



UNIVERSITI
TEKNOLOGI
MARA

Monograph Series of UiTM Pahang

COMPASS

Compilation of Pahang Scholars' Synergy

Vol. 1. No. 2 (Teaching and Learning Practices)

ISSN 1985-9937



Giving Feedback in the Classroom

Kamisah Hj Ariffin

ABSTRACT

Feedback is important in the teaching and learning process. It can inform the learners of their performance and promote a conducive and supportive classroom climate. Studies have shown that positive feedback is more effective than negative feedback on the learners' learning development. However, there has been evidence that positive feedback in general terms and automatic way may not necessarily achieve good effects on the learners. Negative feedback, on the other hand, if given in a supportive way can be regarded as constructive and able to bring about positive effects. This paper looks into the possibilities of giving feedback on learners' performance that can bring positive effects on their subsequent performance.

Keywords: teacher's evaluation, teacher's feedback, correction, assessment

Introduction

Teacher's feedback is an important aspect of teaching and considered as one of the significant instructional variables in enhancing student achievement (Hattie, 1993). This is supported by Alton-Lee (2003, p. 91) who claimed that 'effective feedback is one of the strongest influences on student outcomes'. In fact, a major research involving 83 million students from around the globe confirms that the key to effective teaching is the quality of the feedback students get and their interaction with teachers (Woulfe, 2009). This is because feedback not only informs learners of how well they have performed, but may also increase their motivation, thus, build or create a supportive classroom climate. To add, Nunan (1991) claims that the feedback can let the students know their performance and motivate them through praises.

Weinstein (1989) puts forward that learners may learn of their performance through their teacher's feedback in the forms of marks given, comments, praises and criticisms. However, Weinstein also reports that there are differences in teachers' feedback with different types of learners. It seems that teachers tend to give more positive feedback and more opportunities to perform to high achievers. In contrast, low achievers seem to receive more negative feedback, more direction and help.

Although there is a consensus that positive feedback is more effective in bringing about positive change to learners' behaviour, Nunan (1991) argues that such feedback often seems to be rather 'automatic' (p. 197). Frequent approval such as 'good', 'right' and 'okay' can lose its encouraging effect (Ur, 2000). On the other hand, negative feedback may not necessarily have discouraging effects on the learners. In fact, if given in a supportive way, it may turn into constructive feedback.

Thus, this paper explores the possibilities of giving feedback on learners' performance that can bring positive effects on their subsequent performance.

Teacher's Feedback

Feedback is defined as information given to a recipient about the correctness, accuracy, or appropriateness of his or her past performance (Ilgen, Fisher and Taylor, 1979). In teaching and learning, feedback is teacher's evaluation of the students' responses (Cook, 2000). Ur (2000) suggests that there are two important components of feedback, namely, correction and assessment.

Teacher's Correction

Errors are indispensable to learners in any stage or level in the process of learning. Brown (2002), referring to second language learning, claimed that learners' errors are significant as 'they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language' (p. 205). In this regard, a teacher's role is to point out the errors and provide correction. Corrections can aid learners clarify their understanding of what they have learned and be informed of their performance.

How should correction be expressed? Ur (2000) attests that corrections should be done in tactful and encouraging ways. However, instead of correcting errors gently, tactfully and supportively, there have been cases where teachers correct errors assertively, rudely and as a condemnation (Ur, 2000). Thus, what kind of correction should be practised in the classroom? Here, it is suggested that learners' preferences as to how errors should be treated can be a useful guide to teachers. Thus, teachers' sensitivity is a keyword here. They need to be sensitive

to learners' personality, needs and preferences. Some learners are very sensitive, thus, tactless ways of correcting may upset them leading to loss of confidence or hating the subject, or even the teacher. In addition, learners have their own preferences about the kinds of corrections that can help them the most.

Ur (2000, p. 249) has listed several techniques used by teachers to correct errors in the classroom:

- i. does not react at all;
- ii. indicates there is a mistake, but does not provide any further information about what is wrong;
- iii. says what was wrong and provides a model of the acceptable version, i.e explicit correction;
- iv. indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from the learner who made the mistake, i.e self-repair;
- v. indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from another member of the class;
- vi. asks the learner who made the mistake to reproduce the corrected version;
- vii. provides or elicits an explanation of why the mistake was made and how to avoid it.

