



## Multimodal Feedback: A Real Challenge in EFL Writing Pedagogy

Watcharee Kulprasit

Department of Western Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thaksin University, Thailand  
E-mail: watcharee.tsu@gmail.com

### Abstract

In the twenty-first century when technology is the mainstream in people's life, multimedia including social media, digital platforms and tools, and multimodal tasks or projects are embraced in education at different levels. In light of the ongoing global epidemic of COVID-19, their contributions are even more vital, especially in the academic realm. Particularly, the conventional instruction in writing pedagogy has been shifted to be the technology-driven one in which both the writing process and writing products are still focused on the online platforms. Therefore, the emergence of technology inevitably affects every step in the writing process, specifically the feedback process. Nowadays, multimodal feedback is the breakthrough in the feedback process where the technological leverage is adopted as a supportive learning tool for developing students' writing competency either to additionally support the traditional one or to compensate for its drawbacks. Nevertheless, what works in a particular context can probably be regarded as a challenge in the other. In the present article, thus, multimodal feedback is under discussion for the practical and effective pedagogical implications when it is applied in the EFL writing pedagogy.

*Keywords: Multimodal feedback, Formative assessment, Second language writing, EFL writing pedagogy, Assessment for learning*

### 1. Introduction

When compared to what happened ten years ago, writing this century is completely different. With the emergence of technology, everything turns out to be systematically multifaceted notions. What once could be conventionally performed in the past is required to embrace digital platforms to carry on. Feedback, a significant tool in writing pedagogy, is not an exception. On the whole, different aspects of feedback have been empirically researched in diverse academic contexts and reported in several articles; for instance, its efficacy, its pedagogical implications in various classroom contexts, several modes of feedback, its varied forms, its different types, etc. Nonetheless, while a single specific feedback type has been conclusively proved to work in some particular academic contexts, multimodal feedback is practically verified in other educational settings.

Technology in the present era allows for a variety of new ways to provide feedback. There are benefits and characteristics associated with each form. A combination of such forms can distinctively serve different purposes in the learning process. Whereas multimodal feedback is applied to several writing contexts, its efficacy is rarely reported, particularly based on experimental research (Thomas, 2019). Moreover, a limited number of multimodal feedback-related research could have been found (Wood, 2018), specifically in terms of the multimodal feedback types (Thomas, 2019). Furthermore, certain issues of its pedagogical implications need to be addressed and discussed, so a smart move towards its integration can be made, especially in the EFL writing context. Therefore, the present article aims to discuss multimodal feedback in second language writing and its formative implementation in the EFL writing context for its most effective pedagogical integration to support the writing process, enhance the writing products, and develop both learners' writing performance and instructors' professional skill.



## 2. Objective

This article aims to discuss multimodal feedback in the second language writing pedagogy for a more practical formative implementation in the EFL writing pedagogical context.

