

Students' Role in Making Feedback Motivating

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Abstract

This study discusses students' role in making feedback motivating, areas of concern embody students' expectations of themselves, their perceptions of their own skills, effort expenditure, their responsibilities within the learning process and the roles they play within the feedback-giving episodes. It includes participation in peer feedback-giving practice; increase the habit of self-evaluation, learning collaboratively with their peers, communication with parents and making open dialogue with teachers. As active learners, students ought to take responsibility for and manage their own learning. Findings in this study implied that self and peer-assessment are effective tools in motivating students to learn. The advantages are three-fold. First, self and peer-assessment acquaint students with the success criteria in order that they understand better how they fill the gap between their current performance and the expected outcome. Second, they facilitate students taking over a pro-active role in the learning, teaching and assessment process. It helps the transition towards a more student-centered approach of teaching and learning. Self and peer-assessment therefore help students develop a stronger sense of themselves as learners. Third, peers as important others can bring very positive impact on students' motivation to learn.

Keywords: feedback, motivation, role, student

1. Introduction

The improvement of student motivation is a problem of major concern to teachers and education researchers. This study arises from my own experience in operating with students of various backgrounds, which indicated that they faced issues of low level of motivation in feedback-giving episodes and as a result, they are passive. The research questions of this study are:

- What are the students' expectations of themselves, their perceptions of their own skills, effort expenditure, and their responsibilities within the learning process?
- What are the roles they play within the feedback-giving episodes?
- How should students take responsibility and manage their own learning in order to foster their level of motivation?

2. Literature review

Students have to change from behaving as passive recipients of the knowledge offered by the teacher to becoming active learners who can take responsibility for and manage their own learning' (Black, 2004, p.17). Examples are their involvement in self and peer-assessment wherever they will evaluate their own and their peers' performance and identify the strengths and weaknesses consequently. Students ought to take a proactive instead of a reactive role in generating and using feedback. In doing so, student centered learning will be promoted and there is an active engagement in learning and learner responsibility for the management of learning.

In preparing students to become capable in regulating and monitoring their own work, Black (2004) suggests, 'students can achieve a learning goal only if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it, so self-assessment is essential to learning' (p.12).

The capability to evaluate one's own work does not merely begin with the practice of self-assessment itself because there are numerous strategies to equip students for the evaluation. As Brindley (1989) argues, self-assessment is a skill, which needs to be learned. This process involves both '*technical training*' (equipping learners with the skills to be able to judge their own performance) and '*psychological training*' (preparing learners to take on more responsibility for

their own learning) (p.78).

Many teachers who have tried to develop their students' self-assessment skills have discovered that the primary and most tough task is to get students to think about their work in terms of a set of goals: 'Insofar as they do so, they begin to develop an overview of that work that allows them to manage and control it for themselves. In other words, students are developing the capacity to work at a metacognitive level' (Black, 2004, p.12). More importantly, motivation can be enhanced: 'self-evaluation is a major mechanism for building intrinsic motivation. If learners exercise control over when to move on to the next challenge, it helps to build confidence and avert failure' (Jalongo, 2007, p.405).

Students can notice the different levels of competence and be aware of what they are expected. In addition, due to abstract criteria, concrete examples can be samples to develop understanding. Since objectivity is one of the keys to evaluate one's work fairly, students ought to be instructed the habits and skills of collaboration in peer-assessment because this could train objectivity, and therefore in turn facilitate effective self-assessment. However, in addition to stimulate the learners' own initiative and capability, teacher feedback also has a crucial role in assisting students' self-regulation. Feedback should serve the aim of feeding forward and the students themselves can always take the next step, with the help of teachers. Learners therefore need some guidance in self-regulating, through feedback, which gives directions to them about what, and how to improve.

Students play also the role of audience to their peers' oral performance, they can offer peer feedback to the students and they should have a better understanding. Despite the limited teacher capacity due to the large class sizes, measures such as self and peer-assessment are indeed effective means to help students take responsibility for and manage their own learning (Black, 2004).

