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The Unsung Power of Teachers' Productive Feedback Features in Improving Self-Directed Learning of EFL Learners: Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Concern about the Iranian EFL learners' dissatisfaction with their learning achievement motivated this qualitative study. While the importance of teacher feedback in English as a foreign language (EFL) and its relation with self-directed learning (SDL) of EFL learners is recognized in the literature, there seems to be a gap specifically regarding the role of Iranian EFL teachers' productive feedback features in fostering EFL learners' SDL. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the teachers' self-reported productive feedback perception and practices in support of Iranian EFL learners' SDL to fill in the gap. For this aim, fourteen Iranian EFL teachers were interviewed, and the data obtained from the semi-structured individual interviews were analysed through content analysis. According to the findings, the participating EFL teachers unanimously comprehended the benefits of productive feedback in the classroom in support of learners' SDL. These benefits, , may contribute to learners' self-awareness, freedom, effective learning, and a stress-free learning environment. However, lack of time, teachers' shortage of knowledge, and the top-down approach to the education system of Iran prevent Iranian EFL teachers from actually implementing these productive feedback features supporting learners' SDL.

Keywords: SDL, EFL, productive feedback features, teachers' perception and practices

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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a spate of interest in feedback, as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 102). Feedback has an important role in learners' achievement (Al-Bashir et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Yang et al. 2021), including language learning accomplishment (Wasik & Hindman, 2018), with a special focus on EFL learning (Banaruee et al., 2018; Zhai & Gao, 2018). Since teachers have a key role in learners' success (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Tian, 2022), their feedback provision also plays a pivotal role in EFL learners' language learning attainment (Tasdemir & Arslan, 2018) if provided feedback is productive (Esterhazy et al., 2021) which is indicative of teachers' qualification (Wang, et al., 2018).

Productive feedback, as defined by Abdolhosseinzadeh Amini et al. (2022, p. 2), is "the process whereby the teacher provides information to learners about their performance or supports learners to gain the necessary information about their performance, where this information aims to support understanding so that learners can use it to progress towards the learning goal". Informed by this definition, it can be inferred in the context of this study that the EFL learning goal can be attainable if both teachers, by stimulating a supportive condition for self-regulated learning, and learners, by gaining complete mastery over the received feedback to take actions afterwards, feel responsible for the learning process. Therefore, the feedback process can be a result of the collaborative accomplishment of both teachers and learners.

Creating an environment supportive of self-regulated learning through different ways such as teachers' encouragement of learners' self-correction and peer-correction feedback strategies, to name but a few, as an attempt for learners to take ownership of their learning, has been highlighted by Carless and Boud (2018), Henderson et al., (2019), and Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006). Therefore, understanding of and using feedback by learners motivated by the teachers' productive feedback delivery can build up learners' SDL, via which, as stated by Bouchard (2012), learners feel accountable for their own learning. Knowles (1975, p.18) defines SDL relation to own learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help from others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes."

Due to the importance of English throughout the world, this language has become the most widely taught foreign language in Iran (Rassouli & Osam, 2019), and knowing English in this context is regarded as an educational and social accomplishment (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). Formal English instruction, as a mandatory course, starts at schools and continues at universities; however, it is also offered by a large number of private language institutes throughout the country for those learners intending to improve their practical skills in English (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). Nonetheless, as the same authors report, Iranian EFL learners do not feel content with their learning achievement after passing the compulsory courses at schools and even attending classes in private language institutes. This dissatisfaction can be, amongst others, ascribed to Iranian EFL learners' low autonomy, or its lack thereof, resulting in learners' less active participation in the class (Zarei et al., 2021). The absence of learner autonomy may result from the features of teachers' feedback provision, which does not allow learners to thrive to manage their own learning process proactively (Beiki et al., 2020; Mohamad Nasri et al., 2022). The benefits of the role of teachers' feedback in Iranian EFL learning outcomes have been emphasized in a recent study by Namaziandost et al. (2024). Nationally, studies by Zarei et al. (2021) and Beiki et al. (2020) highlighted that Iranian EFL learners experience low engagement due to inadequate teacher feedback, which impedes their autonomy. This is echoed in international research by Carless and Boud (2018), which found that effective feedback strategies across various EFL contexts significantly boost learner autonomy. These findings underscore the need for Iranian EFL teachers to rethink their feedback approaches to empower learners and enhance their educational experiences.