## 3. Multimodal Feedback: What Practically Works in Second Language Writing Pedagogy

Feedback driven by technology is prevalent in all fields; in fact, it becomes a common characteristic of writing instruction in this decade. However, as each feedback mode has not only advantages but also certain limitations, a combined feedback approach is regarded as a useful pedagogical practice to develop students' competence in writing pedagogy (Bakla, 2020). Multimodal feedback (MMF) is a mix of various modes and types of technology-mediated advice or criticism such as video, graphics, audio, or texts given in the learning process, especially in the area of language learning (Thomas, 2019). Hence, a particular common mode of feedback, written feedback, should not be regarded as the only approach to contribute to students' writing competency development in second language writing any longer; in contrast, other modes of feedback or multimodal feedback should be integrated into the writing instruction, so certain limitations or drawbacks of the traditional one can be minimized or suppressed (Chang et al., 2017), or it can transcend limitations of the single feedback being used (Martin, 2020). This allows students to seize more opportunities to learn from this formative feedback type (Martin, 2020). Through the more interactive and formative language learning atmosphere, this type of feedback promotes personalized learning and encourages engagement (Zhang, 2018; Thomas, 2019). It can be an approach to attracting and suiting various students' learning styles (Bakla, 2020). Besides, multimodal feedback helps improve students' understanding of the feedback, so they can decode it and revise their writing according to the feedback they receive (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017; Bakla, 2020). Furthermore, if a dialogic environment can be established through the multimodal feedback process, it helps promote the interaction where questions can be asked for clarification or confusion can be cleared up (Bakla, 2020). From an evaluator to a writing coach, a teacher's role is shifted to facilitate a close relationship developed between the teacher and the students through the negotiation in the multimodal feedback process (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017; Zhang, 2018). In other words, it is a sort of feedback in which technology engagement introduces various modes of feedback to promote negotiation for language development in writing pedagogy (Wood, 2018). Multimodal feedback, in this case, reduces students' possibility of feedback ignorance (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017) and also improves students' motivation for polishing their work (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017; Zhang, 2018). Particularly, the combination of visual and audio feedback contributes to feedback decoding for a better understanding of the messages delivered through the feedback (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017). Multiple modes of feedback offer a chance to allow students to embrace a great number of concerns without feeling overwhelmed; for instance, the use of screencast feedback as supplementary feedback besides the conventional one (Chang et al., 2017).

## 4. Multimodal Feedback: A Real Challenge in the EFL Writing Pedagogical Context

As several positive attributes of multimodal feedback can be observed in the second language writing pedagogy, when this kind of feedback is incorporated into the EFL writing pedagogical context, what empirically works in one context may not work in another. Certain issues are raised for a discussion regarding its implications in the EFL writing pedagogy.

Due to its nature, to start with, multimodal feedback involves providing and receiving feedback in various ways. It initiates not only teachers but also students' diverse feedback processes and feedback experiences (Wood, 2018). To them, this is inevitably perceived as a more complex task in terms of both the process and the feedback itself (Chang et al., 2017). Hence, it can provoke alarming and discouraging reactions from both parties and eventually lead to a lack of commitment to be involved in such a procedure



(Chang et al., 2017). To give a clearer picture, it can be explained that the use of multimodal feedback becomes a real challenge instead of a learning tool at first as students in the EFL writing contexts have limited language proficiency, especially their L2 proficiency to deal with such overwhelming feedback. Consequently, they probably struggle to understand a number of writing concerns from different modes of feedback, not to mention the access to each feedback mode. Accordingly, this possibly discourages these students to be aware of the benefits of multimodal feedback and to employ it as a supportive learning tool for their writing improvement. Meanwhile, teachers themselves strain to offer feedback in multiple modes. For them, multimodal feedback creates more time-consuming tasks for them since they have to use diverse modes to provide feedback that suits not only students' learning styles but also their writing concerns and the nature of writing assignments, tasks, or activities they are engaged (Martin, 2020).

Another major issue is language use in multimodal feedback. As feedback comes into several modes, students are required to decode it all whether it is delivered in their L1 or L2. As indirect feedback is usually given in the written form, and direct feedback is delivered in the oral form, it is even incomprehensible for EFL students when all of these feedback modes are not delivered in their L1, not to mention the fact that their overall L2 proficiency does have a considerable influence on their L2 competence to decipher the feedback in different modes as well (Elola and Oskoz, 2016; Campbell and Feldmann, 2017). Nevertheless, EFL students are liable to understand the spoken feedback if it is provided in L2 rather than the written feedback in L2 (Campbell and Feldmann, 2017).

