

Medal and Mission Feedback in ESL Classrooms: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Teacher feedback is one of the important components in teaching and learning. Teacher feedback functions as information provided by teachers to learners in order to reduce the gaps between learners' current level of understanding and the targeted learning goals. Researchers have revealed a few issues and concerns related to teacher feedback. Teacher feedback is discovered to be ineffective, vague and too general. Some teacher feedback also consist negative remark that adversely affect learners' self-esteem. The shortcomings of teacher feedback have led to its failure in enhancing learners' development. As an effort to overcome this problem, many education systems have resorted in practicing formative feedback. This paper provides a literature review on one of formative feedback practices, Medal and Mission Feedback. Medal and Mission Feedback is a type of feedback that acknowledges learners' strengths, identifies learning obstacles and suggests the next necessary steps for improvements. Teachers need to consider a few important characteristics when providing Medal and Mission. It is hoped that this paper is able to provide useful insights to ESL teachers especially in practicing this newly introduced feedback practice.

Keywords

English as Second Language (ESL), Formative Assessment, Teacher Feedback, Medal and Mission, ESL Learners

1. Introduction

Mottet (2008) defined feedback as information from a source to a recipient about the correctness, accuracy or appropriateness of recipients' past information. In the context of teaching and learning, feedback refers to any procedure carried out by a teacher to inform a learner if an instructional response is correct or wrong (Lee, 2008). Mack (2009) added that feedback from teachers can be in the form of comments, questions or error corrections which are provided based on learners' tasks.

Teacher feedback is one of the central components in learners' academic development. Hyland & Hyland (2006) claimed that teacher feedback serves as a channel where teachers are able to comment and suggest ways to achieve learners' improvement. Learners at the receiving end admit that they prefer teacher feedback compared to other feedback types including online, peer and selfevaluation (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). This is because teacher feedback helps learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Silver & Lee, 2007). Learners are able to identify any gaps in their learning and take necessary steps to close them with the help of teacher feedback. Low achievers especially benefit from teacher feedback. Ellis (2009) implied that teacher feedback provides them with affective support to continue making learning progress. This is agreed by Gleen and Goldthwaite (2014) who reported that psychology of low achievers is positively impacted through teacher feedback as it is a sign their teachers have paid attention into their work. Similarly in Malaysian ESL classrooms, teacher feedback is viewed as the main requirement for learners' improvements (Maarof et al., 2011). Pei et al. (2013) described teacher feedback as a compass which provides learners with a sense of direction towards achieving learning goals. Teacher feedback has a positive influence on learning process (Razali & Jupri, 2014) that makes it useful even if it is provided minimally (Ismail et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, a few international and local studies have reported that some teacher feedback does not lead to learners' development. It is believed that the causes lie in the teacher feedback itself. Keh (1990) discovered that teacher feedback often does not contain information adequate for learners' revision. This corresponds with the findings reported by Connors & Lunsford (1993) as cited in Hyland & Hyland (2006) who observed that some teacher feedback are incomplete and inaccurate. Learners have also expressed that some teacher feedback are demotivating due to the inclusion of negative remarks. Silver & Lee (2007) believed that criticisms given as feedback leads to negative feelings among learners. Weaver (2006) reiterated that negative comments offered excessively by teachers can be demoralising for learners. Campbell (2016) has inferred that the feelings of distraught, terrified, agitated and embarrassed among learners are caused by teachers' unconstructive comments.

In Malaysian ESL classrooms, Razali & Jupri (2014) revealed in their studies that teacher feedback is found to be vague, too general and confusing for learners. Saidon et al. (2018) also discovered that teachers' feedback patterns are inconsistent. Othman (2006) suggested that the different range of feedback practices among Malaysian ESL teachers is because of the absence of explicit guideline on feedback use. As a result, learners receive feedback that is based on teachers' experience, prior training or the existing examination marking scheme (Saidon et al., 2018). The effectiveness of teacher feedback is also questioned by certain

teachers as to whether it helps in their learners' development (Maarof et al., 2011).

The Ministry of Education Malaysia has taken a number of educational reforms to improve the education system in competing more effectively in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. One of many measures is the introduction of curriculum which aligns with Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in teaching and learning English Language. Since 2013, the Ministry of Education has organised courses at all levels including federal, state, district and school to brief ESL teachers regarding the new direction of teaching and learning English Language. ESL teachers are encouraged to incorporate formative teaching ideas and approaches in the effort to accelerate learning (Ministry of Education, 2018). Teacher handbooks have been distributed to all schools so that the formative assessment principles and practices become the heart of teaching and learning English language. Formative feedback especially the Medal and Mission Feedback is outlined as the necessary building block for formative practices. Basically, it is a type of feedback that is frequent and ongoing that recognises learners' achievement, identifies their obstacles and recommends the next learning step to reach the target. The Ministry of Education Malaysia encourages the implementation of this particular feedback type to effectively develop learners' potential in learning English Language.

