

# **THE EFFECT OF FEEDBACK IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A STUDY CONDUCTED WITH ELEMENTARY PUPILS IN VITIA**

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## **Abstract**

Feedback is one of the most crucial components in achieving teaching and learning goals. It creates critical thinking intellectuals when used properly, in the best timing, manner and approach, giving students the opportunity to reflect, understand and see their work from different perspectives. Throughout this paper was treated the effect of feedback, the way it influences learners' motivation and achievement if used in accordance with the proper situations and circumstances in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, it explains the procedures and the best practices which are taken from different sources, including particularly relevant studies. In order to gain specific and realistic data, a case study was conducted in different elementary public schools of Vitia's city with sixth to ninth grade pupils, maintaining a quantitative methodology (including questionnaires for both teachers and students).

On the other hand, theoretical contribution was very helpful since it supported my hypothesis in relation to the impact of feedback. The sources taken for this research revealed that feedback is very significant in the educational environment and emphasizes that it is one of the best choices for teachers when it comes to nourishing EFL to Albanian students. There is a considerable number of instructions on how to use feedback in different situations during the teaching process, accordingly, the research in educational settings in Vitia's schools shows the utilization of feedback as an instrument with which teachers assess students, at the same time correct and praise them through feedback. So, based on the findings, the study suggests that well-constructed feedbacks should be implemented as an instrument of formative assessment throughout the learning progress as it boosts motivation and builds up comprehension towards L2 acquisition.

*Key words: formative assessment, feedback, improvement.*

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## **Introduction**

The huge influence of feedback is experienced every day in our lives and workplaces. Everyone in his or her life has received any kind of feedback relating to the way of doing things. This is a very natural and normal part of everyday actions that people experience. Implementing feedback as part of learning new things is considered very helpful and effective because it indicates if learners are successful on what they are doing and whether they are approaching the right way of completing particular tasks and assignments. The impact of feedback in everyday practices is also highlighted through many referenced sources, as in the following: *"Feedback is considered as a vital approach to facilitate students' development as independent learners in order to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning"* (Bashir, Kabir, & Rahman, 2016, p. 38).

So, feedback, as an immediate response provided to students, is an inseparable part of every evaluation and assessment process, which praises learners for their work, provides extra information and if necessary points out any possible misconception. Here is quoted another statement regarding the formulation of feedback. “*Formative feedback is defined in this review as information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning*”. (Shute, 2008, p. 154).

The present article provides to its readers a miscellaneous set of information because, besides it is personally investigated, it is also supported by point of views of other researchers that previously dealt with this topic. Thus, formative assessment, as its label suggests, is to assess learners formally. That is what feedback actually consists on. Feedback may be any reaction of the teacher that indicates learners for those areas where they need improvement in. Teachers can use feedback in various circumstances but in general most of the situations are specified inside the four groups mentioned by Brookhart. : 1) *a teacher can provide information to correct a practice; 2) a friend can provide information to clarify understanding; 3) a learner can refer to an answer key to evaluate the accuracy of an answer; and 4) an individual can self-reflect on a past experience to improve future action.*” (Brookhart, 2017, p. 131).

Correction is one of the most frequent feedback used by teachers which is fast, suitable, understandable and produces better results for students’ development. Formative assessment, though a formal way of evaluation, is a very beneficial way of nurturing L2 to EFL learners because it reduces the gap between the current position and where they want to be (learning goals). Here is another citation which further defines exactly what feedback actually consists on: “*Feedback is information provided by an agent such as teacher, peer or administrator regarding some aspects of an individual’s performance or understanding*” (Timperley & Hattie, 2007, p. 81).

### **Purpose of the study - Statement of the problem**

Feedback is historically known as a way to make people aware of their flaws or weaknesses when performing or trying to accomplish something. So far, it is described to be the best of tools which assesses, corrects, or even praises all the efforts that people make in achieving their objectives and goals. This time, the effect of feedback was supposed to be investigated in terms of academic settings, specifically the way it affects learners’ inner side and their achievement. Throughout their careers, teachers receive feedback themselves and are obviously aware of the potential risks of delivering a bad-structured one to their learners.

