



ELT in the Algerian University: Instructional Modes and Assessment Approaches and Techniques



Suggested topic:

The Value of Feedback in Promoting Learning in Higher Education: The case of EFL learners' speaking skills

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Abstract

This paper aims at reporting the results of a semester-long investigation undertaken at the Department of English of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem: (fall 2012- winter 2013). The research involved a population of about a hundred EFL students and ten 'Oral Expression' teachers. Data were gathered through questionnaires addressed to students and teachers, through semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as through the weekly observation of two teachers and their students during 'Oral Expression' classes. The focus in this article will be on the value of feedback as being a formative assessment technique initiated by the teacher, self –practiced by the learners or provided by peers. The results of the investigation have shown that some learners who have been introduced to the practices above cited are able to focus on areas of improvement. On the other hand, the research revealed that a number of students at the Department of English of Mostaganem University still hold the teacher as sole responsible for their assessment (and learning by extension) and are especially not aware of the formative practice of self and peer initiated feedback.

Key words: Formative Assessment – Feedback – Self-Assessment – Peer-Assessment- Speaking Skills

1- Introduction

As the topic of language assessment has grown salient in the EFL sphere, it has become commonplace to consider it as an indispensable element in education along with language learning and language teaching. However, in the Algerian context there is a tendency among some educators of either overlooking the importance of assessment, or clinging to its traditional function: that of serving summative purposes.

In higher education, the stakes can even be greater insofar as the learners have chosen the paths that will presumably lead them to their professional life. There is an urgent need for them to be punctually informed about their progress but also to gain in autonomy, a dimension

that might have lacked in earlier stages of their education. That is why learners as well as teachers might need to ‘unlearn’ some assessment practices, where the latter do not serve their objectives, and shift to ones that foster learning and learner autonomy.

When asked, most learners equate success in language learning with the ability of speaking the target language. Thus, in their view and in the words of Robert Lado, ‘*the ability to speak a foreign language is the most highly prized language skill.*’ (Lado, 1961:239). The investigation at stake sprung first from a questioning: “What if assessment were THE answer as to how learners could improve their level of language proficiency?” The research was also motivated by the gap observed in the number of empirical research work undertaken in Algerian universities concerning the assessment of speaking skills as compared to that of their teaching.

2- Background of the Study

This paper reports on a semester-long investigation that was undertaken at the Department of English of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem: (fall 2012- winter 2013). The research was a descriptive study that aimed at investigating Algerian university teachers’ procedures of evaluating EFL learners’ speaking skills in the module of ‘Oral Expression’ (O.E). It thus drew a broad image of the state of affairs focusing on the many different aspects involved in the assessment of these difficult skills. Procedures, techniques, and tools were scrutinized along with EFL teachers and learners’ views and attitudes towards the evaluation of speaking ability. The data gathered during the investigation concerned both summative and formative assessment practices, but the focus in this article will be on **formative assessment** and more particularly on the value of **feedback** as being a formative technique initiated by the teacher, self –practiced by the learners or provided by peers.

- *The sampling of the population:* The research involved a population of about a hundred EFL students (out of a total of six hundred second year LMD students) and ten out of sixteen ‘Oral Expression’ teachers who were given questionnaires. Additionally, two ‘Oral Expression’ teachers and their respective students were observed and interviewed. All of the above-mentioned population was chosen randomly for the sake of convenience.

- *Data gathering tools:* In order to investigate teachers’ and learners’ attitudes and opinions about assessing speaking, we made use of two questionnaires: one addressed to

teachers and consisting of five parts including thirty-one items, and another one addressed to students consisting of six parts and thirty-nine items. We also made use of written field notes during classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students.

3- What is Formative Assessment?

The concept of “formative evaluation” was introduced by Scriven in 1967 in an article on the evaluation of educational programs. For him, the purpose of formative evaluation is to allow successive adaptations of a new program during the different phases of its development and its implementation. In 1968, the idea of formative evaluation was quickly incorporated by Bloom who applied it to student learning in his newly defined model of mastery learning. Over the years, successive and extensive literature was produced concerning formative evaluation with the term assessment having progressively replaced evaluation when it came to student learning in the classroom setting.

