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# The Role of Feedback on School Performance

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## **ABSTRACT**

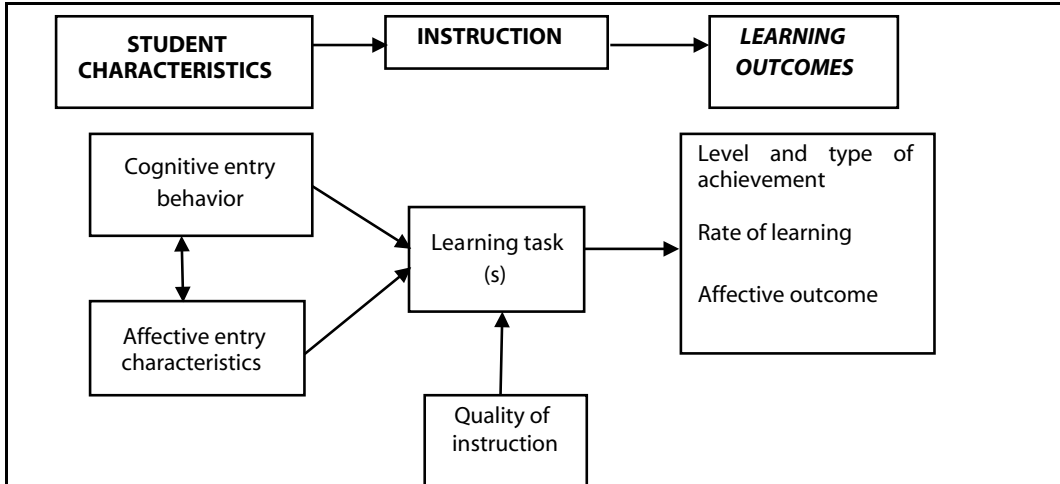
*This study aims at investigating the role of feedback on school performance. A total of 444 respondents including 217 males and 227 females were sampled from twelve secondary schools in Dodoma region in Tanzania. In the sample, 218 respondents were drawn from the group of high performing schools and 226 from the group of low performing schools in the regional ranking list of school performance in the Form Four National Examinations. The comparison between the two groups was made based on the extent to which the component of feedback was given in schools. Data were collected using questionnaire which assessed whether feedback was given in schools. The comparison also focused on completion of the planned topics, administering quizzes and tests, timely provision of performance feedback, correction of the performance feedback, re-writing of the exercises or tests after correction of performance feedback and re-marking of the re-written exercise or tests. Data were descriptively analysed to obtain frequencies and percentages for each group. The findings revealed that about 35.4 percent of students from the group of low performing schools reported a maximum of 57.14 percent of unfinished topics as opposed to 17.4 percent from their counterparts the high performing schools who reported the same proportion of unfinished topics. Therefore, it was concluded that failure to complete topics as per the syllabus and feedback provision are among the determinants of school performance. These findings have theoretical and practical implications for future research. The paper recommends that teachers should stick to their professional responsibilities and ensure completion of topics and timely provision of feedback to students.*

**Key words:** School performance, feedback, performance feedback, timely feedback

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Previous studies on the determinants of school performance identified communication, learning facilities, guidance and family stress (Mushtaq and Khan, 2012); students' divergent, convergent thinking, and metacognitive thinking, and teachers' ability to foster divergent, convergent and metacognitive thinking (Joshua, 2016) as determining factors of school performance. Other factors include students' self-efficacy and use of teachers' feedback (Kyaruzi, 2019). Addressing school performance, the theory of school learning as expounded in Bloom (1976) proposes some variables that account for much of the variations in school learning. One of the dual basic assumptions underlying this theory is that the history of the learner is at the core of school learning; and the other is the possibility of modifying the characteristics of the learner during instruction. The theory of school learning deals with three major variables namely, students' characteristics, instruction, and learning outcomes. According to Bloom, two major levels of student's characteristics that determine student's learning are cognitive entry behaviours and affective entry characteristics. Cognitive entry behaviours refer to the prerequisite learning required for the learning tasks on which instruction is to be provided. Affective characteristics refer to the student's motivation to learn new learning tasks. The instruction variables are defined in the theory as the quality of instruction. This is the extent to which the cues, practice, and reinforcements of the learning process are appropriate to the needs of the learner. The next paragraph describes how these variables relate to students' difference in learning.

