

An Investigation Into Indirect Feedback In EFL Classrooms: Case Of The “Université Chrétienne Bilingue Du Congo”

Katembo Mukirania Celestin,

English Language Teacher at the Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (UCBC/DRC)

Abstract

The Need To Help Language Learners Develop Learner Autonomy To Foster Language Development Occupies Special Attention In Teaching. In This Paper, Teaching Consists Of Enabling Language Learners To Learn Autonomously. And The Development Of A Language Is A Result Of Trials And Errors Followed By Appropriate Feedback. Sadly, Observation Reveals That EFL Teachers At The “Université Chrétienne Bilingue Du Congo” (UCBC), Mostly Provide Feedback Which Hampers The Learners’ English Language Development. Teachers Do Not Give Students Opportunities To Process Their Errors. As A Result, Students Don’t Take Advantage Of Teacher Feedback To Learn And Grow. In Attempting To Overcome This Issue, I Contend That One Solution Is Providing Reflection-Provoking Feedback; Namely, Indirect Feedback. The Latter Leads Learners To A Deep Reflection On Their Errors To Foster English Language Development.

Keywords: *Indirect Feedback, EFL Classroom, English Language Development*

Date of Submission: 15-06-2023

Date of Acceptance: 25-06-2023

I. Introduction

In the teaching and learning process, “feedback refers to comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other persons” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 199). In order to help students learn and grow gradually, teachers need to be more asking than telling teachers. They must provide feedback which requires students to think deeply and learn from their errors (Dormer, 2011). They must avoid doing the work that students need to do to continue to develop skills. In direct feedback, teachers provide the correct forms of the students’ faulty productions. And as a result, students make no effort to learn from attempts to correct their errors by themselves in light of teacher feedback. Thus, this paper aims at encouraging provision of indirect feedback to give students enough information to enhance student learning through deep reflection on their errors.

II. Literature Review

Feedback-related literature provides different definitions, roles and forms of feedback. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), some studies have investigated feedback and its effects since the 1980s.

Given the purpose of this article, one key definition of feedback in the current pedagogy and the necessity of indirect feedback are the focus of this section.

Feedback in the Current Pedagogy

Ambrose et al. (2010) define feedback as “information given to students about their performance that guides future behavior” (p. 125). This definition shows the necessity to intentionally consider regular formative assessment followed by feedback which is conducive to improvement in EFL classrooms. English teachers have the responsibility to assign tasks which form students on a regular basis (Dormer, 2016). The assigned tasks will form students if they are followed by quality feedback in a reasonable time. Thus, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to multiply opportunities to give appropriate information to EFL learners so as to allow them to consolidate their skills in the English language. Doing so makes formative assessment a real assessment for fostering learning.

In the same way, Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that feedback is productive when it fosters student learning through self-error correction ignited by teacher implicit feedback. The teacher serves as a true facilitator by providing guidance through feedback provision. Therefore, EFL teachers need to reduce direct feedback significantly since it mostly leads EFL learners to effortlessness due to the correction of learners’ errors by the teacher. In other words, EFL teachers need to be more asking than telling by providing students with enough appropriate information which helps them to learn from their strengths and growth areas. The more EFL learners strive to correct their errors, the more they develop strong skills in the English language.

Lightbown and Spada (2013) encourage indirect feedback because they believe that it leads to student production. The latter leads students to a gradual development of skills in the English language. Learners develop their critical thinking skills through the process of attempting to correct their errors in light of the teacher’s reflection-provoking comments.

In the same direction, Ferlazzo (2013) insists that feedback must lead to a positive difference. In this paper, a positive difference is the enhancement of student learning. Otherwise, teacher feedback is unproductive. For this reason, teachers must strive to provide students with feedback which clearly states what students need to do to think about their errors and learn from them.

In a nutshell, the particularity of this article is the focus on the necessity of indirect feedback in the EFL classrooms at the Christian Bilingual University of Congo in order to enhance students’ significant development of skills in English.

Indirect Feedback and its Necessity in EFL Classrooms

Indirect feedback allows students to improve their work by learning from their errors. Thus, the trial-and-error approach to the teaching and learning process, i.e., providing students with opportunities to learn from their mistakes is of utmost importance. Richards and Schmidt (2002) insist that the EFL learners’ interlanguage is inevitably characterized by some imperfection because it is developing. And it is the teacher’s responsibility to help EFL learners to develop their English in a reasonable time frame. One of the best ways to do so is providing feedback which is likely to lead learners to learning from their errors. Dormer (2016) reminds that teaching in the twenty-first century is enabling learners to learn autonomously. Therefore, EFL learners’ errors provide a golden opportunity to enable them to learn independently. Teachers need to take advantage of students’ errors to provide specific information which allows students to reflect on their errors and consolidate their English language skills. By doing so EFL teachers lead students to the development of skills to work independently.

