

Teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production in basic English courses

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Introduction

This study attempts to characterize EFL teachers' uses of feedback on students within the context of oral production, with the use of interviews, surveys, class observations, and field notes. The subjects of the study were two English teachers at a public Colombian university in a foreign language program.

The importance of communicative competence has increased among the field of teaching a foreign language. In this sense, oral production has become the skill that students need to develop more immediately. (Bañuelos & Dominguez, 2006). In the foreign language program of the public university of this study, teachers mostly pay attention to this skill, and students are always demanding good performance. Here it is where the relevance to implement better pedagogical practices, and promote improvement in students is required.

Feedback on oral production plays an important role in teaching. It is essential in the learning field; in fact, it leads to improvement in students. (Klimova, 2015). This means that teachers should improve the use of this tool in the classroom, in order to achieve the goal of improvement. The data collection used in this research help to identify teachers' beliefs on the uses of feedback, their strengths and weaknesses which might contribute to improve the quality of their teaching practices regarding feedback.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT.

Feedback is a tool for learning that drives students to improve and achieve goals when gaining knowledge (Orsmond, P.I; Maw, St.; Park, J.; Gomez, S.; Crook, A. 2013). Phil Race's theory, the ripple on a pond, supports this by stating that it is one of the seven principal factors that promote successful learning. Bearing this in mind, feedback results to be an essential element for educators since it indicates them the steps they should take for students' improvement. (Klimova, 2015)

-Feedback plays a significant role in teachers' performance, and of course on academic education since it allows teachers to assess learning and promote improvement in students. Besides this, it is relevant to state that feedback belongs to formative assessment—and its emphasis is not on students' results, but on their process in order to achieve the established goals. In relation to this, the Ministry of Education in Colombia (MEN), in their document: *Fundamentaciones y orientaciones para la implementación del Decreto 1290 del 16 de abril de 2009*, states that the nature of assessment is not only for students, who emphasize and consolidate their learning process, but for educators who reflect on their teaching process.

Unfortunately, despite what is written in this document, in Colombia the reality is different [1]. This may have its origin in some reasons,—such as the lack of training in assessment (Lopez & Bernal 2009), which has incidence on teachers' poor knowledge and skills about giving feedback, their beliefs on feedback and the lack of time to use it in the classroom. All these reasons suggest that teacher may be using feedback inappropriately focusing only on grades rather than on students' improvement.

In our experience as language learners and student's teachers we have noticed that teachers are focused on evaluative and testing practices rather than on feedback or assessment processes which would allow better improvement in students' performance. One of the reasons may be that teachers might not be aware of using it as a pedagogical tool to enhance classroom interaction and oral communication. In connection with this, Lopez & Bernal (2009) in their research about assessment in Colombia, found that grades are the only feedback that students receive and most teachers and students do not find it valuable. They use evaluation as assessment being their purpose to provide marks because they are required to do it.

3. GENERAL OBJECTIVE.

Characterize EFL teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production in English Basic Courses.

3.1 Specific Objectives.

To identify teachers' beliefs on the use of feedback regarding oral production in basic English courses.

To examine how basic English teachers, use feedback on students' oral production

To explore strengths and weaknesses on teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production in basic English courses.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Literature Review

Different factors during the teaching process in the classroom have been largely discussed by scholars. One of them is teachers' beliefs in the classroom. The importance of this lies in the idea that the students' performance is influenced by what the teachers believe and what they usually practice mostly in the classroom. It is a fact that a belief conditions us to act in certain way being good or bad according to the believer. These beliefs exert an influence on the way teachers give feedback when teaching English.

4.1.1 Feedback

Since teachers' traditional forms of testing and examine students have shifted into a concept of instruction and formative process, scholars have insisted on doing research regarding this matter. One of their concerns is on feedback, which is the subject of this study, and its role in teaching and learning. The main focus of our investigation is on teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production.

Preliminary research has been carried out by scholars interested on the field, such as Race (2001) who in his reflection on *Using Feedback to Help Students to Learn*, suggests that feedback is essential and it has a lot to deal with competence in learners, he supports this statement with his theory, *Ripples on a Pond*, (Race, 1993) in which he highlights feedback as the main element for successful and meaningful learning.

