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PROVIDING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK AND CORRECTING ERRORS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Providing feedback and correcting errors to learners on their performance is an important aspect of teaching. In the traditional educational environment the errors made by the students are frequently corrected and given feedback, because the focus of classroom instruction is on accuracy. Giving feedback and correcting errors may serve not only to let learners know how well they have performed, but also to increase motivation and build a supportive classroom environment.

In this context, this paper aims at highlighting the importance of feedback, some key areas including what is error and feedback, types and models of feedback, attitudes towards errors and some feedback strategies.

Keywords: *feedback, errors, error correction, assessment, learning process*

OFERIREA FEEDBACK-ULUI EFICIENT ȘI CORECTAREA GREȘELILOR ÎN CLASA DE LIMBĂ ENGLEZĂ

Oferirea feedback-ului și corectarea greșelilor studenților cu privire la performanța lor este un aspect important al procesului educațional. În mediul educațional tradițional greșelile făcute de studenți sunt adesea corectate și prin feedback-ul oferit, deoarece predarea în clasă se concentrează pe precizie. Oferirea feedback-ului și corectarea greșelilor pot servi nu doar pentru a permite studenților să știe cât de bine au îndeplinit ceea ce era necesar, ci și pentru a crește motivația și pentru a construi în clasă un mediu favorabil și motivant.

În articol se urmărește evidențierea importanței feedback-ului, fiind abordate câteva aspecte-cheie, cum ar fi definiția greșelii și a feedback-ului, tipurile și modelele de feedback, atitudinea față de greșeli și unele strategii de feedback.

Cuvinte-cheie: *feedback, greșeli, corectarea greșelilor, evaluare, procesul de învățare.*

Introduction

Teachers engage in feedback practices every day. With school leadership support and access to high quality resources, teachers can ensure that the daily feedback they provide to their students achieves the greatest possible benefits. The learning process usually includes a teaching intervention and a student response. Following this, feedback is provided about an aspect of the student's response. For assessment to function formatively, the feedback must be used to inform teaching and learning choices, and as the impetus to adjust strategies if need be. Teachers need to include opportunities in their classrooms for eliciting student thinking and understanding. In addition to learning tasks and activities, questioning and discussion can provide valuable insight into student progress and can reveal misconceptions.

Defining feedback

Feedback has long been recognized as an effective tool for student learning [1-3]. According to M. Lewis, for teachers, feedback provides information about the students' learning progress and is a form of evaluation for their teaching. For learners, feedback is considered an ongoing process, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses as well as their learning progress [4]. Providing feedback in the EFL writing class is believed to be a teacher's major responsibility, particularly in higher-context cultures, in which authority is primarily in the teachers' hands and students feel that it is inappropriate to question teachers [5].

Errors and corrective feedback constitute a natural part of the teaching-learning process in a foreign language. Errors can be defined as deviations from the norms of the target language [6]. They reveal the patterns of learners' development of inter-language systems, showing where they have over-generalized a foreign language rule or where they have inappropriately transferred a first language rule to the foreign language [7]. According to R.Ellis, the main finding of studies of error treatment is that it is an enormously complex process [6].

Corrective feedback is an indication to a learner that his or her use of the target language is incorrect, and includes a variety of responses that a language learner receives. Corrective feedback can be explicit (e.g. "No

you should say goes, not go.”) or implicit (e.g. “Yes, he goes to school every day.”), and may or may not include meta-linguistic information (e.g. “Don’t forget to make the verb agree with the subject”) [7].

However, feedback is provided as part of an assessment process that uses both partially explicated criteria and professional judgement. Feedback provided can help to shape perceptions of a relational dimension while at the same time the relational dimension is a factor in the extent of engagement with feedback [8].

In addition, teachers need to be able to integrate feedback processes with their pedagogical content knowledge in order to better attend to student learning needs and to provide useful feedback [9].

Types and models of feedback

In their review of feedback’s role in contemporary learning theories, S.Askew and C.Lodge characterise the cognitivist, corrective view of feedback as a ‘gift’ from the teacher to the learner, where feedback is a one-way communication. In contrast, the socio-constructivist view sees learning as a process developing through loops of dialogue where feedback is a process taking part within a learning context [10].

L.Van den Bergh et al argue that the quality of feedback is determined partly by whether clear learning goals are established and communicated. There is very good evidence that setting specific goals, often with criteria for a high quality performance on a task, effectively and significantly increases individual performance [11].

J.Hattie and H.Timperley (2007) suggest that it is useful to consider a continuum between instruction and feedback with the points towards the centre where feedback and instruction become entwined. For example, tutor–student dialogue within a seminar might involve both feedback and instruction. Feedback provided at different points on the continuum is likely to serve different purposes and require different levels of support for students’ understanding and ability to act on that feedback [12].

