The Use of Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching in Selected Primary Schools in Mabelreign District in Zambabwe

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Abstract: This study sought to establish the use of Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Zimbabwe, using the interpretive case study design which is qualitative in nature. A population of 50 teachers in the Warren Park suburb of the Mabelreign District was used. Only three teachers from different schools were purposively selected. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and observations and was analyzed using the inductive thematic approach. The study concludes that corrective/negative feedback was used more often than positive feedback when implementing the CLT. Teachers were aware of the significance of feedback. Some of the points that they raised were that feedback allowed them to correct and motivate students effectively. Besides the evidence that negative and positive feedback is important in the CLT, teachers should be encouraged to use positive feedback more often as negative feedback since giving both may have a helpful impact on the effective implementation of the CLT.

Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to learning a language by way of communication and interaction rather than by rote which is learning using repetition (Richards, 2005; Mareva & Nyota 2012). In this article, feedback is taken to mean an influential instruction that is given to learners by their teachers, that strengthens, improves, rectifies and directs them adeptly in achieving the objectives of the lesson (Knight, 2003). This definition indicates the importance of feedback which is to support, amend or redirect learner's performance in their school work.

According to the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015-2022), the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe endorsed the use of CLT. The Ministry recommended this teaching approach to assist learners become communicative competent and proficient in the English language. This approach is used in the English classroom to improve learner's use of language through interaction and collaboration. CLT requires teachers' adequate feedback to learners.

A study carried out by Sibanda and Nani (2020) on feedback as an assessment to undergraduates at a higher institution of learning in Zimbabwe found that fundamentals for and of giving feedback seemed to be disregarded due to challenges experienced by both lecturers and postgraduate students. Another study by Muchemwa (2020) focused on exploring if teachers and learners shared the same feedback meaning at secondary schools. The study found that there were high overall means for Feed Up, Feed Back and Feed Forward for both teachers and students who valued these response aspects although they disagreed on some aspects. Most of research done in Zimbabwe on the CLT

approach did not focus on the significance of feedback in a language classes at primary school, hence the need to carry out this study.

Research carried out by Fattah and Saidalvi (2019) claims that teachers use traditional methods which do not assist learners to give feedback to their teachers or peers as should be done in CLT. The aforementioned scholar argued that CLT classes have only the teacher giving feedback to the learners. The scholar further argued that CLT classes have only the teacher giving feedback to the learners. There appears to be a tentative understanding of the use of feedback in CLT that makes language learning and teaching ineffective. Consequently, it may seem the classroom teacher does not value both positive and negative (corrective) feedback (Horner, 1988). This study, therefore, focused on the imperativeness of feedback in the learning of English language using CLT at primary school level in an attempt to find solutions to the problem of learner's low performance.

Studies show that feedback assists learners in improving their spoken English (Toro et al., 2019). Glasgow and Hicks (2009) observed that the amount of feedback given is connected to improvement in the learners' performance. Feedback is considered as an invaluable exercise that should be done in every classroom as it promotes independent learning (Bamkin, 2013; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2011; James et al., 2010). In the same vein, Ferguson (2011) supported the view that feedback is fundamental as it helps learners gauge, monitor and regulate individual learning.

In CLT, feedback is viewed as an ongoing interaction between the teacher and learner as well as among learners themselves (South Hansley School, 2013; Luz, 2015; Toro et al., 2019). These assertions are supported by the Ofsted Inspection Report (2018) which acknowledged written feedback as an interaction between the teacher and learners. As alluded to before, feedback is a way of acknowledging learners' work, checking understanding and fluency as well as making decisions about what teachers and learners need to do next.

There is however a debate on what makes good feedback in CLT (Spada, 2007). Literature reveals that in second language learning, feedback can either be positive or negative (corrective) (Ellis, 2009). Positive feedback approves and shows that

the response given by the learner is accurate. In communicative language teaching, positive feedback may be viewed as effective and significant. When applied, positive feedback may motivate the learner better in comparison to negative feedback which is always correctional.

