

# A Study of Effective Teacher Feedback in English Continuation Writing Classes

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## Abstract

As an important part of classroom discourse, effective teacher feedback ensures the quality of classroom discourse. Most studies nowadays take reading or writing classes as research subjects, but the research on teacher feedback in continuation writing classes has not been discussed yet. Besides, most researchers pay less attention to the effective use of teacher feedback. Therefore, in order to find out the effective use of teacher feedback in continuation writing classes, this paper will explore the characteristics of effective teacher feedback by observation and discourse analysis methods in five excellent English continuation writing classes. The main findings are as follows: experienced teachers attach great importance to the use of feedback; second, experienced teachers prefer to use mixed feedback; third, teachers are supposed to use different types of teacher feedback, especially the Question Closely, Repetition plus Question Closely and Recast plus Question Closely. These findings will remind teachers of the importance of teacher feedback, and provide useful guidelines for teachers who are confused about how to use teacher feedback in continuation writing class.

**Keywords:** teacher feedback, continuation writing, classroom discourse

## 1. Introduction

Teacher feedback is the evaluative and instructive response made by teachers to learners' language efforts, answers, and performance. As the interactive bridge connecting teachers and students, teacher feedback is an important part of classroom discourse. The effective use of teacher feedback not only provides effective discourse input but also promotes students' effective language output. At the same time, teacher feedback not only can help teachers regulate the classroom and deepen the teaching content, but also increase students' motivation and interest during classroom interaction. However, some teachers are still not aware of the importance of teacher feedback, and there are some problems with the use of teacher feedback, like inaccurate use of teacher feedback in certain situations (Li Dongqing, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to study how to use teacher feedback effectively.

In regard to teacher feedback, most researchers nowadays only focus on studying lessons like reading or writing classes, while the continuation writing class has not been discussed yet. Different from writing or reading, Continuation Writing is a writing method combined with reading comprehension, requiring students to continue to write the essay after reading incomplete stories. The Continuation Writing connects language input (reading) with output (writing) to produce interactive effects, thereby promoting language learning (Wang Chuming, 2012). The continuation writing method brings students a sense of creative accomplishment and enhances learners' self-confidence. Continuation Writing now has been a new type of writing task in the Chinese college entrance examination. In the continuation writing classes, learners first read and understand an incomplete text to realize language input, with the guidance of teachers, then they conceive the plot and imitate the language from reading, and finally complete the text to achieve language output.

On account of the functions of teacher feedback, it is necessary to discuss how to use teacher feedback effectively in continuation writing classes. Therefore, the study will mainly discuss the characteristics of teacher feedback in excellent continuation writing classes. Through the detailed investigation, the author is dedicated to providing useful teaching references of teacher feedback to help teachers to improve their ability to use teacher feedback and speed up teachers' professional development in teaching continuation writing.

## 2. Literature Review

From the communicative perspective, “teacher feedback” is the responses to learners’ efforts, which help them achieve their communicative goals (Ellis, 1985). For language teaching, teacher feedback is the response to language learners, through feedback, learners can judge whether they have understood the teacher’s instructions in the right way and whether they have mastered the target language (Seliger, 1983). The purpose of teacher feedback is to promote communication between teachers and students. The more detailed and in-depth the feedback the teacher provides, the better the learning effect students will receive.

Harris (1952) released an article named Discourse Analysis, which was a curtain-raiser to discourse analysis in Western countries. Since then, empirical research on teachers’ classroom language has been started in foreign countries, and the research on teacher feedback has achieved a lot since the 1970s. Some foreign scholars were dedicated to demonstrating the effectiveness of teacher feedback. Well (1993) emphasized teacher feedback can prolong the students’ answers and promote communication between teachers and students. Long (1996) pointed out that correct feedback was of great significance for providing students with correct language input. Waring (2016) and Carlson (1979) also pointed out that teachers’ feedback can promote students’ engagement and increase the teaching effects. Wang Xue (2018) came up that effective teacher feedback can help student to express their own opinions and create a harmonious environment. Yu Jiamin (2022) proved that students’ behavior and cognitive engagement were positively related to the five dimensions of teacher feedback, including the validity, function, characteristics, basis, and content.

Secondly, some researchers concerned the category of teacher feedback. For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) proposed six types of corrective feedback: Explicit Correction, Recast, Clarification Request, Metalinguistic Feedback, Elicitation, and Repetition. Sheen (2006) put forward that feedback can be divided into Implicit Feedback and Explicit Feedback. Liu Xudong (2009) divided teacher feedback into the feedback of theme, the feedback of form, and the feedback of content. Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011) proposed single teacher feedback and mixed teacher feedback.

