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A good relationship is not enough: How teacher trust shapes feedback-seeking behaviors in second language writing

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined how L2 writers' trust in their teacher predicts their feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) and whether this relationship is mediated by learners' perceived self-presentation cost and feedback value. Questionnaire data were collected from 128 students enrolled in L2 writing classes at a major US university. Three confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the construct validity of target variables. Regression and mediation analyses revealed that competence-based trust, reflecting students' trust in their teacher's instructional competence, positively predicted both feedback monitoring and inquiry. These relationships were mediated by feedback value, whereas self-presentation cost did not emerge as a mediator. In contrast, learners' affect-based trust, reflecting learners' emotional trust in their teacher, directly predicted feedback inquiry and showed a small negative indirect association with increased self-presentation cost. The findings suggest that while emotional trust may encourage students to approach teachers for feedback, trust in teachers' instructional competence plays a more central role in promoting active engagement with written corrective feedback by enhancing its perceived value. Overall, the results underscore the distinct but complementary roles of affect-based and competence-based trust in shaping students' proactive engagement with feedback in L2 writing. Theoretical and instructional implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Research on written corrective feedback (WCF) has traditionally focused on how WCF-related variables, such as the type, medium, and timing of feedback, can influence students' L2 writing performance. However, it is commonly observed that regardless of the type of WCF, some learners fail to benefit from teachers' feedback due to various individual and contextual factors (Bitchener, 2017). Such observations, which have led to inconsistencies in the results of studies on the effectiveness of WCF (see Li & Vouno, 2019), have been shifting researchers' attention toward how learners benefit from WCF (Bitchener, 2019; Boggs & Manchón, 2023; de Larios & Coyle, 2021; Han, 2019).

This growing shift in focus to the role of learners' engagement with WCF has led to the emergence of the topic of feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) in second language (L2) writing (Papi et al., 2020). FSB refers to "learners' intentional, calculated, and strategic

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attempts to gather feedback information on their L2 writing performance" (Papi et al., 2020, p. 486). There are two general categories of FSB: feedback monitoring, representing learners' efforts in gathering and using WCF to improve their L2 writing, and feedback inquiry, reflecting learners' direct requests for WCF. Students' FSB in L2 writing has been found to positively predict their L2 writing performance (Zhan et al., 2023) even above and beyond the quantity of WCF provided by the teachers (Papi et al., 2024). Several studies have also provided evidence for the importance of students' motivational and affective antecedents of FSB, including their mindsets (Waller & Papi, 2017), achievement goals (Papi et al., 2020), perceived cost and value of FSB (Gu, 2025; Papi et al., 2020), self-regulation (Xu, 2021), and shyness (Xu & Wang, 2024).

A few studies have provided preliminary support for the role of teacher-related factors such as teachers' support (Zhang, 2024; Zhang & Jiang, 2025) and feedback practices (Xu & Wang, 2023) in L2 writers' FSB. Although these studies highlight the importance of teacher support and feedback practices, teachers' practices may be most beneficial when they lead to students' perceptions of their teacher's trustworthiness (hereafter, *teacher trust*). Trust plays an important role in how students respond to teacher feedback and in improving students' L2 writing quality (e.g., Lee & Schallert, 2008a, 2008b; Ranalli, 2021). As Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) noted, when students' distrust is prevalent, they expend energy on self-protection rather than learning. Yet, trust has remained an underexplored topic in L2 writing (e.g., Lee & Schallert, 2008b). Specifically, we are not aware of any studies examining how students' perceived teacher trust can be associated with students' FSB in L2 writing. Exploring students' trust in their L2 writing teacher can lead to a better understanding of L2 writers' FSB and inform instructional strategies to enhance it. In this study, teacher trust is conceptualized along affective and competence-based dimensions. Affect-based trust represents the extent to which students believe that their teachers are personally trustworthy individuals, and competence-based trust refers to students' belief regarding the instructional competence of their teachers. Perceived teacher trustworthiness can potentially minimize learners' perceived costs associated with corrective feedback or maximize its perceived value, thereby enhancing their FSB (Mahbodi et al., 2025). To test these speculations in the context of L2 writing, in the present study, we examined how teacher trustworthiness may enhance FSB and whether the relationship between teacher trust and FSB is mediated by the self-presentation cost of FSB and the value of WCF.

1.1. Feedback-seeking behavior in L2 writing

As a dimension of proactive L2 learning (Papi & Hiver, 2025), FSB refers to learners' strategic and proactive efforts to seek and use corrective feedback to improve their L2 learning and performance. The notion of FSB was first introduced to the field of L2 writing by Papi and colleagues (2020) based on their work in both L2 writing (Waller & Papi, 2017) and speaking contexts (Papi et al., 2019). Based on similar models in organizational psychology (e.g., Ashford, 1986), Papi and colleagues (2020) classified FSB in L2 writing into two types. Feedback monitoring is an implicit feedback-seeking strategy involving paying attention and trying to learn from the feedback present in the context. Feedback inquiry involves asking a teacher or other sources for feedback on L2 writing performance. Using interview and focus-group data, Zhou et al. (2023) found that, to improve their L2 writing performance, ESL students in Australia used monitoring and inquiry strategies to seek feedback from different sources, such as their teachers, peers, private tutors, and the university's writing assistants. Of the two FSB variables, feedback monitoring has been found to better predict L2 writing performance. For instance, Papi et al. (2024) found that ESL writers in the US who engaged in feedback monitoring outperformed others in all the measures of writing quality, including vocabulary, organization, mechanics, language use (grammar), and overall quality.

Papi et al. (2020) developed a questionnaire to measure FSB in L2 writing contexts using 128 students enrolled in foreign language writing classes in the US. The researchers used exploratory factor analysis to confirm the construct validity of the feedback monitoring and feedback inquiry scales. In addition, their multiple regression analyses showed that a growth L2 mindset, characterized by the belief in the malleability of one's L2 learning abilities, predicted both feedback monitoring and inquiry, whereas having a fixed mindset did not predict either one. In addition, the researchers found that students' perceived value of feedback mediated the relationship between their growth mindset and FSB variables. In contrast, students' self-presentation cost—the fear of looking incompetent—negatively mediated the relationship between their fixed mindset and FSB variables.

