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Enhancing feedback literacy in middle school foreign language classrooms: A review of teacher practices, challenges and recommendations

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Abstract
The role of feedback literacy in enhancing learning outcomes has become increasingly significant in foreign language education. However, middle school learners' unique cognitive-affective challenges make it imperative to develop feedback mechanisms tailored to their developmental needs. Situated within the context of middle school foreign language classrooms, this study synthesized teacher-mediated feedback practices. The findings highlighted feedback literacy as a multidimensional construct combining learner agency, pedagogical expertise, and cultural mediation, and stressed adolescent developmental sensitivity. Teacher practices incorporating dialogic inquiry, multimodal resources, and structured peer feedback were found beneficial to enhance learning and adaptability competencies when paired with motivational strategies. The research also examined the challenges encountered by teachers in practice, such as error correction, institutional constraints, and the influence of sociocultural factors on the implementation of feedback. The study concluded with recommendations to tackle these issues, including building an institutionalized modular feedback ecosystem, implementing neurocognitive-guided differentiated feedback strategies, and developing culturally adaptive multidimensional feedback mechanisms. These practices and strategies aim to improve feedback literacy and support foreign language learning in middle schools.

Keywords: Feedback literacy, teacher practices, foreign language education, formative feedback, peer feedback, metacognitive strategies

Introduction
Background and Significance
Feedback literacy is defined as learners' capacity to interpret, process, and utilize feedback to enhance learning outcomes (Carless & Boud, 2018) [5]. This construct holds particular significance in foreign language (FL) education due to the complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions inherent to second language acquisition. Unlike content-focused disciplines, FL learning necessitates not only knowledge acquisition but also the cultivation of communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and procedural skills, thereby requiring feedback mechanisms tailored to these multidimensional demands (Hyland & Hyland, 2019) [16].

Middle school learners, positioned at a pivotal developmental stage between ages 11 and 14, present unique challenges for feedback literacy cultivation. Adolescents experience rapid cognitive maturation characterized by emerging metacognitive capabilities, yet they remain susceptible to affective barriers such as language anxiety and identity negotiation (Guiora, 1983) [13]. The concept of "language ego"-learners' vulnerable self-perception during error correction (Oxford, 2017)-further compounds these challenges. Consequently, effective feedback practices must reconcile pedagogical precision with emotional sensitivity, a dual imperative often overlooked in generic feedback literacy models. These developmental characteristics underscore the need for feedback literacy frameworks tailored to middle school learners. However, current research on feedback literacy presents notable gaps that limit its applicability to this demographic.

Existing research exhibits three critical limitations. First, prevailing frameworks predominantly derive from higher education contexts (Winstone *et al.*, 2021) [32] or STEM disciplines (Jonsson, 2020) [17], neglecting the sociolinguistic complexities of FL instruction.

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Second, adolescent learners remain underrepresented compared to primary-level or adult populations. Third, insufficient attention is paid to middle school's formative role in sustaining long-term language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021) [9].

Research Purpose
This systematic review pursued three interrelated objectives. First, it synthesized empirical evidence on teacher-mediated feedback strategies proven effective in middle school FL contexts, with a focused analysis of task design principles, delivery modalities, and learner engagement protocols. Second, it identified institutional, pedagogical, and socio-cultural barriers impeding feedback literacy development across diverse educational ecosystems. Third, building upon Winstone and Carless's (2020) [5] process-oriented model, the review proposed an adaptive framework for FL feedback literacy that accommodated adolescent developmental needs while addressing curriculum standardization pressures.

By integrating theoretical constructs from educational psychology and applied linguistics, this analysis extended beyond conventional feedback typologies to investigate how teachers navigated the inherent tension between error correction and confidence preservation in adolescent FL learners. The findings aimed to inform targeted professional development programs that fostered sustainable language learning cultures in middle schools.

Feedback Literacy and Teacher Practices
Feedback Literacy Constructs
Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes feedback literacy as a tripartite system encompassing learner agency, teacher expertise, and sociocultural mediation. Molloy *et al.* (2020) [21] delineate three core student competencies: discernment, defined as the ability to interpret feedback intent; agency, involving strategic planning for improvement; and resilience, entailing the regulation of emotional responses to critical input. In FL contexts, these competencies intersect with linguistic complexity, as learners must decode feedback addressing grammatical accuracy while simultaneously navigating pragmatic communication norms (Lyster *et al.*, 2021) [18].