In addition, it is claimed that multimodal feedback promotes a dialogic environment where students are required to interact and be engaged (Bakla, 2020), however, to EFL students, this sort of feedback is overwhelming when they have to deal with different versions of feedback, especially if it is given in their L2. This possibly takes some time or longer time for them to decode and digest the information to understand how to apply the ideas to polish their work. Subsequently, the dialogic environment that is assumed to be established by the use of multimodal feedback can possibly linger on. When it occurs, it is usually because they have questions about the feedback or seek clarification on particular issues of the feedback they receive which rarely happens. For less proficient EFL students, unfortunately, it is possible that multimodal feedback can be perceived as an overwhelming desire to discourage them to learn from the feedback and improve their work. Since many aspects of writing need to be concerned, they are likely to dismiss criticism and suggestion they gain through different modes of feedback.

With regard to the above concerns, it, thus, probably provokes anxiety for students (Bakla, 2020). This anxiety can turn out to be an obstacle that decreases students' motivation or even blocks their minds from learning from this kind of formative assessment tool and embracing its blessings to help develop their writing competence. As a result, a valuable contribution of multimodal feedback to the EFL writing instruction probably requires negotiations between teachers and students to figure out how it works and how it will produce the best results.

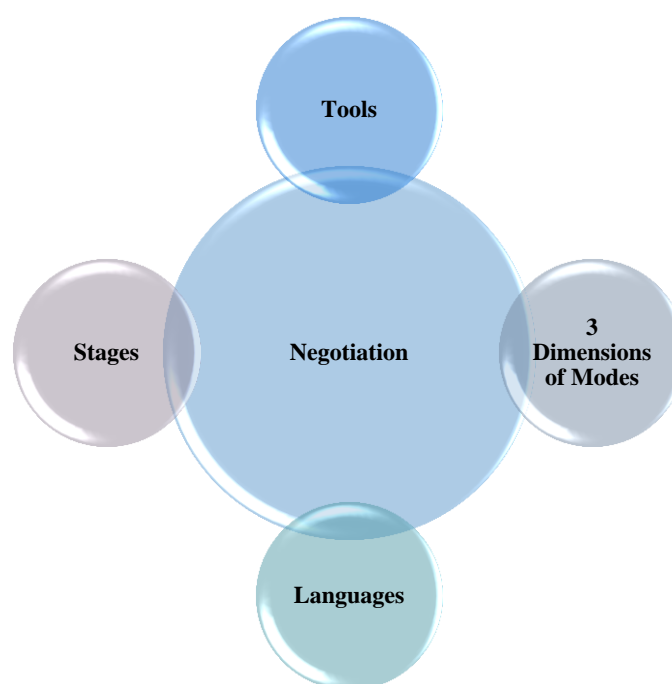
### **5. The Formative Implementation of Multimodal Feedback: A Pedagogical Implication in EFL Writing Contexts**

These days, technology drives the world where everything is possible with a single click. Even though it facilitates almost every aspect of our daily lives, it can sometimes prove to be a significant obstacle. Surprisingly, students' technology-driven literacy in their everyday life rarely supports theirs in the academic context. Besides, teachers themselves do not realize that technology-driven literacy practice in their routine can be applied to develop and strengthen their technology-mediated L2 literacy in the school context (Zheng and Warschauer, 2017). The framework of bridging activities (Thorne and Reinhardt, 2008) that embraces multiliteracies pedagogy (The New London Group, 1996) helps enhance not only students' L2



linguistics but also the meaning-making process through social L2 learning and skill development. In such a case, social media tools should be integrated into L2 writing pedagogy to create multidimensional bridging activities in which their multiliteracies can support one another to strengthen their weaknesses and broaden their literacy competency (Elola and Oskoz, 2017).

With the ideas being discussed above, an implementation of multimodal feedback in writing pedagogy can be recognized as a key element to weave all the frameworks together to strengthen students' multiliteracies for their language and skill development. In so doing, an orientation week should be launched to introduce this kind of feedback. With a clear understanding of this concept, the orientation itself can be regarded as a starter of the implementation. Then a negotiation on the formative pedagogical implication of multimodal feedback in the EFL writing context should be served as the main course. Regarding this procedure, the four major components are involved in a discussion between the teacher and students.



