REVISTA INVECOM
ISSN en línea: 2739-0063

Formative feedback in secondary school English teaching: a systematic review of evidence (2021–2025)

Retroalimentación formativa en la enseñanza del inglés en educación secundaria: una revisión sistemática (2021–2025)

Received: 22/07/2025 - **Accepted:** 20/10/2025

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Abstract

This systematic review analyzes formative feedback and its role as a pedagogical strategy in secondary-level English language teaching. The PRISMA 2020 methodology was used, and only articles indexed in Scopus between 2021 and 2025 were considered, applying clearly defined inclusion criteria. Of the 121 initial records, 29 articles passed the final filter and were analyzed, covering essays, case studies, mixed methods, and exploratory reviews from Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The results are grouped into five main areas: corrective and formative feedback focused on writing, use of digital tools for feedback, formative assessment approaches (AFL/LOA), gamification and active peer learning, as well as associated factors such as self-efficacy. Research by Nakata et al. (2025), Schiller et al. (2024), and Fleckenstein et al. (2024) shows that corrective feedback is effective when aligned with student needs. Likewise, Lee and Ko (2025) and Meyer et al. (2024) demonstrate the potential of the metaverse and artificial intelligence chatbots. Gamification, according to Darwis et al. (2024) and Zghoul and Bataineh (2024), increases interest and promotes peer feedback. In conclusion, formative feedback is an essential element for students to improve their English proficiency, develop greater autonomy, and feel more motivated. It also provides a solid foundation that contributes to more effective English language teaching in today's educational institutions.

Keywords: formative feedback, secondary education, English language teaching.

Resumen

Esta revisión sistemática analiza la retroalimentación formativa y su papel como estrategia pedagógica en la enseñanza del inglés en el nivel secundario. Se empleó la metodología PRISMA 2020 y se consideraron únicamente artículos indexados en Scopus entre 2021 y 2025, aplicando criterios de inclusión claramente definidos. De los 121 registros iniciales, 29 artículos superaron el filtro final y fueron analizados, abarcando ensayos, estudios de caso, métodos mixtos y revisiones exploratorias provenientes de Asia, Europa y América Latina. Los resultados se agrupan en cinco ejes principales: retroalimentación correctiva y formativa enfocada en la escritura, uso de herramientas digitales al servicio del feedback, enfoques de evaluación formativa (AFL/LOA), gamificación y aprendizaje activo entre pares, además de factores asociados como la autoeficacia. Investigaciones de Nakata et al. (2025), Schiller et al. (2024) y Fleckenstein et al. (2024) evidencian que la retroalimentación correctiva resulta eficaz cuando se alinea con las necesidades del estudiante. Asimismo, Lee y Ko (2025) y Meyer et al. (2024) demuestran el potencial del metaverso y de los chatbots con inteligencia artificial. Por su parte, la gamificación, según Darwis et al. (2024) y Zghoul y Bataineh (2024), incrementa el interés y promueve la retroalimentación entre pares. En conclusión, la retroalimentación formativa constituye un elemento esencial para que los estudiantes mejoren su dominio del inglés, desarrollen mayor autonomía y se sientan más motivados. Además, proporciona una base sólida que contribuye a una enseñanza del inglés más efectiva en las instituciones educativas actuales.

Palabras clave: retroalimentación formativa, educación secundaria, enseñanza del inglés.

Introduction

Secondary education in English primarily aims to develop communicative competencies that ensure effective interaction in diverse academic and social contexts. In achieving this goal, feedback emerges as an essential tool within the teaching-learning process, as it allows for the simultaneous guidance, correction, and

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reinforcement of student performance across various linguistic skills. According to Islas (2017), corrective feedback, even when delivered in an automated manner, serves as an effective mechanism for enhancing written production by providing students with precise indications regarding the errors made and areas with potential for improvement.

Contemporary research confirms that systematically applied formative feedback not only leads to improvements in grades but, more significantly, fosters self-direction and critical reflection, competencies that are fundamental for autonomous learning. Moya-Muñoz et al. (2025) demonstrate that the implementation of deliberate feedback strategies increases student engagement and results in measurable advances in both comprehension and linguistic production. Complementarily, Ortega-Martín et al. (2022) emphasize the central role of feedback in developing writing competencies. Their analysis reveals that critical examination of one's own productions, combined with teacher guidance, facilitates the active construction of knowledge.

