

The Power of Feedback in Improving Student's Foreign Language Proficiency

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the importance of feedback in teaching and learning process. Students' proficiency of language depends in many factors. It affects the perception of language and cultural education. Feedback is important for teachers to evaluate teaching as a whole process. It is important for students to understand how much they have progressed, what they need to change. Students have different teaching styles so challenging teaching makes them evaluate themselves as whole persons sharing ideas within different cultural societies. It describes different types of feedback used in different processes. Effective feedback depends on aim, language level and students' needs. Positive feedback rather than negative feedback help students became better active learners.

Key words: students' language background, effective feedback, efficient teaching-learning process.

1. Introduction

Global changes have affected social life of people. Even in Albania the decades of transition has brought changes in perception of foreign language teaching and learning. The shift of teaching from teacher-centered classes to student -centered classes made it possible to change methodology. From differentiating methodology teachers began to perform new skills in teaching. From learning to know to learning to use, foreign language has become a means of communication. A teacher defines concepts, goals and ideals to adopt his/her teaching to students' needs.

Innovation leads students' learning and using the power of language for their social behavior and communication. This leads the innovative teacher to meet his teaching goals to his/her students by differentiating teaching methods too. The design and selection of teaching methods must take into account not only the nature of the subject matter but also how students learn. (Davis, 1997) The whole teaching process involves different steps.

The role of an effective teacher is important for student's performance in acquiring and using language in communication. A word that we are listening a lot in recent years is Feedback. Giving and taking information about the subject in student-centered classes is very important. In student-centered classes acquiring fluency is often considered more important than the acquisition of structural part of language itself. Student-centered classes leads student to creative thinking and speaking. In such context is very important to define goals helping students' progress. Than some questions are stated *Feedback? Why? When? Importance?* Let us try to give an answer to these questions by analyzing processes.

2. Feedback and its importance in the whole language process

In student-centered classes it is important to provide students with materials, information, clarifying ideas about why are they learning. In student- centered classes the basic principles for most of the methods are:

- Students should be actively involved in the learning process
- Topics should be relevant and interesting
- Whenever possible learning experiences should take place in real-life situations where the relevant knowledge and skills will really be needed and used. (Westwood, 2008)

These criteria's meet the inquiry of both CLT and the Curricula of Foreign Language Teaching in Albania: Implementing Communicative methodology in foreign language teaching. (Curricula, 2000) Teachers should be always aware of the type of feedback and the time. Having different students with different styles and emotions even feedback should be considered. The foreign language teacher has to secure that type of feedback which attracts students to participate in communicative activities. A positive and right feedback help students even reinforce positive social and cultural behavior in and outside classroom. The whole teaching process raises some question about the role of feedback in student's proficiency:

- *Is feedback given properly in order to help students defining what's good or wrong in their performance, or just creates confusion?*
- *What type of feedback can the teacher secure to students to help them being efficient? (Musai, 1997)*

As feedback has to do with advising, criticizing. Feedback may be given orally or in written form. *Why is important?* Feedback is important for student's proficiency. Feedback includes two factors which are cognitive and motivational ones. (Brookhart, 2010)

Feedback in Explanation and Questioning

The teacher begins the lesson by presenting information that may be known or unknown. Even in such a case teacher uses feedback by asking questions such as:

- Do you understand....?
- Do you have any unclear concepts...?
- Do you have any questions...?

If the English language teacher uses these types of questions after explaining he/she takes feedback by students' answer and understand if there is a problem. In this case we have students-teacher feedback. Students are expected to discuss and ask questions to clarify their language perception. Asking and answering questions happens continually in EFL classes. If constructed well students understand. But even here it is not enough giving questions without repeating and asking students. From questioning, again teacher takes feedback. Students' responses depend on teacher effectiveness of asking. Students are actively involved in collecting, using information and receiving continuously feedback. The whole teaching process has to do with language interaction. Feedback is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance. (Ur, 1996)

Feedback in evaluating different Tasks

Evaluation in EFL happens through assessment. Teachers give written or oral assessment to evaluate students. After a formative or summative assessment teacher corrects and give marks or write down notes. Returning tests to students teachers give feedback. Apart from written feedback even words have their own effect. According to Truscott (1996) feedback of error correction is sometimes harmful to students' fluency. From my teaching experience as we focus in student's fluency it's better letting finishing than giving oral feedback in an obtrusive way. Praising or suggesting students to perform tasks or activities better next time would motivate and encourage student to learn. For this reason we might say that positive feedback helps students

become better learners. The teacher understands if students have understood the lesson through evaluation, for this reason feedback is a necessity. (Clark, 1991)

Through guided feedback students understand where they are what do they have to learn better. For this reason it's important to be given at the right time and in a proper way. Just correction of something without explanation doesn't help. Students should get information about everything in order to be productive. Without feedback it's impossible because even if it is absent for other reasons it should be used to secure students' progress and motivating students. (Sinclair, J & Coulthard, M., 1975). Teachers should inform students frequently and facilitate their learning experience. Teacher usually writes down the wrong and the right version of something in a test. This is done almost for all language skills such as writing, grammar exercises, reading tasks but even for listening tasks. Writing tasks such as essays or projects require teachers to write down comments and to correct even structural part as well. Students respond by taking in consideration teacher's comment and improving their writing, listening skill next time. Oral feedback is important for a reading and speaking exercise. Feedback is given even for error correction in written or orally although in many cases students do not like such kind of feedback because they feel bad and perhaps would not do any kind of task next time. Grammar tasks for example should be given in written form because students understand better what's wrong. It is sometimes better to give feedback through comments; in such a case it depends on what kind of skill is the teacher correcting. So we might say that teacher's methodology doesn't stand just in differentiating strategies of teaching but even in providing feedback.

Conclusion

Teachers should provide continuously effective feedback in EFL classes. Feedback is important for all language levels and age of students. Feedback motivates our English students to become effective learners. Student's proficiency of all language skills depends even on the right and effective feedback. Before giving feedback teachers must take in consideration students' ability and should create a positive learning environment. Feedback should be always accompanied with student's freedom to express themselves especially in a university English class when students study to become language teachers. Sharing, discussing and understanding is the key to a successful and effective teaching and learning process in an EFL classroom environment.

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