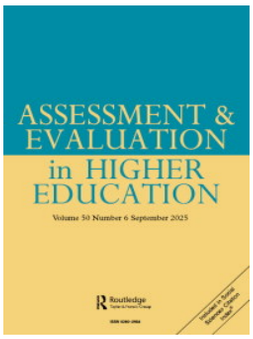

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Do well-regarded university teachers exhibit feedback literacy? Examining the validity of a competency framework

Turkan Istencioglu[a], Berit Lassesen[b], Annika Büchert Lindberg[b], David Boud[a,e], Ole Eggers Bjælde[b], Kenan Dikilitas[c], Tatiana Ershova[c], Robert Morris Gray Jr[c], Monika Kvernenes[c], Peter Musaeus[b], Christopher Neil Prilop[b], Arild Raaheim[c], Monica Alterskjær Sundset[d] and Camilla Svensen[d]

[a]Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia; [b]Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [c]University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway; [d]UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway; [e]University of Technology Sydney, Syndey, Australia

ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has advanced the notion of teacher feedback literacy (TFL) as necessary to foster student uptake of feedback and feedback literacy. However, the literature falls short of empirical work that demonstrates how these ideas translate into practice. This paper investigates the extent to which the feedback practices of highly regarded university teachers align with the proposed macro, meso, and micro level TFL competencies. Drawing on semi-structured interview data gathered from 33 associate and full professors across five universities in Australia, Denmark, and Norway, a deductive thematic analysis revealed that all levels of competencies were evident and showed a relatively balanced distribution overall among the three levels, although the prominence of competencies within each level varied. Most of the participants (85%) exhibited competencies across all three levels. Feedback practices such as effective resource use, dialogic feedback design, and constructive feedback were more prominent, whereas managing feedback pressures and differentiating feedback occurred less frequently. An inductive analysis yielded two additional competencies related to the relational dimensions of TFL and meta-feedback practices. This paper offers an empirical contribution to the TFL research and concludes by providing practical implications for educational institutions to enhance feedback practices.

KEYWORDS

Teacher feedback literacy; university teaching; feedback processes; deductive analysis

Introduction

Over the past decade, understandings of feedback have evolved (Boud and Molloy 2013). Interest has moved from a focus on how feedback is conceptualized and what students do in feedback processes to the role and awareness of teachers within this

CONTACT Turkan Istencioglu t.istencioglu@deakin.edu.au Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.
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new understanding (Carless and Winstone 2023). A notable development was the introduction of feedback literacy as a key concept (Sutton 2012). This term has developed to encompass the abilities of both students and educators to comprehend, engage with, and benefit from feedback processes, highlighting their mutual responsibility in the feedback process (Boud and Dawson 2023; Carless and Boud 2018).

From the students' perspective, there is growing acknowledgment that learners must take an active role in feedback processes, rather than simply receiving information from teachers (Henderson, Ryan, and Phillips 2019). Students must be equipped to initiate, interpret, evaluate, and act upon the inputs of others to enhance their learning. Conversely, an important question arises from the educators' standpoint: What forms of feedback literacy are essential for teachers if they are to design and implement feedback practices that support student development (Boud and Dawson 2023)?

For teacher feedback literacy (TFL), progress has been made in conceptualizing the notion and identifying competencies of feedback-literate educators (e.g. Carless and Winstone 2023). However, relatively little empirical research has explored what feedback-literate teachers do in real educational settings (Boud and Dawson 2023). This study aims to address this gap by examining the empirical validity of the proposed TFL framework.

Teacher feedback literacy

Teachers play a significant role in feedback beyond merely providing commentary on what students do; they are responsible for creating courses, designing assessment tasks, and organising feedback activities, all while ensuring that feedback processes achieve their intended outcomes.

Carless and Winstone (2023) proposed a conceptual framework for TFL encompassing three interconnected dimensions. The first is the design dimension, which emphasizes planning curricula and assessments that encourage student engagement with feedback. The second is the relational dimension, addressing the interpersonal and emotional factors in delivering feedback. Finally, the pragmatic dimension relates to navigating institutional realities, including workload and assessment structures (Carless and Winstone 2023). Building on this foundation, Boud and Dawson (2023) further developed the concept of TFL, suggesting that a mere conceptual understanding of TFL may be insufficient to encompass the full spectrum of competencies necessary for teachers to implement effective feedback processes. They established an empirically derived competency framework consisting of 19 competencies across macro, meso, and micro levels of teacher activities, from program design to individual feedback interactions. This multitiered framework allows for differentiating feedback events and processes at the levels of individual interactions, course design, and institutional strategy.

