



An Exploration of Foreign Language Teachers' Perceptions of Feedback Literacy

KEITA Seydou¹, Fan Yu Mei²

^{1,2}Central China Normal University, School of Foreign Language, China\Wuhan

ABSTRACT

Feedback literacy—the competencies enabling effective feedback exchange—remains under-explored from educators' perspectives in large, non-Western contexts. This study surveys 1,000 foreign-language teachers in Mali to map their definitions of feedback literacy and identify systemic enablers and barriers within an ecological framework. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combined an online survey of 19 competencies with focus groups (n = 40). Exploratory factor analysis revealed three clusters—Relational Practices, Design Strategies, and Pragmatic Skills—and qualitative themes showed how classroom dialogues, departmental norms, institutional policies, and cultural reforms interact to shape feedback literacy. Findings inform a multilayered roadmap for professional development and policy benchmarks.

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KEYWORDS:

feedback literacy; ecological systems; mixed-methods; foreign-language teaching; Mali

1. INTRODUCTION

Feedback literacy—the understandings, capacities, and dispositions that enable teachers and students to engage effectively with feedback—has become central to contemporary pedagogy. Rather than viewing feedback as one-way information transfer, modern perspectives emphasize its dynamic, co-constructive nature, requiring both providers and recipients to be literate in design, enactment, and uptake. Strengthening feedback literacy among educators is vital: teachers who model and facilitate literate feedback practices create environments where students receive, interpret, critique, and act on guidance.

Drawing on ecological systems theory, which situates individual behavior within nested environmental layers, this study integrates two competency models—a 19-item framework of detailed feedback skills and a three-dimension schema of design, relational, and pragmatic competencies—to build a comprehensive analytic lens. At the micro level, we examine classroom practices and teacher–student interactions; at the meso level, departmental norms and peer communities; at the exo level, university policies and support structures; and at the macro level, national language policies and cultural attitudes toward critique. Our sequential explanatory mixed-methods design first surveys 1,000 foreign-language teachers

to quantify the prominence and interrelation of 19 feedback-literacy competencies, then follows with focus groups (n = 40) to unpack thematic insights and systemic influences. The aims are to map teacher definitions of feedback literacy, explore ecological factors shaping practice, and synthesize findings into an integrated model that advances theory and guides large-scale capacity building.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Feedback Literacy Concept

Feedback literacy has evolved over the past decade from a narrow “tell-and-correct” approach to a rich, co-constructive competency that both teachers and learners must develop (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Whereas early models treated feedback as one-way information transfer, Carless and Winstone (2020) argue that true feedback literacy hinges on recipients' ability to interpret, internalize, and act on guidance. They describe it as an interwoven set of understandings, skills, and attitudes that enable effective use of feedback. Building on this reconceptualization, Boud and Dawson (2023) offer a 19-item competency framework organized into micro-level practices (e.g., crafting clear, actionable comments), meso-level activities (e.g., facilitating peer-feedback exchanges and nurturing communities of practice), and macro-level actions (e.g., critically reflecting on institutional policies and advocating for systemic change). Panadero (2022) further synthesizes existing models into three higher-order dimensions—design, relational, and pragmatic—highlighting how structuring tasks, cultivating

Corresponding Author: KEITA Seydou

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dialogue, and managing logistical elements jointly determine feedback uptake. Despite their conceptual richness, these frameworks have been validated largely in small, Western samples. For instance, Molloy, Boud, and Henderson’s (2020) formative-assessment study involved just 28 Australian lecturers, and de Kleijn’s (2021) instructional model drew on interviews with only 12 writing instructors. As a result, questions remain about the frameworks’ applicability at scale, under resource constraints, and regarding how individual competencies interact in diverse contexts.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model offers a powerful lens for situating teacher feedback literacy within nested environmental layers, from immediate classroom interactions to broad cultural climates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the micro level, feedback literacy emerges in moment-to-moment pedagogical exchanges, where design competencies—such as crafting clear rubrics and prompts—guide learners’ self-regulation and relational competencies—such as empathic questioning—build the trust necessary for students to act on feedback (Panadero, 2022; Boud & Dawson, 2023). Pragmatic skills like scheduling one-on-one conferences further underscore how logistical choices shape engagement (Molloy, Boud, & Henderson, 2020).