In the area of language learning, autonomy means each learner is accountable for his or her own learning process (Oxford, 2016, 2017), therefore, throughout this study, "SDL" and "learner autonomy" have been used interchangeably (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Wang Chong & Reinders, 2022). Despite enough literature on SDL of EFL learners (Anches Holzweber, 2019; Chong & Reinders, 2022; Ghaith, 2018; Jonsson, 2012) and on teacher feedback in the area of EFL (Banaruee et al., 2018; Jonsson, 2012; Zhai & Gao, 2018), literature still questions the current standard of EFL in Iran (Mohammadian Haghighi & Norton, 2017; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016; Safari & Rashidi, 2015), specifically the way it supports Iranian EFL learners' SDL (Beiki et al., 2020; Farahani, 2014;

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Kiany & Shayestefar, 2010; Majdi & Pishkar, 2016), and the way Iranian EFL teachers' feedback is presented to learners (Beiki et al., 2020; Derakhshan & Karimian Shirejini, 2020). Therefore, Iranian EFL teachers must ponder about their feedback features to inspire SDL in learners. As already mentioned, while there is substantial research on SDL in EFL contexts globally, there is a specific scarcity of studies examining the unique challenges and opportunities within Iran's educational framework. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how EFL teachers' self-reported practices of productive feedback can contribute to fostering SDL among Iranian learners. By shedding light on effective feedback strategies that empower learners to take ownership of their learning, this research aims to provide practical insights for educators and policymakers striving to enhance the quality and autonomy of EFL education in Iran.

2. Literature Review

While the study primarily examined teachers' perspectives and practices, it acknowledged the interconnectedness of the two constructs of teachers' productive feedback and learners' SDL within the context of self-regulated (SR) principles, referring to spontaneous thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and modified to attain their learning objectives (Zimmerman, 2000). Feedback at the SR level can boost the learner's skills in self-evaluation, provide learners with greater confidence to engage further in the task, and enhance their willingness to invest effort into seeking and dealing with feedback information (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). When learners can monitor and self-regulate their learning, they can more effectively use feedback to reduce discrepancies between where they are in their learning and the desired outcomes or success of their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), which ultimately leads to SDL. Feedback underpinning learners' SDL is informed by the constructivist theory (Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1973), indicating that feedback strategies should engage learners in building up their knowledge for the sake of performance development. In so doing, learners accept that learning cannot take place without their own efforts (Boud & Molley, 2013b; Hauk, & Gröschner, 2022; Loeng, 2020). Moreover, teachers' engagement, as a mainstay of providing learners with an SDL environment, is also grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding.

2.1 Teacher Productive Feedback in Support of Learners' SDL

Teacher productive feedback, based on the definition provided by Abdolhosseinzadeh Amini et al. (2022), concerns both teachers' and learners' engagement in the feedback process to let the learning happen and it should also, as highlighted by Kerr (2020), move toward learner autonomy. To utilize productive feedback features and strategies stimulating learners' SDL, as confirmed by AbdolhosseinzadehAmini et al. (2022), teachers should support not only learners' comprehension and subsequent action (Brookhart, 2017; Henderson et al, 2019; Rachel et al., 2019), (User-friendly feedback and Actionable feedback strategies, respectively) but they should also provide sufficient description of the situation to learners (Wiggins, 2012) (Tangible and Transparent feedback). In the EFL setting, to create an SDL environment where learners' autonomy is promoted (Almusharraf, 2020; Heidarian, 2016; Hernández Méndez & Reyes Cruz, 2012), teachers' use of self-correction feedback, (Boud & Molloy, 2013b; Satake, 2024; William, 2016) (Actionable feedback), as a main factor of SDL (Akmilia et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2019) is required. Moreover, the importance of peer-feedback strategy (Carless, 2015; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Van Blankenstein et al., 2024) (Consistent feedback and Timely feedback) in facilitating EFL learners' SDL is also highlighted in a study by Cui et al. (2021) reporting the advantage of peer-feedback in enhancing EFL learners' autonomy in their writing skill.