According to the theory, cognitive entry behaviours, affective entry characteristics, and the quality of instruction determine the nature of learning outcomes. The said learning outcomes are the level and type of achievement, rate of learning, and affective outcomes. This means that, given favourable learner's entry characteristics and quality of instruction, all learning outcomes are likely to be at a high or positive level, leading to minimal variation in the learning outcomes including academic performance. Figure 2.2 illustrates the constructs of the theory of school learning.

**Figure 2.2: Major Variables in the Theory of School Learning**

**Source:** Bloom (1976)

Briefly, three interdependent variables focused in this theory include the extent to which a student has already learned the basic prerequisites for the learning to be accomplished; the extent to which a student is motivated to engage in the learning process; and the extent to which the instruction to be given is appropriate to the learner. On the other hand, the variable quality of instruction is in one way or another related to both what teachers can do to help students succeed in school learning and teachers' ability to foster creative and metacognitive thinking in the classroom. According to the theory of school learning, quality of instruction mediates the relationship between learners' cognitive entry behaviour and academic performance. The theory defines the construct quality of instruction as being comprising of cues, reinforcements, participation, feedback, and correctives of the mistakes done by the learners (Bloom, 1976).

Defining these components, Bloom has these to say: quality of instruction ... has to do with the cues or directions provided to the learner, the participation of the learner in learning activity (covert or overt), and the reinforcement which the learner secures in some relation to the learning. Because much of school instruction is group instruction and because any attempt at group instruction is fraught with error and difficulty, a feedback and corrective system must be also included in the quality of instruction (p.115).

In Bloom's theory of school learning, the term feedback refers to short formative tests at the end of each lesson which may indicate what the student has learned and what the student still needs to learn to attain mastery of the learning objectives. The term correctives on the other hand, refers to suggestions as to what each student should review in the original or new instructional materials, special explanations and additional workbooks and practice exercises. These can also include additional instruction on particular ideas missed by the student which should be frequently reviewed. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) define feedback as actions taken by the teachers to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of students' task performance. In the similar manner, Hattie (2011) conceptualized feedback as information provided by the teacher, peer, book, parent, self, or experience about the aspects of one's performance or understanding. In this article, the term feedback is in line with the definitions by both Kluger and DeNisi (1996) and Hattie (2011). It specifically involves teachers' provision of informative results of short formative classroom tests at the beginning of the term before starting instructions, at the end of each lesson, weekly and monthly tests, provision of corrective instructions, and remarking (scoring) students' mistakes.

This theory informed the formulation of specific objectives of this study. This is because the determinant variables of specific objectives of the present study were deduced from the feedback construct of the theory. Thus, the main question was whether or not there would be differences between the students from the group of schools ranked as high performing and those from the group of schools ranked as low performing in terms of feedback. feedback in this respect comprise completion of the planned topics, administering quizzes and tests, timely provision of performance feedback, correction of the performance feedback, re-writing the exercise or tests after correction of the performance feedback and re-marking the re-written exercise or tests. This question has been thoroughly addressed in this work.

The reviewed literatures on the role of feedback on school performance have indicated that feedback is one of the important variables in explaining school performance. However, it seems that it is not the feedback alone, but rather interpretation and utilization of such information in correcting past mistakes in learning and performance. For example, Oettingen, Marquardt and Gollwitzer (2012) instructed their participants to receive positive or moderated bogus feedback on their creative potential and then engaged in groups of mental contrasting, indulging in the desired future, dwelling on the present reality or

irrelevant contrasting with respect to taking a creative test. Their findings revealed that mental contrasting participants who received positive feedback performed better than those who received moderate feedback. They also performed better than the indulging, dwelling, and irrelevant contrasting participants, regardless of the feedback received. These authors concluded that mental contrasting of a desired future with present reality transforms positive feedback on creative potential into successful performance.

