ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Effects of Teacher' Feedback on Learners: Perspectives of English Majors at a Private University

**Anh Nguyet Thi Nguyen[+],
Hang Dieu Thi Nguyen**

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Vietnam
[+]*Corresponding author ● Email: anhntn@ntt.edu.vn*

ABSTRACT

Feedback is claimed to be a great contributor to learners' academic achievements. However, in real-life classrooms, teachers' feedback-giving practices do not always match learners' expectations, resulting in adverse effects on learners. This study investigates the frequency, the timing, the manners that the teachers of English majors at Nguyen Tat Thanh University (EFL teachers at NTTU henceforth) delivered feedback on their students' oral performance, their feedback contents and the influence of their feedback-giving practices on the students' learning motivation and language achievements. The study adopted a mixed methods research design. The quantitative data were collected from the observation with 10 classes delivered by 10 EFL teachers at NTTU and from the interviews with 30 students attending the 10 classes observed with 3 students per class. The interviews also provided targeted qualitative data. The findings show that not all the teachers recognized the importance of feedback. Some ignored or gave insufficient feedback during teacher-student interactions. In some cases, the teachers' feedback was too general to help students make any improvements in their performance. Some even provided feedback in a way that negatively influenced the students' psychology and learning motivation. The findings also reveal the students' expectations for frequent, timely, constructive feedback given in encouraging manners. The study finally makes some recommendations regarding feedback giving for NTTU teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feedback - teachers' responses to what students say or write (Harmer, 2015) - is widely recognized as having a formative effect on learning and thus, treated as a tool of educational guidance. In language teaching and learning contexts, feedback is considered as a fundamental part of classroom activities (Ha & Murray, 2021; Lyster et al., 2013), greatly contributing to learners' success (Hattie, 2013; Hattie & Yates, 2014). In fact, feedback may even have more effects on learners' language achievement than any other single factor (Black & William, 2010; Ha & Murray, 2020). That explains why feedback in language teaching and learning has been drawing extensive attention from educators and researchers. Most studies recently conducted on this topic focus on the importance of feedback in general and oral corrective feedback in particular (Ha et al., 2021; Ha & Murray, 2020; Ha & Murray, 2021; Hattie & Yates, 2014; Lyster et al., 2013; Hattie, 2013; Black & Wiliam, 2010). Some other researchers investigate the relationship between motivation and oral corrective feedback in English as a foreign language classroom (Guo & Zhou, 2021; Zouaidi & Hermessi, 2019). However, not many studies address feedback-related issues in Vietnamese educational contexts. In reality, it is shown that in language classrooms in Vietnam, teachers' feedback-providing practices do not always match their learners' needs and expectations due to the gaps in their beliefs about feedback

(Ha & Murray, 2020; Ha et al., 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). In their studies, which were conducted at primary and secondary schools in Vietnam, these researchers point out some mismatches between teachers and learners' beliefs on feedback, which result in adverse effects on learners' motivation and outcomes of the teaching and learning. Whether a similar problem exists at universities has, so far, not been investigated though. The current study, therefore, aims to investigate the frequency, the timing, the manners the EFL teachers at NTTU deliver feedback on their students' oral performance, the contents of their feedback and the effects their feedback-giving practices on the students' learning motivation and language achievement. The findings hopefully raise teachers' awareness of students' feedback-receiving needs and expectations, and adjust their feedback-providing habits as a consequence to optimize the interactions with students in English classes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Feedback in educational contexts

Feedback is defined as information given to learners about their performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance (Ur, 1996; Harmer, 2015; Dan, 2023). Feedback can be divided into various types depending on classification criteria. Harmer (2015) classifies feedback according to its objectives, mode and timing. In terms of its objectives, feedback can be *comments* teachers give on what students have said/written or on how they have said/written it for the assessment purpose, feedback can also be *corrections* teachers offer when a student makes a mistake; regarding its forms, feedback can be provided either in an *oral* mode - teachers' oral responses to learners' spoken errors; or in a *written* mode - teachers' written comments on students' written assignments; or by means of *gestures* - body language used as responses to students' performance; as for its timing, feedback can be either *immediate*, i.e. given as soon as an error occurs or *delayed*, i.e. not provided until the end of an activity or a lesson (Harmer, 2015). Within the scope of this article, feedback means any of teachers' responses, either provided orally or expressed by means of body language or gestures, to students' oral performance for comment, assessment and correction purposes.

Focusing on feedback patterns, Lyster and Ranta (1997) identify six feedback types, namely *explicit corrections*, *recasts*, *elicitation*, *clarification requests*, *metalinguistic feedback* and *repetition*. Herra and Kulinska's (2018) feedback taxonomy, however, consists of seven types, including the six ones listed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and *non-verbal clues*. Though *recasts* are the most frequently used, all of the feedback types are effective and feedback efficacy greatly depends on learners, teachers' feedback delivery manners and feedback-giving conditions (Li, 2010; Lyster et al., 2013; Nassaji, 2017).