Several other studies on the motivational predictors of FSB in L2 writing suggest that the more students value writing in their target language, the more they engage in FSB. For instance, studies found that learners with a growth L2 mindset pursued learning goals focused on developing their L2 writing competence, valued WCF for that purpose, and engaged in FSB. By contrast, those with a fixed mindset were more concerned about the cost of displaying weakness through FSB and avoided engaging in FSB as a result (e.g., Papi et al., 2019; Sun & Huang, 2023; Yao & Zhu, 2024; Xu & Wang, 2023). Similarly, studies that explored the roles of future L2 writing selves suggest that the value students associate with WCF motivated them to engage in FSB. For instance, Xu and Wang (2023) found that having an ideal L2 writing self—a maximal goal representing the learners' ideal image of the L2 writer they want to be—positively predicted their feedback monitoring and inquiry. However, having an ought-to L2 writing self—a minimal goal concerned with meeting expectations and obligations—did not predict the FSB variables. Zhan et al. (2023) and Zhang (2024) found similar positive paths from students' ideal L2 writing self to both feedback monitoring and inquiry. Zhang (2024) also found a weaker path from students' ought-to L2 writing self to feedback monitoring.

Other studies have shown that other competence-related variables mediated or moderated the relationship between motivational variables and FSB. For instance, Yao and Zhu (2024) found that even learners with a fixed mindset engaged in FSB if they enjoyed high levels of L2 proficiency. Those with a growth mindset, however, engaged in FSB regardless of their proficiency level. Zhan et al. (2023) found that FSB positively mediated the relationship between future L2 writing selves and L2 writing performance only for high-achieving students. However, the mediation effect was negative for mid-achieving students and non-significant for low-achieving students. These findings suggest that the students who have stronger feedback-seeking skills (Boggs & Manchón, 2023; Han & Hyland,

2015) or more effective use of self-regulation strategies (Xu, 2022; Xu & Wang, 2024) were more likely to engage in FSB effectively.

Teacher-related variables have also been shown to be important in learners' FSB. Researchers have found that learners' FSB is influenced by teachers' instructional style and rapport with students (Xu & Wang, 2023), the quality of teachers' feedback-related interactions with students (Xu, 2021), and learners' level of emotional comfort in seeking feedback from their teachers (Xu & Wang, 2024). Other studies have found that teachers' emotional, instrumental, and academic support can positively influence students' FSB (Zhang, 2024; Zhang & Jiang, 2025). Such factors can enhance students' relationships with their teachers and trust in their teachers' competence, thereby increasing students' engagement in FSB (Bitchener, 2017; Papi et al., 2020).

1.2. Teacher feedback and trust

Teacher-student relationship is defined as "the generalized interpersonal meaning students and teachers attach to their interactions with each other" (Wubbels et al., 2014, p. 364). These relationships are among the key contributors to student learning and motivation (Hattie, 2009) and have received increasing attention, especially with the emergence of positive psychology in L2 research. Research has shown that establishing a positive relationship can enhance the quality of classroom L2 instruction and interactions (Gkonou & Mercer, 2018), students' attitudes and beliefs about the course and the instructor (Sun & Shi, 2022), and L2-related emotions, such as enjoyment and engagement (Li, 2023), while reducing negative emotions, such as learner burnout (Li & Zhang, 2024). Having quality relationships with teachers can also increase learners' FSB in employment (Anseel et al., 2015), and educational contexts (Carless & Boud, 2018). Although teacher-student relationships have received increased attention in L2 writing research, the notion of trust, which is an important dimension of this relationship, remains an underexplored topic.

Trust can be defined as "the reliance on others' competence and their willingness to look after rather than harm what is entrusted to their care" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 548). Research reveals that teacher trust is an important component of effective feedback and the key to building and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships (Bayraktar et al., 2025). Bayraktar et al. (2025) suggested that students' trust in their teachers can be achieved or ruined by teachers' reactions to their work (see also Turner & Husman, 2009). Thus, feedback seems to be an important element of establishing trust and further enhancing students' FSB. Most reviews and studies on students' perceptions of effective feedback mention they want feedback that is "timely, personal, explicable, criteria-referenced, objective, and applicable to further improvement" (Bayraktar et al., 2025, p. 390). If feedback is ambiguous, students cannot know how to improve, and it could even lead students to mistrust their instructor (Troy et al., 2024). Fong et al. (2018) described students' perceptions of *constructive feedback* as 1) including information for improvement, and 2) being provided in a "respectful manner … that mentions the performance's strengths as well as weaknesses" (p. 239).

Despite its importance, trust has been neglected in L2 writing. In one study on feedback-seeking in oral L2 learning contexts, Mahbodi et al. (2025) found that teachers' competence-based trust positively predicted students' feedback monitoring and negatively predicted feedback inquiry, whereas affect-based trust positively predicted both FSB types. Such results, however, cannot be directly extended to L2 writing contexts, as corrective feedback on oral performance in the classroom is often spontaneous and public, whereas WCF can be provided privately and at any time after students write a text. These differences in the temporal and audience dimensions of the two types of feedback can result in distinct affective and cognitive orientations toward corrective feedback, a topic our study explored.

In summary, our review of the literature suggests that trust in teachers' feedback has two components that may affect students' FSB: a cognitive component encompassing perceptions of teacher competence and an affective component encompassing perceptions of teacher care (Lee & Schallert, 2016). To seek feedback on their L2 writing from teachers, students must trust that their teacher 1) has the competence to provide critical feedback, and 2) can provide critical feedback in ways that demonstrate respect and care and engender hope for future success. As students weigh the potential self-presentation costs of seeking instructors' critical feedback against the potential value of receiving it, they likely rely on their judgments of their teachers' competence-based and affect-based trustworthiness. In this study, we sought to determine how these two aspects of trust were associated with students' FSB and whether these relationships were mediated by their cost-benefit analyses.

1.3. Research questions

Following Mahbodi et al. (2025), we explored how students' perceptions of their teachers' trustworthiness (teacher trust) predicted students' FSB through the mediating roles of self-presentation costs and the value of feedback. Examining such mediation can help us understand how trust influences students' cost-benefit analyses, which, in turn, shape their FSB. The importance of such cost-benefit analyses has also been established in previous oral FSB studies, in which mindsets and achievement goals have been associated with the costs and benefits of FSB (e.g., Papi et al., 2019, 2021; Papi, 2021). Previous studies have also shown that teacher support is associated with lower self-presentation cost of FSB (Zhang, 2024; Zhang & Jiang, 2025). When the cost of feedback-seeking outweighs its value, it inhibits FSB (Zhou et al., 2023). Given the distinct nature of the L2 writing classroom, such cost-benefit analyses are expected to be associated with different types of trust and FSB. More specifically, given the less public and less immediate nature of WCF, we anticipated that students' affect-based trust would play a less important role in their FSB in L2 writing. Based on this review and the expectations, we formulated the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the relationship between students' perceptions of their teacher's trustworthiness (affect-based and competence-based teacher trust) and their FSB (feedback monitoring and inquiry) in L2 writing?