Thirdly, researchers started to pay attention to the current situation of teacher feedback in the real classroom and the preferences of students and teachers. When it comes to the research of current situation and preference, Tian Wei (2017) put forward that the type of teacher feedback was used differently in different class types, and the teacher feedback had a great impact on learners’ language input and emotional attitude. Chenzhu Xinyu (2021) found that teacher feedback is a small part of teacher discourse in the classroom in the real language teaching classroom, and both teachers and students like positive feedback.

In recent years, some researchers have turned attention to the use of teacher feedback in certain lesson types, including reading and writing classes. For example, Fan Haibin and Liu Min (2018) discussed the situation of teacher feedback in a reading class in a school and found that teachers were used to using Repetition as the feedback.

Based on the previous research, we can see that there are three aspects to studying teacher feedback, including its function, category and current situation. However, there is little study on how to improve teachers’ effectiveness of teacher feedback (Lin Pu and Wang Xiaojing, 2022). Besides, we also can find that the continuation writing class has not been discussed in the field of teacher feedback, so it’s necessary to find out the effective strategy to use teacher feedback in the continuation writing classes.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Questions

There was little study on how to improve the effectiveness of teacher feedback (Lin Pu & Wang Xiaojing, 2022); besides, only several types of lessons are discussed in regard to teacher feedback, such as reading or writing classes. As a useful method to improve learners’ writing, continuation writing class has not been discussed in the field of teacher feedback, so it’s significant to study the effective use of teacher feedback in the continuation writing classes. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- (1) What’s the proportion of teacher feedback in excellent continuation writing classes of senior high school?
- (2) What are the common types in excellent continuation writing classes of senior high school?

### 3.2 Research Subjects

Since the study focuses on the effective use of teacher feedback in continuation writing classes, typical excellent writing classes should be selected. Therefore, the author selected five excellent continuation writing classes as the research subjects by whittling down classes from Chinese official teaching websites. The reason why the five

continuation writing classes were chosen is because they can be categorized as the excellent demonstration classes. Three of them are displayed as “Excellent Public Classes” and two were prized as the first prize of “National Basic Teaching Skills Competition for High School English Teachers”. Besides, all five continuation writing classes are taught in recent years (from 2020 to 2022).

Although there are some potential limitations on the selection of research subjects, such as the small sample size and the five award-winning classes are not representative enough, the five award-winning classes still can provide some useful references for the effective use of teacher feedback in continuation writing classes.

Table 1. Information of the Five Continuation Writing Classes from English Teaching Competitions

Lesson No.	Teaching time	Teachers	Source	Awards	Province	Time
Lesson 1	48 min	T1: Get the First Prize in English Young Teachers' Basic Teaching Skills Competition of Jiangsu Province High School, etc.	Excellent Public Course in Nanjing	Teaching Achievement Display	Nanjing	2020
Lesson 2	46min	T2: Get Second Prize for Municipal Demonstration Course, etc.	Constructive Achievements Display	Teaching Achievement Display	Hainan	2021
Lesson 3	44min	T3: Get First prize in Hangzhou's "Shared Excellent Courses" Competition, etc.	Constructive Achievements Display	Teaching Achievement Display	Zhejiang	2022
Lesson 4	41min	T4: Get Second Prize of Provincial course Design, etc.	The 15th National Basic Teaching Skills Competition for High School English Teachers	First Prize; Best Comprehensive Quality Award	Shandong	2021
Lesson 5	38 min	T5: Get First prize of Municipal Quality Courses, etc.	The 16th National Basic Teaching Skills Competition for High School English Teachers	First Prize; Best Teaching Effects Award	Henan	2022

### 3.3 Research Methods and Instruments

The theoretical framework used in the study is the Initiation-Response-Feedback Model and Discourse Analysis. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) indicated that classroom language follows a rigid order and they proposed the IRF model. IRF model is composed of Initiation, Response, and Feedback. Teachers give a topic, and students will make the corresponding response, then teachers will give the feedback. Discourse analysis entails examining and interpreting textual content, whether it's spoken or written. Rather than focusing solely on its structural and syntactical aspects, this approach delves into the underlying meanings conveyed by the text, often characterized as exploring “beyond the sentence” (Ralph & Jeff, 2006). The paper will mainly analyze the transcription text by the sentence meanings to find out the types of teacher feedback.



