

Providing Feedback to Learners on Tasks in EFL Classes

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Abstract

Feedback is one of the various types of techniques used by language teachers to understand student’s progress to a given activity or task. Frequent feedback involves good communication between students. During a task, the teacher monitors and helps. Given the correct answer and reasons, lowers anxiety. Providing feedback to learners on tasks and other types of assignments improve their language acquisition. Why should teachers use feedback on Tasks? What types of feedback do teachers use in language classes? Which are some of the advantages? These are some of the research questions that are considered in this paper, from theoretical to practical point of view. Feedback affects students’ language proficiency at any level. What should learners improve? Where should learners focus? Effective learning depends on effective frequent feedback. In this paper, there are considered some types of tasks, activities and types of feedback used in different language classes.

Keywords: *written feedback, oral, acquiring language, efficient learning process.*

Giving Feedback on Tasks

As English teachers, we know that feedback can be applied to a range of activities, but in this paper, it refers to a variety of techniques used by the teacher to facilitate learning from the learner to a task or activity and to the importance of it. The teacher is responsible for student’s proficiency, for this reason everyone has the right to know its progress. Tasks are integral parts of learning. If they are not evaluated, then the students do not know how have they progressed. For this reason, it is very important to give feedback on tasks.

The emphasis in a communicative task is on successful task completion and consequently the primary focus is on meaning as learners realise their

communicative intentions. (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, p. 167)

A teacher employs a variety of techniques to give feedback to learners. Feedback can be oral and written. Oral feedback is the most natural one of the feedback types, because it can be given instantly and frequently when needed (Clarke, 2003). It depends whether you need to use the first or the second. There are also different types such as teacher or student's feedback (pair, group). The first is traditional, while the second involves more learners and is very good for communication.

While giving feedback:

- The teacher directs feedback by beginning from pair to pair or from group to group, and from a question to another question.
- Time controlling. It depends on the type of task, on the mistakes or errors the amount of time given to feedback. Feedback from the experience may take 5 to 10 minutes or an extended one up to 15 minutes.
- Proficient students grasp feedback quicker than low proficiency ones, for this reason the teacher is responsible to provide feedback to everyone.
- The teacher is responsible to low the barriers of anxiety, to encourage students to participate and talk.
- The teacher should ask whether students understood after providing feedback.

Teachers might benefit from exploring their feedback practices and developing an awareness of what constitutes effective feedback (Richardson, 2019).

Why should teachers use feedback on Tasks?

Feedback is given for different reasons:

- First, it is enjoyable, gives satisfaction and shows to the student if the task is correct.
- If it is an oral task, it encourages students to participate, to cooperate and use what they know. At the end of the task, feedback is given by the teacher or by the students. In the second case, it creates a challenge for them.

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- Students understand not only where the mistakes are but also even, why there is a mistake or an error. They learn from errors. The teacher asks the students what they found difficult to understand or to do.
- If students perform a task and we just listen but we do not provide feedback, then the students will never understand what went wrong.

Feedback is a continuing process, thus it is not given just at the end but even while students deal with a task or activity, the teacher monitors and gives feedback. The direct corrective feedback is what EFL students in fact want (Zaman & Azad 2012).

Feedback

1. Teacher: The teacher asks questions to keep students interest high.

- If it is a grammar exercise, the teacher may refer to a grammar reference so students can check their answers. As an example grammar books or test books usually have got the answers at the end as Headway Intermediate Tests or Destination Grammar etc.
- Answers are provided on the blackboard or on an answer sheet handed to students at the end of the task
- Students are divided into groups to check and give the correct answers.

2. Students give feedback

- Pair checking. In the same way as they work together, students may correct each other. They collaborate, discuss, use what they know and exchange ideas in the target language. Shy or less proficient students will be motivated to interact with their peers.
- From the experience, in simulation classes, we encourage students to take the role of the teacher. This is effective because they take responsibility and ask students to choose someone from the group to conduct feedback.
- Students are given some flashcards that have the answer on the back. After completing the task, they can give the correct answer.

As language classes are student centered classes, the introduction of feedback by students themselves gives the opportunity to be leaders and take responsibilities. Thus, feedback as a process itself teaches students to use the most effective techniques. A task gives students the opportunity to interact about the task, use English language and focus on the task aim.

Some tips while giving feedback to students in EFL classes:

1. Be positive

When we always check something, the tendency is to point out mistakes. Well, from the experience this is wrong. We have to choose carefully the words by praising and pointing out with chosen words if there are mistakes. Expressions like: *Ok, but you could have done this...; It may have another word to be used...: Well you see, good job, but next time try to be more precise...* If we immediately say negative words, then the student would not like to speak next time. They would be afraid because of mistakes or errors that they may make. This does not help.