RQ2. How do students' self-presentation cost and feedback-value mediate the relationship between students' affect-based and

competence-based teacher trust and their FSB (feedback monitoring and inquiry) in L2 writing?

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants for this study included 128 undergraduate students enrolled in L2 writing courses at a major university in the United States (50 males, 76 females, and 2 responses missing). The students' ages ranged from 18 to 55 years (mean = 21.83), they were in different years of their studies, and from various majors. Most of the students were native speakers of English (N = 112), and they were taking writing classes in French (N = 75), Spanish (N = 19), Russian (N = 14), Chinese (N = 7), German (N = 7), and Japanese (N = 6). The length of their L2 learning experience varied from one to five years (mean = 3.57). The participants were enrolled in 2000-level (N = 44), 3000-level (N = 25), and 4000-level (N = 54) courses, which reflect the university's institutional classification of foreign language course levels and correspond approximately to intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced proficiency.

2.2. Instruments

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger project that used a 62-item questionnaire, including 10 demographic questions, 30 items measuring the six target variables, and the remaining items measuring variables not reported in this study. The first part of the questionnaire included items measuring the FSB subscales of feedback monitoring and feedback inquiry as well as self-presentation cost and feedback value subscales, which were developed by Papi et al. (2020). This section also included items measuring students' perceptions of their teachers' competence-based and affect-based trustworthiness, which were adapted from Mahbodi et al. (2025).

The FSB scales included five items to measure students' feedback monitoring and five items assessing feedback inquiry in the L2 writing context. Feedback monitoring items measured the degree of attention learners paid to the feedback they received on their L2 writing (e.g., *When I get my papers back, I read all of the comments carefully*). Feedback inquiry items measured learners' direct requests to their teachers for feedback on their L2 writing (e.g., *I ask my Spanish teachers to tell me how I can improve my Spanish writing*). Six items were included to assess the value of the feedback that students received from their teachers (e.g., *I find feedback on my Spanish writing to be useful*), and three items assessed the risk of students' self-presentation cost associated with seeking WCF (e.g., *It is embarrassing to ask my teacher for feedback on my Spanish writing*). To measure students' trust in their instructor, we employed the trust scale from Mahbodi et al. (2025), which was adapted to reflect the L2 writing context. This scale included four items measuring participants' competence-based trust, that is, trust in the teaching knowledge and competence of their teacher (e.g., *I trust my writing teacher's competence and teaching skills*) and seven items measuring affect-based trust, which represented the students' level of emotional trust in their teachers (e.g., *I can freely share my personal or academic challenges, goals, and dreams with my Spanish writing teacher*). All responses to the questionnaire items were measured on a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating *Strongly Disagree* and 6 indicating *Strongly Agree*.

The last part of the questionnaire was used to collect participants' demographic information, which included questions about their gender, age, first language (L1), university status (undergraduate or graduate), year of study, class level, major, and self-reported performance.

2.3. Procedures

After receiving approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board, we contacted the instructors of L2 writing courses, describing the study and asking if the instructors were interested in collaborating. Once we received confirmation from the instructors, we scheduled class visits to administer a paper questionnaire. Before taking part in the study, participants were given a consent form outlining the study's purpose and procedures; they were also informed of its voluntary nature and the anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data. To minimize the potential influence of the instructors' presence on students' responses, the instructors left the room while students were completing the questionnaires. Students took approximately 15 min to complete the questionnaire.

2.4. Data analysis

Guided by prior theoretical expectations and empirical studies, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the survey dimensions and the construct, discriminant, and convergent validity of teacher trust, cost-value, and FSB. Given the simple binary structure of the hypothesized models, we conducted Monte Carlo simulations (Muthén & Muthén, 2002) using the *Lavaan* package in the R program (Rosseel, 2012) on the trust, cost-value, and FSB models to examine the adequacy of our sample size for CFA. Monte Carlo simulations using the ML estimator with 1000 replications and a sample size of 128 indicated full convergence (100%) for all three models, with 100% (trust), 91.9% (cost-value), and 94.4% (FSB) of replications meeting the fit criteria. In addition, all the fit indices across the three models were excellent (CFI >.99, RMSEA <.023, SRMR <.042), further confirming that our sample size was sufficient for stable CFA estimation with minimal parameter bias (<.006).

To address the study's first research question on the relationship between teacher trust and FSB, we conducted multiple regression analyses with trust variables as predictors and FSB as the outcome variable. In addition, to answer the second research question, mediation analyses were performed using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (Version 5.0; Hayes, 2022) in SPSS 27, with indirect effects

estimated via 5000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. In addition, power analysis with G*Power 3.1 indicated the current sample size provided 80% power to detect at least a small-to-medium effect ($f^2 \approx .08$) at $\alpha = .05$, confirming that the sample size was adequate for these analyses. Finally, statistical significance was evaluated at an a priori alpha level of .05. As the regression and mediation models were theory-driven and specified a priori, no formal adjustment for multiple comparisons was applied.

2.5. Confirmatory factor analysis

To examine the factorial structure of the scales we used in the study, we conducted a series of CFAs using the *Lavaan* package in the R program (Rosseel, 2012). To ensure convergence, all models were estimated by maximum likelihood with up to 1000 iterations. We tested three sets of theoretically driven two-factor models, including a) a cost-value model, b) a trust model (i.e., affect-based trust, competence-based trust), and c) an FSB model (i.e., feedback monitoring, feedback inquiry). We first examined the hypothesized structure for each model and made revisions only when supported by empirical evidence (e.g., modification indices) and theoretical justification.

To evaluate model fit, we used multiple indices, including the chi-square test, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). According to Kline (2016), a smaller and non-significant chi-square (χ^2) value typically indicates better model fit. However, as χ^2 is often sensitive to sample size, additional fit indices were included to assess the model. As goodness-of-fit indices, CFI and TLI indicate acceptable model fit when the values exceed .90 (Byrne, 2010). In contrast, RMSEA and SRMR indicate acceptable fit when their values are below.08. In the following sections, we present the results of the three models individually, and the final model fit indices are summarized in Table 1. The results of the analyses for each model are presented in Appendix A.

