Full Length Research

The Importance of Providing Constructive Feedback in Developing Students' writing in Universities Of Uzbekistan

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The following scientific article is based on the action research done among EFL educators providing feedback in writing classes, hence it is the most vital guide for students to adapt and adjust their writing strategies. The principle aim in undertaking the following research is to evaluate the Assessment Literacy of Educators and to identify the influence of it in providing constructive feedback to students' writings in language Universities of Uzbekistan. The research was carried out with the help of two data collection methods: questionnaire and rubric. The questionnaire was conducted with the aim to identify the level of educators' assessment literacy. And, rubric was used to analyze the feedback given to students' writings. Both data helped to identify the level of giving assessment feedback. A total of 68 EFL educators and 50 students' writings were involved in the study. The result showed that increasing educators assessment literacy level, providing constructive, meaningful, timely feedback and   applying peer assessment and peer –feedback tasks in writing classes are the major inducement factors influencing in development of students' writings. It is recommended that to ensure the major inducement factors the university have to analyze and make some changes in curriculum.

Keywords: assessment literacy, assessing writing, constructive feedback, washback, rubric, rater training.

INTRODUCTION

During the years of professional development, we have observed learners in our own classes and those of our colleagues and noticed that learners are frustrated, nervous, bored or non-motivated during the examination. However, the main aim of the assessment is not to frighten the students but see their achievements. Some learners dread to take tests, and for some educators it is hard job to design them. Given that educators begin using new content, why not to start applying new assessment, because the aim of assessment is to see progressing evolution, and each educational stage gives a lot of possibilities to evaluate students' understanding and progress.

Due to the Presidential decree 18/75, "On further improvement of foreign language teaching and learning", aimed at upbringing of highly educated, with broad-outlook young generation, the new system of education was established in Uzbekistan. The main objective of the system is – to improve the quality, accessibility, efficiency and strengthening the practical approach to education.

Starting from this period many changes were done in the field of education. New methods of teaching, new pedagogical technologies, new approaches started to be implemented. All of them were focused on developing learners' skills, so that

they will be able to apply these skills in real life situation. Also, communicative language teaching where techniques aimed to be authentic, that means all the texts and tasks are authentic and contextualized started to be implemented. One of the biggest challenges while improving the quality of education is training educators' assessment literacy, especially in evaluating productive skills (writing and speaking). In the following article we are going to present some problems that occur in assessing writing. As known, assessing productive skills always considered as subjective; as there are too many factors that may influence to the process of assessment, internal and external.

Studies in language testing have proved that a well-developed assessment tools and, constructive feedback may impact positive washback on both teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerations in scoring

According to The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Assessment (2012), the most important considerations in scoring include (a) designing or selecting a rating scale or scoring rubric and (b) selecting and training people who will be doing rating. Scoring as an assessment can be either holistic or analytic (sometimes called multi-trait). That is raters can either give a single score based on their overall impression of a piece of writing or can evaluate different aspects of performance separately – for example, by giving one score for content, another for organization, and still another for language use. A single score is usually preferred in situations where a large number of tests need to be scored in a short time, such as in placement testing. On the other hand, for classroom purposes, it is often more informative to give students separate scores for different aspects of writing such as content, organization, and use of language. For classroom assessment of course the instructor will ordinarily be the person who evaluates students writing, but in many language programs, such as intensive English programs where there are either several sections of the same course or levels that students need to pass through, it makes sense for tests to be scored by people other than the classroom educators. Whoever scores the assessment must be careful to be as consistent as possible in rating, so that the rating is fair to all students. It is common practice in large-scale assessments to have written responses scored by at least two trained raters, using a third rater if the first two raters disagree by wide margin.

In order to improve classroom writing assessment, it is important to understand some fundamental issues. These issues include the nature of writing ability, whether and when to test writing in the classroom and what the alternatives are, the qualities of good tests in general, and what research tells us about the two key elements to any writing assessment: the task (what we ask students to do) and the scoring.