Leachy (2005) has explained how peer-assessment can benefit both the student assessor and the recipient in terms of making future improvement. It is asserted that 'students who get feedback are not the only beneficiaries. Students who give feedback also benefit, sometimes more than the recipients do. As they assess the work of a peer, they are forced to engage in understanding the rubric, but in the context of someone else's work, which is less emotionally charged.' (p.22).

This reinforces the findings of the literature that peer-assessment is a motivating tool in feedback giving practice. In this case, students can be more objective as it is not their own work and the peers will find it easier to communicate with fellow peers than teachers will. Not only future improvement can be made but also skills in self-regulating one's own work can be built.

Pintrich (2003) cited some research findings and stresses, 'the importance of peer groups and interactions, with other students as important contexts for the shaping and development of motivation' (p.675). Teachers ought to facilitate learners developing their capacity to be responsible for their own learning, and to care about the learning of their peers. With strong collaboration, teamwork and active learning, a learning community with mutual trust can be formed. With peer-assessment, feedback giving is not limited to teachers' as the sole source. Learners can be directly involved in assessing others' work. With a set of clear criteria and enhanced audience awareness, there can be quality feedback given by peers to each other. This reflects peer-assessment as a tool to encourage students to participate actively in the learning process.

As the literature reviews show, these studies have demonstrated that feedback and motivation are very important topics in education research worldwide

3. Methodological approach

The first part of this study laid the theoretical framework for understanding the importance of students' role in making feedback motivating.

The second part describes and justifies the methodological approach used in this study in order to establish:

- What are the students' expectations of themselves, their perceptions of their own skills, effort expenditure, and their responsibilities within the learning process?
- What are the roles they play within the feedback-giving episodes?
- How should students take responsibility for and manage their own learning in order to boost their level of motivation?

This study adopted a case study approach as the research methodology. A naturalistic case study was undertaken to gather data to answer the research questions. Data sources included teacher interviews, student interviews, students' drawing, questionnaires, teachers' reflections, record of students' performance, as well as record of teachers' feedback-giving episodes.

3.1 *Setting and participants*

This study was undertaken in two high public schools of Durres, Albania. There were 100 students and 10 English teachers as part of this study. The schools use Albanian as the medium of instruction and English as a second language.

3.2 *Instruments for data collection*

Instruments for data collection include interviews, questionnaires, observations and teachers and students reflections. Interviews were one of the major sources of data in this study. Data was extracted from the interviews conducted with students, observations and the feedback-giving episodes to explore how they perceived themselves and in particular, their roles in the learning process. It was hoped that insight could be drawn in areas such as students' expectations of themselves, their perceptions of their own ability and effort expenditure, their responsibility in the learning process and the roles they play in the feedback-giving episodes. This stage of data analysis provides useful linguistic data focusing on the genre of the feedback-giving sessions.

3.3 *Data analysis*

Data are first presented in relation to students' perceptions of the relationship between motivation and teacher feedback. Both qualitative and quantitative data collected from questionnaires and students' interviews are presented following this framework. To answer the research questions data was extracted from the interviews conducted with students, student's reflections to explore how they perceived their influence in the learning process. It was hoped that insight could be drawn in areas such as students' expectations of themselves, their perceptions of their own ability and effort expenditure, their responsibility in the learning process.

4. **Findings and discussion**

4.1 *Student respondents' perceptions of the relationship between motivation and teacher feedback*

The data analysis mainly focused on the interviews conducted with the students. Data are given in relation to the suggestions given by student respondents about what makes feedback motivating. These embody comments and suggestions given by students regarding the content of feedback, techniques of feedback giving and the use of language by teachers. These suggestions serve as perceptive insightful teachers when they reflect their feedback giving insightful. The trustworthiness of the approach to data analysis is discussed, including the triangulation of data, and therefore the recursive and iterative nature of data collection: firstly, the different sources of information collection helped substantially in triangulating the interpretations of findings. Having obtained the results from the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with student informants.

In addition, when they were asked to comment on their previous experience of receiving teacher feedback, they were invited to share a number of the findings drawn from the questionnaires. This helped substantially to answer the research questions because students provided insight into and explanations about a few of the findings from their perspective. Their points of view were taken as a means to triangulate the interpretation of data as well as findings from other sources.

