PRAISE AND FEEDBACK IN THE SECONDARY EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating praise and feedback practices in the EFL classroom. The method implemented in this study is qualitative method. The researcher conducted the study using observation as the main tool. The researcher has chosen two classes from two schools, grade four class from the primary school and a class from a secondary school where the students and teachers from the two different observed schools were involved. Through the findings of this study regarding praise and feedback in the EFL classroom, it is crucial to use them in classrooms in a proper way. Besides; praise and feedback encourage and motivate students mainly if praise is targeted and not used just randomly. Teachers should use positive specified praise if they are impressed by an answer or behaviour, Furthermore, the study revealed that feedback should be given regularly whether verbal or non-verbal. Teachers should care about the selected feedback they are going to use, in other words, for young children, ability feedback is preferable while for older ones, effort feedback is preferred.

1   Introduction

It is agreed that feedback and praise are the most vital aspects that make and craft our society nowadays. I would not doubt or hesitate, not a slight percentage, the significance of feedback and praise is in the core of our lives, whether in the classroom, at work, in society in general or whenever a constructive conversation is taking place between two or more people. In this paper, the researcher have profoundly introduced the sense and meaning of praise and feedback in its various forms and occurrences, The researcher has provided this paper a brief study that observes and scrutinizes some of the effects that praise and feedback comprise regarding teachers' and students' standpoints and responses on that matter. Some different perspectives have been stated regarding some researches that have been conducted. Some with, and other against, noting that I deeply and fondly support feedback and praise on all the levels.

I.1. The Purpose Of The Study
- This study aims at investigating praise and feedback practices in the EFL classroom.
I.2 The specific research questions are:
-   What kind of praise do teachers use in the EFL classroom?
-   What expressions of praise and feedback do teachers use in the EFL classroom?
-   What is the reaction of students to teachers' praise in the EFL classroom?

2. The literature Review
2.1 Definition of Praise and Feedback: A Generic Outlook

The term praise means to value highly and it is derived from the Latin verb pretiare (Shepell, 2000) and it also involves admiration or approval.(Blote, 1995) . According to Blote, teacher praise contains positive affect and is a detailed response to student behaviour than feedback. .(Blote, 1995).(Brophy 1981) defined praise as commending the worth of or to express admiration. According to Thomas, there are 110 "ways to praise" but noted that few of them can work in the classroom. (Thomas, 1991). (Burnnett (2001) considered and referred to these generic positive statements as general praise such as "that's great, fantastic, well done, amazing)

The term feedback has been defined as a means of students' improvement by providing information concerning students' ability or inability to understand (Hattie, 1993). in this regard and in a research done by Hitz & Driscoll's (1989), they have come to find out that effective and positive praise occurs when the teacher positively acknowledge students' work. In a more recent study Hitz & Driscoll (1994) suggested that constructive encouragement is needed to enhance self-esteem and this included highlighting improvement and efforts using positive comments and caring for students' feelings. According to Thomas and in his study, he emphasized the necessity for praise in the classroom by considering it a positive tool to extinguish undesirable behaviour and to reinforce desirable behaviour An American research cited by Merrett & Wheldall (1987) suggested that overall the general level of teachers' positive and negative feedback is low, despite the fact that teachers' negative feedback is more than positive feedback. (Strain et al., 1983). Feedback is the procedure in which the result or yield of a deed is a response to alter the subsequent action. Feedback is indispensable to the working and endurance of all narrow systems instituted throughout existing and lifeless nature, and in synthetic structures such as education system and economy. As a joint current, feedback is intrinsic to all relations, whether person-to-person, person-to-device or device-to-device. In a managerial framework, feedback is the data turned over to a person or group regarding its preceding conduct, so that the being may regulate its existing and upcoming actions to pull off the preferred upshot.

A prevailing method that you can arbitrate as a teacher is by being cautious about the approach you exploit in students' praise. In this paper, praise relates to positive feedback generated to students by educators and others on particular academic results. Praise only relates to constructive feedback; feedback by itself can be either constructive if positive praise or unconstructive if negative praise. Proffering praise for students' efforts and attempts can modify this attitude so that students may be able to start perceiving their own aptitude as an aspect that can be expanded when praised in a positive form. According to (Brophy 1981), praise is an important reinforcement method for teachers because it helps to build self-esteem, provide encouragement and create a good rapport between the teacher and the students .Praise brings about augmented flexibility, in this context, flexibility refers to the course of properly adapting, in spite of difficulties at school, work, family or other facets of life and comprising a selection of substitute strategies that can be exploited when one fails. Resilience or flexibility is an approach that can be enhanced and expanded with thought and endeavour, when scholars run into impediments and dilemmas.