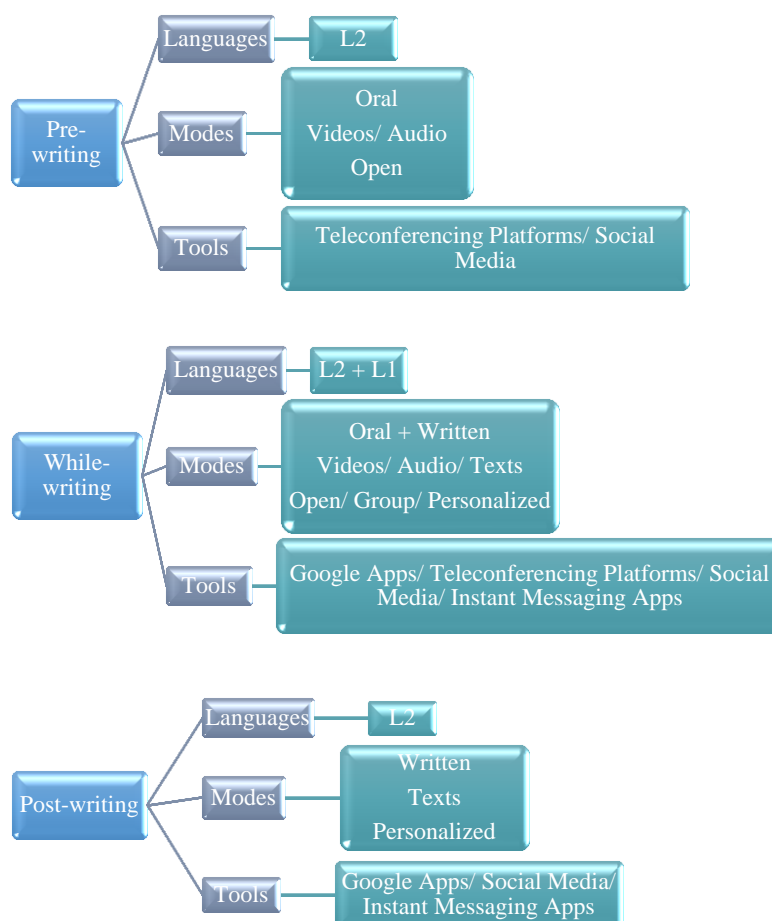
**Figure 1** Four major components of formative multimodal feedback implementation

According to Figure 1, the four key components: tools, modes, stages, and languages are considered when both the teacher and students enter into negotiations for the formative implementation of multimodal feedback in writing pedagogy, particularly in the EFL contexts. For the first element, the means of feedback delivery should be set. That means their mutual agreement on tools needs to be reached through the negotiation process. They can be social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.; Google Apps: Google Docs, Google Meet; teleconferencing platforms: Zoom Meetings, Cisco Webex Meetings, etc., instant communication or instant messaging apps or platforms: Line, Messenger, Skype, WeChat, etc. The next component is modes. Three distinct dimensions of feedback modes should be mutually decided to use for each channel, for example, whether it should be the written or oral one. Besides, graphics, videos, audio, and texts are also the modes they both have to choose to deliver the feedback through the selected channel. Finally, the modes of feedback including the open, group, or personalized ones should be also



taken into a consideration. Different modes are appropriate for different tools or channels. Each serves a distinguishing purpose or need, so their mutual purposes must be set as they can use both the tools and the feedback modes to accomplish them. Language use is another important factor to consider as discussed previously. For the language to not be a factor causing them to struggle through the process, the student's L1, L2, or both should be discussed to see which is their preferred language that can support their language learning and writing skill development through the process. Last but not least, all of these components must be integrated into the three stages in the writing process: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing to formatively foster students' writing competency development.

All in all, to deal with the issues being raised and to practically develop a dialogic environment where multimodal feedback is formatively and effectively integrated into the writing process in EFL writing pedagogy, the following model will serve as a general guideline for the implementation.



