

Feedback Mechanisms of DepEd English Teachers in Modular Distance Learning: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

With the shift in the educational setting from traditional classrooms to online learning for most countries and modular distance learning in the Philippines, giving feedback to the students proves to be a challenge. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether online or through modular learning, only included feedback as a part of the problems encountered, not as the main aspect of the research. Thus, this study explored the nature of the feedback practices delivered by English DepEd teachers to their students through modular learning. Moreover, this is primarily concerned with the teachers' experiences and methods of developing feedback for their students in this modular distance learning scheme. The study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a single explanatory case study. The study involved eight public English high school teachers and was conducted in two public secondary high schools in Leyte. The data was collected through an interview protocol, analysed using thematic analysis, and validated through triangulation. The findings of this study revealed that explicit error correction through annotation and positive feedback through commendation are the only feedback mechanisms/corrections used by the English DepEd teachers on their modular instruction.

While these practices address some of the problems in English learning through modular distance learning, it is observed that they are severely limited by internal and external factors from both teachers and students.

Keywords: Feedback Practices; modular learning; teachers' experiences and method; error correction; and positive feedback.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization has declared the novel SARS-CoV2 infection a pandemic for 2020. It has become a significant global public health issue. To stop the virus from spreading further, infection control and physical distancing measures were implemented. An abrupt shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to virtual modalities was made to continue the academic courses while avoiding people gathering and the potential risk of the spread of infection. In terms of internet access, teacher ability, and student-parent readiness, it forced teachers to instruct with no or little preparation (Fachriansyah, 2020). It also disrupted their lesson plans and tested their ICT literacy skills (Gao & Zhang, 2020), resulting in a peculiar set of educational changes and challenges (Cherukara & Markose, 2020). This, in turn, calls for several adjustments among schools globally.

Governments have mandated that schools halt face-to-face instruction for the majority of their students to save the learners, faculty, and teachers from the dangers posed by COVID-19. This goal is fully supported by the Department of Education (DepEd) of the Philippines. To abide by this mandate of the government, DepEd adopted the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) as a way to continue education since school closure is not an option. BE-LCP is a set of educational solutions that responds to the issues of basic education caused by COVID-19 (Department of Education Order No. 12, s. 2020), which includes the deployment of different learning modalities (DepEd, 2020b). Parents and guardians were required to complete the DepEd's Learner and Enrolments and Survey Form during the 45 days of enrolment in public schools (Bernardo, 2020). The purpose of this survey is to determine which alternative learning methods students prefer and whether they are prepared for distance learning.

Modular Distance Learning entails individualized instruction that enables learners to use printed or digitalized self-learning modules, whichever is accessible to the learner and applicable to other learning resources (DepEd, 2020). This is a teaching strategy fit for all learners from urban and rural settings since the central foundation for learning is the modules provided by the Department of Education. Teachers make learning self-paced for students by giving printed modules to their parents or guardians following the school's class schedule; thus, making the student's learning self-paced, which develops a sense of responsibility in them (Labrado et al., 2020). They must also keep track of the student's progress and visit students at home who require correction or support (DepEd, 2020).

Due to insufficient information, Labrado et al. (2020) discovered that educators found it difficult to separate learners by Purok (zone) during the initial implementation of printed modular distance learning. They also found out that parents struggle to balance being an employee and a facilitator for their children. Moreover, due to late and unverified enrolment, copies of the self-guided module are insufficient. In addition, the quality of the module being distributed also became a problem. The modules provided are created in such a short period that errors such as factual, clerical, and typographical ones are observed (Gonzalez, 2015). Also, the face value of some modules is not good, as some pictures are not clear (Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020). Further, teachers who are making modules, especially those without training, cannot make modules that meet the standard learning capacity of the students (Oranggaga, 2022).

Additionally, some habits of learning interactions in face-to-face instruction have been eliminated (Allo, 2020) or have become difficult to employ. One of which is the provision of feedback. Teachers from ten different public secondary schools in Tacloban City find giving feedback in modular distance learning difficult, among other problems (Acala & Castroverde, 2021). Teachers have expressed the dilemma they are facing as the way of learning and the current type of learning instruction do not match. They use modular learning; however, they provide feedback through different social media platforms and/or messaging. The problem lies with the fact that not all learners have gadgets, a stable internet connection, and a budget for learning (Dewi, et al., 2022; Santiana, et al., 2021; Pratama & Dewi, 2022). Thus, it's challenging for teachers to provide learners with feedback. At best, they can give their feedback to the parents during Card Day or Portfolio Day, as the students are discouraged from attending this event because of the implemented health restrictions. Furthermore, Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) suggested that feedback be given immediately and in vernacular to assist learners in their current situation.