The issues of what makes good feedback and how feedback should be delivered effectively have also been the concerns of many researchers. Regarding feedback contents, Harmer (2015) asserts that effective feedback should contain two elements: (1) *assessment* which is meant to inform learners about how well or badly they have performed and (2) *correction* which is intended to help learners realize what they have done right, what they have done wrong and to give better alternatives to the wrong. In evaluation of feedback efficacy, Dan (2023), Byrnes (2021), Wang and Li (2020), Ha (2017), Brown (2016), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Harmer (2015) agree on the three most important evaluation criteria, including (1) being specific and clear about what learners do well and what they need to improve, (2) offering supportive suggestions and providing specific actions learners could take to improve their performance, and (3) focusing on learners' effort to fulfill the task even if the outcome is imperfect. The researchers also give further explanations for their advice. Firstly, general feedback like *Great job, Good, Well done* or *Almost there* is easy for teachers to give, but not always easy for recipients to understand; therefore, feedback detailing exactly what students are doing well or what they need to improve can be definitely more effective. Secondly, students will be frustrated if teachers only let them know their work needs improvement without giving details on how exactly the mistake might be fixed, so specific and constructive suggestions can provide feedback recipients with some ideas about what changes they should make for subsequent improvement. Finally, encouragement is essential to motivate students to succeed, so by praising students for their effort to complete the task assigned, teachers can boost students' motivation and enhance their engagement in learning. With regard to feedback frequency, Harmer (2015) divides mistakes into three main types, including (1) *slips* which are mistakes students can correct by themselves once they are pointed out to them, (2) *errors* which are mistakes that students cannot correct by themselves and which therefore need explanations, and (3) *attempts* which are mistakes students make because they do not yet know the correct way of doing it. As suggested by Harmer (2015), due to the nature of each mistake type, teachers should only focus on

errors while ignoring slips and attempts. That means not all mistakes should be corrected. As for feedback timing, Dan (2023), Byrnes (2021), Wang and Li (2020), Ha (2017), Brown (2016), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Harmer (2015) emphasize that feedback loses its impacts if delayed too long and immediate and more frequent feedback helps keep students on track for the goals; so timely feedback always works. Regarding this point, Harmer (2015) further explains that the timing of feedback largely depends on the learning goals and the learning stages. According to him, immediate feedback, also called on-the-spot correction or online correction, is better when students are learning new knowledge, so it should be applied in practice stages when accuracy is the main focus; however, slightly delayed feedback, also referred to as after-the-event correction or offline correction, can actually be helpful when students are applying new knowledge, so it is suitable for production stages when fluency is the target to be achieved. In terms of feedback language/gestures, the researchers also remind teachers to use positive, constructive and non-judgmental language and/or gestures even when addressing areas that need improvement because the language teachers use and the actions they do have the ability to lift students up or break them down; that is why teachers should be careful and selective in the language they use to give feedback.

2.2. Motivation in language learning

Gardner (2010) defines language learning motivation as the blending of desire, effort, and enjoyment to learn a language. Motivation in general is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it (Dornyei, 2000). In educational contexts, learning motivation can help direct learners' behavior towards particular goals, lead to their increased effort and energy, enhance their initiation of and persistence in activities, lead to their improved performance (Ormrod, 2007). Demotivation, on the contrary, is the dark side of motivation which affects students' acquisition of knowledge and skills, even if they have the most outstanding abilities (Al-Said, 2023). Motivation can be of two main types: *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*. People with intrinsic motivation do an activity for the pleasure and the satisfaction it brings without an external drive while those who exhibit extrinsic motivation perform an activity to attain certain outcomes which are not related to the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). That means while intrinsic motivation comes from within, extrinsic motivation comes from outside an individual. Though intrinsic and extrinsic motivation cannot coexist as they are total opposites, the trick for teachers is in how to balance the use of extrinsic reinforcement in a way that can foster learners' intrinsic motivation (Alderman, 2004).

According to Harati et al. (2021), Ekiz and Kulmetov (2016), Tuan (2011) and Petsche (2009) there are a number of internal and external factors affecting learners' interest in classrooms and their wish for learning. As mentioned by these researchers, lack of belief in abilities and knowledge, physical/mental problems are some of the crucial internal motivational factors while teachers, learning circumstances and friends are some of the key external impacts on students' motivation. Among the above-listed factors, teachers are the one that learners' motivation to learn is highly dependent on. As further explained by the researchers, teachers' appropriate teaching manners and interesting teaching techniques supported with timely guidance and advice can arouse, maintain and boost students' interests in the subject even when it is so dull and boring, teachers' appropriate behavior towards learners can exert huge impacts on learners' psychological condition, and teachers' effective feedback in particular and teacher-learner interactions in general can keep students motivated since they know their teachers follow their individual development. Regarding the relationship between teachers' feedback and students' learning motivation, Al-Said (2023), Guo and Zhou (2012) emphasize that frequent, high-quality and timely feedback as well as necessary help and support from teachers can keep students motivated and involved in learning activities.

2.3. Language achievement

Achievement in language learning is defined by Asvio and Arpinus (2017) as the acquisition of language knowledge or language skills developed by a subject. Language achievement lays a foundation for the development and improvement of language performance and language proficiency, which is the ability to use the language in real-world situations and which is the goal of most language learners (Asvio & Arpinus, 2017).

