Unpacking Student Feedback as a Basis for Metacognition and Mediated Learning Experiences: A Socio-cultural Perspective

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Abstract

The study examines the effects of the feedback given to students by lecturers as learning support. It was conducted with undergraduates in an educational theory course in a South African university. The thesis was that although some of the feedback messages transmitted to students regarding strengths and weaknesses in learning get easily decoded and turned into action to improve performance, some messages are misconstrued by the students making the process of giving feedback complex. Data was collected through a cross-sectional feedback survey utilizing focus group interviews with 50 Bachelor of Education pre-service students conveniently sampled. The data analysis followed a thematic approach with super ordinate themes used to structure the discussion of findings. The study found that student feedback needs to be culturally responsive for it to foster metacognition in them. The conclusion was that unless lecturers provide feedback that is simple, meaningful and clearly focused, students are unlikely to take much heed of it as there is a general tendency to focus more on the marks obtained than on the role of the feedback provided. This makes some students leave university under-prepared or half-baked in terms of providing student feedback on performance.

Keywords*: Feedback, feedback sandwich, mediated learning experiences, metacognition, scaffolding, self-regulated learning*

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Introduction
Conceptualizations of the Notion of Student Feedback

Current trends in constructivist pedagogy require that educators and learners engage in learning conversations in their quest to co-construct and share knowledge (Magano, Mostert and Van der Westhuizen, 2012). This paper argues that in spite of the view that some of the feedback messages given to students by their lecturers and tutors can usefully be taken heed of and turned into action to improve performance, some of the messages are misunderstood by students making the provision student feedback difficult for some to really decipher. The current and emerging global economy and the divergent trends in student beliefs and values require that academics the world over use feedback as a key way of mediating learning (Hodges 2005; Kozulin, 2002). A number of writers (e.g. Boud 2001; Laurillard 2002; Sadker 1998; Yorke 2003) have argued that feedback is under-conceptualized in the theoretical literature in higher education and elsewhere. As a result, this makes it difficult for lecturers and tutors to design effective feedback practices or to evaluate their effectiveness. While there has been a move over the last decade to conceptualize learning from a constructivist perspective (Laurillard, 2002), approaches to feedback have, until recently, remained obstinately focused on simple transmission perspectives. However, as noted by Higgins, Hartley & Skelton (2001), student feedback on performance, when effective, is widely considered integral to learning because students learn faster and more deeply if they know what the strengths and weaknesses of their performances are and most importantly when they become aware of how to improve on future performance.

According to Boud (2001), one of the most valuable contributions any educator can make to students' learning is through the provision of constructive feedback. To do this, they need to be conscious of the different approaches to feedback as well as the dangers of cultural transplantation in the provision of student feedback in academia. It is in this light that scholars and academics outside of South Africa need to understand the different conceptualizations of the notion of feedback by their students and the many and varied insights on the ways through which the provision of effective feedback can be disseminated to students in their quest to effectively scaffold their learning experiences.

Approaches to Effective Student Feedback

Woodsmall (2000) the brains behind what has become popularly known as the feedback sandwich approach to assessment asserts that feedback is most effective when presented in a manner that ensures that the good news, which should be clear, specific, personal and honest come first and that the bad news, which should be specific, constructive and kind follows and that an encouraging conclusion sums up the feedback. The rationale for such an approach is that giving critical feedback to students in order to change their learning behaviour can be a delicate process that needs to be approached with circumspection (Eikenberry, 2012). It is in this light that Woodsmall's feedback sandwich technique recommends that the feedback giver first focuses on the positives before the negatives comments then provide a critique and finally end with some other positive and then ends with some other form of positives as well. Eikenberry argues that if this is done properly, most feedback recipients will heed it leading to improved performances. He adds another dimension to feedback when he argues that in addition to the feedback sandwich, there is also the complimentary sandwich technique to feedback. Unlike the former (feedback sandwich approach), which is ideal for scaffolding or supporting young students, the latter is more oriented towards softening or disguising required criticism (Askew & Lodge, 2000; Eikenberry, 2012). The former approach tends to make sense conceptually because by putting the negative feedback in the middle of positives, recipients are more likely to take heed if it. Proponents of this approach (eg, Hodges 2005; Woodsmall 2000) maintain that with this kind of approach, the relationship between the feedback giver and the recipients is often maintained, even if the negative feedback in the middle may be unpalatable. The aforementioned approaches suggest the existence of positive and negative feedback genres in student assessment practices. While positive feedback refers to the good news given to students for tasks well done and that also need to be repeated, its inverse describes the bad news or things that did not go well in the students' tasks and which do not need to be repeated (Eikenberry, 2012). In the feedback sandwich approach, positive feedback would also entail suggesting what would improve the students' future task performances. According to Hodges (2005), when providing positive feedback assessors need to refer to specific examples from the task or assignment that are worthy of praise and then adopt some kind of descriptive feedback as in the following example:

