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ABSTRACT

Oral corrective feedback (OCF) is usually provided on the verbal communication of speech participants. This type of feedback is mostly used in second language teaching and learning. However, outside the classroom context, OCF is not pronounced. So, this paper assesses the effect that oral corrective feedback has on employees' performance at BeckyHays Tailoring Shop, Kumasi, Ghana. Utilizing the purposive sampling technique, six (6) apprentices were studied through observation and interview. The study results indicated that corrective feedback, specifically OCF, can be instrumental in improving employees' performance. Also, it was realised that oral corrective feedback could sharpen apprentices' observational skills. Finally, the study revealed that OCF could provide a fertile ground for peer-teaching, which is geared towards performance improvement. The paper recommended that OCF strategies of directive remarks, recommendations, and model imitation should be reinforced in the informal and non-formal contexts in Ghana, owing to their ability to affect employees' performance positively.

Key words: Oral Corrective Feedback, Employees' Performance, Directive Remarks, Model Imitation

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INTRODUCTION

Research works on corrective feedback vary in context and focus. For instance, Mori (2002, 2011) investigated the relationship between teacher beliefs and oral corrective practices. The findings of the work showed that teachers' opinions and beliefs affected their classroom practice of oral corrective feedback. Similarly, Junqueira & Kim (2013) concluded from their research that teachers' prior experiences, as students, prejudiced their beliefs as well as classroom activities on corrective feedback. Research works that focused on the positive and potential negative effects of corrective feedback include those of Harmer (2012), Brookhart (2008), Hattie & Timperly (2007), Gebhard (2006), Lyster & Ranta (1997), and Lightbrown & Spada (1999) just to mention a few. On the affirmative view, corrective feedback on students' language errors could assist the learners' learning growth such that it could give them knowledge of what is accepted and unaccepted in the scope of the jurisdiction (Gebhard, 2006). In Harmer (2012), corrective feedback was perceived as averting the fossilization of errors, since errors that go uncorrected develop into internalized parts of students' learning. Such a situation obstructs students from proficiency as their stock of learned materials becomes mixed with flawed representations. In Lyster & Ranta (1997), oral corrective feedback was seen as a booster of students' oral language and grammar competence. Thus, the immediate prompts that follow errors committed enabled students to work on their oral language competence.

Conversely, several scholars (i.e. Brookhart, 2008; Brown, 2001) opine that too much feedback can have injurious consequences on students' learning efforts. In selected circumstances, learners may feel disproportionately restricted, when too much feedback is given. They could, also, perceive the learning material and environment too unbending. Such perception about the learning tasks can prevent students' interest and self-confidence.

Some scholars have identified several feedback strategies. For instance, Lyster & Ranta (1997) made mention of six basic corrective strategies – explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. In classroom contexts, *recasts* (i.e. reformulation of all or part of students' utterance, without the error) is frequently used (Ellis, 2017). However, as to its effectiveness, in terms of facilitating student learning is a topic of another discussion. For instance, while Lyster (1998) and Ellis (2017) are doubtful, citing its weakness in encouraging student's self-correcting capabilities, other scholars (Long, 1996; Centeno & Ponce, 2019) noted the prominence instructors placed on *recasts* is a critical component of oral corrective classroom strategies. It is worth noting that Lyster & Ranta's (1997) significant six-part taxonomy of feedback strategies were categorized by Ellis (2009, p. 8) into two main types – input-providing, and output prompting. Again, Ellis (2009) identified paralinguistic signals as an innovative signal which is common in classroom contexts. One likely hindrance of this strategy is that teacher's facial expression or other gestures may not be understood as it was anticipated. For instance, a teacher's facial appearance planned to designate an error in the learner's exclamation may be perceived by the learner as mockery. This could diminish the learner's confidence. Also, depending on the situation and the facilitator demonstrating the gesture, the paralinguistic signal can confuse learners.