Studies by Ellis (2009) further show that in CLT, positive feedback is less often used as compared to negative feedback. On the other hand, negative feedback is used when learner's responses are linguistically incorrect. CLT proposes that during interaction, teachers should not correct learner's errors. Alternatively, learners should be left to self-correct themselves (Al-Magid, 2006; Zaman et al., 2012).

Although literature has been presented about feedback, there is limited literature on the imperativeness of positive/negative feedback when implementing CLT at primary schools in Zimbabwe. The author is therefore prompted to carry out this study. The teaching of English may be successful if teachers understand the value and use of both positive and negative/corrective feedback in the implementation of CLT. The researcher assumed that the value that teachers place on feedback may affect how learners learn in a communicative class. The aim of this study was to establish the imperativeness of positive and negative feedback on CLT implementation at the primary school level.

Review of Literature
CLT and Feedback
There are two types of feedback in language teaching that may be used by the teacher during CLT leaning. As already mentioned, the two alternatives are positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback has the purpose of confirming and motivating learners (Han, 2002). Han (2002) further gives an example of positive feedback as "Yes, that's correct." Negative feedback serves the purpose of correcting the learner's errors. While Al-Magid (2006) is of the opinion that negative feedback should not be done in CLT because it interferes with communication which is important in a communicative class, the author also states that that errors made by learners are guesses about the language and that as learners progress with experience, they eventually self-correct themselves.

Wu (2008) opines that it is a misunderstanding not to give learners negative feedback. However, scholars like Truscott, (1999) and Lyster (1999) have

the view that negative feedback is accepted in CLT. The accepted negative feedback which is implicit may not interfere with communication. Truscott (1999) and Lyster (1999) argue that teachers frequently give negative feedback by rewording their inappropriate statement while preserving meaning. Thus, negative feedback is corrective to the extent that it provides the learner with the correct form without disturbing the communication. This feedback is beneficial in that the teacher gains the learner's attention and understanding.

According to Brandl (2008), implicit feedback is a fundamental principle in CLT and it gives the provision of negative and positive feedback to the learners. The author further suggested that the use of implicit feedback is a necessity in a CLT classroom since it gives both negative and positive feedback. While there is written literature on teachers' predilections and efficacy of corrective feedback in second language learning classes, relatively few studies have ever explored the significance of both negative and positive feedback at primary school level in Zimbabwe.

Feedback Strategies Used by Zimbabwean Primary School Teachers in CLT

According to Hattie and Learning (2009), effective feedback is distinct, focused, is significant and is well-matched with the learner's prior knowledge. It provides logical connections. Against this assertion, the fundamental issue on effective feedback is that language or vocabulary used should be comprehensible and relevant to the learners' work. Ellis (2009) discusses six types of feedback namely recast, repetition, clarification request, explicit correction, elicitation and paralinguistic signal. These strategies work when the teacher is implementing the CLT using group work, role play pair work, dialogues or projects. During these activities, positive or negative feedback is important, depending on which one the teacher uses and how they use it. Recast feedback is used when learners are interacting among themselves. The teacher incorporates the uttered words and corrects them lexically, syntactically and morphologically. The learners put together the sentence in a correct manner. An example of the recast feedback is as follows:

Learner: The dog bite the girl two times
Teacher: The dog bit the girl twice.

Lyster and Ranta (2013) observed that teachers have a tendency of using repetition together with other types of feedback and for this reason, it is usually not viewed as a separate strategy. In repetition, the teacher repeats the learners' utterances by emphasizing the error. The learners become aware of the mistakes through the intonation used by the teacher. An example of repetition is as follows:

Learner: My mother will helped me with homework.
Teacher: Your mother will HELPED you?
Learner: My mother will help me with the homework

In clarification request strategy, the teacher indicates to the learner his/her misunderstanding of the utterance. For example:

Learner: What do you bought with your money?
Teacher: What?

With explicit correction, the teacher ascertains and specifies the wrong statement given by the learner and then corrects it. For example:

Learner: In Monday
Teacher: Not in Monday. We say on Monday

Another strategy that teachers may use in CLT is elicitation. In elicitation, the teacher recaps the correct part of the learner's statement but not the wrong one. Just like repetition, the teacher uses emphasis to signal to the learner to complete the sentence.