Formal feedback consolidates itself as a significant pedagogical mediator in the teaching of English as a foreign language in secondary education. Olivera Sagua (2021) argues that when systematically organized and directed toward continuous improvement, this mechanism enables the overcoming of common obstacles in reading comprehension and oral expression, provided it is applied periodically and articulated around defined objectives. In line with this, Sulca Rojas (2022) identifies that the digital mediation of feedback through applications like *Kahoot!* has a revitalizing effect: the activity transforms into a cognitive game that captures attention and, most importantly, strengthens reading skills.

In this context, relevant evidence has emerged in Peru regarding formative feedback. Requiz Lucas and Torres Estrada (2025) confirm that the incorporation of this resource in rural schools allows students to solidify communicative competencies, enhance their self-efficacy, and orient themselves toward more autonomous learning. These results align with the transition from a traditional evaluative model to a formative approach, wherein feedback is conceived as a guiding dialogue that provides constant support and consequently facilitates deeper and more meaningful access to knowledge.

The literature review underscores that formative feedback—implemented through traditional strategies or mediated by technology—stands out as one of the most effective mechanisms for optimizing the teaching and learning of English at the secondary education level.

Research question

What is the impact of formative feedback on the teaching and learning process of English among secondary education students?

Research objectives

General objective

• To analyze the impact of formative feedback on the teaching and learning process of English among secondary education students.

Specific objectives

• To identify the strategies of formative feedback employed by English teachers in secondary education.
• To evaluate students' perceptions regarding the relevance of formative feedback in their learning process.

This study aims to analyze this impact at the secondary education level, considering both students' perceptions and the pedagogical practices of teachers.

Methodology

This research adopts a systematic review design, following the protocol established by the PRISMA 2020 methodology. The literature search was exclusively limited to the Scopus repository, owing to its recognized prestige in disseminating high-impact scientific works.

Inclusion criteria were defined as studies published between 2021 and 2025, in the format of scientific articles, open access, written in English, and focusing on the educational domain. Conversely, exclusion criteria included theses, book chapters, documents more than five years old, publications with restricted access, and texts written in languages other than English.

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in study selection

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Publications between 2021 – 2025.	• Articles published before 2021.
• Studies related to formative feedback in English teaching.	• Duplicate documents.
• Research focused on secondary education.	• Works in levels other than secondary education (primary or higher).
• Articles published in English or Spanish.	• Publications in other languages.
• Original articles, peer-reviewed, and open access in Scopus.	• Theses, book chapters, or documents with restricted access.

Note. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined based on the research objectives and rigorously applied during the identification, screening, and eligibility phases, following PRISMA 2020 methodology.

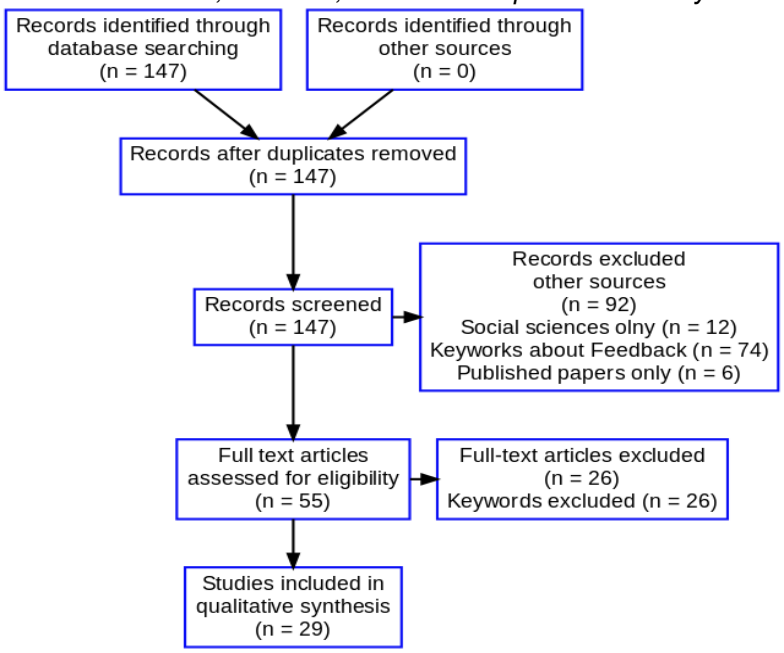
To optimize information retrieval, an advanced search equation was developed in Scopus, considering publications in English and employing Boolean operators and truncation adapted to the database's syntax. The general equation used was as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("formative feedback" OR "feedback") AND ("English teaching" OR "English language" OR "English as a foreign language" OR "EFL" OR "enseñanza del inglés") AND ("secondary education" OR "high school" OR "secondary school")) AND (PUBYEAR > 2020 AND PUBYEAR < 2026) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Efl") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Corrective Feedback") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Formative Assessment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Secondary Education") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Feedback")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final"))