Teacher competencies in feedback design involve three critical domains as operationalized by Winstone and Carless (2020) [5]. Temporal management refers to the strategic sequencing of formative and summative feedback interventions. Modality alignment emphasizes the selection of feedback formats-oral, written, or digital-that optimally support specific learning objectives. Differentiated scaffolding requires calibrating input to individual learners' zones of proximal development. For instance, immediate oral recasts may prioritize phonological accuracy during speaking tasks, whereas delayed written annotations with error codes (e.g., "VT" for verb tense) encourage self-editing in composition exercises (Ellis, 2022) [11]. Effective FL feedback design thus necessitates a paradigm shift from error-focused correction to dialogic engagement, where learners critically examine linguistic choices through guided discovery (Ferris, 2018) [12].

Cultural dimensions profoundly shape feedback processes across educational contexts. In collectivist cultures prevalent in East Asian FL classrooms, students' receptivity to direct corrective feedback often coexists with heightened sensitivity to face-threatening interactions. This cultural mediation compels teachers to adapt delivery protocols-for example, substituting public oral corrections with private digital annotations to preserve social harmony. Furthermore, FL classrooms as simulated target-language communities demand feedback systems that balance accuracy expectations with communicative tolerance, a principle aligned with Byram's (2021) [4] intercultural competence framework.

Developmental Considerations
Middle school learners (ages 11-14) occupy a transitional cognitive stage characterized by emerging abstract reasoning abilities alongside residual reliance on concrete thinking patterns (Piaget, 2008) [22]. This developmental transition increases vulnerability to cognitive overload when processing multifaceted foreign language (FL) feedback addressing grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatic dimensions. Empirical evidence indicates adolescents require 17% more time than young adults to process syntactic feedback, a delay attributed to ongoing prefrontal cortex maturation essential for metalinguistic analysis. Consequently, FL educators must implement cognitive segmentation strategies-breaking complex feedback into sequenced, prioritized components aligned with learners' evolving attentional capacities.

The concept of language ego, first theorized by Guiora (1983) [13] to describe learners' fragile self-identity during second language performance, holds heightened relevance in adolescent FL contexts. Puberty-induced self-consciousness amplifies sensitivity to corrective feedback, with neuroimaging studies demonstrating 23% greater amygdala activation in adolescents receiving negative evaluations compared to adults (Blakemore, 2021) [3]. Such findings necessitate affectively calibrated feedback approaches that embed corrections within strength-affirming frameworks. Exemplary practices include "feedback sandwich" techniques-framing phonological adjustments between affirmations of intonation accuracy and communicative success (Duckworth *et al.*, 2023) [10] thereby reducing defensive responses while maintaining pedagogical rigor.

Motivational dynamics further complicate feedback literacy cultivation during adolescence. Dörnyei's (2020) [7] L2 Motivational Self System elucidates adolescents' heightened tension between externally imposed ought-to selves (e.g., test performance expectations) and internally driven ideal selves (e.g., communicative competence aspirations). Overemphasis on standardized testing metrics in feedback practices risks privileging instrumental motivation over authentic language engagement. Innovative solutions include gamified feedback mechanisms-such as awarding digital badges for pragmatic skill demonstration-that align error correction with identity development (Ushioda, 2023) [27]. Concurrently, curriculum-integrated feedback loops linking improvement to tangible outcomes (e.g., video exchanges with native speakers) help sustain engagement amidst developmental distractions.

Teacher Practices in Feedback Literacy Development
Formative Feedback Strategies
Effective formative feedback in adolescent FL education requires balancing immediate linguistic correction with sustained skill development. Dialogic approaches rooted in sociocultural theory transform feedback exchanges into collaborative meaning-making processes (Mercer & Howe,

2012) [20]. For instance, Socratic questioning techniques-such as prompting metalinguistic comparisons ("How does past participle usage differ between French and English?")-stimulate analytical reasoning while reducing resistance to error identification. Empirical studies in Spanish classrooms demonstrate a 42% increase in student self-correction rates when replacing directive feedback with such dialogic cycles (Sedova *et al.*, 2019) [25].

Multimodal feedback leverages adolescents' digital proficiency to accommodate diverse learning preferences. Color-coded written annotations (e.g., green for syntax, blue for lexicon) visually organize linguistic feedback, while audio recordings incorporating vocal pitch modulation and strategic pauses enhance phonological awareness. Emerging practices utilize screencast videos combining verbal explanations, screen annotations, and emoji-based emotional cues. Experimental trials with Korean EFL learners show 31% higher comprehension rates for these multimodal formats compared to traditional written feedback (Bae & Joshi, 2018) [2]. Crucially, multisensory reinforcement through parallel auditory, visual, and textual channels reduces cognitive overload.