Most studies investigating feedback-related issues conducted during the past two decades have recognized the important role feedback plays in teacher-learner interactions and students' learning success. Teachers' feedback that is given to students plays a key role in their academic performance (Maharma & Abusa'aleek, 2022). Feedback is greatly essential and beneficial for learners' language development since it helps highlight the strengths and the weaknesses of the progress they are making (Rathan, 2021; Herra & Kulinska, 2018; Nassaji, 2017; Li, 2010; Lyster

et al., 2013; Mackey & Goo, 2007). More specifically, feedback helps learners understand where they stand and what they need to improve; effective feedback is, therefore, helpful in that it not only motivates students to work harder to achieve their goals but also contributively shapes learners' behavior and builds up the relationships between teachers and learners (Dan, 2023; Rathan, 2021). Feedback provided by teachers can be positive or negative. *Positive feedback* is praise or compliments to reassure that learners are on their way to whatever their goal is and to highlight what they are doing well whereas *negative feedback* is mainly criticism that points out what learners are doing wrong (Rathan, 2021). Both positive and negative feedback assert certain influence over learners and their learning achievement. While positive feedback is primarily used as an important educational tool to inspire learners to keep up what they are doing, to give them a sense of accomplishment and to increase their motivation, engagement, eagerness and confidence in learning, negative feedback may lower their self-esteem, negatively affecting their psychology (Dan, 2023; Rathan, 2021; Pankonin & Myers, 2017). However, negative feedback can also be helpful in aiding self-assessment which helps learners realize where they are for the improvement of their later performance (Dan, 2023). Essentially the same conclusion about negative feedback is also reached by Bangert-Drowns et al. (1991). In their research about instructional effects of feedback in test-like events, they realize that "*when an item was answered incorrectly during instruction, it was much more likely to be answered correctly in the feedback condition than in the no-feedback condition*" (p. 232). Rathan (2021), therefore, suggests that teachers should maintain a balance in their use of both negative and positive feedback in real teaching practices.

Regarding the relationship between learning motivation and learning achievement, Rathan (2021), Zouaidi and Hermessi (2019), Yanuarti and Rosmayanti (2018), Zimmerman (2013), Mega et al. (2014) and Dornyei, (2000) assert that motivation plays an essential part in students' achievement and commitment, so their language achievement is highly determined by their learning motivation. Learners who are sufficiently motivated are usually seen successful in learning a language (Mercer et al., 2012; Dornyei & Chan, 2013; Alrabai, 2016; Alamer & Lee, 2019). However, the relation between learning motivation and language achievement is mutual. The growth in learners' language achievement is usually the result of the growth in their motivation and learners' increased interest in school subjects is the consequence of their growing knowledge (Mercer et al., 2012; Dornyei & Chan, 2013; Alrabai, 2016; Alamer & Lee, 2019). That explains why motivation is considered the first condition for achieving desired learning outcomes and the driving force behind the educational process.

The studies reviewed above have shown the influential role teachers' feedback plays on learners' learning motivation and language achievement. However, not much research regarding feedback-related issues in Vietnamese tertiary educational contexts have been conducted so far. There is, therefore, a need for more research to gain deeper insights into how university teachers offer feedback on their students' performance and in what ways their feedback influences the feedback recipients. Thus, the current study is carried out to meet that urgent need. It seeks to address the two following research questions: (1) In what ways do EFL teachers at NTTU deliver feedback on their students' oral performance in terms of frequency, timing, contents and manners?; (2) To what extent do their feedback-delivering practices affect their students' learning motivation and language achievement?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were collected by means of classroom observation and face-to-face interviews with the students to investigate the frequency, the timing, the manners that the EFL teachers at NTTU delivered feedback on their students' oral performance and the contents of the feedback they provided. Qualitative data were also obtained via student interviews to obtain their opinions about their teacher's feedback-giving practices and the influence of these practices on their learning motivation and language achievement.

3.1. Participants

Participating in the study were 10 out of 18 EFL teachers at NTTU and 30 students who were taught by the 10 subject teachers. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms (T1 - T10 and S1 - S30) were used. Convenience sampling technique was employed to select the teachers. They were the ones who were scheduled to have classes between June 12th, 2023 and July 1st, 2023. The subject students were selected by means of purposive sampling technique. Three students who had the most interactions with the teachers during the observation time in each of the observed classes were requested for the oral interviews right after the observation. Participation in class was seen as a criterion for selecting the subject students because participation or engagement in class is the observable behavior

or evidence of motivation (Parrish, 2022). The researchers' purpose was to discover whether the students' motivation for in-class participation was boosted or diminished by their teachers' feedback-providing practices.