Such statements were also concerned by Hattie & Timperley (2007) whose work *The Power of Feedback*, presents a wide overview of the importance of this tool in student and teacher learning. Hattie & Timperley propose that when feedback is directed at a right level, it promotes the assistance of students' comprehension and the development of effective strategies to process the information. Based on these initial studies, feedback results to be a powerful element and an inherent technique to any learning context to favor students' improvement. The use that teachers give to this tool would determine the students' proficiency in their learning processes and consolidate strong basis for reflexing.

In the last few years, much more information on feedback has become available, but with an emphasis on teachers' beliefs, which is also part of the present study. Professor Gavin Brown, 2012, from University of Auckland in his work about teacher beliefs about feedback does an analysis on teachers' quality of provided feedback, his research considers 518 New Zealand practicing teachers, evaluation their conceptions and their practices, having as a result that feedback's understanding are mostly focus on improving learning than enhancing students' well-being, except on evaluative report. In a major advance in 2014, Perumanathan explored the interplay between teachers' beliefs and practices highlighting assessment and feedback in students' learning. Perumanathan found out that despite educators were aware of the role of feedback, their beliefs, learning intentions and criteria were not connected to good feedback practices, suggesting the necessity of further research for more understanding in this field. Later on 2016, Hidri developed a work, in which he investigated secondary and university teachers' assessment conceptions in an EFL context, concluding that assessment beliefs and views can

potentially affect its practices, and of course these includes feedback which is suggested to be encouraged in order to be provided for students' performance.

There are different types of feedback that are used in the classroom. The use of these ones is guided by teachers' beliefs and they have a clear impact on students' improvement of aural skills. Also the knowledge and use of this feedback impact students' English proficiency.

4.1.1 Oral production.

In a study carried out in 2012, where five teachers and their students in their second year of college were consulted to know their opinion about the role of teacher's feedback, the author, Bouraya Wafa, found that the five teachers used different types of feedback in different ways: oral, personal and even written when correcting oral production in order to not make the student feels shy in front of their classmates. However, the teachers always tried to improve the student's performance and for that reason, they used all the ways known by them to achieve their goal. The teachers mentioned that they provided feedback immediately after the student finished his/her performance because it is more worthy. One teacher said that he avoided negative criticism; for he thinks that the students find the feedback more helpful when they are not offended. According to the author "all teachers considered the feedback as an important technique in their teaching process to correct their learners' mistakes and to improve their oral performance in terms of grammar, structure, semantics, and pronunciation". Teachers' beliefs guide him/her to act in a certain way when giving feedback to the students, selecting or avoiding specific types of feedback.

The author comes to the conclusion that most teachers should take into account giving feedback based on students' preferences and reactions for ensuring effectiveness. Besides, she states that the provided feedback needs some features to be effective because sometimes it did not produce the effect required in students that considered it offending and not as a motivator. Teachers' belief played an important role in the way students perceived feedback. However over the idea that the students perceive feedback different from the teachers, the latter ones have the notion that it should favor students' improvement.

The authors Gavin T L Brown, Lois R. Harris and Jennifer Harnett on their study: Teacher beliefs about feedback within an Assessment for Learning environment: Endorsement of improved learning over student well-being, found that teachers expect their students use the given feedback, with the explicit purpose, for improving their learning outcomes quality and developing autonomy instead of encouraging and protecting students' self-esteem, which were considered as a minor aspect of the learning-oriented conception of feedback. It was also revealed that there were relations between teachers' conceptions of feedback and the practices they associate with it. Demonstrating an interconnection between what teachers believe and what they practice.

However, the study recognizes that teachers during their practice pedagogical work would not make distinctions among process, task, and self-regulation feedback. They would implement feedback without taking into account this distinction due to a lack of study in this field.

In most cases the teachers express what they think about feedback through complex ideas. Maybe the confusing ideas about it and the shame of teachers to recognize it could lead them to

not be honest. It is suggested that focus groups or interviews may identify language that teachers use to express complex views about feedback and these data would be useful in creating additional statements that shed light on teachers' conceptions.

They conclude that feedback remains an essential pedagogical practice even where assessment is not a government policy or do not play a dominant paradigm in the academic society. Nevertheless, since all these practices are expected from teachers, the results may not reflect the teachers' personal beliefs. As teachers, it is supposed that they manage some techniques to improve students' learning even when teachers have not literacy about the topic because it is an issue inherent in teachers' role.