Thulie, in this paragraph you have clearly defined the concept of practice.

In doing so they should endeavour to point out at least one effective idea, argument, paragraph, sentence, phrase or word used. Undercutting praises by including a '*but*' or suggestion for improvement

in the same sentence can water down the good news (positive feedback) and should thus be avoided at all cost. The following is an example of how this can be done.

> 'Busi, I thought the way you handled this was both valid and original. I particularly like the way you...'

The good news need to be honest or realistic as in the following example: 'strong conclusion' or 'powerful thesis', not 'excellent or poor essay ' as this does not help the student to know where to improve or what exactly is excellent in the essay.

In providing negative feedback, assessors need to be specific to make clear what they are reacting to, which word or idea is wrong and explain in what respects it is wrong or inappropriate. To be truly constructive in giving negative feedback, it is important to suggest how the work could be rewritten in order to be acceptable. There is also need to limit the amount of negative feedback by not commenting on many issues. Asking questions in order to help students develop or support their ideas might also be helpful in giving negative feedback. This paper further argues that the potential for tutors and lecturers to influence the future performance of their students constitutes the process of feed forward. So, in order to generate feed forward, the feedback given must not only identify the students' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1987) or gap between actual and desired performance but must also provide the information needed to close that gap. This is particularly important in formative assessment where specific guidance is provided to scaffold students to close the performance gap as opposed to concentrating on the pass or fail grades. When this happens, the feed forward effect is even greater as the focus of the feedback shifts and quickly becomes learning rather than marks (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell & Litjens, 2008).

Problem Statement

Previous research results (e.g. Black and William 2001; Dunn, Morgan, O'Reilly and Parry 2004; Pintrich, 2002; Reid and Harris 2005) have shown that where the classroom culture focuses on rewards, marks, grades or place-in-the-class ranking, students tend to look for the ways and means, ethically or otherwise to obtain the best marks rather than at the needs of their learning which these marks ought to reflect. Where they have a choice, they will avoid difficult tasks. They also spend time and energy looking for clues to the right answers. Some may be reluctant to ask questions for fear of failure. Students who encounter difficulties and poor results are often led to believe that they lack ability and this belief may lead them to attribute their difficulties to a defect in themselves about which they feel they cannot do much to improve. As a result, they may retire hurt and avoid investing effort in seeking to improve their learning attainment. Seen in this sense, the research questions addressed by this study are: what role does feedback play in the process of student assessment? And what feedback support is necessary to foster metacognition in students' learning?

Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

Deploying the Vygotskian socio-cultural perspective to student feedback l argue that the concept feedback can be explained in terms of how it is used as a way of promoting mediated learning experiences (Kozulin, 2002). Through the assessment comments made by lecturers and tutors in the margins of their students' written work, students can be scaffolded from lower mental functions (LMF) to higher mental functions (HMF) in academic writing (Vygotsky, 1987). For such feedback to foster effective metacognition in students, it needs to be provided within their ZPDs, a Vygotskian conceptual framework that describes the difference between what students can do on their own and what they can do with the assistance of a mediator such as a tutor, lecturer, parent or a more competent peer collaborator (Tudge, 1990). This means that any meaningful feedback that is given to students at an opportune time such as at the end of a unit, topic or after writing an essay can be equated with scaffolding that is provided in their ZPDs to meet them at their point of need, or desire to transform their prior knowledge or LMF to HMF (Kozulin, 2002). A lecturer or tutor who uses language well in his provision of student of feedback on an assignment thus provides what the Vygotskian socio-cultural approach to learning and development considers one of the modern psychological tools for scaffolding students towards excellence in their learning attainment. This implies that the process of assessing students' work should be seen as a way of mediating learning and the given feedback becomes a learning tool (Wertsch, 2001). Assessment, as the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using and reporting information over time about a student's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes (Darling Hammond & Snyder, 2005) should thus comprise both positive and negative feedback presented in line with the best approaches possible. According to Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William (2003) the feedback given to scaffold learning should thus make a distinction between Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessment of Learning (AoL).

The former emphasizes the role that the student can play in his own learning by involving him in deciding learning outcomes, helping him to identify progress, highlighting challenges as well as reflecting on ways to improve in future tasks. It is therefore synonymous with formative assessment as viewed by Sadker (1998) and Yorke (2003). For Boud (2000), the ethos of AFL is an understanding that the students measure their progress against previous attainments rather than against other students. It is thus a collaborative process between the lecturer or tutor and the students and is at the heart of supporting the students' learning cycle as shown in figure 1. On the other hand AOL comprises the traditional form of assessment that generally involves assessing the students' performance at the end of a unit of work, or after a period of time, such as at the end of term or year. It is thus synonymous with summative assessment (Ferguson 2011; Boud 2000; Yorke, 2003). Very often the only feedback given on this kind of assessment on performance is a grade determining passing or failing in the student. While this information can be very useful to the tutor/lecturer in establishing whether or how he progresses to the next level, the benefit of a grade alone, without supporting information on how to improve is rather limited as it does very little to scaffold him and foster the development of metacognitive skills (Flavell & Wellman, 2007). All forms of feedback on assessment should thus strive to develop the students' metacognitive skills by supporting, monitoring and evaluating their performance as well as guiding them in determining areas needing improvement for the to reach their targets if they are to be considered effective (Garner, 2007; Pokorny & Pickford 2010). Pioneers of the constructivist paradigm, Piaget and Vygotsky acknowledge this role of metacognition in promoting cognitive development. For example, in his research with children at the concrete operational stage (7-11 year-olds), Piaget demonstrated children's ability to verbalize the processes they used in completing tasks and the ways in which they were aware of their thinking. He called this awareness consciousness of cognizance, which maps closely to the notion of metacognition (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2008). Vygotsky further explored these ideas in his research about the child's inner voice or the process of verbalizing internal thoughts as a way to make sense of something (Wertsch, 2001). Articulating internal thoughts out loud not only helps a student learn, but also demonstrates an awareness of the learning process, which are both important aspects of metacognition as conceptualized in this study. Part of the process of developing the students metacognitively entails helping them to learn how to be aware of their own thinking and how to direct it consciously and strategically toward the desired ends. It is in this sense that the provision of effective feedback on their performance is considered a condition necessary for the development of their metacognitive abilities (Nicol & Boyle, 2003).

Effective Feedback: A Condition Necessary for the Development of Metacognitive Skills in Students

In almost all educational programmes metacognition as a concept that is highly related to student feedback and according to Garner (2007) it disguises much more complicated concepts that have kept scientists, philosophers and educational psychologists puzzled for hundreds of years. Among the puzzles often encountered are: how can we truly think about our own thinking when the brain that is doing the thinking is also the thing that is being thought about? Philosophical puzzles aside, metacognition is most usefully thought of as knowledge and understanding of what students know and how they think, including their ability to regulate their own thinking as they work on set classroom tasks (Flavell & Wellman, 2007). While cognition is necessary for students to perform tasks, metacognitive skills allow them to understand how these tasks are to be performed (Garner, 2007; Weaver, 2006). It implies that students have to think about their own thinking and this explains why proponents of feedback for metacognition (e.g. Bransford et al., 2000) maintain that it is most commonly broken down into two distinct though interrelated areas: metacognitive knowledge, which is an awareness of one's thinking and metacognitive regulation, which describes the ability for one to manage his own thinking processes. These two components are often used together to inform learning theory on the grounds that students have thoughts, conceptions and intuitions about their own knowledge and thinking (Bransford et al., 2000; Ndofirepi 2014).