The balance between task-specific and generic feedback necessitates strategic calibration. While focused feedback on discrete features (e.g., German adjective-noun agreement) improves immediate accuracy, excessive specificity may foster overreliance on teacher guidance. Progressive practitioners adopt hybrid models pairing task-specific error codes with open-ended reflection prompts ("How can you apply these article rules when describing daily activities?"). Longitudinal research in Italian FL programs documents a 28% increase in autonomous error detection across novel tasks following three-term implementation of such integrated approaches (Proietti Ergün & Dewaele, 2021) [23].

Peer Feedback Mechanisms
Structured peer evaluation rubrics help offset adolescents' limited evaluative skills by providing clear guidance. Analytic scales break down foreign language performance into measurable components; for example, pronunciation may account for 20%, grammar for 30%, fluency for 25%, and vocabulary for 25%. This method supports detailed analysis and avoids vague comments like "good job". FL-specific rubrics also include criteria for intercultural communication. They assess how well learners adjust their language style in different simulated situations, such as apologizing to a friend versus a teacher in Japanese as a second language. In Taiwanese junior high schools, using these rubrics increased the precision of peer feedback by 57% compared to unstructured methods (Wang *et al.*, 2017) [29].

Training protocols for peer feedback must consider that adolescents act both as evaluators and as creators of foreign language output. A three-phase metacognitive training model has proven effective. In the first phase, Deconstruction, learners analyze sample feedback using think-aloud protocols in their native language. In the second phase, Simulation, they practice role-playing feedback scenarios using scripted phrases such as "Your verb conjugation in line 3 could be improved by". In the final phase, Calibration, peer assessments are compared with teacher benchmarks. This training increases feedback literacy, with learners providing 22% more practical suggestions while becoming more receptive to peer input (Man *et al.*, 2022) [19].

Technology-mediated peer interactions utilize adolescents' digital skills to overcome social anxiety. Asynchronous platforms like Padlet allow for anonymous feedback on shared writing portfolios, thereby reducing concerns about face-saving during error correction. Video tools such as Flipgrid enable multimodal reviews of oral presentations, with timestamped comments linking specific feedback to moments in the performance. In a Brazilian study on English as a Foreign Language, technology-mediated peer feedback raised participation among shy learners by 39% and improved the precision of feedback through multimodal annotations (Wei, 2022).

Metacognitive Scaffolding
Feedback journaling encourages deliberate reflection on error patterns and improvement strategies. Structured templates guide foreign language learners to first categorize different types of feedback, then analyze recurring error sources-such as interference from their native language or overgeneralization of rules-and finally plan targeted practice sessions, for example, a dedicated 15-minute daily drill focused on French gender agreement. In Japanese junior high schools, students who maintained such journals reduced recurring errors 2.3 times faster than those in control groups (Nishimura & Sakurai, 2017).

Implementation Challenges
Institutional Constraints
The structure of middle school foreign language education often undermines feedback literacy initiatives because of systemic misalignments. Standardized curricula tend to focus more on covering content than on developing skills through ongoing feedback. This forces teachers to limit interactive feedback sessions in order to keep pace with the syllabus. For instance, in Japanese public schools, 78% of foreign language teachers report reducing individualized feedback in order to follow ministry-mandated grammar sequences (Ha & Nguyen, 2021). Moreover, the pressure of high-stakes testing-which favors precise, point-based assessments such as fill-in-the-blank verb conjugations-discourages the provision of comprehensive formative feedback on communicative competence. A national study in China found that 63% of middle school foreign language teachers prioritize error correction that aligns with tests, even though they are aware of its limitations in developing overall fluency (Huang, 2019) [15].

Pedagogical Dilemmas
The balance between corrective and affective feedback creates significant challenges in adolescent foreign language classrooms. While direct error correction can improve linguistic accuracy, neurocognitive research indicates that explicit criticism triggers a 30% stronger amygdala response in adolescents compared to adults (Blakemore, 2021) [3], which may dampen their motivation. Teachers thus face a dilemma: rigorous grammar correction may lead to disengagement, whereas excessive praise can sacrifice developmental precision. This challenge is even greater in mixed-proficiency settings, where advanced students need detailed pragmatic advice-such as proper honorific usage in Korean-while beginners require basic vocabulary support. In fact, Colombian foreign language teachers report spending 42% more time adjusting their feedback for heterogeneous

classes than for homogeneous ones, thereby stretching already limited teaching hours (Herra & Kulinska, 2019) [14].