Learners' involvement in Goal-oriented feedback, either through their engagement in creating goals (McMillan, 2018; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) or by reminding them about the goal specified for each task (Van den Bergh et al., 2013), also contributes to EFL learners' SDL by making learners feel more accountable for their own learning process (Muñoz & Jojoa, 2014), and making them open to further feedback (Voskamp et al., 2020). Considering "learner disposition for seeking feedback" (Boud & Molloy, 2013a, p. 707) and increasing wait-time strategy to let learners think before responding (McMillan, 2018), as productive feedback features can also contribute to learners' SDL. In conclusion, the literature has confirmed the role of teachers' productive feedback in improving learners' SDL. However, the absence of investigations of these two constructs in the EFL setting of Iran motivated us to conduct this study to find an answer to the following research question:

What are EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the provision of feedback ~~provision~~ to motivate EFL learners' self-directed learning?

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What are EFL teachers' practices regarding the provision of feedback to motivate EFL learners' self-directed learning?

3. Methodology

To elucidate the main concepts of this study which were exploring Iranian EFL teachers' perception and practices of productive feedback features in a way to motivate EFL learners' SDL, a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate method. For this qualitative-based study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted due to two reasons: a) being flexible for collecting data, and b) allowing researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the study (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

3.1 Design

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was selected. Participants were selected based on snowball sampling, a non-random sampling method, which is common in qualitative studies (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). This sampling method is implemented when the researcher finds it "difficult-to-reach-populations" (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018, p.2). Given that the researchers both have resided abroad, finding Iranian EFL teachers interested in taking part in the interview procedure of our study posed significant challenges.

3.2 Instrument

The main instrument for data collection was semi-structured interview, which allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and practices regarding productive feedback and its role in supporting self-directed learning (SDL). The main researcher communicated with a few of the potential research participants whom she used to work with as an English teacher in private language institutes in Iran and asked them to invite those they know to attend the interview (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Then, the email addresses of all potential research participants were shared with her via WhatsApp so that the main researcher could email them an informed consent form, including the objective of the study, potential benefits of the study, and confidentiality, for their contribution

to this study. It was promised to keep their identities anonymous. To understand the potential influence of participants' backgrounds on their perspectives, the researchers collected self-reported demographic information, including gender, qualifications, and teaching experience as an English teacher (Table 1). This information was gathered during the initial survey phase and was deemed essential for analyzing how personal and professional factors might shape participants' perceptions and applications of feedback strategies. Participants were encouraged to provide accurate details to ensure the validity of the study's findings.

After receiving their completed informed consent forms, the researchers understood that a total of 14 Iranian EFL teachers (12 females and two males) teaching English at six private language institutes in three cities in Iran were volunteers to participate in the study. Due to the distance between the main researcher, as an interviewer, and the participating EFL teachers, the interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform at a certain time that was earlier set via emails. The whole process of data collection was four weeks. Each interview session was done for about 60 minutes and they were all recorded for further analysis.

At the beginning of each interview, the researchers briefly explained the features of productive feedback strategies to the participants, followed by a series of prompts to familiarize them with the study's intentions. The participating EFL teachers have different qualifications and years of teaching experience in private language institutes (Table 1). However, their teaching practices were all influenced by the top-down approach to education system of the country (Hashemi Moghadam et al., 2019; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2017; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017).