Figure 1. IRF Interactive Model

In order to collect and analyze the data of teacher feedback in the five excellent continuation writing classes, the quantitative and qualitative data are mainly collected by using the classroom observation method. Classroom observation is the research method that researchers intentionally observe students' performance and collect conversations in real classes.

The author referred to observation scale of teacher feedback of Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011) and made some modifications. The categorization of teacher feedback from Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011) was quoted by many researchers in China. The corpus of Lin and Zhou (2011)'s observation scale is taken from the "Middle School Classroom Discourse Corpus" of Northeast Basic Foreign Language Education Research Center of Northeast Normal University in China. These corpora are regular English teaching classes in ordinary middle schools, which can truly reflect the current situation of English classroom teaching in middle school, and has certain typicality and representativeness.

In the categorization of Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011), teacher feedback is initially classified into single feedback and mixed feedback, and each type includes sub-types of teacher feedback. "Single feedback" refers to the teacher only using one type of feedback, and "mixed feedback" means that the teacher uses two or more types of feedback (Lin Zhengjun & Zhou Sha, 2011). In the modified observation scale, the single feedback includes Positive Feedback, Explicit Correction, Elicitation, Repetition, Recast, Elaboration, Evaluation, Metalinguistic Feedback, Clarification Request and Question Closely. Positive Feedback language is the teacher's positive feedback to the student's discourse; Explicit Correction is when the student's answer is wrong, the teacher directly points out the student's error; Elicitation means that when a student cannot answer a question or does not give the correct answer to the question, the teacher will use another method to ask the question or ask the student to fill in the relevant content or information; Repetition refers to the teacher saying the student's answer again; Recast refers to a teacher's reformulation of part or all of a student's expression that contains one or more errors; Elaboration means that teachers add new information and extend the topics discussed in order to enhance students' understanding; Evaluation means that teachers put forward their own ideas or express their own emotions to students' answers; Metalinguistic Feedback usually refers to the evaluation, information or questions given by teachers to the linguistic forms (especially phonetic, lexical and grammatical errors) answered by students; Clarification Request means that the student's discourse has an error, the teacher asks the student to clarify the previous answer by means of rhetorical question or choice question; Question Closely means that the teacher asks further questions about the student's answer and guides the student to say the correct answer. Classroom Observation Scale of mixed feedback that is composed of different types of single feedback to form the mixed teacher feedback.

The main instrument used in the study is the transcription software of iFlytek. The author downloaded and watched the five teaching videos, then transcribed the five videos of continuation writing classes; after the transcription, the author identified all teachers' feedback and their processes, which were recorded on the observation scales, and counted the number of teacher discourse and feedback. When there were ambiguous feedback instances during transcription and analysis, two other researchers were invited to make the judgement.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The Proportion of Teacher Feedback

The author transcribed the five excellent continuation writing classes, then counted the words of teacher's discourse and classified the number of teacher feedback.

The Table 2 shows that teacher feedback accounts for a high proportion of teachers' discourse, proving that teacher feedback plays a critical role in excellent continuation writing classes. The average frequency of teacher feedback in an continuation writing class is 99, and the average ratio of teacher feedback to teacher discourse is 53%, which is more than half of the teachers' discourse. Therefore, we will know that experienced teachers will teacher feedback frequently, so as to promote classroom communication, increasing students' language input and output.

Table 2. The Amount of Teacher Feedback in a Class

Lesson	Teacher	Time of Teacher Feedback	Teacher Feedback/Teacher Discourse
1	T1	68	1424/3806 (37.41%)
2	T2	102	1748/2947 (59.31%)
3	T3	100	2322/3181 (73.00%)
4	T4	149	1449/2372 (61.09%)
5	T5	76	717/2075 (34.55%)
Average		99	7660/14381 (53.26%)

#### 4.2 The Types of Teacher Feedback

Aiming to find the types of teacher feedback, the author marked the types of feedback used in the five excellent continuation writing classes, analyzed and sorted them out. Based on the classification of teacher feedback from Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011). The type of teacher feedback was specified from the two dimensions of single-type feedback and mixed-type feedback.

As Table 3 shows, it is found that the mixed teacher feedback accounts for a high proportion in teachers' feedback. The total frequency of teacher feedback in five excellent continuation writing classes is 495. The mixed teacher feedback is 293, which is more than three-fifths of the total number of teacher feedback, with a proportion of nearly 60 percent. The mixed teacher feedback of Lesson 3 ranks the first in using the mixed feedback, with 71 percent in total; T4 is the lowest, with 49 percent of the mixed teacher feedback in her continuation writing classes.