Collectively the research defines feedback as information:

- for the learner and teacher about the learner’s performance
- about performance relative to learning goals
- based on evidence of learning
- from the teacher, the student or peers
- leading to changes in teacher and student behaviour.

There is wide agreement about the intent of feedback. Effective feedback is designed to achieve improvement in student learning, continuously driving a student’s current performance towards a current learning goal [12, 13] (adapted principally from Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Black and Wiliam, 2010).

There are two well-referenced models that explain the underlying principles of feedback: J. Hattie and H. Timperley (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and P.Black and D.Wiliam (Black and Wiliam, 1998, 2010 and 2009 and Wiliam, 2010). Both models agree that the purpose of feedback is to achieve changes in student learning, so that student understanding and performance meet the identified learning goals. At the heart of both models are three similar core elements to address within the feedback process [12-16].

J.Hattie and H.Timperley reviewed a lot of works to synthesize a model of feedback that focuses on its meaning. Their review used the lens of formative assessment questions (Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?), which they call “feedback questions”. Thus, they recognized the importance of feedback in the formative process. Feedback can be the information that drives the process, or it can be a stumbling block that derails the process [12].

P.Black and D.William model of formative assessment rely on the following questions: Where the learner is going, Where the learner is right now and How to get there.

Both models agree that good feedback processes produce two key outcomes:

- Teachers use and adapt effective teaching strategies to help students make progress in areas identified as needing attention
- Students change what they do to address the learning goals more effectively [15].

J.Hattie and H.Timperley propose a model of feedback that distinguishes four levels: (1) feedback about the task (such as feedback about whether answers were right or wrong or directions to get more information), (2) feedback about the processing of the task (such as feedback about strategies used or strategies that could be used), (3) feedback about self-regulation (such as feedback about student self-evaluation or self-confidence), and (4) feedback about the student as a person (such as pronouncements that a student is “good” or “smart”).

The level at which the feedback is focused influences its effectiveness. Feedback about the qualities of the work and feedback about the process or strategies used to do the work are most helpful. Feedback that draws students' attention to their self-regulation strategies or their abilities as learners can be effective if students hear it in a way that makes them realize they will get the results they want if they expend effort and attention. Personal comments ("Good girl!") do not draw students' attention to their learning [12].

P.Black and D.Wiliam emphasise student self-regulation, which is consistent with the most powerful level of feedback identified by J.Hattie and H.Timperley [14].

Level	Description	Impact
<i>Task</i>	how well tasks are understood and performed	Useful
<i>Process</i>	the main process needed to understand/perform tasks	Powerful
<i>Self-regulation</i>	self-monitoring, directing and regulating actions	Powerful
<i>Self-level</i>	personal evaluations and affect* (usually positive) about the learner	Ineffective

Feedback has been categorized into three types in terms of its source: teacher feedback, peer feedback and self-assessment [17].

Peer feedback is a process in which learners engage in conversations pertaining to their performances [17]. Learners give each other feedback by commenting on their work. P. Rollinson has asserted that peer feedback is preferred by teachers for a few reasons. First, peer readers are useful sources of feedback. Second, it is not a usual way of providing feedback.

Responses from students have been found to be more specific. Finally, reading others' work can contribute to learners becoming critical readers and being able to self-reflect based on their feedback experience. P.Rollinson further noted that peer feedback may have some limitations, such as time constraints and that student characteristics may make it difficult for the learners and teachers to make use of this type of feedback [18]. H. Smith (2010) has argued that group and pair communicative activities which allow learners to provide peer feedback are more often preferred in modern language learning environments [19]. *Teacher feedback* can be considered the most commonly preferred feedback type, as the teacher is the richest source of the target content in the classroom. With regard to the process approach in language learning, the teacher is the usual and continuous provider and source of feedback [20].

A final source of feedback may be learners themselves, who often repair their productions. This process is known as *self-correction or self-repair*, and it most commonly been discussed with regard to written feedback [21].

In order to thoroughly comprehend the concept of feedback, it is necessary to recognize its various types. Feedback is categorized into various forms depending on certain factors. S.M. Brookhart has included the variables of "timing," "amount," "mode" and "audience" in her feedback model. Feedback strategies can vary in several dimensions: *timing, amount, mode, and audience*. These dimensions are analyzed below.

Timing

The purpose of giving immediate or only slightly delayed feedback is to help students hear it and use it. Feedback needs to come while students are still mindful of the topic, assignment, or performance in question. It needs to come while they still think of the learning goal as a learning goal that is, something they are still striving for, not something they already did. It especially needs to come while they still have some reason to work on the learning target. Feedback about a topic they won't have to deal with again all year will strike students as pointless. A general principle for gauging the timing of feedback is to put yourself in the students' place. When would students want to hear your feedback? When they are still thinking about the work, of course. And when they can still do something about it.