The concept of formative assessment entails the idea of an ongoing (continuous) process that aims at informing learners who are “forming” their competencies and skills about their growth with the aim of helping them achieve their learning goals. Thus, according to Black et al (2003) formative assessment can occur many times in every lesson and involve different methods to encourage students to express what they are thinking and several different ways of acting on such evidence. Cizek (2010) who suggests a constellation of ten key features of formative assessment mentions feedback that is non-evaluative, specific, timely, related to the learning goals, and that provides opportunities for the students to revise and improve work products and deepen understanding as one key feature of formative assessment.

4- Teacher Assessment and Corrective Feedback

Central to the idea of formative assessment is feedback. Feedback is defined as *“information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance.”* (Ur, 1996:242). Ur distinguishes between two components of feedback: assessment and correction. In feedback as assessment, learners are simply informed about how well or poorly they have performed. In feedback as correction, learners are provided with specific information regarding their performance and explanation, provision or elicitation of other or better alternatives. (ibid)

Feedback from teachers to students is an important component of formative assessment. Research calls for **specific, descriptive feedback** that allows students to learn from their work in order to advance further (Black & Wiliam: 1998). Good feedback contains information that a student can use, which means that the student has to be able to hear and understand it. Giving/receiving feedback is a delicate matter as much as it is an important one; on the one hand, it involves learners' feelings of control and self-efficacy and on the other hand, it requires teachers to be non-judgmental. However, any sort of feedback involves some kind of judgment. That is why it is important for learners to evolve in an inclusive classroom environment. An environment where students see constructive criticism as a good thing and understand that learning cannot occur without practice. If part of the classroom culture is to always "get things right," then if something needs improvement, it's "wrong." Teachers have to explain to their students that the purpose of giving feedback is to help and promote learning; and that 'getting it wrong' is not 'bad', but rather a way into 'getting it right' (Ur: 1996). Similarly, teachers have to accept that giving feedback does involve some kind of judgment but to try to make the attitude to this more positive: that mistakes are a natural and useful part of language learning (Brookhart: 2008).

In her book, *How to Give Effective Feedback* (2008), Brookhart explains the powerful virtues of formative feedback. She says that its true power lies in its double-barreled approach: addressing cognitive and motivational factors. If learners know where they are in their learning and what to do next (cognitive factor), they will develop a feeling of control over their own-learning (motivational factor).

Given the virtues of formative or corrective feedback, one is tempted to ask how to best use it. First, teachers need to keep in mind that one of their roles is to encourage students by praising them for work that is well done. Praise is an important component of student's motivation and progress. However, teachers need to be careful about over-complementing the learners especially when their own self-evaluation tells them they have not done well; this might prove counter-productive (Harmer: 2007). As to whether or not correct students' errors, Bartram and Walton (2002) propose questions teachers should ask themselves and that may help to decide whether to let an error go or not:

- 1- Does the mistake affect communication?
- 2- Are we concentrating on accuracy at the moment?
- 3- Is it really wrong? Or is it my imagination?
- 4- Why did the student make the mistake?

- 5- Is it the first time the student has spoken for a long time?
- 6- Could the student react badly to my correction?
- 7- Have they met this language point in the current lesson?
- 8- Is it something the students have already met?
- 9- Is this a mistake that several students are making?
- 10- Would the mistake irritate someone?

5- Self and Peer Assessment

So far, we have identified the primary goal of formative assessment as providing feedback to students and teachers about the targets for learning, where students are in relation to those targets, and what can be done to fill in the gaps. But, if teachers are the unique providers of assessment then it is difficult to see how students can become empowered and develop the skills they need to prepare them for learning outside the university and throughout life (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick: 2006).

Modern approaches to education stress the fact that each learner should be encouraged to cast a critical eye over their own work and effective self and peer- assessments can do just that. According to Brown, self-assessment derives its theoretical justification from a number of well-established principles of second language acquisition: notably, the principle of **autonomy** and that of **intrinsic motivation**. Peer-assessment appeals to similar principles, the most obvious of which is **cooperative learning** (Brown: 2003). Furthermore, self and peer assessments “...are becoming more important as alternative assessment method since they could encourage learners to be involved in the assessment process.” (Boud: 1999)

In effect, self and peer assessments are seen as **authentic** types of assessments that are valuable not only because they help learners understand how the assessment process actually works, but because they prepare learners for real-life situations (in the workplace, for example) where they will not have a teacher telling them if they have carried out an action correctly.