In line with this, this literature review study will attempt to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What are ESL teachers' understanding of Medal and Mission Feedback?
- What are the attitudes of ESL teachers towards Medal and Mission Feedback practices?
- What are the challenges faced by ESL teachers in practicing Medal and Mission Feedback in classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Feedback

Macdonald (1991) defined teacher feedback as a process which involves a teacher providing some commentary to learners relating their written ideas. In this process, the teacher assesses learners' strengths and weaknesses before recommends steps for improvement. The feedback given by teachers are usually regarding learners' performance and understanding (Timperley & John, 2007). Mottet (2008) specified that teacher feedback is about accuracy, correctness or appropriateness of learners' development. Mark (2009) suggested that teacher feedback can be given in the form of comments, questions or error corrections. Teacher feedback practices are regulated between teachers' pedagogical goals, learners' learning needs and policies of instructional and governmental policies. Lee (2009) claimed that the purpose of teacher feedback is mainly to let learners' know if their instructional responses are accurate or not. Shute (2008) added that teacher feedback provides information that modifies learners' thinking and attitudes towards learning improvement.

2.2. The Roles of Teacher Feedback

Studies have proven that teacher feedback is crucial in the pedagogical process (Brookhart, 2008). This is likely because teacher feedback links teachers' practices to learners' needs (Bayley & Gamer, 2010) and effectively improves learners' performance academically (Hattie, 2009). Teacher feedback is more preferable by learners compared to other feedback sources as they believe it is necessary for their development (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Teresa et al. (2013) inferred that learners preferred teacher feedback more than peer feedback and self-evaluation because teacher feedback is detailed, effective and beneficial. Comments and suggestions offered by teachers are rich in information (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) that help them in reducing their learning gaps (Hattie, 2009).

Silver & Lee (2007) believed that teacher feedback allows ESL learners to acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses in language learning. Through teacher feedback, learners become conscious of any discrepancies between their current understanding, knowledge and skills and the intended learning goals. Due to this awareness, learners could take required actions to reach their targeted goals. Other than that, Choi (2013) added that teacher feedback helps learners to improve their linguistic skills such as error identification and correction. This further develops learners' thinking skill as they make improvements based on teacher feedback (McGrath et al., 2011).

Furthermore, teacher feedback is found to benefit learners with low achievements. Boston (2002) reported that low achievers are able to improve their work through their own efforts guided by teachers. Not only does it serve as linguistic support, teacher feedback also positively affects them by increasing their motivation (Ellis, 2009). Glenn & Goldthwaite (2014) reasoned that teacher feedback inspires these low achieving learners because it indicates that teachers have thoughtfully looked into their work.

In Malaysian ESL classrooms, Maarof et al. (2011) revealed in their study that learners view teacher feedback as an important component for their improvements. Learners' preference towards teacher feedback proves that teacher feedback positively influences learners in their language learning (Razali & Jupri, 2014). Teacher feedback is able to direct learners towards achieving learning goals (Pei et al., 2013) through effective self-revision even when it is given minimally (Ismail et al., 2008).

2.3. A Shift to Formative Assessment

Gipps (1994) discovered that starting 30 years ago, the educational system has begun shifting from summative to formative assessment. Researchers in their studies have acknowledged the significance of formative assessment (Black & William, 1998). William (2018) describes formative assessment as a process in which evidence about the development of learners are retrieved and made sense by teachers before the next learning steps are suggested in achieving learning targets. The evidence is obtained by teachers through classroom observation, discussion and analysis of learners' work (Boston, 2002). Information gained from the evidence is used by teachers to modify teaching and learning process in achieving intended learning outcomes (McManus, 2008).

According to Benner (2011), the focus of formative assessment is the development of learning rather than their scores and grades. Black & Wiliam (1998) viewed formative assessment as a promising way in supporting learners' development. Kingston & Nash (2011) discovered that formative assessment positively affect learners' competence. Therefore, there are recommendations that formative assessment should be used as a means of improving teaching and learning (OECD, 2013). Nielson & Dolin (2016) pointed out several changes in all levels of educational system with the aim to incorporate formative assessment into everyday teaching. This includes educational institutions which are transforming their teaching facilities and approaches to embrace the formative practices (Law, 2015).

The Malaysian education reform in 2013 which aligns English Language with CEFR promotes the practice of formative teaching ideas in classrooms to accelerate learning (Ministry of Education, 2018). ESL teachers are expected to upgrade their teaching practice so that they align with formative principles. In ESL classroom, teaching, learning and formative assessment should be regarded as components of an ongoing process. In other words, formative assessment exists simultaneously in teaching and learning, not separately from each other.