Good timing: Returning tests and assignments promptly.

A teacher gave a multiple-choice test, scored it later that day, and returned the test to students the next day. After she handed back the scored tests, she spent class time going over the answers. In educational psychology terms, this is "knowledge of results." Even this simple feedback about the outcome is good and is good to do promptly. You may want to provide prompt feedback, but feel too busy or over-whelmed to do so. A tip that works for some teachers is to make a special effort to catch up with feedback responsibilities. You can't be prompt with today's work if you still have last week's on your desk. But once you are caught up, you may find the pace is the same except that you are dealing with more recent work.

Bad timing: Delaying the return of tests and assignments.

We can all remember those times in school when we thought, "Is she ever going to return that report?" I encourage you to recall those incidents and the accompanying feelings of frustration and of being ignored and use that energy to spur yourself to return your students' work promptly. It should be your regular practice to do that, and students should know it and be able to count on it. If students do experience regular, timely feedback, they will most likely be understanding if an emergency arises and you take longer than usual to return an assignment [22].

Amount

Probably the hardest decision to make about feedback is the amount to provide. A natural inclination is to want to "fix" everything you see. That's the teacher's-eye view, where the target is perfect achievement of all learning goals.

For real learning, what makes the difference is a usable amount of information that connects with something students already know and takes them from that point to the next level. Judging the right amount of feedback to give how much, on how many points requires deep knowledge and consideration of the following:

- The topic in general and your learning target or targets in particular
- Typical developmental learning progressions for those topics or targets
- Your individual students

In addition, making a judgment about the amount of feedback requires considering all three simultaneously. Your feedback should give students a clear understanding of what to do next on a point or points that they can see they need to work on. This requires you to know your students; for some students, simply getting clarity and improvement on one point would be sufficient, whereas others can handle more. In order to know what should come next, dig into your knowledge of the topic (what else should they know?) and your teaching experience with the topic (what typically comes next?).

Try to see things from the student's-eye view. On which aspects of the learning target has the student done acceptable work? Which aspects of the learning target would the student benefit from improving upon next? Are any particular assignments coming up that would make it wiser to emphasize one point over another? Is there any particular point that you and the student have a history about? For example, if you and the student have been working hard on neatness, maybe a comment about handwriting would be right on target. If not, that comment may not be as useful as some of the other things you could say about the work, and you might choose to skip that and concentrate on something else.

Good amount: Using the Goldilocks principle.

The Goldilocks principle says, "Not too much, not too little, but just right." Appropriateness varies case by case, and here is just one illustration.

Bad amount: Focusing only on mechanics.

We all know teachers whose first inclination would be to use a contrasting-color pen (red, of course, is the favorite) and fix the mechanics. *Salad* should be *salad*. There should be a period after teachers. That sort of thing, although important, does not advance the student as a writer as much as the comments about the writing process [23].

Mode

Feedback can be delivered in many modalities. Some kinds of assignments lend themselves better to written feedback (for example, reviewing and writing comments on students' written work); some, to oral feedback (for example, observing and commenting as students do math problems as seatwork); and some, to demonstrations (for example, helping a kindergarten student hold a pencil correctly). Some of the best feedback can result from conversations with the student. For example, rather than telling the student all the things you notice about his or her work, you might start by asking questions such as these: "What are you noticing about this?" "Does anything surprise you?" Decisions about whether to give the feedback orally or in written form should be partly based on the students' reading ability, especially for younger students. Could they understand what you would write? Such decisions are also partly based on opportunity. Talking with students is usually best, because you can have a conversation. However, you don't have the time to talk with every student about everything. It is important to match your feedback to the student's proficiency level as much as possible. Feedback is only useful if the student understands it. W. Mo (2007) suggests five areas for classroom teachers' observations that will help them gauge English language learners' communication proficiency:

- How well the student understands classroom discussions (Does the student understand classroom talk at all? Can s/he understand if speech is slow and includes repetition?)
- How well the student speaks (Does the student hesitate or search for words? Does the student ever initiate a conversation?)
- How well does the student use academic English, especially academic vocabulary?
- How easy is it to understand what the student says?
- How well does the student use conventional grammar and sentence patterns? [24].

Audience

Like all communication, feedback works best when it has a strong and appropriate sense of the audience. Feedback about the specifics of individual work is best addressed to the individual student, in terms the student can understand. That simple act is powerful in itself because, in addition to the information provided, it communicates to the student a sense that you care about his or her individual progress. ("The teacher actually read and thought about what I did!") So, the first point about audience is "Know whom you're talking to and talk to them!"