Another conclusion is that teachers need a growth-oriented experience on feedback since they can mitigate its impact by taking into account that the students could be psychologically harm. These experiences would include teachers in their pre-service teaching; otherwise "they will resort to giving vague, unhelpful feedback such as "doing well", "could be doing better", or "not working hard enough" when being in service.

The independent educational developer and writer Phil Race in his dissertation "using feedback to help students to learn" made an overview about the role of feedback in students learning and the advantages and disadvantages of one type of feedback and another. For Race, feedback plays one of the most important factors in learning according his experience; he is completely sure that feedback favors the improvement in all sort of learning activity.

As many scholars, Race differentiates positive and negative feedback – but he prefers the term "critical." However, in practice, it is most useful the use of both types. The synthesis of these types can lead the students to improvement without affecting his/her self-esteem.

To conclude, this literature allows us to have a general view about how teachers' beliefs guide them to use one or another type of feedback favoring or not the students' performance. In the same line of thoughts, it is identified different factors that teachers take into account when providing feedback.

4.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.2.1 Beliefs

Beliefs exist in connection to other beliefs, contradict one another, and indicate the complexity of belief systems (Breen et al. 2001).

Woods (1996) demonstrated that beliefs are non-consensual, include the existence of abstract entities, are evaluative, have a high degree of episodic/anecdotal materials, have different degrees of strengths, range from strong to weak, and have a high degree of overlap

4.2.2 Teachers' Beliefs

Beliefs are an essential element for carrying out the educational process. They shape the way teachers teach, evaluate, treat students, and even grade them. In other words, they help to understand how teachers shape their own work. Beliefs, in Borg's (2001) words, "is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior".

More definitions have been carried out regarding beliefs in the educational context, basing its propositions on beliefs as the guide for teachers' attitudes in the classroom and in their pedagogical practices. In agreement with Borg's definition, Li (2012) proposes that beliefs are closely related to how teachers use strategies when dealing with daily challenges; besides, they not only influence their own well-being, but influence students' learning environment. As it is proposed by these authors, beliefs have a tremendous impact on teachers' pedagogical practice, and their students. Their arguments and views of learning are also determined by their own beliefs (Li, 2012 in Haney, Lumpe & Czerniak 1996; Khader, 2012) Their decisions, thoughts and behaviors are determined by what they actually believe.

Beliefs cannot be considered as a whole, in fact, there are different types of beliefs if we regard about teaching. Michael Borg proposes three types of teachers' beliefs and its significant roles in Language Teaching, Borg (2001), beliefs about learners, learning and about themselves.

- **Beliefs about learners**

One factor that affects classroom practice is teachers' beliefs about learners. The way teachers perceive their students will determine their pedagogical practice. learners can be thought as clients, raw material, partner's, individual explorers, Meighan (1990) .

if students are seen as clients, then the educator position and their role will turn into a cooperative work, and he or she will be a facilitator rather than the "boss" in the classroom. However, when they are perceived as raw materials, they will be forced to master the language.

As we can see, both perceptions about learners suggested by Meighan will definitely influence on teachers' behavior in the classroom.

- **Beliefs about Learning**

Not all teachers perceive learning in the same way, even their strategies, methods and activities in class are used depending on their beliefs about learning. For example, a teacher might think that Total Physical Response is the best method to teach English to EFL secondary students since in that way they will learn faster. However, another teacher might think that grammar translation method works even better, and all his or her activities will be lead to use this approach.

In this sense, teachers beliefs about learning could not be considered just as what they think it works in the class, but about how clear they are regarding the language itself and how to study it.

- **Beliefs about themselves**

What do you think about you? this is the question that leads these item and that profoundly enhance the process of teaching. Two elements that engage such process are self-efficacy and emotions.

Self- Efficacy

These refers to people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives, Bandura (1994). How capable teachers think they are will certainly produce impact on their performance in the classroom. For example, a teacher with strong sense of efficacy will probably

approach difficult activities or he/she will challenge learners to master something. Their expectations are higher and she/he is constantly promoting progress in learners. Now, if the sense of efficacy is low, something different is likely to happen because teachers will not assign something they do not feel comfortable with.

Emotions

This element does not precisely deal with emotional experience when teaching, but with the interpretation of situations in the classroom, Frenzel et al (2009). Depending on how teachers perceive any situation, they react and behave in certain way. Schutz and Zembylas (2009) in their book *Introduction to Advances in Teacher Emotion Research: The Impact on Teachers' Lives* claimed that around 50 percent of teachers who entered their profession, left after five years. This, according to Schutz and Zembylas lays on teachers' emotional nature of their profession. In this sense, it is noticeable how influential emotions are in the process of teaching.