Macro level competencies include institutional and program-wide strategies that shape the broader feedback environment. Competency at this level involves contributing to feedback-related policy, leading professional development initiatives, and promoting an institutional culture that values and supports effective feedback practices (Boud and Dawson 2023). Teachers in leadership or management roles

can influence how feedback is prioritized within quality assurance processes, teaching evaluations, or strategic learning and teaching plans. As Carless and Winstone (2023) observe, structural support at this level is critical for sustaining feedback reforms and ensuring that feedback literacy is embedded throughout the institution.

Meso level competencies involve feedback practices at the course or curriculum design level. Feedback-literate educators integrate formative and summative feedback loops into the structure of a course, aligning assessment tasks with learning outcomes and embedding opportunities for students to engage in peer feedback, self-assessment, and iterative improvement (Carless and Winstone 2023). This level also includes coordination among teaching teams to ensure consistent expectations and feedback quality within different units or instructors. Teachers at this level may collaborate in planning to enhance coherence and transparency in feedback processes (Boud and Dawson 2023).

Micro level competencies refer to the everyday practices of providing information to students on specific tasks or performances and engaging with them about what they might do. They include crafting clear, timely, and constructive feedback information oriented toward student development. Teachers at this level participate directly with students, encouraging feedback uptake, such as framing comments dialogically, inviting response, and supporting emotional engagement (Carless and Winstone 2023). These practices are central to facilitating learning in one-to-one or classroom contexts and require sensitivity to students' needs and readiness to act on feedback (Boud and Dawson 2023).

Together, these levels emphasize that TFL is not solely an individual competency but is a distributed and systemic capability.

The early work on TFL was either purely conceptual (Carless and Winstone 2023) or empirical, but based on inferences from Australian datasets collected for other purposes (Boud and Dawson 2023). The latter potentially privileges features of the Australian higher education context rather than understanding TFL internationally. Indeed, Liang et al. (2025) pointed out that the feedback literature in general is dominated by scholars from Hong Kong and Australia. In the small body of literature on TFL, several empirical studies were conducted on teachers' feedback messages (e.g. Van Heerden 2021), the relational aspect of TFL (e.g. Heron et al. 2023; Payne, Ajjawi, and Holloway 2023), perceptions of different feedback practices (e.g. Chan and Luo 2022), and TFL in L2 writing (e.g. Lee and Mao 2024; Xu et al. 2024).

Evaluating and validating a framework regarding its applicability, relevance, and effectiveness across various educational settings is important (Karunarathne, Selman, and Ryan 2024). Such a study could contribute to scholarly discourse by confirming the robustness of the concept (Karunarathne, Selman, and Ryan 2024) and enhancing teachers' understanding of areas in which their feedback literacy can be improved. Additionally, such research may provide valuable insights for institutions to inform professional development and educational policies, promoting innovative feedback designs and practices while enhancing TFL. In this study, we drew on the TFL framework of Boud and Dawson (2023) and applied deductive thematic analysis to investigate the degree to which participants' self-reported practices were reflected in the framework's macro, meso, and micro-level competencies. In doing so, we

evaluated the framework's relevance and practical alignment with teachers' descriptions of their feedback. Specifically, we asked:

What aspects of the TFL framework proposed by Boud and Dawson (2023) are evident in the reported feedback practices of highly regarded university teachers?

Methods

Context and participants

Thirty-four university teachers from five universities in Norway, Denmark, and Australia, all recognized for their strong reputations for providing feedback, were recruited. Their expertise was identified by faculty leaders and/or those with knowledge of their feedback practices. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 2 to 30 years (average 15 years). Except for two individuals, all served as course or unit coordinators or had responsibility for entire programs. Most participants had completed formal pedagogical training in line with their respective institutions' requirements. Gender representation was generally balanced. The courses offered by the teachers spanned various disciplines, including social sciences, humanities, health, and STEM fields.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from September 2023 to January 2024, following a protocol informed by Boud and Dawson's (2023) framework for TFL. Before the interviews, participants received written information about the study and provided their informed consent. The interviews, lasting 45 to 60 min, in English explored the participants' teaching experiences and feedback practices. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. However, one transcript was excluded from the dataset, as it did not provide analysable data related to TFL, despite the intentions of the interviewer.

