

THE SANDWICH FEEDBACK MODEL AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING FEEDBACK EFFECTIVENESS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20794612>

ABSTRACT

Feedback is recognized as one of the most important factors influencing student learning, academic achievement, and the development of feedback literacy in higher education. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of teachers in creating effective feedback environments that support student engagement, reflection, and continuous improvement. Among the various approaches to feedback delivery, the Sandwich Feedback Model has gained considerable popularity due to its balanced structure and practical applicability.

The purpose of this study is to examine the principles, advantages, limitations, and educational applications of the Sandwich Feedback Model in higher education. The research is based on a qualitative literature review of scholarly publications related to feedback, feedback literacy, educational communication, and student engagement. Particular attention is given to the three stages of the model: positive feedback, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement.

The findings indicate that the Sandwich Feedback Model can contribute to student motivation, self-confidence, feedback acceptance, and the creation of a positive learning environment. The study also demonstrates the applicability of the model in various educational contexts, including presentations, written assignments, classroom discussions, group projects, and thesis supervision. At the same time, several limitations of the model are identified, including the potential dilution of critical messages and the risk of excessive reliance on praise.

The study concludes that the Sandwich Feedback Model represents a practical tool for enhancing feedback quality and supporting the development of feedback literacy in higher education when implemented thoughtfully and appropriately.

KEYWORDS

feedback, feedback literacy, teacher feedback literacy, Sandwich Feedback Model, higher education, constructive feedback, student engagement, formative assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is widely regarded as one of the most powerful factors influencing student learning and educational effectiveness. In contemporary higher education, feedback is no longer viewed merely as information provided by instructors regarding students' performance. Instead, it is increasingly understood as an interactive process that supports learning, promotes self-reflection, facilitates self-regulation, and encourages continuous improvement. Effective feedback enables students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, understand expectations, and make informed decisions about future learning activities.

The growing emphasis on student-centered learning and formative assessment has led to increased interest in the concept of feedback literacy. Feedback literacy refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that enable individuals to understand, interpret, and use feedback productively. While much of the literature focuses on student feedback literacy, recent studies emphasize the equally important role of teachers in designing and

delivering feedback that promotes learning and engagement. Consequently, teacher feedback literacy has emerged as a key professional competence in higher education.

The effectiveness of feedback depends not only on its content but also on the methods used to communicate it. Different feedback approaches vary in their structure, objectives, and potential impact on learners. Among these approaches, the Sandwich Feedback Model has become one of the most widely used methods due to its simple structure and focus on balancing positive and constructive comments. By combining recognition of achievements with guidance for improvement, the model seeks to maintain student motivation while supporting academic development.

Given the importance of effective feedback practices in higher education, there is a need to examine practical feedback approaches that can contribute to both teaching effectiveness and the development of feedback literacy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the Sandwich Feedback Model, examine its key characteristics, advantages and limitations, and explore its potential applications in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feedback is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors affecting teaching effectiveness, student learning, academic achievement, and professional development. In contemporary education, feedback is viewed not merely as information provided to learners about their performance but as a dynamic process that supports learning, promotes self-reflection, and facilitates continuous improvement. Effective feedback helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas requiring further development, and make informed decisions about future learning strategies. Furthermore, feedback contributes to the development of self-regulation, critical thinking, and learner autonomy, enabling students to take a more active role in their educational journey. As a result, feedback has become an essential component of effective teaching and learning practices in higher education.

One of the most influential contributions to feedback research was made by Hattie J. and Timperley H., who described feedback as information provided regarding aspects of performance or understanding. According to their framework, effective feedback helps learners answer three key questions: “Where am I going?”, “How am I going?”, and “Where to next?”. Their work established feedback as one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement [1].

Woitt S. et al. investigated the factors influencing students’ feedback literacy in higher education. Their findings indicate that students’ motivation, self-efficacy, learning orientation, and prior educational experiences significantly affect how feedback is perceived and utilized. The study further highlights the importance of creating supportive learning environments in which students view feedback as a valuable resource for development rather than as a mechanism of judgment [2].

A comprehensive review conducted by Vakili R. et al. synthesizes contemporary research on feedback literacy and identifies several key challenges. These include students’ limited ability to interpret feedback comments, emotional resistance to criticism, and insufficient opportunities to apply feedback in subsequent learning tasks. The review concludes that effective feedback practices require both instructor competence and student readiness to engage actively in the feedback process [3].

Practical approaches to developing feedback literacy are discussed by Mamad A., who identifies several essential capabilities that should be fostered among students. These include understanding the purpose of feedback, evaluating the quality of one’s own work, engaging in peer feedback activities, and transforming feedback into concrete actions for improvement. The

study suggests that feedback literacy can be systematically developed through repeated exposure to reflective learning experiences and collaborative assessment practices [4].

Recent studies suggest that feedback should be viewed as a shared responsibility between teachers and students rather than a one-way transmission of information. In this context, teacher feedback literacy and student feedback literacy are closely interconnected. Teachers design learning opportunities, facilitate dialogue, and support students in developing the skills necessary to interpret and apply feedback. Consequently, the quality of student engagement with feedback largely depends on the feedback literacy of teachers.