2.6. The cost-value model

In the initial cost-value model, the CFA results demonstrated a mixed fit. Although some indices suggested acceptable fit (CFI =.942, TLI =.919, and SRMR =.066), the chi-square test was significant $\chi^2(26) = 51.67$, $p = .002$, and the RMSEA value of .088 slightly exceeded the acceptable limit of .08, 90% CI [.052,.123], suggesting potential misfit. After reviewing the factor loadings and modification indices, two items were removed to improve model fit. Item 7 (*I would like to get more feedback on what would help me to improve my Spanish writing*) was deleted because the standardized loading was smaller than.5. Additionally, to ensure unique indicators for each variable, item 2 (*It is important to me to receive feedback on my Spanish writing*) was removed because the modification index (MI = 8.85) suggested a cross-loading onto the cost factor. The revised model, presented in Fig. 1, showed improved overall fit, with indices falling within the acceptable-to-good range.

2.7. The trust model

The CFA results of the initial trust model revealed poor goodness-of-fit indices. Although the SRMR value of .067 indicated an acceptable fit, the values of $\chi^2(43) = 117.99$, $p < .001$, CFI = .894, TLI = .864, and RMSEA = .117, 90% CI [.092, .142] indicated that the initial model should be revised. To address the issues in model fit, we revised the items based on the suggested modification indices. The first four modification indices suggested adding error covariance or cross-loading related to item 15 (*I can talk freely to my ESL writing teacher about difficulties I am having at school, and I know that she/he will be willing to listen.*). Also conceptually, this item overlaps with items 10 and 40. Thus, we removed the item to improve discriminant validity and avoid cross-loading. The alternative model demonstrated improved fit with CFI = .941, TLI = .922, and SRMR = .052, indicating acceptable fit. However, the chi-square test was significant $\chi^2(34) = 70.31$, $p < .001$, and the RMSEA value of .091 was above acceptable limit of.08, 90% CI [.061, .122]. The modification index (MI = 7.814) from the alternative model suggested adding an error covariance between items 25 and 40 to improve the fit, as both items tap into the teachers' responsiveness to students' concerns. After adding the covariance, the final model (Fig. 2) demonstrated an acceptable fit.

2.8. The feedback-seeking behavior model

The CFA results of the initial FSB model showed that most goodness-of-fit indices were below the accepted range. Although the SRMR value of .06 indicated an acceptable fit, the overall results of CFA showed a poor fit of the data, $\chi^2(34) = 133.28$, $p < .001$, CFI

Table 1
Overall Fit Indices for Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Model:	χ^2	*p*	*df*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR
Cost-Value	23.17	.040	13	.967	.947	.078 [.017,.129]	.055
Teacher Trust	62.78	.001	33	.952	.934	.084 [.052,.115]	.049
FSB	29.22	.046	18	.983	.974	.070 [.010,.114]	.031

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

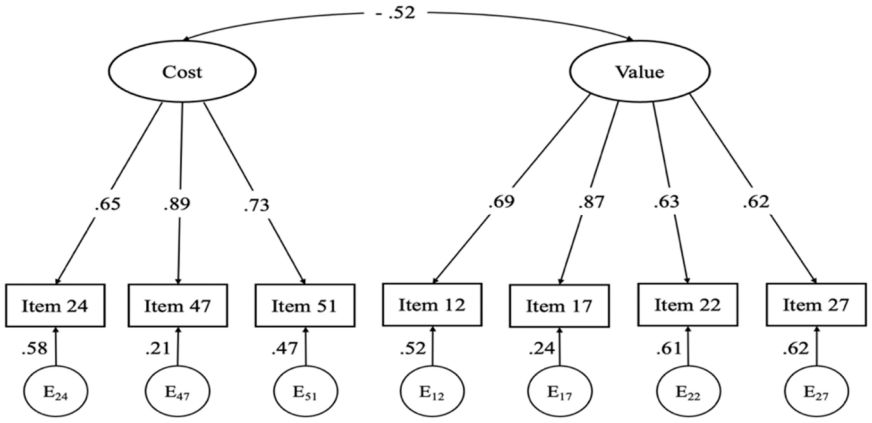

Fig. 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Cost-Value Model.

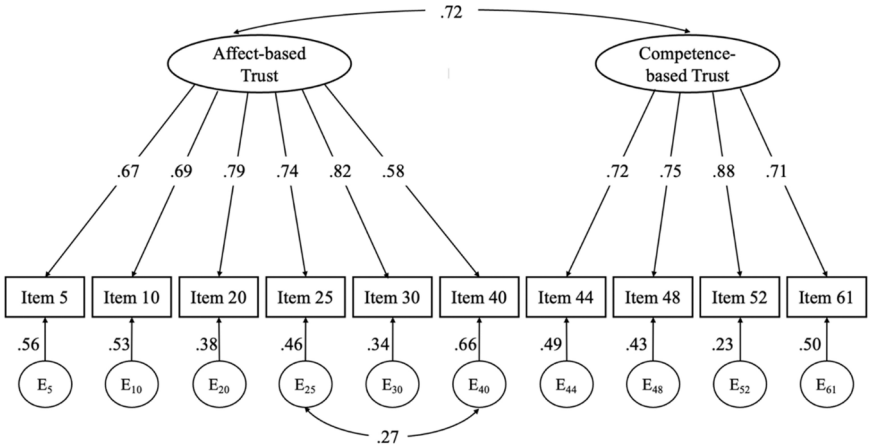

Fig. 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Trust Model.

= .889, TLI = .853, and RMSEA = .151, 90% CI [.125, .178]. To improve the model fit, we removed items 13 and 56 and added an error covariance between items 50 and 54, guided by modification indices and theoretical considerations. Specifically, item 13 (*I ask my Spanish teacher to tell me what I do wrong in my Spanish writing*), associated with the feedback inquiry, exhibited a high modification index value of 16.21, indicating a significant potential cross-loading onto feedback monitoring. To ensure each factor was unique, we