4.3 Feedback

What most teachers seek to achieve during their educational process is to take students to one level to another, this can be simplified in what is called: improvement. The idea of making students improve comes from the fact that most educators see education as a step-by-step process in which we are supposed to achieve something with our students. Based on this, they use strategies, methods, approaches, ideas, etc; in order to reach what is expected. In these terms, teachers have crossed with many concepts and proposals regarding improvement and achievement in students. However, it does not mean that all of them will be mastered, just as it happens with one of the most important tools to improve and achieve goals in learning: Feedback.

This research aims to explore feedback in the field of teachers' beliefs and oral production, but before associating these concepts, it is necessary to have a deeply understanding of each one. As beliefs were already concerned, feedback should be ddefined.

Hattie & Timperley (2007) suggest a definition of feedback and they conceptualize it as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. Hattie & Timperley, then claims that feedback is also a consequence of performance.

This last concern is related to Ur (2006) whose concept lays on "the information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance". What these authors mean is that the main purpose of feedback is to identify the areas that need improvement based on results (performance) gotten from students. Another concept that contributes to this last, it is the one proposed by Aparicio (2007) who also states that feedback is information, but he focuses on give by a teacher to students about their performance. What Aparicio tries to demonstrate in this case is that when learners receive the information they are going to be capable of realize what they have to improve and this will lead them to achieve the purpose of what has been taught.

4.4 Oral Production

Speaking

Speaking is an oral and productive skill (Bailey, 2005), this is what most teachers know and what they agree with. Speaking has been seen just as one of the four language skills, and it might be considered just as the act of saying something. However, Bailey 200 goes beyond this concept. She proposes that “speaking consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning” going further requires the addition of the concept of meaning. Besides, she complements her statement by supporting with the following concern: “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information”

As this research is making emphasis on teaching, it is important to keep in mind those concepts that lead to the education process. Regarding speaking, Bula, 2015 proposes some key elements when teaching speaking. From those elements, based on the purpose of this research, we chose pronunciation, students’ first language, and oral communication errors

1. Pronunciation

This component seems to be the paramount of speaking, and teachers always seek to increase students’ proficiency in this field. In fact, it is more demanded by teachers than other elements.

2. Students’ First Language

This is an important element since our research participants are dealing with EFL students, and it is essential to consider their native language. “Teachers, particularly

when working with beginners, have to construct manageable and, at the same time, challenging tasks so learners do not switch to their L1” Bula 2015

3. Oral Communication Errors

What will teachers correct? when are they going to do it? These are questions in which teachers struggle since speaking has some other components that represent a difficulty for teachers since they have to decide which errors are they correcting, when to do it and even in which way; and in this way feedback starts playing its role.

What do teachers want their students to achieve when speaking? good pronunciation? accurate speaking or grammar? it does not matter what the focus is, at the end the intentions arrive in the production of something and in this case oral production.

Teaching Oral Production

Oral production belongs to the speaking skill and it is considered as “the one students need to develop more immediately; that is why there is a number of factors that have been implied as enhancers or impediments to the development of such ability” Bañuelos; Dominguez, 2006. Factors might be understood as learning strategies, ways of assessing or methods implemented by the teacher in order to improve this skill. However, students still struggle when producing, some of them might try, but with simple words or even hesitate to speak, situation that is hardly evidence on written production.

Regarding this, Brown & Yule (1989) consider that problems with oral production are obvious. This is because as speaking requires a giver and a receiver, students are always judged by others, specially the teacher. In our experience as language learners, we have noticed that when a student speaks, the teacher is always expecting something, mostly

based on what he or she has taught; this creates an atmosphere of tension about doing something perfect. The speech students produce is always evaluated, maybe in terms of grammar, vocabulary, content or even pronunciation, but it is still exposed to correctness

Bearing in mind the difficulty in oral production, teachers and scholars on the field wonder what to expect when teaching this skill, or where to lead students to. Brown and Yule (1989) suggests that the product should be “express themselves”. We understand that oral production goes beyond the process of producing sounds, but attempts to communicate something. Since the first moment a student speaks, he or she is trying to leave a message to his or her audience, which is not only present in the classroom, but in every day.

