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The Importance of Providing Meaningful Written Feedback to Students

Kinzang Tshewang

Dashiding Higher Secondary School, Punakha

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Abstract

I*n the pursuit of quality education in Bhutan, there has been a desire to give the best teaching to students. Similarly, every teacher is expected to provide the best instruction to students in my school. This action research investigated the issue of giving meaningful feedback to students on their assignments. The research was carried out at Dashiding Higher Secondary School, Punakha, Bhutan with the class twelfth students. The data were gathered over time through the interviews, documents analysis, and survey. The findings were authenticated using the researcher's comments, feedback from a critical friend, and diary notes. The findings revealed that the teacher must provide meaningful and timely written feedback. It is also recommended that students must be made to read the feedback and get used to knowing their weaknesses and strengths in learning the subject.*

Keywords - curriculum, secondary education, learning, professional, teaching

Corresponding: twang44@gmail.com

Introduction

"Assessment theories and academics alike espouse the importance of feedback on performance assessment tasks for supporting improvement and progress in student learning achievement" (Orrella, 2006, p. 37). Feedback is considered as a difficult issue in higher secondary education, although it is acknowledged as being a crucial element in the development of the students' learning progress.

National survey both in the UK and Australia endorsed the aforementioned statement. Considering its value and effectiveness in student learning, a substantial and growing body of research in higher secondary school is found important. Feedback is important approach to become autonomous learners who can assess, oversee, and manage their own learning (Fegrurson, 2011). According to Eraut (2006), effective feedback has the following positive effect on the growth of students' learning: "When students enter in higher secondary school, feedback they received plays a vital role in the achievement and improvement of learning in future. Thus, we need to know much more about their learning. Indeed, there is very sense of professional identity, is shaped by the nature of the feedback received by the students. We need feedback on feedback" (p. 118). Although, there is a large indication supporting the usefulness of feedback to promote student learning, research has shown that students received mere feedback on their task and dissatisfied with the feedback they received on the course of work (Nicol, 2010). As a result, it leaves a void in both teaching and learning. Further, students report that teachers fail to follow up on their work and do not provide prompt feedback (Orrela, 2006). Additionally, teachers must avoid the conventional methods of giving evaluation because these methods eventually undermine their students' work.

Situational Analysis

Ever since I took over Dashiding Higher Secondary School as the Principal, the rate of student failure in the examinations had been a worrying phenomenon. I taught English in class XII, and there were many failures in my subject. This made me to continuously ponder about the causes of student failure. My students were not learning adequately enough to be able to pass the examinations. The quality of their class work and homework were unspeakable. Students could not answer questions correctly, both orally and in writing. Their handwriting was illegible. There were too many mistakes in all their works. Upon further reflection, I realized that I needed improvement in giving feedback to students on their performance. Students looked at their written works only to find if there was inadequate feedback on their written assignments. Though there were many other factors, this can be one of the causes why students performed poorly in examinations.

Therefore, in this action research, I examine my practices in providing feedback to students on their written work. Having taught for the last nineteen years, I was not able to improve my feedback practices. I have experienced classroom situations either as a teacher, vice-principal, or Principal that without proper and meaningful feedback, students' learning is incomplete. Therefore, it was my dream to improve my practices of giving feedback to students on their performance.

Competence

I had received workshop on assessment back in 2019. Moreover, I have been teaching in the higher secondary schools for several years. In addition, I have produced various Inspection Reports, Impact Study Reports, and Journals on my learning experiences in Dhaka for policy formulations at the Royal Institute for Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) for the Senior Executive Leadership Program on Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal (BBIN) (SELP-9). I have also conducted action research on health and physical education while I was undergoing M.Ed course at Paro college of Education. Besides my interest and experience in teaching English, I want to analyse students preferred techniques of feedback process and provide consistent follow up and quality feedback in their written works.

Literature review

Feedback on Students' Written Work

Feedback is crucial in the educational domain. It raises learners' awareness toward their mistakes and sheds light on areas that improve competence then performance. According to News Media Research ([NMR], 2019), feedback "needs to offer a chance for learners to judge their performance and evaluate it in relation to their changed work/learning strategies." Further, feedback is a source of information about students' strengths and weaknesses on their writing to do improvement (Sadler, 2009; Wahyuni, 2017). Giving feedback means telling learners about the progress they are making as well as guiding them on areas for improvement (Lewis, 201; Marzano et al. 2001)). Further, study shows that feedback given by a teacher makes learners more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in a learning course so that it is expected that they can use the strengths to overcome the weaknesses by understanding the feedback given (Wahyuni, 2017).