As part of a wider study of TFL, deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used to identify TFL competencies based on the outlined macro, meso, and micro level categories. The process followed structured phases: Teams first coded 5–6 transcripts to refine the codebook, then independently coded two transcripts before resolving discrepancies through discussion. An independent researcher then coded all transcripts and also inductively identified emerging competencies. Intercoder agreement was ensured by comparing code sets and resolving discrepancies through discussion (Byrne 2022).

In the fourth phase, analysis focused on identifiable aspects of teachers' feedback practices. To maintain construct validity, only quotes showing concrete TFL-related behaviours were retained. This ensured alignment with the framework's practice-based focus. Finally, representative quotes were selected for each competency level and for newly distinguished competencies. Trustworthiness was established through collaborative coding validation, ongoing analytic dialogue, and external review, enhancing the credibility and comprehensiveness of the identified TFL competencies. Although it is not a part of thematic analysis as such, in this paper we

reported the extent to which each competence was reflected in the total sample to give an indication of how widespread the competencies were represented within the sample.

According to Boud and Dawson (2023), the distinctions between macro, meso, and micro levels are not strictly defined within the context of TFL. Therefore, instances that overlapped during the coding process were categorized according to the levels proposed by the framework. For example, in several cases, using technological aids for feedback and involving students in peer feedback processes appeared both under the macro-level competency of 'uses available resources well' and under relevant meso-level competencies.

Findings

The data showed varying prevalence of competencies across levels but each level was well-represented; 85% of participants demonstrated competencies at all three levels. All 19 competencies were identified in the sample. The four sections below delineate the three levels through a series of tables that provide frequency counts, percentage distributions, and representative excerpts drawn from the collected data. Each competency is articulated in detail to elucidate its interpretation within the context of the dataset.

Macro competencies

Uses available resources well

The majority (76%) reported effectively using resources to support their feedback designs, particularly peer feedback and technology-based tools like automated feedback or interactive quizzes, which provide immediate performance responses. These resources sought to help students access feedback easily and enhance performance.

Develops/coordinates colleagues

The majority (73%) reported collaborating with colleagues on feedback processes, for instance by making collective decisions and refining feedback designs each year based on their effectiveness. Many reported guiding those providing feedback, such as markers or teaching assistants, on best practices to ensure a consistent student experience. Participants discussed the success of these practices, observed colleagues, and adopted strategies inspired by them. Many attributed their feedback designs to a positive feedback culture within their institution.

Develops student feedback literacy (SFL)

More than half (58%) highlighted their efforts to cultivate students' feedback literacy. This involved explaining the purpose of feedback to enhance student learning and promote feedback as a valuable tool for improving students' understanding and the quality of their work. For instance, some created explainers about the benefits of peer feedback and how to do it successfully. Some also informed students on how

Table 1. Illustrations of macro level competencies.

Competency	*n*	%	Illustrative except
Uses available resources well	25	76%	Now we have pretty good digital feedback system, where you can highlight text, and add comments, etc. The good thing about that, is that … the whole group has access to that.
Develops/coordinates colleagues	24	73%	In all of the units, we, as a team sat down and thought about different ways that we can help scaffold students' learning and provide feedback.
Develops student feedback literacy	19	58%	We do a formal piece of work around feedback literacy. We used the now-published feedback scale, and they did that pre-, and then we did a 30-minute seminar discussion, interactive work.
Creates authentic feedback-rich environments	17	52%	[Authentic] feedback is very much peer feedback. That's one of the concepts of academia. When you go to conferences or submit articles, you get peer feedback… We try to train the students at the department in listening to their peers, the other students…
Improves feedback processes	16	48%	What really helped about these feedback designs was that I was in the unit for a really long time, 18 trimesters. None of these things happened overnight. It was like a gradual build-up…Do we need to tweak something here? Then the next semester, I'd add an extra layer. Then the next semester, I'd add another layer.
Plans feedback strategically	11	33%	There was a plan. With 1500 students and 30 tutors, things can go wrong quickly…When the markers were comfortable with that, we added the next layer to it in the next trimester… We designed the assessment and mapped out how we would challenge the students to do something more.
Manages feedback pressures (for self and others)	9	27%	Often, we give assignments that say: use one of these four articles, or three of these five articles to write your text, for instance. Then, we divide the work between [me and my colleagues] so that all of us do not have to read all the articles to be able to give students good feedback.

Note. $N = 33$.

to effectively provide and receive constructive feedback to enhance their skills and achieve academic goals, while others implemented formal training on SFL to encourage students' active roles in feedback processes.