Teachers recurrently employ praise as an instructional tactic to boost the incidence of children's positive social and academic performances. From the outside, praise seems to be a straightforward approach that the tutor alone can apply. Nevertheless, in fact, praise is a multifaceted give-and-take procedure that mutually encompasses the teacher who generates praise, and the students who are the receivers of that praise. The efficiency of a teacher's exploitation of praise is impacted by the students' personal and educational divergences, distinct circumstances where praise has been formerly granted to them (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Lam, Yim, & Ng, 2008), and attributes of the praise proffered. Children from diverse environments and knowledge, counting socio-economic groups, aptitude levels, developmental levels, and sexual characteristics, may retort to praise in a different way (Hitz & Driscoll, 1988).

2.2   Attribution Feedback

Attributions were initiated to the psychosomatic literature by Heider (1958). Illustrating on his approach, Weiner (1979) devised an attribution model appropriate to attainment contexts. In this system, attributions are classified according to three measurements: locus (inside or outside the person), stability (moderately constant or unbalanced in due course), and controllability (mainly controllable or uncontrollable by the individual). Effort is internal, unbalanced and convenient, which is fairly constructive to inspiration. People who do well at a certain assignment and deem that they can persist on working hard, are more prone to anticipate potential achievement and be aggravated to apply the effort. People who do not exert significant strength and execute inadequately on an assignment are more prone to be urged and inspired to carry on if they believe that harder work will eventually generate accomplishment. (Burnnett, 2001) and his study on praise and feedback found out that younger children lean towards ability feedback such as *clever, excellent*...while the older children preferred effort feedback such as : *It seems you worked hard on that...*   Some research highlighted ability feedback and considered it as more important for the students than effort feedback (Marsh, 1990 ;Craven et .al, 1991; Dohrn and Bryan, 1994) despite the fact that other research suggested that effort feedback is more preferred by Primary students in Australia.(Burnett, 2001). Mueller & Dweck (1998, cited in Dweck, 1999) conducted a study on fifth grade students and found out that ability teacher feedback was correlated with students' interest in performance tasks while teacher effort feedback increases interest in learning tasks.

2.3. Facets of Feedback and Praise:

Generating successful written feedback is one of the key responsibilities for English writing teachers (Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). As teacher's feedback has been designated to be pleasing for the growth of students' writing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, 2004; Goldstein, 2004; Zhang, 1995), dispute continues over whether written feedback must be granted as it is repeatedly ignored and misinterpreted by students (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Guénette, 2007; Truscott, 1996). Teacher's feedback has been assessed for being result-focused, since it takes place most regularly at the closing stages as a result of time and class limitations (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). Another notion dispute that as higher-attaining scholars tend to retort surely, and take advantage from educator's feedback, less attaining students react weakly and are regularly required to be urged to understand the teacher's remarks (Guénette, 2007). Research in contrast, has stated that peers' feedback also can add to students' writing (Jacobs, 1987; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). Peers' review is currently regularly applied in the writing classroom, where it has been illustrated to have constructive upshots on students' writing progression and result (Paulus, 1999; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Whilst investigations have shown that teacher's feedback is likely to produce more remarks at the grammatical stage, peers' feedback can produce more remarks on the substance, group and terms (Paulus, 1999). In addition to valuable outcomes on the eminence of writing, peers' feedback has benefits, such as increasing decisive judgments, student independence and social communication among scholars (Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006). The application of peers' feedback permits students to obtain more personal remarks besides granting critics the chance to perform and expand diverse language talents (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

From the other hand, praise is emphasized in the classroom for its importance. .(Brophy 1981, P. 10) suggested that " even in a classroom where a teacher praises [a child] once every five minutes, the rate of praise for the average student , would be.......once every two hours" .

. .(Thomas, 1991) , indicated how important praise in the classroom is by saying that praise can be a motivational tool in the classroom if reinforcement involved using the students' names, selecting suitable praise words and describe precisely the behaviour that merits that praise.