It is indeed a truism that corrective feedback has enjoyed extensive debate in language teaching and learning. However, in other informal sections where apprentices are admitted to learn a vocation, little has been documented in the literature. So, the current study sought to apply knowledge and theories of corrective feedback on a real-life working environment situation to examine its effectiveness, and assess the challenges and exciting discoveries which may agree with previous studies or may reveal new, relevant and insightful

knowledge on corrective feedback. This may contribute to the widening of scope and deepening of research on corrective feedback.

There are numerous studies on corrective feedback that focus on classroom situations and language acquisition. Some of these studies include Lyster & Saito (2010); Ellis & Shintani (2014); Erlam, Ellis & Batstone (2013); Ellis (2017), and Centeno & Ponce (2019). Mifka-Profozic (2013), for instance, compared the effectiveness of some corrective feedback strategies to see which ones are potent in facilitating students' learning. She compared the impact of an implicit input-providing strategy (recasts) and an implicit prompt (requests for clarification) on the acquisition of two French verb forms (*passé composé* and *imparfait*) by 50 high school students in New Zealand. The results showed that learners who received recast feedback techniques progressed more than learners who received the prompt. She noted, however, that the instructional context could also have an impact.

However, studies on the application of corrective feedback in non-academic contexts seem rare in the Ghanaian craftsmanship (i.e. tailoring, hairdressing, carpentry, masonry, etc.) working environment. This situation suggests a gap in scholarly knowledge in the Ghanaian craftsmanship working environment. Therefore, the current study sought to examine the effect that oral corrective feedback techniques have on the performance of selected apprentices who were working in the informal context of Ghana. Specifically, the study was guided by the following objectives:

- To identify the most frequently used oral corrective feedback (OCF) strategies at the workshop
- To assess the effect of OCF strategies on employees' performance

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of Performance

Several scholars have come up with their theoretical conceptions on work performance. Most

of these scholars have highlighted what they perceive as the major dimensions of work performance. For example, classical works by Murphy (1989), Campbell (1990), Viswesvaran & Ones (2000), and Borman & Motowildo (1993) have all highlighted one or two theories. Murphy (1989) came up with four dimensions to label the work performance domain: (1) task behaviours, (2) interpersonal behaviours (communicating and cooperating with others), (3) downtime behaviours (work-avoidance behaviours), and (4) destructive/hazardous behaviours (behaviours that lead to a clear risk of productivity losses or setbacks). However, Campbell's (1990) performance concept contains eight dimensions. These include (1) job-specific task proficiency, (2) non-job-specific task proficiency, (3) written and oral communications, (4) demonstrating effort, (5) maintaining personal discipline, (6) facilitating peer and team performance, (7) supervision, and (8) management and instruction. Campbell (1990) argues that these eight dimensions are comprehensive in describing the dormant structure of performance at the general level. He further notes that these dimensions can have different sub-dimensions, and the content may vary across jobs (Koopmans et al. 2012). Viswesvaran & Ones (2000) in their part argues that there are 10 dimensions of individual work performance: (1) overall job performance, (2) productivity, (3) quality of work, (4) job knowledge, (5) communication competence, (6) effort, (7) leadership, (8) administrative, (9) interpersonal competence, and (10) compliance with/ acceptance of authority.

Borman & Motowildo (1993) argue that the entire work performance domain can be incorporated in task performance and contextual performance. They describe *task performance* as behaviours that directly or indirectly contribute to the organisation's technical frame of operation (core), and contextual performance as behaviours that support the organisational, social and psychological environment in which the technical core must operate (Koopmans et al., 2012). Examples of

contextual activities are: volunteering, persisting, helping, cooperating, and abiding by rules and regulations. Task activities, on the other hand, may vary from job to job, while contextual activities are common to many jobs (Koopmans et al. 2012).

