
Feedback Strategies Used by University Instructors in the Classroom Setting

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims to explore the feedback strategies used by Libyan university instructors in the classroom setting, particularly in the context of teaching English. 35 Libyan instructors from different universities took part in the study. A questionnaire with 32 items was utilized for data collection. The data analysis revealed that providing students with timely feedback was reported to be dominant. It was also found that verbal feedback was the most preferred technique by many instructors. Encouraging students to ask clarification questions to avoid any misunderstanding after offering feedback was another significant result. The data also showed that many instructors didn't feel encouraged to keep a record of their students' achievements. Unexpectedly, most of the participants either never used online feedback or rarely used it.*

KEYWORDS: constructive feedback, instructors' feedback, classroom setting

INTRODUCTION

In the field of teaching and learning feedback defined as “any message generated in response to a learner’s action.” (Mory, 1994). Whereas Duijnhouwer et al. (2012) stated that feedback is the information given to students by their instructors in a timely manner for the purpose of improving their performance, adjusting their behaviour, or increasing their motivation. Similarly, Abdulrahim (2017) described feedback as any response regarding a student’s performance or behaviour. He added that the main purpose of providing feedback is not to criticize or harm students, but to “enhance learning, prompt acquisition of skills and drives professional growth”.

Feedback can be very useful if it was given in the right way and at the right time. It helps students to know where they are and what they need to achieve their learning goals. “Once they feel they understand what to do and why, most students develop a feeling that they have control over their own learning” (Brookhart, 2008). On the other hand, there is a strong correlation between not providing feedback and students’ failure. Entwistle et al. (1989) and Ramsden, (2003) argued that if students didn’t receive any feedback on their performance, they will not be able to recognize their weaknesses until after having the examination. “Even then, they may not be given enough information to enable them to improve”. Therefore, teachers should be well trained on how and when to give feedback, and how to follow up on the impact of their feedback on their students’ performance, but this of course is not an easy task. Researchers such as (Brookhart, 2008; Schwartz, 2017; Matlick, 2020) highlighted the common problems that teachers may face in providing feedback such as the inability to give

regular feedback, providing short feedback in one word or phrase that doesn't explain the learner's performance or too detailed feedback that the learner doesn't need. Sometimes the feedback is vague and doesn't directly relate to the objectives of the lesson. Thus, this study aims to explore the feedback strategies used by some university instructors in the classroom setting, particularly in the context of teaching English.

Research problem

It was noticed that some Libyan university instructors have different opinions regarding the strategies of giving feedback to their students in terms of timing, type, and methods of providing feedback. Some of them prefer to give immediate feedback as the information is still fresh in the learners' minds, whereas others believe that delayed feedback would be more effective as students have enough time to think of their weaknesses. Meanwhile, it was unclear whether the instructor's feedback met the students' needs or not and whether that feedback had a positive impact on the students' performance. This difference among the professors encouraged me to carry out this study in order to determine the feedback strategies used by them in the classroom setting, particularly in the context of teaching English.

Research questions

- What type of feedback do Libyan university instructors provide?
- How do Libyan university instructors provide their students with feedback?
- When do Libyan university instructors provide their students with feedback?
- How do Libyan university instructors follow the impact of their feedback on students' learning?

Significance of the study

It is hoped that the findings of the current study would make a significant contribution to bridging the gap in the literature review. It is also hoped that the results of the study will motivate other researchers to conduct further studies to investigate other aspects related to providing students with constructive feedback. However, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to other university instructors as the sample size used is small.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of feedback

Several studies have considered feedback as one of the most important factors that help the learning process, regardless of the different learning environments (Hattie and Timperley 2007; Hattie and Gan 2011). The importance of feedback is not only to help students realize the gap between their current and potential knowledge, understanding, and skills, but also to help them regulate and organize their own learning process (Narciss 2013).

However, Shepard (2001), reviewed the findings of more than one hundred studies that dealt with giving feedback where he found that only about a third of this number confirmed that feedback contributes to improving students' performance. The results indicated that, "not the "giving" of feedback that causes learning gains, it is the "acting" on feedback that determines how much students learn". He added that "unless students know the answer to the question,

“Where am I going?”, feedback is just a series of instructions disconnected from a learning destination”.