If the same message would benefit a group of students, providing feedback to the class or group can save time and also serve as a mini-lesson or review session. If you speak to the whole class when only a subset needs the feedback, you can use the students who have mastered the concept as the "more experienced peers," helping you demonstrate the concept or skill. Or you can pull a group aside to give some feedback while others are doing something else.

You can also mix individual and group feedback. For example, imagine you had just collected a writing assignment in which you found many students had used bland or vague terms. You might choose to give the whole class some feedback about word choice, with examples of how to use specific, precise, or vivid words instead of dull and uninteresting ones. You might couple that with some thought-provoking questions on individual students' work: "What other words could you use instead of big? "How could you describe this event so someone else would see how terrible it was for you?" [22]

Errors about facts or concepts imply that studying longer or differently might be helpful. Trying to classify what kinds of facts or concepts were particularly problematic can help students "study smarter, not harder" by focusing on the trouble spots. Students should also be able to indicate why the right answer is correct. This activity can be done in groups and is most useful if there are more opportunities ahead for the students to work with the material. It makes sense, in fact, to build in at least one more lesson or assignment after this kind of feedback, to provide a purpose for students' work and to send the message that it is possible, and important, to learn from mistakes.

Students filter what they hear through their own past experiences, good and bad. Students are less likely to pay attention to descriptive feedback if it is accompanied by judgments, such as a grade or an evaluative comment. Some students will even hear "judgment" when you intended description. Some unsuccessful learners have been so frustrated by their school experiences that they might see even an attempt to help them as just another declaration that they are not successful. For these learners, it helps to point out improvements over their own last performance, even if those improvements don't amount to success on the assignment.

Feedback should be positive. Being "positive" doesn't mean being artificially happy or saying work is good when it isn't. Being positive means describing how the strengths in a student's work match the criteria for good work and how those strengths show what the student is learning. Being positive means pointing out where improvement is needed and suggesting things the student could do about it. Just noticing what is wrong without offering suggestions to make it right is not helpful [22].

T.Tunstall and C.Gipps (1996) developed a typology of teacher feedback based on observations in primary schools. They divided feedback into two main kinds: descriptive and evaluative. Positive evaluative feedback includes rewards, general praise, and the like. Negative evaluative feedback includes punishments, general criticisms, and so on. On the descriptive side, however, all of the feedback has a positive intention. Even criticism, if it is descriptive and not judgmental, is intended to be constructive. T.Tunstall and C.Gipps talk about descriptive feedback as being composed of "achievement feedback" and "improvement feedback." Achievement feedback describes or affirms for a student what was done well and why. Improvement feedback describes for a student what more might be done and what strategies might lead to improvement of the work [25].

Attitudes towards errors and some feedback strategies

Therefore, giving feedback based on the particular qualities of a student's work means the information itself will be of maximum usefulness. Giving the feedback in private means that the student will not have to worry about what peers' reactions may be. Therefore, you help the student avoid some of the ego protection and face-saving that can get in the way of feedback.

Feedback can lead to learning only if the students have opportunities to use it. One of the best ways you can help students learn to use feedback is to make sure you build in opportunities for students to use it fairly soon after they receive it. Also, it will be useful to design lessons in which students use feedback on previous work to produce better work. For learning targets that involve knowledge and understanding of facts or concepts, for example, use a series of homework and in-class assignments, and perhaps quizzes, which will enable students to see what they know and what they still need to understand. Feedback from each successive assignment should inform studying and work on the next assignment. By the time of the unit test or other assignment that counts for a grade, students will be at the top of their learning curve. They should be able to see how the work along the way helped bring them to that point. If some students don't, point it out to them.

Students respond to their feedback in different ways at different times which means that the point at which evaluation should be carried out is very difficult to identify. In addition, the problem of isolating the effect of feedback within the multifaceted learning environment means that causal relationships are difficult if not impossible to prove [22].

Thus, it is important for the teachers to give opportunities for students to make the connection between the feedback they received and the improvement in their work. In the final analysis, feedback is always adaptive. It always depends on something else. Feedback is based on the learning target, the particular assignment, the particular student, and the characteristics of a given piece of work.

Conclusions

Accordingly, feedback also depends on the depth of the teacher's understanding of the topic and of how students learn it. Good feedback happens when one makes sound choices about feedback timing, amount, mode, and audience. Good feedback happens when one focuses on the work and the process the student is used to. Good feedback describes work rather than judges it, is positive, and makes suggestions for improvement. Good feedback is clear and specific. Good feedback helps students become self-regulated learners. Good feedback gives students the help they need to become masters of their own destiny when it comes to learning. And finally, feedback is good only if students do learn and become more motivated and one's classroom becomes a place where feedback about learning is valued.

In conclusion, we would like to mention that feedback supports students to understand what is to be done and how to improve their performance. It is also enables a teacher to see how teaching practice can be improved, and which teaching and learning strategies are more likely to be effective.

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