Research Article

FEEDBACK TO FEEDFORWARD:
THE GAME CHANGER IN ESL/EFL TEACHING

Le Dinh Tung

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam
Corresponding author: Le Dinh Tung – Email: tungld@hcmue.edu.vn

ABSTRACT

This report focuses on examining how powerful feedforward is when utilized within ESL/EFL teaching environments. In contrast to feedback, which centers much around past achievements, feedforward pays attention to what could be done differently and provides the direction toward realization (Dweck, 2006). According to a recent study, it was suggested that AI could be utilized to increase student learning motivation and self-monitoring by providing students with clear and purposeful developmental guidance, which proved to be effective (Carless & Boud, 2018; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). According to Biggs (2003) and Hyland and Hyland (2006), assessment can build alignment with teaching practices and customize learning processes, such that it becomes critical in language training. However, there are still some areas that need further research, such as learners' different cultures and new cultural environments. Using technology in delivering feedback may be promising, though it should be researched further (Wang, 2014). These points need to be addressed to help understand how impactful feedforward could be turning it into a breakthrough in English language teaching. The purpose of this review is to provide an in-depth examination and suggest future research paths for enhancing the advantages of feedforward strategies.

Keywords: *ESL; EFL; feedforward; feedback*

1. Introduction

Feedback in English as a Second Language (ESL) has been noted as a critical factor influencing the learning trajectory of students' English acquisition. As a result, constructive feedback is fundamental in determining how far one has gone and where else he/she needs more assistance, therefore becoming an indispensable component of successful language acquisition.

In ESL, feedback has various educational roles which involve serving as an effective tool for rectifying pupils' mistakes and consolidating their accurate utilization of language, which is the key to developing linguistic competence in learners. When used appropriately,

feedback could substantially increase students' involvement and enthusiasm resulting in better academic performance and more active classroom membership.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) underscore the importance of customizing feedback to cater to the unique needs of each learner, thereby encouraging a more individualized learning approach. The setting in which feedback is provided, coupled with the distinctive attributes of the learner, is critical in evaluating the effectiveness of the feedback. For example, overly general feedback may swamp learners, while feedback that is directed toward specific areas can assist learners in focusing on distinct areas that require improvement (Lee, 2019).

In the past few years, the concept of feedforward has been gaining momentum in the ESL/EFL education sector, with researchers underscoring its transformative impacts. It is perceived as a strategy to not only augment student learning but also their drive to succeed, owing to its forward-looking advice. Carless and Boud (2018) propose that merging feedforward with regular feedback can cultivate a conducive environment for growth, aiding students in comprehending and utilizing feedback in their subsequent work. Lee (2017) supports this, noting that precise, practical feedforward can significantly improve ESL learners' writing skills as they advance. Wang (2014) found that using technology tools for feedforward in ESL classes ensures that feedback is not only timely but also detailed, enabling students to improve their future work. Xu (2020) explored learners' perceptions of this, finding that feedforward is well-received among Chinese EFL students for the clarity and encouragement it offers. Butler and Zeng (2014) observed that feedforward is particularly beneficial for young learners in task-based assessments, enhancing their engagement and aiding their language skills by providing solid tips for future tasks. These findings collectively underscore the potential of feedforward as a powerful tool for continuous improvement and a positive atmosphere in ESL/EFL learning environments.

2.   Research Methodology

The paper methodology section has a structured procedure of the levels of process found in a literature review survey that moves from providing feedback to feed forward in ESL/EFL studies. It is specifically for the scheduling of an elaborate and objective process of the study given the known routine used in systematic reviews.

2.1. Research Design

The current investigation utilizes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach that is particularly effective in consolidating the existing studies concerning a certain area. The SLR method comprises a structured search process for identification as well as evaluation of multiple study conclusions through its synthesis. The study adhered to the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), which are aimed at making the review process more transparent and rigorous.

2.2. Research Question:

How has the transition from feedback to feedforward impacted ESL/EFL teaching and learning?

2.3. Search Strategy

The researchers utilized an extensive research strategy for collecting relevant literature about feedforward in ESL/EFL education terms. The search was carried out in such databases as ERIC, JSTOR, SCOPUS, WEB OF SCIENCES, and GOOGLE SCHOLAR. The keywords of the search were defined as "feedforward," feedback," "language learning," "EFL," "ESL," "teaching methods," and "educational strategies" which were combined by the Boolean operators to make sure that they presented a wide and comprehensive range of useful findings. The scope of the search was confined to peer-reviewed articles written in English and published from 2014 to 2024, to guarantee the timeliness and relevance of the research included.