However, research indicates that these two types of assessments have a risk of being perceived as a process of presenting inflated grades and being unreliable: “*subjectivity is a primary obstacle to overcome. Students may be either too harsh on themselves or too self-flattering*” (Brown, 2003: 28). Moreover, students usually feel ill equipped to undertake the assessment or tend to be biased against the proficiency of peers. (ibid) Therefore, “...*self and*

peer evaluation of learners' performance or ability have been considered to be sub-assessments for teachers" (Brown & Hudson, 1998: 653-675). By sub-assessment, it is meant that they support teachers' final decisions about students' evaluation.

We believe that apart from the grading issue, these methods can be effective if used in classroom activities for the simple purpose of monitoring students' performance. Thus, learners can comment on their own or their classmates' performance using a checklist¹ or guidelines to do so. This would allow students to be more attentive, would raise their awareness as to their own progress and increase their level of motivation.

In order to be effective, self-assessment should respect basic elements that are cited below:

Necessary Elements for Effective Student Self-Assessment

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- 1- Awareness of the value of self-assessment.
 - 2- Access to clear criteria on which to base the assessment.
 - 3- A specific task or performance to assess.
 - 4- Models of self-assessment.
 - 5- Direct instruction in and assistance with self-assessment, including feedback Practice.
 - 6- Cues regarding when it is appropriate to self-assess.
 - 7- Opportunities to revise and improve the task or performance.
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Table 1: Necessary Elements for Student Self-Assessment Adapted from:
(Goodrich: 1996 in Andrade, 2010: 93)

Table 1 shows that in order to be effective, self-assessment should be based on some key elements among which are the assessment criteria, the task to be assessed, the appropriate moment of self-assessment, the motivation of the students and the improvement of the task being assessed by correctives and revision. In addition, it is to be highlighted that, in many cases, students are hesitant to judge the quality of their performance because the conditions are not available, for example, the absence of criteria for self/peer-assessments. Goodrich (1996) confirms that the elements of self-assessment are also its condition and if they are available in the classroom, effective self-assessment is likely to occur (Andrade, 2010: 93).

¹ For more details of checklists and assessment grids that students can use as self-assessment tools you can refer to Brown 2003.

To conclude, external feedback (such as teacher feedback) and internal feedback (such as student self-evaluation) affect student knowledge and beliefs. If used effectively, together they can help students with self-regulation: deciding on their next learning goals, devising tactics and strategies to reach them.

6- Results and Discussions

The results obtained from the teachers' and students' questionnaires as well as from classroom observations and interviews are discussed in this section. As the original questions encompass a larger investigation, only questions pertaining to the formative assessment practice of teacher feedback, self and peer-assessments are mentioned here.

6.1 Students' Questionnaire

Question 1: Teachers' correction of students' mistakes

Does your teacher correct your mistakes?

The objective behind this question is to know whether students get corrective feedback from their teacher during 'Oral Expression' classes. 62% of the students affirmed that their teacher **often** corrects their mistakes, 32% of them stated that their mistakes are **sometimes** corrected. Only 3% of the informants declared that their mistakes are **rarely** corrected and 3% of them stated that their teacher **never** corrects their mistakes.

From the results above it is apparent that teachers take the opportunity to correct their students' mistakes. Correcting mistakes is a vital part of on-going assessment but to say whether this is done in an effective way or not, we must know how and when students' mistakes are corrected as explained in earlier sections.

Question 2: Teachers' feedback on students' performance

Does your teacher tell you how well you have performed?

To this question, the majority of the informants 51% stated that their teachers **sometimes** gave them feedback as to how well they did. 27% of them are **often** given feedback on their performance. 16% of the students declared that their teacher **rarely** provided feedback, while only 6% of them **never** received any feedback on their performance. It is recommended from teachers to give a brief feedback after students complete a task so that they know how well they are performing.

Question 3: Students' familiarity with self-assessment

Have you ever heard of self-assessment?