Creates authentic feedback-rich environments

About half (52%) explained how they created classroom environments that promoted authentic feedback, reflecting typical practices within their discipline (Dawson, Carless, and Lee 2021). For example, some teachers used peer feedback processes and trained students in giving and receiving peer feedback, reflecting standard academic practices. Some implemented simulated patient interactions in health settings to reflect real-world experiences. Participants also encouraged students to use diverse information from their environment to assess and improve their efforts. To illustrate, they provided documents detailing the instructions, standards, guidelines, or evaluation criteria for the tasks, or they encouraged students to look at how other students approached similar tasks.

Improves feedback processes

Nearly half (48%) described how they enhanced feedback processes. Most gathered evidence regarding the effectiveness of their feedback methods by asking feedback-specific questions in surveys (e.g. student evaluations), while others reviewed student work samples to determine if students incorporated comments received in their subsequent work. Some initiated conversations with students about their opinions and experiences with feedback processes. A few participants teaching a specific unit for an extended period reported an ongoing refinement process, involving minor adjustments each semester that led to significant improvements in their feedback designs.

Plans feedback strategically

One-third (33%) described various strategies for planning feedback, such as connecting feedback across assessments to enhance the transfer of information from one task to subsequent ones. Additionally, participants zoomed out from individual courses to design broader feedback models. As students progressed through their degrees, the complexity and intensity of feedback requirements increased. Instructors in parallel courses managed workload by concentrating feedback in one unit. They also scaled practices for larger cohorts using technology, for example, through smaller assessments or automated updates. Additionally, many refined their feedback designs iteratively, adding new layers over time.

Manages feedback pressures (for self and others)

About 27% described their methods for managing feedback pressures. The main challenge was balancing effective feedback processes with the workload involved. Some respondents addressed this by dividing tasks among colleagues, using teaching assistants, and involving students in peer feedback.

Meso competencies

Designs for feedback dialogues and cycles

Two-thirds (67%) of participants reported feedback as a dialogic process with two-way interactions, helping students improve performance through cycles. Many highlighted the repeated assessment of specific outcomes, where subsequent assignments aimed to enhance deep learning. Participants reported examples of providing feedback on drafts, allowing for revisions, and implementing staged feedback through nested tasks, which they believed students found more engaging. Additionally, many respondents encouraged students to seek specific feedback from various sources.

Maximises effects of limited opportunities for feedback

Half (52%) highlighted activities and strategies to maximize limited feedback opportunities, considering time and resources. Examples included using strategic prioritization, particularly in large classes, or using multiple-choice questions or quizzes for feedback and clarification. Another example was offering collective feedback that identified common patterns in students' performance or conducting verbal feedback

sessions instead of written feedback. Furthermore, respondents directed their feedback to areas where the impact was most significant, such as key concepts, and where students could realistically take action to enhance their performance.

Table 2. Illustrations of meso-level competencies.

Competency	*n*	%	Illustrative except
Designs for feedback dialogues and cycles	22	67%	…the abstract should be written as the first thing … Then, I ask them to revise their abstract each week until what they are actually doing becomes clearer to them…Two weeks before they hand in their full essays, the same groups come together…[with] 30 min allocated for each person where we are commenting on the whole essay.
Maximises effects of limited opportunities for feedback	17	52%	Typically, we'll get a small subset of between 200 and 400 students who will really interact and engage, and we focus our efforts on them because if we do that, perhaps through a ripple effect, they might then reach out to others in the unit, and we might drag them along in a slipstream metaphor.
Utilises technological aids to feedback as appropriate	17	52%	I had a peer feedback activity as part of assessment where I would pair students using Feedback Fruits [an app to facilitate feedback]. Students would be automatically paired and would give peer feedback on a draft of their assessment.
Designs feedback processes that involve peers and others	17	52%	…We require them to do individual presentations. We often use peer feedback as well as staff feedback… [for] students to be able to recognize what's good about the presentation or bad, and to comment on that in a constructive way…
Organises timing, location, sequencing of feedback events	16	48%	I spent … time scaffolding it, [to] feed forward into the next assessment early on…I try to make it quite comprehensive and encourage the tutors to do [this] earlier on in a very targeted way, and then less towards the end of trimester. The assessment builds up; one leads the other to the final. I said, 'Don't give them lots of feedback at the end, especially not what they need to improve'.
Designs to intentionally prompt student action	15	45%	Students are encouraged to reflect on their performance and to use the feedback to help them perform better or more easily in subsequent rounds of assessment… The ones who need to resubmit describe how they've implemented improvements in their work. The students who are not obliged to resubmit, who performed better, use the feedback from the first major written essay, peer reviews … the whole way through to help them improve…
Frames feedback information in relation to standards and criteria	12	36%	…we give them a bunch of criteria and a marking rubric, which they use themselves when doing their initial peer reviews on each other, so they become familiar with that marking rubric…the teachers then use this same marking rubric to give feedback.
Constructs and implements tasks and accompanying feedback processes	8	24%	I give them five examples of other BA theses, which they … read and discuss in groups…They are all good but are all different to convey the message that there's not one recipe for how a good essay looks…So, from the very start of the seminar, they have an idea that this is the end product.
Manages tensions between feedback and grading	6	18%	…I would rather spend my time, helping, like assistance, giving them feedback on how to improve than spend my time writing justifications for bad grades. I don't want to put in time explaining why an exam got an F but would rather explain how to improve…