Other researchers such as Ames, 1992; Black & William, 1998; Butler, 1988; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) have stated that effective feedback which has a positive impact on students’ achievement is the one that directs their attention to the intended learning goals. They also indicated that feedback is most effective when it emphasizes the strengths in the work and gives guidance for improvement.

Types of feedback

Oral and written feedback, formal and informal feedback, descriptive, evaluative, peer and self-assessed feedback are the most common types of feedback used by instructors. For example, oral feedback is usually provided in class during the presentation of the lesson in response to students’ interaction, answers, and discussion, while written feedback is normally given after conducting a written task. Several studies have demonstrated the power and effectiveness of oral feedback when provided in a timely manner as it is easy and can be provided in different ways that can meet the learners’ individual differences. Whereas written feedback provides students with a detailed record of their performance and suggestions that they can read and re-read whenever they need (Chappuis, 2012)

Feedback can be evaluative through giving students grades for what they have done, or show comments, or using expressions like, very good, excellent, and well done but do not carry detailed information or guidance that the students could use to improve their performance. On the other hand, descriptive feedback is another type of common feedback that describes the learners’ performance and gives examples that demonstrate the quality of the work done by the students or provide some hints that may help them to modify or develop their work.

Among the types of effective feedback are self and peer feedback. In self-feedback students reflect on their performance and determine their strengths and weaknesses then they act accordingly. Whereas peer feedback is the advice or suggestions that students offer each other in relation to each other’s work (Teacher Standards and Accreditation, 2021) Peer feedback can be regarded as a form of formative assessment and collaborative learning (Topping, 1998; Van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2010). However, some studies have found peer feedback to be as effective as teacher comments (Cho & Schunn, 2007).

Informal feedback can take place any time inside or outside the classroom spontaneously without prior planning. However, for this type of feedback to be effective, teachers should establish a good relationship with their students, train them on how to give and receive feedback either from their classmates or from their teachers and how to use that feedback for their learning. In contrast, formal feedback is planned and provided in a systemic way. It is provided according to the students’ performance after the completion of the assessment activities carried out by the students during the class. Formal feedback includes assessing students’ performance, grading, and documenting the results as evidence for the students and the educational institution.

Characteristics of effective feedback

Not every feedback provided to students is useful and helps to bridge the gap between the student's current performance and what they should do according to the standards of the task. Thus, there are some characteristics that must be considered by instructors when providing feedback to their students. For example, feedback should be descriptive not evaluative. That is, it should be given in a form of written or verbal comments that could help students understand what they need to do to improve their performance further. Another important characteristic of effective feedback is to be specific. This means that if the work done by the student was outstanding, the instructor feedback should not be limited to describing the work as excellent, but examples that describe what made the work excellent should be provided. The same thing should be done if the work was beyond the required level. Examples that explain why the work was weak and how can be improved by giving the students some hints or clues that could help them develop their work.

Furthermore, several studies have confirmed that the longer the time between completing a task and giving feedback, the less useful it is (Denton et al. 2008). "Students ideally wanted feedback quicker than staff would like to provide it" (Mulliner, & Tucker, 2015). Therefore, providing feedback immediately after completing the task has a significant impact on enhancing learning, considering that the experience that the student went through is still present in their minds, and therefore the students can link the feedback to the mistake they made.

It is also important that the feedback should focus on what the learner does rather than the learner's himself. Moreover, the feedback should be limited in terms of amount. That is, the amount of the feedback should be limited to only one or two errors each time instead of focusing on all errors that might exist on the students' work. This does not mean neglecting the rest of the errors but postponing some of them to give the students the opportunity to follow and use the feedback provided by the teacher.

Ways of giving feedback

There are a range of feedback strategies can be used by teachers. One of the methods of providing feedback is called recording patterns of behavior. The teacher creates a table with two columns as shown below, one for the type of error made by the students and the other one for the initials of students who made the error. After completing recording the data the teacher analysis the table to decide the type and the method of giving feedback.

