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How English teachers' corrective feedback practices can promote second language acquisition in Intermediate Phase classrooms in South Africa: A case study

ABSTRACT

In South Africa, many non-native English-speaking learners experience a variety of language challenges in classrooms and, as a result, underperform in national and international assessment opportunities. Teachers need to assist these learners with sufficient and effective feedback. The purpose of this qualitative study was, firstly, to explore the relationship between Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model for effective feedback and the Interactionist Theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Gass & Mackey, 2006) and, secondly, to explore the corrective feedback practices of Intermediate Phase English Home Language teachers that promote SLA. Observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 15 purposively selected teachers from five different schools. The research findings indicate that the participants experienced various language-related challenges in their teaching of Intermediate Phase English Home Language. Mostly, the participants utilised transmission teaching approaches to provide formative, oral, written, descriptive, and self-feedback. Feedback in terms of Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model on the task level was mostly applied as opposed to feedback on the process, self-regulation, and the self-level.

Keywords: Corrective feedback practices, second language acquisition (SLA), English as medium of instruction (EMI), Intermediate Phase, case study, self-regulated learning

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1. Introduction:

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa reported that 89,7% of black Grade 4–6 learners were taught through the medium of a second language in 2007 (DBE, 2010:2, 21), and that this percentage has since increased (Taylor & Coetzee, 2013). This practice is reinforced by parents who endorse the notion that English as a medium of instruction (EMI) will provide both social and economic advantages to their children (Makoni, 2017:1). Furthermore, the DBE uses the terms English Home Language (EHL) and English First Additional Language in a different sense than what is commonly assumed in the literature:

> *Home Language is the language first acquired by learners. However, many South African schools do not offer the home languages of some or all of the enrolled learners but rather have one or two languages offered at Home Language level. As a result, the labels Home Language and First Additional Language refer to the proficiency levels at which the language is offered and not the native (Home) or acquired (as in the additional languages) language (DBE, 2011:8).*

This leads to the fact that some learners in EHL classrooms in the Intermediate Phase are not English mother-tongue speakers, as they come from diverse home language backgrounds. For example, a learner might have a Sesotho-speaking mother and an isiZulu-speaking father who migrated to Johannesburg. In this instance, English should be a Second Additional Language for the learner, but because English is the medium of instruction in school, the parents decide to enrol the child in the EHL class even though the learner has no prior exposure to the English language and no sufficient support at home to acquire the language.

Consequently, many South African learners in the Intermediate Phase underperform in national and international assessment opportunities such as the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In South Africa, the intermediate phase consists of Grades 4, 5 and 6. Only 52% of Grade 3 learners in South Africa passed the literacy assessment section of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) of 2014 (the most recent ANA results available as they were discontinued in 2016) (DBE, 2014). South Africa scored the lowest of the 50 participating countries on reading and comprehension in the language of instruction in the 2016 PIRLS. Furthermore, the results from the PIRLS indicated that 78% of South African Grade 4 learners are not able to read for meaning and that 57% of those who completed the assessment in English were unable to attain the lowest benchmark (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, McLeod, Palane, 2017). Of the participants who were tested in English, 79% learned through the medium of a second language (Howie et al., 2017).

The drawbacks learners experience in the Intermediate Phase are further exacerbated by what Clegg (2007) identified as typical African L2 (second language) classroom contexts, which are characterised by learners with low proficiency in the L2, L2 teachers

who are not confident in the use of and teaching the learners in the medium of instruction, the L2 which is marginally employed in reading, writing and speech, repetition and memorisation and lessons lacking a measure of cognitive challenge. These barriers to teaching and learning have a detrimental effect on the way that learners acquire their L2 and on the way that EFAL teachers facilitate learning and guide learners through the process of language acquisition.

According to Sibanda (2017:7-8), there is a "need to strengthen a multiplicity of variables like teachers' language proficiency, learner motivation, instructional methods used, time allocated to language instruction, and FAL infrastructure outside the classroom, amongst other aspects." One of the ways to address some of these issues is for teachers to provide corrective feedback (CF). Carless and Boud (2018:1315) define feedback as "a process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies". Ellis (2009:2-3) defines CF as

> *the form of a response to a learner utterance containing a linguistic error. The response is an other-initiated repair and can consist of (1) an indication that an error has been committed, (2) provision of the correct target language form, (3) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these.*

Studies have shown that CF promotes SLA (Ebadi, Saad, & Abedalaziz, 2014; De Vries, Cucchiarini, Strik & Van Hout, 2010; Li, 2010; Zimmerman & Campillo, 2003:23; Chung & Yuen, 2011:23). Although there is still much contention on the effectiveness of written CF in promoting SLA with convincing evidence from studies that have investigated its effects on the improvement of learners' writing skills (Truscott, 1996; 1999), research has proven the positive effects of oral CF as well as focussed written CF:

- Oral CF is most effective when it occurs within the same time frame and context in which the learner makes the error (Mackey, 2012);

- Written CF can promote SLA (Sheen, 2007; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008);

- Written CF is more effective when it is focussed on a few error types rather than on all the errors learners make (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Sheen 2007; Ellis et al., 2008)

- CF can promote learning (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005);

- CF should focus on marked grammatical features or features that the learners have identified themselves to be struggling with (Ellis, 1993);

- Different CF strategies include recasting, repetition, clarification, explicit correction and elicitation. Choosing any of these "calls for considerable pragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence, and it is likely that teachers respond intuitively to

particular errors committed by individual students rather than knowingly in accordance with some predetermined error-correction policy" (Ellis, 2009:9-10).