2.4. Formative Feedback

Hattie (2009) claimed that formative feedback is the primary element in formative assessment and has the strongest influence on learning. Miller (2009) observed frequent use of formative feedback due to the learning shift from summative to formative learning culture. Rather than focusing on learners' final product, formative feedback contradicts summative feedback by emphasizing learners' development. Hattie & Timperley (2007) highlighted the significance of formative feedback as it suggests learners' with the next instructional steps towards achieving a specific learning goal. This was confirmed by Bennett (2011). This is likely because, through regular reflections on their work, learners get to learn and enhance their cognitive skills (Susanne, 2013). Anna and Julio (2007) also recommended the use of formative feedback for teachers' and learners' competence. It is also promoted in policy documents, supported by teachers and expected to be ingrained in the cultures of educational institutions (Crisp, 2007).

As an effort to embrace the use of formative feedback in classrooms, Malaysian Ministry of Education has distributed teacher handbooks with the aim to guide ESL teachers in implementing formative practices. In the teacher handbook, formative feedback is described as the necessary building block for formative assessment (Ministry of Education, 2018). This formative feedback is titled as Medal and Mission Feedback. This type of feedback which is frequent and continuous should be given in a specific pattern that recognises the pupils' achievement, identifies challenges and suggest forward.

3. Medal and Mission Feedback

Mory (2003) has outlined four main characteristics that constitute feedback that support learning. First, feedback should acknowledge learners' for increasing accuracy. Second, feedback should emphasize accurate responses to link learners to their prior stimuli. Third, feedback should consist of information that helps learners correct errors. Lastly, feedback should scaffold their learners to understand and analyse their learning process.

Nicol & Macfarlaine-Dick (2006) have also shared their views in what constitutes good feedback which leads to substantial gains in learning. Based on their studies, good feedback:

1) explains the learning goals;

2) stimulates self-assessment in learning;

3) provides rich information;

4) promotes communication between teachers and learners;

5) increase learners' motivation and self-esteem;

6) gives opportunities to close learning gaps;

7) helps teachers to shape their teaching.

Additionally, Hattie & Timperley (2007) suggested that feedback should answer three major questions:

a) Where am I now? (What are the goals?)

b) How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?)

c) Where to next? (What steps need to be taken to achieve the learning goals?)

The terms "feed up", "feed back" and "feed forward" are used to describe the notion of these three questions respectively. Therefore, this has encouraged Petty (2009) to come up with the concept and term "Medal and Mission Feedback" to strengthen and encourages learners to self-regulate their own performance. Thus, Medal and Mission Feedback as pictured in **Figure 1** is basically a type of feedback that offers information of what learners have done well, what learners need to work on and clear goals. Petty (2009) described Medal and Mission as the best feedback type because it is frequent, task-centred, learner-referenced, specific, forward looking and in the form of a target.

Characteristics of Medal and Mission Feedback

1) Medal

Petty (2009) describes a medal as information of what learners have done well and what is good about it. It is teachers' responsibility to inform learners what is correct about their work. This is because learners are not able to judge their work in certainty. Learners deserve to know the strengths of their work because it can surely encourage them to put more effort in learning. A medal does not only describe the positive aspects of the work but also the learners' planning and effort. Petty (2009) disagreed that marks, grades or other comparative comments to be regarded as medals because they are considered measurements. Petty (2009) has outlined four main characteristics of a medal and they are:

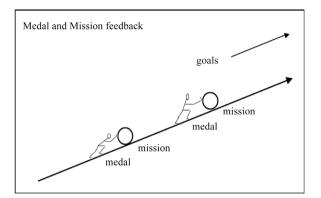


Figure 1. Medal and mission feedback.

• Frequent

A good medal, according to Petty (2009), should be given frequently throughout the lesson. Teachers should regularly recognise learners' effort and achievement every day instead of reserving their praise for conspicuous merit. Medal and Mission is frequent feedback that gives impact on learners' achievement (Ministry of Education, 2018). Black & Wiliams (2009) emphasized that teachers need to find the right timing to give feedback and it needs to be frequently integrated into teaching and learning in general. Teacher feedback can only be useful when it connects with what learners' current activity. As a result, teachers need to have the ability to exploit the unexpected classroom moments when giving feedback. Timing is critical in providing feedback because Brookhart (2008) described the student preference as "just-in-time, just-for-me information delivered when and where it can do the most good".