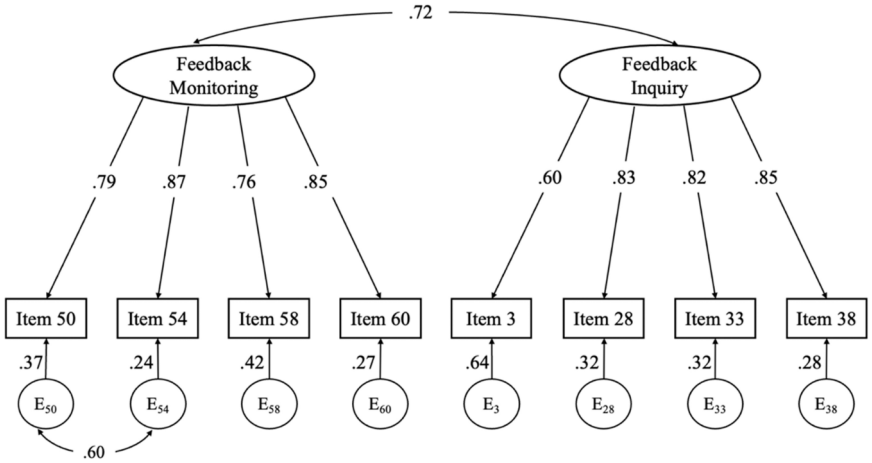

Fig. 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Feedback Seeking Behavior Model.

removed this item. Furthermore, item 56 (*When my Spanish teachers point out mistakes in my writing, I try not to make them again*) had the lowest standardized loading (.57) among the indicators. Conceptually, the part about "not to make them again" can be captured by item 60, which focuses on learning from mistakes. Thus, we removed this item. Finally, the modification indices suggested that co-varying the error variances for items 50 and 54 would improve the model fit. This modification is theoretically appropriate as both items assessed a similar aspect—students' attentiveness to learn from feedback. The revised model, presented in Fig. 3, showed an overall good fit, with an acceptable RMSEA.

2.9. Reliability and validity of the scales

The values of Cronbach's Alpha for all used scales (Table 2) were above .78, suggesting good internal consistency. Additionally, McDonald's Omega demonstrated good to excellent reliability with values ranging between. 81–.93. The subscale reliabilities, ranging from .80 to .89, further supported good internal consistency of the used scales. Taken together, all three indicators supported the internal consistency and the overall reliability of the scales.

The average variance extracted (AVE) for all scales ranged from .50 to .67 (Table 2), indicating convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, discriminant validity was supported, as the AVE for each factor was larger than its squared correlation with the other factors in its model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). However, for the trust model, the AVE for competence-based trust was larger than the squared correlation between affect-based and competence-based trust (r^2 =.51), whereas the AVE for affect-based trust was almost identical to its squared correlation, providing only marginal support for discriminant validity between the two trust factors.

3. Results

3.1. Predictors of FSB

In response to the first research question (RQ1: What is the relationship between students' perceptions of their teacher's trustworthiness (affect-based and competence-based teacher trust) and their FSB (feedback monitoring and inquiry) in L2 writing?), we performed a series of regression analyses using the mean scores that were computed based on the CFA results. The first set of regression analyses focused on feedback monitoring as the dependent variable (Table 3). In Model 1, with affect-based trust and competence-based trust entered as predictors, $F(2, 125) = 19.43$, $p < .001$, which accounted for 24% of the variance in feedback monitoring (R^2 =.24), competence-based trust was the only significant predictor, β = .39, $p < .001$. Model 2, with cost and value as predictors, was also statistically significant, $F(2, 125) = 64.22$, $p < .001$, accounting for 51% of the variance in feedback monitoring ($R^2 = .51$). Both cost and value emerged as significant predictors. Cost negatively predicted monitoring ($\beta = -.19$, $p = .005$), whereas value positively predicted monitoring (β =.62, $p < .001$).

For the second set of regression analyses, feedback inquiry served as the dependent variable (Table 4). Model 3 with affect-based trust and competence-based trust as predictors, was statistically significant, $F(2, 125) = 30.57$, $p < .001$, accounting for 33% of the variance ($R^2 = .33$). Affect-based trust emerged as the only significant predictor, $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$. In Model 4, with cost and value as predictors, the overall regression model was significant, $F(2, 125) = 28.68$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .31$, predicting 31% of the variance in feedback inquiry. In this analysis, value was the only significant predictor, $\beta = .55$, $p < .001$.

3.2. Predictors of cost and value

The third set of regression analyses examined perceived value as the dependent variable (Table 5). Model 5, which included affect-based trust and competence-based trust as predictors, was statistically significant, $F(2, 125) = 18.87$, $p < .001$, accounting for 23% of the variance in perceived value ($R^2 = .23$). Competence-based trust positively predicted perceived value, $\beta = .38$, $p < .001$, whereas affect-based trust was not a significant predictor.

Finally, in Model 6 with cost as the outcome variable, the overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 125) = 38.74$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$, explaining 38% of the variance in perceived cost (Table 6). Competence-based trust negatively predicted perceived cost ($\beta = -.70$, $p < .001$), whereas affect-based trust was not a significant predictor.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics, Average Variance Extracted, and Intercorrelations.

	M(SD)	*α*	*ω*	CR	AVE	*r*	r^2
Cost	1.68 (.85)	.80	.81	.80	.58	-.52	.27
Value	5.17 (.74)	.78	.84	.80	.50		
Affect-based Trust	4.77 (.93)	.85	.91	.86	.51	.72	.51
Competence-based Trust	5.36 (.80)	.83	.87	.85	.59		
Feedback Monitoring	5.00 (1.00)	.90	.93	.89	.67	.72	.52
Feedback Inquiry	4.35 (1.14)	.86	.89	.86	.61		

Note. α = Cronbach alpha, ω = McDonald's omega, CR = composite reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Table 3
Multiple Regression Results with Feedback Monitoring as Outcome Variable.

	B	SE	Beta	*t*	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Model 1							
(Constant)	1.67	.54		3.07**	[.59, 2.73]		
Affect-based Trust	.15	.10	.14	1.47	[-.05, .35]		
Competence-based Trust	.49	.12	.39	4.10***	[.25, .72]	.67	1.50
Model 2							
(Constant)	1.01	.54		1.87	[-.06, 2.08]		
Cost	-.23	.08	-.19	−2.83**	[-.38, −.07]		
Value	.84	.09	.62	9.20***	[.66, 1.03]	.87	1.15

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Results with Feedback Inquiry as Outcome Variable.

	B	SE	Beta	*t*	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Model 3							
(Constant)	.37	.58		.64	[-.77, 1.52]		
Affect-based Trust	.56	.11	.46	5.08***	[.34, .78]	.67	1.50
Competence-based Trust	.25	.13	.17	1.93	[-.01, .50]		
Model 4							
(Constant)	-.02	.73		-.03	[−1.46, 1.41]		
Cost	-.03	.11	-.02	-.29	[-.24, .18]	.87	1.15
Value	.86	.12	.55	6.95***	[.61, 1.10]		

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Multiple Regression Results with Value as Outcome Variable.

