



Undergraduate Learners' Attitudes towards Teacher Feedback on the Assignment Scripts: A Case Study on the Undergraduate Students of the Department of English, University of Information Technology & Sciences (UITS)

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Abstract

This paper reported on a study on different types of teacher feedback on the assignment scripts and students' attitudes towards teacher feedback. The number of the total participants in this study was forty. The participants were undergraduate students from the Department of English, University of Information Technology & Sciences (UITS). A questionnaire with twenty-six items was used as an instrument to collect the data. The findings showed that the students got three types of feedback more frequently (oral, written, and explicit) and students preferred both oral and written feedback most.

Keywords: Feedback, Attitudes, Participants, Questionnaire, Findings, Instruments

Introduction

Feedback is one of the teaching techniques, which helps students to improve their language skills. According to previous studies, it is proved that teacher feedback is distortive for students because teacher comments are too equivocal to get the knowledge (Sommers, 1982). However, some studies support that feedback is highly important to develop fluency and accuracy in writing (Wu, 2003 and Chan, 2004). The current problem in giving teacher feedback is that majority teachers do not pay attention to the student preferences or attitudes towards what types of feedback most of them want (Birenbaum, 1997; Entwistle & Tait, 1990; Gijbels & Dochy, 2006).

In the Department of English, University of Information Technology & Sciences (UITS), the undergraduate students submit two assignments individually in each semester as it is the institutional evaluation system to check up students' gradual progresses. Each student is given feedbacks on their hand written scripts that can be any jpg or pdf format. As the effectiveness of teacher feedback depends on the types of feedbacks teachers give and also on learners' attitudes towards it, it is needed to assess the major type feedback and the level of learners' perceptions towards the feedback given by their teachers.

With these things in mind, the purpose of this study is to examine undergraduate students' attitudes towards teacher feedback on their assignment scripts enhancing learning and teaching writing skills.

The present study investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the major types of feedback teachers give on the assignment scripts?
2. What are the utmost attitudes of the students towards teacher feedback they got on their scripts?

Literature Review

Teachers provide feedback in order to help students to improve their language skills in a language teaching-learning environment.

Oral and written feedbacks are the most frequently used teacher feedback (Hadzic, 2016). Sanja Hadjic's (2016) paper, "Oral and Written Teacher Feedback in English as a Foreign Language Classroom in Sweden", focused on feedback provided by the teachers both orally and in written form. The participants were from a secondary school. The total number of the participants was 67. The findings showed that teachers did not correct the learners all the times. They frequently used written feedback for giving both explicit and implicit feedback. Furthermore, teachers motivated the learners by providing oral comments.

According to previous studies, written feedback has many difficulties to be understood by the learners because of unclear written instructions. According to Zacharias's (2007) study, it is indicated that learners have some troubles in reading teacher feedback. Even, most of the cases, teacher given written feedback is unreadable.

In Zacharias's (2007) study, 130 participants (100 students and 30 teachers) participated to respond the questionnaire and 21 students and 10 teachers participated in the interview. Then, the aim of this study was to find out the major problems students find out when they read teacher feedback. The results provided three major big problems. Firstly, it was general feedback that was the main problem in understanding it. If the teacher just writes 'many mistakes on grammar', the feedback will be too general to get. This finding was confirmed with Ziv's (1982) study, suggesting that students want to receive the feedback which is explicit and more suggestive. The second difficulty was that students did not know how to correct the error. The last one

was usage of complex words while giving feedback.

Similarly, in Zamel's (1983) study, it is claimed that some teacher given feedbacks are not clear to provide the precise suggestions. For these reasons, students even keep away from the teacher's feedback. (Sommers, 1982 and; Zamel, 1985)

In contrast, students consider feedback as a useful instrument for improving their writing skills because it helps them to correct the errors.

According to Wu's (2003) study, teacher feedback is very important and useful due to its high quality and accuracy. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. The total participants were 94 students including 60 male and 34 female learners. These participants were 3rd year students of a High School. They were investigated by two types of instruments including questionnaire and two sets of individual semi-structured interview. The major finding is that nearly 60% of the students considered that feedback is highly effective in their correction of the errors. Similar finding was got by Cohen and Cavancanti's (1990) research and it indicates that students accept teacher feedback eagerly because it is very helpful for them to understand the errors and mistakes.