Error:	Students who made the error:
Skim and scan to preview text	JC
Sourcing - information source, author, type of document	JC JT DL MM SL ST ND CT
Draw conclusions	JC JT MM TA AA LR CM TR VR IB AV TM SO KF

Sandwich feedback is another method that was proven to be effective. It consists of three steps (praise – criticism – praise). The first step is praising the student for what he/s has done,

clarifying that by giving some examples. The second step is highlighting the mistake made by the student and the third step is to appreciate the efforts made the student and encourage them to improve their performance by providing some hints. Schwarz (2013) mentioned three reasons for using sandwich method. First, it is easier for people to accept criticism after receiving appreciation and positive feedback. Second, he “assumes the sandwich approach provides balanced feedback; and third, he believes that giving positive feedback with negative feedback reduces discomfort and anxiety”.

In investigating the effectiveness of different forms of feedback Edeiken & Berenato (2014) found that big proportion of students prefer handwritten feedback “may be due to the perception that handwritten feedback is more personal and seems to allow for a closer rapport to be established with the marker. Whereas Merry, S., & Orsmond, P. (2008) stated that students may prefer verbal to written feedback. This may be due to students desiring contact with the marker for additional clarification on the feedback provided. Students are also required to take notes while receiving feedback from their instructors. This enhances understanding the comments given by the teacher and students can return to read their notes when needed. Finally, it is advised that the teacher conducts individual meetings with students when providing feedback as it is considered one of the most important methods because it allows the student to express himself freely, especially the shy one and it also gives him the opportunity to discuss the feedback and ask clarification questions (Obilor, 2019).

Follow up feedback

There is another important stage that the teacher should take to ensure the effectiveness of the feedback which includes following up on the impact of the feedback on the students’ engagement and performance after providing it. There are various ways as suggested by Bowman (2020). For instance, set up another meeting with the students to discuss the feedback, create discussion opportunities for students to interact with the feedback, encourage peer discussion to explore action steps in response to feedback, ask students to assess the comments provided by the teacher, or ask students to respond in writing showing their reflection on the feedback.

METHODOLOGY

Research design & participants

The study adopted a quantitative approach to explore the types and methods of providing feedback as well as the follow up procedures applied by Libyan university instructors. To answer the research questions, a questionnaire of 32 items using 4-point Likert scale ranged from always to never and divided into 4 categories was used for data collection. The first category was concerned with the different types of feedback used by the participants whereas the second category investigates the various ways of giving feedback to students and the third one dealt with finding the timing of providing feedback, and the final category focused on the follow up procedures used by the instructors to see the impact of the feedback on the students’ performance. The questionnaire was designed after a careful review of a number of previous studies that investigated the importance of feedback, types and methods of giving feedback to learners and engaging students with the feedback. The questionnaire was revised by some experts to ensure its validity, then posted online to be completed by 35 full-time instructors

from different Libyan universities. 15 of them PhD holders whereas the rest have got MA degree in teaching English with a minimum of 3 years teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected, the appropriate statistical analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. Basic descriptive analysis was conducted, as illustrated below:

Table #1 types of feedback provided by instructors.

No	Types of feedback	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I provide my students with verbal feedback	57.1%	34.3%	5.7%	2.9%
2	I provide my students with written feedback	20%	65.7%	11.4%	2.9%
3	I provide my students with formative feedback	37.1%	54.3%	8.6%	0%
4	I provide my students with summative feedback	28.6%	51.4%	14.3%	5.7%
5	I encourage student peer feedback	22.9%	62.9%	14.3%	0%

Table #1 demonstrates the common types of feedback provided by Libyan university instructors. It indicated that more than 57% of the participants always use verbal feedback, and 34% sometimes use it. Formative assessment was the second most common type of feedback implemented by the participants with 37.1%. Nevertheless, there are still a large percentage of the participants (54.3%) who sometimes use formative assessment. Summative feedback was also dominant. As shown in table 2, the findings revealed that 51.4% sometimes use summative feedback and more than 28% always use it. The data indicated that around 63% of the participants sometimes encourage student peer feedback and 22.9% always encourage peer feedback.