Table 1. Research participants' biographical information

Interviewees	**Gender**	**Qualification**	**Teaching experience**		
			>5 years	5-10 years	< 10 years
Teacher 1	M	MA of TEFL	X		
Teacher 2	F	MA of English translation		X	

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Teacher 3	M	BA of Translation		X	
Teacher 4	M	MA of TEFL	X		
Teacher 5	M	MA of TEFL		X	
Teacher 6	M	PhD candidate in TEFL			X
Teacher 7	M	MA of TEFL		X	
Teacher 8	F	MA of TEFL	X		
Teacher 9	M	MA of TEFL		X	
Teacher 10	M	BA of English		X	
Teacher 11	M	MA of TEFL		X	
Teacher 12	M	BA of Translation	X		
Teacher 13	M	MA of TEFL	X		
Teacher 14	M	PhD candidate in English literature		X	

3.3 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

After transcribing the recorded interviews, the data were prepared for content analysis. All 14 transcriptions obtained from individual semi-structured interviews were numbered from 1 to 14 and these numbers were also assigned to the interviewees to avoid using the real names of participants. Qualitative content analysis is a qualitative technique implemented for doing data analysis and interpretation (Schreier, 2012). To conduct effective content analysis, the collected data should be reduced through constructing categories or themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To carry out deductive and inductive content analysis, Erlingsson and Brysiewicz's (2017) overview of the content analysis technique was followed. The researchers initially perused the interview transcriptions, followed by splitting up the text into meaning units. Then, these meaning units were further shortened while still maintaining the central meaning. Next, the researchers labelled these "condensed meaning units by formulating codes and then grouping these codes into categories". Finally, the conclusion was made, and the obtained results were reported (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017, p.94). During the content analysis, the researchers refrained from using ambiguous codes and those codes having similar meanings were regrouped under the same category.

To guarantee the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, four techniques of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were employed. To establish credibility, the three methods of accurate description of the participants (Lincoln & Guba's, 1985) including: member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), direct quotations from the participants (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006), and negative or incongruent information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) were applied. To guarantee transferability, two approaches of a thick description of participants' features, selection, and context (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012) and an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as a clear description of the steps taken, were applied. The audit trail and thick description also contributed to the dependability of the qualitative data (Elo, et al. 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conformability of the qualitative data was also confirmed when the researchers adopted a neutral stance towards the study (Elo, et al. 2014). Furthermore, ensuring credibility, transferability and dependability could also assist us with the conformability of the data (Ryan et al., 2007).

4. Findings

Through open coding and deductive reasoning, the two categories of *Perception* and *Application* emerged when quotations reflected a participant's perception of the role that teachers' productive feedback can have in SDL of EFL learners, and when mention was made that productive feedback was indeed applied in practice motivating EFL leaners' SDL.

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After classifying the main categories, different codes associated with each quotation were selected inductively and then assigned to the relevant category. As shown in Table 2, four codes of "self-awareness, learners' freedom, effective learning, and stress-free learning opportunity" and three codes of "top-down approach, lack of time, and lack of teachers' knowledge" emerging after data analysis were assigned to the Perception and Application categories, respectively. Here, the association of each code with its category was elucidated through qualitative data analysis and literature.

Table 2. Codes assigned to categories

Category	**Code**	**meaning unit example**	**Condensed meaning units example**
Perception	1. Self-awareness	"…Teachers provide effective feedback to learners by allowing them to self-correct themselves, they can help them be autonomous and accountable by being mindful of their own learning."	Allow them to self-correct themselves, to be autonomous, to be mindful
	2. Learners' freedom		
	3. Effective learning		
	4. Stress-free learning opportunity		
Application	1. Lack of time	"It's such a hassle not giving useful feedback to my students most of the time, but it's a fact due to the shortage of time and workload. This lack of time doesn't get me to reflect on my feedback efficiency to learners."	A hassle not giving useful feedback, shortage of time, not reflect on my feedback efficiency to learners
	2. Lack of knowledge		
	3. Top-down approach		

Figure 1 also illustrates the existing interrelationship among the codes of each category, implying that every inductively selected code falling under the selected categories can influence the other.