Note. $N = 33$.

Utilises technological aids to feedback

Half (52%) reported deploying various technologies for feedback, primarily through online systems like audio and video feedback and tools for formative self-tests within learning management systems. While some administered basic online quizzes to assess comprehension, others implemented more sophisticated methods, including the use of pre-formulated, generic comments. Technology was used to improve feedback practices for larger student groups, such as online peer feedback systems.

Designs feedback processes that involve peers or others

Half (52%) described how they designed and used feedback processes involving peers and others. They explained creating guidelines and rationales for peer feedback and training students to participate in these processes. For example, they emphasised providing students with feedback language, training on exemplars as well as preparing students to listen to their peers. Additionally, they encouraged students to connect with other feedback providers, such as professionals from organizations or internships.

Organises timing, location sequencing of feedback events

Nearly half (48%) reported that they sequenced feedback events with care, either within the context of assessments or learning activities. They emphasized designing feedback events integral to the unit design, creating interconnected task sequences that allow insights from one task to enhance performance in the next. The participants also highlighted the importance of planning and scheduling these feedback events from the start, ensuring that students received timely guidance and support and could apply the feedback to subsequent work.

Designs to intentionally prompt student action

Nearly half (45%) described developing feedback processes that required students to use feedback information, for instance through resubmission of assignments or by writing a reflection on how they responded to the feedback information. Students were likewise encouraged to apply feedback on course assignments as these would directly improve the final assessment or be part of a portfolio.

Frames feedback information in relation to standards and criteria

One-third (36%) made explicit connections between feedback and the standards or criteria for the task. Sometimes, criterion-referenced feedback was supplemented with additional written comments and a grade. Rubrics emerged as a key tool for framing feedback, and several highlighted their practice of actively engaging students in the use of rubrics by having them evaluate their own work or that of their peers against specific criteria. Importantly, respondents dedicated time to explain the significance of the criteria to students and how to effectively utilize rubrics.

Designs and aligns tasks with feedback processes

Some (24%) reported using exemplars to aid students in understanding what defined high-quality work and clarified expectations for specific tasks. For example, students

analysed features of an exemplar to discern what enhanced its quality and to contemplate ways to improve their work. Additionally, a participant noted that they set aside time during class to review common feedback themes from the previous assignment, prompting students to consider how they would integrate the received feedback into upcoming tasks.

Manages tensions between feedback and grading

Few participants (18%) addressed the tension between feedback and grading, distinguishing the former as formative guidance and the latter as summative justification. Some emphasized the greater value of process-oriented feedback over end-point grade explanations. Others reported using ungraded assessments with personalized feedback, which, they claimed, proved more effective for learning than traditional exams.

Micro competencies

Crafts appropriate inputs to students

A significant majority (85%) reported that feedback on students' work was designed to maximize benefits for the students. This approach included corrections, affirmations, and the identification of areas for improvement, delivered in a positive and supportive tone. Respondents noted that students acted more effectively on those comments pointing to needed improvements. Constructing positive and motivating comments was also regarded as essential, rather than using a tone that might discourage students. Additionally, teachers reported formulating questions to prompt students to think about their work in new ways instead of providing an answer to them.

Identifies and responds to student needs

Over half (58%) indicated that their focus was on identifying and addressing the individual needs of students regarding their work. This approach involved tailoring comments to meet the specific requirements of each student at different points in

Table 3. Illustrations of micro level competencies.

