The Effect of Teacher's Feedback on Students' Language Skills at University Level

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Abstract: The study examines the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills. The motive behind the study was to explore the ways that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of teacher feedback. Questionnaires were used to collect data from a purposive sample of 205 students studying at Salahaddin University. Regression analysis was used to determine the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills with the aid of SPSS version 23. The results of the study showed that oral feedback has positive effects on the students' speaking skills. It was also revealed that the provision of oral feedback causes an improvement in the students' writing skills. The results further showed that the use of written feedback was observed to be posing negative effects on the students' writing skills. A lot of students certainly wanted their teachers to focus on sentence structure and style (structural mistakes). It was concluded that the effectiveness of teacher feedback is mainly influenced by the amount of the feedback followed by the timing of the feedback and lastly the mode of the feedback. The study recommended that university teachers must use oral feedback more but, in most cases, it is always important for them to use both oral and written feedback depending on the circumstance. The originality of the study is in its potency to highlight that teacher feedback does not always yield the desired results and its use is subjective to the timing, mode and amount of the feedback provided.

Keywords: Improving Language Skills, Oral Feedback, Teacher Feedback, Written Feedback, Writing Ability, Speaking Ability.

1. Introduction

Feedback is an essential part of effective learning and its use serves an important aspect in educational institutions. It is worthy to note that the importance of feedback in this research is mainly tied to academic performance (Race, 2001). It is implied that providing feedback is of paramount importance towards enhancing students' academic performance. Bellon et al. (1991) concurs with this idea and asserts that feedback helps students to understand the subject being studied and gives them clear guidance on how to improve their learning. Meanwhile, one of the key subject areas that requires a lot of feedback is the studying English as a foreign language (EFL). This can be reinforced by ideas which suggest that EFL teaching and learning are surrounded by a lot of challenges which can hamper performance (McKay, 2001; Meunier & Granger, 2008; Razak, Saeed & Ahmad, 2013). Such challenges can be identified and dealt with through the use of feedback systems (Yi'An, 2001). Meanwhile, it is considered that providing feedback in class is more effective when different types of feedback methods are combined together (Williams, 2005). A notable combination of feedback methods that can yield effective results includes a combination of oral and written teacher feedback methods (Chandler, 2003). Oral and written teacher

feedback methods have been established to enhance students' understanding, the level of thinking and performance (Schwartz & White, 2000). Thus, if students are to exhibit their language skills in a better way, it is important to provide both oral and written feedback. But the use of both oral and written teacher feedback methods varies with context under which it is being provided. Notably, English language university contextual situation still needs to be fully explored.

Though the provision of teacher feedback is considered to be a desirable and essential component in learning, its use among university students is relatively different (Crawford, 2016). In most university classes, teacher feedback is rarely provided and students often encounter a lot of difficulties. The inability and insufficient provision of teacher feedback poses huge drawbacks on students' academic performance (Brown, Peterson, & Yao, 2016). To be specific, Banditvilai (2016) noted that the ineffective use and lack of provision of teacher feedback severely undermines students' language skills. The reason being that university students are presumed to have gained significant knowledge and understanding of how to tackle language problems (Hyland, 1998). This problem can be a contributing factor to lack of improvement in university students' language skills (Meunier & Granger, 2008). Thus, if students are to exhibit sound improvements in their language skills, then teacher feedback needs to be provided to students continuously. However, the use of teacher feedback is surrounded with different perceptions about its importance and conditions under which it can yield effective positive changes in students' language skills. For instance, Freeman et al. (2015) noted that teacher feedback is more effective when provided in the form of positive feedback as opposed to negative feedback. Núñez et al. (2015) concurred with this idea and asserted that negative feedback is demotivating and can cause students to lose interest in learning. Such has been a case with most Kurdish students as noted by a decline in the number of students enrolling in language studies at university level (Salim, 2018).

In addition, teacher feedback has been downgraded among English language students for failing to deal with specific errors undermining students' language skills (Man & Tomoko, 2010). This can be supported by insights which showed that feedback often fails to deal with structural and lexical mistakes (Ahmad, Saeed, & Salam, 2013). Despite the challenges that may be observed in the use of teacher feedback, its benefits are often underscored in most universities (Abdullah, 2015). The reasons being that it incites students to depend too much on their teachers and hinders their innovative abilities (Brown, Peterson, & Yao, 2016; Freeman et al., 2015). All these issues can be made clear and addressed by examining the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills. This also includes looking at conditions under which teacher feedback can warrant improvements in students' language skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classification of Feedback

One of the most important challenges that are associated with the term feedback is the definition of feedback. This follows observations made which showed that the term feedback has various definitions and such definitions vary with the context under consideration. For instance, Oxford Dictionary considers feedback to be information about a person's performance of a task, reactions to a product etc., which is used to make future improvements (Oxford Dictionary, n.d). However, in the context of education, feedback can be defined as performance-related information that is given to students with the sole aim of improving their skills and attitudes (Pirhonen, 2016). Taras (2013) defined it as output that is administered

to a learner by another person such as a teacher. In simple terms, feedback in this study will be defined as performance-related information that is given to students after completing a writing, reading or speaking exercise.