After applying the selection and filtering criteria, a total of 29 studies were included in the systematic review, as detailed in the PRISMA diagram.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of the identification, selection, and inclusion process of analyzed studies



Note. Content generated from https://hollyhartman.shinyapps.io/PRISMAFlowDiagram/

The initial search in the database identified 147 relevant records for the review, with no additional documents found through other sources. After the removal of duplicates, the same number of records remained (n = 147), which underwent an initial screening process. At this stage, 92 records that did not meet the established criteria were excluded: 12 belonged solely to the social sciences, 74 focused on feedback themes unrelated to English teaching, and 6 corresponded to previously published articles that did not qualify as scientific studies.

Subsequently, 55 full-text articles were evaluated to ascertain their eligibility. Of these, 26 were excluded for failing to adhere to the key terms defined in the inclusion criteria. Ultimately, 29 studies met all methodological and conceptual requirements and were incorporated into the qualitative synthesis of the systematic review.

Results and discussion

To systematically organize the gathered empirical evidence, the 29 final articles identified in Scopus were classified according to their main characteristics. The following table provides a summary of the authors, year of publication, indexing source, type of study, and country of origin, thereby illustrating the methodological and geographical diversity of the included research.

Table 2

Analysis of identified research articles

Authors	Year	Journal	Type of study	Country of origin
Nakata et al.	2025	System	Mixed (surveys and modeling)	Japan
Burhanuddin et al.	2025	Asia Pacific Education Researcher	Multiple case study	Indonesia
Lee & Ko	2025	Education and Information Technologies	Comparative quasi-experimental	South Korea
Sardegna et al.	2025	System	Qualitative study (telecollaboration)	USA
Jung & Oh	2025	English Teaching Korea	Conversational analysis	South Korea
Ay Kaya & Yangin	2025	Participatory Educational Research	Sequential explanatory mixed	Turkey
Rana & Rana	2025	Journal of Language and Education	Interviews and observation	Nepal
Li et al.	2025	Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching	Exploratory review	China
Wardana et al.	2025	Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics	Mixed (tests, surveys, interviews)	Indonesia
Schiller et al.	2024	Computers and Education	Experimental	Germany
Fleckenstein et al.	2024	Learning and Instruction	Randomized controlled trial	Switzerland
Darwis et al.	2024	Teaching English Language	Applied study (Kahoot!)	Indonesia
Meyer et al.	2024	Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence	Experimental (AI – GPT-3.5)	Germany
Long	2024	Journal of Asia TEFL	Exploratory study (ChatGPT)	Hong Kong
Bi et al.	2024	Journal of English Studies	Mixed (case in writing)	China
Cretu & Popa	2024	Cogent Education	Mixed (surveys and interviews)	Romania
Zghoul & Bataineh	2024	Journal of IT Education – Innovations in Practice	Quasi-experimental	Jordan
Kim	2024	Language Learning and Technology	Experimental (AI chatbots)	South Korea
Yang & May	2023	Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics	Case study	China
Can et al.	2023	Technology, Knowledge and Learning	Mixed (SRS in classroom)	Turkey
Nguyen et al.	2023	Forum for Linguistic Studies	Qualitative (teacher interviews)	Vietnam

Ahmetovic et al.	2023	Journal of Language and Education	Quantitative (surveys)	Bosnia and Herzegovina
MacKinnon & MacLean	2023	International Journal of Technologies in Learning	Mixed (online learning)	China
Guliyeva	2022	Universidad y Sociedad	Case study (evaluation)	Azerbaijan
Maier	2021	Computers and Education	Experimental (controlled trial)	Germany
Mabrur et al.	2021	International Social Science Journal	Survey (COVID-19 e-learning)	Indonesia
Elfiyanto & Fukazawa	2021	International Journal of Instruction	Comparative quasi-experimental	Indonesia
Milla & García Mayo	2021	Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics	Comparative study (CLIL/EFL)	Spain
Mahmood et al.	2021	Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies	Survey (teacher self-efficacy)	Malaysia

Note. The information presented in the table is based on the 29 final articles identified in Scopus (2021–2025). The studies were classified according to authorship, publication year, indexing source, methodological design type, and country of origin, following the inclusion and exclusion criteria defined in the systematic review.