Teachers' reflection was also an effective means to triangulate the interpretation of what they did in the feedback-giving practice. From their perspective as teachers, they explained in what areas they had done well and when improvement was required. Triangulated with the findings from student interviews and questionnaires, this information was useful in identifying the gap between teachers' perceptions of their own apply and students' expectations of their teachers' feedback-giving practice. Interviews also helped triangulate the findings drawn from other sources of data. For instance, the gap between students' expectations and teachers' views of the feedback giving apply could be bridged. When, informants were shown a feedback-giving episode, they informed the researcher whether their definitions of 'good' practices coincided with each other.

4.2 *Students' perceptions of their own ability and effort*

After the feedback-giving sessions, students were asked how they interpreted their own abilities in terms of their English literacy, as well as how much effort they had invested. From the interviews, students commented that they perceived themselves as having a coffee level in English and they admitted that they were not confident in using English:

Well, we do not speak English much; and it is hard to organize and make sentences on the spot. (Student)
It is because we are...we really do not have much confidence... (Student)

Students also admitted that they had stopped studying and saw no point to continue studying after the public examination. They said that little effort was invested after the examinations:

The exam is over. How come studying! (Student)
Interviewer: Are all the things stopped as the exam is finished?
Student: Yes. I do not study English now, though I would like to take it up again.
Interviewer: Is it related to the exam? As it is over ...
Student: Yes, I work hard for the exam.
Student: Yes, as the exam is over, it is over.

Nevertheless, some students prioritized learning in general before preparing for the examinations. A student in an interview said that:

However, having learnt something is good because for an oral exam, you only remember things before the exam and will forget them all after the exam. Therefore, having learnt something is better. (Student)

Such priority demonstrated a strong correlation between students' goal orientation and effort expenditure. In other words, it is closely related to students' orientation of a task or performance goals, or whether they had a tendency to have a work avoidant goal, which implies that they wanted to get a task completed with the minimum amount of effort.

4.3 Student responsibility in the learning process

In the interviews conducted with students, the researcher also elicited information from students about how they perceived themselves in terms of the responsibility they had in the learning process. When asked about whose responsibility it was to take up learning, students said that the responsibility of learning did not lie with the teachers, but themselves. They commented that:

Actually, it is students' responsibility.... You need to do it yourself. Just that I do not know what happen to students nowadays. Partly because we are lazy... (Student)
Interviewer: Do you feel that she also has the responsibility? Do you think the teacher has to follow up with you the next day, asking you or...?
Student: No. I feel that her responsibility is done as she has told me.
Interviewer: You think that the responsibility lies with you yourself.
Student: On me.

Students in the two groups gave similar responses to the above questions. Students were consistent with the belief that they themselves should bear responsibility for learning, not the teachers. However, students were found to have taken rather few turns and short responses in the feedback-giving sessions.

4.4 The roles students played in feedback

As discussed in the literature review and asked in one of the research questions, students should have a role to play to make the feedback motivating. Therefore, it is crucial to consider what roles students perceived themselves had been playing in the feedback-giving sessions.

What possible roles students can take to make teacher feedback more motivating? The findings support the proposal given by Black (2004) that to ensure that the next step can be taken in order to enhance student learning, there needs to be a readiness to change the roles that both teachers and students play in supporting the learning process. Below are some of the extracts from the student interviews:

Interviewer: ... What role do you perceive yourself playing? For example, active, passive or you have the same status

as friends, teacher-student... what role do you think you played?

Student: Passive

Student: passive

Interviewer: What else?

Student: Listener.

Interviewer:... listener?.

Students in this interview commented that they saw themselves as passive, playing the role as a listener. Another group of students shared a similar view: Actually, it is feedback from the teacher.

We do not need to talk so much. During the discussion, we have spoken already. (Student)

This extract reveals that students had this perception of not needing to speak in the feedback-giving session. This affects their engagement and participation.