Hattie (2011) observes that given the importance of feedback, the teacher needs to direct it at the right level to help students comprehend, engage, or develop effective strategies to process information intended to be learned. This is not just a matter of providing feedback, but rather the feedback should be timely, clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge and provide logical connections. Other researchers have debated on whether the feedback should be immediate or delayed. On the one hand there are studies that emphasise on immediacy of feedback for successful performance while some have suggested reasoning the timing for feedback because sometimes negative feedback might be harmful if provided immediately than if it is delayed (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). To them (Ibid.), good feedback should be given close to the act of learning production so as to facilitate development of self-assessment in learning; deliver sufficient information about students' learning; encourage dialogue around learning by teachers and peers, positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; provides opportunities to rectify mistakes; and provide information to teachers that might help to improve teaching. In the same vein, having analysed studies from 240 million students on the role of feedback on school achievement, Hattie (2011) ranks feedback as among the top ten influencing factors of school achievement.

More studies regarding the role of feedback on human performance are reported elsewhere. For example, in Nigeria, Danga (2012) reports the role of feedback on academic performance among senior secondary school students. In Singapore, Cheah and Li (2020) report that company supervisors' structured feedback as positively influencing students' overall project performance in presentation and reports. Further, Scherman, Smit and Archer (2013) report the role of the use of feedback in schools as a means of improving academic performance in schools. Despite such a crucial role of feedback in academics, its role in school performance in Tanzania has received little attention in research and thus, it was unclear in the context of secondary schools examinations.

## **Classroom Tests, Corrective Instructions and School Performance**

Although better criterion performance has been associated with more frequent testing, the amount of improvement in achievement seems to diminish with the increasing number of tests (Cankoy & Tut, 2005). On the other hand, research has advised to cautiously emphasize the role of tests on learning. For example, Cankoy and Tut (2005) found that there was no difference in performance on non-routine math story problems among three groups of subjects, one of which spent 70percent of class time on test-taking skills, the second spent 50percent and the third of which only spent 30percent of class time on the same. This researcher concluded that tests and classroom instruction should emphasize and foster problem-solving skills than test-taking skills.

In similar manner, the use of corrective instructions is thought to be one of the important classrooms practices a teacher should employ as a way of helping learners reflect and assess their way of achieving learning objectives. Students also seem to be benefiting much from corrective instructions and would like to receive them for their successful learning. Calsiyao (2015) investigated the attitude of students toward corrective feedback in classroom oral errors among 365 students and found that students desired correction for all their spoken errors. Students wished they had teacher correction, peer correction, self-correction when given hints and would like to see their grammatical errors being always corrected. On the other hand, students regarded teaching without corrections as a poor method of instruction. Similarly, Kyaruzi (2019) reports that students' self-efficacy and use of teachers' feedback jointly predicted their mathematics performance to a small extent and recommends potential interventions to improve students' self-efficacy in mathematics and the use of mathematics teachers' feedback. Yet, the extent at which these subtle classroom practices and feedback might be influencing school performance in secondary schools is unclear.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Dodoma region. Dodoma region was purposively selected because it had the highest decline in passes in Divisions I-III of 3,822 pupils from 4,728 in 2010 to 906 in 2011 (URT, 2012). Within the region, Dodoma Municipality and Mpwapwa Districts were purposively selected so as to obtain one urban district and one rural district. Participants in this study were strategically

drawn from 12 secondary schools. The main criterion for school selection in the study was being in either low or high performing schools category; therefore, 6 schools were drawn from the top list of high performing schools and the other six were from the least performing schools in Dodoma region. This is because it was thought that students from high performing schools might be experiencing good classroom practices related to feedback and corrective instructions. About 48.9 percent (217) were males and 51.1 percent (227) were females. Their age varied between a minimum of 16 years and a maximum of 23 years with a mean age of 17.76 and a standard deviation of 1.19. Participants came from both urban and rural schools, the proportions of which are indicated together with other variables in Table 1.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variables	Levels	Proportion	
		F	%
Sex	Males	217	48.9
	Females	227	51.1
School Ownership	Government	165	37.2
	Private	76	17.1
	Community	203	45.7
Location of the School	Urban	186	41.9
	Rural	258	58.1

Feedback and correctives were measured as part of the study conducted among 444 secondary school students. To measure this important variable, one academic subject, geography, which was a subject of interest to the researcher, was selected. questionnaire was administered to students with questions intending to collect information on teachers completion of topics as indicated in the syllabus, the kind of tests administered, timely provision of performance feedback, after-test corrections and re-marking of the corrections to check for students' improvement.