3.2. Research instruments

The data were collected via two sources: classroom observation and individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Each of the subject teachers was observed one time for around one hour. The observation was meant to investigate (1) whether the teacher provided feedback on every of his/her students' oral responses to his/her requests or questions during the observation time, (2) the timing he/she gave the feedback, (3) the feedback contents, (4) the language he/she used as well as (5) the gestures he/she showed when giving feedback in each case. Follow-up interviews with the participation of three students selected from each of the observed classes were conducted right after the observation was finished. The semi-structured interview consisted of 12 questions grouped into 4 categories. Group 1 including Questions 1 - 3 was meant to gain information on the teachers' feedback-giving frequency, the students' opinions and expectations on how frequently they would like to receive feedback from their teachers. Questions 4 - 6 put in Group 2 were intended to get data on when the teachers provided feedback in the observed classes and when they often provide feedback in their interactions with students, the students' views and wishes regarding feedback timing. Group 3 with Questions 7 - 9 was designed to explore what information the teachers gave and normally give in their feedback, whether the feedback can help the students make any improvements in their performance and what information the students expect to receive from the teachers' feedback. Group 4 consisting of Questions 10 - 12 was aimed to investigate the language/gestures the teachers used and usually use when interacting with the students and the effects of their language/gestures on the students' learning motivation. To prevent any possible misunderstanding which may be a threat to the validity of the data collected, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese language.

3.3. Data collection

The 10 lessons scheduled to be between June 12th, 2023 and July 1st, 2023 delivered by the 10 selected teachers were observed by the two researchers and a supporting teacher. Each lesson was observed for around one hour, producing approximately 10 hours of observation data. During the observation, information on how many students and which students were having oral interactions with the teacher; whether the teacher gave feedback on every of the students' responses; when and how he/she gave feedback in each case was ticked and noted in the pre-prepared observation form. On completion of each observation, interviews with three students selected were conducted separately by the three observing teachers. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' notice and permission.

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data on the teacher's feedback frequency, timing, contents and manners were statistically analyzed and described by means of SPSS software. Qualitative data on the students' opinions about the teacher's feedback-giving habits, the effects of these practices on their learning motivation and their language achievement as well as their expectations regarding their teachers' feedback-providing practices were thematically analyzed and reported according to the interview question groups with the support of Nvivo software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below presents the information obtained from classroom observation, including the total number of interactions between the 10 subject teachers with their students in the 10 observed classes during the observation time, the teachers' feedback frequency, timing, contents and language/gestures.

Table 1. Classroom Observation Results

T.	Number of interactions with students	With no feedback provided	With feedback provided							Language Gestures
			N	Timing	Content					
					With no specific information	With specific information				
						Str.	Wea.	Sol.		

T1	7	5 71%	2 29%	As soon as errors occur				2 100%	neutral
T2	5	2 40%	3 60%	After utterances				3 100% only give keys	neutral
T3	6	6 100%	0 0%						
T4	7	7 100%	0 0%						
T5	5	3 60%	2 40%	After utterances	2 100%				neutral
T6	4	2 50%	2 50%	After utterances	2 100%				neutral
T7	4	4 100%	0 0%						
T8	4	4 100%	0 0%						
T9	6	0 0%	6 100%	After utterances	4 66.6%	2 33.4%	2 33.4%		neutral & negative
T10	6	0 0%	6 100%	After activities	2 33.4%		4 66.6%	4 66.6%	
10	**54**	**33 61%**	**21 39%**	A.s.a. 1 / Af.utt. 4 / Af.act. 1	**10**	**2**	**6**	**9**	**neu.** 7 / **neg.** 1

Feedback frequency

Table 1 shows quite disappointing results concerning feedback frequency. As seen from the Table, up to 61% of the students' performance was not assessed and/or corrected by the teachers whereas only 39% of the students' answers received feedback from them. Only 2 out of 10 teachers showed their awareness of the feedback role by responding to 100% of their students' answers. Another 2 teachers, accounting for 20%, provided feedback on less than 40% of the students' responses. More disappointingly, as high as 40% of the teachers totally ignored feedback when interacting with their students.

The analysis of the student interview data revealed a result somewhat contrary to what was noted from the classroom observation. 27 out of 30 students interviewed said *Yes* to Question 1 - *Did your teacher give feedback on every of your responses in today's lesson*? With an attempt to discover the reason leading to such differences in the results collected from the two sources, the researchers realized that such utterances as *Ah ha*, *OK*, *Thank you* or such actions as nodding heads, smiling were considered teachers' feedback by the students. With that way of understanding the concept of feedback, most of the student respondents gave the response *Yes* to Question 2 - *Does he/she usually do so?* They confirmed that their teachers always provided feedback on their oral performance. They also expressed their satisfaction about this habit. However, some students gave quite opposite ideas. Student 10, one of the three students who said *No* to Question 1, said:

"My teacher usually says nothing after I give answers to her questions. I want her and other teachers to give feedback on whatever I say or write because I myself do not know if what I do is right or wrong. Different students have different problems, so teachers should talk to students about their own mistakes, instead of just correcting some common mistakes like what my teacher did in today's lesson."