• Task-Centred

Teachers need to give a medal that focuses on the task rather than learners' ability. For example, a teacher should state "all the paragraphs are organized" instead of stating "you are a good writer". Orsmond & Merry (2001) suggested that the focus of good feedback is on the learners' current level of achievement in a task. Ogede (2002) found out that learners want to know what works and what does not in their task completion. Black & Wiliams (2009) have reported the benefits of task-involving assessment rather than ego-involving assessment. Compliments should be given based on effort, task completion, achievement and skills demonstrated. Praise that is ego-centred only tells learners that their achievements are based on personal attributes rather than effective effort. Feedback that focuses on tasks benefits low achievers because it convinces them that improvements are possible if they put more effort (Boston, 2002).

• Learner-Referenced

Petty (2009) believed that a medal should be given to a learner for what is a reasonable achievement for that learner. A medal should not be given based on what would be good for the average learner in the class. Teachers should give feedback by specifically referring to one particular learner's achievement. Thus, teachers need to consider learners' developmental background when giving feed-

back (Brookhart, 2008). When providing feedback to learners, simple vocabulary and sentence structures should be used. It is important to choose words carefully to show respect towards learners. This will increase learners' self-esteem and encourage them take responsibility of their own learning. Straub (2000) suggested that connecting teacher feedback with specific words from learners' work creates a feel of conversation and makes learners feel included.

• Specific

When providing both praise and constructive criticism in feedback, teachers need to use clear and specific comments (Goldstein, 2004). Vasu et al. (2016) found out that learners demand longer and explicit feedback. This is because explicit feedback promotes learners' reflection and cognitive engagement. Petty (2009) also suggested that feedback should be specific, not vague and clear as to exactly what is being praised. For example, instead of praising "well done", a teacher should write "you have identified all the main ideas". Specific feedback is useful as learners often do not know the reasons for praise of their work (Pei et al., 2013). Teachers need to let learners know the reasons of the praise to indicate the value of accomplishment. Learners also will feel less intimidated when they are aware of the reasons behind the praise given by their teachers.

2) Mission

A mission refers to information about what learners need to improve and how to improve it (Petty, 2009). For example, a teacher could say "in your next written essay, try to pay attention to your spelling". Apart from telling learners what does not work in their task, they are also told how to improve. This kind of feedback is forward-looking and positive which is easier on learners' ego and they will regard it more like advice rather than criticism. Providing a mission is to reduce the gaps between their current understanding and learning goals. Petty (2009) again emphasized that marks and grades cannot be considered as missions because they are measurements. A mission has two main characteristics which are:

Forward Looking And Positive

A mission is forward looking feedback that informs learners on what needs to improve and how to improve. Apart from letting learners know what is wrong in their work, they are also suggested ways on how to do better. Shute (2007) claimed that effective feedback shows ways to improve, not just what is wrong. This is helpful for low achievers as they are able to challenge their learning obstacles using the feedback. Orsmond et al. (2013) believed it helps learners to understand the content of their subject and also ways to improve. Alamis (2010) revealed that learners value feedback associated with positive feelings because it boosts learners' motivational beliefs and self-esteems (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This is supported by Lindemann (2001) that effective feedback must be focused, clear, applicable and encouraging.

• A Form of A Target

Teachers are encouraged to give feedback in a form of target that teachers can

monitor (Petty, 2009). This focused and precised feedback assists learners to adjust their way of thinking and work on the specific areas that need improvement (Phelan et al., 2011). Ogede (2002) also supported that directive feedback protects learners from a "gloomy future" as teachers get to share their knowledge and skills. Pei et al. (2013) in their study found that learners valued directive feedback as it provides guidance for improvements. However, Brookhart (2008) reminded teachers to offer focused guidance without giving the solution away.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Medal and Mission Feedback is a type of feedback that helps learners to identify strengths in their work. It also helps learners to be aware of what is wrong in their work and guides them to improve by taking necessary instructional steps. Medal and Mission Feedback has met the requirements of effective feedback as suggested by several studies. Petty (2009) has introduced this Medal and Mission Feedback by outlining a few characteristics. First, feedback given by teachers should be frequent throughout the lesson. Second, it must be task-centred which means any comments given should be related to learners' task. Third, feedback needs to be given based on the achievement of one particular learner in a task not that of an average learner. Next, feedback should contain specific information enough to promote self-revision. Other than that, feedback must be forward looking and positive to enhance learners' motivation. Finally, it has to be in a form of a target to ensure learners know what steps they should take to improve.

Some implications could be derived from this paper that benefit ESL teachers and learners. With regard to classroom feedback practices, teachers are able to incorporate Medal and Mission Feedback in their lesson to accelerate learning. Teachers are able to consider the characteristics of good feedback while providing their own to learners. Learners on the other hand, are able to know what type of feedback suitable in their learning. Apart from identifying errors, learners are able to know that they deserve positive reinforcement to keep them moving forward in reaching their learning goals.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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