Students' Reactions to Teacher's Written Feedback in the ELT Classroom

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Abstract

The need for supporting student writing has received much attention in writing research. One specific type of support is feedback. Feedback is a word that needs thorough definition for it represents a useful contribution to learning. Teacher gives feedback on students' written output to hone their writing skills and build their confidence. As such, teachers' feedback plays a vital role in producing self-regulated writers. However, it is not easy for learners to process feedback in order to improve their writing skills if it is delivered in a random manner and without clear relation to the teaching input. This study investigates the students' reactions to their teacher's written feedback in their Field Study 3 manuals. Thirty college students from Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Muntinlupa were selected in the study. As a qualitative research, document analysis and interviews are used. The study has shown that feedback improved students' writing. The findings in this study provide teachers with some insights into effective ways of assisting students in learning to analyze their weaknesses and in developing their writing skills.

Key Words: Feedback, Practices, Students' Reactions, Student Writing, Teacher's Feedback, Written Corrective Feedback

Introduction

Background

Writing is one of the macro skills that is normally referred to English language. It is the symbol of language by means of text form. Writing is needed for transferring, recording and relating information effectively from user to user (Merriam Dictionary, 2010). It is a central expertise that comprises a whole live skill, ingenious development in discovery, subsequent and determining scheme, analysis system, feedback, and modification (Lainuddin, n.d).

One of the things that teachers can do to assess their students' writing skill is through feedback. Feedback is a word that needs thorough definition for it represents a useful contribution to learning.

In writing area, corrective feedback *on form* is concerned with any incorrect grammatical or lexical use of the target language. It is noted from *feedback on content,* which denotes to any remark, proposition, query, or request for elucidation, amplification and data given by the teacher that concerns to the ideas, organization, style, and rhetorical construction of the text (Hyland & Hyland, 2006 as cited in Guenette & Lyster, 2013).

As contend by Hattie and Timperley (2007), the main function why there is feedback is to lessen the gap between understanding and performance. Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next? These are the

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three major questions to be answered to have effective feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007 as cited in Bergh, Ros & Beijaard, 2013). They also added that in order to develop students' learning and teacher's feedback, it is of primary significance that teacher must establish definite learning objectives. Likewise, these learning goals must be communicated to the students for better understanding.

On the other hand, Lee (2008) argued that students' perceptions on teachers' feedback and the teachers' practices are intertwined with each when it comes to feedback. Giving feedback to students' writing is sometimes not well understood by the students because it is not clear to them even though feedback is known as one of the ways for the assessment in connection with the different facets of learning. Students do not know how to understand their teachers when it comes to the comments being seen in their work. It is not easy to apprehend what the teachers are trying to point out. It often receives negative views on both sides.

However, there has been little attention given to the reactions of the students in their received comments coming from their teachers. Current study on students' views of teacher feedback is inadequate by the weak link between students' reactions and teacher feedback.

This study contributes to existing feedback research by relating students' reactions to actual teacher feedback in classroom setting, focusing mainly on how the relative issues might have influenced students' responses to teacher feedback and how teacher make corrective feedback. Being aware of students' reactions can help teachers adjust the way they give feedback, produce positive students' responses, respond to the needs of the students, and to bring life-long positive effects on student writing.

Theoretical Support

This study is anchored in two theories namely Interactional Feedback by Long and Input Hypothesis by Krashen in giving feedback.

Needless to say, interactional feedback is viewed by many researchers as the center of the second language learning. The latent benefits of interactional feedback can be seen in several theories in Second Language Acquisition such as the Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996) and Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985). Both input and interaction are essential in the teaching-learning process. Likewise, they are both necessary components in the learning process because they alert, assist and encourage learners to be better learners, thinkers, speakers and journalists.

Input Hypothesis is important in this study because teachers will become aware of how they provide feedback to students' writing. Teachers will become mindful if the feedback they are providing is comprehensible or not. In addition, the effectiveness of input is amplified when students have to negotiate the meaning. Thus, Interaction Feedback is needed in this process. Face-to-face interaction is important to clarify things with regard to students' writing. Interaction facilitates acquirement because of the conversational modifications that provide learners with the input they need. They now have more time to process the input they receive coming from the teachers. This can lead to better understanding to students and teachers.

Statement of the Problem

The role of any type of feedback has been a critical area of second language acquisition research for the past decades. Many factors must be given considerations regarding feedback. The classroom context can have

a direct impact on how students perceive the teachers' feedback. How students respond to feedback may influenced by the teacher who delivers the feedback, who the teacher is and how he or she interacts with students during the feedback process. Thus, it is necessary to go beyond the act of feedback to examine the factors that influence students' reactions regarding feedback.

With this purpose in mind, the present study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Do students learn from teacher's written feedback?

2. How do students react to the feedback provided by their teachers?

Method

Research Design

Teachers give feedback to student writing to ensure the maximum development of one's totality as regard to writing.