It is essential to classify feedback into different categories because each individual type of feedback works effectively in a different way (Earl, 2003). Also, each form of teacher feedback is associated with different benefits and negative effects. Moreover, there are different circumstances under which feedback can be provided and such circumstances include reading, speaking and writing activities (Elnicki, et al., 1998). Efforts to examine the effects of teacher feedback are therefore effective and fruitful when they are properly linked to the right situation and context. This is of paramount importance in EFL and ESL which have proved to be a challenge to most academic students (Pirhonen, 2016).

Teacher feedback can be provided either in the form of oral feedback or written feedback. Oral feedback is different from other forms of feedback such as written feedback in the sense that it is provided during a task (SSGT, n.d). Oral feedback 'attracts favour' in the sight of some scholars mainly because students can easily and immediately 'absorb' the feedback and place effort towards improving themselves (Earl, 2003; Hatie & Timperley, 2007). More so, Timperley (2007) strongly emphasised that oral feedback is more productive and effective in improving students' learning. This is because it places a demand on university students to remember it and utilise it in dealing with future circumstances.

Written feedback involves feedback given to students' written work. Written feedback is sometimes considered as optional because it is slightly different from oral feedback in that it requires written comments and a correction of a different kind (Bitchener et al., 2005). This type of feedback is usually not immediate and the teacher has time to think about how to give feedback and on what. Therefore, there are different strategies used when providing students with written feedback. For instance, a teacher can provide feedback that is related to the content and the organization of the writing, as well as to the grammar and vocabulary (Weigle, 2002). Weigle also asserts that the purpose of teacher feedback is to provide guidance to students when writing.

The most important question that researchers have dealt with so far is the issue of the effectiveness of written feedback, as some believe that correcting students' work does not lead to better results. Bitchener et al. (2005) outlined that grammar correction in writing is not necessary because it is harmful and ineffective. Truscott believes that error correction diverts energy from other productive aspects of writing. However, Bitchener et al. (2005) considered Truscott's conclusions to be premature and that more well-designed research needs to be conducted before any conclusions can be drawn.

2.2 Students' Language Skills

Language skills are a collection of four skills that enable a person to understand and deliver spoken language for sound and effective interpersonal communication (Morehouse, 2017). They are known as the four skills of language and are categorised into writing, reading, speaking and listening skills. Of these four skills, speaking is considered to be one of the natural language skills and as such, it is known as the most active skill or productive skill (Banditvilai, 2016). On the other hand, reading is of paramount importance because it enables people to understand spoken language expressed in a written form. As a

result, speaking skills (SS) are considered to be an artificial skill (Morehouse, 2017). Writing is mainly the production of a spoken language using a set of written words (Darancik, 2018).

The importance of language skills is mainly attached to their sequence which is believed to play a pivotal role when learning either a first or second language (Birsch, 2011). Morehouse (2017) believed that an individual must first learn how to learn to listen (L), speak (S), read (R) and write (LSRW skills). The most important issue surrounding language skills is centred on the question when should one learn all the four skills (Darancik, 2018). Darancik also noted that one should learn all the four skills when (i) his or her goals require the use of all the four skills and (ii) the targeted language makes it mandatory for one to possess all the skills. Thus, whether learning a First Language (FL) or a Second Language (SL), LSRW skills aid in facilitating the learning of a targeted language. Meanwhile, Birsch (2011) considered speaking and writing as the key skills needed to learn a targeted language. This study will therefore adopt this idea and extend it to the study of the effects of oral and written feedback on students' writing and speaking skills.

2.3 The Error-Correction Debate

Efforts to promote an improvement in university student's language skills can prove to be effective when centred around the concept of error analysis. Error analysis plays a pivotal role in addressing language problems face students not only at university level but also at other academic levels. However, there are diverging views surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of error analysis. Hence, it is important to examine related studies on error correction so as to map strategies that can be used to enhance students' language skills.

Notable work on error correction is centred on ideas developed by Truscott (1996) who was against the idea of correcting L2 grammatical errors. The reason was Truscott believed that error correction inflicted harm on students. In other words, Arguments were that no positive feedback can be obtained from using error correction. As such, error correction is considered to lack effectiveness in L1 (Leki, 1990). However, Truscott believed that the same applied to L2 and this implies that error correction is ineffective in addressing language errors made by L1 and L2 students. In addition, Truscott strongly argues that the effectiveness of error correction still remains to be proved as noted by Sheppard (1992). Supporting ideas point out that students often have challenges in identifying their mistakes and hence need assistance from the teacher to guide them (Hendrickson, 1978). This entails that teacher feedback is needed all the time to guide students in correcting their mistakes. Thus, ideas by Hendrickson highlight that errors made by students are there to expose students' limitations and help them to find ways to correct them. All these ideas place a great stumbling block in examining if error correction is desirable and can provide positive feedback or not.

