

Means of Providing Feedback to the Learners

Marsela HARIZAJ

University "Ismail Qemali" of Vlora, Albania

Department of Foreign Languages

marselahirizaj@yahoo.com

Veneranda HAJRULLA

University "Ismail Qemali" of Vlora, Albania

Department of Foreign Languages

venerandahajrulla@yahoo.com

Abstract

Feedback is one of the crucial components of teaching and learning processes in EFL classes. Providing feedback to learners throughout the teaching process is very important. Why should teachers use feedback? How many types of feedback may be used in a foreign language classes? Which are the advantages of using it? These are some of the research questions that this paper deals with, from theoretical to practical point of view. Feedback affects learners' proficiency at any level. Reviewing goals, techniques, strategies and teaching perception helps efficient teaching. Without feedback, students do not know where their difficulties are. What should they have to improve? Where to focus? Sometimes it may be neglected without knowing its importance. Effective teaching depends even on effective feedback given to learners. In this paper, we will consider some means of providing feedback to learners.

Keywords: *visual, verbal, written feedback, students' language proficiency, efficient learning.*

Introduction

Globalization has brought changes about the way people concept living and education. People from different parts of the world are learners of different concepts, languages, jobs, professions, socio-cultural background and so on. However, through all the times, from the past to the present and the future preserve to them the great desire: learning a foreign language. The concepts of *why?* *how?* and *what?* foster the need to learn a language more. There is a shift of the concept from "*learning for the sake of learning*" to the concept of "*learning for*

communicate". Learners need and develop the concept to communicate effectively in this world.

According to Moss and Brookhart,¹ feedback is a teacher's response to student work with the intention of furthering learning. This feedback does not have an established point of time and space. In other words, English language teachers, and foreign language teachers in general, may use it in different ways and times. Feedback may be practiced in different forms: *visual*, *verbal* and *written*. In this paper, we will consider some ways of providing feedback to learners and how to use them effectively. Fostering student's proficiency depends on many teaching components. It serves to learners to acquire language, while to teachers to differentiate methodology. According to Hyland,² providing feedback to students is often seen as one of the teacher's most important tasks, offering the kind of individual attention that is otherwise rarely possible under classroom conditions.

The aim of this study comes just from the need to improve what concern languages teachers: effective teaching – effective learning, as long as the students' goals are also the teachers' goals. Feedback has to be used in the right way for it to be effective.³

In our everyday teaching, we use feedback with our students in every class, in every subject at any time. However, *are students aware of feedback? Should we use it more? Is it effective for student's communication?* We should begin first of all by analyzing the very concept of feedback, because sometimes is clear and sometimes is not, sometimes is used consciously, but sometimes is not. This study focuses on communication, feedback and its types: oral, written, direct, indirect, and on teachers' and students' concept of the importance and effectiveness of feedback.

Feedback and target language

As language teachers, we are aware that students face every day different communication problems. For these reason, this study is conducted to determine the types, amount of oral and written feedback, student's responses, techniques used by teachers to help English foreign language learners overcome

¹ C. M. Moss and S. M. Brookhart, *Advancing formative assessment in every classroom: A guide for instructional leaders* (Alexandria Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009).

² K. Hyland, *English for Academic Purposes. An Advanced Resource Book* (London: Routledge, 2006).

³ N. Frey and D. Fisher, *The formative assessment action plan: Practical steps to more successful teaching and learning* (Alexandria Va.:ASCD, 2011).

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communication problems, feelings, fostering motivation on the concept of learning. There are not many studies in the Albanian context about feedback uses in English foreign language classes. Feedback sometimes is neglected as a concept too. However, feedback is an important concept in the theories of language acquisition. Feedback is also an important means of motivation.

In the language process, teachers can provide a variety of feedback to students. Feedback is important for error correction too. *Curricula of Foreign Language Teaching*⁴ stresses the fact of enhancing student's communication through providing meaningful social contexts in language classes helping students overcome the barriers of learning.