A qualitative design specifically the Basic Qualitative Research, naturalistic inquiry strategy of approaching a setting without preexisting assumptions, is deemed appropriate for the study that seeks to explore how students react to the feedback provided by their teacher. "How people interpret things and experiences" is one of the interests of Basic Qualitative Research.

Participants

Thirty-six college students participated in the present study. Of all the participants, ten (10) male students and twenty-six (26) female students came from Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Muntinlupa. The university is a public school located in NBP Reservation Katarungan I, Poblacion Muntinlupa City. The researcher chose the Field Study 3 subject as the source of the data because the students are required to answer their manuals. For them to qualify to be participants in this study, they should **a)** be bonafide and regular Second Year students, **b)** have studied in Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Muntinlupa (PLMun) from first year (first and second semester) up to now, and **c)** taking English as their specialization.

The students came from various social classes where they are placed together aiming to excel in their academic life. Majority of the students speak English in the class because of the rule "English Policy" in their field of specialization.

Data Collection Technique and Procedure

The researcher collected the qualitative data purely via document analysis of Field Study 3 (Technology in the Learning Environment) manuals of the students. Anchored on the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards and the Competency Standards of CMO 30, s. 2004, the Field Study courses are practical learning experiences which are aligned to the professional education courses. Additionally, the researcher got the qualitative data through individual qualitative interview with thirty students.

Data Analysis

The researcher did the analysis of data by distinguishing the themes that resulted in the gathered data. For themes to really surface, the researcher meticulously compared and contrasted each of the students' reactions

about their teacher's written feedback. Due to this painstaking process, the researcher was able to know if the feedback is either equal in form or in meaning.

The results of the initial analysis, in the form of coding were tabulated using Microsoft Excel. The coded responses were considered under two types, positive or negative. Specifically, the researcher followed the successive steps in doing the qualitative data analysis of students' reactions about their teacher's written feedback.

Step-by-Step Process of Analysis to the Construction of the Themes

a. Researcher transcribed all the recorded conversation.

b. Researcher read the transcribed conversations of students' reactions about their teacher's written feedback on their output.

c. Researcher put some symbols such as cross, check, star or even shapes. These symbols helped the researcher distinguish which of the conversations mean the same thing.

d. Researcher coded all the marked data.

e. Researcher e-read initial codes to check on the exactitude of details under the initial codes.

f. Researcher made an initial classification of codes into themes.

g. Researcher merged all the lists. They were done manually and tabulated on Microsoft Excel into one master list of major themes from all the data.

h. Researcher identified the cyclical patterns reflected in the master list.

Steps a-h were done manually.

Results and Discussion

Question # 1: Do students learn from teacher's written feedback?

In order to find out whether the students learn from teacher's written feedback, the data I got from the interview were analyzed by means of looking at the recurring themes in the corpora.

Student-participants of the study consistently recognized the value and the use of feedback in understanding teacher's written feedback. Though majority of the participants clearly articulated the minute attention that they give to the comments coming from their teacher all throughout the semester, they all acknowledged that feedback of the teacher has instructional value and can be considered as an effective tool in evaluating learning. Improvements on how the teacher should write the feedback and how she utilized in class were proffered for an optimal use in instruction.

Question # 2: How do students react to the feedback provided by the teachers?

Making a student understand the comments of the teacher is one of the most widely recognized uses of feedback. The standards in feedback clarify to the students the targets that are to be achieved during the

assessment. This use of feedback was expressed when students were asked about their initial reaction to the comments coming from their teacher. The students distinctly expressed:

Teacher's feedback serves as a guide for me to improve something regarding my output. (Student # 5)

Students # 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 20, 23, 27, 32, 33, 35, and 36 have the same concept of answers with that of student 5. Their first impression to the teacher's written comment is for the enhancement of their work or output. They saw that feedback is important because it serves as a guide for them to have better output. They also added that it serves as an eye opener for them to see their past mistakes and make them right for future tasks.

Furthermore, I also noticed that they are not only focusing on the comments of the teacher but rather they are also paying attention to the professional and personal attributes of the teacher. As the student # 2 said, "I am happy and I admire my teacher who writes comments. This comment of student # 2 is being attested by student # 22 because she believes that because of the marks seen in her manual, she knew that the teacher read her work.

In addition to this part, students # 25, 29, 30 mentioned that their teacher is impressive and worthy to be appreciated because of her efforts in checking all the manuals of the students. "Despite of her busy schedule, she finds time to give comments to her students' outputs." (Student # 9). "The teacher is good in reinforcement activities." (Student # 27) Student # 31 finds her teacher really supportive, amiable, forthcoming and kind. "Your feedback to us is very inspiring and makes us become better."

In addition, I want to emphasize the answer of student # 33 "It greatly helps us students to know our errors. It checks us our grammar, the same goes with using proper markings (e.g. period, comma etc.). She has the same idea with that of student # 34. Their answers have a connection to the idea of Ferris (2006) that she made a distinction between "treatable" and "untreatable" errors. As I assess my students, they commit "treatable" errors. They are not aware with regard to the verb tense, verb form, subject-verb agreement, articles, pronouns and spelling.