Having this under consideration, in the current article are discussed the different ways that feedback can be delivered, paying full attention to the situations and circumstances that require any particular type of feedback. Furthermore, through this paper was intended to be mentioned how necessary and important it is for teachers to be fully aware of setting clear challenges and goals and accordingly give specific feedbacks which are effective in touching the core parts of the lesson and in boosting students’ motivation. Despite the general impact of feedback, special emphasis was given to the difference between oral and written feedback, timing of its delivery and whether it should be explicit or implicit.

## **Methodological framework**

To set clear and specific research goals, in the study were incorporated three research questions through which was supposed to be given conclusions upon several issues that this study was basically concerned with. These questions include types of feedback that best fit in teaching specific language skills, the way feedback is perceived among Albanian students and how is their motivation influenced through feedback.

For this study were compiled different sets of questionnaires handed to students and teachers in the Vitia's public schools, which were the target population of the research. Teachers' questionnaire was compiled with 24 questions, which highlights crucial aspects of teachers' experiences, regarding their students' behavior, their learning capabilities and their affinity to receive feedback. 26 teachers of Vitia's schools were included in this research. Questionnaires were made of questions compiled in Close Ended Format and Open Ended Format.

The very first questions of teachers' questionnaire were about their age, their level of education, and their work experience, moving to their opinions regarding feedback, the frequency they use oral feedback and written feedback, and the difference in effect they see between these two broad types of feedback. Further, they were asked about the timing of feedback delivery and the way it impacts learners' motivation. Teachers were also asked to write down some strategies of using feedback considering their learners' emotional side and their openness to receive feedback. The full questionnaire is attached in the appendix of the paper.

The other set of questions was handed to learners. Pupils' questionnaire was made of 20 questions, conducting 90 students who were randomly chosen, three or four from each classroom, by probability sampling. At first hand, as warm up questions, students were asked about their age, gender, and the grade they were attending. Then, they had to answer questions relating feedback, as from whom do they receive feedback more often, whether after receiving feedback they understood faster and better the different tasks, and whether feedback has increased their motivation and facilitated their speaking performances.

Furthermore, students had to answer the questions in relation to the timing of feedback, also the difference between oral and written feedback and the way each impacts their understanding. The full questionnaire is attached in the appendix of the paper. Respondents of different ages managed to complete the questionnaire in timely circumstances and they faithfully responded without being interrupted or affected by their teachers or other school members. Since the quantitative method is best known for describing and treating the findings based on statistics, in the current study was included this method as the appropriate approach to analyze the data taken from questionnaires. Stating a hypothesis regarding the effect of feedback on EFL learners, indicates the first impression about feedback which is as follows:

### **Hypothesis**

*"A well- structured, corrective feedback leads towards motivation enhancement, and therefore towards better outcomes in students' performance."*

### **Research questions**

1. How do teachers increase students' motivation through feedback?
1. What type of feedback should be applied in correcting the four specific English language skills (reading, speaking, writing and listening)?
2. How is feedback accepted (perceived) within the Albanian learners during EFL classes?

## Literature review

All the literature relating to feedback highlights an advantage for both the teacher and the student. In order to meet the best students' language needs and therefore improve their accomplishment, every responsible EFL practitioner incorporates different techniques and strategies to reach this goal. Giving students feedback is many times considered as one of the teacher's most difficult, yet most significant of tasks, so offering students individual attention through regular feedback targets performance which is supposed to reach higher levels of improvement.