According to (Merrett and Wheldall,.), boys are more likely to receive negative praise by female teachers in contrast with male teachers who always use positive praise to their students (Merrett and Wheldall, 1992).

3-Methodology:

The researcher conducted the study using observation as the main tool. Two classes from two schools in Dubai were observed for 10 minutes each. One school is primary for boys taught by a female teacher with an experience of 12 years of teaching English as a foreign language and the other is a secondary school for boys taught by a male teacher of English as a foreign language with an experience of 20 years. The observer transcribed the ten minutes of observation by jotting down every single word by the teacher and the students in addition to paying attention to all nonverbal communication that took place which was meaningful whether by the teacher or by the students. (see appendices A and B) . The reason for choosing two classes from two different cycles, that is to say, cycle one and cycle three is to observe the type of praise and feedback implemented by the two teachers in these two different cycles , furthermore, to observe whether praise and feedback is used by the female English teacher and the male English teacher and the frequency of such usage. The purpose from this observation is to find out to what extent teachers of English use praise and feedback in their classes whether general praise, effort feedback, ability feedback or negative feedback.

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were two classes from two different schools, one school is primary for boys and the other school is secondary for boys. Grade 4 from the primary school with 20 male students was observed while grade 12 from the secondary school with 19 students was observed too. The focus of the observation being done was to observe the use of praise and feedback by the English teachers in their classes and the responses of the students in both levels to them.

3.2 Instrumentation

The Structural Observational Schedule (SOS) was exploited in the classroom observation and was managed by the Researcher. This schedule relies on Observing Pupils and Teachers in Classrooms (OPTIC) (Merrett & Wheldall, 1986), and was altered to trace academically-centred feedback/praise via instructors. The schedule examined the selection of feedback/praise specified, and the four categories were: Ability Attributional Feedback ("You are an excellent reader", "You have the skilfulness to be fine in English", "You give the impression of being very clever in English"); Effort Feedback ("You have been practicing hard", "Your results in English reveal the immense endeavour you have presented", "You are a self-starter in reading"); General Praise ("Astonishing work", "Congratulations", "Sustain the good work") and Negative statement ("Come on, you can perform much better", "That's an incredibly messy work", "That's not satisfactory"

4- Analysis and Discussion

The researcher has chosen two classes from two schools, grade four class from the primary school taught by a female English teacher and a class from a secondary school taught by a male English teacher, where the students and teachers from the two different observed schools were involved.. Cautious reflection should be granted to the kind of praise and feedback exploited by teachers within their classrooms. The first class which the researcher observed was the 4th grade of the primary school. Nunan (Nunan, 1989. P :76) said " there is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classrooms", therefore, the author personally came into the classroom to observe. The observed 10 minutes are transcribed (see appendix A).

The observer sat in the rear of the classroom and observed the activities and the roleof the teacher and the students with an Structural Observational Schedule (SOS) to report the frequency of using praise whether general, effort feedback, ability feedback and negative praise)

The female teacher enters the class and greets the students, and the students reply greeting. The teacher writes the date and the title of the lesson on the board, then she asked the students to open their books page 32, accordingly, the students followed the instructions and opened their books. The relationship between the students and the teacher is great as students respect their teacher and were happy the time she entered the class, the majority were smiling to her and one student brought the chair for her and helped her in in cleaning the board optionally although she didn't ask him to do that, this indicates that the rapport is fine.

The whole classroom observation lasted 10 minutes,. The observer transcribed the teachers questions and the students responses in addition to the teachers feedback and the type of praise that the teacher used. The observer focused on the teacher, simply to verify the teachers' reactions to the students. The Researcher carried out every classroom observation via the SOS. Ethics consent and deliberate approval were acquired. (Appendix, Transcript A)

The strength points as observed:

The students opened their books page 32 in response to their teacher invitation who asked them a question:

What can you see in the picture?

The students raised up their hands to answer and the teacher selected one whose name is Ibraheem, who answered by saying " *I can see a boy*" . The teacher praised him and gave him candy to motivate other students to take part in the classroom interaction.(line 9,10) of transcript A. from line (11 to 14) in this transcript, every student who answers in a right way was given a candy by the teacher, furthermore, the teacher asked the rest of the class to clap for him, and praise him by saying , *excellent, very good, great, thanks, waw, you are so great*. The atmosphere in the class was positive and students were interacting well.