The growing importance of teacher feedback literacy is associated with changes in higher education, including student-centered learning, digital technologies, formative assessment, and the increasing emphasis on self-regulated learning. In such conditions, teachers are expected not only to evaluate student performance but also to foster learners' capacity for reflection, self-assessment, and continuous improvement. Therefore, teacher feedback literacy has become an essential professional competence for educators in contemporary higher education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on a qualitative literature review focusing on the Sandwich Feedback Model as a widely used approach to providing constructive feedback in higher education. The research examines scholarly publications related to feedback, feedback literacy, educational communication, and student engagement, with particular attention given to the principles and practical application of the Sandwich Feedback Model.

The methodological approach involved the identification, selection, and analysis of studies discussing the structure, benefits, limitations, and educational effectiveness of the model. The selected sources were analyzed to examine the three stages of the Sandwich Feedback Model—positive feedback, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement—and their contribution to student motivation, self-confidence, reflective learning, and acceptance of feedback.

In addition, practical examples of applying the model in higher education were developed and analyzed. The study also evaluates the advantages and limitations of the Sandwich Feedback Model and assesses its potential as a tool for enhancing feedback quality and promoting feedback literacy among university students.

Results and discussion

The Sandwich Feedback Model is one of the most widely used approaches to providing constructive feedback in educational and professional environments. The method is based on the principle of placing constructive criticism between two positive comments, creating a three-layer structure similar to a sandwich. The purpose of this approach is to communicate areas for improvement while maintaining the recipient's motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage with feedback. The Sandwich Feedback Model consists of three sequential stages that work together to create a balanced and constructive feedback process [5-7].

Stage 1. Positive Feedback. The first stage focuses on identifying and acknowledging the learner's strengths, achievements, and successful aspects of performance. At this stage, the instructor highlights what the student has done well and recognizes the effort invested in completing the task. Positive feedback helps establish a supportive atmosphere, strengthens students' confidence, and increases their receptiveness to subsequent comments. Importantly, praise should be specific and evidence-based rather than general. For example, instead of saying "Good job," an instructor may note that the student used relevant academic sources, presented arguments logically, or demonstrated strong analytical skills. Such feedback allows

learners to understand which behaviors and actions contributed to their success and should therefore be maintained in future work.

Stage 2. Constructive Feedback. The second stage represents the core component of the Sandwich Feedback Model. During this stage, the instructor identifies areas requiring improvement and provides clear recommendations for further development. The primary purpose is not to criticize the learner but to help them recognize opportunities for growth and improvement. Effective constructive feedback is specific, objective, and focused on performance rather than personal characteristics. It should explain what aspects of the work need improvement, why these changes are important, and how they can be achieved. For example, an instructor may recommend strengthening the literature review, improving the structure of a presentation, or providing more evidence to support arguments. By offering practical guidance, this stage transforms feedback into a valuable learning tool.

Stage 3. Positive Reinforcement. The final stage concludes the feedback process with encouragement and support. After discussing areas for improvement, the instructor emphasizes the learner's potential for future success and expresses confidence in their ability to achieve better results. Positive reinforcement helps reduce possible negative emotions associated with criticism and maintains motivation for continued learning. At this stage, the instructor may highlight the progress already made by the student, acknowledge their willingness to learn, and encourage them to apply the recommendations provided. As a result, learners leave the feedback conversation with a sense of direction, confidence, and motivation to continue improving their academic performance.

Together, these three stages create a feedback process that balances recognition of achievements with constructive guidance for improvement. By combining encouragement and developmental recommendations, the Sandwich Feedback Model seeks to enhance student motivation, support self-reflection, and foster a positive learning environment in higher education.

Let us discuss several possible examples of use the Sandwich Feedback Model:

Example 1. Student Presentation. A student delivers a presentation on the role of artificial intelligence in financial services. The instructor begins by highlighting the strengths of the presentation, noting that the student selected a highly relevant topic, demonstrated confidence while speaking, and effectively used recent examples from the banking sector. The instructor then moves to constructive feedback, explaining that some slides contained excessive text and that the conclusions could have been supported by additional academic sources. Finally, the feedback concludes with encouragement, emphasizing that the student has strong presentation skills and that improving the visual design and evidence base will make future presentations even more professional and persuasive.

Example 2. Research Paper or Essay. A student submits a written assignment on financial literacy among young people. The instructor first praises the student for choosing an important research topic, organizing the paper logically, and using several credible sources. The constructive component of the feedback focuses on the need for deeper analysis and stronger connections between the literature review and the conclusions. The instructor points out that some arguments are descriptive rather than analytical. The feedback concludes positively by acknowledging the student's clear understanding of the subject and expressing confidence that additional critical analysis will significantly enhance the quality of the paper.