In addition, the bibliographies were manually checked of selected articles to identify other relevant research that were not found by the original search. To provide an inclusive appraisal of the research area, conference proceedings, theses, and dissertations, also including grey literature have been considered.

2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review included studies provided they met the criteria to ascertain relevance and quality. The following were inclusion criteria: (a) Studies must focus on feedforward or feedback in the context of ESL/EFL education, (b) Studies must be empirical, including quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research, (c) Articles must be published in peer-reviewed journals between 2014 and 2024, and (d) Studies must be written in English.

Exclusion criteria were: (a) Reports on corrective feedback in non-ESL/EFL context, (b) Theoretical papers without empirically based data, (c) Articles published before 2014 and beyond 2024, and (d) Papers in languages other than English.

2.5. Study Selection

In this research paper, the contractual model designed by Dixon-Woods (2016) was employed, and the steps in the Systematic Quantitative Literature Review (SQLR) method proposed by Pickering and Byrne (2014) were followed (see Figure 1).
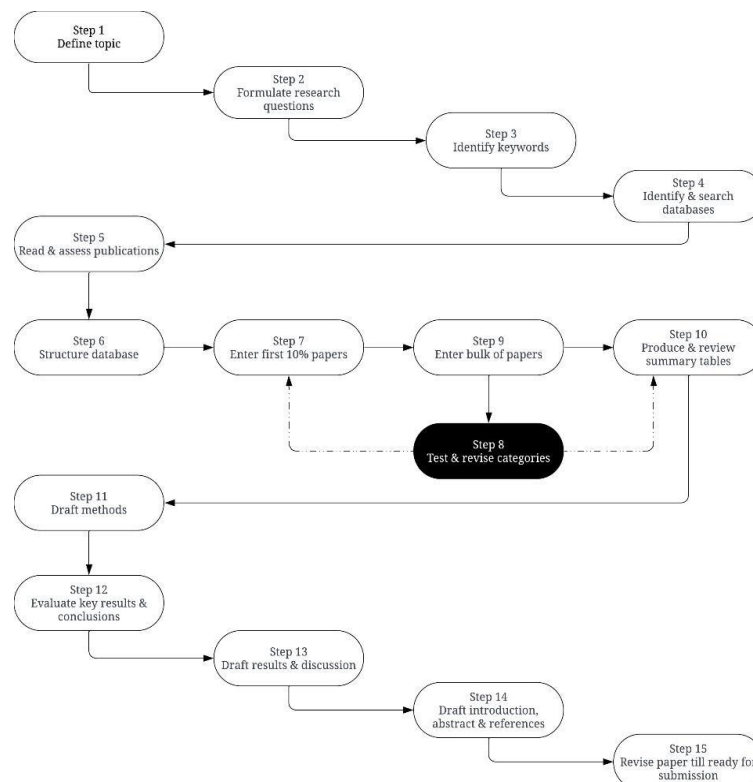
Figure 1. *Systematic Quantitative Literature Review step process*

(Pickering & Byrne, 2014, p. 539)

A total of 532 articles were found at the start but after we got rid of the duplicates, only 487 were left. Titles and abstracts of these articles were looked at to determine how relevant they were to the topic of study. A total of 102 articles were screened and found suitable for this study. Therefore, full versions online were looked for and verified if they would work for inclusion in this report by reading through each of them meticulously. Hence, 37 papers were later formed as part of the research review.

2.6. Data Extraction

Information was retrieved from selected research using firms meant for data extraction in all cases. Data collected consisted of the following: (a) Author(s) and their publication year(s), (b) Research objectives, (c) Study design and methodology, (d) Sample size and characteristics, (e) Key findings related to feedforward and feedback in ESL/EFL education, and (f) Implications for practice and future research.

Two individuals were responsible for the data extraction process to ensure accuracy and consistency. Any disagreements were discussed and resolved by both parties.

2.7. Data Synthesis

A "thematic analysis" approach (Braun & Clarke 2012) was used to combine data. This method allows for the inclusion of information from many design samples. This technique involves assimilating prevailing ideas and connections between instances examined. Urgent themes in the papers were found so that feedforward effectiveness,

student views on feedback from feedforward teachers, and the way technologies help in delivering feedback can be discussed under various headings like these.