Then the teacher asked another question:

What is the boy in the picture doing? Line 15

The teacher elicited students by their *names* which is considered as a strength point and invite to give answers , going on teacher ability feedback to encourage all students to participate and to have no free riders in the class. Suhail answered the question by saying *" he is cleaning the table after food"*, the teacher praised him by saying *"excellent"* and went on asking (line 17) " *what type of work is cleaning the table*" , selected Suhail, who answered *"family chores"*, the teacher praised him too and asked the class to clap for him. The teacher in line 23 asked the class: "*What chores do you do at home?"* eliciting answers from the whole class: (line 23-27)

Suhail indicated that he *washes dishes*, Amer *sets the table*, Ali said that he *takes the garbage out of his house,* Khaled said that *he mows the lawn,*

The teacher praised them all by saying *very good, excellent, well done, great……*

Then the teacher wrote list of words on the board (line 29) asking the students to read them.

The teacher asked *" who can use lawn in a sentence?"* The students raised their hands and she elicited Hamed. Yes Hamed: (line 39 of Transcript A).   *"I mow the lawn every weekend"*

Teacher response: line 40: *"you are right, good sentence"*

The teacher went on asking students to give sentences praising right answers and giving ability feedback following (Burnnett 2001) as referred to in the literature review about the importance of ability feedback for young children. "Younger children favor 'ability' feedback, and as they develop, their favour for 'effort' feedback augments." The teacher was successful in exploiting effort feedback , during the observation period, which is 10 minutes, the teacher used effort feedback for 13 times which is great.

The weakness points:

The teacher shouldn't have shouted on Ali as he was unable to read lawn. (*Line 30 Appendix .A transcript 1*) and . and when she asked him to say it again, he refused because she hurt him and was afraid to do the same mistake. Furthermore, in line *(50 transcript A)*, she was tough with Ali and her non-verbal communication was threatening to him. Although he didn't do anything wrong as the researcher observed.

The other negative point as observed, asking Suhail most frequently in lines (11, 18, 42) and ignoring some students who are raising up their hands all the time.

Negative praise was also observed when she accused Ali *(in line 51*) by say *why are you cheating?* And in (*lines 32 , 37*) when she looked at Ali steadily and asked him to *be as good as* Saif.

The second class which the researcher observed was the 12th grade of the secondary school.and the lesson was about *Compound adjectives*

The observed 10 minutes are transcribed (see appendix B)

The teacher enters the class and greet the students

The students rely greeting.

The lesson was about What do you know about.........? The Camel, Dubai, , English language

The teacher distributed worksheets over the students and asked them to work in groups in order to write as much as they know on the given words.

The teacher was giving the instructions individually while distributing the worksheets about what they are supposed to do. He gave the students 3 minutes to answer:

What do you know about the camel? While the students are working,

      (*the teacher circulates and checks, helps students who are unable to write,*)

      (*three minutes passed, discussion started*)

The teacher asked Adel to answer the question. *(Transcript B line 5)*

Adel answered by saying *it is patient, ship of the desert*., the teacher said *aha, fine*

The teacher then asked Ahmed who answered by saying: *famous large animal line 7, the teacher responded by saying: ummm....not bad , can be to some extent.*

The second question by the teacher: *what do you know about Dubai?*

Yes Ramy : *It is a famous city   (line 9 Appendix B)*

Teacher: good........what do you say saif?(Line 10 Appendix B)

Saif answered by saying it is an expensive city.

The teacher responded by saying : not in all aspects.......never generalize Saif.

The student said as compared to Sharja and Ajman, it is.......*seemed upset from the teacher response. (line 13)*

Teacher asked: *What do you know about your school?*   Yes Mohamed

What do you think Mohamed?   Student's response: *good school.........(line 16 transcript B)*

What do you think Rashed?   Student's response   *it is a secondary school*

The teacher commented in an ironical way(*waw, are you sure)...(line 19)*

The teacher asked again, *What do you know about English?....yes Saif*

What do say Saif?....Saif, ...international ......teacher response: excellent...(Line 21 transcript B

What about you Ahmed? ....Ahmed...*reluctantly.....maybe...maybe   important*

Teacher, how do you know? Student: We need it everywhere   *(line 25)*

Teacher; Ok, fine inviting Anas to participate who said we need it to communicate. (line 27)

The teacher: SO ? communicate now – laughing to break the ice as the students looked tensioned and not willing to participate as it was a pure teacher-centered class in which the teacher is dominating.