Assessment literacy

The knowledge based in the case of language assessment makes reference to the body of theoretical and practical knowledge that language educators include EFL educators require in relation to aspects such as the purpose of assessment, the appropriateness of the assessment tools being used, the testing conditions, the interpretation and implications of results, ect. In the following an outline proposed by Brindley (2001), Inbar-Lourie (2008) emphasized aspects such as "the reasoning or rationale for assessment (why), the description of the trait to be assessed (the what), and the assessment process (the how) " as the assessment knowledge dimensions language educators require. Other authors (Popham, 2009; Schafer, 1993; Stiggins, 1999) have also attempted to define what constitutes the knowledge base assessment for educators across various areas including EFT education. Stiggins (1999) suggested a list of seven content requirements for competences aimed to provide a comprehensive foundation in assessment practices. These include (a) connecting assessment to clear purposes, (b) clarifying achievement expectations, (c) applying proper assessment methods, (d) developing quality assessment exercise and scoring criteria and sampling appropriately, (e) avoiding bias in assessment, (f) communicating effectively about students achievement, and (g) using assessment as an instructional intervention. Herrera, L. & Macias, D. (2015) stated that training within these seven competencies will undoubtedly bring significant benefits not only to our EFL educators, in the sense that they will have a clear picture of what students may know (declarative knowledge) and what they can do (procedural knowledge), but also to their EFL students in the sense that they may be provided with more reliable assessment instruments, practices, and conditions.

The role of assessment tools

Educators can vary the tools of assessment. Some can be in the form of quick checks or observations, like pop-quizzes; while others− be more formal like formative and summative assessments. The aim of any evaluation is to see what and how students have learned, (what techniques do they use), and

whether they can apply these knowledge in real life or not.

Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer (2002) stated that feedback can be obtained from test takers, test administrators, and the test users during test administration. Test takers can provide feedback on their perception of and attitudes toward the test and test tasks and on their performance. Feedback, whether written or spoken, is a good guide on how your work is progressing. It should let you know:

▪ What you have done well
▪ How you can improve or develop the specific assignment
▪ How you can achieve successful outcomes over a number of assignments

The hypothesis is that constructive and precise feedback will help to develop students motivation in writing.

The issue of the effectiveness of giving feedback in developing writing is arguable among different educators. Several scientists argued on this issue, for example, Lee (2017) described in her work that feedback has a pivotal role to play in the writing classroom. Much of the existing literature has highlighted its limited impact on student learning. Whether it is educator feedback, self-/peer feedback or computer-mediated feedback, there is yet no conclusive evidence about its efficacy across different contexts. It is therefore not surprising that feedback has remained one of the most vibrant research topics in writing, which provides the impetus for this special issue on feedback in writing. Also, McMartin-Miller (2014) talks about error treatment. The role of a educators as an instructor and the students' attitude in assessing second language writing. The durations and the length of provided feedback plays great role in the development of students writing skills. We agree with Cristine McMartin that the most important keys in providing effective feedback are appropriate duration and length.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the current study is to interview University educators (EFL) with the purpose of identifying the current practices and conditions of assessing writing. The main aim was to find out the way of assessing and providing feedback, whether educators are assessment literate and what obstacles are faced by educators.

METHODS

The report of the research is based on 68results received from educators with the help of research methods like questionnaire (was conducted with each educator face to face) and rubric (analyzing classes and piece of writing)held at the University of World languages in Tashkent. The Uzbekistan State University of World Languages is basic educational establishment in the country; it is the leading and basic university in developing and implementing reforms in teaching foreign languages. All new projects and methodology are trialed, piloted and started to be implemented in here. So, we also decided to choose this context and run our experiment. The major aim of the research was to enable educators to describe their assessment procedures, especially in assessing writing. The educators involved in research were both assistant and senior educators, who had different years of working experience; also they were representatives of both genders males and females.

The collected data was aimed to cover the following:

• The level of assessment literacy of educators
• The duration and length of giving feedback

Data collection tools are useful in qualitative research, in our case questionnaire for educators and rubric for analyzing the type of feedback; let us to elicit educators' experience, viewpoints and attitudes towards a certain social concept.