In this regard, Peña & Onatra (2009) in Brown & Yule (2001) considers two important functions for Oral Production development: Transactional and Interactional. For the purpose of this research, we decided to consider these functions from West & Lynn (2009) regard, due to the relationship with feedback that is raised.

First, the **interactional model** is perceived as a conversation in which the sender and the receiver can alternate roles (West & Lynn, 2009; in Schramm, 1954). This fact leads to another important one, the process of feedback, both, the sender and the receiver, give responses to the messages that are in function. Schramm proposes two ways in which feedback is provided: internal and external

5. METHODOLOGY.

5.1Introduction.

This research has two specific objectives set within the context of academic issues:

1. To identify teachers' beliefs on the use of feedback regarding oral production in Basic English courses.
2. To examine how teachers use feedback on students' oral production
3. To explore strengths and weaknesses on teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production in Basic English courses.

An important aspect to this research work relates to objective 3: the opportunity to identify teachers' uses of feedback and their implementation in students' oral production, a subject that would refer to the teacher's perception but that in the academic field can shed light on if the students are being well-guided to improve their oral performance or not. Therefore, the opportunity to know about how teachers use feedback could contribute not only to the study of

the types of feedback, but a richer understanding of its strengths and weaknesses in teachers' uses and the students' oral production as result.

The theoretical framework identified a gap in the existing research and evidenced the necessity for a study about the teachers' uses of feedback favor or not the students' oral production in Basic English courses at a public university. An important contribution of this research work will be the analysis of empirical data on how teachers use a type of feedback instead of another. Objective 2 takes this research further collecting the uses of feedback applied by the teachers in the classroom, giving more understanding of the issues surrounding the implementation of some types of feedback over others and so be better placed to contribute useful knowledge in relation to feedback in the university environment – specifically basic courses.

In this section the details of the research strategy adopted to address the research issues identified will be described; together with the site and participants, the means of collecting data for analysis.

5.2 Research design.

The research in this study is focused in an in-depth study (Characterize EFL teachers' uses of feedback on students' oral production in English Basic Courses) within a real context at a university. So the research strategy that will be adopted is a case study which is a descriptive qualitative research that seeks to analyze a phenomenon or case in its bounded context and, since it focuses on professors who teach Basic English courses in a public university and aims to describe their beliefs and uses of feedback as the main phenomenon of the study. Zainal (2007) states that case study is also an exploration in real-life environments, and there are limitations for the number of events, conditions, and relationships between the participants. So, this concerns

with a close observation on what happen in a particular context. This strategy allows the researcher to concentrate on specific aspects – i.e. in this research, on teachers' uses of feedback.

Qualitative approach has been implemented in this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) this kind of research implicates studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. It means that the paper is focused on a context that could not be generalized. Other aspects suggest the qualitative approach in this study. The objectives of this research attempt to illustrate a phenomenon in a natural setting and the perception of the participants regarding a matter: teachers' uses of feedback in Basic English courses. And the means for data collection are intrinsically related to obtain qualitative data.

5.3 Settings and participants

The site for this research work is Universidad of Sucre in Sincelejo, Sucre. The study focuses in foreign language program in A1 and A2 English level which corresponds to first and second semester respectively. The participants are two teachers: one has taught in Basic English courses for almost five years and another one two years approximately.

5.4 Data Collection Instruments.

This research is interested in collect qualitative data. There are different ways by which this is possible. However, classroom observation and semi-structure interviews have been selected with the purpose of satisfying the aforementioned objectives in this research. In classroom observations, data will be gathered from first hand: the researcher; due to he/she is the direct instrument to register the situation presented. Observations are not only a tool for a specific research question, but also are the best technique if we will to have a fresh perspective

and when the participants are not able to talk about the study itself. As in the following research the participants are not involved with the topic, and we aim to gather some information about our study, we observed the classes, two hours once a week. Besides, we record them to register everything regarding oral production. We did this through audio recordings and field notes.

In interviews, the door is open for that the interviewed can express their perceptions about the issue. This instrument tries to gather information about the opinions, beliefs and thoughts of teachers regarding oral production feedback in their English courses. As Kvale (1996: 14) remarks, an interview is the alternation of perceptions between two or more people on a topic. It means that a confrontation of ideas can arise in order to get a deeper understanding of reasons.

A survey was also carried out where teachers' perceptions about types and uses of feedback were identified. It is for making a parallel between what is on the paper and the reality.

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