Teachers’ Oral Feedback Impact On Efl Students’ Oral Proficiency: Case Of Undergraduate Classes Of The English Branch At Mku-Biskra

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Abstract

As English has become the world’s Language of Wider Communication (LWC), more and more BAC holders enroll in the English programs at the Algerian universities. Large classes appear, therefore, to characterize most of the English departments across the country, which minimize the chances for students to be proficient speakers of English. Optimal learning of English, however, requires a balanced mastery of the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing). Nonetheless, this paper concerns itself with probing students’ attitude towards and perception of the speaking skill. Intuitively, students do not seem to be aware of the importance of being orally proficient in English. From an insider perspective, we have noticed that ‘poor oral proficiency (POP) characterize the vast majority of the undergraduate students of the English Branch at MKU of Biskra. Throughout the current paper, we made it our point to address two main questions: (1) to what extent are the students aware of the speaking skill importance? (2) to what extent is the teacher’s oral feedback effective and influential in improving the students’ oral proficiency? We believe that if our students receive immediate oral feedback and take it into consideration seriously, there will be a significant improvement in their oral proficiency. Two questionnaires, the linchpin of this work, were administered to the teaching staff of the English Branch at MKU of Biskra and a sample of 30 undergraduate students. The findings thereof are analyzed and reported in this paper.

Keywords: Teachers’ Feedback, Impact, EFL Students, Oral Proficiency

Introduction

As far as EFL classrooms are concerned, speaking attracts the attention of almost all the students. They are interested in this skill in particular because they need to practice the target language: fluently and accurately. Unfortunately, despite their strong will to speak accurate English, they still suffer from committing serious mistakes while speaking. Sometimes, our EFL students are aware of their mistakes but they do not accept their teacher’s feedback. Therefore, to raise their awareness about their speaking sufficiencies, as EFL teachers, we have to be careful when and how our feedback should be provided. According to Harmer (2007 : 97):

“When students are involved in a speaking activity such as a role-play or conversation, instant and intrusive correction is often not appropriate since it can interfere...”

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with the flow of the activity and inhibit students just at the moment when they should be trying hardest to activate their language knowledge. “

Feedback And Students’ Attitudes

Moreover, providing feedback is the responsibility of the teacher in the first place. In other words, to draw our students’ attention to their speaking errors is our mission as EFL teachers since the classroom may be the only environment where the students can practice the language as Hedge (2000. 288) asserts that “in many foreign language situations, where there is little exposure to English or practice available in the community, error correction is an expected role for the teacher”. In the same vein, as a feedback provider, the EFL teacher should know when to correct his/her students’ errors to improve their level, otherwise his/her correction will be negatively received.

Harmer (2001:276) pointed out that “when students are in the middle of a speaking activity, over correction may inhibit them and take the communicativeness out of the activity. On the other hand, helpful and gentle correction may get students out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitation”.

Analysis Of The Students’ Questionnaire

Q1: How often do we receive oral feedback in classroom?

Graph 01 demonstrates the frequency of receiving oral feedback in classroom. The results reveal that 35,29% of the surveyed students state that they receive oral feedback very often. 41.17% of them say sometimes, 11.76% say rarely, and 11.76 did not answer the question at all. From our participants’ answers, we confirm that all our colleagues provide oral feedback in their classrooms. This means that both teachers and students recognize the importance of oral feedback.

Q2: Do all your teachers provide you with oral feedback? Yes/ No
As indicated in Graph 02, the majority of our respondents (64.70%) state that not all of their teachers provide them with oral feedback. Whereas 35.29% of the students state the opposite. Indeed, those 35.29% of the participants confirm that they receive feedback from their teachers of different courses such as: Written Expression, Oral expression, ESP, Linguistics, Pragmatics, Phonetics and Didactics. Therefore, all EFL teachers, regardless of the courses they teach, they are aware enough of how beneficial is the oral feedback provides for the improvement of their students oral proficiency level.

Q3: Which type of feedback do you prefer?