Moreover, student # 7 and student # 10s' first impression to the teacher's comments as that feedback is useful. "It is just like sharing their thoughts towards student's ability", as student #7 mentioned. Others viewed it as cool, advantageous, and they make them aware because of their strengths and weaknesses.

Despite this prevalent recognition of the ability of feedback to make students reflect on their performances, students were very vocal in stating that it was not really good. As I analyzed the transcribed data, I found that despite the positive initial impressions of the students with regard to the student's written feedback considering the professional and personal attributes of a teacher, I noticed that some of the students I interviewed find feedback as a negative one. From their answers, I learned that written comments must be carefully given and the words must be comprehensively chosen. Some got disappointed (student # 13), shocked (student # 16), confused (student # 17), offended (student # 21), nervous, (students # 29 and 30).

Students' overall responses might be very positive on the improvement and usefulness of teacher's written feedback in understanding teacher's expectations; however, it should be noted that when this was specifically asked, students began raising their concerns about feedback and its effectiveness in making them understand teacher's expectations. Majority might have acknowledged its value on this aspect, but some students argued

that the written feedback used in their manuals can still be improved in terms of clarity and comprehensibility. This is true with the idea of Hattie and Timperley (2007) that the main function why there is feedback is to lessen the gap between understanding and performance. They also added that in order to develop students' learning and teacher's feedback, it is of primary significance that teaching must establish definite learning objectives.

In a similar finding, Abdullah and Sidek (2012), Bergh, Ros, and Beijaard, (2013), and Guasch *et al.* (2013) mentioned that it is essential for teachers to provide feedback which is suited to their stated goals. There should be a match between the teachers' stated goal of objectives and the appropriate type of feedback that teachers have to use. They need to be mindful of the alignment of those things to reach the desired optimum objective. Additionally, it will provide teachers with some understandings on how they are going to effectively assist students in their learning. Likewise, they need to know and analyze their students' weaknesses.

With all of these ideas that surfaced, it is clearly a given that feedback allows students to reflect on their performance by specifically defining their strengths and areas to improve on. Furthermore, it also serves as instruction for them to identify the areas that they need to work on next time when they have to deal with similar output. Clear, brief and comprehensible descriptors are necessary for students to read, appreciate and learn from the performance in indicators stipulated in the feedback given. Thus, the students learn from the comments of the teacher.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has shown that feedback improved students' writing. An important thing to note is that the research was facilitated by the classroom teacher so that it could run naturally. The findings in this study may provide teachers with some insights into effective ways of assisting students in learning to analyze their weaknesses and in developing their writing skills. As the concept of Input Hypothesis, teachers will become more conscious of the way they critique students' writing. Teachers will start to pay closer attention to whether or not their criticism is understandable. Being aware of what students need and how they perceive teachers' feedback and error corrections, teachers can create awareness among students in the areas that they need to improve in order for them to take on the challenges of writing in both academic and professional worlds. In an effort to raise students' writing proficiency, it is important that teachers provide feedback that corresponds with their instructional goals. Additionally, teachers should review and consider how they respond as genuine and interested readers.

It seems to be clear that teachers should place an equal emphasis on the different foci, when giving feedback (form and content feedback) so that students can improve other aspects of their writing not just their grammatical or mechanical problems. Panel chairs can step in and reinforce a policy so that form is equal to content in the scheme of work and add more marking criteria to the marking scheme so students have a clearer indication of where to improve either on ideas, organization or grammar.

This study called attention to the various ways that students react when processing the teachers' comments. The results of this study support the notion that teachers should always be aware of and provide what their learners need. This begins with a principle understanding of the goals of writing instruction and the alignment with teachers' feedback focus. If the teacher's instructional goals and feedback focus are in alignment, students

will be more focused and directed to the feedback given, thus, making the feedback more meaningful and useful. Another important point is to ensure an appropriate correspondence between writing approach and its implementation. Once the teacher is clear about his or her writing approach and provides matching feedback, learners will be more likely to benefit most from the writing and correction processes. Correcting or giving feedback is not unidirectional, but rather a shared practice if it is to be optimally effective. Additionally, a process called interaction feedback is required. For the purpose of deciphering students' writing, face-to-face communication is crucial. Because of the conversational changes that give learners the input they require, interaction helps learners develop new skills. As a result, they have more time to consider the information the teachers provide. For both students and teachers, this may result in a greater comprehension.

Therefore, the findings of this study may be useful in providing teachers' insights into how students react to their feedback and as a consequence, enabling teachers to make better feedback decision accordingly. Although students' actual uptake of feedback is sometimes not indicative of the usefulness of the feedback provided, teachers are still considered accountable in helping students to understand how feedback is expected to improve their writing and why teachers need to provide specific feedback. It is recommended to have further studies regarding this topic since this study is limited to a single location and is small in its scope.

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