Despite ideas established stating that error correction is trivial in learning, some of the prior studies have not managed to establish any significant positive effects of error correction in learning (Ferris, 1995; Salteh & Sadeghi, 2015). A study by Cohen and Robbins (1976) on ESL students established that the use of written feedback does not cause meaningful improvements in the students' ability to deal with ESL errors. Their study did not rule out the importance of error correction but managed to emphasise that error correction can prove to be ineffective most of the times. However, the study managed to highlight that inconsistency and questionable quality of the part of the teachers is what causes students to make errors.

Also, Truscott (1996) noted that there is not much evidence that proves that written correction helps students in dealing with their language errors.

There are a series of studies which dismissed Truscott's idea and these studies date back to the 80s. For instance, Cardelle and Corno (1981) conducted a limited scale analysis of error correction on ESL students in USA. Similar studies consequently followed such as the one by Fathman and Whalley (1990) and Ferris (1994). All these studies aimed at dismissing ideas by Truscott and outlined that the study cannot be generalised. These studies also managed to establish that corrective feedback has positive effects on ESL students.

With all these ideas in mind, it remains imperative that error correction is beneficial but its importance and desirability is subject to vary. This can vary according to the nature of students involved, learning environment, teacher quality and competence etc. The effectiveness of error correction can be said to be beneficial when it is provided in the form of positive feedback. The importance of error correction is also governed by factors such as timing, feedback amount and mode.

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

Research on teacher feedback started long ago and still ongoing and this being necessitated by the ever-changing teaching and learning environment. With new ideas being introduced and gradual changes in economic development, social, political and religious sectors continuously becoming evident in academic circles, students are being exposed to a series of challenges. Such challenges can be identified and dealt with by using written and oral feedback (OF) strategies. In most cases, there is a strong need to continuously improve the effectiveness of feedback strategies. As a result, such an effort can be made possible by engaging in a series of researches.

Pankonin and Myers (2017) did a study that looked at how the use of positive and negative feedback affects students' behaviour. In their argument they highlighted that changes in students' behaviour are determined by the form of feedback provided. That is, as to whether negative or positive feedback has been provided. Their findings showed that negative feedback has a negative effect on students' behaviour. Positive feedback was noted to be having positive effect on students' behaviour. This entails that the use of written and oral feedback will have different effects on students' language skills depending on whether the feedback has been administered in a negative or positive way. That is, students' language skills will positively change with respect to the provision of positive feedback. The opposite is true with regards to negative feedback and the effects of both negative and positive feedback on students' language skills are conditional on their timing, mode and amount.

Pirhonen (2016) did an examination of how students perceive the use of feedback in EFL classes using a sample of 100 students. The descriptive analysis results showed that EFL students consider it a must that teachers ought to provide them with oral and written feedback. With such regards, it was noted that oral and written feedback help to deal with significant EFL problems undermining students speaking, reading and writing abilities. Such a study thus identifies aspects which can be used to assess the effectiveness of feedback strategies in EFL classes. Hence, it can thus be said that providing feedback to EFL students will effectively enhance students' English speaking, reading and writing abilities. Hadzic (2016) placed effort on the impact of written and oral feedback in EFL classes using a mixed research approach. The notable

observation that can be made from this study is that it places concerns over situations under which feedback strategies can be applied. That is, it shows that the contextual situations under which feedback strategies can be applied tend to vary with one another. This, therefore, entails that efforts to improve the effectiveness of feedback strategies in EFL university classes can be boosted by using the right feedback strategy (amount and mode) that matches the EFL class' contextual situation (timing).

Elashri (2013) did a study that looked at the influence of direct feedback strategies on students' writing performance using an experimental design. Evidence collected from the application of the analytic scoring and holistic rubric tests showed that feedback is of significant importance in improving EFL students writing capabilities. Hence, such a notion can be applied to the study of the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills. Deductions can thus be made that feedback is essential for improving students' language skills.

Ferris (1994) conducted a study that outlined that students are bound to make different types of errors ranging from grammatical, structural and lexical mistakes. The results showed that students often at times prefer teachers to focus on totally different errors. This has implications on the desirability of teacher feedback and how effective it will be in improving students' language skills. This is also tied to circumstances and/or conditions under which teacher feedback will prove to be effective. As such, the timing, mode and amount of feedback provided have a great significant effect on the effective of teacher feedback and students' language skills.