Further, the study suggests that the quality of the corrections of students' note book have immediate impact in students' learning; if the correction is clear and consistent, it will work (Bitchener et al., 2005). In the same way, the evaluation must be ongoing, which is defined as the process of receiving continuous feedback on one's performance (Sergiovanni

& Starratt, 2000). Thus, Brown, et al., (2004) suggest that feedback to students on their written works should be targeted to enhance learning, and it should be timely, positive, detailed, motivating, participative, not just putting ticks.

Feedback Strategies

The following factors can be used to identify feedback strategies: (a) timing (when and how often feedback is given); (b) amount (how much feedback is given); (c) mode (oral, written, or visual/kinesthetic feedback); and (d) audience (individual, group, class feedback). Feedback focus (work, process, self-regulation) and comparison (criterion, norm, and self-referenced) are two ways to explain and analyze content. Classroom feedback should contain definable qualities that are, significantly, under the partial control of the teacher in order to be effective. In many instances, verification feedback involves a teacher simply stating "correct" or "incorrect"; Facilitative feedback is intended to provide successive clues or hints for guiding students to figure out problems themselves (Guo, 2020).

In line with socio-constructivist perspectives that view feedback as a social practice in which engagement is influenced by individual and contextual factors, Price et al. (2011) proposed a model of student feedback action encompassing several stages in the process to leading to a considered response. These stages include: collection of teacher assessment feedback, immediate attention, cognitive response, and immediate or latent response. Price et al. observed that failure to collect assessment feedback in the first stage is common although "collection" is the most visible indicator of student intention to engage. In the second stage, it was found that most students will read or listen to feedback at least once, but some students may ignore it and put the feedback in the bin. The next stage of cognitive response is considered the most critical point of engagement where students are supposed to work with assessment feedback to internalize it in relation to their learning goals, but Price et al. found that this was not a common occurrence among students. In the final stage, students' tendency to act on teacher feedback usually depends on a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Across these stages, Price et al. posited that each stage may not be of equal importance in engagement, but can prompt further engagement or disengagement as a precursor to the next stage of the process.

Now-a-days, a number of E-feedback techniques have been developed to improve the students 'learning process. This E-feedback can be adopted by the teachers to improve the feedback for the students. Students felt feedback given on assignments was often vague and ambiguous, making it hard to follow. Additionally, students complained that feedback was overly negative and not useful to them. It might be a reason that students were less likely to act on feedback to improve their subsequent work. All

seemed to think that instructors were not willing to spend time writing helpful feedback and did not seem to care about student learning (Price et al., 2010). With the promise of feedback, students would be happy to wait, even if it would be a little longer (Ferguson, 2011). Studies have reported some students' antipathy toward electronic feedback (Ferguson, 2011; Scott, 2006). One of the disadvantages of e-submission is a lack of social interaction, as it lacks personal touch. Since learning remains a profoundly social experience (Scott, 2006), students expressed their hunger for more opportunities to have a dialogue with instructors (Price et al., 2010). Some research has found that handwritten feedback is personal (Morgan & Toledo, 2006). Others (Denton et al., 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Price, et al., 2010) have reported that handwritten feedback is difficult for students to read, due to illegible writing.

Provide Positive feedback

Students' motivation or positive response to feedback is of paramount importance here. It depends on the type of feedback which competent teachers would opt for in dealing with the errors made by their students (Farrah, 2012). Rewarding is evaluative feedback at its most optimistic such as smiley faces, stickers, stars, treats and various reinforcements both in written and verbal. If feedback is provided at the suitable time, it can help students understand, engage with, and create successful techniques for processing material that is meant to be learned. Feedback must be clear, useful, meaningful, and congruent with students' prior knowledge, as well as provide logical links, in order to be effective. According to Hattie (2009), feedback is more helpful when it affirms.

Feedback tactics appear to be an important aspect in improving the affective relationship between teachers and their students, as well as students' involvement, performance, and self-regulation, according to the literature (Black et al., 2002; Black & William, 2014; Hattie, 2009). According to Dweck (2006), the nature of feedback has an impact on motivational mindsets (mere Performance vs. Mastery). Therefore, providing specific and meaningful feedback to students encourages them to regulate their learning.

Negative Feedback: When feedback isn't accurate

When the information communicated by the teacher focuses on the student rather than on performance or understanding, the affective dimension of feedback is especially important. This type of feedback might have unfavorable consequences and heighten the dread of failure. Feedback gives pupils information that they can use to draw inferences about themselves, others, and the world around them. This is most common when feedback is designed to highlight characteristics of the self that may influence not only how students make decisions regarding school (Freire et al., 2009).

