EFL students' emotional responses to oral feedback: The case of Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Feedback, a crucial component in supporting student learning, has been subject to extensive research in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Although some studies have explored students' emotional reactions to written feedback provided by teachers, there is a scarcity of research on emotional responses to oral feedback. Thus, this case study seeks to enhance the existing literature by investigating how students emotionally react to oral feedback. The study argues that the manner in which oral feedback is delivered can elicit unexpected emotional responses from students. This study was conducted in three senior high schools in Jakarta, Indonesia, with six participants from each school. Each student participated in a semi-structured interview, resulting in a total of 18 interview data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that students expressed both positive and negative emotions in response to teacher oral feedback, with a tendency towards the latter outweighing the former, resembling an imbalanced scale. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of students' reactions to oral feedback and encourages teachers to reflect on their feedback practices.

Keywords: *EFL students; Emotional responses; Oral feedback*

1. Introduction

Emotions have been said to play a significant part in learning as they "profoundly affect students' academic engagement and performance" (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012, p. 259). Similarly, feedback has also been considered by many as one of the most influential aspects of a learning process (Ellis, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Nakata,

2017), which is why studying both emotions and feedback simultaneously might lead to a fruitful result. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the majority of studies have put their emphasis on researching the relationship between student emotions and motivation (Pavelescu, 2019) with less attention being paid to feedback and emotions. Therefore, the current study is interested in examining students' emotional responses to their teacher's feedback - oral feedback to be specific.

While much has been understood about how oral feedback is helpful in supporting student English language learning, little is known about how oral feedback affects student emotions. A lot of studies exploring student emotions have been conducted in the area of written feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017; Ryan & Henderson, 2018). Therefore, more studies on how students emotionally respond to oral feedback in this area are necessary if teachers are to fully understand how their oral feedback influences students' emotions. In the context of Indonesia, studies exploring student emotional response to feedback are scant - this fills a gap in the literature. The overarching aim of this study is to investigate student emotional responses to teacher feedback. Thus, the following question is posed: How do students emotionally respond to their teacher's oral feedback? This study is expected to shed light on our understanding of student emotional responses to teacher oral feedback while also providing teachers with clues to contemplate on their feedback practice.

2. Literature review

It has been generally acknowledged that oral feedback is an important part of classroom interaction. Especially when learning to speak English as a foreign language, oral feedback can act as a measure to evaluate a learner's oral language production. In the context of EFL learning, traditionally oral feedback serves two functions: to acknowledge the learner's language production or answer and to correct errors or mistakes. The earlier is often called positive feedback and the latter is known as corrective feedback.

2.1. Positive feedback

Positive feedback is often used to acknowledge and praise students for their correct answers or excellent performance. Words of reinforcement such as 'excellent', 'good', or 'good job' are some of the examples of verbal positive feedback (Ellis, 2009). Praises are linked to motivation in learning English and it has been said to boost student motivation and self-esteem (Sigott, 2013). Positive feedback is an area that is quite under-researched in the EFL context as it is considered insignificant in improving language skills. However, positive feedback remains vital to student learning. One of the most relevant studies on positive feedback, praise in particular, is that of Wong and Waring (2009) who define praise as "a way of reinforcing a student's giving of a correct response, which, in the context of language reaching means reinforcing correct comprehension or production of a language structure" (Wong & Waring, 2009, p. 196). It was argued in their study, however, while giving praise might increase student motivation, it could also potentially close an opportunity for learning as the answer is already correct. Therefore, Wong and

Waring (2009) suggested that teachers problematize students' answers even if it is correct. This way, students are able to voice their understanding of the answer.

In an experimental study conducted in an Iranian context, Abbasi et al. (2015) compared the achievement of two groups of students learning English taught by the same teacher. In one of the groups, the experimental group, students were given positive motivational feedback and praise. The pre-test and post-test results showed this group experienced a significant improvement, as portrayed in their test scores, compared to the group that did not receive positive feedback and praise. The finding of the study illustrates how positive feedback and praise can encourage students to perform better in their learning.

2.2. Corrective feedback

Contrary to positive feedback, oral corrective feedback sets a different story as it has received a significant amount of attention. One of the most influential studies on corrective feedback is that of Lyster and Ranta (1997). Their observational study investigated feedback in French immersion classes and generated the formulation of six types of corrective feedback that teachers often used when correcting their students' language errors or mistakes. These types include:

1. Recasts which occur when the teacher reformulates a student's speech and corrects the mistakes at the same time;
2. Explicit correction, which occurs when the teacher tells the student where the error lies and corrects it;
3. Repetition, which occurs when the teacher repeats the student's error;
4. Clarification requests which occur when the teacher asks a question to indicate that the student's speech contains an error;
5. Elicitation, which occurs when the teacher attempts to elicit the correct utterance, usually by asking students to complete the teacher's utterance;
6. Metalinguistic information which occurs when the teacher poses a statement or information that indicates an error has occurred.