The overall research question to be addressed in this paper is the following: What are the CF practices of Intermediate Phase EHL teachers to promote SLA? The sub-questions related to the main research question are:

1.   What is the relationship between CF and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, according to literature?

2.   What are the nature and types of feedback, with elements of the Interactionist Approach to SLA, that are employed by Intermediate Phase EHL teachers?

3.   What language-related challenges do participants experience in their teaching of the Intermediate Phase EHL?

4.   What types of feedback practices do South African Intermediate Phase language teachers apply to enhance SLA of English?

The aim of this study was to investigate how Intermediate Phase teachers' CF practices in EHL classrooms in South Africa can promote SLA.

2.   Theoretical and conceptual framework for feedback in language classrooms

In this section, Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model for effective feedback as well as the Interactionist theory of SLA (Gass & Mackey, 2006) will be discussed, as these theories informed this study's conceptual framework. The framework of Hattie and Timperley (2007:86) illustrates the ways in which feedback reduces the gap between current and desired understanding of learners, and the levels at which feedback should be provided. Figure 2.1 presents Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model of feedback to enhance learning. Effective feedback has to answer three major questions asked by a teacher and/or by a learner: Where am I going? (What are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is made towards the goal?), and Where to next? (What tasks need to be taken on to make better progress?). The abovementioned questions do not work in isolation but together, closing the gap between where the learners are and where they aim to be, which empowers feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:90).
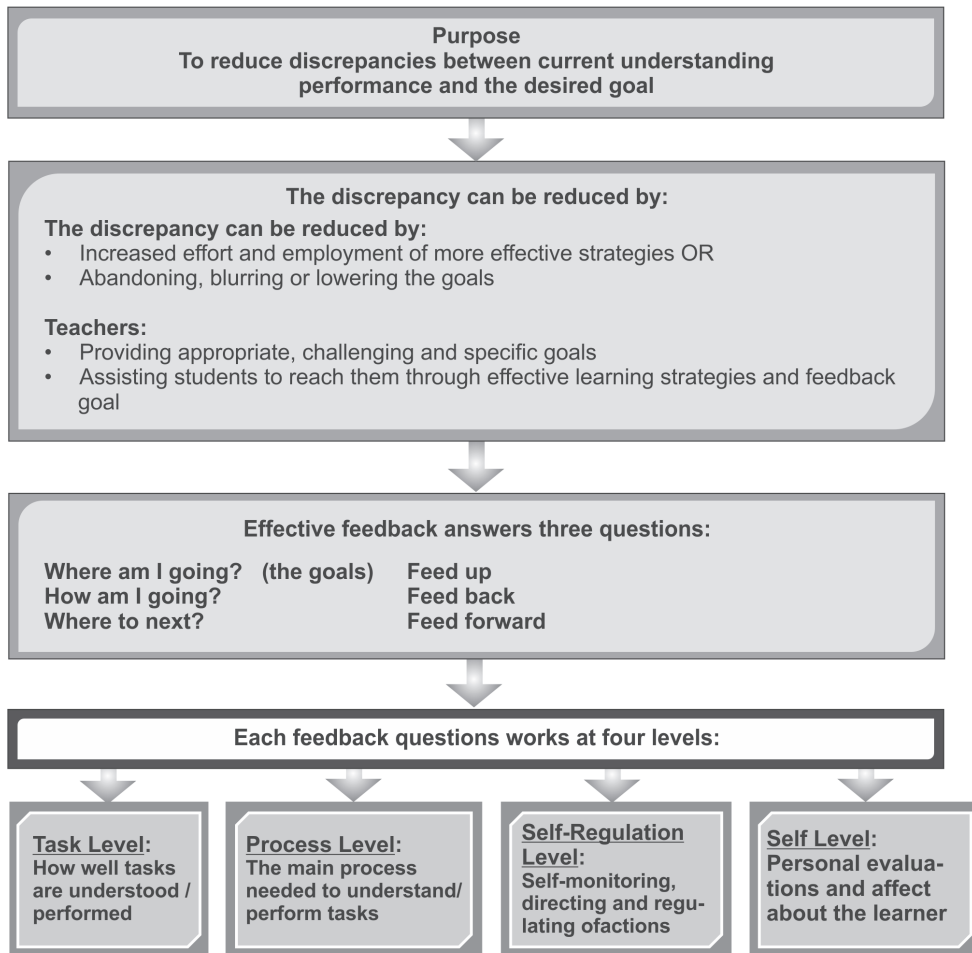
Figure 2.1: A model of feedback to enhance learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86)

The focus of feedback is important. There are four major levels of feedback namely, task performance, the process of understanding how to do a task, regulatory or metacognitive process, and the self or personal level (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:90). Feedback can be about a task, such as whether or not work is correct or incorrect, and is provided immediately. The task level of feedback may include directions to acquire more, different, or correct information on a task. This level provides corrective feedback on errors made. Feedback on the process level involves the acquisition, storing, reproduction and use of knowledge, and changes in performance from previous efforts. At this level, learners need to construct meaning (understanding) when completing more complex tasks.