As stated in different articles, feedback as assessment for learning (formative feedback) has a huge role in making students aware about their flaws or misconceptions relating their performances or tasks. "*As a crucial component of classroom assessment, feedback provides information about students' learning, performance, knowledge, or understanding and is often referred to as one of the most powerful sources of influence on student learning*". (Lee, 2017, p. 4) Schoolmasters have long taken under consideration feedback as a noteworthy variable influencing learning. Relying on literature it can further be argued from many researchers of the same field that "*feedback is the most important communication skill, both outside and inside the classroom because around all the time; it is just another word for effective listening; it is an opportunity to motivate; it is essential to develop performance; and it is a way to keep learning*" (Klimova, 2015, pp. 172-173).

Effective delivery of feedback means defining goals clearly and determining all the ways and strategies that lead to the fulfillment of those particular goals. This way, a study undertaken on the power of feedback, suggests that in order for the feedback to be beneficial, teachers need to set up three major related questions: "*Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next? These three questions address the dimensions of feed up, feedback, and feed forward.*" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 88) As it can be seen, from these aspects of feedback it is required that both students and teachers appoint the learning goals regarding the future performances. These goals can vary, which include: singing a song, winning a race, riding a bicycle, writing a postcard, etc. Based on the previous citation, this aspect of feedback is *feed up*.

On the other hand, the next dimension of feedback, which basically involves the progress and the ways that lead towards progress, is *feed-back*. Respectively, this answers the question *How am I going?* Furthermore, the *feed-forward* dimension can be regarded as one of the most influential means for effective learning. Here is specifically included all the information that leads to more sophisticated self-regulation mechanisms, deeper comprehension and better strategies to achieve the learning intentions. Diving deeper within the literature relating feedback, it comes out that timing of feedback delivery is another crucial and decisive feature of feedback that must be taken under consideration.

Based on a reviewed literature, here is mentioned the impact it may have: "*It is necessary to be aware that feedback is not appropriate in all situations. For example, when a learner is making a speech, there is no use interrupting and giving feedback since the learner is focusing on his/her speech, and therefore not able to concentrate on any feedback given.*" (Rydahl, 2005, p. 6) Another issue in providing feedback is whether it should be written or oral. No doubt, they both have their advantages and benefits if used in proper time and pertaining situations. As oral feedback is immediate and more direct, it is supposed to be more powerful and effective. On the other hand, even written feedbacks are not of less use because through a written feedback students can be provided with records of their performance evaluation, and this way they see their work with a more critical perspective. Anyways, more determinant conclusions on these two broad types of feedback, are given in the '*Conclusion*' section.

## Results and discussion

The data taken from questionnaires represent a unique collection of information clustered in a string of the most outstanding features beginning with teachers' and continuing to students' opinions in relation to the impact of feedback during learning English as a second language. Down below are selected some questions to be displayed statistically which are considered as the most significant questions that represent the core objective of the questionnaires. Obviously, the final conclusion is given after the full measurement and analysis of the data taken from all the questions. So, one of the most important questions that both participants were asked to answer was to make the difference in effect between the two broad types of feedback, which are oral and written.

Q. According to your experience, the kind of feedback that has had the most impact in positive results is:		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Written	8	30.8
	Oral	18	69.2
	Total	26	100.0

Teachers' responses

Q.13 In which cases do you think that feedback is more understandable?		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Written feedback	29	32.2
	Oral feedback	61	67.8
	Total	90	100.0

Students' responses

Weighing down the answers relating to oral feedback over the written one, it came out that oral feedback is more effective because it is more straightforwardly delivered and touches the center of the error. Learners expressed that when they receive a feedback immediately after the mistake, they first of all understand the occurrence of the mistake, then they get to know with the newer and appropriate ways of completing their tasks. As it was expected, most of the teachers agreed that feedback depends on different aspects in order to be effective. As classrooms consist on diverse learners, it is pivotal that teachers be sensitive and consider each learner individually.

Students are all different in personality, rehearsing and keen to find the right answers for the questions raised during learning, so they can become easily offended or feel less important if the teacher is not careful in delivering oral feedback. Even when there is a perfect condition to deliver an oral feedback, there are still some learners that experience it bullying or find themselves in different teasing situations among their peers, so when receiving feedback it only hardens their situation. In these circumstances teachers should use written feedback more often than oral feedback.