2. Differentiate techniques

Try not to give feedback in the same manner. Once you may mix oral with written feedback. Use different colorful chalks or crayons for different types of mistakes while you give feedback. It depends whether if it is an oral task or a written task while giving feedback. If it is an oral one, let the student finish then you may give feedback. Correction should wait otherwise the student will lose confidence.

3. Involve students on giving feedback

Always choose try to choose tasks that are interactive. In such a way while giving feedback you may choose peer correction technique. Divide students in groups to give feedback to each other. This makes feedback funny and not boring. Students still interact and understand that they learn from mistakes.

4. Do not focus just on some students

In the same way as we give tasks to everyone and in the same way that we choose carefully interactive activities to involve all the students, our primary focus is to listen and to correct everyone not just those that speak more than the others. 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 (Hyland, 2006). We should not discriminate. As soon as we enter in a language class, everyone is important and has to learn in an equal way. Feedback is an important tool of any language classroom. If it is done correctly and effectively it helps students to learn effectively.

Practical Tasks and Feedback

Below there are given some types of tasks given to students that study English as a foreign language and for specific purposes.

Project-works: enables to use different topics with different subjects. Students exploit internet information and draw conclusions.

❖ Example 1st year students of Business Management

Project: Create a website, for your school (consider the points why? What to put and what we can do with a website).

Description

Students are divided in groups of 4. One is the leader. Students work for 20 minutes. While doing the task they collaborate with each other in English language. The aim of the task is to use cognitive knowledge, exploit information, use English language. It is a written task. The teacher monitors. After the task the groups evaluate each other. They give feedback on what they understood, what should they improve.

❖ Example 1st year students of the Faculty of Humanities

Project work:

-Albania and UK landscapes and beautiful sites to visit.

-Education and curriculum development in the Albanian context. A comparison of past and present.

-Languages as a cultural bridge and their role in globalization.

Students are divided in groups of 4. They have to choose between the topics. One is the leader. Students work for 20 minutes. The aim of the task is to use cognitive knowledge, exploit information, use English language. It is a written task. While doing the task they collaborate with each other in English language. The teacher monitors. After the task the groups evaluate each other. They give feedback on what they understood, what should they improve.

❖ Example 1st year students of Informatics

Project work

Create an ergonomic school. Design the project and give details. Consider technical specifications.

Students are divided in groups of 4. They have to choose between the topics. One is the leader. Students work for 20 minutes. The aim of the task is to use

cognitive knowledge, exploit information, use English language for specific purposes. It is a written task. While doing the task they collaborate with each other in English language. The teacher monitors. After the task the groups evaluate each other. The teacher gives feedback on what they understood, what should they improve.

Topic for discussion

Speaking about visiting well known sites

Suggest a place to visit in your country

Give arguments about pros and cons of visiting it

Technology and communication

Speak about ways of communication that we use nowadays. Which one do you use often?

The benefits and risks of internet. Playing online games: why and why not?

What do you consider a virtual crime? How can parents control their children while using internet?

Students work for 10 minutes. The aim of the task is to use cognitive knowledge, exploit information, use English language. It is an oral task. While doing the task they collaborate with each other in English language. The teacher monitors and interact. The teacher gives feedback on what they understood, what should they improve.

To relate what is explained in the task description, aim and feedback, let us have a look at what is said about the aim of tasks.

Tasks of any kind require the activation of a range of appropriate general competences, for example: knowledge and experience of the world; sociocultural knowledge (concerning life in the target community and essential differences between practices, values and beliefs in that community and the learner's own society); (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, p. 167)

So as it is seen, the task itself requires and evolves different types of knowledge from the student.

Essays: enables to use cognitive knowledge, may be used with different classes on different issues.

❖ Example: 1st year students of Business Management

The economic growth of Albania in the past decade.

Example: 1st year students of Informatics

The role of technology in the contemporary society. How has computer changed our life. (1st year informatics students)

Description

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Students work at home. It is a written task. The teacher evaluates and give written feedback. The teacher gives feedback on what they understood, what should they improve.

In the case of tasks designed for language learning or teaching purposes, performance is concerned both with meaning and the way meanings are comprehended, expressed and negotiated. (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, p. 167)

Conclusion

In language classes getting and giving feedback to students on different kinds of tasks or activities, teachers should encourage, should be clear and let the students know that what they do and how do they learn is appreciated. In this way we build student's self-confidence. In student-centered classes, feedback has a special role in acquiring the knowledge through tasks and activities. In the same way as we give feedback on tests being formative or summative, we can give feedback to make them revise and learn from mistakes.

Differentiating feedback techniques encourage and motivate students to interact and collaborate with other peers. The teacher instructs, diagnose and resolve problems and have a clear picture of what should be improved in teaching. Effective teaching has positive effect on learning, the main goal of both teacher and student in a language classroom.

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