Learning at the process level is more effective, as it enhances deeper learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2000:93). At the self-regulation level of feedback, learners develop greater skill in self-evaluation and confidence to engage further in a task. This level also allows for reflection, planning, and monitoring. This type of feedback influences self-efficacy, self-regulatory proficiencies, and self-beliefs in learners about their learning so that they are encouraged to better a task (Hattie & Timperley, 2000:90). Lastly, feedback can be personal in the sense that it is focussed on the "self". Positive feedback relates to the affective side of learners, and it also allows learners to take ownership and responsibility for their learning.

There are important aspects related to these levels of feedback that can be found in the Interactionist Approach to SLA (Gass & Mackey, 2006). These aspects include exposure to improved input, output, and negotiation of meaning through the provision of positive and negative corrective feedback that remain important for language development. The Interactionist Approach promotes cognitive and metacognitive development, as learners are able to improve their cognitive abilities and productive skills in language. According to Vygotsky (1978), interaction assists learners in improving their language proficiency through the help and guidance of others when they cannot improve on their own, slowly steering away from support that eventually results in autonomy and self-regulated behaviours. Learners are provided with opportunities to produce language orally and engage in negotiation when engaged in face-to-face interaction (Ellis, 2003). Interaction can be regarded as a form of mediation through which learners collaboratively create new forms and functions. Ellis (2009:5-6) states that researchers who use the interactionist framework as a foundation for SLA highlight the value of CF in the sense that it "can help learners notice their errors and create form-meaning connections, thus aiding acquisition".

The first aspect of input can be defined as language usage and other media that a learner is exposed to through listening, reading, writing and speaking. This is conceptualised as the positive evidence learners receive about the target language (Gass et al., 1998). Input can be adapted during communication to facilitate understanding. Therefore, one could amend language instruction, for example, to cater for the needs of learners of varying proficiencies during the negotiation of meaning (Mackey, 2012). Mackay, Hill, Stone and Bunge (2011) and Mackey (2012) indicate that corrective feedback is the way in which learners engage with input, which eventually contributes to L2 development. Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis states that if input is noticed, it becomes intake in language acquisition. He therefore proposes that corrective feedback aids learners to notice the gap between interlanguage forms and target forms, which in turn helps them to develop interlanguage (Ebadi, Saad & Abedalaziz, 2014). Secondly, output offers learners the opportunity to experiment with hypotheses regarding the target language (Swain, 2005). It directs them to attend to target language forms and constructs and helps them to identify any gaps between their interlanguage and the target language, thus promoting fluency and accuracy. There is also modified output, which is described as the reconstruction of a learner's utterance in response to feedback (Mackey, 2012), and that facilitates language development (McDonough & Mackey, 2006). Lastly, the negotiation of meaning during conversation establishes the achievement of understanding between

conversers, which comprises the elements of input, output, and CF, and is also a key component of the Interactionist Approach. Negotiation during interaction and learner communication facilitates language learning by offering learners comprehensible input and the opportunity to modify their own output to better comprehend the language (Mackey, 2012). Negotiation may lead or direct learners to be more attentive to future input, nurturing their awareness of particular features of the target language and affording them multiple opportunities to prove or disprove the hypotheses they have formed regarding language development. According to Ebadi et al. (2014:16), CF promotes language learning and memory, which are necessary for the negotiation of meaning in the language classroom. Furthermore, Dalili (2011) proposes that interactional feedback, which could include clarification requests, comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and repetitions, used to help learners to modify their output.

The Interactionist Approach, therefore, allows for the scaffolding of tasks, negotiation of meaning, flexibility of group work, and a learner-centred environment. This allows learners to construct their own meaning, share ideas, develop metacognition, develop self-efficacy, and become independent, self-regulated learners. Figure 2.3 illustrates the links between Hattie and Timperley's (2007) feedback model and Gass & Mackey's (2006) Interactionist Approach in SLA.
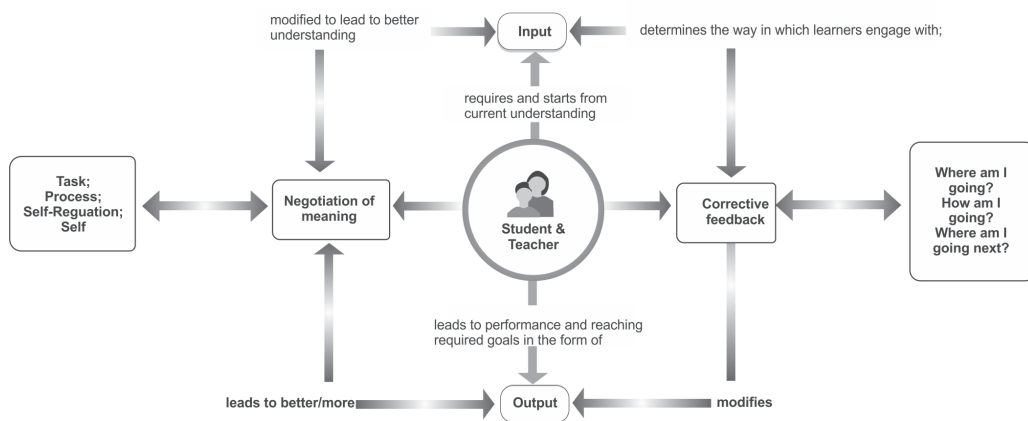

Figure 2.2 Combining the Interactionist Approach (Gass & Mackey, 2006) of SLA to Hattie & Timperley's (2007) Feedback Model

In Fig. 2.2, the different components of the Interactionist Approach were paired with the components identified in Hattie and Timperley's model, the different levels of feedback are dealt with during the process of negotiating meaning and CF in providing the answers to Where am I going?; How am I going?; and Where am I going next?. Input and output are both closely connected to the negotiation of meaning and CF in the sense that input starts from learners' current understanding and output displays learner performance and showcases whether they reached the goals that were set.