Competency	*n*	%	Illustrative except
Crafts appropriate inputs to students	28	85%	…It involves a lot of a very close reading of what they were writing about, their proposal and then thinking about, 'there's something about that doesn't seem like it's going to work'. Giving them some suggestions, explaining why, it's very detailed.
Identifies and responds to student needs	19	58%	…teacher will insert in-line text comments as well. So, the amount the teacher will write will vary a bit… from a short paragraph to maybe three quarters of a page depending on what we feel that the student requires or will benefit from.
Differentiates between varying student needs	15	45%	…he was already an excellent student, and… yeah, the standards are not the same, because I think he has potential to do even more. So, I'm giving him slightly harder, more intense feedback, but for the purpose of his own growth and development, because I felt like he had potential to do even more.

Note. $N = 33$.

time. For example, some respondents noted that they provided feedback on language issues to international students, in addition to assessing the quality of their work. Others adjusted the amount of feedback based on what they believed would be most beneficial for a particular student. Most highlighted their commitment to personalized comments, ensuring that students found them useful and actionable for improvement.

Differentiates between varying student needs

Nearly half (45%) shared various approaches for providing feedback on students' work, customized to address diverse student needs. They emphasized the importance of recognizing students as individuals and the necessity of using different feedback techniques for different students. For instance, being attentive to how individual students responded to comments on their work shaped the way teachers offered feedback to those students. Additionally, some mentioned that students performing well or poorly required different types of support from feedback. Therefore, participants actively sought ways to provide additional support and guidance to students who struggled to engage effectively with feedback, particularly through face-to-face conversations.

Additional competencies

This study's analysis of feedback practices yielded two additional competencies that may enhance the existing framework.

Creates safe feedback environment

Some (33%) described practices aligned with the relational dimension of TFL suggested by Carless and Winstone (2023), particularly in cultivating a safe and supportive feedback environment that promoted psychological safety. These practices involved finding ways to build trust and rapport with students and provide support in a sensitive manner. For example, some reported self-disclosing personal experiences to establish strong connections with students and enhance their engagement with feedback. They also encouraged students to participate in further discussions or seek clarification after receiving initial feedback.

Table 4. Illustration of the two additional competencies.

Competency	*n*	%	Illustrative except
Creates safe feedback environment	11	33%	…I think, in the individual setting, it's always going to be an issue, because you are a person with a lot of power, that's sitting in front of them, and trying to give them feedback on something that they want to do well. So, I try to figure out, how can you do it in ways that reduce that shame feeling and focus on the learning of it?
Provides meta-feedback	5	15%	So, when they have these individual presentations, we always have a [student] commentator who gives the first feedback based on this framework…then we will comment on the commentator. The teacher waits until the end, then comment on both things.

Note. $N = 33$.

Provides meta-feedback

Few participants (15%) reported engaging in meta-feedback, defined as feedback on feedback that aims to enhance peer feedback and self-evaluation skills (Deneen and Hoo 2023). This included teachers commenting on the quality of the peer feedback students provided to one another and offering guidance on how students engaged with feedback processes. Students were also prompted to reflect on the usefulness and relevance of the feedback received for improving their subsequent work.

The analysis presents distinct yet interrelated patterns of TFL operating across macro, meso, and micro levels, including two new competencies. This nuanced foundation enhances our understanding of how these competencies are applied in practice, a topic explored further below.

Discussion

The concept of teacher feedback literacy argues that university teachers must understand feedback and the capability to design courses in which feedback processes are enacted effectively to improve student learning. It recognizes that feedback processes should span the curriculum and should not be limited to activities in a given course unit or assignment (Boud and Dawson 2023; Carless and Winstone 2023). Using the empirically derived teacher feedback literacy competency framework (Boud and Dawson 2023) as a lens, the current study investigated the feedback practices of highly regarded teachers and found that the framework broadly represents what they claim to do, although it has been viewed as an idealized model that may not accurately reflect real-world teaching contexts (Tam 2025).

Our analysis showed which aspects of feedback literacy were well-developed and which were less apparent. Since participants described their actions related to feedback without directly addressing the competencies in the framework, it is likely that the study may under-represent the prevalence in their practice. Nevertheless, the overall results indicated that the framework captured those practices. However, there was wide variation among individuals about the extent to which it represented what they did.