Table 3

Thematic axes and authors of studies on Formative feedback in English teaching processes

Thematic axis	Representative authors
1. Corrective and formative feedback in writing	Nakata et al. (2025); Jung & Oh (2025); Wardana et al. (2025); Schiller et al. (2024); Fleckenstein et al. (2024); Bi et al. (2024); Elfiyanto & Fukazawa (2021); Milla & García Mayo (2021)
2. Technology and innovation in feedback	Lee & Ko (2025); Meyer et al. (2024); Long (2024); Kim (2024); Maier (2021); Mabrur et al. (2021)
3. Formative assessment: AFL and LOA (Assessment for Learning / Learning-Oriented Assessment)	Burhanuddin et al. (2025); Rana & Rana (2025); Yang & May (2023); Nguyen et al. (2023); Guliyeva (2022)
4. Gamification, digital platforms, and collaborative learning	Ay Kaya & Yangin (2025); Li et al. (2025); Darwis et al. (2024); Zghoul & Bataineh (2024); Sardegna et al. (2025); Can et al. (2023)
5. Psychoeducational factors and teacher self-efficacy	Wardana et al. (2025); Ahmetovic et al. (2023); MacKinnon & MacLean (2023); Mahmood et al. (2021)

Note. The classification of the 29 articles into five thematic axes was based on an analysis of the objectives, methodologies, and main findings of each study.

The first line of evidence revolves around the implementation of corrective and formative feedback in English writing instruction. Meta-analyses consistently indicate that the magnitude of positive transfer is mediated by the quantity, specificity, and immediacy of the feedback provided. Nakata et al. (2025) reveal significant discrepancies between the designs preferred by learners—who favor explicit correction complemented with verbal praise—and the approaches adopted by instructors, adversely affecting competency indicators. In the same vein, Jung and Oh (2025) document that the implementation of one-on-one writing conferences fosters self-correction through metalinguistic interventions and the incremental construction of sentences, thereby enhancing learners' cognitive autonomy.

Other findings bolster this research trajectory. Wardana et al. (2025) quantify significant improvements in writing competencies and perceptions of self-efficacy resulting from corrective practices, while Schiller et al. (2024) and Fleckenstein et al. (2024) demonstrate that the level of behavioral engagement acts as a mediating variable between feedback and quantifiable achievement. The recurrence of corrective effects across multiple cultural scenarios is evidenced by comparative analyses: Bi et al. (2024) study Chinese cohorts, Elfiyanto and Fukazawa (2021) compare Indonesian and Japanese contexts, and Milla and García Mayo (2021) conduct their research in European CLIL programs, corroborating that the relative efficacy of oral and written feedback systematically varies according to the organizational principles of each institution.

Concurrently, a robust body of studies examines the integration of technology in feedback processes. Lee and Ko (2025) analyze the metaverse as a linguistic interaction environment, concluding that while it enhances

motivation and participation, oral production remains inferior to that observed in face-to-face activities. Meyer et al. (2024) confirm that the most advanced versions of language models, such as GPT-3.5, offer automated feedback that improves text revision processes and elevates student motivation. Long (2024) reinforces this finding by validating the use of ChatGPT as a tutor in written feedback, although he cautions that learners face adjustment difficulties when suggestions are not fully assimilable. Kim (2024) investigates the creation of chatbots offering automatic recasts, highlighting noticeability as a necessary variable for achieving long-lasting learning outcomes. Finally, both Maier (2021) and Mabrur et al. (2021) agree that the actual effectiveness of online feedback platforms and learning environments for immediate feedback depends primarily on the learner's disposition toward self-regulation and secondarily on a didactic design that adequately incorporates these resources.