Following the invention of these types, studies on oral corrective feedback have been mushrooming in many different contexts. In the main, such studies used the framework to scrutinize feedback in various aspects of language learning (e.g. Ajabshir, 2014; Li, 2010; Lyster et al., 2013; Siauw, 2017; Yoshida, 2010; Zrair, 2019). Researchers conclude that oral corrective feedback is powerful in terms of promoting language acquisition and learning (Nassaji, 2015).

For feedback to be useful in helping students, Nakata (2017) argues that it should meet five criteria. First, feedback has to be clear. It must use clear vocabulary choices and grammar, and it has to be delivered with clear pronunciation. Second, feedback needs to be specific, which means that it should direct the student's focus on form (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Lightbown & Spada, 1990) so that if the student's language production is incorrect, they can recognize it immediately. Third, feedback has to be timely so that

students can act on the feedback they receive. Fourth, feedback should be encouraging. Teachers have to recognize the students' preferences for feedback. Some students are reluctant to receive feedback explicitly in public, while some others expect likewise. Fifth, feedback has to be ongoing in that teachers have to be "patient and nurture student development overtime" (Nakata, 2017, p. 83). This nurturing aspect of feedback is crucial as it shows how teachers care about student learning and development (Eriksson et al., 2018).

2.3. Student preference of feedback

The six types of oral corrective feedback are further divided into explicit and implicit categories. Explicit feedback is the feedback that is given explicitly, such as explicit correction and metalinguistic information. On the other hand, implicit feedback is given in a more subtle and indirect way, such as recasts, repetition, clarification requests, and elicitation. Such division in the types has opened up discussions on student preferences of how they want to be corrected. While there have been contradictory findings on the effectiveness of explicit and implicit correction (Zarei et al., 2020), it is generally supported that explicit feedback is more effective, thus preferable, than the implicit one. In an experimental study examining the role of implicit and explicit corrective feedback in a Persian EFL context, Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) found that explicit corrective feedback was more effective in improving student grammatical accuracy. However, there have been studies showing that student preference for feedback depends on the context of the lesson. For instance, Yang (2016) conducted a quantitative study on adult learners' feedback preference on phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic errors. The participants were 159 university students. The results of the questionnaire and interviews showed that students preferred metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, and recasts on almost all types of errors. This finding tells that feedback preference could be contextual.

2.4. Emotional response to oral feedback

Feedback that is encouraging can improve student self-efficacy (Chen & Hsu, 2022) which then will influence their uptake. Positive feedback is most likely encouraging as it makes students feel appreciated. Many studies have looked at positive feedback in terms of praise and its relation to motivation (Dweck, 2007; Mercer & Ryan, 2013; Robins, 2012). Receiving praise also has been reported to have a positive impact on student emotion (Mahfoodh, 2017).

Corrective feedback, on the other hand, is a different story. Several studies have reported how oral corrective feedback causes students to feel embarrassed. A recent study by Zrair (2019) investigating the use of oral feedback to develop speaking skills has highlighted students' reluctance to participate in the classroom as they were worried the teacher's oral feedback would embarrass them. As a result, students were unwilling to speak so they would neither make any errors nor receive corrective feedback. Another

study on emotional responses to teacher's oral feedback is the work of Agudo (2013). His study used a questionnaire to investigate how students feel about their teacher's oral feedback. One of the items in the questionnaire asked how students felt when the teacher corrects their mistakes, and the most dominant response was that students felt satisfied, and the second most dominant was them feeling embarrassed. It can be inferred then from the study that oral corrective feedback does not always promote negative emotions.

It is argued in the study that the way in which oral feedback is delivered can lead to an unexpected emotional reaction from the students. Therefore, if oral feedback that is corrective in nature is to make students motivated or encouraged, it should be conveyed in a way that would not put students on the defensive. Additionally, attention has to be paid to the amount of oral corrective feedback provided. Ayedh and Khaled (2011) have argued how feedback is managed can profoundly affect emotion and feeling. The more the students received corrections, the more they would feel discouraged which could hinder the language learning process.

3. Method

3.1. Instruments

This is a qualitative case study utilising an in-depth semi-structured interview as the main data source. The purpose of an interview is "to obtain information and understanding of issues relevant to the general aims and specific questions of a research project" (Gillham, 2000, p. 2). A semi-structured interview was chosen due to its flexible structure, allowing the researcher "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p.90). The participants of this study were 18 students from three different senior high schools in the capital city of Indonesia. All students were in the 11th grade. Participation in this study was voluntary, therefore, the researcher selected the students who were willing to participate in the study. Prior to that, the students were given information and explanations about the study, and they had been given an opportunity to ask questions related to the study before volunteering. The participants were interviewed individually at the time the most convenient to them. During the interview, students were asked to share their experiences of feedback and how they reacted to the feedback. The interview was audio recorded, and each interview lasted for about 30-35 minutes.