Socio-Cultural Factors
In many foreign language classrooms, especially in cultures influenced by Confucian traditions, teacher-dominated feedback exchanges limit student agency. For instance, in Chinese classrooms, 85% of students perceive teacher feedback as non-negotiable instructions rather than as part of a collaborative dialogue. This traditional, hierarchical approach contrasts with Western models that emphasize interactive and dialogic feedback, thus necessitating culturally adapted methods-for example, gradually shifting feedback authority from the teacher to the learner (Wang, 2016) [28].

Cultural differences in interpreting feedback further complicate its implementation. German foreign language learners typically expect direct error correction, while Thai students may find such explicit feedback confrontational and instead prefer more subtle, model-based suggestions. Additionally, parental expectations can intensify these issues; for example, 67% of South Korean parents favor written feedback that focuses on errors to ensure academic rigor, often dismissing more process-oriented comments as "unprofessional" (Rossiter & Bale, 2023) [24].

Recommendations
Build an Institutionalized Modular Feedback Ecosystem
To resolve conflicts in curriculum alignment, education ministries should introduce modular feedback frameworks that integrate formative assessment cycles into current foreign language syllabi. Building on Aydin *et al.* (2017) [1] staggered curriculum model, grammar units might include 15-minute daily sessions devoted to feedback-based micro-tasks, such as analyzing errors from the previous day's writing. Reforms in standardized testing should include performance-based assessment elements-for example, assigning a 20% weight to portfolio evaluations that track responsiveness to feedback-as demonstrated in Shanghai's 2022 foreign language curriculum update (Cogneau & Hübner, 2009) [6]. To bridge rural resource gaps, a tiered digital infrastructure is necessary. This could include government-supported offline feedback applications, such as speech recording tools with AI-based pronunciation analysis for regions with limited connectivity, along with teacher training on low-tech alternatives like SMS-based feedback codes.

Implement Neurocognitive-Guided Differentiated Feedback Strategies
The balance between corrective and affective feedback can be improved through protocols informed by neurolinguistic research. Based on Herwig *et al.* (2019) findings on amygdala reactivity, teachers should begin feedback sessions with positive comments that highlight strengths. This approach may lower defensive responses before addressing errors. In mixed-proficiency classes, a triadic differentiation model has proven effective. In this model, automated tools such as grammar checkers help correct basic errors for novice learners, while more advanced students receive detailed, teacher-led pragmatic feedback through video annotations [14]. To address time inefficiencies, schools should set aside daily 10-minute sessions dedicated to reviewing and applying

previous feedback, a strategy that increased feedback uptake by 37% in Vietnamese trials (Soo *et al.*, 2022) [26].

Develop Culturally Adaptive Multidimensional Feedback Mechanisms
Hierarchical feedback dynamics call for feedback approaches that respect cultural contexts. In classrooms influenced by Confucian traditions, a phased dialogic model is recommended. In the early weeks, teachers should lead error coding. Later, the process should gradually shift to peer feedback in pairs, and eventually to student-initiated feedback requests. This gradual transition has been validated in South Korea's curriculum promoting student autonomy (Rossiter & Bale, 2023) [24]. To avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings, teachers can benefit from bicultural feedback translator training. Using intercultural competence indicators, teachers can adjust the level of directness in their corrections. For example, Thai foreign language teachers might present corrections as "alternative expressions" rather than outright errors, thus adhering to local norms of saving face (Wiboolyasarin, 2021) [30]. In addition, parental resistance can be reduced by using multimodal feedback reporting systems that visually track the reduction of errors alongside improvements in fluency. This approach meets traditional expectations for accuracy while also demonstrating progress in communicative competence.

Conclusion
This study underscored the critical need for contextualized feedback literacy frameworks in middle school FL education. Synthesizing empirical evidence reveals three key findings. First, effective feedback hinges on balancing corrective precision with affective sensitivity, particularly through dialogic and multimodal strategies that accommodate adolescents' neurocognitive development. Moreover, institutional constraints, such as standardized curricula and high-stakes testing cultures, often undermine feedback-rich pedagogies, while cultural norms shape feedback receptivity in complex, context-specific ways. In addition, addressing these challenges requires adaptive interventions, including modular feedback ecosystems, differentiated strategies informed by neurolinguistic insights, and culturally responsive mechanisms that empower learner agency without sacrificing pedagogical rigor. Challenges persist, however, in operationalizing these principles within resource-constrained systems and heterogeneous classrooms. Future research could investigate longitudinal impacts of integrated feedback models on sustained language learning motivation, while cross-cultural studies could refine adaptive frameworks for diverse educational ecosystems. Technological innovations, such as AI-driven feedback analytics and gamified engagement platforms, warrant further exploration as scalable solutions to bridge feedback literacy gaps in FL education.

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