Three Tier Feedback for Effective Language Study

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Abstract
Planning, developing and deploying proper feedbacks form a vital part of learners' learning process. In the modern education system, learners are neither trained to reflect upon their learning progress nor schooled to receive feedback from their peers and teachers. Skills in receiving and giving feedbacks promote learning by tracking the learners' progress and guiding them to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Lack of effective and regular feedback widen the gap between actual and desired performance of the learners. This study provides an understanding of the role of feedback in teaching-learning process and details how self-exploratory feedback and those received from teachers and peer-groups make learning effective.

Keywords: Self-Assessment, Peer-Assessment, Teacher-Assessment, Feedback

Introduction
Any course of study shall clearly outline in specific, measurable statements the knowledge, skills and competencies that the learners would master by the end of the course. Learners need to be tested on whether they have acquired these learning objectives as detailed in the course outcomes. This testing is usually done through a three-hour paper-pen test (Summative Evaluation) conducted at the end of the course and the Continuous and Comprehensive Assessment (Formative Assessment) which is often completed before the Summative Evaluation. The scores or grades of these tests are considered as indelible information of the learners' learning progress. But these tests do not demonstrate the actual level of mastery or competence achieved by the learners and fail to outline what and what-not the learner has learnt. Here comes the need and importance of leveraging feedback for improving the effectiveness of learning.

The objective of conducting a language assessment should be two-fold; for the purpose of evaluation and to provide support for the learner to learn effectively. Both Summative and Formative Assessments, these days, are mere diagnostic tools to rate what the learners do not know. They are never seen as tools for language expositions, language practise and language use. These tests should focus on interpreting "what the learners are learning in the class and how well they are learning it". (Cross and Angelo:4). For that the tests should have a strong correlation with the classroom teaching and learning processes. Learners should be

continuously monitored of their learning progress and should be informed of their levels of proficiency. This continuous information or feedback helps learners attain the learning objective by informing them of their strengths and weaknesses during the course of study.

Feedback

Feedback plays an important role in the teaching-learning process. They are mainly teacher-led, student-led and peer-led. Feedback "…confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies" (Butler and Winne 275). Furthermore,

> … feedback is an inherent catalyst…when a discrepancy exists between current and desired performance, self-regulated learners seek feedback from external sources such as peers' contributions in collaborative groups, teachers' remarks on work done in class, and answer sections of textbooks. (246)

Many tend to think that feedback comprises the critical comments given by the teachers which reflect on the learning progress of the learners. For some others, feedback is the linguistic error codes written by the teacher on the answer scripts to inform the learners of the mistakes they have made. These types of teacher feedback, being judgemental in nature, do not greatly help learners learn from their mistakes as they do not train them on how to respond to the information gained through the feedback. Besides, in these modes of traditional teacher feedback, the learner is not taken into consideration and the teacher himself/herself decides what to assess and how to assess.

> Classroom Assessment is an ongoing process, best thought of as the creating and maintenance of a classroom 'feedback loop.' By employing a number of simple classroom assessment techniques that are quick and easy to use, teachers get feedback from students on their learning. Faculty then complete the loop by providing students with feedback on the results of the assessment and suggestions for improving learning. To check on the usefulness of their suggestions, faculty use classroom assessment again, continuing the 'feedback loop.' As the approach becomes integrated into everyday classroom activities, the communications loop connecting faculty and students -- and teaching to learning -- becomes more efficient and more effective. (Angelo & Cross 6)

Self- assessments as Effective Feedbacks

The potential of self-assessment as an assessment tool to appraise the learning improvement of the learners has not been widely used. Its subjective nature often attracts criticisms about its reliability and effectiveness. However, self-assessments can be used to mould self-directed learners who apply critical thinking and reflective practices in language learning. Self-assessments are not always loose judgements of one's own learning based on their beliefs and speculations alone, but are self-marking instruments to track the learning habits and progress of the learners.

Criterion-referenced tests …facilitate an adaptation to the learners' own language learning goals, and the possibility of helping the learner "form a clear conception of how he is progressing" (Oscarson: 9).