	B	SE	Beta	*t*	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Model 5							
(Constant)	2.75	.40		6.89***	[1.96, 3.54]		
Affect-based Trust	.12	.08	.15	1.59	[-.03, .27]	.67	1.50
Competence-based Trust	.35	.09	.38	3.93***	[.17, .52]		

*** $p < .001$.

4. Mediation analysis

In response to the second research question (RQ2: How do students' self-presentation costs and feedback value mediate the relationship between students' affect-based and competence-based teacher trust and their FSB (feedback monitoring and inquiry) in L2 writing?), we conducted a series of mediation analyses using 5000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples in SPSS. The alternative trust dimension was included as a covariate in all models. The results for each trust dimension are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

4.1. Competence-based trust

With feedback monitoring as the outcome variable (Table 7), competence-based trust positively predicted perceived value ($b =$

Table 6
Multiple Regression Results with Cost as Outcome Variable.

	B	*SE*	Beta	*t*	95% CI	Tolerance	VIF
Model 6							
(Constant)	4.90	.41		11.90***	[4.08, 5.71]		
Affect-based Trust	.15	.08	.17	1.95	[-.001, .31]	.67	1.50
Competence-based Trust	-.74	.09	-.70	−8.14***	[-.92, −.56]		

*** $p < .001$.

.333, $p < .001$), which in turn positively predicted monitoring ($b = .746$, $p < .001$). In addition, the bootstrapped indirect effect of competence-based trust on monitoring via perceived value was significant (indirect effect = .25, 95% CI [.12, .48]), suggesting partial mediation. Competence-based trust also negatively predicted cost ($b = -.73$, $p < .001$), and cost negatively predicted monitoring ($b = -.22$, $p = .037$). However, the bootstrapped indirect effect of competence-based trust on monitoring via cost was not statistically significant (95% CI [−.01, .39]), suggesting no mediation via cost.

With feedback inquiry as the outcome variable, competence-based trust significantly predicted higher perceived value ($b = .333$, $p < .001$), which, in turn, significantly predicted inquiry ($b = .679$, $p < .001$). In addition, the indirect effect was significant (indirect effect =.226, 95% CI [.102, .431]), indicating full mediation. Competence-based trust also significantly predicted lower perceived cost ($b = -.732$, $p < .001$). However, cost did not significantly predict inquiry ($b = -.025$, $p = .839$), and the indirect effect was not significant (indirect effect = .018, 95% CI [−.152, .197]), as the confidence interval included zero.

In sum, competence-based trust influenced feedback monitoring and inquiry primarily through learners' perceived value of feedback, with value partially mediating its effect on monitoring and fully mediating its effect on inquiry, whereas perceived cost did not serve as a significant mediator.

4.2. *Affect-based trust*

As presented in Table 8, affect-based trust did not predict value (b =.069, $p = .427$) or monitoring ($b = .169$, $p = .110$), and its indirect effect on monitoring via value was not significant (indirect effect =.051, 95% CI [−.068,.211]), suggesting no mediation. However, it positively predicted cost ($b = .26$, $p = .004$), and higher perceived cost was associated with lower monitoring ($b = -.22$, $p = .037$). The indirect effect was small and barely significant (indirect effect = −.06, 95% CI [−.18, −.003]), suggesting a weak negative mediation pathway.

With inquiry as the outcome variable, affect-based trust also did not significantly predict perceived value (b =.069, $p = .427$), and the bootstrapped indirect effect on inquiry via perceived value was not statistically significant (indirect effect = .047, 95% CI [−.061, .208]). This indicates that value did not mediate the relationship between affect-based trust and feedback inquiry. Affect-based trust significantly predicted higher perceived cost ($b = .255$, $p = .004$). However, cost did not significantly predict inquiry ($b = -.025$, $p = .839$), and the bootstrapped indirect effect of affect-based trust on inquiry via cost was not statistically significant (indirect effect = −.006, 95% CI [−.079, .046]). Therefore, there was no mediation.

In sum, affect-based trust only showed a direct effect on feedback inquiry and did not operate through perceived value or cost. Instead, it showed only a small, negative indirect association with monitoring via perceived cost.

5. Discussion

The first research question asked whether teacher trust predicted students' FSB, and the second research question investigated whether these relationships were mediated by the self-presentation costs and the value of feedback. To present a clear and coherent discussion of the results, this section first presents the regression and mediation results related to competence-based trust, followed by those related to affect-based trust.

6. Competence-based trust

Competence-based trust positively and strongly predicted feedback monitoring. Although competence-based trust was negatively associated with cost, perceived cost did not significantly mediate its relationship with monitoring. In addition, competence-based trust did not directly predict feedback inquiry, but it did so through the positive mediation of value. In other words, a higher value associated with WCF leads students to engage in both monitoring and inquiry to seek out teachers perceived as competent. The lower self-presentation cost students associate with FSB from competent teachers also contributes to students' monitoring of the WCF they receive from teachers; however, this cost does not influence their tendency to ask for feedback.

These results suggest that trust in L2 writing teachers' competence can lead to students' greater value of the WCF, which, in turn, shapes their FSB. That is, students who trust their teachers' L2 writing and instructional competence tend to engage in both feedback monitoring and inquiry because they value their teachers' feedback and are not discouraged by the fear of embarrassment or negative evaluation (self-presentation costs). It seems that the learning value of feedback is the main driver of these students' direct and genuine requests for it. As confirmed by the relatively high mean for feedback monitoring and inquiry (Appendix A), these students view their teachers as competent and value the WCF they can receive from them. They not only approach the teacher to ask for it, but also pay close attention, engage with it, deeply process it, and try to learn from the feedback provided (Papi et al., 2020). In addition, when

Table 7
Bootstrapped Mediation Models with Competence-based Trust as Predictor (N = 128).

Outcome Variable	Mediator	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	Mediation
Monitoring	Value	.249	.087	[.120, .477]	Partial
Monitoring	Cost	.161	.100	[-.007, .390]	No
Inquiry	Value	.226	.085	[.102, .431]	Full
Inquiry	Cost	.018	.088	[-.152, .197]	No

Note. Affect-based Trust dimension was included as a covariate in each model. Mediation is supported when the 95% CI does not include zero.

Table 8
Bootstrapped Mediation Models with Affect-based Trust as Predictor (N = 128).