As much as 93% of the student respondents shared Student 10's idea when answering Question 3 - *Do you want your teachers to give feedback on every of your answers? Why or why not?* They all expressed that they wanted to be corrected as much as possible and they did not mind being corrected. Evidently, there exist some mismatches between what teachers do and what students expect in terms of feedback frequency. That more than half of the students' answers were not evaluated and their errors were not corrected can lead to negative effects on learners, and their language achievement can be diminished as a consequence since frequent feedback can keep students motivated and involved in learning activities (Al-Said, 2023; Guo & Zhou, 2012) and effective feedback can result in students' better academic performance (Maharma & Abusa'aleek, 2022).

It is recommended that in giving feedback, EFL teachers at NTTU should distinguish errors from slips and attempts and offer constructive error corrections as much as possible to help students improve their performance. Besides dealing with the most common problems that students have, teachers should also focus on individual student's serious errors - the errors which can cause misunderstanding in communication or the errors which are closely related to the target language point in the lessons (Harmer, 2015).

Feedback timing

Table 2. Observed Teachers' Feedback Timing

N (Teachers)	Teachers' feedback timing					
	As soon as errors occur		After students finish utterances		After activities finish	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
6	1	16.7%	4	66.6%	1	16.7%

As noted from Tables 1 and 2, among the 6 teachers who did respond to their students' answers, 4 teachers, making up 66.6%, provided feedback immediately after the students finished their utterances. One teacher, comprising 16.7%, always interrupted the students' performance to give explanations on a point that they had just mentioned or to ask them one or two questions about what they had just talked about or simply to say such words as *Ah ha*, *OK*, *Good*. Another 16.7% of the teachers did not respond to the students' performance until the activity they were assigned to do finished.

The information gained from the student interviews showed slight differences, however. All of the feedback recipients in the observed classes, when responding to Question 4 - *Did your teacher provide feedback as soon as you made an error, or after you finished an utterance or after you finished the activity or until the end of today's lesson?*, selected the third option. When asked for clarification on their responses, Student 1 - one of the students interrupted for feedback by the teacher - commented:

"She often takes notes of our mistakes during our performance. When we finish our task, she helps all the students in class correct one or two most common pronunciation mistakes we have made. But sometimes, she interrupts us like what she did today."

Student 18, whose answers were commented right after he finished the sentences containing errors, shared: *"My teacher waited until I finished my activities to give feedback."* When reminded that in the observed lesson, feedback was given to him as soon as he finished his utterances, he showed some embarrassment and explained that in fact he did not remember exactly when feedback was provided for him.

Concerning the students' opinions about the teachers' feedback timing, Student 1 revealed that the teacher's intervention made her forget what she had intended to say, and she did not like that habit. In the same vein, Student 2 also expressed her dissatisfaction with the timing the teacher delivered feedback. She voiced:

"Being intervened during my performance is an unpleasant experience which may distract me from my on-going task and reduce my mood for learning. This teacher has the habit of stopping us when we are speaking, and I don't really like it that way."

The two students' ideas meant that they did not like being interrupted or intervened during their performance. This viewpoint was shared by all of the students interviewed when they answered Question 6 - *When do you want your teacher to give feedback*? The analysis of the student interview data also showed the students' preferences for after-the-event feedback. As explained by the respondents, feedback provided right after they completed an utterance or a task could help them recognize their errors immediately while feedback delayed until the end of the lesson, on the contrary, did not help them much since they might have forgotten the errors they made by the time the feedback was provided.

The EFL teachers at NTTU are advised to take the students' aforementioned ideas in consideration when giving feedback. However, they should also be reminded that whether immediate or delayed feedback should be used depends much on what lesson stages they are at and what types of errors they are dealing with (Harmer, 2015). As far as lesson stages are mentioned, on-the-spot feedback could be suitable at practice stages where most activities are intended for students' accuracy and mostly consist of short questions and answers. Overall performance of such activities may not be influenced by immediate feedback, therefore. By contrast, after-the-event feedback would be the best choice at production stages which prioritize students' communicative competence and thus, activities are designed for fluency purposes. The activities at these stages are often longer than those at the practice stages; therefore, immediate feedback may hinder the students' flow of speech (Ha & Nguyen, 2021). Regarding error types, if students mispronounce or misuse words, teachers should wait until the end of the utterance or the activity. In case students have problems with ideas or vocabulary to express their ideas, teachers can provide immediate support. However, to prevent this situation, teachers are advised to provide students with necessary vocabulary, structures, ideas related to the topic they are going to talk about at the pre-teaching stages. With more complicated errors which may take time for explanations, waiting until the end of the lesson is the best choice.

Feedback contents

As reported in Table 1, only 39% of the students' answers received feedback from the teachers. Among the 21 pieces of feedback provided, there were up to 10 cases in which the teachers' feedback was only general comments like *Good job*, *Well done*. Among the 11 remaining feedback-provided cases, two pieces of feedback were given with the students' strengths and weaknesses pointed out; however, no solutions for error improvement were suggested. In the other 3 cases, the teacher showed correct answers as soon as the students finished their utterances without justifying why the answers should be so and why the students' responses were not accepted. In the two remaining cases, feedback was given as soon as problems occurred. The teacher interrupted her students' performance to give corrections without pinpointing their strong and weak points. Teacher 10 was one of the two teachers who gave feedback on 100% of their students' performance. 4 out of 6 responses given by his students were commented with their weaknesses spotted in details and practical solutions for their improvement constructively offered. Regretfully, he did not either detail what his students had done well or praise their efforts.