The first data collection method is questionnaire. According to Popper (2004) questionnaires are practical and they provide an opportunity to collect a large amount of information from a large amount of people in a short period of time. Also, he states that questionnaires can be analyzed more "scientifically" and objectively than other forms of research. On this bases, we have chosen this method to collect overall information about the current situation and the views of educators on assessment literacy. Questionnaire is a valuable in our research depending on the specific objectives. Questionnaires provide access to "what is inside a person's head" and make it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs).The questionnaires were distributed to the EFL educators. It was designed in the form of yes/no questions and the rating scale. Thus, it was easier for to count the same answers and make analyses. In order to conduct the questionnaires the permission was asked from the Faculty dean and educators, after, it was taken from each educator during their office hours. It is argued that the information is more reliable when it is gathered by interviewing each one, rather asking to complete the form. The researcher may get more specific information, and understand the participants' intention by interviewing. (Appendix I)

The second type of data collection method was **feedback types tally.** It was focused on the feedback given to writing, and intended to use this method by observing the class or asking a piece of writing and analyze the type of feedback with the help of rubric. As

noted in ("Grading and Performance Rubrics", n.d) more formatively, rubrics can help the researcher get a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their class. By recording the component scores and tallying up the number of participants scoring below an acceptable level on each component, researches can identify those skills or concepts that need more instructional time and effort. We have found this method useful in our research to identify whether educators are constructive, timely and provide meaningful feedback, as feedback is valuable when it is received, understood and acted on.It is not a secret that, the interaction with clear feedback brings to the learners' understanding on how to develop their learning. So, the aim of this research was to help colleagues with recommendations in giving clear feedback. For conducting the second data collection method the permission was asked from educators to observe their "writing" classes, and to analyze some students' writings. As we, educators, apply process-oriented writing, we could observe the feedback giving process during the lesson, but more informative results were taken from the students' written work. (Appendix II)

After gathering data with the help of two data collection methods, we started to work on the most important part of the research: analyzing collected data. In order to make calculation easier, we designed tools in the form of yes/no, and ranking: no open ended questions. The answers of each respondent were counted and presented in the results section by ranking them, so, it is easier to see the number of respondents. Also, some results were presented in percentages, to make it easier to view the whole scope. Calculations in percentages were done based on the following formula:

$$Rp = \frac{Nr \ (number \ of \ respondents)}{Np \ (Total \ number \ of \ participants)}$$

Where,

Rp = result in percentage
Nr = number of respondents
Np = total number of participants

In the first step, the identification of the assessment literacy of EFL educators, was focused on finding the level of LAL: which included six important spheres in assessing writing: such as,
1. Participation on language assessment programs
2. Program's focus
3. Designing assessment for writing
4. Rubric development
5. Giving constructive feedback
6. Rater training

In the second step, the identification of providing effective feedback was studied. The rubric was designed in the form of analytical one, and the descriptors helped to analyze the feedback provided by educator easily. We were interested in the following components of providing feedback:
1. whether the feedback provided help to improve students future work,
2. whether it is detailed and informative,
3. whether it is fresh and moves on to subsequent task,
4. whether it is linked to the assessment criteria

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data collection, provides the following information. The data presented below demonstrates the results of each question in the questionnaire and rubric

Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Yes	56 (1)
No	12 (2)

Figure 1: Participation on language assessment programs (N=68)

Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Assessing reading, writing, speaking and listening	18 (1)
How to make tests based on CEFR for EFL learners	15 (2)
Evaluating and criticizing language tests	6 (3=)
Rubric development	6 (3=)
Giving feedback	5 (5)
Methodology	4 (6)
Validity, reliability practicality of test designing	1 (7=)
Large scale testing	1 (7=)

Figure 2: Topics that course emphasized (N=56)

Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Neutral	25 (1=)
satisfied	25 (1=)
Very dissatisfied	6(3)

Figure 3: Design of a language assessment for writing

Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Neutral	28 (1)
Satisfied	20 (2)
Dissatisfied	3 (3=)
Very dissatisfied	3(3=)
No response	2 (5)

Figure 4: Rubric development

Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Neutral	28 (1)
Satisfied	17 (2)
Dissatisfied	11 (3)