The difficulty of giving feedback or the lack thereof poses a threat to effective and/or successful autonomous learning. This is one of the several issues of English language teaching in the Philippines, along with the varieties of English. Concerning the dominance of English in educational settings, those long years of colonization and how it impacted language teaching in the country were explicated by Agustin (2022), both the loopholes and perks in terms of English language proficiency. Hence, the feedback mechanism is an imperative discourse, especially in teaching-learning contexts. Chakraborty and Nafukho (2014) emphasized that in creating and maintaining a positive learning environment, the provision of consistent feedback is a must, along with the right use of technology to deliver the right content. Moreover, the provision of positive feedback and the enhancement of autonomous learning plays a crucial role in the stimulation and maintenance of learners' motivation (Thohir, 2017). Thus, Asbari et al. (2020) stress the need for teachers to find a way to give feedback to students. It is in light of these contentions and the limited literature that talks about the nature of teachers' feedback in English teaching and learning and how it is delivered in modular distance learning during the pandemic that the researchers pursued this study.

This study is anchored on the Seven Principles of Good Feedback Practice of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006). It is a set of practices that helps or aids to strengthen the students' capacity to self-regulate their practice. These key principles address the cognitive, behavioural, and motivational aspects of self-regulation (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). These are the following: (1) helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards); (2) facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning; (3) delivers high-quality information to students about their learning; (4) encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning; (5) encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; (6) provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance; (7) provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

By using this model, the researchers were able to describe the feedback practices practised by the English teachers in modular distance learning. This study aims to discover the feedback mechanisms delivered by teachers to their students through modular learning. Specifically, it aims to answer the question: What are the feedback mechanisms used by English high school teachers in basic education modular learning during the pandemic?

METHOD

In this study, the researchers utilized a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design is a method for studying and comprehending the significance that people or groups assign to a social or human situation (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, this study made use of a single explanatory case study. According to Yin (2003), an explanatory case study is defined as the study of a case (e.g., a person, group, or organization) to explain causal relationships between the case and its context in a real-life situation. In this single explanatory case study, the unit of analysis was the nature of the feedback delivered by English teachers in Modular Distance Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study was conducted in two public secondary high schools located in Leyte, Philippines. These schools implemented modular distance learning as a new normal scheme of education as mandated by DepEd where instructions are delivered through modules. They also deliver feedback on modular learning.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Eight (8) English teachers participated in the interview. Consent was solicited before the actual conduct of the interview with the participants. Among the eight participants, seven (7) are BSED English graduates and are now teaching English subjects, and one (1) English teacher is not a BSED English graduate but is teaching English subjects. Seven (7) participants were interviewed through phone calls and only one (1) participant was interviewed through face-to-face. During the interview schedule, the participants were oriented on the purpose of the study, their role and the possible benefits of the findings of the study. Consent was asked for the conversation to be recorded. The recorded conversation was taken to complement the field notes written during the interview. After the interview, the researchers asked the participants for their documents with feedback and the students' submitted outputs for the validation of their responses. Confidentiality of the data acquired was strictly observed.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim. Afterwards, the data were subjected to thematic analysis following the steps of Nowell et. al (2017). Moreover, triangulation was conducted through the teachers' documents with feedback and the students' submitted outputs. The said documents were subjected to document analysis.

The teachers' document with feedback and the students' submitted outputs were subjected to content analysis. The researchers read, analysed, and checked the documents and looked for recurring themes. They categorized it and identified the prevalent concepts, then generated initial codes. Afterwards, the researchers checked whether the code generated was valid, reliable, and in a rational pattern. After taking these measures, the researchers triangulated the generated codes from the interviews with the analysis of the documents and compared them to test the consistencies in the themes found from the interview and document analysis.