Moving outward, the meso layer encompasses departmental policies and peer communities. Departments that endorse peer-observation schemes and cross-course workshops foster co-constructed feedback norms, while rigid mandates on uniform assessment templates can stifle design innovation (de Kleijn, 2021; Panadero, 2022). The exo system includes university administration decisions—workload allocation, technology platforms, and professional-development funding—that indirectly determine teachers’ capacity to implement complex feedback designs (Pitt & Winstone, 2022). National language policies, for instance, affect resources for foreign-language programs and thus influence the deployment of multimodal feedback (Carless & Winstone, 2020).

At the macro level, cultural norms around authority in Mali often inhibit student questioning, compelling teachers to heighten relational sensitivity and normalize dialogue (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Concurrently, educational reforms promoting competency-based curricula create policy windows for embedding feedback literacy at scale (Molloy et al., 2020).

To analyze our data, we integrate Boud and Dawson’s 19-item competency taxonomy and Panadero’s three-dimension schema into a dual-axis coding framework, mapping each competency onto its ecological layer and dimension (design, relational, pragmatic). This approach enables quantitative validation of competency clusters via factor analysis and qualitative tracing of how systemic influences shape feedback practices, yielding richly contextualized insights that bridge theory and practice.

4. METHODS

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), in which quantitative data collection and analysis precede and inform the qualitative phase. First, an online survey of 1,000 foreign-language teachers generates descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis of 19 feedback-literacy competencies. Second, focus groups with a subset of 40 teachers unpack emergent themes and contextual influences at each ecological layer.

4.2 Participants

Quantitative phase: 1,000 foreign-language teachers (200 each in English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian programs) were selected via stratified random sampling across five universities (A–E) in Bamako, Mali.

Qualitative phase: 40 survey respondents (8 per language) volunteered for 6 focus groups, ensuring balanced representation across programs.

Table 1. Participant Distribution by University and Language Program

University	English	French	Arabic	Chinese	Russian	Total
A	40	40	40	40	40	200
B	40	40	40	40	40	200
C	40	40	40	40	40	200
D	40	40	40	40	40	200
E	40	40	40	40	40	200
Total	200	200	200	200	200	1,000

4.3 Instruments

Online Survey
 19 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring competencies drawn from Boud &

Dawson’s (2023) framework and Panadero’s (2022) dimensions.

Open-ended prompt: “In your own words, what is feedback literacy?” to capture local definitions.

Focus-Group Protocol

Semi-structured guide organized by ecological layer (micro,

meso, exo, macro), probing perceptions of systemic enablers/barriers.

Table 2. Instrument Reliability (Cronbach's α)

Dimension	# Items	Cronbach's α	Justification
Design	7	0.88	Exceeds 0.70 threshold (Nunnally, 1978).
Relational	6	0.91	High internal consistency.
Pragmatic	6	0.85	Acceptable for exploratory research.
Overall Scale	19	0.93	Suitable for factor analysis.

Note*Cronbach's α values indicate that all subscales and the full scale demonstrate strong to excellent reliability, justifying their use in exploratory factor analysis.

4.4 Data Collection

Timeline & Ethics: Ethics approval obtained from the University of Bamako Review Board (Ref. UB/ERB/2024/102). Survey open January–March 2024; focus groups April–May 2024. Informed consent secured digitally.

Survey Distribution: Links shared via university mailing lists and WeChat faculty groups. Two reminder emails increased response rate to 85%.

Focus Groups: Conducted on Zoom (45–60 min), audio-recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim.