3.2. Data analysis

Once the interview finished, the interview data was transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were then analysed using thematic analysis and some aspects of the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The thematic analysis aims "to identify themes within the data" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 88). It was helpful in finding patterns from the data and constructing categories that were responsive to the research questions. There are three stages of coding in the analysis process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Codes were constantly compared to seek similarities and differences

before forming final themes. Before proceeding to the coding process, the researcher first read each transcript three times to familiarise herself with the data. When finished, the researcher began to do the first coding phase manually, the open coding, in which keywords from the data were highlighted. In the axial coding phase, the researcher looked for similarities between keywords, and those that were similar were clustered together to form a category. In the selective coding phase, categories formed in the previous stage were again compared for similarities and differences. Categories with similarities were joined together under a larger category- this would be the theme reported as the major findings in the study.

4. Findings and discussion

Data showed that students in the current study expressed or experienced different emotions as a response to their teacher's oral feedback. Their responses can be classified into two categories: positive and negative emotions.

4.1. Positive emotions

In terms of positive emotion, students stated how they were happy when their teacher provided good feedback that indicated how well their performance was. Feedback that was seen motivating and increasing their knowledge also added to their positive feeling. Students mentioned positive responses as they were pleased with the teacher's feedback especially when the information indicated that they had done well, was motivating, and added to their knowledge. Wilson mentioned that she feels "pleased if the feedback is good", while Raina felt the positive emotions because "the feedback is usually motivating". Iting said she was pleased because she knew new things upon receiving oral feedback.

For Rei, receiving information about his performance made him pleased because it showed that his teacher was paying attention and cared about his performance. He said "I would feel pleased that my teacher actually cares about what I say, what I think, and what I do in front of the class." (Int). Seemingly, there were different reasons for students' positive responses to their teacher's oral feedback.

It was explicit from the findings that the teachers provided students with both positive and corrective feedback. Positive feedback, though often overlooked, is always present in the classroom, and it positively influences student self-efficacy (Chen & Hsu, 2022). The findings that showed students felt positive about the teacher feedback were in line with those of Yakışık, (2021). Yakışık's study (2021) investigated EFL students' preferences and emotions about oral feedback and found over 70% of students felt satisfied and happy when receiving feedback. This finding places the importance of positive feedback in supporting student learning, especially the one that is encouraging and adding to students' knowledge. That being said, apparently, students in the current study did not perceive positive feedback as praise but as something else. While in the literature, there has been quite an extensive discussion regarding praise as positive

feedback, the current study offers a different perspective, that is, positive feedback is the type of feedback that encourages learning and promotes improved understanding.

The current study has also illuminated an interesting finding; it shows how students equated teacher feedback with attention – they perceived that the teachers cared when they gave feedback. The notion of teacher care has been discussed in several educational studies concerning teacher-student relationship. Caring means "emotions, actions, and reflections that result from a teacher's desire to motivate, help or inspire their students" (O'Connor, 2008, p. 117). In the classroom context, teacher care can act as one of the pedagogical strategies and describe interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the students (Gasser et al., 2018). In an earlier study, Teven and McCroskey (1996) investigated the relationship of perceived caring with student learning and teacher evaluation. The authors listed ten items to scale caring, but none of them mention oral feedback as an aspect of caring. However, in a more recent study Eriksson et al. (2018) theorised that one of the rationales for teacher feedback provision was their intention to express caring to students, especially those with low self-esteem and confidence. In feedback, caring is demonstrated through "praise, 'miroring' and taking time to talk to a student, highlighting strengths and showing that efforts had been noticed" (Eriksson et al., 2018, p. 199). The discussion on teacher feedback as a reflection of teacher care is rarely found in the feedback literature, especially in EFL studies, thus the findings of this study might have revealed another potential area to pursue within the EFL literature.

4.2. Negative emotions

Students also mentioned negative emotions when receiving oral feedback, especially when the feedback was in the form of corrections. They expressed a range of feelings such as feeling embarrassed, disappointed, and discouraged.

4.2.1. Embarrassed

Students often mentioned how they felt embarrassed by their teacher's feedback. Sky said she was" embarrassed when [she] made a mistake". Wilson and Iting added they were embarrassed when being corrected infront of others, letting others know that they had made a mistake. It was worse because the teacher corrected them in a loud voice so they were put in the spotlight. As Emily put it "Teachers often give feedback with a loud voice so I feel embarrassed. I am embarrassed because other friends are looking at me."