Chandler (2003) examined how the use of different types of error feedback affected the fluency and accuracy of L2 student writers. The results are in support of the use and importance of teacher feedback and consider it to cause an improvement in students' level of fluency and accuracy. Ferris and Roberts (2001) also explored the efficacy of underlining errors in their study and found that it helps students to write accurately.

Dobbs and Arnold (2009) did an analysis of the relationship between preschool teachers' reports of children's behaviour. The study findings were based on an examination of data collected from twenty-four preschools teachers and one hundred preschools children. The findings revealed that giving too much commands to preschool children can cause children to engage in disruptive behaviour. This was noted to be relatively true especially with regards to written feedback which reprimands children a lot and causes them to continue engaging in the disruptive behaviour.

Ahmad, Saeed and Salam (2013) conducted a study on the effect of corrective feedback on academic achievements of students. Using findings obtained from an examination of data collected from 200 teachers, the results showed that feedback is a desirable and an important aspect of teaching and learning. As such, the results consider students who receive feedback to be in a better position to exhibit high performance levels as opposed to students who do not get corrective feedback. The reason is that feedback helps teachers to examine loopholes affecting the effectiveness of teacher feedback. As a result, corrective action can be taken leading to an improvement in the effectiveness of teacher feedback.

Boyles (2017) did a study that looked at the effect of oral feedback on perceived classroom community on undergraduate students using data collected from sixty-eight undergraduate students. The findings were in

support of the benefits of oral feedback and highlighted that oral feedback is instant and provides detailed information about how students can improve their speaking skills.

All these results are in support of the importance of teacher feedback. This review also shows that teacher feedback does not always cause an improvement in students' language skills (performance). The effects vary according to the type of feedback provided as to whether written or oral feedback has been given. Also, the desirability and use of written or oral feedback is determined by the amount, timing and mode of feedback provided by the teachers. This also includes as to whether the feedback has been provided in a negative or positive way.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was a quantitative research and relied a lot on the use of statistical packages such as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 to analyse the collected data. This also included the use of a combination of data analysis techniques such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, regression analysis and reliability tests.

3.2 Population and Sampling Techniques

The study was based on a purposive sample of 205 English department junior students drawn from the College of Education, College of Basic Education and College of Languages at Salahaddin University-Erbil. The use of purposive sampling was justified by its ability to focus on an area of interest which in this case in English language students (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). Such is of paramount importance because it makes it feasible to answer the research questions (Palys, 2008). Thus, 205 questionnaires were randomly distributed to students from the College of Education, College of Basic Education and College of Languages at Salahaddin University.

3.3 Research Instrument

The study relied on the use of a questionnaire which was comprised of three sections. The first section catered for details on teacher feedback while the second section covered information about the effects of feedback strategies on students' ability to write in the English language. The third section focused on acquiring information about the effects of feedback strategies on students' ability to speak in the English language. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from one to five corresponding to strongly disagree, disagree, may agree, agree and strongly agree respectively. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Pirhonen (2016) and its adoption was justified by its ability to cover a significant number of aspects relating to the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills. This was also important because it served as a point of reference and comparison of the obtained findings. However, amendments were made to the study questionnaire developed by Pirhonen (2016). This was important because it helped to ensure that the study remained valid and reliable in addressing research questions related to the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills.

3.3.1 Validity Tests

The validity tests were conducted as part of efforts to enhance the validity and reliability of the developed research questionnaire (Drost, 2011). This was accomplished through the use of a focus group which was comprised of fifteen stage three English Department students (five students from College of Education, five students from College of Basic Education and five students from College of Languages at Salahaddin University in Erbil). A focused group in this study was defined as a group of students who participated in organised discussions so as to obtain information about their experiences and views of the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills (Homan, 1991). The students were asked questions related to what they understood about teacher feedback, its importance, and how it affected their language skills. The questionnaire items were modified based on responses obtained from the fifteen students, and the questionnaire was given to six academicians for further examination. Additional improvements were also made based on the recommendations made by the academicians. This played a great role in ensuring that the obtained students' responses remained highly reliable and valid in addressing issues pertaining to the effects of teacher feedback on students' language skills (Drost, 2011; Flores & Alonso, 1995; Kitzinger, 1994).

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation Techniques

The collected data was analysed using SPSS version 23 using a set of descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient test. A significant number of the research questions were answered based on findings obtained from the estimated regression models. Regression analysis was used because it helped to determine the effects of teacher feedback on university student's language skills. This was accomplished by developing two models as follows;

Model one: Effects of oral feedback on university students' speaking skills

This involved regressing the effects of oral feedback against the university students' speaking skills. Incorporating regression analysis concepts such as coefficient (α), the estimated parameter (β) and the error term (μ), the following regression model was developed and used to fulfil the purpose of this study;

$$SS = \alpha + \beta_1 OF + \mu \qquad [1]$$

Model two: Effects of written and oral feedback on university students' writing skills

This involved regressing the effects of written feedback (WF) and oral feedback (OF) against the university students' writing skills (WS). The following regression model was developed and used to fulfil the purpose of this study;

$$WS = \alpha + \beta_1 OF + \beta_2 WF + \mu \qquad [2]$$

The above models were augmented by the use of the Pearson correlation coefficient test to ascertain how the model variables were correlated. Microsoft Excel was also used to present the findings in a meaningful and easily interpretable form. The findings will thus be presented in the form of tables, charts and graphs.