Feedback as stated above can be taken and given through tasks, assessments, portfolios, in oral form through explanation, questioning and oral tasks. In other words provided frequently it helps students communicate fluently and offers for teachers a clear view of students' problems. Knowing the problems of their students, teachers can improve techniques and strategies of teaching. After explanation, the frequent questions are *Did you understand? Do you have questions? Do you have any unclear concept?* This is direct feedback. In student-centered classes direct feedback is very important.

Means of providing effective feedback to learners

Foreign language teachers have to use strategies or techniques effectively to meet the goals. Feedback should be seen as having a positive effect and not a negative effect on learners. Language teachers should take in consideration some different uses of feedback and students' feelings. Why? and Where? Are the common questions, so let us have a look at some suggestions of Where? And Why? to use effective feedback. There should be always a balance between the feedback on form and the feedback on content.⁵

Teachers can provide feedback in different ways through different means such as:

- *Portfolios (reflection on proficiency);*
- *Oral feedback: Oral tasks (reflection on accuracy and fluency);*
- *Written feedback: Written tasks like: essays, test (reflection on errors, mistakes and content).*

⁴ *Kurrikula Kombëtare e Gjuhëve Moderne për Arsimin Publik Parauniversitar* (Tirane: Toena, 2000).

⁵ P. Ur, *A course in language teaching* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

According to Clarke,⁶ oral feedback is the most natural one of the feedback types, because it can be given instantly and frequently when needed.

- Using portfolios

Students complete portfolios:

- *without pressure or time constraints;*
- *Portfolios clearly demonstrate progress of students over time;*
- *Portfolios develop active learners;*
- *Conversations about entries demonstrate comprehension and the ability to use academic language.*

For the above reasons the use of portfolios gives direct feedback to student's proficiency. Usually portfolios are used in secondary and high schools. Written feedback, like oral feedback, is in the same way efficient.

- Written feedback: Comments on students' writing:

Purpose:

- *Help students understand if the content is right if they understood the questions;*
- *Help students understand their errors and mistakes;*
- *To give students a motive for revision.*

If teachers correct in a paper just with a mark, sometimes it is not enough.

- Feedback and error correction

- *Errors and mistakes (grammar and content).* According to Harmer⁷ students often prefer feedback on grammatical items instead of for example on content or the design.
- *Comprehensive feedback: give clearly written feedback, so that students understand better;*
- *Direct Feedback: oral and written;*
- *Indirect Feedback: let students understand through analyzes.*

- Students' responses to Feedback: Interviews and questionnaire

- *What feedback did you get from the essay?*
- *What feedback did you get from the test?*
- *When revising your test, did you focus more on grammar correction or content correction?*
- *What part of feedback written was clearer? Why?*

⁶ S. Clarke, *Enriching feedback in the primary classroom: Oral and written feedback from teachers and children* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

⁷ J. Harmer, *How to teach writing* (Harlow: Longman, 2004).

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- *Describe your feelings when you read your test.*
- *Do you prefer more written or oral feedback?*
- *Which one do you think is more efficient for you? Which one do you think help you improve your proficiency?*

According to Mudra,⁸ interviews give the participants a chance to think of answer deeply as it is not static on one type of question only and the interviewer is able to explore the participants' answers to other possible responses or explanations.

Conclusions

In studying the effectiveness of foreign language classroom, this paper presented some reviews on the feedback concept in English foreign language classes. It was discussed about effectiveness of feedback, some types of it and several samples where and why to use it.

According to our teaching experience, the concept itself is related explicitly to students' learning. As the processes are inseparable in the same way, feedback is inseparable in the foreign language classroom.

Feedback can be given in two ways: oral and written. In both cases, the use of feedback depends on teaching goals and purpose. As learners are not exposed to everyday foreign language as they do in their native language, feedback should be part of their learning process. Students will have success if they exactly know their own proficiency and this is done just thanks to frequent feedback. Teachers need to reflect frequently on their teaching strategies to meet teaching goals to student's goals. Teachers need to use different types of feedback that would lead the students to language proficiency.

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