STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK: A CASE STUDY OF PRE-UNIVERSITY ESL LEARNERS IN THE MALDIVES

Khadheeja Mohamed Sameer*

Language and Humanities
The Maldives National University
Republic of Maldives
khadheeja.mohamed@mnu.edu.mv

Dheeba Moosa

Research and Innovations
Islamic University of Maldives
Republic of Maldives
dheeba.moosa@ium.edu.mv

*Corresponding Author email: khadheeja.mohamed@mnu.edu.mv

Submission: 09 April 2021

Revised: 18 May 2021

Accepted: 03 June 2021

Peer-review under responsibility of 5th ASIA International Multidisciplinary Conference 2021 (Online)

Scientific Committee

<http://connectingasia.org/scientific-committee/>

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Office # 6, First Floor, A & K Plaza, Near D Watson, F-10 Markaz, Islamabad, Pakistan,

editor@readersinsight.net

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ABSTRACT

In language teaching pedagogy, feedback is crucial for English as a Second Language (ESL) students to achieve the target language competency they desire. According to literature, effective feedback can only be given when educators understand the way individual students perceive the feedback that they are given. Unfortunately, there are very few published studies on the Maldivian students' perception of feedback till date. Therefore, to understand pre-university students' perception of feedback, this qualitative case study used data through focus group discussions and stimulated recall sessions from a sample of six students. The findings indicated that the students from the selected institute felt encouraged as well as appreciated when the lecturers gave feedback. Moreover, they felt apprehensiveness when the lecturers failed to provide enough feedback, or any at all. This indicated that the students highly regarded the importance of feedback. Therefore, it is advisable for educators to consider how students perceive the written corrective feedback provided for them so that it may result in successful uptake.

Keywords: *Written Corrective Feedback, Corrective Feedback, Written Feedback, ESL Learners, Successful Uptake*

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

1. Corrective feedback is pivotal for student motivation and to build confidence
2. Corrective feedback that are customized to the individual needs of students result in more successful uptake
3. Corrective feedback focused on the positive aspects of students work is more effective in terms how students reevaluate their inter language hypotheses resulting in better uptake.

Research Objectives

Feedback develops the learners' awareness of the correct language useage and promotes self-directed learning through implicit measures (McCord, 2012). Most studies focus on the educators' beliefs of how feedback should be provided instead of the students' perception (Pan, 2020). However, Seker & Dincer (2014) highlights that many contextual factors contribute to the students' different preferences of feedback. Hence, a one-size-fits-all strategy to provide feedback would not be effective (Rowe & Wood, 2014).

Every year, a lot of students enrolled in pre-university programs in the Maldives complain that they are unable to cope with the assessment objectives of the writing assignments. It could be surmised that these students may have not been receiving the type of feedback they require. Moreover, the Maldives is an under-researched geographical context with much differences between the culture, background, and belief systems of Maldivian students, from that of students from countries where most research has already been conducted (Seker & Dincer, 2014; Chung, 2015). Hence, the current study investigates students' perception of corrective feedback in the Maldivian by addressing the following question;

- How do pre-university students from a selected well-established university in the Maldives, perceive the written corrective feedback given to them?

Methodology

The study is a qualitative case study confined to the students currently enrolled in Centre for Foundation Studies (CFS) in the Maldives National University (MNU). A total of six average performing students from each stream (business, science, and humanities) were selected using purposive sampling method for a focus interview session. This is because they would be a particularly typical case, and hence allow more transferability of the findings (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Flick, 2009).

A semi-structured interview was used to collect information during the focus group session. The interview questions were adapted from the instruments used by Diab (2011), Amrhein and Nassaji (2010), Mahfood (2011), Ismail (2011), Seker and Dincer (2014), and Jamalinesari et al. (2014) in their studies, as they had been approved for validity and reliability.

Stimulated recall interviews were also conducted. The students were provided a hardcopy of their graded assignment report which was downloaded from Turnitin via the university's Moodle Portal, including the comments and similarity index. The feedback and comments were enumerated, and the students were asked to discuss their views and reactions to the feedback.

Results

Students responded affectively to the WCF. They believed feedback to be an important concept in their learning, and they expected to receive feedback. Moreover, The students expressed more contentment and elevated motivation when their lecturer acknowledged the positive aspects in their writing as reinforcement. On the other hand, the learners associated negative reactions to lack of feedback as they felt disappointed and overlooked when their lecturer failed to provide sufficient feedback, or any at all.

Students also had predetermined subjective opinions on the effectiveness of WCF. They generally believed individualised comments to be more beneficial than a general remark provided via the Turnitin Grading System (Quick Marks). Moreover, all the students agreed that the grading rubric, although not dominant, is an essential component for their learning. However, they expressed disappointment with the lack of clear directions by the lecturer due to use of standard rubric. This may be due to their lack of awareness of self-assessment techniques using the rubrics. In addition, the students believed that feedback given should be detailed enough for them to identify their errors. Only then would they use the feedback in their future writings.

Findings

When students associate positive reactions to corrective feedback, it helps the students to test their interlanguage hypothesis (Tangkiengsirisin & Kalra, 2016). Moreover, it reduces

writing anxiety due to the fear of being judged for their mistakes (Wright & Larsen, 2016; Hassan et al., 2020). Therefore, educators must include short affective comments to highlight the positive evidence in the students' work, and individualized comments on specific errors (Ismail, 2011; Seker & Sincer, 2014; Tang & Liu, 2018). Also, WCF must provide sufficient justification for successful uptake (Mahfoodh, 2011). In addition, grading rubrics play a reinforcing role in language learning and must be used as a tool for peer- assessment and self-assessment (Brown & Aberwickrama, 2010).

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Author's Biography

Ms Khadheeja Mohamed Sameer is a full-time Lecturer at The Maldives National University (MNU), Centre for Foundation Studies, where she teaches and coordinates different modules of English Studies and Academic English. Khadheeja's area of interest is 'assessment in education' and she finds the area of formative assessment in language teaching very intriguing. She had completed her Master of Education from the Maldives National University (MNU) and Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from the Islamic University of Maldives (IUM), while focusing on the formative aspects of education in her research projects.

Dr Dheeba Moosa is the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) at the Islamic University of Maldives (IUM). Her education has given her a strong background in qualitative research. This has also helped her to develop further interest in conducting research and publishing. Dheeba has extensive experience in the field of education, more specifically in teaching English Language and linguistics as well as research methods. She did her PhD in Education from the University of East Anglia (UEA), Norwich, England and her thesis was about "exploring action research as a tool for improving English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Maldives".