To question 3, the majority of second year LMD students (54%) have not heard of self-assessment. However, 39 % of them heard of it. We may conclude that not all teachers are familiar with self and peer-assessments and thus these notions have not been discussed in class with students. This conclusion is confirmed in the teachers' questionnaire.

Question 4: Students' ability to self-assess

If your answer to question 3 is "yes", are you able to assess your performance?

79% of the questioned students (the large majority) have declared to have the capacity to measure their oral ability. If teachers devote some of their pedagogical time to explain to students the positive impact that self-assessment can have on their learning process, more and more learners will trust their capacities in measuring their own oral ability.

Question 5: Opportunities given to students to self-assess

Are you given the opportunity to assess your oral performance?

Self and peer assessment can be useful techniques through which students feel more responsible for and more independent in their learning. The majority of the respondents (56%) stated that their teachers give them the opportunity to assess their oral production.

Question 6: Students' types of self-assessment

If your answer to question 5 is "yes", is it through: a- Assessing your own home or classwork b- Assessing your peers' home or classwork c- other, please specify?

Of the 52 students who are offered the opportunity to self-assess, 40 of them (78, 92%) state that they do so through assessing their own home or class work. 12 of them (23, 07%) assess their peers' home or classwork.

6.2 Teachers' Questionnaire

Question 1: Teachers' acquaintance with self-assessment

Have you ever heard of self-assessment?

Not all teachers of oral expression heard of self-assessment. 80% (the majority) of them did but 20% of them did not. Although the results seem positive, it remains evident that students' autonomy and learning of how to assess themselves may be compromised by their teachers' ignorance of such practice.

Question 2: Teachers' beliefs of students' ability to self-assess their performance

If your answer to question 1 is "yes", do you think that your students are able to assess themselves?

Of the eight teachers who said that they were acquainted with the notion of self-assessment only 2 of them trust their learners' ability to assess themselves. The majority (75%) of them is pessimistic regarding such assessment. We may conclude that most teachers hold a very limited and traditional view of assessment practices. Their pessimism may stem from a simple lack of experience and/or training in these alternative types of assessment. We believe that once they experience it, they will no doubt discover another positive way of doing things differently.

Question 3: Teachers' justification

Please, explain why

The explanations provided by the teachers who think that their students cannot assess themselves are that their students need first to be introduced to such a practice, to be prepared and learn how to use self-assessment tools effectively; in short that they need to be trained by their teachers; a point of view that we do share. Other teachers said that their students do not possess the required capacities to be involved in such responsibilities. As for those who answered "yes", they explained that they believe learners can determine whether they performed well or not. They added that teachers should help them raise their awareness to lead them to use self-assessment effectively and become autonomous.

Question 4: Students' opportunities to self-assess

Do you give your students the opportunity to self-assess?

Although the majority of teachers said that they did not trust their students' capacity to assess themselves, most of them (60%) stated that they do give their learners' opportunities to self-assess; a practice that should be adopted by ALL teachers.

Question 5: Students' self and peer assessments' types

If your answer to question 4 is "yes", is it through: a- Assessing their own home or classwork b- Assessing their peers' home or classwork c- other, please specify?

Out of the six teachers who answered "yes", two teachers said that their students usually assess their own home or class work while five teachers said that they gave their students the opportunity to assess their peers' home or classwork. One teacher selected both options.

6.3 Classroom observations & interviews

In his section, results from observation classes are reported and explained; a few points arising from post-observation as well as semi-structured interviews are discussed and used to support what was observed in 'Oral Expression' classes. The issues discussed here will be limited to the following: (1) The assessment tools used by the teachers and (2) How formative assessment was conducted in the classroom.