Example 3. Group Project. A team of students works on a project related to sustainable finance. During the project evaluation, the instructor first recognizes the group's effective collaboration, timely completion of tasks, and creative presentation of results. The constructive

feedback addresses certain weaknesses, such as unequal participation among team members and insufficient attention to risk analysis. The instructor then concludes by emphasizing that the group demonstrated strong teamwork and that improving coordination and analytical depth will help them achieve even higher results in future projects. This approach allows students to appreciate their achievements while understanding areas that require further development.

Example 4. Classroom Participation. A student actively participates in seminar discussions throughout the semester. The instructor begins by acknowledging the student's enthusiasm, willingness to contribute, and ability to stimulate discussion among classmates. The constructive feedback focuses on the tendency to provide answers without sufficient academic evidence or references to course materials. The instructor recommends supporting opinions with theoretical concepts and research findings. The feedback ends with positive reinforcement, emphasizing that the student's active engagement is highly valuable and that stronger evidence-based arguments will further improve the quality of classroom contributions.

Example 5. Master's Thesis Supervision. A master's student presents the first draft of a thesis on digital financial technologies. The supervisor initially praises the originality of the topic, the relevance of the research problem, and the student's commitment to the project. The discussion then shifts to areas for improvement, including the need for a clearer methodology, a more comprehensive literature review, and better justification of the research hypotheses. The feedback concludes with encouragement, highlighting the strong potential of the study and expressing confidence that, with further refinement, the thesis can make a meaningful academic contribution. This balanced approach helps maintain the student's motivation while ensuring continuous improvement of the research work.

The Sandwich Feedback Model offers several important advantages for teaching and learning in higher education:

1. Maintenance of student motivation. By beginning and ending with positive comments, the model helps students remain motivated and confident in their abilities.
2. Reduction of anxiety and defensiveness. Constructive criticism is presented in a supportive manner, making students less likely to perceive feedback as a personal attack.
3. Creation of a positive learning environment. The model promotes respectful and supportive communication between instructors and students.
4. Facilitation of feedback acceptance. Students are generally more willing to listen to recommendations for improvement when their strengths are first acknowledged.
5. Enhancement of self-confidence and self-esteem. Recognition of achievements helps learners develop a positive perception of their academic abilities.
6. Ease of understanding and implementation. The three-stage structure makes the model accessible to both experienced and novice instructors.
7. Applicability to various educational situations. The model can be used for presentations, essays, classroom participation, group projects, examinations, and research supervision.
8. Balance between praise and constructive criticism. Students receive a more comprehensive evaluation of their performance, including both strengths and areas for improvement.

Despite these benefits, the Sandwich Feedback Model also has several limitations:

1. Risk of ignoring constructive criticism. Students may focus primarily on positive comments and pay insufficient attention to recommendations for improvement.
2. Predictability of the structure. If used too frequently, learners may anticipate criticism immediately after praise, reducing the effectiveness of the feedback.
3. Perception of insincerity. When positive comments are not specific or genuine, students may view them as artificial or merely a way to soften criticism.
4. Potential dilution of important messages. Significant problems in performance may appear less serious when surrounded by positive comments.
5. Limited promotion of dialogue. The model often emphasizes one-way communication rather than interactive discussion between instructor and student.
6. Limited suitability for diverse student groups. Some students prefer direct and straightforward feedback without the introductory and concluding positive statements.
7. Possibility of overemphasizing praise. Excessive focus on positive aspects may reduce attention to developmental needs and learning challenges.

The Sandwich Feedback Model remains one of the most accessible and widely used feedback approaches in higher education. Its ability to combine encouragement with constructive guidance makes it particularly valuable for supporting student development, although its effectiveness depends on the quality, sincerity, and specificity of the feedback provided.

CONCLUSION

Feedback has become an essential component of contemporary higher education, supporting student learning, academic achievement, self-reflection, and the development of feedback literacy. As educational systems increasingly emphasize student-centered learning and formative assessment, the quality of feedback provided by instructors plays a critical role in promoting meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, identifying effective feedback strategies has become an important area of educational research and practice.

The findings of this study indicate that the Sandwich Feedback Model represents a practical and accessible approach to delivering constructive feedback. Its three-stage structure, consisting of positive feedback, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement, enables instructors to balance recognition of students' achievements with guidance for improvement. The model contributes to student motivation, self-confidence, and acceptance of feedback while fostering a supportive and respectful learning environment.

The analysis also demonstrates that the Sandwich Feedback Model can be successfully applied in various higher education contexts, including presentations, written assignments, classroom discussions, group projects, and thesis supervision. Its flexibility and ease of implementation make it particularly valuable for instructors seeking to enhance communication with students and encourage active engagement with feedback.

Despite its advantages, the model should not be considered a universal solution for all feedback situations. Its effectiveness depends on the quality, specificity, and sincerity of the comments provided, as well as students' willingness to engage with feedback. Future research may focus on empirical investigations of the effectiveness of the Sandwich Feedback Model in different disciplines and educational settings, as well as its role in the development of teacher and student feedback literacy.

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