Reliability test is one of the essential tests used in conducting research and its importance lies in verifying the internal consistency of the model variables (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). As a result, Cronbach's alpha was

used to test the extent to which the variables are reliable in explaining the effects of teacher's feedback on university students' language skills. Cronbach's alpha has values that range from 0 to 1 and values from 0.70 were considered to give reliable estimates (Riege, 2003). As part of efforts to ensure that the study confined to sound ethical guidelines, participants were asked to complete a consent form and were informed that the study is voluntary. The findings of this study were also treated with total confidence.

4. Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis was conducted using 203 responses obtained from a purposive sample of 205 English department junior students drawn from the College of Education, College of Basic Education and College of Language at Salahaddin University-Erbil. The data was analysed using SPSS version 23.

4.1 The Most Preferred Type of Feedback

One of the prime focus of this study was to determine the most preferred type of feedback by the university students. Given a choice between oral and written feedback, it was noted that most students preferred written feedback over oral feedback. The results depicted that 65% (132) of the students indicated that they preferred to obtain written feedback as opposed to oral feedback. On the other hand, 35% (71) of the student expressed their desire to have access to oral feedback (see figure 4.1). This entails that university students' preferences of teacher feedback vary between students. This can be reinforced by ideas given by Chandler (2003) which showed that there are significant differences in students' preferences of teacher feedback.
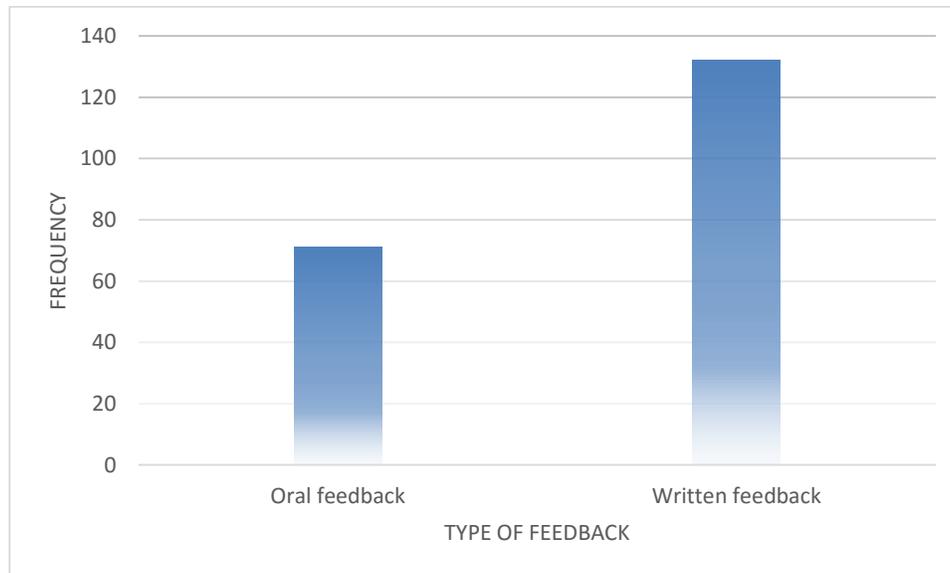

Figure 1: The most preferred type of feedback by the university students

4.2 Factors Influencing More the Effectiveness of Teacher Feedback

The second aim of the study was to determine factors influencing more the effectiveness of teacher feedback. Based on figure 4.2, it was noted that 45% of the students considered the amount of feedback given as the most important factor that influences the effectiveness of teacher feedback. This implies that providing students with more feedback will help to enhance their performance. Ahmad, Saeed and Salam (2013) considered this to be true and highlighted that providing more feedback helps teachers to examine loopholes affecting the effectiveness of teacher feedback. As a result, corrective action can be taken leading to an improvement in the effectiveness of teacher feedback.
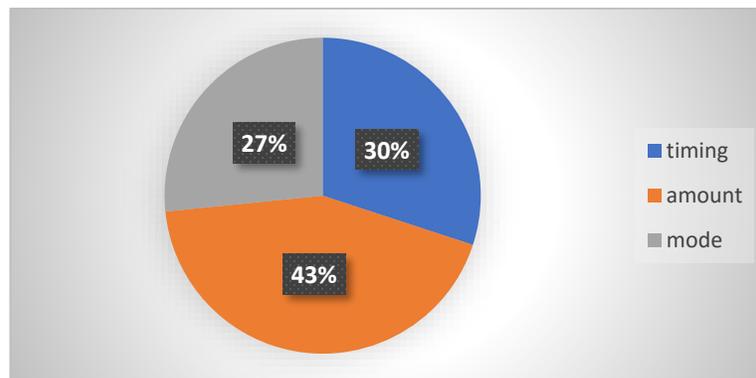