6.3.1 Teachers' assessment tools

In order to assess their students, teacher (A) and (B) proceeded differently:

Teacher (A) developed a rubric and gave the students that tool early in the semester. It was actually introduced as early as session (3). After he discussed with his learners what they thought made a good conversation (Title of the lesson: What Helps You Learn English: session 1 & 2), learners, guided by their teacher, could guess the elements that made a good speech. These elements were actually the rubric's criteria. Step by step, teacher (A) led the learners to a deeper understanding of what it meant to use an appropriate and specific vocabulary, why pronunciation has to be accurate and the voice has to be loud, why it is important to be clear in the ideas we express, what fluency and accuracy mean etc... Thus, the rubric was used as a teaching tool to discuss the multiple dimensions of effective speaking. It was also used as a point of reference for learners to assess their own and their mates' performance. Teacher (A) used the rubric for both formative and summative purposes and made his learners familiar with the criteria so they know what is expected from them and become self-aware of the progress they make in speaking. (**Table 2: Oral Presentation Feedback Rubric**)

| Focus of Feedback | 1 Point Needs Improvement | 2 Points Developing | 3 points Proficient |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Pronunciation Correct, Loud and Clear | | | |
| Fluency Natural Flow of Speech | | | |
| Accuracy Well-formed sentences and Correct Use of Grammar | | | |
| Vocabulary Use of Precise and Varied Vocabulary | | | |
| Communication Effective Details and Examples and Arrangement of Parts | | | |

In addition to this rubric, the teacher said during an interview that he also paid attention to **organization, use of details and examples** as well as **non-verbal communication** while evaluating a learner's performance.

On the other hand, Teacher (B), though guided by specific criteria that are important for assessing speaking skills, did not hand in any rubric to his learners. He did take into consideration the multiple elements that constitute a good speech and did provide his learners with feedback and comments on their performances but students were not directly aware of what they should pay attention to. Teacher (B)'s assessment checklist was mostly used for summative purposes (attributing grades).

The Scoring Grid he used includes the following rubrics:

- **Delivery**
- **Language Use**
- **Topic development**
- **credibility**

Teacher (B) explains:

- **Delivery:** Verbal and non-verbal skills/ Pronunciation/ Intonation/ Overall intelligibility.
- **Language Use:** Grammatical structures/ Word choice/ Coherence.
- **Topic Development:** Relevant information/Appropriate detail/ Clarity/ Organization/ Purposefulness.
- **Credibility:** Understanding of the problem/ Self-confidence.

It is of utmost importance for EFL teachers to have a clear understanding of what it means to be able to speak a language in order to transfer this understanding to the selection or design of tasks and evaluation criteria. It seemed clear that both teachers assessed their learners' performances with some criteria in mind however, if the learners are not aware of what is expected from them and what aspect(s) of their speech production has/have to be improved, there is little chance for them to ameliorate the quality of their production. That is why using checklists or grids not only allows teachers to provide sound bases for the feedback on their learners' performances but it also enables the learner to spot the "problem" or the specific aspect(s) of language s/he needs to improve.

6.3.2 Teachers' formative assessment

This section discusses how assessment was conducted mainly for formative purposes. The focal point is feedback. As discussed earlier, feedback should address both cognitive (where learners are in their learning and what to do next) and motivational factors (learners develop a feeling that they have control over their own learning). Both external (teacher feedback) and internal (self-assessment) feedbacks affect students' beliefs and learning.

During our observation, we could notice all such instances but at different degrees of focus. Also, teachers (A) and (B) held different views about how feedback should be administered while both incorporating it in their 'Oral Expression' classes.

To start with, one common point between the observed teachers is that they insist on the importance of positive feedback. Holding a positive attitude themselves and insisting that their students be positive too while assessing other learners' performance. Both teachers provided a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere. Teacher (A) for instance, explained to his learners that making mistakes is not something "wrong" on the contrary; it is a way to learn from them. This was used as a reminder whenever the teacher sensed that learners were hesitant to participate because of their fear of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback from their mates. Likewise, teacher (B) asked his students to always start with the positive points while commenting on their mates' performance. Both teachers explained the term feedback to their students:

Teacher (A): ".....Feedback is not the same as grade, this is what you did well; it is what you could do better..."

Teacher (B): "... What worked and what was not so effective..."