The term school performance as used in this study refers to a categorization of a school in a performance rank in terms of performance position from the first to the last. The groups are normally labelled in the best 10 and in the worst 10. The term was thus, represented by two levels of school performance namely,

high performing school (if it falls within the best 10 in the regional list) and low performing school (if it falls in the worst 10 in the regional list). This was based on the consistent appearance of some schools among the group of high performing schools while on the other hand some schools consistently appeared among the low performing group of schools. Students were thus, sampled based on low and high performing schools, the analysis was made to compare the two groups of students in what their teachers practiced regarding feedback and corrective instructions. It was thought that students from high performing schools might be experiencing good classroom practices related to feedback and corrective instruction.

### 3.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Completion of the Planned Topics

The question on whether Geography teacher completed the topics as planned in the previous class (Form 3) syllabus was supplemented by the question that reporting the number of topics not completed if any. The findings revealed that about 82 percent (180) of students from high performing schools reported that their geography teachers completed topics as planned in the syllabus while only 17percent (38) reported that the topics were not completed. On the other hand, about 81percent (183) of students from the group of low performing schools reported not to have finished the intended topics while only 19 percent (43) reported to have completed the topics. Table 2 summarizes the results on the number of topics not completed.

**Table 2: Unfinished Topics by School Performance**

Unfinished Topics	High performing schools		Low performing schools	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
<b>0 out of 7</b>	00.0	180	43	19.0
<b>1 out of 7</b>	14.29	-	36	15.9
<b>2 out of 7</b>	28.57	-	67	29.6
<b>3 out of 7</b>	42.86	-	-	-
<b>4 out of 7</b>	57.14	38	80	35.4
<b>Total</b>		218	226	100.0



Table 2 indicates that the 17 percent of students from the group of high performing schools, who reported that their teachers did not complete the intended topics, also reported that four out of 7 ideal topics were not finished. This implies that these students actually learned less than a half of the syllabus. On the other hand, of the 81 percent students from the group of low performing schools, who reported not to have finished the topics, 35.4percent learned less than a half of the syllabus (three topics), 29.6 percent missed two topics and about 15.9 percent missed one topic.

### 3.2 Administering Tests

The second component of feedback investigated was test provision in the schools. It was thought that timely testing would encourage learning, and that difference in the number of tests provided to students from high performing schools would be significant in comparison to their counterparts from low performing schools. The main question was, 'Does your Geography teacher provide the following tests?' Table 3 summarizes the results.

**Table 3: Administering Tests by School Performance**

	High performing schools				Low performing schools			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
Type of test	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
A test on the first-class session before learning any Form Three geography topic	0	00.0	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0
Short quizzes after each completed lesson	0	00.0	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0
Weekly tests	0	00.0	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0
Monthly tests	38	17.4	180	82.6	0	00.0	226	100.0
Midterm tests	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0	0	00.0

End of term examinations	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0	0	00.0
Annual examinations	218	100.0	0	00.0	226	100.0	0	00.0

Table 3 indicates that all students from both groups of high and low performing schools reported that there were no tests on the first-class session before learning any Form Three geography topic (Diagnostic tests), short classroom quizzes after each completed lesson and weekly tests. While only 17.4 percent (38) students from the group of high performing schools (a non-government school) reported the provision of monthly tests as a common practice in their school, about 82.6 percent (180) of students from the group of high performing schools and about 100percent (226) of students from the group of low performing schools reported not to have been assessed on monthly basis. There was no difference observed between students from the group of high performing schools (N=218) and students from the group of low performing schools (N=226) in reporting midterm, end of the term and annual assessments in the schools. All students from the two groups replied in affirmative in response to the question. This was interpreted that regardless of the school category, testing (assessment) seems to be one component of feedback which is not very much emphasized in schools since with the exception of one school, the rest of the sampled schools were only conducting mandatory tests as instructed by the ministry of education and training.