The timely manner of feedback is very significant as well, because when learners receive feedback immediately, they react to it in a positive way and remember the experiences of the learning situation. In case we wait too long to deliver feedback, learners may not be able to make the connection between feedback and their performance. During speaking activities, Albanian learners are apt to shift to their mother tongue when they do not know or do not remember a particular word. In order to help them transmit the whole message, teachers provide them with feedback. This way, learners improve their errors faster and more directly, in a way that stimulates new vocabulary and helps in avoiding mother language.

Another issue that was stated in the beginning was how to handle situations with explicit and implicit feedback. Based on results, when teachers deliver explicit correction, they indicate clearly and notably the occurrences of learners' mistakes. This involves an amount of criticism and as a consequence puts learners in discomfort and hurts their feelings. In order to deliver less judgmental and entertaining feedbacks, teachers make them implicit paying more attention to behavior and situation rather than to individual. Overall, feedback delivery among Albanian learners proved to be a very productive and game changing means of formative assessment.

Learners expressed that when they receive positive constructive feedback, they are more willing to take risks, to participate in different oral performances and to take lead of harder tasks or assignments. So, praising students throughout the learning process, even for their slightest achievement, brings great results for the end products. Albanian teachers claimed that teaching English as L2 to their learners is not an easy mission because of the complexity and subtlety of the language and at times it is hard to keep the balance between praising and giving corrective feedback. A tiny failure in keeping this balance, according to teachers, would lead to students' distrust in feedback and this way it becomes useless.

## **Conclusion**

Through this paper was aimed to be investigated and elaborated the hypothesis in relation to the way corrective feedback, abbreviated CF, has been regarded in SLA (second language acquisition). So far, feedback has been described as information relating to reactions of someone's performance or way of doing things, usually received by parents, relatives, boss, teacher or even the experience itself. In the beginning of this paper was stated a hypothesis as a pre-attitude on the effect of feedback that claims that in order for the feedback to be effective it must be well-organized and structured in a way that fits the best way and timing to be delivered.

This article was also directed from several research questions which were used as a guide and which potentially showed the real purpose of the study. In this paper was followed a procedure that involved two sets of questionnaires compiled for teachers and for students as well. Considering the answers of both participant groups (teachers and students) a successful teaching and learning process consists on making clear and specific learning goals. So, according to the study, a feedback that focuses the most sensitive pedagogic areas where improvement is necessary and offers information on how to achieve these goals, is basically regarded as an effective feedback.

Giving feedback is also seen as a sensible part of teaching, considering the different psychological state of learners, so, decreasing the potential risk of critical comments would be another rule in giving students feedback. Based on the findings, there are different challenges in feedback deliverance. First of all, feedback is considered as judgmental to some extent. Being tolerant in cases when students make mistakes, does not mean that mistakes are welcome, it simply indicates that new learning is taking place, which creates space for continuous feedback. Moreover, the study shows that the correction manner may not be flawless and unique for all types of learners, since what may seem convenient for one student can be discouraging and demotivating for others.

As a conclusion, the hypothesis stated in the beginning proved to be right, since the overall result of the study showed a great impact of feedback on the improvement of performance of EFL elementary school pupils. A feedback that encourages learners' personal development leads to better comprehension levels and progress of aptitude in the future. In order to develop learners' language skills and nourish their motivation, a teacher should keep offering them feedback throughout the whole learning process.

## Recommendations

Finally, this paper suggests the progressive implementation of feedback in the academic environments, always having the focus on the performance of the students and not on their personal traits when giving them feedback to correct. A feedback will be effective when teachers are encouraging, specific, and convince their students that mistakes do not need to be perceived as something negative, because making mistakes throughout learning is also the protagonist part of the process.

Also, apart from CF which always indicates students weaknesses in performing, teachers also need to take into account that praise plays a huge role in increasing learners motivation, so giving positive feedback builds their confidence, this way helps them create and develop skills and strengths towards L2 acquisition.

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