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Investigating Primary Student Teachers' Knowledge and Attitudes towards using different types feedback at Princess Nourha bint Abulrahman University.

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Abstract :

Current research concerning students' learning has been focusing on the central role feedback plays in students' learning and achievement. The current study aimed at investigating Saudi female student teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards using different types of feedback inside the primary classroom at Princess Nourha bint Abulrahman University. Two instruments were utilized to achieve the purpose of the study. Ninety student teachers responded to the attitude questionnaire and the knowledge test. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the results. The study found that even though student teachers hold positive attitudes towards using different feedback methods, they lack the knowledge to do so. Applications for the current results were provided.

Key words: Feedback- Student teachers- Attitudes-Knowledge Test

Introduction

Giving effective feedback is a vital part of communication and essential part of effective learning. It helps students understand the content, and gives them clear guidance on how to improve their learning. Feedback is the information that teacher gives to students about their performance in an activity. The purpose of feedback is to help students improve their performance. Many teachers support Askew and Lodge's (2000) broad definition of feedback that states "all dialogue to support learning in both formal and informal situations" (p, 1). Carlson (1979) also adds that feedback is "authoritative information students receive that will reinforce or modify responses to instruction and guide them more efficiently in attaining the goals of the course" (cited in Ovando, 1992, p.4).

Providing students with effective feedback is crucial for maintaining an open communication climate. Feedback is essential in communication so as to know whether the recipient has understood the message in the same terms as intended by the sender and whether a student agrees to that message or not. Hattie and Timperley (2007) believe that feedback on students work can serve a variety of purposes that help close the gap between the current level of performance and the expected

objective. Pickering and Pollock (2001) believe that with effective feedback a student will be able to successfully self – monitor, have higher aspiration for farther achievement, greater self – satisfaction, and higher performance overall. By taking the time to sit down with a student and offer constructive criticism, give necessary help, offer suggestions, and providing positive feedback, teachers can positively impact student learning (2001).

Providing high quality formative feedback and assuring that students engage with it help facilitate and promote learning. Clarke (2003) believed that quality formative feedback needs to be timely, motivating, personalized, manageable and in direct relation to assessment criteria.

This implies that teachers should look at feedback as a tool that motivates students to engage and remain in the learning process. This fact encourages students especially young learners to view their current state of understanding and competences and reflect upon them, regardless of performance. Yorke (2003) found that providing a highly motivational feedback environment was one of the most challenging and the most important teacher’s tasks. Nicol and Macfarlane (2006) also state that providing the right kind of feedback to students can make a significant difference in their achievement.

As discussed previously, educators agree that providing different means of feedback is essential part of the cycle of teaching and learning. Several methods of feedback have been tested and have been proven their effectiveness in improving students’ learning. Among these methods are: immediate versus delayed feedback, supportive feedback, confirmation feedback, oral feedback, verbal and written feedback, positive and negative feedback, direct, explicit written feedback, and corrective feedback (Schachter,1991; Ohta,2001; Young & Cameron, 2005; White & Rosario, 1995; Johnston,2004). For example, Kyriacou (2007) points out that supportive feedback helps students deal with the difficulties they encounter in a

situation where they need further assistance rather than being admonished. Also, in FEL, Young and Cameron (2005) investigated whether direct, explicit written feedback are effective in language learning. The study found a significant effect for the combination of written and conference feedback on accuracy levels in the use of the past simple tense and the definite article in new pieces of writing. Verbal and written feedback have been tested and proven as effective tools of communication in EFL classroom (White and Rosario, 1995).