Methodology

Participants

This study was done with the undergraduate students of the Department of English, University of Information Technology and Sciences (UITS). Forty participants presented to give responses to the questionnaire. Participants were selected randomly based on convenience and purposeful sampling. The reason behind this is that the undergraduate students are pretty much available in the virtual class system and as they are on the path of higher education, their perceptions will be much more needed to evaluate the teacher given feedbacks. Furthermore, undergraduate students are very used to getting teacher feedback. So, this selection of participants provided a fairly representation of undergraduate level.

Instrument

This is a quantitative survey research. For the purpose of studying the major types of feedbacks

and the learners' attitudes towards teacher feedback on the assignment scripts, a questionnaire was developed. A five point Likart scale was used ranging from always to never and from strongly agree to strongly disagree given after each statement. The responses were rated as always/strongly agree =5, usually/agree=4, sometimes/neutral=3, occasionally/disagree=2, and never/strongly disagree=1. I have developed a technique from Icy Lee's (2008) instrument, which will investigate the students' attitudes towards teacher feedback. This survey did not blindly follow Lee's (2008) instrument rather a modified questionnaire was used to make it more appropriate. This questionnaire has closed-ended items under 3 groups:

- A) SECTION A: Instruction
 - B) SECTION B: Types of Feedback
 - Sub-section 1: Oral Feedback
 - Sub-section 2: Written Feedback
 - Sub-section 3: Explicit Feedback
 - C) SECTION C: Attitudes
 - Sub-section 1: Effectiveness
 - Sub-section 2: Preference
- The questionnaire itself is provided in the appendix section.

Results

Table 1-5 display the results of the questionnaire survey. The percentages, means and standard deviations for each of the responses in the Likart scale are shown here.

Table 1: Oral Feedback Means & Percentages of Oral Feedback

	Never	Some times	Often	Usually	Always	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
1: Teachers tell me about my grammatical problems	10.0%	35.0%	17.5%	20.0%	17.5%	3.00	1.301
2: Teachers tell me about content problems in my question answers.	7.5%	37.5%	17.5%	22.5%	15.0%	3.00	1.240
3: Teachers tell me about organization problem of my writing.	27.5%	25.0%	25.0%	10.0%	12.5%	2.55	1.339
4: Teachers make overall comments on my assignment orally.	20.0%	37.5%	20.0%	12.5%	10.0%	2.55	1.239
5: Teachers tell me how to correct my mistakes and errors.	17.5%	40.0%	10.0%	20.0%	12.5%	2.70	1.324

SD: Std. Deviation %: Percentage

Table-1 measures the values of the items from (1 to 6) which are included in the section of 'Oral Feedback' in the questionnaire. The means (3.00 and 3.00) of the first two values (item 1: teachers tell me about my grammatical problem and item 2: teachers tell me about my content problems) indicate some positive stand towards teacher oral feedback. This analysis shows that maximum number of students

get oral feedback in their assignment scripts. But, the percentage rate (27.5%) of item 3: (organization problem) in table-1 gives a little bit contradictory results. It tells that though maximum numbers of the students get oral feedback on grammar and content problems, they do not get more frequent oral feedback on organizational issues of writing.

Table 2: Written Feedback Means & Percentages of Written Feedback

	Never	Some times	Often	Usually	Always	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
6: Teachers give written comments on my grammatical mistakes and errors.	22.5%	30.0%	17.5%	17.5%	12.5%	2.68	1.347

7: Teachers give written comments on the content.	20.0%	37.5%	12.5%	25.0%	5.0%	2.58	1.217
8: Teachers give written comments on vocabulary use.	37.5%	32.5%	15.0%	10.0%	5.0%	2.13	1.181
9: Teachers give written comments on my creativity in writing.	37.5%	37.5%	10.0%	10.0%	5.0%	2.07	1.163
10: Teachers give overall written comments like 'good' or 'very good'.	42.5%	20.0%	17.5%	12.5%	7.5%	2.23	1.330
11: Teachers give only the grades in my scripts without any indication to my errors.	32.5%	37.5%	10.0%	12.5%	7.5%	2.25	1.256
12: Teachers give both grades as well error feedback.	15.0%	37.5%	12.5%	22.5%	12.5%	2.80	1.305