III. Method

This paper investigated indirect feedback in EFL classrooms at UCBC. It necessitated the literature review on the topic of feedback and its importance in the language teaching and learning. Reading key books provided essential information.

In addition, given the focus on written feedback, copies of six English assignments were gathered to help appreciate the kind of feedback provided by UCBC EFL teachers. They were from fifty low-intermediate level students. The next part deals with a brief description of research results.

IV. Results

A glance at the assignment copies of UCBC EFL learners reveals that their teachers mostly provide direct feedback. The latter increases students' passivity toward English language development. Teachers mostly do the work that EFL learners have to do in order to develop skills in the English language. Written feedback provided by UCBC EFL teachers predominantly included:

1. crossing out, circling, or underlining the EFL learners' errors without stating what needs to be done to improve them;
2. writing down the correct forms of answers; and
3. assigning poor scores without stating clear reasons why learners lost the other points.

An observation reveals that it is due to this predominant way of providing feedback that the English language is not being developed significantly by UCBC EFL learning. Teachers' feedback is not enhancing the skills of students for effective English language development. It doesn't lead students to actions which are likely to foster language development.

V. Discussion

Feedback provided by UCBC EFL teachers is mostly unproductive since it doesn't lead most students to action. When teachers do the work that students are supposed to do, English language development by learners is hampered. Teachers don't lead students to actions which are conducive to the development of skills in the English language. Dormer (2016) encourages EFL teachers to take advantage of the students' errors to enable them to develop skills to learn English independently. Thus, teachers must provide students with feedback which is informative enough that learners understand correctly what they must do to correct their own errors and learn through that error-correction process.

One way to make it more effective is returning the students' copies for the first time without a grade/score. Because most Congolese students are grade-oriented, they will work hard on the improvement of their answers so as to get a good score. This will at the same time allow them to think deeply about their errors for learning enhancement.

Some Examples of Indirect feedback statements

The following comments can lead students to reflection on their errors and enhance student learning:

1. Please double-check subject-verb agreement here.
2. Please revise the formation of plural nouns ending in -y preceded by a consonant.
3. Please pay special attention to word choice. Not all French cognates are true cognates. Replace this word by a word that best suits this context please.
4. Please use definite and indefinite articles appropriately.
5. Please double-check the spelling of this word.
6. You wrote this word in French. Please write it in English.
7. Please revise the third person singular simple present tense of verbs ending in -ch.
8. Please pay special attention to the third person singular simple present tense of verbs ending in -y preceded by a consonant and -y preceded by a vowel.
9. Please replace this preposition with another that best suits.

10. Double-check word order here please.

Students' attempts to correct their own errors in light of the aforementioned informative feedback statements will undoubtedly help them develop skills which will lead to avoidance of similar errors in the future. And since UCBC students are grade-oriented, it is advisable to first of all return their assignment copies with instructive comments without grades. A grade can only be provided after students have taken time to reflect on their errors and correct them.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Actual use of a specific language plays a critical role in its development by learners. The latter need as many opportunities as possible to develop skills in the language they are learning. This article has shown that providing indirect feedback is one of the powerful ways to help EFL learners to use English as they learn it through processing their own errors. Direct feedback provided by UCBC EFL teachers has been revealed to be a hindrance to the development of English by UCBC students. Therefore, it is important to encourage UCBC EFL teachers to mostly provide students with feedback which pushes them to actions leading to English language development. This paper suggests action in terms of self-correction as students' response to teachers' reflection-provoking comments. Students need golden opportunities to process and correct their errors so as to develop skills in the English language.

Teachers should avoid doing what students have to do to continue to learn and grow. Teacher feedback in the form of giving the correct forms of the students' errors has been a barrier to student learning and growth in the area of English language at UCBC. Learners' errors should be viewed as a special opportunity to provide instructive feedback leading students to learning from their errors.

An investigation on the oral indirect feedback in UCBC EFL classrooms would be an interesting topic to consider developing in the near future.

References

- [1]. Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: 7 research-based principles for smart teaching* (1st ed.). New Jersey: Jossey-Bass.
- [2]. Dormer, J. E. (2011). *Teaching English in missions: effectiveness and integrity*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.
- [3]. Dormer, J. E. (2016). *What school leaders need to know about English learners*. Alexandria: Tesol Press.
- [4]. Ferlazzo, L. (2013). *Classroom management: Q&As*. Bethesda: Education Week Press.
- [5]. Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [6]. Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (3rd ed.). New York: Pearson Education.