Feedback can be very powerful if done well, the power of formative feedback lies in its double barreled approach, addressing both cognitive and motivational factors at the same time. Good feedback gives students information they need so they can understand where they are in their learning and what need improving. Once they feel they understand what to do and why, most students develop a feeling that they have control over their own learning. Peddie (2000) asserts that future focus needs to be placed on formative assessment and effective use of feedback. He also found that teachers' responses to the way they actually give feedback to students lacked detail and warranted further investigation. He also believes that feedback is conceptually complex and a logistical challenge for classroom teachers, so there is a desperate need to investigate and highlight student teachers attitudes and knowledge towards feedback since they will be the ones responsible for teaching young generation.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined based on related literature by Tunstall and Gipps' (1996):

Feedback: It refers to the authoritative information students receive that will reinforce or modify responses to instruction and guide them more efficiently in attaining the goals of the course.

Confirmation feedback: It informs the learner about the accuracy and correctness of a response.

Corrective feedback: It informs the learner that his/her response was incorrect with the knowledge of the correct or desired response.

Diagnosis feedback: It attempts to explain the source of the incorrect response by the comparison with common mistakes.

Elaboration feedback: It provides related information designed to enhance and extend the learner's knowledge acquisition.

Facial and non-verbal feedback: It refers to facial expressions reflect emotional stimuli.

Written feedback: It refers to the written comments on students 'papers or tests.

Positive feedback: refers to the feedback which gives learners information on their happiness, any good results, praise, rewards and the list can go on.

Negative feedback: It refers to the feedback which indicates criticism, unhappiness, complaints, lack of results, and pain.

Informal feedback It means that teachers can "drop by" students' desks and comment on their work.

Formal feedback: With formal feedback, students attend a conference with the teacher where teachers check progress toward goals.

Evaluative feedback: It refers to the feedback which makes a judgment about the other person, evaluating worth or goodness.

Interpretive feedback: It seeks to test your understanding of what has been said by interpreting and paraphrasing back to the other person what you think has been said.

Supportive feedback: It seeks to support the other person in some way.

Probing feedback: It seeks to find more information by asking deeper questions that seek specific information.

Understanding feedback: It seeks to understand not just what was said, but the whole person underneath.

Statement of the problem

Through the researchers experience and field visit observing student teachers sat Princess Nourha University, they have noticed that student teachers ignore, do not care for the learner's errors, or do not deal with those errors sufficiently and appropriately. This behaviour affects students' performance and denies the learner of the main benefits of live teacher-student interaction. Since students come from different educational and social backgrounds and have different personalities, the researchers believe that it is important to realize that each will have his/her own feedback needs. Thus, it is important to discuss and explore the different types of teacher feedback used in primary EFL classrooms. Although there has been extensive research on the importance of using feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Pickering and Pollock ,2001; Clark, 2003), the absence of definitive research about the different types of teachers' feedback that specific to elementary student teachers at Princess Nourha University was the primary motivation for this study. The main purpose of this study was to investigate student teachers knowledge and attitudes towards using different feedback types.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study stems from the following considerations:

1. Findings from this study will help teacher educators in designing instruction that can improve student teachers' understanding and implementation of different types of feedback.
2. Finding from this study will also help guide designing curriculum and activities that can improve student teachers knowledge of the different types of feedback.
3. The findings of the study may provide student teachers with insights into the importance of using effective types of feedback in classrooms.

Research Questions

The present study investigates the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of primary student teachers at Princess Nourha bint Abdulrahman University towards using different types of feedback in their teaching?
2. Are primary student teachers at Princess Nourha bint Abdulrahman University familiar with different types of feedback as identified by current literature?

Population and Sampling

The target population of the study was senior female student teachers in the college of education at Princess Nourha bint Abdulrahman in Saudi Arabia. There were 90 students who participated in this study. All of these students were seniors who were in their last semester before beginning their internships in schools as a part of their training program.

