The Impact of Explicit Feedback on EFL High School Students Engaged in Writing Tasks

El impacto de la retroalimentación explícita en tareas de escritura en lengua inglesa de estudiantes de secundaria

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The aim of this article is to examine the impact of feedback on content and organization in writing tasks developed by learners of English as a foreign language. The type of study is qualitative and the research design is a case study. One study involved three students and a female teacher, and the second consisted of three students and a male teacher. Research instruments involved were a structured interview, a writing task in class and document analysis. The findings show that students feel motivated to re-write a writing task when the teacher provides feedback on content and organization. Moreover, there was evidence of improvement in the students' writing when they incorporated the teacher's comments.

Key words: Feedback, motivation, writing, writing tasks.

El objetivo de este estudio es examinar el impacto de la retroalimentación, orientada a contenidos y organización, en escritos desarrollados por aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera. El tipo de investigación es cualitativa y el diseño un estudio de casos. Un caso se conformó con tres estudiantes y una profesora, el segundo quedó compuesto por tres estudiantes y un profesor. En relación con los instrumentos, se utilizaron una entrevista estructurada, una tarea de escritura y el análisis documental. Los resultados muestran que los estudiantes se sienten motivados a reescribir una tarea de escritura cuando el profesor comenta las ideas y la organización de esta. Además se evidenció una mejora en los escritos de los estudiantes al incluir las sugerencias del profesor.

Palabras clave: escritura, motivación, retroalimentación, tareas escritas.

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Introduction

Many issues may happen with the teacher and learner interaction during the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning process. Thus, teachers are always concerned about what is occurring with their learners during lessons. They want students to learn from their mistakes; in this case, language teachers expect students to learn a new language by being aware of the aspects they need to improve. That is why they provide comments to learners when correcting. Some of the teachers do respond (in written or oral form) to their students’ tasks without noticing the effect it may produce on the students. The researchers of this study, during their pre-service experience, have noticed that language teachers provide these comments in different ways: some of them mark the text with ticks or crosses, while others provide the correct answer or just refer to an aspect that needs to be improved (vocabulary, grammar, or other).

The last five years spent at different schools and in educational contexts have helped us to notice that learners are not conscious that receiving feedback gives them the opportunity to be led down the right path, hence, the potential to learn and improve their writing competence. Therefore, if students are not involved in understanding the feedback provided, they will not improve their language competence, regardless of the amount of time they spent trying to learn it. This reality implies that improving is a matter of personal commitment and not a matter of time. Learners need to apply those comments given by their teachers to their learning process in order to avoid committing the same mistakes over and over. Hence, in order to better understand the impact of informing the students about their weaknesses or strengths during the process of learning a foreign language, the researchers consider it relevant to carry out an in-depth research project. For this reason, in this study we examined in detail the impact of explicit feedback provided on content and organization in writing tasks, and whether this response motivates EFL learners to improve.

In the first part of this article, the reader will find a review of the principal concepts of this research such as feedback, writing, feedback on writing and motivation. In the second part, methodological aspects are described. In the third part, all the data collected are revealed and then analysed. In the last part, a summary of the conclusions is presented.

Concept Framework

In order to define feedback in second language acquisition, the concept of acquisition will be clarified. Acquisition is considered as the use and understanding of a language in terms of conveying messages instead of learning (Krashen, 1981). The concept of feedback on second language acquisition will be revised.

Feedback

According to Ur (2006), “feedback, in the context of teaching in general, is the information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance” (p. 242). The author states that feedback is the information that explains how well or poorly learners performed. The main objective is to identify the potential areas where some improvements could be made as well as to foster students’ autonomy.

In the same context, Aparicio (2007) adds that feedback is the information given by the teacher to students about their performance. The author suggests that feedback is the information an instructor gives to his learners about their performance so they are able to check themselves and be more successful in fulfilling the goals of a course.

Gattegno (as cited in Nunan, 1995) suggests that feedback is a fundamental element during the teaching and learning process of each individual learner since it allows not only the correction of errors during a written assignment, but also the establishment of