Teachers should make judgments about the type of corrections they should exercise in class based on the learners' factors mentioned above. For example, teachers usually correct errors immediately. However, teachers should also consider the learners' knowledge on the topic. If learners do not know the correct form, teachers should use the explicit feedback technique. However, if they already know the correct form, perhaps, the best way is to employ the implicit feedback technique. This may enable the learners to make sense of their errors and foster their own progress. In addition, learners' preferences on corrective feedback should also be taken into account. For example, Oliver (2000) found that children preferred recasts (rephrasing learners' utterances), while older learners preferred clarification requests and explicit feedback.

Teacher's Assessment

In the learning process, assessment has always been associated with tools, techniques and procedures for collecting information on learners' performance. Usually, learners will be informed of their performance by

marks or grade obtained. However, assessment also involves teachers' evaluation through responses and comments on learners' answers. This paper is more interested in this kind of assessment rather than the score assessments.

In assessing the learners' performance, teachers should bear in mind that the purpose of assessment is to help and promote learning. Thus, teachers should decide on the kinds of comments and responses that are appropriate that can develop students' affect on learning. The following table lists some examples from the literature on the kinds of assessments in the form of feedback given by teachers in the classroom (Harmer, 2000; Ur, 2000; Ma, 2006).

Table 1: Examples of Teachers' Assessments

Assessment		Examples
Positive	Confirmation	Good. Right. Yes, you are right. That is correct. Excellent. Well done. Good work. That is perfectly correct. That is very interesting. That is exactly the correct answer. No, that is wrong. I am afraid that is not quite right.
	Encouragement	That is much better. You are getting better. You have made a lot of progress. Try again. May be this will help you. Don't worry, try again.
Negative		That was rather disappointing. That is awful. That is horrible. You fool. Idiot. What a load of rubbish. I have never heard of anything so ridiculous. This is the last time I shall tell you.

Classroom Implication

Most empirical studies have confirmed that positive feedback is effective in the learning process as it is encouraging and supportive, thus, motivating (Brophy, 1981). However, it is noteworthy that automatic and overuse positive feedback can devalue its worth. Ur (2000) even contended that overuse and uncritical feedback can be irritating. This implies that not all positive feedback can be beneficial to the students. Automatic positive feedback without specifying learners' particular accomplishment may not offer any information on the values of their accomplishments.

Although negative feedback seems to be undesirable in classroom practice, it can also bring positive change in learners' behaviour. Researchers have also suggested that negative feedback can benefit the learners if given supportively and constructively (Ur, 2000). Teachers should avoid giving hurtful comments to the learners. Instead, negative feedback should be given in the form of positive and constructive critics. For example, rather than saying 'What a load of rubbish!', the teacher can say 'When you do this again, it is better if you ...' instead. Learners might benefit from this kind of feedback rather than the automatic positive feedback.

Another important consideration when giving feedback is learners' personality. Some learners are very sensitive and may not take positively to any feedback given openly in the classroom. Thus, instructors need to know their learners well before deciding on the kind of feedback that they would give.

Conclusion

This paper has established the need for teachers to reflect on their feedback-giving practice in the classroom. Teachers need to consider their feedback methods based on their learners' personality, needs and preferences. Teachers should also consider employing a variety of feedback methods so that learners will have a range of opportunities to develop their own learning. In addition, the feedback should also be meaningful to the learners and their learning development.

References

- Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Brophy, J. (1981). Teacher praise: A functional analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 51(1), 5-32.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Cook, V. (2000). *Second language classrooms: Research on teaching and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (2000). *How to teach English*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Hattie, J.A. (1993). *Feedback and teaching and learning*. Christ Church Grammar School Annual Conference.
- Ilgen, D. R., Fisher, C. D., & Taylor, M. S. (1979). Consequences of individual feedback on behavior in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 64, 349-371.
- Ma, X. (2006). *Teacher talk and EFL in university classrooms*. Unpublished Master's Dissertation. Chongqing Normal University & Yangtze University, China.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology: A textbook for teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oliver, R. (2000). Age differences in negotiation and feedback in classroom and pairwork. *Language Learning*, 50, 119-151.
- Ur, P. (2000). *A course in language teaching practice and theory*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Weinstein, C. S. (1989). Teacher education: Students' preconceptions of teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(2), 53-60.
- Woulfe, C. (2009, January 4). NZ Study challenges world on teaching. *Sunday Star Times*. Retrieved February 1, 2009 from <http://www.stuff.co.nz/4809052a11.html>.

KAMISAH HJ ARIFFIN, Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang. kamisah@pahang.uitm.edu.my