Figure 2: Factors influencing more the effectiveness of teacher feedback

It was depicted that 30% of the students considered the timing of the feedback to be an essential element that influenced more the effectiveness of teacher feedback. This is relatively true because providing students with feedback at an inappropriate time can actually render it ineffective. Voelkel and Mello (2014) considered that behavioural circumstances and individual conditions such as mood and attitude can negatively hinder the effectiveness of teacher feedback. Meanwhile, 27% of the students indicated that the mode through which feedback is provided also affects the effectiveness of teacher feedback meaning that teachers are required to devise effective ways of providing students with feedback.

4.3 Types of Errors University Students Want Their Teachers to Focus on

Foremost, it is imperative to note that not all students desire to have feedback on certain language issues. Some students may prefer that their teachers focus on specific errors while others prefer them to focus on totally different errors (Ferris, 1994). Failure to identify these types of errors can cause teachers to neglect the necessary areas students need help with. This negatively affects students' language skills and hence it is always important to identify such errors.

The students strongly agreed to a large extent that oral feedback helped them to remember something better when they wrote it down. This is because it accorded them an opportunity to work in a noise-free-classroom environment. This is because they had highest means scores of 3.34 and respective standard deviations of 0.75 and 1.34. This meant that oral feedback is more effective when students write down notes or details provided by the teacher.

Table 1: The most important type of errors students want their teachers to focus on

Type of errors students want their teachers to focus on	Description	Count	Percent %
Sentence structure and style (structural mistakes)	no	45	22.20%
	yes	158	77.80%
Vocabulary and expressions (lexical mistakes)	no	72	35.50%
	yes	131	64.50%
Grammar and sentence pattern (grammatical mistakes)	no	136	67.00%
	yes	67	33.00%
Content and ideas	no	157	77.30%
	Yes	46	22.70%

The findings revealed that the students certainly wanted their teachers to focus on sentence structure and style (structural mistakes). It was established that 158 (22.20%) students positively indicated that they want their teachers to focus on structural mistakes as opposed to 45 (22.20%) students. This means that structural mistakes represent a key problem faced by university students. It was also discovered that lexical mistakes were also part of the problems the students wanted their teachers to focus on. Further observations were made that 131 (64.50%) students expressed their feelings towards having their teachers to focus on vocabulary and expressions. This is relatively true especially when observations were made that vocabulary and expressions are key problems affecting EFL students' language skills (Ahmad, Saeed & Salam, 2013).

Meanwhile, it was noted that the students did not want their teachers to devote significant attention to grammar and sentence patterns, content and ideas. This can be evidenced by the obtained figures which revealed that 136(67%) and 157(77.30%) of the students were reluctant to have their teachers devote attention to grammar and sentence patterns, content and ideas respectively. However, 33% and 22.70% preferred that their teachers to focus on grammar and sentence patterns, content and ideas respectively. These differences in preferences over the focus of error correction strongly indicated that there are differences in the use, effectiveness and preference of feedback. Hence, teacher feedback needs to be designed in manner that accounts for all the students' language skills needs.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were computed to determine the average effects and responsiveness of oral and written feedback variable effects. This is important in determining the average number of students who preferred to receive and not to receive both oral and written feedback.

4.4.1 Written Feedback

The variable written feedback was made up of nine elements which were measured using a five-point Likert scale. A highest mean score of 3.84 was associated with a standard deviation of 1.14. This meant that more students preferred written feedback because it helped them to revise their work. Siewert (2011)

noted this to be true and asserts that written feedback provides detailed information about how students can resolve mistakes made during written exercises.

The second preference of written feedback was noted to be in respect of the effective use of oral feedback on students' class assignments. A mean score of 3.63±1.16 indicated that a relatively high number of students wanted their teachers to provide them with oral feedback on class assignments. Similar deductions can be made with respect to the use of oral feedback because teachers always underline the errors students make (3.60±1.20), teachers often provide discouraging written comments (3.34±1.34), providing feedback individually is the most preferable way of offering written feedback (3.11±0.94), students prefer getting written feedback as opposed to oral feedback (3.09±1.39), written feedback often causes students to lose my self-confidence (3.02±0.24). This entails that university students considered these aspects to be relatively true in respect to the provision, use and preference of oral feedback.