The data that were used in this study were gathered through an interview protocol. The data were analysed carefully following the inductive thematic approach. As stated by Creswell (2012), the thematic approach is frequently used in scrutinizing qualitative data. It is also a useful method for probing the different perspectives of the participants, emphasizing the similarities and differences between the responses, and spotting unforeseen insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feedback Mechanisms/Corrections Used in Basic Education Modular Learning During the Pandemic

In printed Modular Distance Learning, teachers have been exerting their effort to deliver a quality education. One of which is ensuring that the important habits in face-to-face classes still be present in the new normal learning such as feedbacking. In the current learning set-up, two themes regarding the feedback mechanisms/correction used by the educators emerged. These are explicit error correction through annotation and positive feedback through commendation.

Explicit Error Correction through Annotation

Explicit error correction points out the errors in the outputs submitted by the students and provides the correct form for the said errors. The participants often provide this type of correction through annotation. They mark the words or phrases that deviate from the prescribed grammatical structure and provide their correct form. These annotations are often written in red ink and sometimes in other ink colours. Moreover, they are often written after they provide positive feedback.

The theme error correction emerged as proven by the lines below:

P1: *Ah, I'm not sure if there are or I cannot still remember [pause] as far as my memory is concerned about the type of feedback. But first, I focus on the content and then since I am an English teacher, a grammatical structure will follow. I provide my corrections directly on their outputs. I encircle the wrong parts in the sentence and then provide the correct form on top of the said error.*

P2: *One is that you have [filler] feedback that will help students to improve. Like if they see your corrections, they will be able to know the right answers, so next time they're not going to be making the same mistakes again. So, what I do is if it is wrong, ginbabagisan ko hiya para mahighlight an error. Sometimes, I write the correct form on top of that error, para maaram na hiya pagkita niya kun hain it sayop.*

One is that you have [filler] feedback that will help students to improve. Like if they see your corrections, they will be able to know the right answers, so next time they're not going to be making the same mistakes again. So, what I do is if it is wrong, I underline it to highlight the error. Sometimes, I write the correct form on top of that error, so that they know their errors once they see it.

P3: *Yes, it is all about everything. We have to correct them and at the same time, they have to improve their performance. So, more or less it's for correction and to improve their performance, especially during the assessment. For example, if their sentence is grammatically incorrect, I mark those parts. It's either I encircle it or underline it. If mayda liwat kulang, I often insert the words na makakakumpleto han sentence.*

Yes, it is all about everything. We have to correct them and at the same time, they have to improve their performance. So, more or less it's for correction and to improve their performance, especially during the assessment. For example, if their sentence is grammatically incorrect, I mark those parts. It's either I encircle it or underline it. If something is missing, I often insert the words to complete the sentence.

This is also evident in the students' outputs.

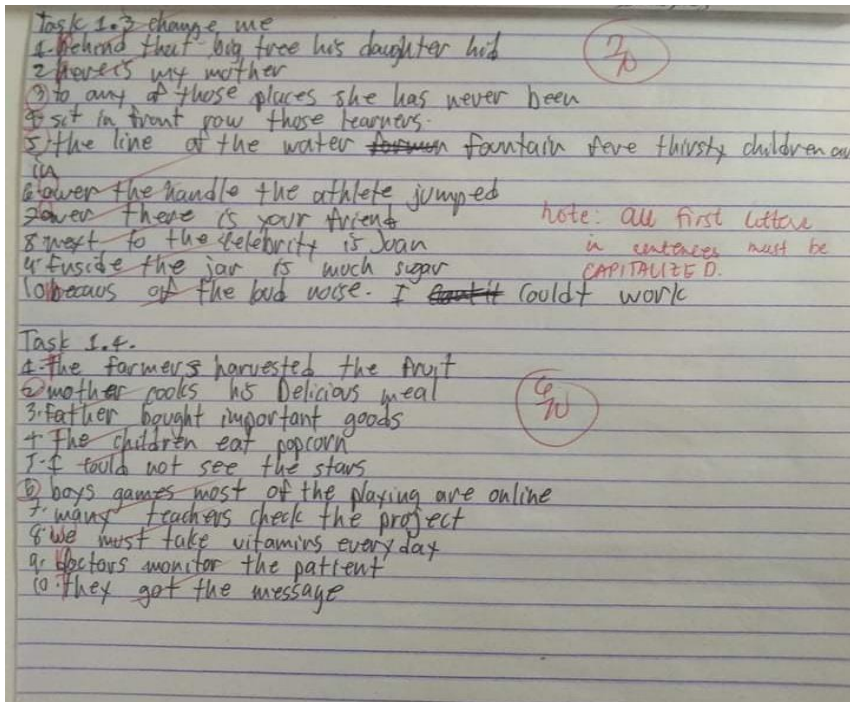


Figure 1: Annotated Student Output (Accuracy Test)