The third axis focuses on formative assessment and its translation into Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) practices. Burhanuddin et al. (2025) emphasize that, despite the partial incorporation of assessment strategies for learning by teachers, the predominance of confirmatory feedback—rather than formative—indicates superficial application. Rana and Rana (2025) extend this observation by noting that even with limited formal training, teachers seek to integrate continuous assessment with feedback-oriented processes aimed at fostering meaningful learning. Yang and May (2023) highlight a heterogeneous interpretation of learning-oriented assessment results among Chinese educators, although all consistently resort to contingent feedback and peer co-assessment. In a different context, Nguyen et al. (2023) document the challenges faced in implementing a competency-based curriculum in Vietnam, related to pedagogical inadequacies, institutional deficiencies, and limitations in teacher training. Complementarily, Guliyeva (2022) reveals, within the Azerbaijani context, the persistent application of traditional assessment models that do not meet contemporary learning demands.

In relation to the use of gamification, digital platforms, and collaborative learning, the collected evidence confirms that the adoption of digital resources transcends mere simplification of feedback, as it fosters active student engagement in their formative process. Ay Kaya and Yangin (2025) demonstrated that the use of the Flip application enhances fluency and confidence in speaking while simultaneously reducing anxiety. Li et al. (2025), through a scope review, report that gamification devices—such as point systems and leaderboards—combined with immediate feedback, positively influence both global English proficiency and student motivation. Darwis et al. (2024) contend that the Kahoot! platform serves as a beneficial resource for digital summative assessment; concurrently, Zghoul and Bataineh (2024) argue that Flipgrid shifts face-to-face dynamics towards environments where self-assessment and peer feedback become routine practices. Sardegna et al. (2025) document that intercultural telecollaboration presents an ideal setting for authentic feedback exchange, while Can et al. (2023) indicate that digital response systems enable students to achieve lower levels of evaluative anxiety and enhance their self-regulation capabilities.

The axis relating to psychoeducational factors and teacher self-efficacy in formative feedback offers an integrative perspective illustrating how emotional and motivational variables moderate the pedagogical effectiveness of correction. Wardana et al. (2025) confirm that teacher self-efficacy and students' self-regulation levels have a positive and significant relationship with writing development following exposure to feedback. Complementarily, Ahmetovic et al. (2023) observe that a favorable disposition towards correction improves motivation, whereas MacKinnon and MacLean (2023) warn that the absence of self-regulatory practices restricts the benefits of an online learning environment based on feedback. In line with this, Mahmood et al. (2021), in a study conducted in Malaysia, conclude that demographic determinants of teacher self-efficacy in written feedback are irrelevant; the authors argue that formative and pedagogical components constitute more influential factors than personal attributes.

The articulation of these five thematic axes allows for the conclusion that formative feedback in secondary English learning is a phenomenon of high complexity, in which the effectiveness of correction cannot be attributed in isolation to the type of intervention—whether direct corrections, the use of digital platforms, or self-assessment repositories. The impact of feedback is mediated by a diverse set of contextual, curricular, institutional, emotional, and pedagogical variables that collectively shape the final impact of corrective activities.

By combining conventional methodologies with emerging digital tools, and by incorporating perspectives from both students and teachers, the body of evidence analyzed constructs a coherent framework that affirms the central influence of formative feedback in creating meaningful and sustainable learning outcomes.

Conclusions

The systematic review conducted corroborates that formative feedback plays a central role in the teaching of English at the secondary education level. This mechanism acts not only as a mediator of academic performance but also as a facilitator of motivation, autonomy, and student engagement in their learning process. By its inherently

continuous and constructive nature, feedback emerges as a genuine toolbox that enables students to progress toward outcomes whose significance and durability suggest consolidation in long-term memory.

According to the gathered evidence, the effectiveness of this mechanism depends on variables such as the quality, timeliness, and relevance of the feedback information. When feedback is articulated clearly, aligned with learning objectives, and supported by scientific evidence, it translates into a positive effect on linguistic competencies overall, with particularly notable achievements in writing, reading comprehension, and epistemic expression. Furthermore, the integration of formative feedback with technological tools and innovative methodologies expands interaction opportunities and reinforces the overall dynamics of the pedagogical process.

The analyzed data lead to the conclusion that formative feedback should be conceived as a central axis within instructional planning, rather than as an auxiliary component. When implemented under a regime of systematic and continuous intervention, feedback not only directs progress toward curricular expectations but also fosters the integration of the four language skills in authentic contexts. Simultaneously, it serves as a true laboratory of metacognition in which students develop self-regulation of learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities, competencies that respond to the epistemological and socio-labor demands of the contemporary environment.

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