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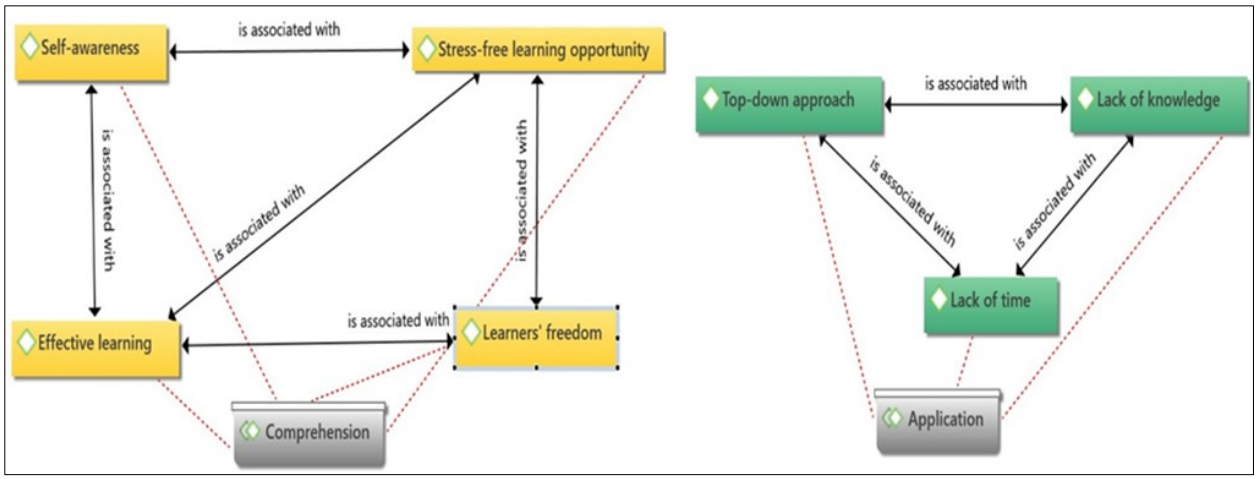


Fig. 1. Interrelationship among the codes falling under the categories

The *comprehension* category was created to answer the initial section of the research question concerning Iranian EFL teachers' perception of productive feedback in supporting EFL learners' SDL. To gain a clear understanding of the way they responded to this question, a few quotations serve as examples. The findings indicate that all participants unanimously realized the positive role that teachers' productive feedback provision can have in developing *learners' awareness* of their own learning needs, resulting in their SDL. The same finding was also echoed in a study by Akmilia et al. (2017) in the context of EFL reporting that the use of self-directed feedback can raise learners' awareness to monitor their own progress which facilitates their SDL. Additionally, recent research by Hua et al. (2024) reinforced this by demonstrating that SDL feedback can prepare learners to be self-aware of their own learning progress.

Teachers' productive feedback to students can make them more curious about their own learning. You know teachers can discuss students' mistakes with them rather than merely giving them the correct response immediately without provoking their curiosity…. As far as I'm concerned, it's through curiosity that students' sense of responsibility increases. This type of feedback allows students to pinpoint their language weaknesses and then lets them learn how to revise their errors effectively. (Teacher 4).

…when teachers provide effective feedback to learners by allowing them to self-correct themselves, they can help them be autonomous and accountable by being mindful of their own learning. (Teacher 10)

Participating EFL teachers also understood the effect that productive feedback can have on *learners' freedom,* in choosing classroom activities and learning goals which they are passionate about, as a User-friendly feedback feature, and on their SDL. A similar finding in the EFL setting was also highlighted by Anches Holzweber (2019) stating that by giving learners the right to select their own learning goals and the tools via which their goals can be achieved, their SDL develops. Moreover, in their recent study, Morris et al. (2022) underscored learners' freedom, amongst other outcomes, as a key benefit of SDL.

I reckon the feedback that teachers give is productive when teachers consider learners' comfort zone concerning the classroom activities and the goal of learning to create more autonomy on the side of learners and let them better learn the activities. (Teacher 6)

Participants' perception of the role of teachers' productive feedback to learners in *developing effective learning* which leads to SDL, is evident in the qualitative data analysis and is also strengthened by literature (Beiki et al., 2020; Mohamad Nasri et al., 2022). Furthermore, Khalid et al. (2020) contribute to this discourse by highlighting that being

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involved in a regular feedback loop with teachers is likely to make learners more self-directed in their own learning and ultimately help them excel in their learning tasks.

The idea of learners' active participation in their learning process, as mentioned by Teacher 3, echoes one of the traits of SDL supporting effective learning. This idea is also stressed in a study by Mohamad Nasri et al. (2022).