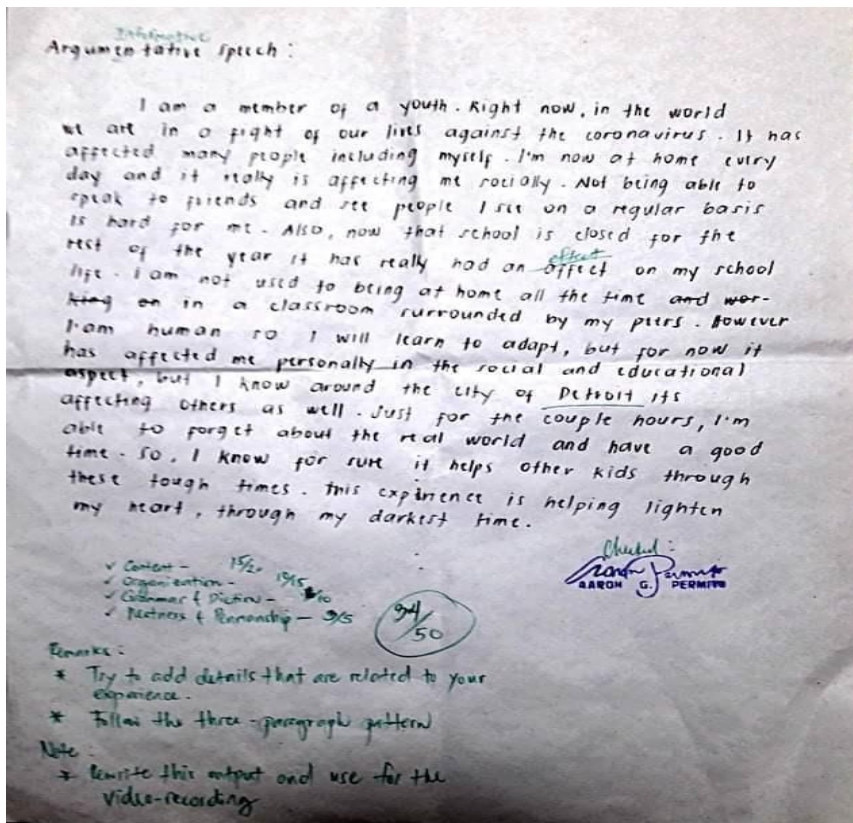


Figure 2: Annotated Student Output (Essay Form)

The annotations provided by the participants most often indicate where the student committed an error, especially in the accuracy type of tests and/or activities. Accuracy type of tests and/or activities are those that concentrate on the nitty-gritty of the language construction such as grammar exercises. The participants provide their feedback by marking and/or underlining the errors. If the errors are the same and found throughout the output, Figure 1, for example, provides a note addressing it in general. This is also true in essay tests. The participants mark the error and provide the correct form beside it. By the end of the output, there is also an overall comment and suggestion. These remarks are based on the learning objectives and goals of the lessons as well as on the nature of the task given. These contain corrective advice that enables their learners to be more aware of their work. This result is in line with the Seven Feedback Practices of Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006). They stated that effective feedback contains relevant information to the objectives and goals of the lesson. Teachers must provide feedback that does not just point out the strengths and weaknesses of the output, but should also be educative towards their errors for them to learn and grasp the nature of the error.

The aforementioned annotations were written in red ink as well as other colours. Most of the participants used different ink colours apart from red. They use ink colours such as green based on an article they have read. According to the participants, the said article stated that the use of red ink has a psychological impact on the learning progress of the students. Hence, they have avoided using red ink in providing feedback and corrections. On the other hand, some participants use any type of ink colour.