As far as the preferable type of feedback is concerned, Graph 03 shows that 58.82% of the participants prefer both types oral and written, 23.52% of them prefer written feedback and the others with 17.64% prefer the oral one. The reason behind their preferences are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Feedback</th>
<th>Students’ reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Expression</td>
<td>_improving the speaking skill (fluency).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_willingness of speaking English spontaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Expression</td>
<td>_improving the writing skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_It is private (between you and your teacher).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>_Written feedback enriches my vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Written feedback helps to write without mistakes.
Oral feedback enhances my speaking fluency.
Oral feedback to speak as natives.
Both of them are beneficial.
Both of them are necessary to acquire a foreign language.

Q4: Do you receive oral feedback from your oral expression teacher precisely? Yes/ No

Graph 04 shows that the vast majority of the students population in question (88.23 %) point out that they receive oral feedback from their teacher of oral expression precisely, and only 11.76 % of the students say the opposite. This indicates that oral expression teachers give a special interest to oral feedback.

A follow-up question is added to Q4 asking students about their oral proficiency level improvement. Those 88.23 % of our participants justify their answers as follows:

My oral proficiency level has improved because of:
- Listening to native speakers
- Listening effectively to the teacher
- Having role plays through which they seek new information and discover new vocabulary.
- Communicating and exchanging ideas with peers.
- Avoiding mistakes through repeated correction.
- Feeling at ease when interacting with the teacher.
- Encouraging environment raises self-confidence.
- Practicing different activities enriches students’ knowledge.

As a final analysis, it appears that extra-curricular activities (such as listening to non-native speakers thanks to movies, etc) back up TT’s efforts to remedy SS’s oral proficiency.

Q5: How do you evaluate your oral proficiency level?

As for this question, the students are asked to evaluate their oral proficiency level. Indeed, they supplied us with different answers depending on their own perspectives. Most of them agree that they have an “average level”. Some others think it is “good”. Nadstill some others believe that only their teachers who are able to assess their oral proficiency level, which indicates their inability to have a precise idea of their proficiency.
The most important point we have noticed from the data collected that there is an improvement whatever its degree is. Those answers were explained as summarized in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average level</th>
<th>Good level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because I:</td>
<td>Because I:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_Feel shy to express my opinions.</td>
<td>_Am able to speak without mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_Lack self-confidence in speaking fluently.</td>
<td>_Am able to speak in front of others without Hesitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_Still need more practice to speak correct English.</td>
<td>_Become good in listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_Become good in listening.</td>
<td>_Get rid of papers during oral presentation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Students’ evaluation of their Oral Proficiency Level.

By the conclusion, the present research wishes to verify whether SS/ELLs are:
_Aware of their proficiency in the target language.
_Perceptions of their skills and abilities.
_Ability in target language to define the degree of their oral proficiency.

Introduction

From an insider perspective and as EFL teachers, I strongly believe in the impact of the oral feedback on the students’ oral proficiency level. My own experience in teaching different courses to different levels strengthen my believe and lead me to write this paper. Throughout the three last years, I taught 2 groups oral expression for their 3 years of the license degree and provided them with oral feedback whenever needed; by the end of each year I have noticed that their oral proficiency level is improving gradually. In the present work, I attempt to investigate the oral feedback impact on the students’ oral proficiency level even if the teacher does not have oral expression classes. Differently stated, I tried to discover whether my colleagues provide oral feedback only as oral expression teachers or even if they teach other courses.

Teachers’ Questionnaire Analysis

Q1: How often do you provide oral feedback in the classroom?
The table indicates that the frequency of teachers’ oral feedback is between “very often” and “sometimes”. 50% of respondents provide oral feedback very often and 50% provide it sometimes. These results show how aware are the teachers of the oral feedback importance to their students’ language learning.