Work performance theories can be grouped into generic and job-specific frameworks (Koopmans et al. 2012). Generic frameworks use more extensive dimensions to describe work performance, while job-specific frameworks use more narrow dimensions to label essentials of work performance. Examples of generic frameworks include those of Murphy (1989), Campbell (1990), Viswesvaran & Ones (2000), and Borman & Motowildo (1993). Frameworks developed for a specific job were mainly targeted at professions in the army, managers, or the sales and service industry. Almost all the frameworks (both generic and job-specific) cited, mention task performance as an essential dimension of performance. Campbell (1990) defines task performance as the competency with which one performs vital job tasks. These include variables such as work quantity, work quality, and job knowledge. Task performance is usually given different tags in diverse frameworks. Examples include job-specific task proficiency as cited in Griffin et al. (2007), Wisecarver et al. (2007), Campbell (1990), and Rollins & Fruge (1992). Technical proficiency is cited in Lance et al. (2006). In-role performance on the other hand is cited in Maxham et al. (2008), and Bakker et al. (2004).

Another kind of performance worthy of mentioning is contextual performance. This performance is the individual behaviour that supports the organisational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function (Borman & Brush, 1993). This is usually manifested under labels such as non-job-specific task proficiency (Wisecarver et al., 2007; Campbell, 1990), extra-role performance (Maxham et al., 2008; Banker et al., 2004), organisational citizenship behaviours (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Fluegge, 2009), and interpersonal relations (Murphy, 1989). Thus, contextual

performance exhibits outside officially approved work goals. Examples of this kind of performance are taking on an additional schedule, showing initiative, and guiding newcomers on the job. Six of Viswesvaran's (2001) dimensions (communication competence, interpersonal competence, effort, leadership, administrative competence, and compliance with/acceptance of authority) could be regarded as contextual performance. So, dimensions that are frequently listed under contextual performance are communication, effort, discipline, interpersonal behaviour, and leadership.

Empirical Review

This section of the paper reviewed selected previous empirical studies on corrective feedback and employee performance. Kihama & Wainaina (2019) examined the influence of appraisal feedback on employee performance using a descriptive design and, a sample of 300 participants (i.e. Heads of Departments, Sectional Heads, supervisors, and workers), the study results showed that: (1) managers provided regular appraisal feedback to employees and that (2), managers found it easier to communicate positive employee performance than weaknesses in employee performance. The study concluded by suggesting that managers should be firm when criticizing the poor performance of employees.

Aguinis (2019) sampled 345 health personnel from Nairobi and solicited their opinion about how organisations manage and improve the performance of employees. Using inferential and descriptive statistics for the analysis, the study revealed that the basis for feedback practices in organizations is usually to develop employee performance by motivating them to put in their maximum efforts towards the attainment of stated goals of the company. The study, however, noted that poor management of feedback can make feedback counter-productive. So, in their best interest, employees must see feedback on their performance as a constructive process.

Also, in Salau, Oludayo, Omoniyi, & Akinbode (2014), the study revealed that for organisations to meet their goals and for employees to stay focused on their given tasks, feedback on their performance must be given regularly. The researchers noted that regular feedback is crucial in keeping employees on their toes as well as giving them real-time assessment of their current performance. While many of the empirical studies reviewed concentrated on the importance of improved employee performance in meeting organisational goals, Marangu (2014) focused on strategies to improve employee performance. The main objective of the study was to find out some strategies that some faith-based humanitarian organisations used to constantly improve their employees' performance and to keep their employees' commitment. The findings of the study showed that:

- good and open communication between top management and other employees,
- both monetary and non-monetary awards to employees,
- performance improvement plans, and
- good career development and succession planning,

were some of the strategies used by these faith-based organisations in improving employee performance.

In a study conducted by Centeno & Ponce (2019) on oral corrective feedback beliefs in an Argentinean EFL university classroom, it was realized that the teacher's beliefs were not always correspondent to her classroom actions on oral corrective feedback. On the most regularly used type of oral corrective feedback employed by the teacher, recast was documented as the most common. In addition, the teacher participant held the belief that she should guide her student to ascertain their own mistakes to inspire learners' self-correction abilities.

On a similar note, Roothoof (2014) conducted a study about whether teachers' beliefs matched their classroom corrective practices. The results of

the study showed consensus among the participants (i.e. teachers) about the fact that beliefs did not always correspond to their corrective feedback practices. In her analysis, Roothoof (2014) inferred that perhaps, the mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and their oral corrective practices arises from the reality that oral corrective feedback is often an instant and instinctive behaviour. The study, thus, provides evidence that teachers' beliefs and their oral corrective practices are not always in agreement.