SD: Std. Deviation %: Percentage

Table 2 shows some contradictory results. The highest percentage rates in “Never” scale (37.5%, 37.5% and 42.5%) of item 8,9 and 10 (vocabulary problems, creativity, overall written comments) indicate that most of the students do not frequently get written feedback on vocabulary, creativity and overall comments like ‘good’ or ‘very good’. On the other hand, the means (2.68 and 2.58) of the values

no 6 and 7 (grammar problems and content problems) express that most of the students usually get written comments on grammar and content problems. There is another prominent mean result (2.80) of the item no. 12 (both grades and error feedback), which shows that usually teachers give both grades and error feedback on the assignment scripts.

Table 3: Explicit Feedback Means & Percentages of Explicit Feedback

	Never	Some times	Often	Usually	Always	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
13: Teachers underline my errors and mistakes.	5.0%	27.5%	15.0%	20.0%	32.5%	3.48	1.339
14: Teachers circle my errors.	5.0%	30.0%	17.5%	22.5%	25.0%	3.32	1.289
15: Teachers give sign indicators to my errors.	30.0%	40.0%	15.0%	7.5%	7.5%	2.23	1.187
16: Teachers give both feedback and correction.	42.5%	32.5%	10.0%	5.0%	10.0%	2.08	1.289
17: Teachers categorize my error clearly.	45.0%	35.0%	5.0%	10.0%	5.0%	1.95	1.176

The results of the table 3 having 5 items measure the explicit feedback students get in their assignment scripts. The highest percentage rate (32.5%) of the item no. 13 (underlined errors) shows that maximum teachers always underline students’ errors and mistakes. Furthermore, the means (3.48 & 3.32) of the values no. 13 and 14 give a positive stand towards teacher explicit feedback. But, the highest

percentage rates (42.5% & 45.0%) of the items no. 16 and 17 (feedback with correction and feedback with error categorization) indicate that though maximum teachers always give somewhat explicit feedback, most of them do not make corrections and categorize learner errors in the assignment scripts.

Table 4: Attitudes (Effectiveness) Descriptive Statistics on Attitude (Effectiveness)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
18: I think oral feedback is more helpful than written feedback.	40	3.10	1.336
19: Written feedback is important for grammar and spelling correction.	40	4.00	.877
20: Oral feedback is important for grammar and spelling correction.	40	3.18	1.130
21: Written feedback helps to improve writing organization skill.	40	3.95	.959
22: Oral feedback helps to improve writing organization skill.	40	3.45	1.085
Valid N (listwise)	40		

Table 4 and its results quantify the effectiveness of the oral and written feedback for improving their grammar, spelling and writing organization skills. It is very clear that the means (4.00 & 3.95) of the item 21 (written feedback) and item21 (written feedback) are much higher than those (3.18 & 3.45) of item20 (oral feedback) and item22 (Oral feedback). This discrepancy signifies that written comment/ feedback is more useful to develop grammar, spelling and organization skills.

Table 5: Attitudes (Preference for Better Understanding) Descriptive Statistics on Attitude (Preference for Better Understanding)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
23: I understand better when teachers give only oral feedback on my midterm scripts.	40	2.88	1.159
24: I understand better when teachers give only written feedback on my midterm scripts.	40	3.52	1.154
25: Only grades of my midterm scripts give me a better understanding of my errors and mistakes in writing.	40	2.58	1.299
26: I understand better when teachers give both oral and written feedback on my midterm scripts.	40	4.27	.905
Valid N (listwise)	40		

Table (5) with its seven items gives some interesting findings. The means (2.88 & 2.58) of the item23 (only oral feedback) and 25 (only grades) are lower in comparison with other means. This result shows that maximum number of the students do not understand well when teachers give either only oral feedback or only grades. The highest means (4.27) of the value no.26 (both oral and written feedback) shows that most of the students understand better when teacher give both oral and written feedback.

Discussion of Results

The data analysis we get from the tables shows that students get oral feedback and written feedback as well as explicit feedback in their assignment scripts. Interestingly, these findings give a clear answer to the first research question of this paper.

The data analysis results under oral, written and explicit feedback sections give some controversies

too. Usually, students get oral feedback on grammar and content problems. This will help them to improve their accuracy in writing. But, it also signifies that maximum number of the students do not get oral feedback on organization problems in writing.