Table #2 ways of giving feedback

No	Ways of giving feedback	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I meet my students individually to give them feedback.	5.7%	51.4%	37.1%	5.7%
2	I give feedback to the whole class focusing on common issues	71.4%	25.7%	2.9%	0%
3	I give feedback on only the most striking weaknesses	20%	62.9%	8.6%	8.6%
4	I send them online feedback	0%	51.4%	25.7%	22.9%
5	I provide examples to make my feedback clear	62.9%	31.4%	5.7%	0%
6	I ask my students what support they need to do better next time.	54.3%	25.7%	20%	0%

7	I encourage my students to ask clarification questions if the feedback sounds vague to them.	82.9%	17.1%	0%	0%
8	I encourage my students to take notes during the feedback session.	54.3%	43.3%	11.4%	0%
9	I consider the individual needs of my students while giving feedback	71.4%	28.6%	0%	0%
10	I provide my students with detailed feedback	31.4%	60%	8.6%	0%
11	I provide my students with specific feedback	45.7%	48.6%	5.7%	0%
12	I use different feedback strategies depending on the case.	45.7%	51.4%	2.9%	0%
13	I use only one fixed strategy in giving feedback.	8.6%	25.7%	34.3%	8.6%
14	I praise the positive aspects before pointing out the negative ones.	71.4%	28.6%	0%	0%
15	I provide my students with specific suggestions for improvement	74.3%	25.7%	0%	0%

Table #2 presents the findings that answering research question 3 “*how do Libyan university instructors provide their students with feedback?*”. The data showed that the majority of the instructors (82.9%) encourage students to ask clarification questions to get clear and constructive feedback. It was also discovered that big proportion of the participants (74.3%) provide their students with specific suggestions to improve their performance. Furthermore, discussing the common errors made by students for the benefit of the whole class, considering the individual needs of students, and praising the positive aspects before pointing out the negative ones were the third and fourth frequently method of providing feedback used by many instructors with 74.3 and 71.4% respectively.

Interestingly, the results revealed that about 23% of the participants never used online feedback, whereas 51.4% stated that they sometimes use online feedback and 25.7% rarely use it. This could be due to the lack of digital facilities available in class. Furthermore, meeting students individually was never done by 5.7% of the participants while 51.4% claimed that they sometimes meet their students individually to provide them with feedback. It was found that providing examples to make the feedback clear, asking students what support they need to do better next time and encouraging them to take notes during the feedback session were also common ways of giving feedback used by more than half of the participants.

Table #3 time of giving feedback

No	Time of giving feedback	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I am committed to providing feedback to my students in timely manner	60%	37%	3%	0%
2	I provide my students with feedback immediately after finishing the task.	54.3%	45.7%	0%	0%
3	I delay giving the feedback until finding the appropriate time	8.6%	51.4%	34.3%	5.7%

In answering the first question “*when do Libyan university instructors provide their students with feedback?*” table #3 shows that 60% of the participants are always committed to providing their students with feedback in a timely manner, whereas 37% are sometimes committed in giving feedback on time. The data also revealed that more than 54% of the participants always provide their students with feedback immediately after finishing the task, and 45.7% do it sometimes. Only 8.6% of the whole population stated that they always delay giving feedback until finding the appropriate time, and 51.4% sometimes delay giving feedback and 34.3% rarely delay providing their students with feedback. This indicates that most of the instructors are aware of the importance of giving feedback in timely a manner.

Table #4 How do Libyan university instructors follow the impact of their feedback on students’ performance?

No	Following up the impact of the feedback	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I ensure students understand the feedback	88.6%	11.4%	0%	0%
2	I set a specific time for follow up	31.4%	45.7%	22.9%	0%
3	I follow the impact of my feedback on the students’ performance	62.9%	22.9%	14.3%	0%
4	I keep a record to track my student’s progress	28.6%	40%	14.3%	17.1%
5	I give my students enough time to respond to my feedback	54.3%	42.9%	2.9%	0%