At the *macro* level, one of the key teacher feedback competencies involved teachers utilizing available resources to design and implement feedback processes. Tai et al. (2023) emphasize that feedback literacies cannot be separated from social, political, and material contexts, as these contexts shape and limit how individuals can act. Therefore, teachers' effective use of available resources may demonstrate their pragmatic competencies (Carless and Winstone 2023) and their ongoing awareness of how they align with, navigate, and resist the structures and practices through which learning occurs (Tai et al. 2023). Additionally, echoing Bearman et al.'s (2017) study on assessment design in higher education, this study revealed that teachers highly valued collegial interactions and collaborations in enacting feedback; hence, relationships are likely to play an important role in designing and implementing feedback. However, in contrast, managing feedback pressures for oneself and others emerged as one of the least prominent competencies among the participants at this level, despite their descriptions of effectively utilizing resources to employ feedback. This may suggest that, because feedback has previously been seen as an act of

individual teachers within their own workload, they struggle to consider managing it with others as a key part of the process—a challenge also identified by Henderson, Ryan, and Phillips (2019). This might indicate the need to locate feedback as a part of the collective responsibilities of those managing courses.

At the *meso* level, many participants reported competencies in designing feedback dialogues and cycles, while managing tensions between feedback and grading seemed less developed. Considering these findings, it can be interpreted that teachers' feedback designs—despite disciplinary differences—seek to promote ongoing and dynamic cycles between teachers and students, particularly through feedback loops, as advocated by Carless (2019). This aligns well with arguments that teachers create opportunities for students to develop their feedback literacy through structured and iterative assessment designs, where students produce, receive, and utilize feedback (Carless and Boud 2018). However, although the results indicated that these teachers were confident in orchestrating feedback cycles and dialogues, the intertwining of grade justification and forward-looking information appeared to persist, leading to a blurring of their distinct purposes (Winstone and Boud 2022). The notion that feedback comments are often perceived as justification or explanation of a grade (Henderson et al. 2021) might exacerbate barriers to fostering feedback literacy for teachers and students. Alternatively, these conflicting results in the meso competencies may also have emerged from the diverse assessment and feedback cultures of the countries or universities involved in this study. For instance, in Denmark, students often receive a final grade based on exams, portfolios, or projects at the end of the semester, while formative feedback is provided during the term and is seldom graded. Consequently, this structural separation may mean that Danish teachers have less need to confront the tension which is commonplace in other systems.

At the *micro* level, many participants reported competencies in crafting appropriate inputs for students related to their assignments, while differentiation between varying student needs occurred less frequently. The way teachers constructed their comments aligned well with Payne, Ajjawi, and Holloway (2023), as they sought to create feedback inputs with careful attention to tone and scaffolding. Participants in this study also employed questioning techniques to probe, encourage, and engage students, in line with Heron et al. (2023). However, despite teachers' high awareness of students as diverse learners with distinct needs rather than mere information recipients, the corresponding competency of catering to diverse students in feedback was less represented in the data.

Interestingly, the analysis yielded two additional feedback competencies. Teachers frequently highlighted practices aligned with the relational facet of TFL, such as supportiveness, approachability, and rapport building, to promote students' engagement with feedback (Carless and Winstone 2023). Echoing Tam's (2025) findings, participants underscored the importance of creating a safe environment to enhance learning through feedback and Soares and Lopes' (2020) emphasis on creating safe spaces for students to learn. This competency might be situated at the *meso* level, as it pertains to the design of feedback practices within the classroom context. Second, the practice of providing meta-feedback may constitute a valuable means of scaffolding students' capacity for evaluative judgments, which is a key component of SFL (Carless and Boud 2018; Tai et al. 2018). Since this practice often involves individual interactions, it might be positioned at the *micro* level.

The analysis revealed that teachers demonstrated varying levels of feedback literacy, with the majority (85%) exhibiting competencies across all three levels. Those who reported more competencies often attributed this to a robust institutional feedback culture at both local and university-wide levels. This emphasises the notion that developing TFL is not an isolated process; it is highly influenced by institutional culture and priorities, including the sharing of practices and access to professional development opportunities.

Implications

Our study suggests that Boud and Dawson's (2023) framework could be enhanced by integrating relational competencies, such as creating safe feedback environments and employing meta-feedback practices, as crucial dimensions of feedback literacy. These relational elements highlight that feedback is not just a pedagogical tool but also a social and emotional practice (e.g. Carless and Winstone 2023; Tam 2025). Additionally, the findings stress the importance of institutional culture and support (e.g. Bearman et al. 2017) in fostering TFL. Educational institutions should prioritize ongoing professional development, structured peer collaboration, and an environment that encourages feedback to improve teachers' capabilities across all framework levels. More research is also needed on what promotes and inhibits the development of teacher competence in feedback in our institutions.