Table 3. Distribution of Two Feedback Types from Excellent Teachers

		Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Sum
Single Feedback	Teacher	27 (39.7%)	38 (37.3%)	29 (29%)	76 (51%)	32 (42.1%)	202 (40.8%)
Mixed Feedback	Teacher	41 (60.3%)	64 (62.7%)	71 (71%)	73 (49%)	44 (57.9%)	293 (59.2%)
Sum		68 (100%)	102 (100%)	100 (100%)	149 (100%)	76 (100%)	495 (100%)

##### 4.2.1 The Use of Single Feedback

Single feedback represents that the teacher gives only one type of feedback during the interactive interaction. Based on the transcribed texts, the author analyzed and sorted out the types and quantities of single-type feedback in the five transcribed texts. Table 4 shows that there are eight types of single feedback in continuation writing classes of excellent senior-high teachers, including "Positive Feedback", "Explicit Correction", "Elicitation", "Repetition", "Recast", "Elaboration", "Evaluation", and "Question Closely". It can be seen that for single teacher feedback, the five teachers all prefer to use "Question Closely". Question Closely is the major type of Single Feedback used in excellent continuation writing classes, with 69 times in total.

The following examples will explain the use of teacher feedback in detail (I represents Initiation, R represents Response, and F represents Feedback). IRF model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) is a common model used by teachers in the teaching process. Generally speaking, teachers give a topic in the classroom, and students will make the corresponding response related to the topic, then teachers will give the feedback to students according to students' responses.

##### Example 1 (Question Closely)

T4: I will show you more secrets. Do you remember at the beginning of the story, who was there? (I)

S: Wilbur. (R)

T4: Wilbur, right? Only one character. Ok, here's Wilbur. Then how did the writer describe Wilbur? (F)

S: Use verbs and actions. (R)

T4: Ok, now look at these, what are these? (F)

S: Action. (R)

T4: Actions, verbs. So, when there's only one character, we can describe each action of one person. Ok? This is the first method. (F)

In the example 1, the teacher was going to teach students how to describe characters in the story. The teacher asked a question about “who” at the beginning of the story, and then a student answered “Wilbur”. With the answer “Wilbur”, the teacher repeated the name at first, then kept asking how to describe the character and what are action words, which guided students to find out the answer by answering the questions one by one.

Table 4. Frequency of the Single Feedback

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Sum
Question Closely	0	9	11	42	7	69
Repetition	3	3	5	8	9	28
Elicitation	8	4	3	8	1	24
Recast	2	6	5	2	8	23
Evaluation	3	6	2	7	3	21
Positive Feedback	3	5	2	6	3	19
Explicit Correction	8	1	0	0	0	9
Elaboration	0	4	1	3	1	9
Sum	27	38	29	76	32	202

#### 4.2.2 The Use of Mixed Feedback

Mixed feedback refers to the combination of two or more distinct types of single feedback (Lin Zhengjun & Zhou Sha, 2011). Since there are multiple ways to construct mixed teacher feedback, and the actual impact of the order of mixed teacher feedback is nearly identical, this study does not consider the order of single feedback. Following this principle, the research identifies 43 different types of mixed teacher feedback in five continuation writing classes. Table 5 displays the part of frequent use of mixed feedback in the five classes.

The number of sub-types of mixed teacher feedback proves the richness of mixed teacher feedback in continuation writing classes. Among all types of mixed teacher feedback, “Repetition plus Question Closely” is used most (44 times), and “Recast plus Question Closely” is also preferred by the excellent teachers in the continuation writing classes (42 times). It is known that the final aim of continuation writing class is to trigger students' output to complete the writing task, by using the “Repetition plus Question Closely”, students' original ideas will be approved, and the “Recast plus Question Closely” will prompt students to think the questions deeply.