Classroom Assessment focuses the primary attention of teachers and students on observing and improving learning, rather than on observing and improving teaching... Classroom Assessment can provide information to guide teachers and students in making adjustments to improve learning." (Angelo & Cross: 4)

Monitoring and assessing one's own learning is a skill that every learner has to master. If not trained in this fashion, one does not own up learning and no learning takes place. Besides, this skill of self-reflection elevates learners to the position of teachers. They monitor their performances, analyse them, and develop their own efficient learning strategies. Thus, in this self-directed scheme, the distance between the learner and the teacher is reduced, the learner sheds off his feelings of anxiety and frustration, and consequently becomes more receptive to the learning process.

Powell summarises the value of self-assessments. He says,

The promotion of independent learning is . . . central to the whole enterprise of higher education because the intellectual powers which it seeks to foster cannot (logically cannot) be exercised except in an independent mode. Critical thinking, judgement, creativeness, initiative, interpretative skills, hypothesis formulation and problem-solving capacities can only be made manifest by someone who is operating independently. (Powell, 209).

There are educationists who do not approve of including self-assessments as appropriate tools for medium- and high-stakes assessment. Medium-stakes assessments are those which do not affect students' lives radically (e.g., mid-term examinations), and "high-stakes assessment as that which can have life-altering potential". (e.g., term -end examinations for a degree) (Roever: 90).

A sample self-assessment rubric for improving paragraph writing is appended.
Read the following statements given below and give a tick mark against the ones you think you have done/ not done.

1) I have a title to my paragraph.

2) I have written the topic sentence which introduces the topic of the paragraph.

3) I have not mixed up the tenses in my paragraph.

4) I have elaborated on the main idea by adding supporting details.

5) In my paragraph, there is no problem regarding the subject-verb agreement.

For making effective self-assessments the researcher outlines three steps namely

1) Understanding the task

The first step towards making self-assessment effective is to inform the learners the 'what and how' of the task. This awareness or task-understanding helps them plan what they are going to do about the task and check whether the task has been accomplished as per the plan.

2) Understanding the evaluation criteria.

The learners should be informed of the criteria by which their language tasks will be assessed. The assessment indicators will always help them bring out the best and assess the work continuously during their drafts.

3) Assessing the task.

Here, the learners revisit the task and revise them before it is given for final evaluation.

Peer assessments as Effective Feedback

Peer assessment is gaining popularity as an evaluative tool which enables learners to evaluate their peer's work and have their work evaluated by the peers. This collaborative assessment tool helps the learners develop their cognitive skills as evaluation is a process of analysing a piece of work and passing value judgements based on its merits. To a great extent, peer assessment enables learners to elevate to the position of teachers and partake in their responsibility, a privilege which had been denied to the learners for ages as teachers alone assessed the learners' work.

Peer assessment allows the learners to have a major say in the assessment process, even to the extent of framing the rubrics of evaluation. This process has grown from "the process of having the learners critically reflect upon, and perhaps suggest grades for, the learning of their peers" (Roberts: 6) to assessing the "amount, level, value, worth, quality of success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status'' (Topping: 250). It has come of age and "appears capable of yielding outcomes as least as good as teacher assessment and sometimes better" (262).

Peer Assessments were not considered an important evaluative tool until recently on grounds that learners' assessment of their peers' work attracts foul play and invites criticism for being subjective. But these assessments are extensively used as an effective feedback tool in achieving learner autonomy.

Teacher Observations as Effective Feedback

"The quality of student learning is directly, although not exclusively, related to the quality of teaching. Therefore, one of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching." (Angelo and Cross. 7). A proactive way to improve teaching is, teachers reflecting and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their classroom interactions through well-planned and systematic classroom observations. This is beneficial both for the teacher and the learners. Through systematic inquiry of their own classroom interactions teachers will be enabled to give suggestive feedback for students about their learning progress and extend remedial help if needed. The teachers can request the help of fellow teachers to observe their classes, but it should be done with an observation chart based on the following criteria:

1) The methodology of lesson presentation

2) Encouragement and motivation extended

3) Setting high expectations for student achievement.

5) Student progress monitoring through a variety of assessment tools.

6) Classroom management.

7) Student interaction

By collaborating with colleagues and actively involving students in classroom assessment efforts, faculty (and students) enhance learning and personal satisfaction. (Angelo and Cross 11)

A rubric of teacher observation is given below.

Date & Time, Class observed, Summary of observations, Key actionable change, Remarks

Conclusion

Effective and regular feedback is an absolutely vital component of the learning process. They promote continued learning which is the key to improvement.

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