacts educational hierarchies. Drawing from CDA's foundational view of language as a tool of social power (Fairclough 1992), this model identifies specific feedback forms, like imperatives and critical judgments, as perpetuating asymmetrical teacher-student dynamics (Ren 2024).

Conversely, strategies such as open-ended inquiries and hedging are found to foster learner autonomy and reposition students as active agents in the learning process (Winstone et al. 2016). This duality in feedback styles directly informs CDA's theoretical expansion into academic discourse, illustrating how linguistic practices can challenge or reinforce institutional power structures (Carless & Boud 2018).

Beyond traditional CDA, the reconceptualization of feedback as dialogic and interactive advances a more relational view of educational communication. Power is framed not as top-down control but as co-constructed through discourse, aligning with Foucauldian theory (Foucault 1977). The categorization of feedback into directive, facilitative, and interactive modes, as well as corresponding speech acts, provides a taxonomy for evaluating how feedback either supports student agency or perpetuates dependency (Hibert et al. 2023; Winstone et al. 2016; Slater et al. 2017). Feedback thus emerges as both a site of potential empowerment and a mechanism of social reproduction, depending on its linguistic framing and delivery (Carless & Boud 2018).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this framework contributes to understanding how students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds interpret feedback differently. Feedback interpretations are deeply shaped by cultural context, particularly regarding authority and learner autonomy. In collectivist cultures, directive feedback may be interpreted as clear and respectful, while in individualistic cultures, it could be perceived as overly controlling. Rossiter (2022) found that European students often misread indirect suggestions as vague or dismissive, highlighting the importance of tailoring feedback to students' cultural communication norms. A culturally responsive approach thus requires educators to consider students' backgrounds and expectations, adjusting feedback strategies accordingly to avoid miscommunication and foster inclusivity. Academic discourse, linguistic capital, and cultural familiarity with indirect or direct communicative norms all shape how feedback is perceived and acted upon (Bernstein 2000; Rossiter 2022; Melly, Listyani & Sumakul 2024). A standardized framework that accounts for these differences enables more equitable and culturally responsive feedback practices, enhancing access to learning for students with varied linguistic repertoires (Chae et al., 2020; Hyland & Hyland, 2019). These insights directly support efforts in inclusive pedagogy and linguistic accessibility, promoting strategies that respect student diversity and enhance engagement (Winstone et al. 2016).

Pedagogically, the power implications of feedback call for substantial shifts in teacher training. Most educators receive minimal instruction on the socio-cultural dimensions of feedback, often relying on intuitively authoritative practices that may limit student autonomy (Weaver, Matangula & Matney 2024; Nguyen 2023). Training programs should instead emphasize the value of linguistic strategies such as hedging and open-ended questioning, which have been shown to foster critical thinking and dialogic engagement (Carless & Boud 2018; Winstone et al. 2016). Additionally, promoting written dialogue and follow-up discussions enables a two-way exchange that empowers students as active participants in their learning (Jwa 2024; Alqefari 2022). Teacher development must also address cultural variability in feedback expectations, ensuring strategies are tailored to diverse student populations (Hyland & Hyland 2019; Carless & Boud 2018).

Finally, a student-centered approach to feedback emphasizes autonomy, reflection, and active engagement over passive correction (Driscoll, 2024). Incorporating self-assessment and peer review encourages students to critically evaluate their own and others' work, fostering independence and metacognitive awareness (Winstone et al. 2016; Nurkhamidah, Lustyantie & Chaeruman 2024). Tiered feedback strategies that prioritize structural before surface-level revisions help manage cognitive load and promote deeper learning (Hyland & Hyland 2019; Adams & Wilson 2017; Silvola et al. 2021). Digital tools, reflective prompts, and one-on-one conferences further enhance student engagement with feedback, supporting long-term skill development (Cheng, Chwo & Ng 2021). As research continues to highlight the benefits of dialogic, culturally responsive, and scaffolded feedback, future studies should examine its implementation across digital and multilingual environments to better support learner agency and academic equity (Carless & Boud, 2018; Winstone et al., 2016).

4.   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on teacher-written feedback should focus on developing structured, dialogic, and student-centered approaches that empower learners while minimizing disempowerment. A central priority is the empirical validation of frameworks designed to measure power dynamics in feedback. Although theoretical models exist, there is a pressing need for empirical studies that assess how feedback enforces, mitigates, or redistributes authority in practice.

Mixed-method designs, including corpus linguistics, interviews, and classroom-based experiments, are essential for building validated, generalizable frameworks across diverse educational contexts. Additionally, research should explore cross-cultural and linguistic variations in how students perceive feedback authority, especially as classrooms become increasingly multicultural. While directive feedback may be interpreted as clear and helpful in some cultural contexts, it can be seen as overly controlling in others. Comparative studies can help tailor feedback strategies to be both culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective. Ultimately, future investigations must aim to validate power assessment tools and guide policy shifts toward student autonomy and dialogue-driven instruction. Such efforts will enable institutions to use feedback not just as a corrective tool but as a meaningful mechanism for intellectual growth, equity, and inclusion.

While this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of power-sensitive feedback practices, several limitations remain. The proposed framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future studies should employ mixed methods, combining corpus linguistics with classroom-based trials, to assess its effectiveness. Quantitative analysis could track authority markers (e.g., imperatives, modals), while qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, could capture student perceptions and revision responses. The review also focuses solely on written teacher-to-student feedback, excluding peer and oral forms. Moreover, its reliance on Anglophone contexts may limit cross-cultural applicability. These constraints underscore the need for broader empirical testing and refinement across diverse educational settings.

5. CONCLUSION

Teacher-written feedback significantly shapes both academic development and classroom power dynamics, influencing student engagement, autonomy, and self-regulation based on whether it is framed as directive, facilitative, or interactive. Despite its profound impact, there remains no standardized framework to measure the power embedded in feedback. Developing such a framework is essential to evaluate feedback effectiveness and strike a balance between teacher authority and student empowerment. To ensure equitable practices, teacher training programs must incorporate power-sensitive strategies that enhance educators' linguistic and pedagogical awareness. Without this training, feedback may unintentionally reinforce hierarchies that discourage student participation. Furthermore, feedback policies should actively include student perspectives, recognizing their interpretations as vital to shaping inclusive and effective learning environments. Understanding how students respond to feedback can help transform it from a top-down evaluative mechanism into a dialogic, empowering process. Incorporating these insights into research, professional development, and policy will redefine feedback as a central tool for fostering academic growth, confidence, and lifelong learning.

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