



Should Feedback Be Spoken or Written?

What New Research Says About Oral and Written Feedback

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WHAT RESEARCH FOUND

Teachers provide feedback in many ways, but one common question remains: Is it better to speak to students about their work or provide written comments? This study compared the effects of oral and written feedback on students' achievement in mathematics among secondary school students.

Students were divided into two groups. One group received immediate oral feedback from the teacher after completing classroom tasks, while the other received written feedback within 24 hours. At the end of the intervention, students who received oral feedback achieved significantly higher scores than those who received written feedback.

The researchers suggest several reasons for this difference. Oral feedback is immediate, allowing students to correct errors while the learning experience is still fresh. It also encourages conversation, enabling students to ask questions, clarify misunderstandings, and receive additional explanations. This interaction helps teachers adapt their guidance to each student's needs.

Written feedback, however, offers different advantages. Because students can revisit written comments later, it provides a permanent record of strengths, mistakes, and suggested improvements. Written feedback is particularly valuable for assignments requiring detailed explanations, revision, or long-term reflection. The study also notes that effective written feedback should be specific, timely, supportive, and focused on improvement rather than criticism.

Rather than concluding that one type of feedback should replace the other, the findings indicate that each serves a different instructional purpose. Oral feedback is especially effective during learning when immediate correction is needed, while written feedback is well suited to assignments that students will review and revise over time.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Teachers often spend considerable time writing detailed comments on student work, yet many students read them only briefly or after the learning opportunity has passed. This study reminds us that the timing and method of feedback are just as important as the feedback itself.

Students benefit most when feedback matches the learning task. A short conversation during a lesson may resolve confusion immediately, while carefully written comments can support deeper reflection after more complex assignments. Effective teachers know when to speak, when to write, and when to combine both approaches.



CLASSROOM REALITY

Teachers Want	Students Often Experience
Feedback that improves learning	Comments received too late to act upon
Immediate correction of mistakes	Waiting days for returned work
Meaningful dialogue	Written comments that are skimmed or ignored
Lasting guidance	Difficulty remembering verbal advice alone

TRY TOMORROW

Before your next lesson:

1. Give brief oral feedback while students are working rather than waiting until the activity ends.
 2. Ask students to explain how they will use your feedback before moving on.
 3. Use written comments for assignments that require revision or extended learning.
 4. Combine oral discussion with concise written notes for important assessments so students can revisit the advice later.
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CAUTION

Neither oral nor written feedback is effective if it is vague or delayed. Comments such as "Good work" or "Needs improvement" provide little guidance. Feedback should clearly explain what students have done well, what needs improvement, and the next step they should take.

ONE KEY TAKEAWAY

The most effective feedback is not simply spoken or written—it is timely, specific, and matched to the learning task.

Keywords: oral feedback, written feedback, formative assessment, mathematics education, student achievement, teacher feedback

Reference

Muhammad, S., Nadeem, M., Hussain, S., & Qahar, A. (2023). *Comparison of the Impact of Oral and Written Feedback on the Students' Academic Achievement. International Research Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 4(3).