In the introduction, research questions were posed, and the narrative synthesis was structured to address them. Key findings were summarized and discussed in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. This approach enabled the feedforward in ESL/EFL education's current research state to be understood extensively, and gaps identified for further study.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

There were no direct ethical implications related to human subjects when the study was done as a review of literature since there was no primary data collection. Nevertheless, guidelines laid down by a set up of ethics to inform systematic review conduct were observed in order to guarantee openness, truth, and integrity in the process of this research.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Types and Timing of Feedback

Language learning has a variety of feedback types that serve different purposes. The British Council argues that feedback can be grouped into 'closed' and 'open-ended' tasks. Closed tasks, for example, grammar exercises with definite right answers, require immediate feedback to give clear unambiguous corrections. On the other hand, open-ended tasks like writing or speaking exercises need more subtle and nuanced feedback which takes account of both language use and content.

According to Bitchener (2012), timing is important when it comes to giving feedback. Instant feedback is usually the best especially for closed tasks as it enables students to understand and rectify their errors on-the-fly. Nevertheless, delayed feedback can prove handy in open-ended assignments where pupils require time for assimilating and contemplating the given critiques.

3.2. Methods of Delivering Feedback

There are different ways in which feedback can be given; these include oral, written, and visual forms. Oral feedback is good for immediate correction and interaction, whereas written feedback creates a reference that students can revisit and ponder upon. Younger learners can be particularly engrossed by visual feedback like making use of videos or digital annotations.

In the case of online classes on ESL, the feedback architecture should match the digital settings. Strategies such as using feedback boxes, post-class summaries, and digital badges or rewards help maintain student engagement as well as provide clear indicators of their progress (Wang et al., 2019).

3.3. Challenges and Considerations

Though useful, feedback must be given delicately in order not to discourage students. An unkindly handled negative reaction can destroy a learner's confidence and impede their

learning progression. Consequently, feedback should be constructive and highlight areas of improvement for the learners instead of just focusing on their errors (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

Moreover, teachers should balance between too much and too little feedback otherwise they can overwhelm students. This allows a positive learning environment where weaknesses are addressed while emphasizing strengths to support progress.

3.4. *Transition to Feedforward*

The idea of "feedforward" shifts from focusing on correcting mistakes that have taken place to facilitating future learning. This method of education is about giving students actionable suggestions that can help them understand how to apply the feedback they receive to their subsequent assignments. Feedforward particularly fosters a growth mindset, encouraging learners to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

In the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, the traditional meaning of feedback has been transformed. In contrast with a backward-looking attitude, that is, what mistakes and omissions were committed in the past years; there is an increasing realization of the need for proactive feedback. Moreover, "feedforward" goes beyond mere correction implying empowering learners to close the gap between where they are now and where they wish to be.

Understanding Feedforward: The word translates into something untypical in terms of an ordinary model of criticism. The emphasis moves away from concentrating on errors done before to improving on what will be done next time or next assignment. It is concerned with providing students with a clear picture of their present position about what should be achieved within a given period. This places them at a vantage point towards whatever they want to achieve their goals. Notably, feedforward emphasizes constructive guidance rather than criticism, fostering a positive and growth-oriented mindset.

Empowering Learners: At the heart of it, feedforward enables students to actively participate in their academic journey. By acknowledging the weak points and making a conscious effort to bridge the gap between real and desired results, learners become partakers of their learning process. The role of educators changes dramatically in this regard as they move from being mere appraisers to guides outlining actionable steps for improvement. For example instead of just saying 'Use academic language in your writing,' a forward-looking feedforward can say "You are currently at Band 4. To get to Band 5, you will need to focus on X, Y, and Z . Here is an example."

Pros and Cons: Several advantages follow with the adoption of feedforward. First, it creates hunger among students about what is ahead; that is, it envisions success rather than dwelling on past mistakes. Second, it speeds up learning by helping learners reach the desirable ends more quickly. Nevertheless, implementing feedforward requires a mindset change from both teachers' and students' sides. Instructors must sharpen their feedforward

skills by ensuring concreteness, supportiveness, and immediacy. Finding the right balance between feedforward and corrective feedback is still very important.