These two theories were specifically chosen for this study as they guided the researchers in terms of the questions that were asked during the interviews of the participants as well as the data that were gathered during classroom observations. The combined model illustrated in Fig 2.2 places the teacher-learner relationship at the centre of the language acquisition and learning process in the EFAL classroom. This relationship is established through input and maintained through the constant negotiation of meaning and CF, and the learners' acquisition and progress are assessed by means of the output that they produce. These factors are relevant to this study as they determine the nature and type of feedback during lessons and highlight the language-related challenges that learners and teachers experience in the feedback process. The next section will discuss the research design and methodology followed in this study.

3.   Research methodology

Research design

This qualitative instrumental case study was positioned in an interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm seemed suitable for the study, since the perceptions of and demonstrations of feedback practices by Intermediate Phase teachers of EHL are based on the responses of 15 research participants rather than on our own conceptualisation. Our study, furthermore, involved thorough and in-depth research (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:395) on the feedback practices used in EHL in order to promote SLA. We followed Merriam's (2009:14-16) four key characteristics associated with qualitative research. Firstly, the research focus was on the process of creating meaning and understanding in the sense that we endeavoured to understand the perceptions of the participants regarding their feedback practices to promote self-regulated learning. Secondly, we were the primary instruments for collecting data when doing observations and conducting individual, semi-structured interviews. Thirdly, we applied an inductive process and a thematic analysis of the data to answer the research questions of the study. Lastly, we provided rich descriptions in our narrative reports on the observations, and individual and semi-structured interviews.

Ethical issues

After receiving permission from the DBE and ethical clearance for this research by the university under whose auspices it was done, we started with the recruitment and selection of the participants. We abided by all ethical aspects of conducting research, such as obtaining informed consent from the participants and respecting and upholding confidentiality and anonymity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Sample

A purposive, criterion sampling strategy was applied to select 15 Intermediate Phase EHL teachers to participate voluntarily in the study. Maree (2016:198) defines purposive sampling as a method used in special situations where sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001:238). These participants were selected based on the purpose of the study and their first-hand experiences with regard to their feedback practices in teaching EHL in the Intermediate Phase. One teacher from each grade in the Intermediate Phase from five schools was selected. Thus, the 15 participants consisted of five Grade 4, five Grade 5, and five Grade 6 teachers of EHL at the selected schools. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 2 to 32 years. Their teaching qualifications included Advanced Certificates of Education, Post-Graduate Certificates, Higher Diplomas in Education, and Bachelors and Honours degrees.

Research sites

To contextualise the school communities where the participants teach EHL, the five schools, coded as SA, SB, SC, SD and SE, will be described briefly. The schools are located in the Gauteng Province. Most learners enrolled at the schools are Africans learners from neighbouring areas such as Fine Town, Orange Farm, and Sebokeng. All the schools are public schools, three of which are quintile four and two are quintile one primary schools that offer classes to full-time learners. The DBE categorises schools into quintiles (one to five) based on the communities they represent. Quintile one, two and three schools are representative of communities with high poverty rates and low levels of education, and quintile four and five schools are those located in wealthy communities (National Norms and Standards for School Funding Act, 1998). The teacher-to-learner ratio in the five schools that participated in this study ranged between 1:40 and 1:48. English is the medium of instruction in all five schools. Schools A, D and E are quintile four, fee-paying public schools. These schools consist of a diverse group of learners from different cultural, language, and socio-economic backgrounds, and English is a third or even fourth language to them. School D is a quintile four school and was one of the first schools in Ennerdale. This is the biggest school in the sample. This school has a diverse group of learners, but compared to schools A, D and E, the majority of its learners are Coloured. Schools B and C are quintile one schools, meaning that they are

non-fee paying schools that rely on support from the DBE. The two schools mostly enrol Black learners who travel daily from neighbouring areas to attend school.

Data collection methods

We collected data via lesson observations and individual, semi-structured interviews with participants. The observations were done first in order to prevent teachers from adjusting their teaching practice for social desirability. One lesson which lasted for a double period of 2 x 30 minutes (one hour) was observed of each of the 15 participants to explore how they utilised feedback to stimulate SLA. Before the observations, the participants introduced the observers to the learners and explained to them why we were visiting the classes to put them at ease with our presence. An observation schedule complemented by field notes was structured around the feedback practices used by the selected intermediate phase EHL teachers to promote SLA (see Appendix A). The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. (See Appendix B for a list of questions that were asked). The next section will discuss the data analysis procedure.

Data analysis

We applied the hybrid approach suggested by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), which allows for the use of both deductive analysis (focussing on identifying data within a priori themes) and inductive analysis (focussing on themes that emerged from the data), to analyse the data. The observations were coded and the individual, semi-structured interviews transcribed. Both data sets were analysed using thematic content analysis. As already mentioned, the schools were coded using alphabet letters and the participants assigned numbers to protect their identities. For example, SAP3 refers to school A, participant number 3. The processes recommended by Creswell (2013:180) were followed, which involve organising data for analysis, then reducing them into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the narrative data in a discussion.