Instruments and Data Analysis

A knowledge test. This instrument was adapted from Hamdan (2011) who investigated the Congruence between Jordanian EFL Teachers' Knowledge and Use of the Various Types of Feedback in Light of Some Variables. The knowledge test was used to collect the data of the present study. The purpose of the test was to find out student teachers' knowledge of the types of feedback that teachers use in their classrooms. The test consisted of sixteen items. The items covered the sixteen types of feedback which were mentioned in the definitions. (See Appendix A)

Feedback attitude questionnaire. This was developed by the researcher to investigate the student teachers' attitudes towards using different types of feedback. The questionnaire contains twenty items that were intended to elicit the subjects' opinions on a five –point Likert scale (i.e. strongly agree 5, agree 4, neutral 3, disagree 2, strongly disagree 1). The questionnaire included two parts: part one consisted of 10 items aiming at exploring students' beliefs about different types of feedback. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 items aiming at exploring students teachers' opinions about

using different types of feedback. Student teachers were asked to choose the answer which mostly represented their beliefs and opinions. (See Appendix B).

Research Design

The design of the present study was a quantitative one. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the question of this study using means, standard deviations, and frequencies.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The Feedback attitude questionnaire was validated by a jury of experts consisting of university instructors, English language supervisors, and well qualified teachers. Their recommendations and comments were taken into account in modifying the instrument before it was used. The experts' comments and suggestions on the original version included: deleting overlapping items, making some editing corrections and forming the questions in a clearer and more direct way. The attitude questionnaire was finally modified as suggested resulting in a twenty items, which was later approved by all the experts. To establish the reliability of the knowledge test, it was applied to a pilot sample from outside the population of the study; the sample consisted of student teachers. Two weeks later, the test was applied again. For reliability, the analysis reported .983 for Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Results

The purpose of the study was to investigate female students' teachers' attitude and knowledge toward using different feedback methods in their teaching. The analysis of the instruments revealed the following results:

Question 1: The first research question the study aimed to investigate student teachers' attitudes towards using different types of feedback inside the classroom in their future teaching. Overall, the mean score of the attitude scale fell in the upper range indicating positive attitude towards using different feedback methods inside the classroom. The highest mean score of the attitude scale is presented in item 11 that states "I

like to use different types of feedback in the classrooms.” Whereas, item 18 that states “I hate to take training workshops to learn about new types of feedback.” received the lowest mean score in the opinion scale. This indicates that student teachers are willing to learn about these types of feedback.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Attitude Scale □

Dependent Variable	N	Mean	SD
Feedback Attitude	90	3.79	.91

Question 2: In order to measure student’teachers’ knowledge about the different types of feedback, the researchers used the most current methods of feedback as a framework developed by (Hamdan, 2011) that been adopted and modified by the researchers. The mean score of the knowledge scale is shown in table 3 below. As shown in the table 2, it could be noticed that the total mean score is low. Also, it can be seen from table 4 that minimum knowledge score was .11 and the maximum knowledgescore is .83. Therefore, it can be said that student teachers who were completed the elementary training program at lack the knowledge of the different means of feedback. Insufficiency in students’ preparation of assessment and feedback caused this result. Further explanations of the results will be highlighted in the discussion section.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Knowledge Scale □

Dependent Variable	N	Mean	SD
Student teachers’ knowledge	90	6.94	2.40

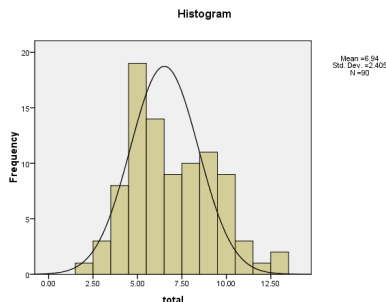


Figure 1: histogram of the total mean score of the knowledge scale

Table 4
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Knowledge Scale

N	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
q1	90	.59	.495
q2	90	.83	.375
q3	90	.11	.316
q4	90	.28	.450
q5	90	.56	.500
q6	90	.37	.485
q7	90	.49	.503
q8	90	.43	.498
q9	90	.47	.502
q10	90	.38	.488
q11	90	.20	.402
q12	90	.52	.502
q13	90	.41	.495
q14	90	.29	.456
q15	90	.57	.498
q16	90	.46	.501
total	90	6.9444	2.40487