Q2 : Do you think that providing oral feedback has an impact on your students’ oral proficiency ? Yes/ No

The table demonstrates that the majority of the surveyed teachers (80%) believe that providing oral feedback has impact on their students’ oral proficiency. 10% of the teachers said NO and 10% of them did not answer the question. From this we recognize that our colleagues provide oral feedback in their classrooms on the basis that it is strongly affects their students oral proficiency. They consolidate their belief with the following reasons. Providing oral feedback is beneficial in terms of:

_Raising the students’ awareness about some aspects of language.
_Fostering the correct linguistic behaviour.
_Drawing the students’ attention to their weaknesses and strengths as well.
_Encouraging students to adjust and improve their performance taking into account the teachers’ recommendations and comments.
_Motivating students to acquire new vocabulary. __Helping students to get used of avoiding mistakes.

Q3: Which type of feedback do your students prefer ?
80% of the teachers state that their students prefer to receive both kinds of feedback ‘oral and written’, whereas only 2% of the teachers who have noticed that their students prefer the oral feedback. They explain their answers as stated:

Oral feedback constitutes an immediate and instant orientation, which is likely to have an instant effect on the ground, whereas written feedback is a memorable instruction to which the student could return at anytime.

_It depends on the activity and the performed task. Sometimes an oral feedback is sufficient but most of time the written one has more impact on learners because they internalize it in their long term memory and whenever needed it comes naturally to them._

_It depends on the situation we are in, or it depends on the time allotted._

_Auditory and visual learners may find oral feedback very useful; however, the rest may rely more on written feedback because they fail to remember their lessons._

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Q4 : Do you provide oral feedback as an oral expression teacher precisely? Yes/NO

As indicated in the table above, 40% of teachers say YES and 60% of them say NO. Undoubtedly, this reveals that the surveyed teachers are not only teachers of oral expression but also of other courses. Those who teach oral expression provide their own explanation as well as those who teach other courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Oral Expression Teachers</em></th>
<th><em>Teachers of other courses</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often looks forward to having my students ameliorate their performances; therefore, I do my best to make comments, recommendations, suggestions as forms of feedback.</td>
<td><em>Written exp, Grammar, R.M because they need it for they are being evaluated in writing.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing oneself and oral feedback go hand in hand.</td>
<td><em>Phonetics: to correct the mispronunciation of words (Grammar or written exp).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback is part of any learning task whether oral or written.</td>
<td><em>Oral expression forms part of the teaching process in the literature module, especially when it comes to poetic devices which are associated with oral proficiency.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I teach only oral expression as TD sessions, for the lectures, we can’t provide feedback.</td>
<td><em>In literature and linguistic modules, I personally provide oral feedback to reinforce what has been covered and to check if it is possible to move onward.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral feedback is sometimes given in study skills module to correct or remind students some of the rules and names of language, but not explicitly.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5: How do your students receive your feedback?

For this open-ended question, we have received a variety of answers that come to confirm the students’ positive attitude towards their teachers’ feedback. They state the following:
Students appreciate receiving feedback especially the written one. Students feel more motivated each time they receive feedback. Students feel enthusiastic and inclined to take the provided feedback into consideration. Students feel comfortable and at ease when receiving feedback. Students trust their teachers because they are so for their own good. They add that: Students need to be prepared to accept to be corrected either by the teacher or by their peers. Students receive feedback positively if it a compliment or praise, and negatively if it is a criticism.

MacLuhan asserts that “the medium is the message” which explains that learners tend to be

………………when the teacher is kind and nice to them and conversely, when the teacher is rough, they tend to perceive negatively his/her instruction and oral feedback.

Q6 : At the end of each academic year, have you noticed any improvements at the level of your students’ oral proficiency level ? Explain. On the one hand, most of the teachers (80%) state that there is an improvement of the level of their students’ oral proficiency level.

They find out there is a relatively explicit progress in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Besides, they have noticed a remarkable decrease in psychological factors such as anxiety and fear of speaking in front of the others. Furthermore, students’ self-confidence increase noticeably since they become able to discuss and express their opinions and thoughts comfortably.