To enhance reliability and internal validity, we used appropriate sampling techniques and built a trail of evidence from our data collection. The validity of this study was further supported by describing the findings in sufficiently rich, "thick" detail and verbatim quotations. We also used member checking and participant validation to enhance trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis will be presented in themes and sub-themes generated after a thorough coding and classification of the data. The next section will discuss our findings.

4. Discussion of findings

The findings of the lesson observations are presented in terms of the nature and type of feedback and how those relate to the SLA Interactionist Approach. The findings from the interviews are presented in two main themes: perceptions of the learners' English language proficiency and feedback practices.

Nature and type of feedback during lesson observations

The observations revealed that all participants applied oral feedback in their teaching of EHL. Descriptive feedback in the form of peer assessment was used by four participants (SBP1, SBP3, SEP1, SEP2, SEP3). Written feedback was observed in the classes of participants SAP1, SBP3, SDP1, SDP3 and SEP1. Self-feedback was observed in the lessons of SAP3, SBP2 and SEP1. Summative feedback was only observed in the lessons of participants SAP1 and SEP1. Participant SEP1 was also the only participant who applied different types of feedback in one lesson, namely oral, peer, written, self, and summative feedback.

Table 4.1: Coded data on the nature and type of feedback provided by participants

SCHOOL B

TEACHER CODE	ELEMENT 1: NATURE AND TYPE OF FEEDBACK
SAP1	Oral feedback * Practical demonstration on how to break words into syllables * Re-explaining the meanings of the words and how to use in sentences * Asks questions to engage learners, allowing them to provide reasons when answering questions * Revisits phonics when sounding words * Teacher provides feedback to answers answered wrong Summative feedback * On spelling test Descriptive feedback * The teacher goes through each word and explains errors made Written feedback * Through corrections on the board
SAP1	Oral feedback * Explains previous work done * Constant repetition of words and definitions * Reflects on subjects, verbs, and objects Asking questions
SAP1	Oral feedback * Through explanations on the use of punctuation marks * Corrects learners * Helps learners to pronounce a word correctly * Asks questions * Explains what words mean * Teacher re-reads to convey the message Self-feedback * Learners complete an activity taking into consideration oral feedback provided

SCHOOL B

SBP1	Peer feedback * Group reading where stronger learners can assist weaker learners during reading Summative feedback * Learners receive a mark after reading for the teacher Oral feedback * Teacher monitors and asks questions as she moves around groups * After learners are done reading, the teacher explains to them where to improve and how to improve Self-feedback * Learners have the opportunity to reflect on reading mistakes
SBP2	Oral feedback * Explains what a dialogue is * Answers learners' questions * Teacher talks as around clarity to uncertain learners
SBP3	Written feedback * Rubric to assess reading Oral feedback * Explains and discusses as the teacher moves between desks * Tells learners what they are doing correctly and incorrectly * Praises learners when correct answers are provided * Provides opportunity for weaker learners to pose questions. Descriptive feedback * Makes examples of frequent errors learners tend to make

SCHOOL C

SCP1	Oral feedback * Asks questions about the reading text before essay writing exercise * Relates text to learners' everyday situation * Acknowledges answers of learners * Re-reads a sentence if learners read incorrectly * As teacher explains she asks questions * Makes comments on common mistakes learners make * Checks on weak learners and provides assistance during first draft * Reminds learners how to start introduction, body and conclusion * Learners plan using a mind map * Motivates learners to think
SCP1	Oral feedback * Discusses the story sentence by sentence * Asks questions based on text * Corrects learners if an answer is wrong * Acknowledges correct answers * Learners complete a written activity
SCP1	Oral feedback * Asks questions about the outline of an essay * Acknowledges correct answers * Explains content of essay writing * Provides correct answers if learners answered incorrectly * Assists learners during the planning of the essay * Learners write a mind map as planning

SCHOOL D

SDP1	Written feedback * Checks on mistakes and corrects and assists learners in need of help through marking and commenting on homework * Writes corrections on the board Oral feedback * Discusses answers and explain why some answers were wrong * Praises learners if all answers are correct * Revises with learners
SDP2	Oral feedback * Questions about the reading text * Summarises to clarify questions
SDP3	Written feedback * Writes corrections of homework on the board * Reviews peer marking Peer feedback * Learners mark each other's books before completing the corrections Oral feedback * Constantly tests leaners' prior knowledge * Praises learners on correct answers given

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SCHOOL E

SEP1	Summative feedback * Revises exam question paper with learners Oral feedback * Praises learners on correct answers provided * Discusses a diary entry. Written feedback * Corrections in books Self-feedback * Learners' complete follow-up activity after doing corrections Peer feedback * Provides learners with opportunity to write answers on the board and if wrong peers correct and explain why it is incorrect if correct learners claps hands
SEP2	Oral feedback * Corrects learners when wrong answer is provided * Provides explanations using practical examples Peer feedback * Discussions in groups of important aspects during listening and speaking, comparing and discussing * Praises learners
SEP3	Oral feedback * Asks questions testing learners' prior knowledge on subject and predicate, * Discusses complex sentences * Praises learners on correct answers Peer feedback * Learners write answers on the board and the rest of the learners explain why answer is correct or incorrect * Follow-up activity on work discussed

Next we will discuss the nature and types of feedback in terms of the different elements of the Interactionist Approach to SLA.