Teachers' procedures for giving feedback on students' performance and involving learners in self and peer assessment was handled differently though. The variant views held by both teachers influenced the way teacher, self and peer assessments were tackled. The difference resided in the focus points and frequency of the feedback. Teacher (A) gave instant feedback right after every individual or group presentation guided by the assessment tool criteria discussed in the earlier. On the other hand, teacher (B) took notes of all students' performances and gave a general feedback to the class including only what seemed to be the major points. Let's illustrate the procedures:

Teacher (A):

Starting from session (3) when teacher (A) handed the assessment tool to his students, after explaining again every element of the rubric, all the learners were involved in the assessment process. Before individual or group presentations, groups of students were formed in order to engage them in evaluating their peers using the assessment tool. Each group was assigned to evaluate a single aspect of effective speech, becoming experts on one aspect. Their focused attention seemed to result in improvements in that dimension of their own speech when it was their turn to present. These peer evaluations of the elements became part of the continuous assessment. After the presentations, teacher (A) first gave the opportunity to the learner(s) to self-assess bearing in mind the different dimensions of effective speech. Then, to compare students' self-assessment, he asked the groups to comment on their mates' performance by providing examples and arguments and then only did the teacher build on the comments or tackled points that were missed.

Teacher (A) prepared a handout of the lessons, explaining the steps that the students should go through while preparing their presentations and reminding them of the assessment dimensions. Here is a sample lesson plan:

| |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">What Helps You Learn English (and What Doesn't)</p> <p>Goal: deliver a 5 minute group presentation on effective and ineffective English learning.</p> <p>First step: Your group discusses and writes down personal English learning experiences. Include both effective (ones that helped you learn) and ineffective ones (ones that didn't). Hint: be specific; describe them so we can hear, see and feel them.</p> <p>Second step: Split your group in two: one working on the effective experiences and one on the ineffective experiences. Each student writes one clear example of effective or ineffective learning events (This is mostly writing on your own, but ask for help if needed.)</p> <p>Third step: Full group gets together again and reads and listens to each other's work. Make corrections and suggest improvements. Remembering what makes a good presentation, pay particular attention to each other's pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and accuracy.</p> <p>Fourth step: Now arrange your collective work in the best order. Decide how to introduce your presentation and how to sum it up in a conclusion. Write this down and decide who will say each part (share duties). This step requires close attention to the 'communication' dimension of good presentations.</p> <p>Fifth step: Practice. During our next class period, all groups will present their work.</p> <p>Remember, your presentation will be evaluated according to the 5 dimensions of good expression that we discussed.</p> |
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Feedback instances:

Self-assessment:

- Teacher: "What can you say about your presentation?"
- Student (A): "I think our group was not coherent. We had a problem of communication"
- Student (B): "I spoke at a very fast pace! When I speak slowly I have difficulty in pronunciation that's why I prefer to speak quickly."

Peer assessment:

- Student (C): "You need to speak more loudly. We could not hear you at the back."
- Student (D): "I appreciated that you separated the words out and that worked well. You broke the words well to make every word ring."

Teacher feedback:

Teacher: Speaking loud enough to be heard by others is really important, otherwise all the other elements: accuracy, fluency etc... will not work... You have to be loud and clear. Speak loudly but not noisily: Shrill voice is really annoying. You need to speak while breathing from this part of the body (teacher pointing at belly.)

Teacher (A) tells an anecdote about his own experience: "I trained myself to breathe and talk to give more air. I went to a speech therapist who advised me to do this: "Imagine you're chewing a big baguette, open your mouth and speak (teacher mimes)..... Think of this before your presentation.

Teacher (B):

Teacher (B) took notes during the learners' presentations. After each presentation, he asked students to comment of their mates' performance without specifying to the students which aspect they should be looking at. He asked them just to look at what "worked and what was not so effective". When all performances were done, he gave his own feedback. It was done mainly orally, writing key elements on the board. Feedback on students' oral performance was not directed to one student in particular but done to the whole class. Teacher (B) explained that the reasons behind

adopting such an approach were several: "psychological considerations, differentiating mistakes from errors, and focusing on specific points etc..."

Teacher (B)'s course was based on different activities that aimed at developing some skills and competences. The topics were numerous: there were debates, games, opinions that aimed at fulfilling different functions: argumentative, descriptive, prescriptive etc... and the teacher alternated between group and pair work. Session (4) was a role-play activity during which students had to work in pairs imagining a father-son/daughter situation where the father received his son's/daughter's school report which was bad. Students had to imagine the conversation. After the first performance, teacher (A) asked if there were any volunteers who would comment on the performance:

Feedback instances:

Peer assessment:

- Student (A): "It was good at the beginning then she forgot the words...but it was good!"
- Student (B): "It was good but the second character did not say anything!"
- Students (C): "The performance was very good. There were some pronunciation problems."
- Student (D): "I liked the pronunciation of X she speaks up and well."