Outcome Variable	Mediator	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	Mediation
Monitoring	Value	.051	.069	[-.068, .211]	No
Monitoring	Cost	−.056	.039	[-.175, −.003]	Yes (small)
Inquiry	Value	.047	.066	[-.061, .208]	No
Inquiry	Cost	−.006	.030	[-.079, .046]	No

Note. Competence-based Trust dimension was included as a covariate in each model. Mediation is supported when the 95% CI does not include zero.

students are confident in their teachers' professional and instructional abilities, they are less concerned about the self-presentation cost of FSB. The self-presentation cost was not associated with feedback inquiry. This suggests that when students trust their teachers' competence, students' perceived value of WCF is the main reason for asking for feedback, and the self-presentation cost does not play an important role. In other words, the students seem to extend the view of the teacher as professionally competent to someone they should not be afraid of asking for feedback and whom they can trust not to hurt their feelings while doing so. The strong correlation between affect-based and competence-based trust ($r = .72$) supports this explanation.

Similar results were found by Mahbodi et al. (2025) in the context of oral FSB. That is, competence-based trust positively predicted students' feedback monitoring through the mediation of value (positively) and self-presentation cost (negatively). However, whereas competence-trust weakly and negatively predicted feedback inquiry, it positively predicted it through the mediation of value. It seems that, in the context of oral and written FSB, the same mechanisms are at play. Students who trust their teachers' instructional competence and value the feedback they provide are more likely to monitor and use it. Conversely, they do not engage in feedback inquiry when they believe they have already received sufficient feedback.

7. Affect-based trust

Affect-based trust did not predict students' feedback monitoring, but it did predict feedback inquiry strongly and positively, in contrast with competence-based trust. In addition, affect-based trust did not predict either the cost or the value of feedback seeking, and neither cost nor value mediated its relationships with feedback monitoring or inquiry. These results suggest that students who trust their teachers as people and have a strong emotional connection with them tend to approach their teachers more often and ask for their feedback more directly. The effort, however, does not appear to be strongly driven by the perceived value of the teacher's feedback, nor by the self-presentation cost of it. The lack of mediation by value may imply that approaching a teacher for feedback may not necessarily be a feedback-seeking strategy and might instead be for secondary motives such as building a relationship with the teacher, making a good impression on them, or learning about their performance expectations (Mahbodi et al., 2025; Papi et al., 2019, 2020). The small mediation of the relationship between affect-based trust and feedback monitoring by cost suggests that students with a good relationship with their teachers may be even more concerned with the self-presentation cost associated with receiving feedback. One possible explanation is that students who emotionally trust their teacher may feel they have more to lose in terms of face or relational standing. This heightened sensitivity to self-presentation cost may, in turn, reduce their engagement in feedback monitoring.

In a similar study on oral corrective feedback, Mahbodi et al. (2025) found that self-presentation cost negatively mediated the path from affect-based trust to feedback monitoring, but the mediation was much stronger. The difference in the size of the mediation could be attributed to differences in the context of the two studies. Oral production errors are often corrected by the teacher immediately and publicly—such immediate, on-the-spot, and public correction may induce negative thoughts and emotions in students, which qualify as a self-presentation cost and can, in turn, harm students' feedback monitoring. The high cost of oral correction in public spaces can increase the emotional cost of FSB, thereby reducing students' engagement with the feedback. L2 writing, however, does not have the same temporal urgency or publicity. That might be why some of the students interviewed by Mahbodi et al. (2025) characterized affect-based trust as a dealbreaker. For instance, one of the interviewees from that study mentioned that unfriendly teachers "make it very difficult to learn because they are very cold or generally dismissive if a student has a question" (p. 17). In contrast to oral interaction, students' written products are commonly documented and shared privately with students. This level of privacy reduces the self-presentation cost of FSB, though it may not affect the perceived value of feedback. In this sense, affect-based trust may play a comparatively less central role in FSB in L2 writing than in L2 speaking, where communicative performance is more immediate and publicly noticeable, and therefore, more emotionally demanding.

8. General discussion

In sum, these results highlight the importance of students' perceptions of their teachers' trustworthiness in shaping their FSB. Students who trust their teachers' professional competence, value the WCF they receive from them, ask for it, and try to pay attention to and use the feedback they receive to improve their L2 writing. These results align with previous studies in employment settings, showing that trust in the supervisor is associated with the employee's enhanced FSB (Choi et al., 2014; McAllister, 1995). They also resonate with Bitchener's (2017) argument regarding the connection between student-teacher relationships and learners' engagement with feedback:

> Learners who have a positive attitude toward their teacher and respect their knowledge and feedback decisions may be more responsive to the feedback delivery choices that their teacher makes (e.g., about what to focus on, when to provide the feedback,

and the types of feedback to be employed) than those who, for one reason or another, do not respect their teacher or the decisions that are made about giving written CF. Learners in the first category may be more likely to attend to and process the feedback than those in the second category, who may refuse to respond to feedback when it is provided. (p. 137)

In our study, students' competence-based trust seemed closely aligned with their respect for their teacher's knowledge and feedback decisions, and their affect-based trust appeared related to their positive attitudes toward their teacher. Affect-based trust marginally reduced feedback monitoring by enhancing the self-presentation cost, and it directly increased feedback inquiry. As discussed above, since feedback inquiry may serve different functions, we suspect that affect-based trust may not be sufficient to enhance students' FSB in L2 writing. In contrast, competence-based trust may play a more critical role in supporting FSB, primarily operating through perceived feedback value to promote both monitoring and inquiry. This does not suggest that affect-based trust is unimportant in L2 writing. Rather, our findings suggest that the two trust dimensions contribute in distinct ways to students' FSB (Anseel et al., 2015; Carless & Boud, 2018), and by extension, the effectiveness of WCF (e.g., Papi et al., 2024). This argument aligns with previous studies in the field of SLA, which have also highlighted the importance of teacher-student relationships in the quality of instructional experiences for both learners (Gkonou & Mercer, 2018; Li, 2023; Sun & Shi, 2022) and teachers (Miller & Gkonou, 2018). For instance, in a case study, Liu et al. (2022) found that the teacher gave more WCF to students they approved of than to those they disapproved of.

9. Pedagogical implications

Our findings suggest that L2 writing instructors should actively enhance their instructional knowledge and feedback practice by providing high-quality and individualized WCF and delivering it in a way that cultivates trust in their professional expertise. Such trust can facilitate students' engagement in seeking and using their teacher's WCF. Emotional trust can be enhanced by establishing rapport, showing care, support, and empathy, being approachable and sensitive, and communicating respectfully. This emotional connection can free students' minds from worries about negative judgments or insensitive comments and instead focus on the content of the WCF provided. Effective feedback includes both specific information for improvement and a positive emotional tone; otherwise, students may exhibit maladaptive responses, including a lack of engagement with corrective feedback. In addition, our results suggest that an emotional connection can encourage students to reach out and request additional feedback and support when needed. Although feedback inquiries may not always be used for learning, they can still serve as an opportunity for the teacher to enhance rapport and build emotional connection with students.