They believe that as long as their students understand what they are trying to convey, it is fine to use any kind of ink. These results deviate from the findings of Carcueva (2018). In her findings, it was revealed that red ink correction is the third preferred type of correction by Filipino ESL learners. It aids in capturing the attention of the students, allowing them to read comments and corrections more easily. However, the results imply that teachers do not only consider the readability of the feedback, but the effect of its presentation as well.

Once the feedback is given, some participants allow resubmissions for the said output, especially when it concerns the overall product. However, most of the participants have expressed that while they provide feedback that points out where the learners need to improve, resubmissions are done rarely. This is because they cannot accommodate the resubmitted outputs within the weekly submissions due to several factors such as administrative tasks to complete and the number of students to check and monitor. They only allow resubmissions when the learners submit incomplete to unanswered learning answer sheets (LAS). This result deviates from the Seven Feedback Practices of Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006). One of the good feedback practices is providing students with opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance. To ensure this, one should be open to resubmission of outputs after they provide feedback. This is one way to put the feedback into action. However, in the current situation of the English teachers, most of them do not allow resubmissions because they already have so much on their plate. In doing so, learners' opportunities to improve and bridge the gap from the current to the desired performance are lessened as well as the feedback provided becomes ineffective as nothing is done towards it.

Positive Feedback through Commendation

Positive feedback is an example of expressive feedback where teachers use praise and is considered useful in promoting students' learning (Orsmond & Merry, 2011). The participants give this feedback through praise of their outputs and their progress, and encouragement for students to continue their hard work. They provide this type of feedback to keep the students emotionally healthy while learning despite the pandemic.

The theme of positive feedback emerged as proven by the lines below:

P1: Okay, [filler] somewhat like positive feedback to be specific like before I proceed to the content, [filler] what I do first give a good statement or somewhat like [filler] appraisal like congratulation for complying with this output, job well done.

P8: Such as, [filler] for positive feedback I give [filler], I appreciate their outputs, and commend them for how they submitted it, such as their penmanship. I also commend the content of their outputs, praising their train of thought and the like.

P4: [filler] It's very important for the students to continue learning and inspire them. Siyempre diba if you are commended with good words, you'll get inspired when your teacher gives you commendations so I also give positive feedback.

This is also evident in the students' outputs.