Charting the Future: It is important when we chart the future of English as a Second Language teaching and learning to study how well feedforward works in various contexts, such as age group, language, and subject area. Enabling teachers to mix feedback and feedforward through their professional development programs will help to increase its impact. Finally, it is this culture in which students are proactive about seeking for forward-looking guidance leading feedforward out of being a buzzword into a true North that helps us get meaning from education (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

3.5. *Theoretical Frameworks and Models*

In this systematic literature review, many theories and models in educational psychology as well as language acquisition have been applied to explain the transition from feedback towards forwarding learning ESL/EFL. Theoretical underpinnings are important for understanding how effective such strategies are as well as their influence on students' achievement.

3.5.1. Sociocultural Theory

One foundation of feeding forward is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which gives it much support through social interaction and culture (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory says that learning is achieved through mediatory activities taking place in society; thus teacher-teacher-student interaction matters most during this process since it influences cognition growth. Teachers use feed-forward to move students' conversations towards future ideas in a way that they anticipate the result of their actions.

According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), this perspective is adopted in which effective feedback should be treated as social practices that require negotiations and interactions between teachers and students. Therefore, they argue that feedback is involved in supporting students' learning processes through which they can be within their ZPDs heading for deeper comprehension and more ability.

3.5.2. Constructive Alignment

As a theory of constructive alignment, Biggs' (2003) approach can also be used to understand how feedforward functions in education. Constructive alignment is a concept that involves matching the objectives for learning activities and assessment tasks with their purposes. Within this system, feedforward makes certain that the taught content specified by feedback ideally correlates with forthcoming learning objectives and therefore fosters cohesive learning.

In their study, Carless and Boud (2018) discuss how the provision of clear and actionable advice that allows students to bridge the gap between their current performance and desired outcomes by feedforward can enrich constructive alignment. With this

approach, feedback is not only backward-looking but forward-looking too as it guides learners on improvements required for subsequent assignments.

3.5.3 Formative Assessment and Feedback

According to Black and Wiliam (1998), the theoretical foundation of formative assessment lays stress on enabling feedback for learning. Feedback is crucial in formative assessment because it enables students to know areas where they go wrong and get advice on making improvements. Feedforward takes it further by showing students how they can relate the feedback they get from one task to another in the future.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) in their model of feedback included feedforward- a crucial element. They asserted that any useful feedback must address three crucial questions; 'Where is it that I am heading?' (Feed Up), 'How am I going'? (Feedback) and 'Where to next?' (Feed Forward). It indicates how significant feedforward is in enabling learners to comprehend how they should proceed in their learning ambitions (Hattie and Timperley 2007).

3.5.4. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Feedforward is linked to the theories of self-regulated learning (SRL) wherein metacognition, motivation, and self-regulation in learning are important (Zimmerman, 2002). SRL is a learning process where students monitor their progress, set goals for themselves, and when they need to adjust their strategies. Zimmerman (2002) holds that learners must take charge of their learning process by setting targets for themselves, assessing the progress they have made towards the attainment of such goals, and adjusting if necessary. Considering this, feedforward provides the requisite scaffolding to facilitate such by helping students comprehend how to use feedback on future assignments.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) talked about feedback's importance in helping students become more independent learners with an emphasis on effective feedback that should support becoming an autonomous self. Thus, feedforward aligns with this since it gives suggestions on what one can do to better him/herself thereby prompting learners to participate more in their learning process. To illustrate an instance, it is easier for students to comprehend their strong points and places they need to work on through the help of exhaustive forward comments by tutors; as such planning and executing learning strategies is done more effectively.

3.5.5. Feedback and Feedforward in Language Learning

In facilitating the teaching and learning of ESL/EFL, feedback and feedforward are essential in language acquisition. Evan (2013) suggests that accurate feedback helps learners recognize and correct their mistakes to develop their language. In the field of ESL/EFL, it is important to have feedback and feedforward to learn a language. According to him, feedback which is corrective plays a crucial role because it enables people who are

learning new languages to identify their errors. Feedforward complements this by offering learners direction on how to enhance their language skills in future encounters.

Lee (2017) observed that ESL students' writing skills improve over time when instructors offer them more detailed feedback that can be acted upon. This result is consistent with the prevailing theoretical perspective making future-oriented feedforward a key factor that supports constant growth and mastery of language.

3.5.6. Integrating Technology in Feedforward

Wang (2014) researched how technology can be integrated into providing feedback, managing to display that digital instruments can hasten and sharpen the response. This kind of feedback that uses technology aligns with both sociocultural theory and self-regulated learning (SRL) as its approaches are interactive and individualized hence enhancing students' self-managed learning.