As giving corrections in front of the whole class caused embarrassment, Kylie (Int) suggested that "it's better not to tell in front of the class if we make mistakes." As a result, some students indicated they would prefer individual, face-to-face oral feedback. In contrast, different from typical students, Nichol (Int) stated he never felt embarrassed even though his teacher corrected him in front of the class:

> When it comes to English learning, I [am] never ashamed because [later] everybody [in the class] knows [how to] speak correctly because my teacher corrected me in front of the class. (Nichol, Int)

Nichol believed that it was beneficial for other students if the teacher corrected him in front of the class as his peers would not repeat his mistake. He saw feedback in a public setting as an opportunity for others to learn, and presumably when his peers were corrected, he saw this as an opportunity for himself to learn.

4.2.2. Upset

For some students, feedback from their teachers resulted in discomfort. They were upset not so much because of their teacher's feedback but because despite their teacher's effort to support their learning, they continue to make mistakes. Ciara mentioned she was "upset because of the mistake part, not because of the teacher" while Raina felt upset because "[she] keep[s] making mistakes.

For others, however, the teacher's feedback caused genuine distress particularly if they did not believe they had made a mistake. This situation happened to Iting when she said "Sometimes when I believe that the answer is correct, I am upset with the teacher because she tells me I am wrong." For Dita, it will make her upset if the feedback was in the form of critiques – the same thing expressed by Durrant as he said "When the feedback is about criticism which tells bad things about me, I will be upset" . It seemed feedback that pointed out mistakes was seen as criticism rather than being helpful. Students saw the teacher did not take into account the effort that they put in. As Rei said "Sometimes I'm feeling a bit upset because I already work hard but I get criticism."

> Irfan (Int) also stated that sometimes he got upset with "the negative feedback which [had] no backing or had no backbone to support". This suggested that sometimes teachers may not have fully explained or justified their feedback to the student's satisfaction.

4.2.3. Discouraged

For a few students, their teachers' feedback made them feel discouraged especially when it was given in what they perceived as an unfriendly manner:

> Teacher gives comments but the comments make us feel down, discouraged, so instead of motivating, she makes us not confident. For example, some teachers would say "you wrote this wrong, where did you cheat from? You should've written this right, so when you cheat, cheat right. (Jack, Int)

In this instance, Jack found the teacher's feedback offensive as she thought the teacher accused her of cheating. This accusation left her feeling dejected and unmotivated. Emily (Int) also stated that her teacher's feedback had at times made her feel disheartened, especially when it was given "in an angry tone." As she elaborated:

> So when giving feedback, try to use encouraging words like supporting, not angry, it makes us feel down… some teachers said you're lacking in this and that, like in an angry tone. That makes us feel down. (Emily, Int)

She believed feedback that was conveyed in a harsh manner could impact on motivation and confidence. The findings of the current study showed how students expressed more negative than positive emotions such as embarrassed, upset, and discouraged. These negative emotions occurred in some circumstances. For instance, students felt embarrassed when the teacher corrected them in front of other students. A similar finding has been expressed in a number of studies (e.g. Agudo, 2013; Yoshida, 2010; Zrair, 2019). Therefore, it can be said that it is indispensable that providing corrective feedback in public creates discomfort for students. As a result, it hinders students from engaging or participating in the classroom as they are worried about making mistakes and being corrected in front of others.

It is interesting to understand that students felt upset as they blamed themselves for the mistakes that occurred. Such findings extend the findings from the previous study, which found that students were often left in frustration when they kept repeating the same mistakes/errors (Agudo, 2013) and they could not get things right. The current study also found that teacher feedback which was conveyed in an unpleasant manner brought a harmful effect to student emotions – they felt discouraged. This finding is in line with what previous studies have found (Elsaghayer, 2014; Martínez, 2014). While feedback should be directed at a personal level (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), it should not attack one's personality (Ayedh & Khaled, 2011) as it would bring a detrimental effect on student learning. Teachers must be aware of their words so not to bring harm to student learning process and development.

5. Conclusion

The current study was set out to investigate how Indonesian EFL students emotionally respond to their teachers' oral feedback. The study has shown how teacher feedback could positively and negatively impact student emotions. It is interesting to note that student negative emotions towards the teacher feedback appeared in certain conditions such as when the feedback was given in front of other students and when the feedback was conveyed in a harsh manner. Therefore, it should be a good reference for the teachers to reflect on their current feedback practice. Improving teacher's feedback literacy could be one of the ways in which we can avoid or minimize negative emotions experienced by students due to oral feedback. The current study has shed some lights on our understanding of student emotional responses to oral feedback. This study, however, only limited its discussion on the description of student emotions. Therefore, this study suggests three areas that future research could examine. Firstly, future research might consider investigating how these emotions affect students' relationship with the teacher and how the relationship affects student engagement and achievement. Secondly, a

further study on how teacher feedback literacy affects teacher feedback provision might also be a potential area to look at. Thirdly, researchers could consider investigating how teacher feedback is perceived as caring by students.

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