On the other hand, other teachers (20%) point out that there is a slight improvement which is not very significant. They state that there is a lack of efforts made by students to improve themselves even if the teacher constantly gives feedback. In addition, the class size, i.e huge numbers of students per group, unable/ frustrates/ compromises the teacher to spend time on one-to-one interaction.

Q7: As an EFL teacher, how do you evaluate your students’ oral proficiency level ?

Almost of the surveyed teachers agree that their students’ proficiency level is medium. They think that this level is affected by many factors such as: large classes, settings, lack of materials, etc. Some of the teachers prepare evaluation rubrics focusing on fluency, accuracy, grammar, and lexis. Still some other teachers think that evaluating the students’ oral feedback is not an easy task.

Presentation, plays, participation, long going assessment, also direct oral exam where an evaluation sheet is used.

Q8: According to your experience in teaching English at University level, what would you recommend to improve your students’ oral proficiency level ?
Indeed, the teachers provide a set of recommendations that may help enhance their students’ oral proficiency level. We state them as follows:

_ Build teacher-student rapport, build students’ self-confidence, train students to accept feedback, feedback should be student friendly, feedback should be offered not imposed, feedback should not be learner-intimidating. I recommend to them:
_ Select the topics in which they feel they are really interested.
_ To variate their source of knowledge and to speak or try to speak English inside the class and outside of it.
_ To create groups if individuals work is not helping enough. * Increasing emphasis on listening.
_ Teaching/ introducing communicative strategies.
_ Modify the syllabi of phonetics and grammar to fit real life situation and students’ needs.

* Practicing English not only in class but also outside with peers, classmates and online chat. Listening to authentic language is also recommended.

* I would recommend collaboration and careful instruction design as well as testing design.

* Students are asked to watch videos at home and many other types of authentic materials, but they must be followed by activities and class discussion.

* To make them listen to native speakers of English as much as possible - To involve them in lessons as active students.

- To give feedback (oral or written) in every module. - To train them to speak spontaneously.

1) Use a lot of listening tasks to develop their listening abilities because it is essential in communication. It helps them use different strategies concerning this skill.
2) Expose learners to the different aspects of the spoken language, this can help them develop both speaking and listening relate situations similar to real ones in the class to enable them interact.
3) Encourage them to have native speakers’ friends.

_ I recommend that students should be given more room, i.e, opportunities to interact with each other and with the teacher.
_ The teaching of oral expression should be more systematic and functionally-based.

Quotations

_ In many foreign language situations, where there is little exposure to English or practice available in the community, error correction is an expected role for the teacher. Hedge (200: 288)
_ Students unused to the demands for speaking in public made by the communicative classroom, even if that ‘public’ is a relatively small number of their peers in group work, may be reluctant to speak up through lack of confidence or fear of ‘losing face’ by making mistakes. (ibid: 290)
_ When students are in the middle of a speaking activity, over correction may inhibit them and take the communicativeness out of the activity. On the other hand, helpful and gentle
correction may get students out of difficult misunderstandings and hesitations. Harmer (2001: 276).

Black and Wiliam (1998: 9) point out:
"feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils". (cited in: Askew, 2000:8)

Feedback says to a student, "Somebody cared enough about my work to read it and think about it! Most teachers want to be that somebody. Feedback matches specific descriptions and suggestions with a particular students’ work. It is just in time, just-for-me information delivered when and where it can do the most good. (Brookhart : 2008:1)

You students do learn. Their work does improve.
You students become more motivated. They believe they can learn, they want to learn, and they take more control of their own learning.
Your classroom becomes a place where feedback, including constructive criticism, is valued and viewed as productive”.

Lightbown and Spada (1999) define corrective feedback as: any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. (cited in Zhang, Zhang and Malob :1)


We the current researchers realized that some EFL teachers seemed unaware and did not appreciate the process of feedback and, thus, did not care about it although extensive research showed that feedback is of great importance to the language process in general.

Reference

Brookhart, SM. (2008). How to give effective feedback to your students. USA. ASCD.