The nature and type of corrective feedback related to input:

Observations revealed that the participants provided input and corrective feedback in the following ways:

- Revisiting content and repeating explanations of a previous lesson through asking questions and correcting errors explicitly; (SAP1, SAP2, SAP3, SBP1, SBP2, SBP3, SCP1, SCP2, SCP3, SDP1, SDP3, SEP2);

- Allowing the learners to ask questions about prior work or content (thereby producing output) and answering their questions (SBP2, SBP3, SDP2);

- Praising learners when they respond correctly to questions on work done previously (SBP3, SDP1, SDP3, SEP1, SEP2, SEP3);

- Corrective feedback was explicit in all instances and no examples of implicit CF were observed.

- During the stages where input was provided, CF was done orally in most classes that were observed (SAP1, SAP2, SAP3, SBP1, SBP2, SBP3, SCP1, SCP2, SCP3, SDP1, SDP2, SDP3, SEP1, SEP2, SEP3. There was one class where CF on prior learning (diary entries) was done in written form and used as input (SEP1).

The nature and type of feedback related to the Negotiation of Meaning:

The following strategies were observed in the participants' lessons as part of the CF related to the negotiation of meaning:

- Practical demonstrations (SAP1);

- Asking and answering questions (SAP1, SAP2, SAP3, SBP1, SBP2, SBP3, SCP1, SCP2, SCP3, SDP1, SDP2, SDP3, SEP1, SEP2, SEP3;

- Repetitions of explanations and definitions (SAP1, SAP2, SAP3, SCP1, SDP1, SDP3, SEP1, SEP3);

- Using and providing feedback through visual organisers such as mind maps (SCP1, SCP3);

- Summarising and paraphrasing explanations (SAP2, SAP3, SBP2, SCP1, SCP3, SDP1, SDP2, SEP1);

- Providing practical examples (SCP1, SEP2);

- Utilising peer feedback (SBP1, SEP1, SEP2, SEP3).

The nature and type of feedback related to output:

Swain and Lapkin (1995) define three functions of output namely, the noticing function (by producing output, learners notice what they do not know or do not know well in the language), the hypothesis-testing function (by saying or writing something, the learners test whether what they have learned is correct and receive feedback from the teacher) and the metalinguistic function (learners reflect on the language they learn, and their output enables them to internalise linguistic knowledge).

None of these functions can occur without CF from the teacher. The participants employed CF during activities related to the written and spoken output by the learners. The CF was provided in oral and written forms. This included:

- Marked tests with oral explanations of common errors made (SAP1, SDP1);

- Learners' written responses to an activity after teacher feedback (SAP3, SCP2, SEP1, SEP3);

- Written feedback in the form of rubrics (SBP3);

- General responses to or summaries of common errors made in an assignment (SBP3, SCP1);

- Correcting learner errors on the board (SAP1, SDP1);

- Teacher discussions and summaries of peer feedback (SBP1, SEP2);

- Peer discussions and feedback prior to teacher feedback (SBP1, SDP3, SEP1, SEP3).

The nature and type of feedback derived from semi-structured interviews

We developed two major themes and five sub-themes. Theme A discusses language-related challenges perceived by the participants. Theme B describes feedback practices. The sub-themes for Theme B were the participants' understanding the concept of feed-back, their perceptions of the purpose of providing feedback, and the types of feedback.

Theme A: Language-related challenges perceived by the participants

This theme relates to two aspects that influenced the participants' perceptions of learners' English proficiency level and the language-related challenges they experienced.

The participants' responses revealed that they experienced various language-related challenges amongst learners, which included the influence of and interference of other languages with English within the multicultural school context. The participants saw this interference as a drawback, whereas Cummins (1979:233) views this interdependence as a condition for SLA. One participant explained:

> *"…There are various different language backgrounds in the South African context it does affect language proficiency a great deal. If a learner's Home Language is a particular language they often transfer those rules of that language into English. For example, I am translating directly, the language rule is that you would say the boy he walked to school and then often also there is no specific male and female pronoun…*[sic]*".* (SAP1).

Additionally, the participants mentioned that the parents of learners were unable to assist them because they themselves were not proficient in English. The following response encapsulates the views of many other participants:

> *"…reading, writing… some of the parents are not so good in the language maybe the parents are Sotho at home so it becomes more of a problem also to assist the child with the work. Access to libraries are limited* [sic]." (SBP1).

Another challenge that was identified related to the gaps in learners' academic literacy and their inability to distinguish between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), as indicated in the response below:

> *"...they on to media… yes and especially when they are supposed to write the composition and all they even use the sms language* [sic]*."* (SBP3).

Additionally, the participants indicated that learners had limited vocabulary, were unable to complete their work, were overly dependent on teachers, and struggled to reason and justify answers. Due to the lack of time for them to finish the syllabus, the participants revealed that they could not ask follow-up questions to consolidate and repeat work, and that they were always behind schedule. The participants perceived the DBE to be only focussed on pass rates and good grades. The focus was, therefore, perceived to be on output alone and not on the whole process involved in SLA. The following are the responses of the participants from a quintile one and quintile four school when asked about the challenges they experience in giving feedback.

> *"...learners become overly dependent on me so instead of doing things on their own they will do a piece and then they will ask me if it's right and then they will do another piece and ask me if it is right and then learners also get mixed up when there are multi-step instructions, so it becomes difficult to complete the work..."* (SEP2).