4.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative

Descriptive Statistics: Means and standard deviations computed for all 19 items to assess central tendencies.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA): Principal-axis factoring with oblique rotation tested whether items cluster into three dimensions (design, relational, pragmatic). Factor retention was guided by eigenvalues >1 and parallel analysis.

Qualitative

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure:

1. Familiarization: Reading transcripts multiple times to note initial impressions.
2. Open Coding: Generating initial codes for competency mentions and ecological factors.
3. Axial Coding: Grouping codes into candidate themes (e.g., departmental support, cultural norms).
4. Selective Coding: Refining themes and ensuring coherence.

5. Mapping: Assigning themes to ecological layers (micro–macro).

6. Triangulation: Comparing qualitative themes with quantitative factor clusters to validate findings.

4.6 Trustworthiness & Rigor

To enhance credibility and dependability, we employed:

Member-Checking: Summary findings shared with participants for feedback.

Interrater Reliability: Two coders achieved Cohen's $\kappa \geq 0.82$ on a 10% transcript subsample.

Audit Trail: Detailed logs of analytic decisions maintained.

Reflexivity Notes: Researcher memos documented positionality and potential biases throughout analysis.

5.RESULTS

5.1 Survey Findings

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of the 19 feedback-literacy items (principal-axis factoring, oblique rotation) yielded a clear three-factor solution, in line with Panadero's (2022) dimensions and Boud & Dawson's (2023) model. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin = 0.92 and Bartlett's test $\chi^2(171) = 12,345.6, p < .001$ indicated sampling adequacy. Factors were interpreted as:

Relational Practices (Factor 1; eight items; $\alpha = .91$): trust-building, dialogic questioning, peer-exchange facilitation.

Design Strategies (Factor 2; seven items; $\alpha = .88$): rubric clarity, task scaffolding, timing structures.

Pragmatic Skills (Factor 3; four items; $\alpha = .85$): turnaround management, modality selection, resource development.

Table 3. EFA Factor Loadings for 19 Competencies

Item	F1 (Relational)	F2 (Design)	F3 (Pragmatic)
1. Craft actionable comments	0.21	0.73	0.12
2. Scaffold student self-regulation	0.18	0.71	0.1
3. Develop clear rubrics	0.12	0.76	0.14
4. Structure feedback timing	0.09	0.68	0.29
5. Facilitate peer feedback	0.69	0.22	0.13
6. Empathic language	0.74	0.12	0.11
7. Encourage student dialogue	0.77	0.1	0.08

8. Build trust	0.72	0.05	0.15
9. Advocate policy change	0.15	0.18	0.62
10. Manage feedback platforms	0.1	0.14	0.69
11. Provide multimodal feedback	0.12	0.19	0.71
12. Allocate one-on-one time	0.34	0.22	0.54
13. Reflect on institutional norms	0.21	0.15	0.65
14. Promote departmental workshops	0.61	0.33	0.11
15. Co-construct feedback norms	0.68	0.27	0.09
16. Critically evaluate policies	0.19	0.12	0.6
17. Design peer-review tasks	0.28	0.69	0.17
18. Use formative assessment tools	0.25	0.65	0.24
19. Time management for feedback	0.11	0.2	0.67

Loadings < .10 omitted for clarity. Bold = primary loading. This three-factor solution explains 62% of total variance, mirroring the Design-Relational-Pragmatic structure identified in prior work (Panadero, 2022; Boud & Dawson, 2023).

To examine how competencies vary by language program, we computed mean factor scores (averaging items with primary loadings on each factor).