### 3.3 Timely Provision of Performance Feedback

Timely provision of performance feedback was the third component of feedback investigated in this study. Students were asked whether their Geography teacher marked and brought back the marked scripts immediately after scoring. It was assumed that students from the group of high performing schools would report the timely provision of performance feedback as opposed to students from the group of low performing schools who would report the delayed feedback. The results indicated that about 82.6 percent (180) of students from the group of high performing schools reported that their teachers marked and brought back the marked scripts immediately after scoring while only 17.4 percent reported the opposite. On the other hand, about 100percent (226) of students from the group

of low performing schools reported timely provision of performance feedback (their teachers marked and brought back the marked scripts immediately after scoring).

### **3.4 Correction of the Performance Feedback**

Students were asked as to whether their Geography teacher made corrections of test questions in the class after providing them with performance feedback. The results indicate that about 16.5 percent (36) of students from high performing schools reported that their teacher would make corrections of the test questions in the class immediately after scoring and giving back the marked scripts. The rest 83.5 percent (182) from the group of high performing schools and 100percent (226) students from the group of low performing schools reported that their teachers were not making corrections of the students' mistakes after receiving the performance feedback. This means that most students remained uncertain of what they were supposed to learn even after tests.

### **3.5 Re-Writing the Exercise or Tests after Correction of the Performance Feedback**

This aspect sought to determine whether students had a tendency or were directed to re-write exercises, quizzes or tests after correction of the performance feedback. about 16.5 percent (36) of students from the group of high performing schools, who reported a tendency of making corrections of the test questions in the class, also reported of re-writing the exercises, quizzes or tests after correction of the performance feedback in the class. On the other hand, 83.5 percent (182) from the group of high performing schools and 100percent (226) students from the group of low performing schools who reported that their teachers were not making corrections of the students' mistakes, also reported not to have been directed or had no tendency of re-writing the exercises, quizzes or tests.

### **3.6 Re-Marking the Re-written Exercise or Test**

The last component investigated was whether teachers re-marked the re-written exercise or test for the purpose of checking students' improvement in understanding it. The results indicated that 100percent (218) of students from the group of high performing schools and 100percent (226) of students from the group of low performing schools said their teachers were not re-marking the re-written exercise, quiz, tests or examinations. Despite the fact that there was no

difference between the two groups regarding this component, it may be logically argued that given the interaction nature of the investigated components that seemed to favour students from the group of high performing schools, students from the group of low performing schools were much likely to be affected by this component. On the other hand, even students from the group of high performing schools could have increased their performances had the practice been faithfully carried out.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study found that feedback has something to do with school performance. This is because the acts that characterized the components of feedback in this study were found being practiced in the high performing schools than in the low performing schools. These findings are consistent with the findings in other past empirical studies (Bangert-drowns, Kulik and Kulik, 1991; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Hattie, 2011; Oettingen, Marquardt & Gollwitzer, 2012) with regard to the role of feedback on school performance. Feedback in the context of this study includes completion of the planned topics, provision of short diagnostic and formative classroom tests at the beginning of the term and at the end of each lesson, weekly and monthly tests, provision of corrective instructions, and remarking (scoring) of students' mistakes. These acts, if put together with other students' characteristics have the power of making significant changes in individual student's academic performance and in the school performance as a whole. However, in the light of the past studies (Bangert-drowns, Kulik and Kulik, 1991; Cankoy and Tut, 2005), tests should be placed at an interval that allows both reflection and correction of the past mistakes while at the same time giving room to learn new materials. In addition, tests should focus on problem solving rather than test taking skills.