> *"…if time allows, which does not happen often because our schedule is very full… with this new CAPS, the pace of work is ridiculous… result I am forever behind, you do not get to finish the curriculum."* (SCP2).

In the above comments, the teachers clearly expressed challenges related to the number of errors made by learners and a lack of time in a school day to address these errors. Written CF is more effective when it is focussed on a few error types rather than on all the errors learners make (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Sheen, 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). It seemed, from their comments, that the teachers were overwhelmed by the large number of errors the learners made and struggled to decide on which to prioritise for providing CF.

Another common challenge identified by the participants was that learners could not read and write in English and the fact that CALP takes longer to acquire than BICS (Cummins, 2000). According to Ellis (1993) CF should focus on language features that the learners have identified themselves to be struggling with. However, the participants remarked that learners could not communicate effectively and lacked interest in learning. These challenges hamper effective CF.

The way teachers provide feedback, whether summative, in written, or spoken format, can result in defensive causal attributions and low self-efficacy beliefs in weaker, less self-regulated learners, as described by Krashen's (1988) Affective Filter Hypothesis. One participant explained her views in the following response:

> *"They feel OK next time I am going to listen, next time I am going to study but then you get that on many of their faces that helpless look… I'll never, I'll never accomplish anything..."* (SAP1).

Theme B: Feedback practices

The three sub-themes that derive from feedback practices are the participants' understanding of the concept of feedback, perceptions of the purposes of feedback, and types of feedback.

Sub-theme 1: Understanding the concept of feedback

When participants were asked what the concept of feedback meant to them in the context of EHL teaching, their responses were vague. They only mentioned a few characteristics of feedback, such as reporting back, identifying strengths and weaknesses to bring improvement, guide learners, and create awareness of mistakes. The following response encapsulates the participants' understanding of the concept feedback:

> "It is information given back to learners to help them, to guide them on improving what they are currently busy with. So if I give you feedback then it means I am telling you what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong." (SEP2).

Some participants (SBP1) (SEP2) and (SAP1) also mentioned that feedback played an important role in helping learners close the gap between present and intended understanding by clarifying misunderstandings. Their basic understanding of the characteristics of feedback is supported by Sadler (1989:119) and Hattie and Timperley (2007:86). It was apparent that the participants were not aware of the value of feedback for the purpose of developing self-regulated skills, such as the fact that feedback should allow learners to monitor and evaluate their learning, find defects in learning strategies and skills, enhance deeper learning, and allow them to take ownership and responsibility.

Sub-theme 2: Perceptions about the purpose of feedback

The participants' responses indicated that they had different perceptions about the purpose of providing feedback. These included making learners aware of their mistakes, acknowledging their hard work, bringing improvement, providing feedback to the parents regarding learners' progress, helping learners to understand, nurturing growth, building learners' confidence and not hurting their feelings, getting learners to be able to read, write, communicate effectively, think and reason, and gauging the effectiveness of their lessons. We concluded that the participants' feedback was aimed at motivating and building confidence to better equip learners for SLA. In the same vein, Krashen (1988) avers that encouragement and positive reinforcement help to lower learners' affective filters so that they can have access to the input provided. The following examples of responses exemplify the participants' understanding of the purpose of feedback:

> "I…to attend to remedy some of the problems that I've encountered… helping them find ways of improving. I think feedback to parents is also very, very beneficial because of that one-on-one that, they have more one-on-one with the learner." (SAP1).

> "I need the learners to learn from their mistakes and the learners to see where they can improve themselves… That is why you need to encourage them to go in that direction so that the learner can work on its own." (SCP3).

> *"I…the learners must be able to communicate confidently and effectively in their Home Language. They must be able to read and give information for enjoyment. They must be able to write different types of texts and for different purposes. They must also be able to use the language to think and to reason." (SEP1).*

According to the data, the participants did not mention purposes related to modifying errors and the development of abilities to monitor and self-evaluate. Most participants wanted to bring about improvement in learners' English language proficiency and for learners not to repeat their mistakes. The perceptions of the participants related to the purpose of providing feedback are supported in the literature by Garrison and Ehringhaus (2013:1), as teachers need to ensure that learners receive constructive feedback, they advise them on their strengths and weaknesses, and provide opportunity for improvement.

Sub-theme 3: Participants' perceptions of the types of feedback they give

The sub-theme revealed that the participants' feedback practices are supported in the literature (see Hattie & Timperley, 2007:86). Their feedback occurred mostly on the task level, which provides constructive criticism and provokes learners to improve immediately by fixing the errors they have made. For example, one participant explained: *"I will call them, speak to them and indicate where they have made the errors by positive encouragement"* (SDP3). Another example of feedback on the task level was provided by a participant (SBP1), who explained that she taught learners to be persistent when performing tasks for them to experience success because of their effort and practice: *"… it's more of practice, practice on all the way."* (SBP1).

An example of feedback on the process level was mentioned by participant SEP1:

> *"I give written activities after each lesson. To also assess. I mark their books timeously and the learners do corrections and I observe also in the class where the learners communicate and answer questions and then we also do revision often to check on their progress".* [sic].

This example of feedback reflects the acquisition and use of knowledge by learners to allow for changes in performance from previous efforts. Giving feedback on the process level, is in accordance with the study by Mackey (2012), which found that oral CF is most effective when it occurs within the same time frame and context in which the learner makes the error.