For Flavell (2003), the aforementioned can be summed up by the three kinds of metacognitive knowledge he identifies: an awareness of knowledge or understanding of what one knows, what he does not know and what he wants to know. The implication of this view for student feedback is that since students are not initially always accurate at describing what they know, they need to be scaffolded so that their metacognitive skills improve. Effective feedback is thus important to promote the development of a culture of metacognition in the classroom. It is necessary for helping students with strategies to regulate, monitor and guide their own learning. This idea is also shared by Darling-Hammond & Snyder (2005) who assert that there are two aspects of metacognition: reflection and self-regulation, which describe stepping back to evaluate work previously done and to determine how best to go forward. Taken together, these processes make up an important aspect of all learning and

development. Metacognitive theorists (e.g. Brown et al., 2003; Flavell & Wellman, 2007) are of the view that one of the key traits good problem-solvers possess is highly developed metacognitive skills, which as adults we also actively engage with in our everyday thinking as we decide what method to use to solve a problem or when to ask for help. Students and novices often lack these skills or fail to recognize when to use them (Flavell & Wellman, 2007). Although the concept of metacognition did not come into common use until the 1970s when it was introduced by psychologist Flavell, the notion of reflecting on one's thinking can be found in writings dating back to Plato, who emphasized the importance of reflecting through dialogue. Dewey often considered the father of progressive education also viewed reflection as a central part of active learning and noted that as long as our activity glides smoothly along from one thing to another there is no call for reflection but our difficulties in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree, try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, we decide how the facts stand related to one another (1933:14). As educators, it is important for us to help foster the development of metacognitive skills in students because these skills help students learn how to learn. This explains why metacognition theorists (e.g. Brown & DeLoache, 2008) use the phrase '*going meta*' to refer to the process by which students step back to see what they are doing as if they were someone else observing it. '*Going meta*' thus implies becoming an audience for one's own intellectual or academic performance (Garner, 2007). When a student is learning to write an essay, for example, reflecting on his own previous work can help him understand what he is doing well and what he is doing poorly. Just as a skilled professional ballet dancer relies on mirrors to help him understand what he looks like and what he is doing as he dances, so does a student in the academic writing process. He has to be able to see his performance through his tutors or lecturers' feedback if he is to improve it. This is not to say that students do not have metacognitive capabilities but to argue that the more they learn about general strategies for learning in specific contexts, the better they become at using them across domains. The challenge lies in helping them learn how to '*go meta*' with regard to thought processes that are not directly visible in order to improve their cognitive performances. Lecturers and tutors must thus create the classroom equivalent of the mirror or the dance studio wall through student feedback on performance. What is needed is therefore the implementation of appropriate feedback strategies in line with the crucial principles underpinning student feedback as discussed below.

Some Principles behind the Provision of Effective Student Feedback

Boud (2000) and Hodges (2005) are of the view that if feedback is to foster sound metacognitive skills in students' learning, it has to make them think more clearly about concepts or processes in the work previously covered and must be linked to the purpose of the assignment and criteria for assessment given. Hodges argues that it is also important to acknowledge the following as some of the principles of effective feedback practices: it has to indicate factual errors, misconceptions and gaps in subject content; support the students' development and understanding of the course content; help them to engage more deeply with course material or tasks; provide information about specific academic writing conventions; indicate strengths and weaknesses in student performance; provide suggestions as to how tasks can be improved; support students' writing development; motivate students and acknowledge their prior learning experience, develop academic relationships between lecturers and students; challenge students to excel as well as justify the marks awarded during assessment processes.