The findings in table 4 showed different follow up techniques used by Libyan university instructors when they responded to the fourth research question “*how do Libyan university instructors follow the impact of their feedback on students’ performance?*”. Significant number of instructors (88.6%) demonstrated that they make sure all students understood the given feedback and about 63% of the participants stated that they follow the impact of their feedback on their students’ performance, whereas 22.9% of the participants sometimes follow the impact of their feedback on students’ performance. And 14.3% do it rarely. The findings also show that only 28.6% of the participants always keep a record to track their students’ progress after giving feedback. However, a large percentage (17.1%) of the participants never keep a record of their students’ progress. Concerning setting a specific time for following up the impact of

the feedback on the students' learning ranges between always (31.4%), sometimes (45.7%), and rarely (22.9%).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study is to gain insights into the university instructors' understanding of feedback. Specifically, it aims to find out when they give the feedback, what types of feedback they use, what methods of giving feedback, and how they follow the impact of the feedback on their students' learning. Throughout the data analysis, providing students with timely feedback was reported to be used most frequently. This matches up with what was stated by Brookhart (2008) that "feedback needs to come while students are still mindful of the topic". Although several studies reported better performance when feedback was given immediately (Kulik and Kulik, 1988; Mulliner, & Tucker, 2015) feedback can be slightly delayed giving students the chance to think and recognize their mistakes (Quinn, 2014; Rogers, 2017).

Despite the fact that different types of feedback are used by Libyan university instructors, "verbal feedback" was found to be the most preferred technique by many of them. This is in agreement with what was discovered by several studies that demonstrated the advantages and benefits of verbal feedback. According to Bloxham and Campbell, (2010) verbal feedback is effective because it can be used during class time, after carrying out a task or an assessment. It creates more discussion opportunities where students can talk about the feedback provided by their instructor and raise clarification questions that enable students to understand the feedback and act accordingly.

The importance of giving feedback lies not only in its type but also in how it is presented to students. The data confirms that many instructors (82.9%) encourage students to ask clarification questions to eliminate or avoid any misunderstanding or uncertainty after offering feedback. By asking such questions after receiving the feedback, learners make sure they understand the feedback and obtain more important information that can help them to follow and act on the instructor's feedback (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Providing students with specific and straightforward feedback was another significant method used by more than 74% of the respondents. This agrees with the results obtained by (Brookhart, 2008) that feedback should be "not too narrow, not too broad, but just right"

In some cases, feedback should not always be individualized, it is more suitable to explain common mistakes in the classroom or provide students with model answers for self-feedback (Naylor, et al. 2014). This is in line with the findings of this study which show that a large percentage of the participants identify and discusses the common mistakes made by students so that all of them can see what is wrong and receive the appropriate feedback. The unexpected result demonstrates that a big percentage of the participants (23%) never use online feedback whereas 25.7% rarely use it and 51.4% use it sometimes. This could be due to the lack of digital facilities available in the classroom or perhaps the instructors are not familiar enough with the use of digital media.

Monitoring the impact of the feedback on the development of students' performance is one of the very important elements that a teacher should address. The results of the current study indicated that more than 88% of the participants were keen that all students understood the feedback clearly. Even though it was not clear how they checked their students' understanding of the provided feedback, one of the best techniques that can help students obtain the feedback is to create various opportunities for students to use the feedback, or to redo the task after receiving feedback (Brookhart, 2008). The data also showed that many instructors didn't feel encouraged to keep a record of their students' achievements. This could be due to the big number of students in class, lack of facilities, and the teaching load. Similarly, the results indicated that few instructors were committed to set scheduled times to meet their students to follow the impact of the feedback. However, more research is obviously required to explore the process of follow-up procedures utilized by university instructors after providing feedback.

CONCLUSION

After a careful review of a number of previous studies, it became clear that almost all of them agreed on the importance of feedback, but the most important thing is how and when to provide feedback. It was noticed that university instructors in Libya have different points of view concerning the way, amount, and timing of giving feedback to their students. Therefore, this study aimed to find out how they perceive the process of providing feedback to their students. The overall findings indicated that providing students with timely feedback was the instructors' priority. It was also found that verbal feedback was the most preferred technique by many of them. Encouraging students to ask clarification questions to eliminate or avoid any misunderstanding or uncertainty after offering feedback was another significant result. Unexpectedly, most of the participants either never use online feedback or rarely use it. The data also showed that many instructors didn't feel encouraged to keep a record of their students' achievements

Despite discovering important results that answered the research questions, it is difficult to generalize the findings due to the small sample size that took part in the study as well as the limited method of data collection. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the study including a larger number of participants with the use of an interview alongside the questionnaire in collecting more detailed and generalizable data.

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