Only two participants (SBP3 and SEP2) responded that they provided feedback on the regulatory process level, which allowed learners to reflect, plan, monitor, self-evaluate, and engage further in a task. Participant SEP2 indicated that she provided oral feedback on a reading task, poetry, and a class activity, focussing on correcting learners' faulty interpretations through discussions and explanations. Thereafter, learners were instructed

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to "…*evaluate whatever they have with them and then redo or look at new ways that they can perform it…"* (SEP2). Providng feedback on the regulatory process level is also in line with studies conducted by Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) and Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005), which proved that CF can promote learning.

Only a few responses were aimed at the self-level, in which the participants enabled learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Participant SCP3 indicated that learners needed to

> "*see if they made mistakes and they can do it in the form of corrections, where the learner self understands that I did this wrong*
>
> *and I did that wrong and I can improve here, I did not read the question there*". Participant SDP1 agreed that "*they are able to see for themselves where is my shortcomings. I need to address a b c and d I need to improve. I need to work a little harder.*"

Another participant added that her feedback developed a sense of ownership in learners:

> "…*they can stand up, take the initiative and say no this is my point of view and maybe this is what I got wrong and you know that gives them the opportunity to reflect now on what they have done*" (SEP2).

Providing feedback on the self level is supported by Ellis (1993), who found that CF is most effective when focussed on language features that the learners have identified themselves to be struggling with.

5.   Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to understand and analyse the feedback practices of Intermediate Phase EHL teachers that promote SLA. Firstly, the theoretical and conceptual framework of the article indicated that Hattie and Timperleys' (2007) model of feedback to enhance learning and the Interactionist Approach to SLA as proposed by Gass and Mackey (2007) can be effectively be combined to provide a model for the nature and types of feedback to promote SLA through effective feedback. Secondly, the empirical findings indicate that the participants perceived learners' standard of EHL to be below their expected standards. The teachers perceived learners' lack of proficiency stemming from their geographic and socio-cultural environments as the main contributing factors. This influenced the way in which CF was applied in the EHL classroom, as could be seen in the participants' understanding the concept of feed back, their perceptions of the purpose of providing feedback, and the types of feedbackthat was provided.

In addition, participants experienced various language-related challenges in their classrooms. These challenges included the influences of other languages on English in

the South African multicultural context, the effects of learners' poor English proficiency on comprehension and communication, the inability of non-English speaking parents to assist their children, and the difference between learners' BICS and CALP. These challenges hampered the teachers' CF in the sense that they struggled to provide feedback within the same time frame and context in which the learners made the errors. Teachers were also overwhwelmed by the number of errors made by learners and struggled to focus on a few error types rather than on all the errors learners made. A small number of teachers used CF to enable learners to identify and correct errors themselves.

Lastly, according to the findings of the study, all the participants mostly utilised traditional, transmission teaching approaches to provide formative, oral, written, descriptive, and self-feedback. However, the most common type of feedback used by the participants was oral feedback. All 15 participants engaged in oral feedback, where they made use of the questioning technique (higher-order questioning e.g., why, how), explaining concepts and words, discussing learners' performance (errors made) and what to do to avoid these errors or improve them, and praising learners' efforts. The feedback was provided on the task, process and self-level of Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model of feedback. The participants provided corrective feedback related to input, the negotiation of meaning and output in various ways during written and spoken activities.

From this study it became clear that the participants are aware of the importance of feedback, and they do apply certain feedback strategies and on different levels. However, the participants provided most of their feedback on the task level, focussing on the correctness of the task, as that type of feedback is immediate.

6.   Recommendations

This study was limited because it only focussed on a small group of teachers (*intermediate phase* teachers) who were situated in one area (Ennerdale). A potentially bigger group of research participants teaching EHL at other schools across South Africa may respond differently to the research question.

Furthermore, training should be provided to teachers in SLA and English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The administrative workload of teachers should be decreased in order for them to focus on teaching, assessing, and providing feedback.

Future research could focus on establishing of professional learning communities at schools for EHL teachers in order to share insights on best practices for the improvement of teaching and learning through feedback and to focus feedback on the levels of process, self-regulation, and self to provide learners with the opportunity to negotiate meaning and process difficult concepts. This might also support learners to better utilise English as LOLT in a multilingual context such as that of South Africa.

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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

School code: __ Teacher code: __

Observation date: _____ Start time: _____ End time: _____

Running record for observed feedback *Consider aspects such as the following: nature of feedback; ways in which feedback is provided; when is feedback provided; frequency of feedback; and learners' engagement with the feedback.*

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-structured interviews questions

1.   What is your highest qualification applicable to the teaching of English Home Language?

2.   How many years of teaching experience do you have as an English Home Language teacher in the Intermediate Phase and which specific grade(s) do you currently teach?

3.   How would you rate the English proficiency level of learners you are currently teaching?

4.   Based on your experience, which particular language-related challenges do learners encounter in your English Home Language classes?

5.   What does the concept **feedback** mean to you in the context of English Home Language teaching?

6.   Describe the ways in which you provide feedback to learners in your English Home Language classes.

7.   What are your intentions when providing feedback to your learners?

8.   Explain what does the concept **self-regulated learner** means to you.

9.   How does the feedback you provide to your English Home Language learners encourage them to:

   i.   Set their own learning goals?

   ii.   Select the best strategies to improve their learning?

   iii.   Select the best resources for completing tasks?

   iv.   Evaluate the success of their own learning?

1.   Is there anything else you would like to offer that I did not specifically ask about?

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