Students' responses to Question 7 - *When giving feedback in today's lesson, did your teacher pinpoint your strengths, your weaknesses, the weakness causes and actions to be taken for your improvement?* - and Question 8 - *Does he/she usually do so?* revealed similar disappointing results. 27 out of 30 students, comprising 90%, answered *No* to Question 7 and a similar number of students said *Yes* to Question 8. They added that what they received from the teachers as responses to their performance in the observed lessons were *Good*, *Good job*, *Thank you*, *Yes* and it is the teachers' habit to use these phrases in teacher-student interactions. When asked to express their feeling towards such type of feedback, 4 students said they were content with this praise and encouragement. Student 13, for example, said:

"*My teacher always says 'Good job' after I finish my answer. She uses this phrase not only in today's lesson but in all of her classes. I like that because it gives me a real sense of achievement and thus, makes me feel encouraged.*"

However, the majority of students gave completely opposite opinions. Take student 14's idea as an example:

"*At first, I had the feeling of satisfaction when receiving comments like Good, Very good, or Good job from the teacher. But she keeps using these phrases, even when I know my answer is not perfect. This makes me confused and a little disappointed because I need to know my problems as well as solutions to the problems. Actually, I cannot learn anything from such feedback.*"

Like Student 14, Student 17 also showed his disapproval of such praising phrases but in a stronger manner:

"I come here to learn, so I expect my teacher to pinpoint my mistakes and show me the ways to correct them. Phrases like Good job, Well done cannot help me in the way I want."

It is undeniable that encouragement is important in motivating learners, but feedback needs not only to be supportive but also to be work-specific and truthful (Dan, 2023; Byrnes, 2021; Wang & Li, 2020; Ha, 2017; Brown, 2016; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Harmer, 2015). With that viewpoint, such phrases as *Good job, Good, Well done* or *Almost there* are only empty praise from which students can hardly learn anything. It is, therefore, recommended that EFL teachers at NTTU should use such general feedback within limits.

Three out of 30 students, accounting for 10%, answered *Yes* to Questions 7 and 8, which was not much different from what was noted during the observation time. One student confirmed that the observed teacher did mention what she had done right and what she had done wrong in her performance but he did not suggest how she should correct the wrong. Another student stated that when giving feedback, her teacher only focused on her mistakes and explained to her how the mistakes should be corrected without mentioning her strong points. The other student revealed that whether the teacher gave explanations when offering corrections or not mostly depended on the mistake type he made. He detailed:

"With our pronunciation mistakes, the teacher asks us to repeat after her in chorus two or three times. With grammar mistakes, she shows the correct answers and reminds us about that grammar rule. With listening or reading comprehension questions, she shows the correct answers without any explanations. In speaking activities, she usually says nothing other than 'Good, Thank you'."

The students' responses to Question 9 - *What information do you expect your teachers to give in their feedback?* sound the alarm about what they urgently need regarding feedback contents that EFL teachers at NTTU should be highly aware of. All of them expressed their expectations for feedback through which they know where they are and what they should do to improve their competence. Student 26, representative of all the student respondents, voiced:

"The feedback the teacher gives is not clear enough. Such sentences as Your answer is wrong or Your answer is not correct let me know that my answer is imperfect, but they cannot spot what is wrong with my answer and why it is wrong. I really want my teachers to let me know both my strengths and weaknesses. Teachers should also tell me why I'm wrong and how I can correct my mistakes. The feedback I receive from my teachers is not specific enough to help me improve my competence."

When further asked whether they were demotivated if the teachers kept pointing out their weaknesses, almost all the students said *No*. As Student 11 shared:

"I don't feel demotivated or discouraged when my teachers point out my mistakes. I know that the teachers do so because they want me to make progress in my study. Therefore, I don't mind receiving negative feedback."

Evidently, feedback EFL teachers at NTTU give can hardly be assessed as being effective since they do not contain the required information. With such feedback, students' language acquisition can hardly be enhanced. The teachers are highly recommended to make their feedback formative, specific, supportive and truthful as suggested by Harmer (2015) and other researchers. That means their feedback to students must be sufficiently detailed and focused to enable their students to monitor their individual progress and further their academic development. They should also maintain a balance in their use of negative and positive feedback since both of these feedback types benefit its recipients in their own ways (Dan, 2023; Rathan, 2021; Pankonin & Myers, 2017).

Feedback language and gestures

Teachers' feedback language/gestures were the criterion that received the most encouraging results from both classroom observation and student interviews. As shown in Table 1, 5 among the 6 teachers seen to give feedback on the students' performance used neutral words and showed appropriate gestures when interacting with the students. Teacher 9 was the only one that occasionally used negative words in a rather threatening manner when her students showed their hesitation in giving answers to her questions or when their performance was imperfect.