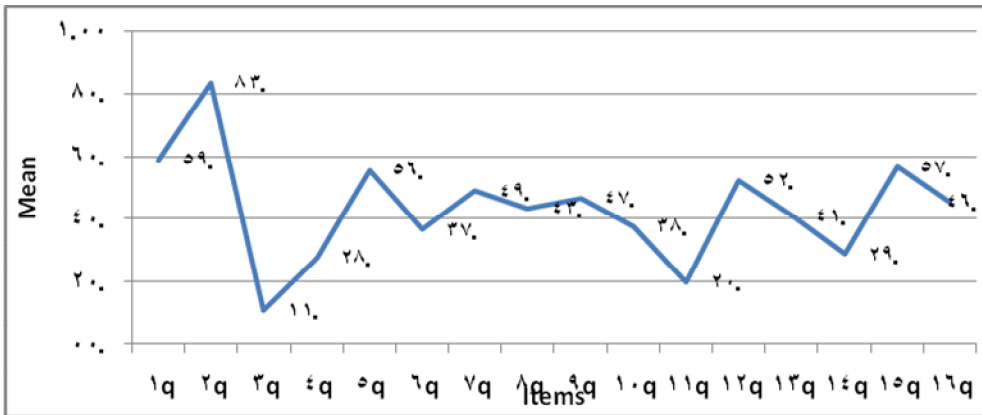


Figure 2
Total Mean Scores of Each Item on the Knowledge Scale

Discussion

It is essential to remember that feedback is a vital tool for ongoing communication between learners and the teachers especially if the receivers are young learners. This study aimed to identify both (a) the current feedback literature and (b) what

are the perceived attitudes and knowledge by future teachers regarding the importance of feedback in teaching and learning. The study has found that student teachers hold a positive attitude towards using different types of feedback. These findings of the study are reported in many studies that investigated similar issues and problems regarding assessment and feedback (Zacharias, 2007; Black, P. & William, D., 1998a; Clarke, S., 2002) which concluded similar results. This result could be due to the following factors: Demographically, all the participants of the study were inexperienced young teachers who might have the enthusiasm to learn new types of feedback that will help them in their future teaching Wang and Fwu (2002). Hence, follow-up research on the same group is suggested to determine whether there is a change of opinion when they exposed through observing and applying different types of feedback during student teachers practicum. Furthermore, majority of the participants may lack of experiences in using feedback by their instructors led them to feel the need to be more knowledgeable about the topic in order to develop a well structured classroom environment that incorporates different types of feedback.

The second major result of the study is student teachers' lack the knowledge about different types of feedback. Different factors might contribute to this result. First, the majority of the participants had one major course in assessment. In this course students learn about general aspects of assessments and feedback in terms of importance and types. However, absence of the application and experience could contribute to the current result (Zacharias, 2007; Black, P. & William, D., 1998a; Clarke, S., 2002). Furthermore, each of the respondents might have different understanding of feedback term provided in the questionnaire. Hence, lack of consensus of definition of the types of feedback could make the participants respond to the items differently. Therefore, this fact could generate contradicting results and eventually influence the final results of the study. So this result should not be generalized and further investigation is needed.

Recommendations

1. Direct instruction about different types of feedback and how student teachers can apply them in everyday teaching is recommended.
2. Based on the current results, training programs and workshops are recommended which will help current student teachers understand these types of feedback and how they can apply them in classroom.
3. Further investigation need to be done regarding student teachers' knowledge of different type of feedback.
4. A direct observation of implementation of feedback by student teachers throughout student teachers training is important to insure implementation of different types of feedback.
5. Using different types of feedback methods must be built into the policy of teacher preparation programs to insure ongoing induction of these types in everyday teaching.
6. Further research is suggested to identify the obstacles that might hinder the implementation of different types of feedback.
7. Consensus that helps unified the feedback terms is needed to minimize misunderstanding of these types.

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