**Figure 2** Formative implementation of multimodal feedback in EFL writing pedagogy

In Figure 2, the way the four key components of multimodal feedback are formatively integrated into EFL writing pedagogy is illustrated. In the first stage of the writing process, the pre-writing stage, the oral open feedback should be delivered in the target language while students do the writing activity, i.e.,



brainstorming ideas about the topic they are going to write. This can be done through teleconferencing platforms where the class instruction is given or the social media like Facebook Room where students' interaction and engagement can be promoted to create "a dialogic environment" at the very start, so the feedback itself is meaningful to the students to pave the right way before they start preparing their first draft. In the next stage, while students are drawing up their drafts, both oral and written feedback should be provided in both languages: their native language and the target language through their selected diverse channels, for instance, Google Apps, teleconferencing platforms, social media, or instant messaging apps to make sure they are able to decode and understand all the feedback they receive and use it to improve their drafts. The use of their first language in this stage enormously helps reduce the tension that probably occurs when they have to collect feedback from various sources, especially when it involves several writing aspects, not to mention their written second language problems for those less proficient EFL students. The feedback in this stage, nevertheless, can be open, group, or personalized. It depends on the nature of the writing assignment or task being assigned. Finally, the individual writing assignment is usually assigned to students in the post-writing stage as it is an assessment tool to evaluate students' writing performance and competency in the target language. Therefore, personalized written feedback can be given through one or more channels like Google Apps, social media, or Instant Messaging Apps. This specific feedback for an individual in this writing stage will support them to polish their writing and be able to produce a better writing product. It is important to note that all the feedback in the three stages of the writing process is the formative one. No scores or grades are marked. The EFL students' writing performance and competency in the target language will be developed through such formative multimodal feedback in each stage.

## 6. Conclusion

Considering that technology is an integral part of our lives, it will be more effective if we can employ it to support multiple aspects of our lives. Formatively using multimodal feedback as part of the pedagogy of writing is also a tangible example of how technology can be utilized for developing human multiliteracies and exceeding the limits of traditional language learning and skill development. This golden opportunity unbelievably turns out to be a real but worth challenge in the EFL writing pedagogy.

## 7. References

- Bakla, A. (2020). A mixed-methods study of feedback modes in EFL writing. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24(1), 107-128. <https://doi.org/10.125/44712>
- Campbell, B. S., & Feldmann, A. (2017). The power of multimodal feedback. *Journal of Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership in Education*, 2(2), 1-6. <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/ctlle/vol2/iss2/1>
- Chang, C., Cunningham, K. J., Satar, H. M., & Strobl, C. (2017). Electronic feedback on second language writing: A retrospective and prospective essay on multimodality. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 9(3), 405-428. <https://doi.org/10.1558/wap.32515>
- Elola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2017). Writing with 21st century social tools in the L2 classroom: New literacies, genres, and writing practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 36, 52-60.
- Martin, D. (2020). Providing Students with Multimodal Feedback Experiences. *Journal of Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership in Education*, 5(1), 16-27.
- The New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-93.
- Thomas, M. (2019). *Recent Developments in Technology-Enhanced and Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. IGI Global.



- Thorne, S. L., & Reinhardt, J. (2008). Bridging activities, new media literacies, and advanced foreign language proficiency. *CALICO Journal*, 25, 558-572.
- Wood, S. A. (2018). Multimodal feedback: A “real” opportunity for negotiation in teacher response to student writing. In J. Dahlman & T Winner (Eds.), *Beyond the frontier, volume II: Innovations in first-year composition* (pp. 253-267). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Zhang, Y. (2018). Analysis of using multimodal feedback in writing instruction from EFL learners’ perspective. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 8(4), 21-29.
- Zheng, B., & Warschauer, M. (2017). Epilogue: Second language writing in the age of computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 36, 61-67.