This result was confirmed by the students' responses to Question 10 - *Did your teacher use positive, negative or neutral language/gestures when giving feedback in today's lesson?* and Question 11 - *Does he/she usually do so?* Take Student 29's idea as an example:

"My teacher uses nice words when giving feedback. She speaks to us in a friendly, gentle way and we like that."

However, Student 25, one of Teacher 9's students, expressed his unpleasant feeling towards the way she interacted in class:

"She is a hot-tempered teacher. She usually gets angry with us, especially when we do not give answers in the way she wants, which really scares me. I never say anything in her class unless I'm forced to."

The language/gestures teachers use when providing feedback can strongly influence the value it has for student learning (Harmer, 2015). Obviously, feedback given in such discouraging manners by Teacher 9 negatively affects the students' psychology and greatly reduces their motivation, their engagement and their language achievement accordingly. Though not a common phenomenon at NTTU, such use of inappropriate language and gestures is still a drawback that needs serious attention and practical solutions from the teacher herself and the people involved.

In responding to Question 12 - *Do you think your learning motivation is influenced by the language your teachers use and the gestures they show?*, 100% of the students said *Yes*. They added that they felt more encouraged and confident when teachers communicated with them using nice words in gentle manners; on the contrary, they lost their confidence and motivation for learning if teachers used bad words or frowned at them disapprovingly when they made mistakes.

The students' responses show that the language the teachers use and the gestures they show when giving feedback have a huge psychological and motivational impact on them. Though most of the teachers conformed with classroom interaction norms in terms of language and gestures, there were still some cases in which the teachers did not perform properly when addressing the students' errors, which negatively influenced the criticized students. These teachers should be fully aware that the language they use and the actions they do have the ability to lift students up or break them down (Harmer, 2015). They are, therefore, recommended to use positive, constructive and non-judgmental language/gestures when interacting with their students in general and when providing feedback in particular.

5. CONCLUSION

This study guided by two research questions was intended to address two feedback-related issues: feedback-giving practices of EFL teachers at NTTU and the effects of these practices on English majors. The research results showed that the students' motivation for learning and their language achievement were both positively and negatively influenced by the teachers' feedback-giving practices. Feedback frequency and feedback contents were the two areas that the students expressed their greatest dissatisfaction with and that needed improving the most. The facts that more than half of the subject teachers ignored or gave insufficient feedback and that only a little more than 50% of the feedback provided contained some of the information beneficial for the recipients' language achievement whereas the other 50% were merely empty praise from which the students could hardly learn anything have showed an alarming situation at NTTU concerning teachers' feedback-providing habits. Feedback timing and feedback language/gestures, though not as good as required, were the two areas where the teachers' practices and the students' expectations closely matched. It is believed that with the research findings EFL teachers at NTTU will become well aware of what their students need from their feedback and take practical actions to adjust their feedback-giving practices as a consequence to optimize the interactions with their students in English classes.

This research was conducted at a private university in Vietnam with the participation of only 10 EFL teachers and 30 English majors. The findings, therefore, may not reflect the comprehensive feedback-giving practices in Vietnamese tertiary educational contexts. More research on feedback-related issues should be done at a larger scale to capture the whole picture of Vietnamese EFL university teachers' feedback-providing habits, contributively enhancing the teacher-student interactions in EFL classrooms in particular and English teaching and learning in general.

REFERENCES

Alamer, A., & Lee, J. (2019). A motivational process model explaining L2 Saudi students' achievement of English. *System*, *87*, 102133. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.102133

Alderman, M. K. (2004). *Motivation for achievement: Possibilities for teaching and learning*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Alrabai, F. (2016). The effects of teachers' in-class motivational intervention on learners' EFL achievement. *Applied Linguistics*, *37*(3), 307-33. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amu021

Al-Said, K. (2023). Influence of teacher on student motivation: Opportunities to increase motivational factors during mobile learning. *Educ Inf Technol (Dordr)*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11720-w

Asvio, N., & Arpinus, S. (2017). The Influence of Learning Motivation and Learning Environment on Undergraduate Students' Learning Achievement of Management of Islamic Education Study Program of Iain Batusangkar in 2016. *Noble International Journal of Social Sciences Research*, *2*(2) 16-31.

Bangert-Drowns, R. L., Kulik, C. C., Kulik, J. A., & Morgan, M. (1991). The Instructional Effect of Feedback in Test-Like Events. *Review of Educational Research*, *61*(2), 213-238. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543061002213

Baronnews (2021). *Students need both negative and positive feedback*. https://www.baronnews.com/2021/12/26/students-need-both-negative-and-positive-feedback/

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2010). Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *92*(1), 81-90. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200119

Brown, D. (2016). The type and linguistic foci of oral corrective feedback in the L2 classroom: a meta-analysis. *Lang. Teach. Res.*, *20*(4), 436-458. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168814563200

Curious Neuron (2018). *The Power of Positive Meaningful Feedback on Student Success*. https://www.curiousneuron.com/blog/2018/1/31/the-power-of-positive-and-meaningful-feedback-on-student-success

Dornyei, Z. (2000). Motivation in action: Towards a process-oriented conceptualization of student motivation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *70*, 519-538. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709900158281

Dornyei, Z., & Chan, L. (2013). Motivation and vision: an analysis of future L2 self images, sensory styles, and imagery capacity across two target languages. *Language Learning*, *63*(3), 437-62. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12005

Ekiz, S., & Kulmetov, Z. (2016). The factors affecting learners' motivation in English language education. *Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology*, *1*(1). http://jflet.com/jflet/index.php/jflet/article/view/12

Gardner, R. C. (2010). *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition: The Socio-Educational Model*. Peter Lang.