To further empirical testing of Boud and Dawson's (2023) competency framework and to enable the measurement of TFL across diverse educational contexts, future research would benefit from developing a scale designed to assess TFL across a broad range of educational settings. This instrument should incorporate both established and emerging competencies to reflect the evolving nature of TFL. Such a scale could be used to examine how institutional culture, pedagogical support, and teaching experience influence the understanding and application of TFL. As a diagnostic tool, such a questionnaire would aid in faculty development by identifying strengths as well as areas for improvement. Ultimately, a shared measurement framework would enhance clarity, comparability, and recognition of TFL as a key focus within feedback literacy research.

Limitations

Several potential limitations should be noted. First, we utilized purposive sampling to recruit participants who were recognized for their high achievements in providing feedback. However, it was not feasible to identify *a priori* group of feedback-literate teachers, as no established scale existed to assess this. We aimed to assemble a group that could serve as the best available proxy; nonetheless, we acknowledge that their reputations may be influenced by the subjective opinions and assumptions of colleagues and managers. Secondly, the general perceptions of effective teaching may be conflated with effective feedback practices. Additionally, we relied on teachers' self-reports regarding their feedback practices, which means we cannot draw definitive conclusions about the actual quality and impact of these practices.

Conclusion

This study enhanced our understanding of TFL by examining how esteemed teachers applied feedback practices at macro, meso, and micro levels. Findings showed that while all competencies in Boud and Dawson's (2023) framework were present, resource use, feedback dialogue design, and constructive feedback were well-supported, managing feedback pressures and differentiating for diverse learners appeared less developed. Additionally, the analysis highlighted two competencies beyond those included in the original framework: relational and meta-feedback practices, emphasising the adaptive, context-driven nature of TFL.

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Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained separately in Norway, Denmark, and Australia in accordance with national regulations and institutional guidelines. Bergen University's RETTE (project ID: R2805), Aarhus University's Research Ethics Committee (Journal no: 2023–0604272; Approval no: BSS-2023-126-K), and Deakin University (HAE-23-125).

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Notes on contributors

Turkan Istencioglu is a PhD candidate with the Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE) at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her PhD research focuses on teacher feedback literacy.

Berit Lassesen is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Educational Development at Aarhus University. Her research primarily focuses on student learning, including approaches to learning, self-regulation of learning, and academic self-efficacy beliefs.

Annika Büchert Lindberg is a Senior Consultant and Educational Developer at the Centre for Educational Development (CED), Aarhus University, Denmark. In her role as an educational developer, she focuses on three key areas: assessment and feedback, teaching and learning in higher education, and international collaboration.

David Boud is Alfred Deakin Professor and Foundation Director of the Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning (CRADLE) at Deakin University, Melbourne. He is also an Emeritus Professor at the University of Technology Sydney.

Ole Eggers Bjælde is a Curator at the Science Museums, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Kenan Dikilitas is a Professor in the Program for University Pedagogy in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen. He has published extensively on teacher development, focusing on identity development and engagement in action research.

Tatiana Ershova is a PhD candidate in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen, Norway.

Robert Morris Gray Jr is an Associate Professor of University Pedagogy and leader of the TeLEd Research Group in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen.

Monika Kvernenes is an Associate Professor in medical and health professions education and the head of the Center for Medical Education at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Bergen.

Peter Musaeus is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Educational Development (CED) at Aarhus University, Denmark. His research focuses on improving teachers' modeling and decision-making in teaching, curriculum design, and assessment.

Christopher Neil Prilop is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Educational Development (CED) at Aarhus University, Denmark. His research interests include instructional design, digital learning environments, artificial intelligence, video, feedback, and expertise (professional knowledge, professional vision, and beliefs).

Arild Raaheim is a Professor in the Department of Education at the University of Bergen.

Monica Alterskjær Sundset is a Professor of Animal Physiology at the Department of Arctic and Marine Biology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway. She also holds the position of Deputy Head of Education in the same department.

Camilla Svensen is a Professor of Marine Ecology, focusing on Arctic zooplankton biodiversity, marine food webs, and the biological carbon pump at the Department of Arctic and Marine Biology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway.

ORCID

Turkan Istencioglu http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7088-8461
Berit Lassesen http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9561-6876
Annika Büchert Lindberg http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0565-5853
David Boud http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6883-2722
Ole Eggers Bjælde http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2767-0317
Kenan Dikilitas http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9387-8696
Tatiana Ershova http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9138-5967
Robert Morris Gray http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9834-1676
Monika Kvernenes http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6042-6383
Peter Musaeus http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6062-055X
Christopher Neil Prilop http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9629-4127
Arild Raaheim http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5668-8703
Monica Alterskjær Sundset http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4850-262X
Camilla Svensen http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9577-3935

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