4.4.1 Roles played in the feedback-giving sessions

In the interviews conducted, student respondents commented that they saw themselves as passive participants, listeners and even outsiders in the feedback-giving sessions it was found that students took a rather passive role. This is consistent with the findings gathered in student interviews when students described the roles they took. In addition, some student respondents had the perceptions, or a misconception, that they had already played their part (by speaking) in the oral practice, so that there was no need for them to continue speaking in the feedback-giving sessions.

The fact that the students did not speak much in the feedback-giving sessions (as shown by the relatively smaller number of turns they had taken) explains why they commented that they thought the locus of control lay largely with their teachers, not with them.

There are several reasons to explain this phenomenon. First, the schools in this study use Albanian as medium of instruction, the students might not have felt competent using English in the feedback-giving sessions to communicate. As a result, they could not express themselves fluently and thus, only listened without responding or initiating a question. Second, as teachers of the study had commented that peer-evaluation was rarely done in class due to poor class discipline, and teacher feedback delivery in class mainly focused on disciplining students, students did not have enough opportunities to practice giving feedback to their peers. Third, as discussed above, this study revealed that teacher influence played a dominant role in motivating students to learn. Nevertheless, in this study, some students commented that they were not that close to their teacher, and the relationship with their teacher was distant. There was a low level of trust and therefore students might not have really wanted to participate in the feedback-giving process at all.

4.5 Roles played in the learning process

In this study, the feedback was examined as a means to motivate students to learn but using feedback to boost motivation should be extended to the larger learning environment.

From the data, students commented that the responsibility for learning lay with themselves (but not on the teachers). They did not blame teachers for their own failure to take follow-up actions after hearing the feedback, but bore the responsibility themselves. Despite taking up this responsibility, students commented that they lacked the ability to use English freely and they said that they invested less than enough effort in this respect. Such perceptions of low ability and little effort expenditure explain their low expectation in the public examination.

4.6 What roles students themselves play in making feedback motivating?

Implications are drawn regarding student learning and how students can play a more proactive role. It includes participation in peer feedback-giving practice, building up the habit of self-evaluation, learning collaboratively with their peers, communicating with parents and making open dialogue with teachers.

5. Conclusions

This study found, that students should play a more proactive role in the learning process by participating in peer

feedback-giving practice, building up the habit of self-evaluation, learning collaboratively with their peers, communicating with parents and making open dialogue with teachers. The student interviews revealed that teachers could also offer support to students in this respect to enhance their self-regulating skills.

When examining the role students can play to make feedback motivating, the findings strongly suggest that peer-assessment should be promoted. It is an effective motivating tool because peers are significant others to students in the learning process and students can retain a larger extent of locus of control in the conduct of peer-assessment. It can also facilitate a dialogue among learners during the feedback delivery process. This study also drew attention to the importance of the need to prepare and train students for them to carry out peer-assessment successfully.

6. Implications

This study explored the role students can play to make feedback motivating and it discovered that there is a strong correlation between self- and peer-assessment and student motivation. While self-assessment can enhance students' self-regulation skills and let students retain the locus of control, peer-assessment facilitates a peer dialogue and promote students' active role in learning (Black, 2004).

Peer-assessment is indeed an alternative to the conduct of dialogic feedback by teachers given the challenges faced by teachers. As active learners, students should take responsibility for and manage their own learning. Findings in this study implied that self- and peer-assessment are effective tools in motivating students to learn.

The benefits are three-fold. First, self- and peer-assessment familiarize students with the success criteria so that they know better how they can close the gap between their current performance and the expected outcome. Second, they facilitate students taking up a more active role in the learning, teaching and assessment process. It helps the transition towards a more student-centered approach of teaching and learning. Self- and peer-assessment thus help students develop a stronger sense of themselves as learners. Third, peers as significant others can bring very positive impact on students' motivation to learn.

Data from the interviews have shown that students see the fear of potential loss of face and peers' company a driving force. This study supports that to help students better understand the criteria used to assess their learning and align their understanding of the standards required with those of teachers and others through self- and peer-assessment.

Given the important role students themselves, play in making feedback motivating, more research needs to address how teachers can train students to conduct peer-assessment successfully, and what teachers can do to facilitate a dialogue among students when delivering and receiving feedback.

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