Figure 5: Giving constructive feedback

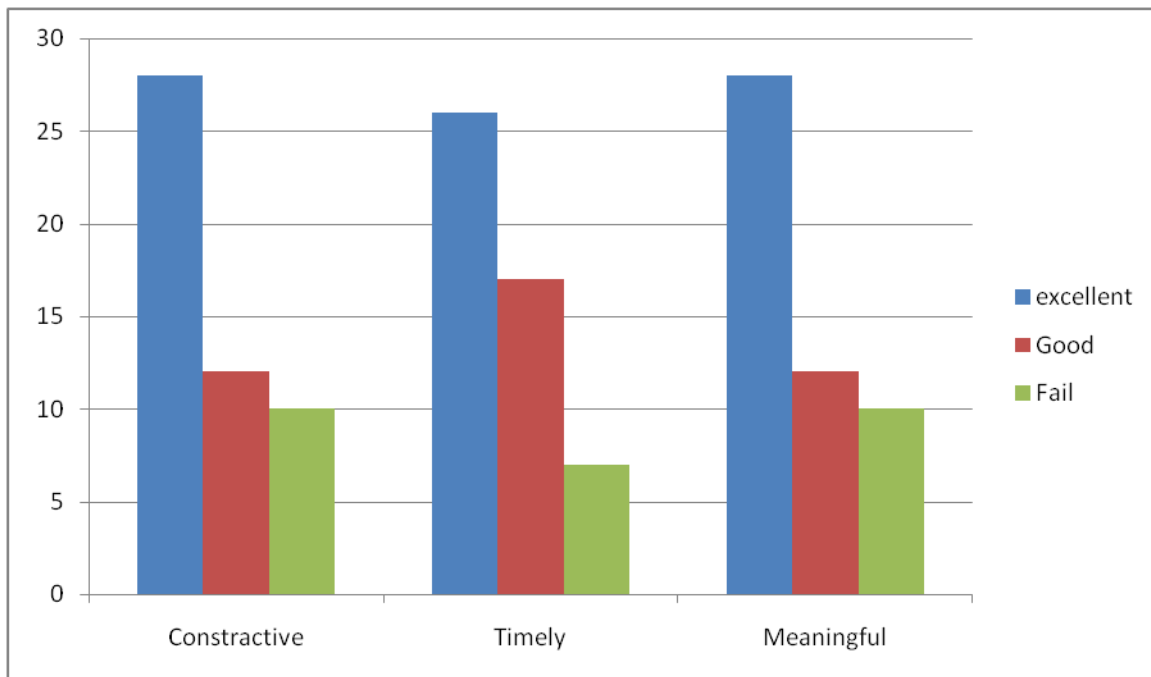| Responses	Number of respondents (rank)
Neutral	18 (1=)
Dissatisfied	18 (1=)
Satisfied	15 (3)
Very dissatisfied	5(4)

Figure 6: Rater training

Figure 7: Efficiency of feedback

The obtained data demonstrates that more than .82 % of EFL educators have taken course on language assessment as a part of their educators' preparation program. However, .18% of interviewed educators did not participate in such programs, which may cause some challenges in their professional work, especially in language testing and assessment. As was mentioned by Stiggins (1999), educators spend 50% of their professional time to organizing assessment and testing procedure. (Figure 1.)Figure 3 demonstrates the equal number of respondents for neutral and satisfied, which shows that educators are mainly satisfied but still not very satisfied, that means there is stimuli and motivation for development. Still they are not strongly confident on their abilities. Figure 4 illustrates the level of educators' satisfaction in rubric development. This clearly demonstrates that, there is still some gaps in rubric development. As, the effective feedback is a part of assessment design (rubric); it should be developed professionally. Hence, a powerful feedback is stimuli that enhance achievement. On the basis on the data presented in Figure 5, we may conclude that .19% of educators are dissatisfied with the way they provide feedback. Figure 6 demonstrates absence of very satisfied educators, which tell us that rater training courses or programs need to be organized. (Figure 6)

Despite the fact that was found with the help of first data collection tool, we tried to get more information by applying second data collection method,

which was more practical. It was based on observing writing classes and analyzing writings, to identify whether the feedback was constructive, timely and had meaningful context. This data was collected by the rubric developed by me. 50 students' works were analyzed and the results were presented in Figure 7. The results of analyzing feedbacks given to the students' writings, shows that results of all three components are mainly the same. .56% of feedback was constructive, timely and meaningful; .30% of it was good but needed to be more concrete; .20% of feedback did not meet the requirement of effective feedback type. There was no evidence for further improvement, however, the role of feedback is encourage students to think critically about their work and to reflect on what they need to do to improve their writings.