What about you Othman, what do you say about English Language?

Othman responded by saying? You can't go on in your life if you are not good in English

Teacher: (at English Othman) ...(*you always do good job at English*)

By the end of the observation time, the researcher has come to know that the class has not any strength points as it ignores the basic point which is stated in the literature review regarding effort feedback as preferred by older students (Burnnett, 2001).

The atmosphere in the class was not friendly as the researcher observed, students were fully controlled although they were working in pairs, but the teacher was interfering with what they are writing.. Most prominently, broad, unfocused praise was mainly and regularly deployed within the classroom, however this kind of praise is not useful, since it is not associated

to a particular conduct or aimed to the flourishing conclusion of an assignment. The upshots of this observation propose that tutors must employ less universal, unfocused praise, more effort and ability comment, and stress more on ability than effort feedback to younger students (grades 1-9) and more effort than skill feedback to elder students (grade 10- 12).

The teacher was sometimes ironical with the students which let the students avoid participating to avoid any unexpected feedback. Praise was used 7 times (*as shown in the SOS),* 3 times general praise which again contradicts with what is mentioned in the literature review that warns using it, using effort feedback *once* and the rest praise expressions were used on no occasion.

5. Implications for teaching and learning English :

Through the findings of this study regarding praise and feedback in the EFL classroom, it is crucial to use them in classrooms in a proper way. Any teacher is an observer in his class, therefore, he has to have feedback , otherwise, it won't be considered as observation because as it is said, observation without feedback is not observation. Praise and feedback encourage and motivate students mainly if praise is targeted and not used just randomly. Teachers should use positive specified praise if they are impressed by an answer or behaviour. Many researcher as discussed above in the literature review highlighted the importance of praise but not general praise on no occasion. Furthermore, feedback should be given regularly whether verbal or non-verbal. Teachers should care about the selected feedback they are going to use, in other words, for young children, ability feedback is preferable while for older ones , effort feedback is preferred .

Classroom positive atmosphere can be created by professional teachers who know *How* rather than *What*. They know that by having good rapport with the students, cooperative learning can be accomplished and this cannot be attained unless teachers praise and reinforce the good habits of their students. Students are more likely to perceive the classroom environment in a positive way if they have a good relationship with their teachers.

Teacher should also avoid negative statements because they have negative impact on students.The age of the students is very important, it has been suggested by Burnnett 2003 that students who are young prefer to be praised in public in front of their classmates unlike older children from age 9-12. Additionally, students preference for effort feedback increases with age while their preference of ability feedback declines as they become older, so teachers should take these into account in dealing with their their students.

Student-centred class should be highlighted where students explore knowledge and can interact in the class which increases self confidence because they will prove themselves in class and receive the required feedback that fulfils their needs rather than being listeners and receivers following the instructions by the teacher.

Teachers of English should take into account the diversity in the classroom regarding students needs, interests, and learning performances because some students are visual learners who can not participate unless they see the text otherwise, they will not gain any sort of praise or feedback, others are audio learners who prefer listening to reading , so they should have their chance to participate and to gain praise and feedback, the last are kinaesthetic learners who learn only through toughing which also should be taken into consideration. Teachers should vary their class methodologies to meet the three types of learners to enable everyone in the class to participate and gain praise and feedback, therefore, by reaching every student in the class, this will create the required positive classroom environment and this can be achieved if teachers take these types of learners into consideration while preparing their lessons.

6. Conclusion

➢ Positive statements should be used in the classroom because they have powerful impact, while negative statements should be avoided because they have negative impact.

➢ Non-targeted general praise has little impact on students and should be used when teachers feel that the student did something that deserves praise and not in a random way.

➢ Both effort feedback and ability feedback should be used in the class to promote students class participation and reinforce the positive classroom environment.

➢ Teachers should not overuse praise in the classroom, only when a situation deserves that so as praise won't lose its impact on students.

➢ Praise and feedback can strengthen rapport (teacher student relationship) and the teacher should have a good EAR. (empathy, authenticity, and respect) with the students and not to use ironical phrases or shout on then in order to build the trustful relationship.

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