Self-assessment:

Teacher: "Were you nervous?"

Student (E): "Yes, I think I was!"

Teacher: "Is it good or bad?"

Student (E): "I don't think it's good."

Teacher: "What didn't work for you? Something you planned but did not achieve?"

Student (F): "I said in order *to* not.... It's in order *not to*"

Teacher feedback to the class:

- “When you speak, you should look at people.”
- “Don’t be in a hurry to finish.”
- “You should pay attention to the cultural aspect of your pronunciation. You speak English with an Algerian intonation. You have to find a way to get rid of this.”
- “You still speak English with an Algerian intonation. Ask a friend to video-tape you and you will have an idea of how you are speaking.”
- “ You make short vowels long; e.g. : /wi:n/ instead of /win/”
- “There are many words you know but do not pronounce correctly such as: Village, persuade, lieutenant...”
- “There are words that you confuse: Experience vs experiment; optimist vs optimistic; a cook and a cooker.”
- “When you report you do not say: I don’t know who is the person but I don’t know who the person is.”

Teacher (B)’s students did not take notes from their teachers’ feedback since it was not directed to a particular person. However, during the semi-guided interview, teacher (B) expressed his concern about student feedback; when asked to complete the statement: Assessment would be better at making learning happen with my students if only..... Teacher (B) answered: “...*we had a rational number of students so that we could perform more individual assessment to meet individual students’ needs.*” Thus, class size, was a real issue for the observed teachers. In fact, teacher (A) also mentioned this problem during the interview saying: “.....*then, because of the size of the class, we had the problem of providing sufficient ongoing feedback so that students could see their progress.*”

To conclude, Teacher (A) and Teacher (B) had similarities and differences in approaching classroom feedback. In spite of their large classes, one favored individual feedback, when the other opted for class feedback. Teacher (B), just like his colleague, used self, peer and teacher evaluation as formative assessment techniques. Their effect was not the same, though, especially regarding student’s attention span and use of the feedback.

7- Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 On corrective feedback

Teachers hold differing views as to whether mistakes should be corrected or not and when and how to correct them and may have different error correction strategies. Their beliefs and practices may pertain to their history with feedback, to their philosophy of language learning/teaching or classroom experience with their learners. Our belief is that if correction of errors is sometimes necessary and positive, in some other times it has a negative effect. It definitely is needed at some point in the learning process to a lesser or a wider extent. Teachers should try to get as much information as possible from the students in order to know what their learning styles and preferences are. Thus, teachers should consider on the first hand the students' reaction to error correction and whether they are ready to digest such information, because some want to be corrected and others do not. On the other hand, teachers should also decide which errors should be corrected and which ones should be left uncorrected, depending on the students' level, students' needs, type of error etc... Basically, Correction builds on the rapport between teacher and students. A good teacher "*should be able to correct people without offending them*" (Harmer, 1998)

It is recommended for teachers who take notes of their students' mistakes in order to provide them with a feedback at the end of an activity to use a chart or other forms of categorization to help them with this. **Harmer (2007)** suggests the following simple instrument:

| Grammar | Words and phrases | pronunciation | Appropriacy |
|---------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | | |

Figure 3.1: A chart for recording student mistakes

7.2 On self and peer assessments

In the previous sections, results from the students' and teachers' questionnaires indicated a lack of knowledge or a misconception about the notion of self-assessment. In fact, the majority of students were not familiar with the practice while the majority of teachers felt that their learners are unable to assess themselves. A feeling shared by some students who declared, "*They are teachers and we are students; they know better and we have to learn from*

them.” This vision of assessment is a very traditional one even in our context where things have evolved tremendously in the recent years with the implementation of the principles of the Competency Based Approach (CBA) in the earlier educational levels. In fact, learners deal with self-assessment rubrics (in terms of can Dos) at the end of each unit of their course books, not only of English but of other subjects as well. Since the university system and that of national education are somehow disconnected, we may infer that some teachers are ignorant of the learners’ entry profile.