In Junqueira & Kim (2013), it was seen that experienced teachers' corrective feedback practices were more interactive compared to that of new teachers. More importantly, the researchers could not find hard evidence of significant influence teachers' (both new and experienced) education background or teaching experience in their oral corrective feedback classroom strategies.

The empirical studies reviewed showed that several research works have been done on corrective feedback and performance. However, most of these studies focused on applications of corrective feedback strategies in the classroom and formal organisational contexts. Consequently, this current study sought to fill this gap by exploring a tailoring shop. The knowledge and experience gained in such a context would deepen and widen the scope of application of corrective feedback.

METHOD

Since the aim of the study was to gain in-depth knowledge about the effect of oral corrective feedback in a working environment, a case study design was selected. The specific case used for the study was BeckyHays Tailoring Shop, Kumasi. The population of the apprentices in the shop as of the time (June 2021) this study was conducted was 10 apprentices. Out of this member, 6 apprentices were selected as the sample size for the study.

This study employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen because the researchers needed specific participants who fit the purpose of

this study. Given that these participants were located in a particular working environment the researchers saw it appropriate to use purposive sampling. Two instruments were used in collecting data. These were interviews and observations. Concerning the interview, the semi-structured type was used. According to Okeeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic & Sinha (2016), one of the major advantages of structured interviews is that it gives the opportunity for new and novel information to emerge. This observation is supported by Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2002) who posit that the open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to extract as much information as possible without compromising on the focus of the interview.

Data collection took 2 weeks to complete. The first week was dedicated to interviews and the second week was used for observation. The interviews were conducted to find soliciting opinions for the first research objective (i.e. the most frequently used oral corrective feedback strategies at the workshop). A Series of observations were also undertaken to solicit ideas for the second research objective (i.e. the effect of these strategies on performance among the apprentices). For ethical reasons, consent was sought from three levels of authority – the manager of the shop, the supervisors, and the participating apprentices themselves.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis and interpretation were done using the objectives of the study.

The most frequently used oral corrective strategies at the workshop

Three main themes emerged from the responses. That is, the study revealed that the most frequently used feedback strategies were:

- Directive remarks
- Recommendations, and
- Model imitation.

Directive Remarks

With the directive remarks, the apprentices noted that their supervisors usually use oral instructions to point out their flaws. For instance, if the way a new apprentice was holding a pair of scissors was not the most appropriate, a supervisor would give a directive remark on the most appropriate way to hold the scissors. Directive remarks were always followed with an expectancy of immediate obedience from the apprentice. Thus, all the apprentices (100%) mentioned directive remarks as the most commonly used oral corrective strategy. Some of them (the respondents) noted that the hidden language from directive remarks was “stop whatever you’re doing now and do this instead!”.

Recommendation

Another commonly used oral corrective feedback was the recommendation. With this feedback, the supervisors would not instruct (as to what the apprentice must do), but they give suggestions that may or may not be taken by the apprentice. Supervisors did not expect immediate obedience in acts of recommendations, unlike those of directive remarks. The apprentices also hinted that recommendation becomes more prominent when the apprentice is about six months into training. They revealed that senior apprentices received more recommendations as oral corrective feedback and very few directive remarks, whereas newer apprentices received more directive remarks and very few recommendations. About 83% of the participants mentioned recommendations as an oral corrective feedback strategy.

Model Imitation

With this technique, supervisors would take apprentices through a step-by-step approach to performing a specific task. Model imitation was usually used anytime there were technical areas that needed mastery by the apprentice. For instance, in drawing out patterns in a cloth before cutting, apprentices were often taken through model imitation. That is, they followed the actions of their supervisor methodologically. The apprentices hinted that model imitations were used

when they had failed to grasp the learning of a certain task through directive remarks and recommendations. In this case, model imitation was often the last corrective strategy deployed.