Table 5. Frequency of the Mixed Feedback

Sub-types of Mixed Teacher Feedback	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	Sum
Repetition + Question Closely	4	9	12	16	3	44
Recast + Question Closely	2	9	7	19	5	42
Positive Feedback + Question Closely	1	7	3	8	5	24
Positive Feedback + Recast + Question Closely	5	2	6	0	4	17
Positive Feedback + Repetition + Question Closely	0	1	10	3	1	15
Repetition + Elaboration + Question Closely	2	1	2	5	1	11

#### Example 1 (Repetition+Question Closely)

T4: Let's see how the story goes. How the story goes? so we need to find out the outline of this story. Do you know how to find out the outline? How to find out the outline? (I)

S: Read the passage. (R)

T4: Read the passage, and then? (F)

S: Find the characters. (R)

T4: Yes, find the characters, and also? (F)

S: Storyline. (R)

T4: The story line. Yeah, good. So we need to find out who did what? And also we need to find out the character's? (F)

S: Emotion. (R)

T4: Yes, emotion. That's the story line and the emotion. Yes. (F)

From Example, the type of teacher feedback "Repetition plus Question" appears three times. At the beginning, the teacher asked how to find out the outline, then the student answered "Reads the passage", then the teacher repeated the answer and continued to ask for more information by saying "And then?". Next, when the student answered "Find the characters.", the teacher repeated his answer again and also kept asking "and also?". Finally, the student answered "Storyline", the teacher repeated the answer once again and asked another question about the key element of the characters. It is obvious that T4 is good at using the "Repetition plus Question Closely" as the feedback to encourage students to complete their answers and giving them encouragement, which represents the "student-centered" educational idea.

Example 2 (Positive Feedback+Question Closely)

T4: Okay. Why did Mr. Zuckerman mend the fence? What happened to the fence? (I)

S: The fence was broken, so they went out. (R)

T4: Oh, yes, at the beginning of the story. The fence or one board of the fence was? (F)

S: Loose. (R)

T4: Yes. Okay. That's all? (F)

S: That's all. (R)

T4: Ok, thank you, you can go back. (F)

In example 2, the teacher asked the reason why Mr. Zuckerman mended the fence, after elicitation, the student answered "Loose" as the reason, then the teacher replied "Yes" as the positive feedback and also keep asking "What's more" to make sure whether there are other reasons. The combination of Positive Feedback and Question Closely not only improves students' confidence in writing but also helps students to read and write in detail.

## 5. Conclusion

This study takes five excellent continuation writing classes as the research objects, mainly exploring the use of teacher feedback in excellent English continuation writing classes. Some characteristics are discussed, including the proportion of teacher feedback, the types of teacher feedback, and the sub-types of single feedback and mixed feedback. The study draws the following conclusions:

First of all, the teacher feedback makes up a high proportion of teacher discourse in the excellent continuation writing classes, no matter in frequency or the quantity of teacher feedback. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to give sufficient feedback to students in continuation writing classes. However, the finding is different from the research Zhang Xuchen (2021), who put forward that teacher feedback accounted for a relatively low proportion of excellent classes.

Secondly, through marking and classifying the types of feedback of five excellent continuation writing classes in the transcript, it is figured that experienced teachers have similar preferences for the use of teacher feedback. All outstanding teachers tend to use mixed teacher feedback because mixed teacher feedback not only can stimulate students' interest in learning but also can stimulate students' imagination. The result is similar to the study of Li Mengjie (2020), which also proved that the frequency of mixed feedback from experienced teachers was higher than that of novice teachers.

Furthermore, by counting quantities of single and mixed teacher feedback in the five transcribed texts, similarities also exist. It can be seen that excellent teachers are skillful and flexible in using feedback strategies. Generally speaking, there are eight types of single feedback in continuation writing classes of excellent senior-high teachers, including Positive Feedback, Explicit Correction, Elicitation, Repetition, Recast,

Elaboration, Evaluation, and Question Closely. For single teacher feedback, Question Closely is favored by excellent teachers most in continuation writing classes. For mixed teacher feedback, there are 43 sub-types in total; among all sub-types, “Repetition plus Question Closely” and “Recast plus Question Closely” are particularly preferred by the excellent teachers in the continuation writing classes.

Based on the findings, some pedagogical implications are summarized in the study. Since a large number of teacher feedbacks are used in excellent continuation writing classes by experienced teachers, it enlightens us to encourage teachers to increase the use of teacher feedback. In view of the preferences of excellent teachers, students should pay more attention to the use of mixed teacher feedback in continuation writing classes. Mixed feedback can encourage students to think deeply and increase students’ learning confidence. In addition, teachers are recommended to try to use some types of teacher feedback, such as the Question Closely, Repetition plus Question Closely and Recast plus Question Closely, which may increase the teaching effects and create interactive classes.

Given the limitations of this study, the author makes the following suggestions for future research. Firstly, the future study on teacher feedback in excellent writing classes should increase the sample size, so the data on teacher feedback will be more objective and comprehensive; besides, more efforts should be made to explore the long-term effects of mixed feedback strategies on students’ writing outcomes.

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