Given that perceived feedback value and self-presentation cost were associated with FSBs, teachers may enhance WCF's perceived value by explicitly connecting it to students' L2 writing needs, goals, and interests. Instructors can encourage students to reflect on, process, and assess how the feedback can improve their written products and skills, thereby enhancing the value of WCF. Given that self-presentation costs were negatively associated with feedback monitoring, teachers may help reduce these costs by normalizing feedback-seeking in the classroom, framing it as an integral part of the learning process, and creating structured opportunities to discuss and clarify feedback. Finally, teacher training programs may benefit from supporting instructors in fostering both affective and competence-based trust with their students.

10. Limitations and future directions

Despite the valuable insights this study offers on the role of trust in student FSB in L2 writing, five limitations need to be acknowledged and addressed in future studies. First, we relied solely on students' questionnaire data, which does not provide in-depth insights into their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings regarding their teachers. Future studies can complement these data by using qualitative methods such as interviews, reflective journals, observations, teachers' reports, or analyses of teacher-student interactions. Our study was cross-sectional, which does not allow for causal inference. Using longitudinal designs or experimental studies to explore how establishing trust influences learners' FSB can provide insights into the causal relationships between these variables. Second, affect-based trust and competence-based trust showed overlap, suggesting issues with their discriminant validity. Future studies can modify some items to better distinguish the competence and affective dimensions of teacher trust. Third, although we collected data from different class levels, we did not measure learners' L2 proficiency (e.g., through standardized tests or self-ratings), nor did we examine its potential role in the analyses. Future research can explore how proficiency may influence teacher trust and its relationship with FSB. Fourth, our small sample size ($N = 128$) did not allow for testing a full structural model incorporating all variables simultaneously (e.g., SEM or Path Analysis) and limited our generalizability to other socio-educational contexts. Future studies with larger samples can provide more reliable answers to similar research questions. Additionally, replicating the study across diverse cultural, educational, and linguistic contexts can yield novel insights into trust and its relationship with learners' behaviors. Finally, the scope of the research was limited to trust, and we did not examine its antecedents nor its direct link to students' L2 writing achievement. Future studies can explore trust as a dependent variable and examine how individual, instructional, and socio-cultural factors may influence students' trust in their teachers. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore whether teacher trust can directly influence L2 writing performance or achievement, or indirectly through its impact on learners' FSB.

11. Conclusions

This study highlights the importance of trust—as an underexplored topic in the field of L2 writing—for understanding learners' FSB. In addition, the findings suggest the distinct yet complementary roles of students' competence-based and affect-based teacher

trust in shaping their FSB in L2 writing. More specifically, competence-based trust emerged as the central driver of students' perceived value of WCF and the self-presentation costs of feedback-seeking, which, in turn, shaped students' feedback monitoring and inquiry (Gu, 2025; Papi et al., 2019, 2020). The results suggest that students who trust in their teachers' professional competence are more likely to value the WCF they receive from them, are less concerned about the negative emotional consequences of FSB and engage in more FSB. By contrast, affect-based trust only directly predicted feedback inquiry, and it was not through increasing the value of WCF or minimizing the image cost of FSB, suggesting that students who are emotionally closer to their teachers may not necessarily engage with their WCF and use feedback inquiry as a strategy for relational and impression management purposes. Yet, affect-based trust remains an important dimension of teacher-student relationships, and its absence can increase the cost of FSB and harm teachers' instructional effectiveness, including but not limited to their feedback practices (Bitchener, 2017; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Papi et al., 2019, 2020).

Overall, these findings advance research on FSB in L2 writing by underscoring the importance of students' affect-based and competence-based trust as two dimensions of perceived teacher trustworthiness. These findings suggest that cultivating instructional competence and emotional connections with students may be key to promoting effective WCF practice. In addition, this study uncovered the motivational mechanisms underlying how students' competence-based and affect-based perceptions of their teachers shape their FSB. Specifically, this study outlines how these feelings of trust affect students' cost-benefit analyses, which in turn shape their proactive engagement in FSB in L2 writing classrooms.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Wenting Song: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Formal analysis. **Hadya Soliman:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. **Mahshid Mahbodi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Anna Yarbrough:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Mostafa Papi:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jeannine Turner:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Conflict of Interest

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Appendix A

Final Questionnaire Scales

Cost

24. My (L2) teacher would think poorly of me if I asked for feedback on my (L2) writing.
47. It is not a good idea to ask my (L2) teacher for feedback on my writing; he/she might think I am incompetent.
51. It is embarrassing to ask my teacher for feedback on my (L2) writing.

Value

12. I find feedback on my (L2) writing to be useful.
17. It is important for me to receive feedback on different aspects of my writing (grammar, content, punctuation, etc.).
22. I would like to get more feedback on the strategies and practices I can use to become more proficient in my (L2) writing
27. Feedback on my (L2) writing can help me become a better (L2) writer.

Affect-based Trust

5. I can freely share my ideas, feelings, and concerns about the class with my ESL writing teacher.
10. I can freely share my personal or academic challenges, goals, and dreams with my ESL writing teacher.
20. I would miss my ESL writing teacher if I transferred to another school.
25. If I share my problems with my ESL writing teacher, I know she/he will respond in a supportive way.
30. I feel that my ESL writing teacher really cares about his/her students as individuals.
40. I can easily share my personal problems with my ESL writing teacher.

Competence-based Trust

44. My ESL writing teacher is both professional and dedicated.
48. I trust my ESL writing teacher's competence and teaching skills.
52. I can rely on my ESL writing teacher to make my learning experience as productive as possible.
61. People who know my ESL writing teacher consider him/her to be a reliable and effective teacher.

Feedback Monitoring

50. When I get my papers back, I read all of the comments carefully.
54. I pay close attention when my (L2) teachers correct my writing mistakes.
58. I try to remember my (L2) teachers' comments on my writing mistakes.
60. I try to learn from my teachers' comments on my writing problems.

Feedback Inquiry

3. When I do not understand my teacher's comments on my writing, I ask her/him to clarify.
28. I ask my (L2) teachers to tell me how I can improve my (L2) writing.

33. I ask my (L2) teachers to point out my writing weaknesses.
38. I ask my (L2) teachers to show me strategies to improve my writing.

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