The effect of oral corrective feedback strategies on performance of the apprentices

The data for this objective were obtained through non-participant observation. Three markers of improvement were sieved from the observation data. Thus oral corrective feedback:

- Saved time and resources
- Sharpened observation skills of apprentices, and
- Served as a system of instruction.

These themes have been analyzed and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Time and Resources

From the observation, it was realized that the supervisors' use of oral corrective strategies saved a lot of time. For instance, the *directive remarks* and *recommendation* were brief and precise. Feedback was thus given in a matter of seconds. This meant that the apprentice could quickly make the necessary changes immediately and learn something on the spot. The prompt nature of this feedback also meant that apprentices were likely to internalize the correction. This can be explained such that taking *directive remarks*, for example, the apprentice (1) learns the correct thing through the oral prompt and (2) puts the correction into practice immediately. This whole process of learning and practising takes place in a matter of minutes. Thus oral feedback techniques used (i.e. *directive remarks* and *recommendation*) saved time for more work to be done, unlike written feedback. What makes written feedback more resource-intensive is the medium of transmitting the feedback. In oral corrective feedback, the medium is simply by word of mouth whereas in written feedback pen, paper, and sometimes printing machines are needed. In today's era of internet communication, the cost of using the Internet

would have to be taken into account when counting the cost of electronic written feedback.

Sharpened Observation Skills of Apprentices

This is one of the areas where significant performance improvement could be read from. Corrective strategies such as model imitation required that apprentices listen and look on as the supervisors teach them the right thing to do. These activities further developed the sensing capacities of the eye and the ear. In the course of the observation, the apprentices gradually took a shorter time to grasp what was being taught through the model imitation corrective strategy. This meant that they were progressing steadily in terms of their mastery of the art of sewing, and this progress was achieved through looking and listening skills. In addition, it was learnt from the observation that, sharpened observation skills further helped apprentices do better at layout and cutting of garment, as well as spotting deficiencies in a layout design. In sum, the model imitation improved the performance of the apprentices.

Oral Corrective Feedback as a System of Instruction

As supervisors at the workshop utilized these corrective feedback strategies (i.e. *directive remarks*, *recommendation*, and *model imitation*), the apprentices were able to internalize them. So, these corrective feedback techniques became a working convention of practice. As newer apprentices were also told what to do, older apprentices acted before the supervisors deployed these strategies. This led to peer-teaching. In this type of peer-teaching, older apprentices taught newer apprentices these corrective strategies. Also, it was observed that new apprentices who had grasped mastery taught their fellow new apprentices. So at the workshop, *directive remarks*, *recommendation*, and *model imitation* were perceived as a kind of system of instruction. The effect of this on performance improvement was that it led to a standardized system of knowledge which created an ecosystem of knowledge and idea

sharing, based on generally accepted principles of corrective feedback strategies.

CONCLUSION

Mostly, corrective feedback techniques have been deployed in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Studies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the effect that oral corrective feedback strategies have on the performance of apprentices at a tailoring workshop in Kumasi, Ghana. The objectives of the study were: (1) to identify the most frequently used oral corrective feedback (OCF) strategies at the workshop, and (2) to assess the effect of OCF strategies on employees' performance. From the study, the major oral corrective feedback strategies identified were *directive remarks*, *recommendations*, and *model imitation*. Thus, all the 6 (100%) participating apprentices interviewed, cited these strategies. The

interviews were conducted on an individual basis, and for all the participants to provide the related responses meant that directive remarks, recommendations, and model imitation were the OCF strategies used in the shop frequently. It was also observed that the OCF techniques identified saved time and resources, sharpened the observation skills of apprentices, and served as systems of instruction in the shop. Therefore, OCF techniques of directive remarks, recommendations, and model imitation were recommended. The study, thus, showed that OCF is not only the preserve of language studies in classroom contexts. Future studies may focus on written corrective feedback and its effect on the performance of employees in contexts outside the classroom. Future studies may also focus on the effects of OCF performance of employees in mechanic shops, restaurants, and hairdressing salons.

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