Methodology
Design

I adopted a cross-sectional feedback survey research design genre owing to its strengths in assessing thoughts, opinions and feelings (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). Because a survey consists of a predetermined set of questions to be given to a sample, we designed a focus group interview guide for data collection. To keep the focus group discussions focused during the feedback survey, I had to adhere to the focus group interview protocol designed (Fayisetani, 2004). I thus asked participants to respond to a set of structured but open ended questions concerning the feedback experiences they receive from their lecturers and tutors as part of their learning support or assessments. The open-ended questions posed to the participants were important in enabling me to generate full explanations and further probe them for in-depth data (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Population and Sample

The population from which the convenient and systematic sample for this study was obtained consisted of 500 second year Bachelor of Education students in the faculty of Education of the university chosen as the site for the study. Given that in probability sampling every individual member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected (Algi, Anua & Abdul, 2014; Maree 2010), I adopted a convenient sample by using the students' class attendance registers as the sampling frame and then selected units systematically in multiples of 10 to yield a total sample size of 50 participants. Because of the convenience of using students from the university where I teach to represent the target population and the systematic identification of sampling units in multiple of 10, I argue that the study adopted a combination of convenience and systematic sampling techniques (Mutekwe & Modiba 2012; Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

In line with the ethical clearance research procedures (Babbie & Mouton 2005), I first sought and obtained permission to conduct the feedback survey from the university and authorities. I also sought and obtained the participants' consent to take part in the study and proceeded to inform them on the purpose of our study prior to conducting the focus group interviews. After assuring them of their right to voluntary participation, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality and that they were free to withdraw from the research without any penalty I began the focus group interviews using the funnel approach by starting with semi-structured questions so as to first ease the participants into the discussion before getting into it full throttle (Mutekwe & Modiba 2012; Odimegwu, 2004). None of the members of the sample chose to withdraw from the study prematurely. As mentioned above the data collection involved the use of focus group interviews because of their potential for enabling the researcher to moderate and direct the discussions towards the desired areas of the research's interest (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Consistent with the literature by amongst others, Hesse-Biber (2010) and Ndofirepi (2014) that an ideal focus group discussion should contain between five and twelve members, after asking the 50 participants to voluntarily categorize themselves into 5 focus groups of 10 members each, I interviewed each of their groups two times for one hour in two months in order to get their overall conceptions and perceptions of the feedback they receive from their lecturers and tutors. To conduct the focus group interviews without disrupting lectures, I had to capitalize on the days when the participants had no classes. As a result, each focus group was scheduled for an interview on a different day. Prior to the interview sessions, participants were fully assured that the data gathered during the interview sessions would be treated with strict confidentiality.

Data Management and Analysis

I conducted the data analysis thematically ensuring that all related data were clustered into the superordinate themes for the convenience of the discussion of the findings (Mutekwe & Modiba 2012). The discussion of results adopted in this study entailed the use of themes and summaries of the participants' responses complemented by the use of excerpts from their accounts of the feedback experiences in the university, the use of a priori codes, inductive explanations and interpretations of the focus group interview data generated by the study,

Results

The results of the feedback survey conducted for this study indicated that for any student feedback to be considered effective, it must address the following assessment issues:

It should be specific, given regularly, given on small chunks of work and it should also focus on learning rather than on marks or on students themselves. It should focus on where the student has done well, gone wrong and what he or she can do to improve on performance in future. The feedback provider should not focus on the student's ego and self-image because this fosters resentment to feedback and builds a defensive syndrome in students. The survey has also shown that feedback without grades has a more positive impact than feedback and marks combined or marks alone. Other findings unveiled through this study were that the feedback that is provided quickly enough tends to be more useful to students than that which is belated. In fact the results of the survey suggested that immediate feedback at each stage of the student's progress through a course has a great potential to improve their future performance. The students' perceptions of feedback were also that if it is not received soon enough, students will have moved on and the feedback becomes irrelevant. It emerged from this study that immediate though imperfect feedback from a peer is more effective than higher quality feedback given by the lecturer or tutor weeks later. Maintaining motivation in student feedback was also found to be one of the most important aspects students appreciate when receiving feedback from their tutors and

lecturers. This finding lent credence to Woodsmall's notion of the feedback sandwich, which he asserts helps to keep the relationship of the educator and his students cordial throughout the learning processes. In addition, students need to understand the grade they receive as part of their feedback on performance. They also need to understand why they did not get a higher mark. In motivating this need, they pointed out that this is important in for them to be able to monitor themselves and improve the quality of their future tasks