Table 2: Written feedback

	Items	M	SD
1	Feedback helps revise my work	3.84	1.14
2	My teacher circles/underlines the errors I make.	3.60	1.12
3	I prefer getting written feedback as opposed to oral feedback.	3.09	1.39
4	Written feedback is more effective when provided on an assignment.	3.63	1.16
5	Providing feedback in groups is the most preferable way of offering written feedback.	2.40	0.85
6	Providing feedback individually is the most preferable way of offering written feedback.	3.11	0.94
7	Teachers often provide discouraging written comments	3.34	1.34
8	Written feedback often causes me to lose my self-confidence.	3.02	0.24
9	Feedback helps revise my work	2.58	0.86

Key: M: Mean Score   SD: Standard Deviation

The students expressed less concern about the use and preference of oral feedback in connection to providing feedback in groups is the most preferable way of offering written feedback (2.40±0.85) and feedback helps revise students work (3.63±1.16). Voelkel and Mello (2014) highlighted that this can be as a result of feedback being trivialised because of not adding value to learning.

4.4.2 Oral Feedback

Examinations were also made in relation to the use and preference of oral feedback among university students. This was done using a five-point Likert scale and an oral feedback variable composed of nine sub-elements (see table 4.4). The students strongly agreed to a large extent as to oral feedback helping them to correct mispronunciation mistakes and that it is the most preferable way of offering oral feedback. This is because they had highest means scores of 3.34 each and respective standard deviations of 0.75 and

1.34. Meaning that oral feedback is more effective when students write down notes or details provided by the teacher and allow students to work in a noise free classroom environment.

The findings also showed similar observations as noted by Lochtman (2002). The findings revealed that the teachers used request-phrases such as "sorry", "pardon me" and "excuse me" while providing feedback. This is because a relatively high mean score of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 0.85 were obtained. This possibly means that these words helped to enhance the teachers' courteousness towards the students and thus putting the students in a much better position to receive the feedback. Similar deductions can be made stating that that oral feedback works best when provided during a task as noted by mean score of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.44. Mendez, Cruz and del Rosario (2012) assert that oral feedback helps to prevent students from continuing making the same mistakes repeatedly and thus curbing impairment in students' learning abilities.

Table 3: Oral feedback

	Items	M	SD
1	Oral feedback is useful in correcting mispronunciation mistakes	3.34	0.75
2	Teachers in my class often use request-phrases such as "sorry", "pardon me", "excuse me" etc while oral providing feedback	3.21	0.85
3	I prefer to get oral feedback individually outside the classroom	3.06	1.20
4	Oral feedback works best when it is provided during a task.	3.12	0.44
5	Oral feedback is more effective when provided after an exercise.	3.09	1.03
6	Providing feedback individually is the most preferable way of offering oral feedback.	3.11	0.65
7	Providing feedback in groups is the most preferable way of offering oral feedback	3.34	1.34
8	Oral feedback makes me lose confidence in myself	3.02	0.24

Key: M: Mean Score   SD: Standard Deviation

4.5 Correlation Coefficient Test

Correlation coefficient test was conducted using Spearman correlation test. The main reason was that it allowed us to determine if teacher feedback methods and students' language skills were complimentary to each other. That is, to say that if the use of oral feedback improves the effectiveness of written feedback or vice versa. The same also applied to language skills, that is, if the improvements in the students' writing skills were correlated to improvements in the students' speaking skills.

Table 4: Correlation coefficient test

Variable	Written feedback	Oral feedback	Writing skills	Speaking skills
Written feedback	1			
Oral feedback	0.313**	1		
Writing skills	0.313**	0.765**	1	
Speaking skills	0.448**	0.468**	0.918**	1

** correlation significant at 0.01 level

The computed correlation coefficient test results provided significant evidence that the use of oral feedback improves the effectiveness of written feedback or vice versa. This was noted from a significant positive correlation of 0.313. On the other hand, improvements in the students' writing skills were noted to be positively and highly correlated to improvements in speaking skills by 0.918. This means that improvements in the students' writing skills were associated with improvements in the students' speaking skills.

4.6 Effects of Oral Feedback on University Students' Speaking Skills

The third objective of the study was to determine the effects of oral feedback on university students' speaking and writing skills. This was accomplished by using regression analysis through which the effects of oral feedback were regressed against the students' speaking skills (see Table 4). The computed results showed that oral feedback has positive effects on the students' speaking skills. This is because an increase in the provision of oral feedback by 1 unit was noted to cause an improvement in the students' speaking skills by 0.52 units. This can be supported by ideas given by Boyles (2017) which showed that oral feedback is instant and provide detailed information about how students can improve their speaking skills. The assumption was that changes in the students' speaking skills are only influenced by one type of teacher feedback, that is, oral feedback. The results showed that changes in the use of oral feedback accounts for 21.2% of changes in the students' speaking skills. This calls for the inclusion of other variables in future studies.