3.6. *Enhancing Student Learning and Motivation*

One of the primary reasons why feedforward is so effective is that it improves student learning and motivation. Traditional feedback frequently emphasizes what went wrong, which can be discouraging and demotivating to students. In contrast, feedforward offers constructive feedback on how to improve in future tasks, encouraging a growth mindset. Carless and Boud (2018) claim that feedforward enhances motivation and engagement in learners since it enables them to focus on what they want from their learning paths. Dweck's growth mindset concept as asserted by this approach on how people tend to respond under various learning situations suggests that amid challenging situations where something seems not achievable one may still try harder believing that it is only through determination that anything great can be achieved (Dweck, 2006).

Adding on that he states that compared with feedback, feedforward is known for giving brief just to the point suggestions which the ESL students find easy to work with. For instance, Lee (2017) observed that when learners receive direct negative comments on their writing there is a continuous improvement in their skills over time. For the same case, Xu (2020) adds that feedforward helped Chinese EFL learners build up their self-confidence and make them feel motivated in a way that would enable them to achieve their language learning goals since it increased their sense of competence.

Feedforward can transform learning environments because it improves constructive alignment so that learning activities and assessment tasks correlate well with the learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003). According to Biggs (2003), constructive alignment means relating teaching methods to what are intended as outcomes. Feedback then, makes sure not only that the marking is right but also that students are given guidance on how they can attain the same goals in forthcoming assignments.

In their recent work, Carless and Boud (2018) seek to explain how feedforward may enhance constructive alignment by providing specific advice for students that can be acted

upon to facilitate movement from their current level of performance to what they would like to achieve. The need for such an alignment is more pronounced in English as a Second Language instruction considering that perfecting language aspects needs extensive exercises and moderations. By keeping an eye on future performance, feedforward ensures that students are persistently striving toward their learning goals.

3.7. *Addressing Individual Learner Needs*

Incorporating feedforward into ESL education represents a revolution due to its capacity to solve individual learners' problems better than conventional backward information. The conventional backward feedback usually has a uniform application; thus, it sometimes fails to meet the specific challenges associated with each learner's situation respectively; hence not well equipped. However; feedforward feedback is customized for every student regardless of his or her situation hence the guidance given out will more likely lead to significant changes for good.

Wang (2014) demonstrated how technology-enhanced feedforward can be useful in ESL classrooms. That is because digital aids can make it easy to offer timely responses that are more detailed and suited to each student's requirements. In language teaching, it is important because many students come from different backgrounds as well as possess varied levels of proficiency. Thus, the provision of direct instructions assists in making certain that there is individual backing for every learner to prosper.

3.8. *Encouraging a Dialogic Process*

The feed-forward process also facilitates a more interactive relationship between teachers and pupils without which learning cannot be effective. Feedback in the traditional sense often takes the form of instructions passed on by instructors to learners thus reducing any chances for meaningful communication. Conversely, feedforward promotes bidirectional conversation where learners take part in the feedback exercise seeking any explanations as they also ask for help in their improvement efforts.

Hyland and Hyland (2006) suggest that feedback be seen as a social practice where negotiation and interaction are involved in a dialogue between the teacher and the learner. Such a dialogic approach creates an enabling learning environment within which students can freely ask for help or share with others about what they want to achieve through learning. Eventually, the feedback process becomes more effective because it involves feedforward working together with the teacher and the learner.

4.   Conclusion

4.1. *Summary of Findings*

Although the concept of feedforward is not entirely new in many parts of the world, its application in ESL/EFL education remains limited, particularly in Slovenia, where significant gaps in the literature have been identified, as highlighted in this paper. The position taken in this research is that the ineffectiveness of feedforward in ESL/EFL

education primarily stems from a lack of relevance. This paper is inspired by recent literature analyzing the transformative potential of feedforward and aims to provide a more focused examination of its application in foreign language teaching, specifically in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) education. This area plays a crucial role in achieving the goals outlined in the vision for European higher education (Ushioda, 2017). Furthermore, feedforward supports self-regulated learning by offering scaffolding that assists students in planning and executing their learning strategies effectively (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Furthermore, feedforward addresses individual learner needs more effectively through personalized guidance, fostering a dialogic process that encourages active student participation. Additionally, feedback should be prospective; by implementing feedforward, educators can ensure that students achieve their learning objectives, which aligns with Biggs's (2003) concept of constructive alignment. Moreover, the integration of technology in delivering feedforward has demonstrated promise in providing timely and detailed feedback tailored to the specific needs of individual students (Wang, 2014).