The study also established that feedback should be understandable to students according to their level of sophistication. Therefore educators need to make the feedback they give to students as unequivocal as possible if it is to be effective in supporting their learning or scaffold them from lower to higher cognitive functions (Vygotsky, 1987). For example, it was apparent in the focus group discussions that many students would need to understand what a successful attempt at a task implies. Lecturers and tutors thus need to demonstrate some evaluative expertise when giving feedback to students. Another issue that emerged was that lecturers and tutors need to be well versed in the conventions of academic writing practices and expectations of the disciplines they operate in. Many students argued that there is need for them to be helped to engage with the given feedback because some find the feedback difficult to decipher. They also noted that some of the feedback given by their lecturers or tutors fails to have an impact on their future learning because of coming too late or being backward rather than forward looking or not being specific enough. Others claimed they often ignore some of the feedback because their lecturers and tutors do not always follow up to see if they have actually used it. The study established that the margins of students' written work are ideal sites for the provision of written feedback comments because tutors/lecturers can offer some of their most useful feedback to students in the margins and end spaces in the students' written work. This observation gave credence to Hodges (2005) and Askew and Lodge (2000) assertion that a clear relationship between in-text and summative end comments is of paramount importance when giving student feedback. The following example of feedback epitomises this view:

> ' Tumie, as you look through your essay draft, please note that many of my questions and comments refer to the fact that you have not included evidence to support your claims about the role of your chosen sociological theory to educational practice in the South African context of education.'

The need for student feedback to be legibly positioned where expected or at visible sites such as in the margins as alluded to above was also cited by many participants. Feedback approaches that tend to focus too heavily on grammatical correctness, especially for essays riddled with language errors tend to demotivate the students' quest to improve as this often leaves them feeling inadequate or with a misguided sense that improvement in writing at the level of syntax, spelling and grammar is all that is required for a successful essay. The use of the red pen was cited as one of the situations that exacerbate the demoralization. The use of the pencil in providing written student feedback was cited as one way that might go a long way towards reducing encouraging them to heed the given feedback. Students also cited the language and tone used in giving student feedback as another demotivating factor in their quest for improved learning attainment. Comments such as, *'Incomplete', Confused!' 'and 'Unconvincing were cited as some of the examples.* In their view, as feedback givers, lectures/tutors need to adopt mitigated and open-ended comments such as, *You might like to think about ...', 'In my opinion, you could expand on this idea by ...', 'What about including information from a greater variety of sources?'* or *'Could this concept be interpreted differently?*

Such an approach helps foster a friendly interpersonal relationship between feedback givers and its recipients.

Discussion

The provision of effective feedback fosters metacognitive skills in students, which are important as tools that scaffolding and empowering students to see learning as a cycle that involves revisiting previous work to see where it can be improved. Effective student feedback promotes self-regulated learning, which implies the ability for students to orchestrate their own learning by planning, monitoring their progress or otherwise and correcting errors where appropriate. Scholars and or academic the world over thus need to realize that effective feedback is integral to all teaching, learning and assessment practices and that when effective, it is not only about providing good information to the students about their learning attainment but also about providing good information to lecturers and tutors about their assessment practices (Ahmad, Abdullah & Ghani, 2014). This implies that the processes of assessments adopted by academics or educators have an effect on the assessors as well as the assessed because the former also tend to learn about the extent to which the latter have developed from their advice on teaching and learning in the classroom.