## **Implications for School Teaching and Learning**

Teaching and learning seem to be the central tasks of any learning institution. Ultimately, the quality of schools are judged by, among other criteria, school performance in terms of completion rates, how students pass examinations, and how competent they become in the skills they were being trained. In the learning process however, feedback seems to play a big role in determining school performance. If schools want to improve students' performance, teachers should actively start by testing students' abilities and skills they are potentially

and actually possessing at the beginning of the term even before teaching starts. This will inform the teacher on the appropriate approach and methods to adopt for each learner in a particular subject. In Tanzania, it seems, a tradition of providing classroom quizzes, exercises and tests is receiving less attention among subject teachers. Even when these are done little is done in practice in terms of correction of the performance feedback. It follows then that students who score higher feel comfortable and become contented with their performances, while at the same time ignoring the mistakes and errors they make in the tests. As one keeps on ignoring such uncorrected mistakes and failures, one accumulates the potential underperformance in one's learning. Even if such a student happens to pass the final examinations and become employed, such uncorrected mistakes will ultimately limit one's performance in the job environment. This might partly explain the cry of employers that universities are preparing incompetent graduates who do not fit for employment.

These findings can also help the responsible authorities such as heads of schools, education officers and the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training to revisit the syllabus to see whether the content planned is proportionate with the time required for learning. If some schools (about 35%) are unable to finish about 57.4 percent of the planned topics in the syllabus without any disciplinary actions against the responsible teachers, then it is high time the Ministry revisited the syllabus in connection to its structure, relevance, credits, units and time allocation. On the other hand, if these are correctly in place then teachers need to be appropriately guided to do their job responsibly.

### **Implications for the Theory of School Learning**

The construct 'quality of instruction' in the theory of school learning (Bloom, 1976) includes the feedback/correctives component. In the theory, the use of feedback and correctives is emphasized as a means of ensuring that students get good quality instruction they need. The theory propounds further that feedback and correctives are likely to account for the relatively high level of students' achievement or the relatively rapid rates of mastery set by the teacher. These findings are consistent with the arguments of the theory and the findings of the current study that students from the group of high performing schools reported much of the components of feedback including correctives than their counterparts from the group of low performing schools. Though in this study not all the constructs of school learning were exhaustively studied, most of the

constructs studied have supported the applicability of the theory in the context of school performance in Tanzania.

### **Limitations, Generalization of the Findings and Implication for Future Research**

the sample selection considered all the necessary criteria for inclusion in the context of school learning. Consistent to the theory of school learning, this study and previous studies elsewhere have indicated the role of feedback on school performance. The difference in the way schools implement feedback components is highly significant in school performance. However, the role of feedback was inquired from students' experiences and judgments on what they experienced in their daily schooling, and not in highly controlled experiment. In addition, though most of the constructs studied have supported the applicability of the theory in the context of school performance in Tanzania, these determinants were not studied against subsequent learning and school performance as the theory suggests. Future research therefore, might address the limitations of the current study findings. This might be by conducting experimental research on for example, how failure of completing topics in the syllabus affects school performance, whether the syllabus of secondary schools are adequately planned to be completed in the given time and whether the final examinations are detailed enough to measure all intended skills. Future research may also study the connection between feedback and subsequent learning and school performance, the impacts of correction of performance feedback on subsequent school performance, the role of re-writing exercises and tests after oral correction in the class, and re-marking the re-written tests for checking students' improvement all these could be juxtaposed with subsequent learning and school performance.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Based on the study findings the following conclusions are drawn, first, since students from the group of low performing schools reported higher proportion of unfinished topics than students from the group of high performing schools, unfinished topics is one of the classroom practices that play a role in determining school performance. Second, though students from both groups of low and high performing schools reported timely provision of performance feedback, most of the students regardless of the group of they came from, reported of lack of

corrections of the test mistakes in the class immediately after scoring and giving back the marked scripts; students were not directed or had no tendency of re-writing the exercises, quizzes or tests; and their teachers were not re-marking the re-written exercise, quizzes, tests or examinations. It is thus, concluded that failure to provide feedback in time and to complete topics as per the requirements of the syllabus are among the contributing factors of school performance. thus, teachers are reminded that national examinations are set based on the syllabus and the best examinations are expected to have their tables of specifications focusing on each objective of the subject matter. in this respect, good teachers should ensure timely completion of the topics to give students ample time to revise and as attempt as many exercises as possible. Furthermore, Quality Assurance Units of education should devise a mechanism of ensuring that teachers are consistently abiding by standard procedures in carrying out such important classroom practices as completion of topics and timely provision of feedback to students.

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