I make sense of productive feedback as feedback that entails learners' active participation in their own learning that opens the way for improved learning and learner autonomy. (Teacher 3)

To my understanding, feedback is effective when it boosts effective learning, otherwise, it's just a piece of advice and can't stimulate learners' accountability. (Teacher 9)

Some interviewees also expressed their voices about the constructive role of productive feedback in encouraging SDL by emphasizing stress-free learning opportunities for learners. This finding is in alignment with the result of the studies conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986) in the context of the foreign language classroom and by Mohamad Nasri et al. (2022), referring to the fact that the less anxious learners are, the more responsibility they can take.

Teachers' productive feedback, based on my knowledge, should not be confined to the traditional way of teaching, based on which the teacher is the only person responsible for giving feedback. By pairing the students and asking them to correct each other's work, we can not only maximize SDL, but also reduce their nervousness in learning new stuff. (Teacher 7)

The statement made by Teacher 7 also revealed that increasing the use of non-traditional feedback provision, including peer-feedback, as a productive feedback strategy can increase learners' SDL .This claim is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Cui et al. (2021) in the EFL context.

4.2 Category 2: Application

In response to the second section of the research question exploring the way Iranian EFL teachers deploy productive feedback in supporting EFL learners' SDL, the second category of application emerged. When all participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the importance of teachers' productive feedback provision in enhancing EFL learners' SDL, it strengthened the possibility that they may apply it in their practice in supporting learners' SDL. However, as displayed by the qualitative data analysis, in most cases, EFL learners do not receive productive feedback, enabling them to feel accountable for their own learning. A few quotations serve as examples.

Most participants reported that they rarely afford learners an opportunity to receive productive feedback such as peer-feedback and self-feedback in the classroom contexts, contributing to learners' SDL. They mostly attribute this deficiency to a *lack of time* and *teachers' scarce knowledge*. Similarly, the findings are in line with Beiki et al. (2020) and Ghaith (2018), stressing that the two factors of teachers' lack of knowledge and time pressure, as existing challenges in the EFL classroom, prevent teachers from implementing productive feedback strategies to make learners feel responsible for their own learning. Recently, Paris (2022) further corroborates this by highlighting that the two components of time and teachers' knowledge play a key role in a learner-centered process of feedback.

I can hardly ever ask my students to give one another feedback on their performance…involving them in this handy process requires enough time. (Teacher 14)

It's such a hassle not giving useful feedback to my students most of the time, but it's a fact due to the shortage of time and workload. This lack of time doesn't get me to reflect on my feedback efficiency to learners (Table 9)

Despite some learners' interests in working together and correcting each other, I usually resist doing it mainly because of the noise they make while discussing together, especially the time when they misunderstand each other. Since I really don't know how to make this activity more pleasurable for both sides, I'd rather take all the teaching responsibility, including feedback provision. (Teacher 10)

Another reason why participating EFL teachers refrain from giving productive feedback (Teachers 1 & 13), despite their awareness of its critical role, might be the existence of the rigid education system in Iran, where all teachers' and learners' behavior is controlled. The presence of a rigid education system in Iran has been confirmed in literature (Hashemi Moghadam et al., 2019; Ostovar-Namaghi, 2017; Rahimi & Alavi, 2017). Therefore, in such a top-down situation, incorporating feedback leading to learner autonomy seems far-fetched. This result is in harmony with the findings of an EFL study conducted by Farahani (2014), stating the low autonomy level of Iranian EFL learners in the

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class because of teachers' provision of spoon-feeding rather than self-feeding feedback. Similar findings have been reported by Singh Negi and Laudari (2022), who emphasized that the EFL learners' dependence on teachers' spoon-feeding feedback prevents them from engaging in independent learning.