For example:
Learner: I will visit if it will not be cold
Teacher: I will come if it is------?

Alternatively, the teacher can give feedback to the learners through paralinguistic signals. The teacher uses nonverbal cues such as gestures to point out the mistake made by the learner. The negative feedback in the form of gestures can be given in a way that motivates or demotivates the learner. For example:

Learner: Last year I go Kariba.

Teacher: Gestures with the right hand over shoulder to indicate past.

From the above example, the learner will be in a position to realize his/her mistake through the teacher's gesture and give the correct answer as follows:
Learner: Last year I went to Kariba.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a case study design which is interpretive. It placed emphasis on the teacher's views within their contexts at primary school level in Zimbabwe (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The researcher preferred interpretivisim as she aimed at exploring the significance and usefulness of feedback during the implementation of CLT. The researcher used the qualitative research approach which provided the participants views and their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2014).The study was hinged on the sociocultural theory (SCT) by Vygotsky (1978). Sociocultural theory is suitable for this study because feedback is based on an interactionist/cognitive view because of its nature in facilitating the interaction in the classroom. Sociocultural theory is suitable for this study because feedback is based on an interactionist/cognitive view because of its nature in facilitating interaction in the classroom.

Population and Sampling

The study was carried out in the Warren Park suburb in Mulberrying District in Zimbabwe. The population of the study in the Warren Park suburb included 50 teachers who taught English at primary school. The researcher sampled three primary schools' teachers from the population to give in-depth rich data on feedback during the implementation of the CLT. The selected teachers fulfilled the following criteria: They were primary school teachers within the suburb. They were holders of a Diploma in Primary School Education and they taught English language.

Instruments

Data was collected using observations and interviews. The researcher observed the kind of feedback that teachers gave during the implementation of the CLT. The researcher interviewed teachers to bring out their voices on how they viewed feedback in the implementation of CLT (Mertens, 2014). Data from the semi-structured interviews and observation were analyzed and discussed Braun and Clarke (2006).

Ensuring Rigor

The researcher took into cognizance the quality of the study so that it may be credible and trustworthy (Marshal & Rossman, 2010). The researcher safeguarded the rigor of the study through transferability, credibility and dependability as recommended by Licoln and Guba (1985). For credibility, the researcher did member checking and stayed in the field for a long time until data saturation was reached. For transferability, the researcher explained and provided wide descriptions of methodology and context. An audit trail of the interview audios, field notes and transcriptions assisted the researcher to achieve the dependability.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the participants from any form of harm, the researcher assured them of confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Parental and guardian permission was sought before the study took place.

Results and Discussion

Based on the observations and interviews made, the findings indicate that during the CLT, teachers did not use positive feedback; instead, they preferred using negative feedback which is corrective. Although teachers claimed that they used written positive feedback, it was found that positive feedback was only given to learners who got everything correct in a written exercise or to learners who responded correctly to asked questions.

From the observed lessons, it can be argued that in CLT classes teachers used negative feedback, which is corrective. When the teachers were asked why they used corrective feedback during oral presentations, they gave the following responses:

Teacher A: I give learners corrective feedback so that they manage to solve the given tasks in their groups or when they are interacting in pairs.

Teacher B: Learners can only become competent during interaction when they receive corrective feedback. I give them projects so that they interact as they research. In addition, if they make errors, the class or their peers can correct them and this assists them to master the correct language or answers.

Teacher C: I usually ask learners to give their peers corrective feedback so that they interact further as a class since I will be using the Communicative Language Teaching approach. The challenge I usually face is that learners usually have problems with carrying out a continuous conversation. They usually give a one word answer.

Teachers confirmed that they used group or pair work so that learners may get corrective feedback from their peers, and this also gave the learners the

opportunity to make continuous conversations even though they would be making errors.

Making errors give learners an opportunity to get corrective feedback. The corrective feedback that learners give to each other in pairs or group work is viewed by Ellis (2009) as recast feedback. Recast feedback is when learners learn and correct each other during interaction. The finding is similar to Shute (2008) who found that recast feedback assists learners to interact among themselves when solving a task and they correct each other's utterances lexically, syntactically and morphologically. The finding resonates well with Vygotsky (1978) who propounds that through using this method, learners can offer each other feedback to reach their zone of proximal development during the interaction.