The findings of written feedback section express that more often students get written comments on their grammar and content errors or mistakes and most of the teachers do not give only grades or only error feedback rather they provide both grades and error feedback at the same time. On the other hand, it is also a matter of concern that very few teachers give overall comments like ‘good’ or ‘very good’ though this type of feedback highly motivates the learners (Ellis, 2009).

Furthermore, the data analysis shows that maximum number of teachers usually provide explicit feedback as they underline or circle the errors or mistakes, which will help them to get the

problem easily. But, a few of the teachers use error sign indicator to provide explicit feedback.

Lastly, the findings indicate that most of the students get better understanding while they get oral and written feedback together. A good number of the students think that written feedback is more important for improving grammar, spelling and organization skill in writing than oral feedback though they give a positive response to the significance of the oral feedback. These findings have already given a clear answer to the second question of this study.

Limitation

Undeniably, there are some external and internal factors which have direct and indirect influence on teacher feedback (Lzci, K, 2006). For example, class system, class size, testing system, scoring policy, number of the teacher, time constraints and so on. This study has been done on teacher feedback and students' attitudes towards it. But, it does not focus on the external and internal influences on teacher feedback. So, there is the need to do further research on the effects of external and internal factors on teacher feedback.

Furthermore, open or semi-structure interviews along with questionnaire to evaluate attitude make a

survey design more appropriate (Wenden, 1991). As it is a very small scale research, those instruments could not be used. Therefore, further researches should be done with more elaborate instruments.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It has already shown that this study has focused on teacher given feedback on assignment scripts and students' attitudes towards it. The results show that teachers give three major types of feedbacks which are oral, written and explicit feedback. This study identifies that in oral, written and explicit feedback, maximum number of the teachers do not provide all the sub types of oral, written and explicit feedback. So, it can be marked as drawbacks in giving feedback. Therefore, these findings will help the teachers to be more proficient in giving all types of feedback.

Furthermore, this study shows students' attitudes towards teacher feedback. It has already shown that more students prefer both written and oral feedback to improve their grammar, content, spelling and organization skill in writing. Therefore, this study will help the students to get appropriate feedback from their teachers to understand their problems in a better way.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Section A: Instructions	
Please read the following statements about teacher given feedback in your midterm scripts and put a tick (√) mark in one box only for your answer of each statement.	
Remember, this is not a test and there is no right or wrong answer. Answer according to what you think.	

Section B: Types of Feedback					
Oral Feedback	Always	Usually	Often	Some times	Never
1	Teachers tell me about my grammatical problems in assignment scripts.				
2	Teachers tell me about content problems in my question answers.				
3	Teachers tell me about organization problem of my writing.				
4	Teachers make overall comments on my assignment orally.				

5	Teachers tell me how to correct my mistakes and errors.				
Written Feedback					
6	Teachers give written comments on my grammatical mistakes and errors.				
7	Teachers give written comments on the content.				
8	Teachers give written comments on vocabulary use.				
9	Teachers give written comments on my creativity in writing.				
10	Teachers give overall written comments like 'good' or 'very good'.				
11	Teachers give only the grades in my scripts without any indication to my errors.				
12	Teachers give both grades as well error feedback.				
	Explicit Feedback				
13	Teachers underline my errors and mistakes. e.g., has <u>went</u>				
14	Teachers circle my errors. e.g., has went				
15	Teachers give sign indicators to my errors. e.g., (sp)----spelling mistake (T)----error in tense				
16	Teachers give both feedback and correction. e.g., has went (gone)				
17	Teachers categorize my error clearly. e.g., has went (verb error)				

	Effectiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18	I think oral feedback is more helpful than written feedback.					
19	Written feedback is important for grammar and spelling correction.					
20	Oral feedback is important for grammar and spelling correction.					
21	Written feedback helps to improve writing organization skill.					

22	Oral feedback helps to improve writing organization skill.					
	Preference					
23	I understand better when teachers give only oral feedback on my midterm scripts.					
24	I understand better when teachers give only written feedback on my midterm scripts.					
25	Only grades of my midterm scripts give me a better understanding of my errors and mistakes in writing.					
26	I understand better when teachers give both oral and written feedback on my midterm scripts.					

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