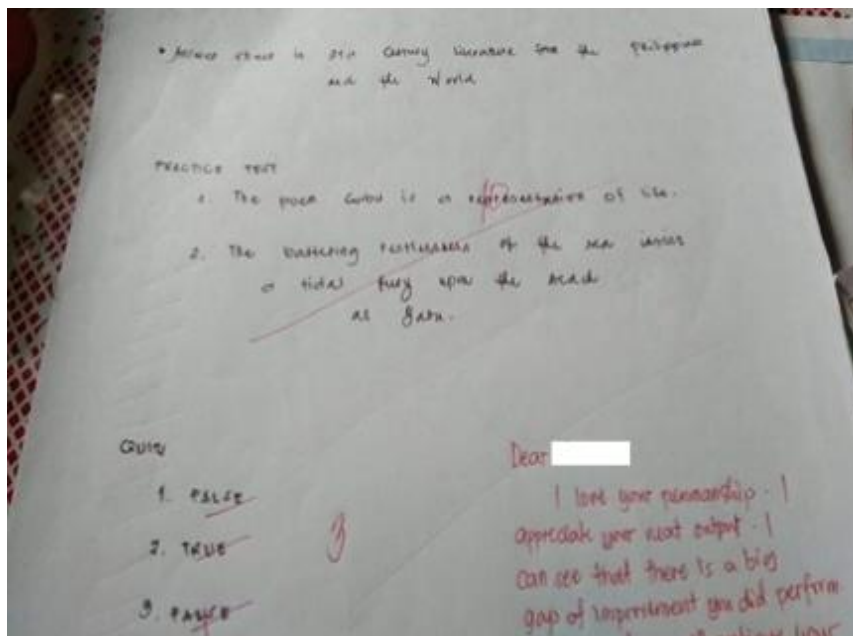


Figure 3: Student Output with Positive Feedback

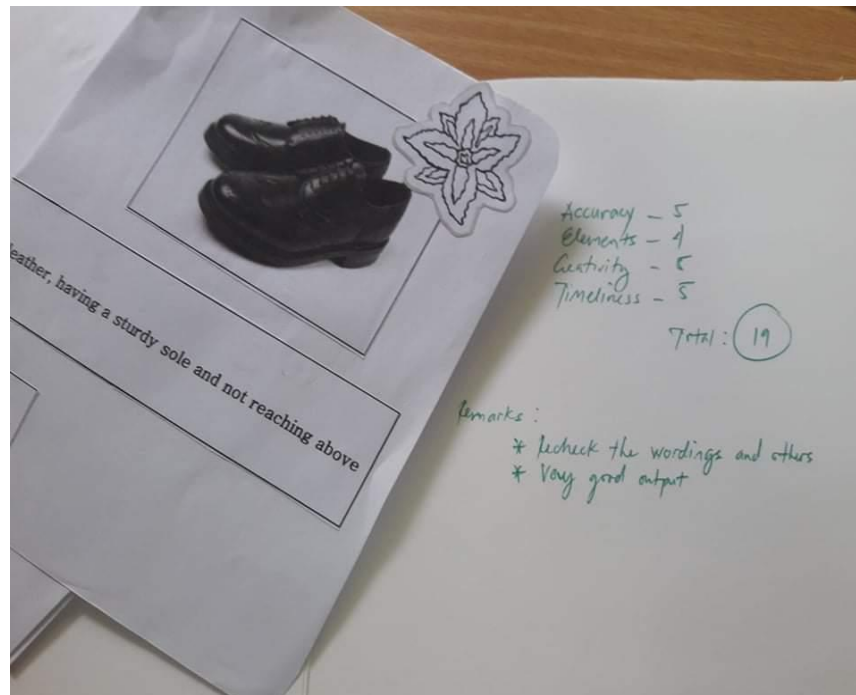


Figure 4: Student Output with Congratulatory Statement

With this type of feedback, the participants provide congratulatory statements for the overall completion of the outputs and praise or commendations for the content and how they were completed. It is often shown through phrases such as "Good job!" or "Very good output!". They also commend the progress the learner had made from their previous works to the recent. Some participants also commend even the little things such as the legibility of the students' outputs as well as their neatness. This feedback is always given in the students' outputs. The participants believe that this helps boost and keep students' motivation in this current set-up of learning. One participant specified that her learners are happy receiving this type of feedback as it gives them a sense that they have achieved something despite the current situation and also often show it to their parents. Further, this feedback is provided to balance the constructive criticism they provide after checking the outputs. This is also their way of being careful to avoid hurting the students' emotions which may lead the students to commit suicide or any self-harm.

This result is in line with the Seven Feedback Practices of Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006). They stated that effective feedback should encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. Feedback should serve as a means for students to continue their learning progress despite the lack of physical interaction in the current learning set-up. Moreover, this is in agreement with Zhang and Zheng's (2018) study, which states that positive feedback boosts students' self-assurance, calms them down both physically and emotionally, and prevents them from reacting negatively to future criticism. They further stated that praise psychologically balances work and gain, reduces students' apprehension about their language learning boosts their enthusiasm for gaining these skills, and minimises the effect of criticism, which can decrease students' motivation.

This idea is also supported by Thohir (2017), wherein he states that language teachers should give feedback in a positive emotional tone. All these learning skills needed by students also require critical thinking which is not only applicable in language studies but also in in-depth literary analysis (Agustin, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In the current printed modular education system of the schools under the Department of Education, the common feedback mechanisms/corrections used by English teachers are explicit error correction through annotation and positive feedback through praise. While these practices address the problems and praise the achievements in an English classroom, it can be observed that these are strained by the current learning setup. These practices are the only practices that they can implement because not all learners can afford or access other technological platforms that can enrich their autonomous learning. These feedback practices are even strained by school activities and workloads they have to complete, resulting in a delay in delivering the feedback. Further, teachers have been persistent in looking for ways to effectively deliver their feedback to the students. These platforms are chosen out of utmost consideration of the learners' situation, especially those who belong to the marginalized sector.

The findings of the current study reflect the continued efforts of the teachers to provide their learners with quality education by making autonomous learning in this set-up as kind as possible to everyone. However, these feedback practices are delimited to the experiences and perceptions of the participants at a public high school. Therefore, it is recommended that a study be conducted in a private setting to determine whether they employ the same feedback practices or not. It is also recommended that the students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the feedback practices be studied, as these will help improve the current feedback mechanism/correction being used.

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