It is of paramount importance that academics realize that effective feedback produces student autonomy by helping them realize how they are performing and advising them on the way forward towards improved performance. This will promote self-regulated learning in the students and thus limits undue dependence on their lecturers and tutors. Feedback aligns teaching and learning: When explicitly linked to assessment tasks, learning outcomes and marking schemes, feedback functions to create and maintain meaning for tutors, lecturers and students alike through a reinforcement of the purpose of assessment and how it relates to learning outcomes. Feedback directly impacts on students' experiences: All lecturers and tutors are seen by students as possessing some form of expert power and therefore carelessly worded or overly judgmental comments on assessments can easily damage the students' self-concept and confidence. This can lead to a student with low self-esteem interpreting all future feedback personally (as a judgment on their ability). On the other hand, constructive, well-written feedback contributes to positive students' self-esteem.

It is also crucial for scholars or academics of this subject to realize that when effective, student feedback has the potential to facilitate self-assessment and encourage learning conversations (Magano et al., 2012; Weaver, 2006). An analysis of the participants' views revealed that the feedback that is given to students in line with the feedback sandwich approach tends to enable them to be receptive to the advice given as feedback on their performance. Owing to the fact that the good news would have come first, students tend to heed the entire feedback comments. The approach thus encourages students to conduct introspection and reflection of their performance and this was found to have a positive impact on their future performances.

Effective feedback provides opportunities to close the performance gap. It is in this sense that effective feedback helps scaffold students to bridge the knowledge gap between their prior knowledge and the new forms resulting from the lecturers' provision of the feedback. According to the Vygotskian socio-cultural perspective, this implies that the feedback given helps to transform the students' LMF to HMF. Feedback encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem in students: A key feature of effective feedback as perceived by the students in this study was the importance they attached to their motivational beliefs and self-esteem. They tended to construct their own motivation based on the feedback given by their lecturers and tutors especially the assessment comments they received. This finding also lends credence to Pokorny and Pickford' (2010) as well as Algi, Anua and Abdul (2014) who contend that the feedback given to students impact enormously on their personal and academic goals as well as their self-esteem and commitment to learning goals. Feedback can have a negative effect on the students' self-concepts: The results of this study also showed that student feedback can also have a negative effect on the students' motivational beliefs and self-esteem by influencing how they feel about themselves, which, in turn, affects what and how they learn. This was found to be particularly applicable to high stakes work (where marks or grades are given), negative feedback can adversely affect the students' motivation to learn especially if it is carelessly expressed. This is because with such assessments students tend to focus more on the goals of passing the tests or examination rather than the actual learning process and therefore if the feedback is hopelessly give chances are that the student will resign from seeking to improve.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from this study were as follows: the calibre of student feedback given by lecturers and tutors need to foster the development of learner autonomy or self-regulated learning as an aspect of metacognition. It should be continuous, promote self-reflection, communicate a rich array of what students know and can do, involve realistic contexts, communicate to students what is valued, portray the processes by which work is to be accomplished and be integrated with instruction. It should thus encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem in students; be integral to both formative and summative assessments, align teaching and learning by directly impacting on students' prior learning experiences, facilitate self-assessment and provide opportunities for closing the knowledge gap in students' learning and development. In light of these conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations

Given that among the main parts of the results of this study was the view that the process of commenting on the students' writing performances is in itself an act of writing, it follows therefore that, we who respond by giving feedback to students must be as concerned with issues of structure, clarity, focus, purpose and voice as we want our students in our disciplines to be. For instance, we need to write our feedback on their performances well, and by well we should not just concentrate on semantic or syntactical correctness but also to include giving the students unequivocal, connected, useful and

respectful comments as we strive to scaffold them towards higher cognitive functions. There is an imperative need to make metacognitive knowledge part of the everyday classroom discourse if lecturers and tutors are to successfully foster a metacognitive culture in their students. Making them metacognitively aware of their learning needs requires ensuring that the MLE lecturers and tutors offer them through feedback make them learn how to learn. It should thus guide them to perceive the written representations of their thinking as crucial in the process of transforming them into effective metacognitive thinkers and writers.

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