When asked to discuss more on recast feedback and how they carried it out, teachers reported the following:

Teacher A: When I use communicative activities like group work or pair, I use recast feedback. It is during the group work where I allow learners to converse freely with their peers. During interaction, learners may make erroneous utterances. I usually give them an opportunity to speak freely and I take note of their errors. I then correct their errors without offending the error maker.

Teacher B: For the recast to be successful during the lesson, I concentrate on allowing learners to interact freely among themselves without disturbing them. If I do not interfere with them, they concentrate on allowing fellow learners to interact freely. I concentrate more on making my students comfortable with speaking English. I do not mind even if English is not grammatically correct. I only come in when learners make a very serious mistake that I think needs to be corrected and I don't correct an individual learner but I correct the error in front of the whole class instead of interjecting the individual learner while talking.

Teacher C: The communicative activities that I use are a prospect for my learners to use the grammar they have learnt. I am also aware that my learners' spoken language cannot be perfect. The communicative activities give them time to practice without my interference. If I happen to interfere, that is when they give one word answers and the lesson ceases to be communicative. Therefore, I choose to use recasts, selecting prudently what I want to correct because I find it awkward to correct

every mistake made by learners without spoiling their self-confidence. When I am correcting leaners, I concentrate on correcting either tenses or pronunciation depending on what I think is important at the time of the lesson. I do this kind of feedback because I consider it as assistance not as condemning my learners. I never correct my learners in the presence of their peers. I even choose to give the negative feedback in their written exercises.

The teachers also confirmed that recast was a very important type of feedback because it is used when learners are interacting among themselves. All the teachers agreed that if they do not correct learners, they would have reinforced errors. As a result, recast helps learners to give correct responses by grammatically correcting written or uttered sentences.

The following excerpt shows what teachers reported about the importance of recast feedback:

Teacher A: Learners should be corrected in everything including the tenses they make so that they do not repeat the same errors.

Teacher B: I don't believe in learners' self-correcting. If I leave them making errors and hope they will self-correct themselves, then I have not done anything. They will still make errors and it will be difficult to un-teach them.

Teacher C: Recasting and correcting learners' sentences is also a purpose of feedback. One wants to teach the learners by teaching them grammatically correct sentences.

From the above findings, it is indisputable that all the teachers consider recast feedback to be significant and useful in the learning of CLT. Teachers affirmed that recast can be used to strategically correct learners in a positive way without making them lose their confidence. This is supported by Raya et al. (2007) who opined that recasts are used to correct learners' errors during their interaction with their teacher and peers without discouraging them to learn.

Although most of the teachers acknowledged that recast is important, one teacher admitted the use of another form of recast feedback in CLT lessons. The teacher highlighted that she used written recast feedback in her learner's exercises. She preferred written recast feedback because she did not want to discourage her learners in front of their peers.

In addition, Teacher C was of the idea that written feedback assisted in to reinforcing, correcting and redirecting learners' efforts and behavior in their language exercises. The use of written feedback is supported South Hansley School (2013) which states that written feedback is a two-way dialogue between teachers and learners that is visible, regular and continual. Contrary, Teacher A and B preferred giving oral recast feedback. They opined that for written feedback to be effective, learners should understand the language written by the teacher. They also highlighted that written feedback can be time consuming. This finding is supported by Nicol (2009) who is of the idea that providing comments to learners' written exercises is a highly time-consuming activity which may not assist the learner, especially if they do not understand written feedback.

From field observations, the fact that Teacher A used clarification for learners to understand and correct themselves through the use of statements like, "come again and may you repeat what you have said," the intonation that the teacher would use may be clear that the answer is wrong and the learner would quickly correct the answer. Although Teacher B and Teacher C rarely used clarification, they used explicit feedback mostly. When asked why they preferred using explicit feedback, both teachers highlighted that they used it to correct their learner's grammatical errors. The teachers also indicated that explicit feedback assist them to review what they have taught to their learners. In turn, learners are able to identify the mistakes they would have made. Regarding to paralinguistic feedback, observed lessons show that teachers were using it without knowing. Teachers used paralinguistic feedback like "mmmmh" or "eeeeh" when they queried given answers. Teachers then highlighted that some of the paralanguage they used was a habit and they were happy with it because it contributed meaningfully to the learners.