The results of the research show that there is a gap between aligning constructive, timely and meaningful feedback. The reason is there are 15 students and one educator, and the duration of writing class is once a week. So, these factors may cause some problems to make feedback constructive which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of a given piece of work, and sets out ways in which the student can improve the work; timely which gives feedback while the assessed work is still fresh in a student's mind, before the student moves on to subsequent task; and meaningful that targets individual needs, linked to the specific assessment criteria, and received by

student in time to benefit subsequent work. Intra-rater reliability is the factor which commonly occurs in classroom educators. When, we are faced with 30 works which do not have a correct answer and we know that we have a week to check, we probably use different technique, first few will be different from last few. We may be "easier" or "harder" and the results may be inconsistent across all test. The same problem was observed during the research, and to our mind the solution to the unreliability is to organize peer-feedback process in writing classes: that will help to make feedback constructive, timely and meaningful.

In order to improve this situation, we did a research on our students. We incorporated peer-feedback in my writing classes. We decide to involve students to the process of designing assessment criteria, we jointly constructed peer assessment tool which we tried to align with the standards, and together developed feedback template. The discussion process was very collaborative, all students were motivated and eager to develop the template, in addition it developed their critical and creative thinking. We have realize that students became successful and confident, when they are involved to the process. The assessment process, including rubric and feedback giving, was not "surprise" for them, and it was not shocking, as they knew what they are expected to do before. This study showed that peer feedback not only provide constructive, timely and, meaningful feedback to the students but also helped students to develop autonomy and improve their learning. Moreover, it helped to reduce educators' workload.

As we practice process-oriented writing, first two drafts will be peer-assessed, which will provide a great chance for learners to develop their skills, and the final draft will be evaluated by educator. As the assessment tool and the feedback template is the same and students were involved in the designing process, there were no challenges in assessing and understanding each other.

CONCLUSION

Altogether, we may conclude that feedback has a significant impact on students' learning process. Thus, it is very important to be assessment literate to be able to design, apply and give constructive feedback. Having proved this, we would like to suggest applying peer assessment and peer –feedback tasks in writing classes. Hence, students will benefit in terms of being involved and understanding the assessment process. So, assessment will not be "surprise" for them, they will understand what is expected from them. By applying this technique, both educators and students will have an opportunity to give clear, effective feedback on time. Also, it is important to state that organizing professional educators' association for

language testers at the University will be appreciated. Based on the results of the research, some recommendations can be driven:

- to analyze EFL curriculum, and add the section with the requirements for assessment and giving feedback. it would be like a frame for educators, and all will follow the same structure;
- to organize the association which will help to promote the understanding of language testing and assessment in professional discipline, and share practices;
- to organize "assessment center" that will include developing professional workshops, seminars, educator-training courses for educators, so that they will have an opportunity to collaborate and share their experiences;
- to study types of assessment decisions university educators need to make and how those decisions meet the students' need.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire for Language Educators

1)   **Did you ever take an entire course on language assessment as a part of your educators preparation?**
Yes_____   **No**_____

2)   **What aspects or topics did course emphasize?**
_____
_____

3)   **Please look at the following language testing and assessment topics, and rate your level of them.**

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
A. Design of language testing for writing					
B. Rubric development					
C. Giving constructive feedback					
D. Rater training					

Appendix II

	Excellent	**Good**	**Fail**
Constructive	Highlights the strengths and weaknesses of a given piece of work, set out ways in which the student can improve the work.	Consists mainly of grammar and spelling corrections, and provides little advice for them to act on.	No advice for them to act on, short forms of comments, that fail in providing information. Eg: Well-written, Good, Ok
Timely	Gives feedback while the assessed work is still fresh in a student's mind, before the student moves on to subsequent task.	Gives feedback before starting new topic	Providing feedback at the end of the term.
Meaningful	Targets individual needs, linked to the specific assessment criteria, and received by student in time to benefit subsequent work.	Promotes a dialogue between educator and student.	Fails in aligning with assessment criteria individual needs and time.