

## **Cultivating Evaluative Judgement through Learner-Orchestrated Feedback: Pathways to Deep Learning, Integrity, and AI Readiness**

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### **Research Domains**

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

### **Abstract**

Learners develop understandings of quality by comparing their work with resources like exemplars, generating 'inner feedback'. Technology mediated environments extend these student led comparison opportunities, crucial for developing evaluative judgement, a vital skill in an AI influenced age. This study investigated how learners (N=40 survey/reflective writing, N=30 interview; 2018-2022) orchestrated self generated feedback in an open, technology supported environment. Findings reveal students used comparisons with peer drafts, exemplars, and teacher feedback on others' work to deconstruct tasks, identify weaknesses, and model standards, enhancing metacognition and evaluative judgement. This process complemented direct teacher feedback, fostered deeper learning, and, by building confidence and prompting ethical discussions, supported academic integrity. The study suggests integrating such learner orchestrated comparative practices into course design offers a scalable, sustainable way to cultivate crucial evaluative skills, preparing students for academic success and responsible engagement with AI.

### **Full paper**

Learners develop understandings of quality through evaluative processes such as comparing their work with exemplars or peers' drafts (Carless, 2020; Nicol et al., 2021). These comparisons help generate 'inner feedback', student derived insights that inform future work. Technology mediated feedback environments extend these opportunities, providing access to additional materials and feedback dialogues that help learners seek clarification or negotiate meaning (Wood, 2021, 2022). Such environments enrich self assessment by allowing students to compare their performance against diverse information sources, broadening the scope for improvement (Nicol and Selvaretnam, 2021).

However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these comparison based, learner led feedback strategies operate in routine blended or online university settings. More insight is needed into how they complement teacher feedback to support deep learning and academic integrity, while remaining sustainable for staff workloads. These issues are particularly relevant within the “new paradigm” of feedback that promotes student agency and feedback literacy (Winstone and Carless, 2019; Carless and Boud, 2018), and encourages learners to self-generate feedback rather than rely solely on external sources.

This study draws on survey (N=40), interview (N=30), and reflective writing data from academic writing classes at a South Korean university (2018 to 2022) to investigate how learners orchestrated their own feedback processes. It explores how comparisons within a technology-mediated open feedback environment, including peer drafts, exemplars, and teacher feedback on other students’ work, supported or enhanced their learning alongside direct feedback.

Findings reveal that learners actively used these resources to deconstruct tasks, identify weaknesses, and plan improvements. Comparing their work with that of peers and exemplars helped them decode assessment expectations and model academic standards. This was particularly beneficial for students who initially struggled, offering a structured pathway to improvement. Engagement increased when comparisons involved familiar peers, adding a social dimension to the process. Students not only compared products but also studied how peers responded to feedback and interpreted task criteria, enhancing metacognitive awareness.

Crucially, this self-directed use of comparisons did not replace teacher feedback. It enriched it. Teacher comments remained central for offering personalised guidance, while comparisons with other work helped learners contextualise this advice and explore broader patterns. Students valued access to teacher feedback on peer drafts, using it to understand how academic standards were applied, recognise common errors, and calibrate their own evaluative judgement, an essential element of deep learning and self-regulation.

Over time, students developed greater confidence in navigating this feedback ecosystem. Repeated exposure to examples of revision and improvement, both their own and others’, normalised struggle as part of the learning process. This encouraged perseverance, reduced anxiety, and inspired greater effort. Metacognition and self-regulation improved as students reflected on these comparisons and adapted their work accordingly.

Significantly, this growing evaluative confidence was linked to academic integrity. Students reported feeling more capable of producing original work independently, reducing reliance on questionable practices. Using comparators also prompted important discussions about ethical boundaries, what constitutes inspiration versus copying, further reinforcing responsible academic behaviour.

The study demonstrates that learner-orchestrated feedback, supported by strategic comparisons, offers a valuable complement to teacher feedback. These methods are not mutually exclusive but synergistic. Their integration into technology-supported learning environments allows for scalable, sustainable feedback practices, especially critical as institutions face increasing class sizes and limited resources for one-to-one feedback.

For instructors, the implications are clear. Curating access to diverse comparators, such as peers developing work (on differentiated topics), exemplars, and peer drafts with commentary, and scaffolding students' abilities to engage with them critically can create rich, connected learning environments. Such practices foster agency, deepen engagement, and strengthen evaluative judgement, while also embedding academic integrity into the learning process.

Ultimately, supporting learners to become reflective, autonomous users of feedback prepares them not just for immediate academic success but for lifelong learning and ethical professional practice. As higher education evolves, integrating these approaches into mainstream course design represents both a pedagogically sound and practically feasible way to enhance learning at scale, especially in the post-generative AI educational era.