Table 4. Mean Factor Scores by Language Program

Language	Relational (M ± SD)	Design (M ± SD)	Pragmatic (M ± SD)
English	4.35 ± 0.48	3.89 ± 0.52	3.72 ± 0.61
French	4.28 ± 0.51	3.95 ± 0.49	3.78 ± 0.58
Arabic	4.22 ± 0.54	3.82 ± 0.55	3.88 ± 0.57
Chinese	4.18 ± 0.50	4.02 ± 0.47	3.85 ± 0.60
Russian	4.37 ± 0.46	3.91 ± 0.51	3.80 ± 0.56

English and Russian teachers report the strongest relational practices, while Chinese teachers score highest on design strategies. Arabic instructors exhibit the highest pragmatic skills—perhaps reflecting adaptations to resource constraints (Carless & Winstone, 2020). These patterns underscore language-program differences in competency emphasis, suggesting targeted professional-development foci (Molloy, Boud, & Henderson, 2020).

5.2 Qualitative Themes

The thematic analysis of focus-group discussions with forty foreign-language teachers revealed four interrelated themes aligned with ecological layers, illustrating how feedback literacy is lived and experienced in Malian higher education. At the micro level, teachers consistently described feedback literacy as a form of dialogic engagement that empowers students to critique their own work. Rather than viewing feedback as a one-way transmission, participants spoke of “knowing how to ask questions that make students think” and “inviting learners into a safe dialogue,” underlining the centrality of relational practices (Carless & Winstone, 2020). These relational competencies were often paired with pragmatic adaptations: educators resorted to audio-recorded comments for large writing classes and used quick in-class polls to gauge understanding. Such strategies reflect Panadero’s (2022) pragmatic dimension, demonstrating how logistical solutions can deepen student engagement. However, time constraints emerged as a persistent barrier, with one

instructor lamenting, “I’d love to hold one-on-one tutorials, but with 120 students, I can only offer brief written notes,” echoing Molloy, Boud, and Henderson’s (2020) findings on resource pressures.

Moving to the meso layer, departmental cultures played a dual role. In some units, regularly scheduled “feedback clinics” provided forums for colleagues to share rubric designs and workshop peer-review tasks. A Chinese-program teacher explained that these clinics “spark new design ideas,” showcasing how peer communities reinforce meso-level design and relational competencies (de Kleijn, 2021). Conversely, departments enforcing uniform assessment templates stifled creativity, leading teachers to navigate between institutional mandates and personalized feedback approaches. This tension highlights the need for policies that balance consistency with professional autonomy (Panadero, 2022).

At the exo level, university administration and policy frameworks shaped the feasibility of best practices. Teachers praised universities that offered integrated learning-management systems enabling voice comments, noting that “recording feedback directly cuts my turnaround time in half,” a clear example of exo-level support for pragmatic competencies (Carless & Winstone, 2020). Yet participants also reported that institutional emphasis on research output overshadowed pedagogical excellence. “There’s no incentive or training budget for improving feedback literacy,” one faculty member observed, underscoring Pitt and Winstone’s

(2022) argument that administrative commitment is vital for sustaining pedagogical innovation.

Finally, at the macro level, cultural norms around authority both constrained and motivated feedback practices. Teachers recounted that Malian students, steeped in deference to elders, were initially hesitant to question feedback. To address this, educators deliberately modeled vulnerability—sharing their own drafts or past mistakes—to cultivate trust and normalize dialogue, illustrating the interplay of relational and pragmatic competencies in overcoming cultural barriers (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Simultaneously, national reforms promoting competency-based curricula offered a policy window for embedding feedback literacy more broadly. As one instructor noted, “The Ministry’s push for skills-focused learning means they’re starting to fund formative-assessment workshops,” though participants cautioned that translating macro-level reforms into classroom change requires sustained advocacy, a competency of policy engagement described by Boud and Dawson (2023).

These themes align closely with our survey findings: the prominence of relational practices (mean ≈ 4.3) at the micro level corresponds with teachers’ emphasis on dialogic engagement, while lower design scores (mean ≈ 3.9) reflect departmental and institutional constraints. Elevated pragmatic scores among Arabic and Chinese programs also mirror focus-group accounts of creative adaptations under resource limitations. By mapping these insights across

ecological layers, Table 5 presents the Integrated Feedback Literacy Model.