To give them effective feedback, I do need to minimize my role in the class and add to the learners' capacity as a proactive learner. To do so, I desperately need autonomy. I mean my teaching practice shouldn't be limited to just textbook activities, direct feedback from my side, and finally students' scores as the only criteria for their progress. But unfortunately, due to the centralized system of education, I can't be in a condition to direct my learners toward more responsibility. (Teacher 1)

I give feedback to learners' errors, but don't know if it's workable because I have honestly never asked them. You know the curriculum has been designed in a way that I have to follow what I have been asked to do in the class and can't always give feedback when, for example, my learners need it at that time. (Teacher 13)

As Teacher 1 uncovered , teacher autonomy plays a notable role in enhancing learner autonomy (Little, 1995; Parker, 2015), which both are influenced by the presence of the top-down approach to EFL education in Iran (Ostovar-Namaghi, 2017).

Only one participant applied a productive feedback strategy in her practice by considering teachable moments, classified as a timely feedback strategy by AbdolhosseinzadehAmini et al.(2022), to fortify learners' SDL. A similar finding was also approved in a study by Mohammad Nasri et al. (2022). Furthermore, McMillan (2018) stressed the importance of teachers' recognition of teachable moments in giving feedback to learners. Postponing feedback provision to a time when learners are psychologically ready to receive feedback and act upon it accordingly was also highlighted in a study by Henderson et al. (2019).

I typically try not to interrupt my students, especially the weaker ones, for every single mistake they make. This way of error correction is, in my point of view, not only time-consuming but is also likely to be counterproductive and may demotivate learners. So, when I feel my students are psychologically ready and, let's say, crave learning new stuff, I'll go for it…. So, they shoulder the burden of their own learning when they find their needs and interests there. (Teacher 6)

While analysing and interpreting the qualitative data, we inferred, based on the information provided in Table 1, that teachers' teaching experience can be, amongst others, a reason why Teacher 6 applied productive feedback in her practice. Our inference is confirmed by an EFL study conducted by Wang et al. (2018), stating that EFL teachers' teaching experience can be reflected in their practice, including effective feedback provision. Soruç et al. (2024) also support this notion, highlighting that experienced teachers are more likely to implement productive feedback strategies in their classrooms. Such experience-based practices are likely to foster learners' autonomy-supportive behaviour in the classroom (AbdolhosseinzadehAmini & Kruger, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Since teacher feedback and the idea of SDL have attracted the attention of plenty of researchers, we appreciated the value of these two constructs in education, including EFL. However, scant information about the role of EFL teachers' productive feedback in facilitating EFL learners' SDL in the context of Iran aroused our interest in conducting this qualitative study. Therefore, the main contribution of this study concentrates on those aspects of EFL teachers' productive feedback strategies, which signify learners' SDL. The findings of this study suggest that EFL teachers' deployment of productive feedback in the classroom context will contribute to learners' self-awareness, freedom, effective learning, and a stress-free learning environment, supporting SDL. It is nonetheless evident from the findings of this study that the current teachers' feedback practice is mostly constrained by lack of time and teachers' shortage of knowledge, as well as the presence of a top-down approach to the education system of Iran. The reciprocal relationship investigated among the selected codes of each category in this study (Figure 1) displays that all stakeholders should pay heed to the influence of all these factors on each other to pave the way for the utilization of productive feedback supporting learners' SDL.

Based on the findings, the existing EFL teacher feedback practices in Iran overlook the active role of the learner taking responsibility for creating their own learning and feedback strategies, which is in contrast with the basic principle of SDL approaches finding the learner as an individual who carries the burden of creating and monitoring their learning

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strategies and process. Therefore, the presence of such conditions can finally support learners' SDL. To achieve learners' SDL, teachers teaching practice, including their feedback provision, needs to be revisited. Concerning the current constraints, teachers, on one hand, should specifically train in the area of providing productive feedback to learners or advocate for changes in the education system to support SDL. On the other hand, principals of private language institutes, as one of the main stakeholders, should afford EFL teachers an opportunity to be initially autonomous in their teaching practice, whilst considering the institutional and learners' learning needs. These findings might affect EFL education in Iran and potentially other contexts by emphasizing the importance of teacher autonomy and the need for a more learner-centered approach to learning. Future research can build upon the findings of the current study by exploring the impact of feedback strategies on different learner demographics. Besides, longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of improved feedback strategies on learner autonomy and overall language proficiency can also be recommended.

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