George Lucas Educational Foundation (2022). *To Increase Student Engagement, Focus on Motivation*. https://www.edutopia.org/article/to-increase-student-engagement-focus-on-motivation/

Guo, W., & Zhou, W. (2021). Relationships between teacher feedback and student motivation: A comparison between male and female students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.679575

Ha, X. V. (2017). Primary EFL Teachers' Oral Corrective Feedback in Vietnam: Beliefs and Practices. *Master of Research thesis, Macquarie University*. https://www.researchonline.mq.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/mq:70822

Ha, X. V., & Murray, J. (2021). The impact of a professional development program on EFL teachers' beliefs about corrective feedback. *System*, *96*, 102405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102405

Ha, X. V., & Nguyen, L. T. (2021). Targets and sources of oral corrective feedback in English as a foreign language Classrooms: Are students' and teachers' beliefs aligned? *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.697160

Ha, X. V., Nguyen, L. T., & Hung, B. P. (2021). Oral corrective feedback in English as a foreign language classrooms: A teaching and learning perspective. *Heliyon*, *7*(7), e07550. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07550

Harati, H., Yen C. J., Tu, C. H, & Cruickshank B. (2021). Online adaptive learning: A study of score validity of the adaptive self-regulated learning model. *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies*, *16*(6), 18-35. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJWLTT.2020100102

Harmer, J. (2015). *The practice of English Language Teaching* (5th Edition). Pearson Education Limited.

Hatti, J. (2013). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Routledge.

Hatti, J., & Yates, G. (2014). *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*. Routledge.

Herra, A., & Kulińska, A. (2018). The role of feedback in the process of learning English as a foreign language. *Forum Filologiczne Ateneum*, *1*(6), 127-143. https://doi.org/10.36575/2353-2912/1(6)2018.127

Li, S. (2010). The Effectiveness of Corrective Feedback in SLA: A Meta-Analysis. *Language Learning*, *60*(2), 309-365. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00561.x

Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *19*(1), 37-66. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0272263197001034

Lyster, R., Saito, K., & Sato, M. (2012). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching*, *46*(1), 1-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444812000365

Mackey, A., & Goo, J. (2007). Interaction research in SLA: a meta-analysis and research synthesis. In Mackey, A. (Ed.), *Conversational Interaction in Second Language Acquisition: A Collection of Empirical Studies*. Oxford University Press.

Maharma, H. A., & Abusa'aleek, R. (2022). Teachers' feedback and students' academic achievement. *International Education Studies*, *15*(5), 65. https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n6p65

Mega, C., Ronconi, L., & De Beni, R. (2014). What makes a good student? How emotions, self-regulated learning, and motivation contribute to academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *106*(1), 121-131. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033546

Mercer, S., Ryan, S., & Williams, M. (2012). *Psychology for Language Learning: Insights from Research, Theory and Practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nassaji, H. (2017). The effectiveness of extensive versus intensive recasts for learning L2 grammar. *The Modern Language Journal*, *101*(2), 353-368. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12387

Ormrod, J. E. (2007). *Educational Psychology: Developing Learners*. Upper Saddle River. Prentice Hall, Inc.

Pankonin, A., & Myers, R. (2017). *Teachers' use of positive and negative feedback: Implications for student behavior*. Applied Psychology Opus. https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/teachers-use-of-positive-and-negative-feedback-implications-for-student-behavior/

Petsche, A. (2009). *Factors that influence student motivation. UNI scholarworks*. Graduate research paper.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *25*(1), 54-67. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Study Cat. (2021). *14 ways to give students meaningful feedback*. https://studycat.com/14-ways-to-give-students-meaningful-feedback

The Teaching Couple (2023). *The Power of Positive Feedback in the Classroom*. https://theteachingcouple.com/the-power-of-positive-feedback-in-the-classroom

Tuan, L. T. (2011). EFL Learners motivation revisited. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *1*(10). https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.10.1257-1272

Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice of theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Wang, W., & Li, S. (2020). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in American ESL and Chinese EFL classrooms: A comparative study. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, *34*(1), 35-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1767124

Yanuarti, H., & Rosmayanti, D. (2018). The relationship between students' motivation and their learning achievement. *Professional Journal of English Education*, *1*(6), 783-788. https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v1i6.p783-788

Zimmerman, B. J. (2013). *Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement: Theoretical Perspectives*. Routledge.

Zouaidi, C., & Hermessi, T. (2018). The Role of Intrinsic Motivation and Oral Corrective Feedback in the EFL Classroom. In *English Language Teaching Research in the Middle East and North Africa*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98533-6_20