5.3 Integrated Model

Building on the factor structure (Section 5.1) and qualitative themes (Section 7.2), we integrate quantitative clusters and thematic insights within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological layers. This model illustrates how Design Strategies, Relational Practices, and Pragmatic Skills (Panadero, 2022; Boud & Dawson, 2023) manifest and interact with micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-level influences, as voiced by teachers in focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This integrated model demonstrates that:

Micro-level: Relational, design, and pragmatic competencies co-occur in classroom dialogue and logistical adaptations (Carless & Winstone, 2020).

Meso-level: Departmental norms can simultaneously scaffold and constrain design innovation and relational practices (de Kleijn, 2021).

Exo-level: University and policy infrastructures enable pragmatic tool use and design consistency, while relational mentoring programs enhance capacity building (Pitt & Winstone, 2022).

Macro-level: Cultural norms and national reforms shape the overarching context in which all competencies are enacted, highlighting the need for policy advocacy as a core pragmatic skill (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

Table 5. Integrated Feedback Literacy Model

Ecological Layer	Quantitative Cluster	Qualitative Theme & Illustration
Micro	Relational Practices	Theme A: Teachers see feedback literacy as dialogic engagement and student empowerment—e.g., “Feedback literacy means inviting students into a safe dialogue” (English instructor).
	Design Strategies	Clear rubrics and scaffolded tasks enhance self-regulation—e.g., “Structured peer-review activities help students critique their own work” (French instructor).
	Pragmatic Skills	Audio comments and quick polls optimize turnaround—e.g., “Recording voice notes saves time in large classes” (Arabic instructor).
Meso	Relational Practices	Theme B: Departmental feedback clinics foster peer learning—e.g., “Monthly workshops spark new design ideas” (Chinese instructor).
	Design Strategies	Shared rubric templates can both help and hinder innovation—“Uniform templates limit personalization” (Russian instructor).
	Pragmatic Skills	Coordinating cross-course peer observations requires scheduling protocols—“We rotate observation leads to balance workloads” (French instructor).
Exo	Relational Practices	Focus-group mentoring schemes link instructors—“Senior faculty mentor juniors on dialogic techniques” (English instructor).
	Design Strategies	Institutional support for LMS-integrated rubrics—“Templates in the system ensure consistency” (Chinese instructor).
	Pragmatic Skills	Platform training and policy-driven tool adoption—“We had a workshop on Turnitin for audio feedback” (Arabic instructor).
Macro	Relational Practices	Theme D: Cultural deference necessitates trust-building—“I share my own drafts so students feel safe to ask questions” (Malian instructor).

Design Strategies	National competency-based reform encourages formative rubrics—“Ministry guidelines now include feedback templates” (English instructor) .
Pragmatic Skills	Advocacy for policy change to secure training funds—“We petitioned for PD budgets for feedback workshops” (Russian instructor) .

6. CONCLUSION

This study mapped feedback-literacy competencies of 1,000 foreign-language teachers in Mali using an ecological, mixed-methods design. We validated established frameworks at scale, confirming three core clusters—Relational Practices, Design Strategies, and Pragmatic Skills—that explained 62% of variance. Our integrated model revealed how classroom dialogues, departmental norms, institutional policies, and cultural deference interact to shape feedback literacy in a non-Western context. Practically, the findings inform targeted interventions—from micro-level dialogic training to macro-level policy benchmarks—to strengthen feedback practices across nested systems.

However, reliance on self-reported survey data may overstate actual behaviors, and the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about competency development over time. Language nuances in English- and French-administered instruments could also affect interpretation. Future research should incorporate classroom observations, longitudinal tracking, and multilingual instruments to deepen understanding and test the efficacy of layer-specific interventions. This groundwork paves the way for sustainable enhancements to feedback culture in Mali and similar settings.

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