4.2. *Limitations of the Research Study*

Even with the increasing research body on feedforward in ESL and EFL education, some missing links should be addressed fully to comprehend its total impact and effectiveness. The key gap is the lack of focus on particular learner groups. Many investigations tend to make generalizations without taking into account differences in age, proficiency levels, or educational history. For instance, even though Xu (2020) looked at how Chinese EFL learners perceive the language, few studies have been done on younger ones or those in primary schools. Feedforward, for them, may have different implications compared to students in tertiary institutions (Butler & Zeng, 2014).

In different cultural contexts, there seems to be a significant imbalance as well. Most of the research available has been carried on in certain regions such as East Asia (Lee, 2017; Xu, 2020). It is important to conduct more studies in other cultures so as to understand people's views on feedforward within education systems and societies of different cultures. Take this for example, educational programs in the West can have varying methods of providing feedback versus those in the East thus greatly affecting the effects of the feedforward strategies they use (Carless & Boud, 2018).

4.3. *Recommendations for Future Research*

To bridge these gaps, several important areas should be studied in the future. In the first place, it is important to undertake longitudinal studies measuring how much feedforward impacts ESL/EFL learners in the long term. In most cases, what researchers do is to employ cross-sectional research approaches thereby giving a glimpse of what feedforward does. There would be a great benefit of using longitudinal studies to see the

transformations that the learner's development undergoes as a result of feedforward with time and whether its advantages can be constant. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

We also need to carry out a comparative analysis here. In the future, research is required to establish how effective feedforward is in different learner populations; that is, between young learners and adults or among beginners and advanced learners. Through such a contrasting study we would be able to know which groups benefit most from feedforward and thus come up with approaches that are tailored to diverse educational needs (Wang, 2014).

Moreover, there is also a requirement for the utilization of technology in delivering feedforward to be researched further besides what has been done already by Wang (2014) showing how great digital tools could work. More investigations are needed to find out how different forms of technology can be best used for their relevant educational settings and zones of cultural generation.

Finally, doing qualitative research on the way teachers and students of different cultures think about feedforward would benefit. It will be possible to come up with feedback strategies that are more responsive to various cultures by taking into account the subtle aspects of culture that influence how well feedback is received (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

❖ ***Conflict of Interest:*** *Author have no conflict of interest to declare.*

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TỪ "FEEDBACK" ĐẾN "FEEDFORWARD": THAY ĐỔI CUỘC CHƠI TRONG VIỆC DẠY VÀ HỌC TIẾNG ANH NHƯ NGÔN NGỮ THỨ HAI

Lê Đình Tùng

Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam
Tác giả liên hệ: Lê Đình Tùng – Email: tungld@hcmue.edu.vn

TÓM TẮT

    Bài viết này tập trung vào việc kiểm tra sức mạnh của feedforward khi được sử dụng trong môi trường giảng dạy ESL. Khác với feedback, vốn tập trung vào các thành tích đã đạt được trong quá khứ, feedforward chú ý đến những gì có thể làm khác đi và cung cấp hướng dẫn để thực hiện điều này (Dweck, 2006). Theo một nghiên cứu gần đây, AI có thể được sử dụng để tăng cường động lực học tập và khả năng tự giám sát của học sinh bằng cách cung cấp cho họ hướng dẫn phát triển rõ ràng và có mục đích, điều này đã chứng minh được hiệu quả (Carless & Boud, 2018; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Theo Biggs (2003) và Hyland & Hyland (2006), đánh giá nên đồng nhất với việc dạy học và tùy chỉnh các quy trình học tập, từ đó trở thành yếu tố quan trọng trong đào tạo ngôn ngữ. Tuy nhiên, vẫn còn một số lĩnh vực cần nghiên cứu thêm, chẳng hạn như văn hóa khác nhau của người học và các môi trường văn hóa mới. Việc sử dụng công nghệ trong việc cung cấp phản hồi có thể hứa hẹn, mặc dù cần được nghiên cứu thêm (Wang, 2014). Những điểm này cần được giải quyết để hiểu rõ hơn về tác động của feedforward, biến nó thành một bước đột phá trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh. Mục đích của bài đánh giá này là cung cấp một phân tích sâu sắc và đề xuất các hướng nghiên cứu tương lai để tăng cường lợi ích của các chiến lược feedforward.

    Từ khóa: ESL; EFL; feedforward; feedback