Teachers and students alike need to get rid of traditional perceptions of role attributions concerning learning and assessment. We believe that teachers need to draw their students’ attention to their roles and responsibilities in their own learning. According to Baxter (1997):

*« The Traditional testing system puts no responsibility on the student. The student is accustomed to the teacher saying if he/she is good or bad... For many students assessment is something that teachers do **to** them, rather than something teachers do **with** them. »*

(Baxter, 1997:57)

Self and peer assessments are at the heart of the learning process and there’s nothing like involving the learner in his own learning. These types of evaluation can be utilized to help students learn their strengths and weaknesses and plan their learning better. Teachers can encourage their learners to become self-critical and to take more responsibility.

Some of the informants declared: “Our teachers can have a better judgment of our work and performance. They have more experience”. So, how far can a student’s judgment of her/his performance be reliable?

According to Underhill (1987)

“All learners have the ability to determine their own oral proficiency within certain limits. What they lack is the experience that enables the professional or tester to compare that learner against an external standard”

(Underhill, 1987:22)

To gain experience in assessing their performance teachers should:

- Organize a session devoted to explaining self and peer assessment techniques.
- Make students familiar with checklists and grids if any.
- Involve students in their own assessment on regular basis.

In other words, learners should be trained to know how they are getting on independently of the teacher. This should be done as an automatic part of teaching, to enable learners to take more responsibility for helping themselves progress...

"... any teaching programme that pays more than lip-service to the idea of student-centered learning should be training learners to monitor and assess themselves".

(Ibid: 23)

If students are assessed on regular basis, teachers might as well encourage them to keep a record of their performance. An interesting tool that can be used jointly by teachers and learners is a ROA (Record of Achievement). This tool can not only serve as a record that helps both learners and teachers keep track of the progress made by the learner, but will also allow more individual exchange and one-to-one feedback that combines both the expertise of the teacher and the learner's insight.

Continuous assessment card or a "record of achievement" (ROA)

| CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT CARD Name:Peter Anderson..... | | | |
|--|---|--|----------|
| Test No → | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Type of test and date | Interview 21 January | Role-playing tasks 19 February | |
| Self- assessment | 'I thought I could answer about half of the 10 questions satisfactorily. Weak on pronunciation' | 'Went very well. But there were a few words and phrases I didn't remember (Important?) | |
| Test result | 7/10 | Good | |
| Comments (by teacher of learner) | ' Slight under estimation Pronunciation not too bad.' (Teacher) ' Better than what I thought' (Student) | ' you sounded a bit blunt, perhaps' (teacher) 'Must practice polite phrases.' (Student) | |

Continuous assessment card (Oskarson, 1989: 6 in Fultcher, 2010: 72)

Besides the different suggestions aforementioned, we should like to add others, among which:

- Developing a mini-unit of instruction to introduce students to assessment grids and protocols as well as the notion and practice of self/peer assessments.
- Training teachers in formative assessment techniques.
- Encouraging classroom observation and action research as means of teacher professional growth and development.
- Increasing teacher cooperation and coordination.

To conclude, teachers in some higher education institutions seem to be more successful in implementing formative assessments than others. This disparity in procedures deprives some students from having equal opportunities to access quality instruction and feedback as well as effective assessment procedures that would make all the difference in improving their speaking skills. In our view, it is high time ALL teachers started to question their assessment practices; after all, as Prof. MILIANI put it: *"One should not forget that our profession is one of the very few where constant questioning of everything we do in class is more of a virtue than a defect."*²

On the other hand, results attest that there is a readiness on the students' part to be assessed on regular basis. They expressed the will to be involved in their own assessment and showed interest in getting feedback on their performance. With this in mind, one cannot overlook the importance and the consequences that assessment procedures can have on learning.

² MILIANI, M. (1990). Towards Communicative Testing: From Pragmatism to Theory. *English Language Teaching in the Maghreb : Current Issues in Evaluation. Proceedings of the XI th Mate Annual Conference (Oujda)*. pp 130-133

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