Table 5: The effects of oral feedback on university students' speaking skills

Variable	Coefficient	Std. error	t	Sig.
Constant	1.753	0.282	6.217	0.000
Oral feedback	0.520	0.090	5.769	0.000
$R^2 = 0.219$;		adjusted $R^2 = 0.212$;		ANOVA= 0.000

Dependant variable= writing skills,
independent variables= oral and written feedback

4.7 Effects of Written and Oral Feedback on University Students' Writing Skills

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the effects of written and oral feedback on university students' speaking and writing skills. This was accomplished by using regression analysis through which oral and written feedback were regressed against the students' writing skills (see Table 4). The provision of oral feedback was noted to be causing positive improvements in the students' writing skills. This is because a unit increase in the use of oral feedback resulted in an improvement in the students' writing skills 0.886 units. This can be supported by insights provided by Ahmad, Saeed and Salam (2013) which depicted that there is a positive relationship between oral feedback and the students' writing skills. Possible reasons can be that corrective feedback (written and oral feedback) helps students to air their views during classroom discussions and participate actively during classroom activities. The other reason can be that feedback causes students to have better understanding of the taught concepts.

Table 6: The effects of oral feedback on university students' writing skills

Variable	Coefficient	Std. error	t	Sig.
Constant	0.881	0.200	4.409	0.000
Oral feedback	0.826	0.058	14.308	0.000
Written feedback	-0.049	0.063	-0.769	0.443
$R^2 = 0.586$;	adjusted $R^2 =0.582$;			ANOVA= 0.000

Dependant variable= writing skills,
 independent variables= oral and written feedback

The use of written feedback was observed to be posing negative effects on the students' writing skills. This is because a unit increase in the use of written feedback resulted in a decrease in the students' writing skills (performance) by 0.049 units. These results are contrast to the findings established by Ahmad, Saeed and Salam (2013) but in support of the findings made by Dobbs and Arnold (2009). This is because written feedback reprimands students and causes them to continue engaging in the disruptive behaviour.

On the other hand, the use of oral and written feedback can be said to account for 58.2% of the changes in in the students' writing skills. Meaning that 42.8% of the changes in in the students' writing skills is explained by other variables.

4.8 Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the variables in examining the effect of teacher's feedback on students' language skills at university level. The decision criterion is to accept variables with alpha values which are at least 0.70 is reliable (Riege, 2003). It was noted that all the variables were highly reliable (see Table 7). In other words, the variables had high internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Table 7: Reliability test

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Decision
Written feedback	0.865	Highly reliable
Oral feedback	0.838	Highly reliable
Writing skills	0.778	Highly reliable
Speaking skills	0.827	Highly reliable

Overall Cronbach's alpha value = 0.866; number of items = 4

5. Conclusion

Teacher feedback is an essential component of learning at any academic level. Thus, its availability, provision and use can help to enhance students' language skills. Positive feedback is highly referable as opposed to negative feedback because the latter can discourage and or demotivate students to work harder. Written and oral feedback are the widely used forms of teacher feedback amongst Department of the English language students. But the most preferred form of teacher feedback used by the students is oral feedback.

Improvement of students' language skills were mainly determined by the amount, timing and mode of the feedback used by the university teachers. However, the effectiveness of teacher feedback was mainly influenced by the amount of the feedback followed by the timing of the feedback and lastly the mode of the feedback. The students wanted their teachers to focus on structural mistakes and lexical mistakes so as enhance their understanding of sentence structure and style, and vocabulary and expressions.

Oral feedback has positive effects on the students' speaking skills because it often provides detailed information about how students can improve their speaking skills. Moreover, oral feedback also helps students to air their views during classroom discussions and participate actively during classroom activities. In addition, the provision of oral feedback also resulted in an improvement in the students' writing skills. However, the use of written feedback posed negative effects on the students' writing skills mainly because written feedback reprimands students and causes them to continue engaging in the disruptive behaviour.

6. Recommendations

In line with these obtained findings and conclusions, the following recommendations can be made;

- University teachers are encouraged to use oral feedback more but, in most cases, it is always important for university teachers to use both oral and written feedback depending on the situation.
- It is important for university teachers to provide feedback at an appropriate time, in an unconducive manner, clarify the feedback and make sure that the students comprehend the feedback.
- Feedback strategies should focus on dealing more with students' structural mistakes and lexical problems. This involves coming up with methods that enhance students' understanding of sentence structure and style, and vocabulary and expressions.

- Students must be encouraged to write things down so that they can easily remember them. This also includes encouraging students to use different forms of communication such as gestures to help other students to understand what they say.
- Teachers must also improve the effectiveness of written feedback by making sure that it does not contain a lot of discouraging comments.

7. Suggestions for Future Studies

The results of the study have provided a satisfactory understanding of the effects of teacher feedback on university students' language skills. However, the estimated regression model requires that additional factors be included in estimating both the effects of oral feedback on students' writing and speaking skills, and the effects of written feedback on students' writing skills. Such factors can include things like attitude, competence, feedback mode, timing and amount etc.

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