The utilisation of repetition and elicitation was frequent in all observed lessons. For example, in teacher A's class, once a learner made an error when giving the answer, the teacher repeated the learner's utterance and emphasized on the error made. When teachers were asked to give reasons of correcting errors in the CLT class, they highlighted that repetition and elicitation assists learners to correct their errors which is similar to Pan (2015) who reported that repetition assists learners to become fluent and accurate when interacting during lessons. If learners are given corrective feedback even after given written exercises, they are able to do corrections. Teachers suggested that repetition and elicitation feedback reinforced what learners had learnt and it also assisted them to be aware of their errors. This view is supported by Mutendi and Makamure (2019) who found that negative or corrective feedback strengthens what learners have learnt through addressing errors they would have made. Subsequently, corrective feedback enhances achievement of learning goals by the learners.

The teachers also highlighted that they give positive feedback which is not corrective sometimes. All the teachers indicated that they used praises like "very good", "well done" when their learners have done well either in an oral lesson or in written exercises sparingly. The findings indicate that teachers were not really worried about the learners who did very well but were more concerned about those who needed help, hence the use of negative feedback most of the times.

The teachers further indicated that once learners received positive feedback, they became more attentive during lessons and they also became more interested in the content being learnt. Although the study indicates that teachers used positive feedback at a minimum level during oral lesson, they used it in written exercises more often. This is supported by Mutendi and Makamure (2019) who acknowledged that positive feedback played a motivational role in learners. Ferguson and Houghton (1992) stated that positive feedback increases levels of praise and reinforced hardworking behavior in learners. From the observations made, all learners who did well and were given positive feedback by their teachers participated during the lessons. In the same vein, the Department for Education (2017) found that when teachers provide positive feedback during lessons, learners are motivated. Feedback increases learner's responsibility for their own learning during group and pair work (Kimbell & Stables, 2008). Positive feedback tends to assist learners to get engaged with the learning processes during interaction and they develop confidence (Glasgow & Hicks 2009).

The Significance of Feedback

Findings indicate that teachers knew and understood the significance of both corrective and positive feedback. Main findings highlight that teachers indicated the importance of all the types of negative feedback (correctional) during activities

like group work, role play pair work, dialogues and projects. Teachers highlighted the significance of the most popular strategy that is recast. Teachers opined that they preferred it because it does not disturb communication during learning activities and does not start a discussion about accuracy, although the recast feedback strategy that teachers used was either oral or written. In this study teachers preferred the oral form and they claimed that the written form was time consuming.

All the teachers agreed that recast was important as it handled learner's linguistic problems without lowering their self-esteem (Raya et al., 2007). Findings also indicate that all the forms of negative feedback are used in the language classroom and they are helpful just like positive feedback. The study found that paralinguistic feedback was also significant just like "recast" although they did not notice when they use it. They claimed that some paralanguage that they used was inherent and they were happy to learn that they were actually meaningful in CLT classrooms.

The research highlighted that all types of negative feedback which is corrective was mostly used by the teachers. Findings also showed that although most lessons were characterised by negative feedback, learners gave corrective feedback to their peers during group and pair work. The teachers' corrective/ negative feedback influenced them to teach grammar through rote learning and memorisation.

Findings also highlighted that positive feedback in the form of praise was rarely used by teachers although it was important. They highlighted that the significance of positive feedback cannot be overemphasized as it motivates the learners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that corrective/negative feedback was used more often than positive feedback when implementing the CLT. The study throws a light on the "value" the teachers gave to feedback at primary school level. Teachers were aware of the significance of feedback. Some of the points that they raised were that feedback allowed them to correct and motivate students effectively.

Besides the evidence that negative and positive feedback is important in the CLT, teachers should be encouraged to use positive feedback more often as negative feedback since giving both positive and negative feedback may have a helpful impact on the

effective implementation of the CLT. Both negative and positive feedback can address an extensive range of intellectual, interactive and motivational features.

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