Students sometimes do not respond well to feedback, according to another research, because it can be misunderstood. The study describes how secondary-level teachers deliver assessment information to students, as well as how this dynamic may affect student engagement in school activities. The findings backed up Schussler's (2009) claim that feedback approaches that don't encourage people don't work.

Research Question

How can I improve providing quality feedback on students' written works?

Research Plan

The theatrical framework and action research plan adopted in this research are "a cyclical and spiral stage process (Figure 1), namely planning, acting, observing and reflecting" (Royal Education Council [REC], 2018)

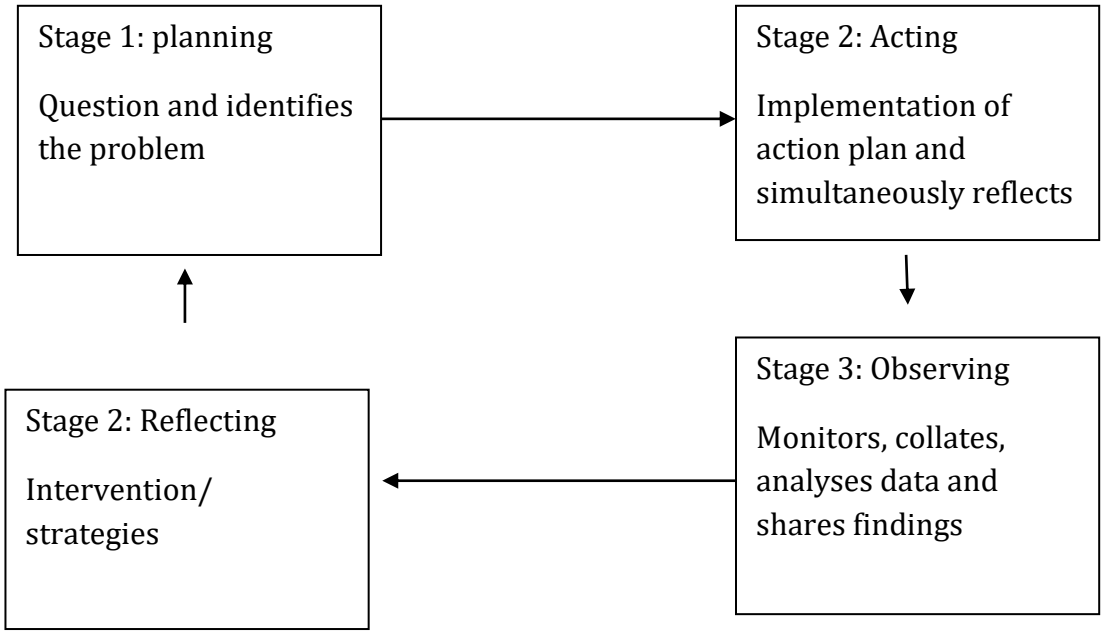


Figure 2 Action Research Process (REC, 2018, p.5)

Procedures

This action research was conducted with two sections of class XII students which consisted 30 students each. The documents and survey questionnaires were used and complied during the reconnaissance (pre-intervention section). As soon as pre-data were collected from the participants, interventions were put into practice (refer intervention section). During the post intervention phase, the participant's documents and performance were analysed and compared with pre-data and impacts of interventions (refer post interventions).

Data Collection

This study employed mixed methods. The use of this design provided an in-depth understanding of the subject matter through personal experiences, interviews and surveys (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This study also associates with personal experiences and behaviors, and hence this approach guided in the collection of data and the process of analysis. Trustworthiness of qualitative data is ensured by using such as credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data were collected through survey, semi-structured interviews, test scores, and document analysis. Each data collection tool complemented the other as the focus of the study was only on corrections of notebooks and providing feedback, which enabled a greater depth of understanding of the issue under study. Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality of participants was maintained by not revealing names and identities in the data collection and while reporting the study findings. All participants were clearly briefed on the purpose of the research and their involvement. The participants signed an informed consent form before the interview to indicate their permission to be part of the study (Arifin, 2018). Further, I sought consent from the participants to voice record interviews. All the collected data were compiled and protected for 5 years.

Pre-intervention (Baseline-Data)

The baseline data were collected using different methods. The first and general document analysis of whether students' note books were checked or not and what types of feedback have been provided by me was conducted. This method of data collection included recording a tally of evidence as shown by the figures below. The figure 3 and 4 show that I neither provided adequate corrections to students' written works nor given any specific feedback on their performance. It also revealed that I had not given any grading on the performance. Further, Critical Friend also indicated that correction works are imperfect. "Only twenty-six out of sixty have been corrected with ticks" and that there is

"no positive or negative feedback given in their notebooks". Feedback to students was limited to "verbal feedback" and "comments," as noted by the critical friend.

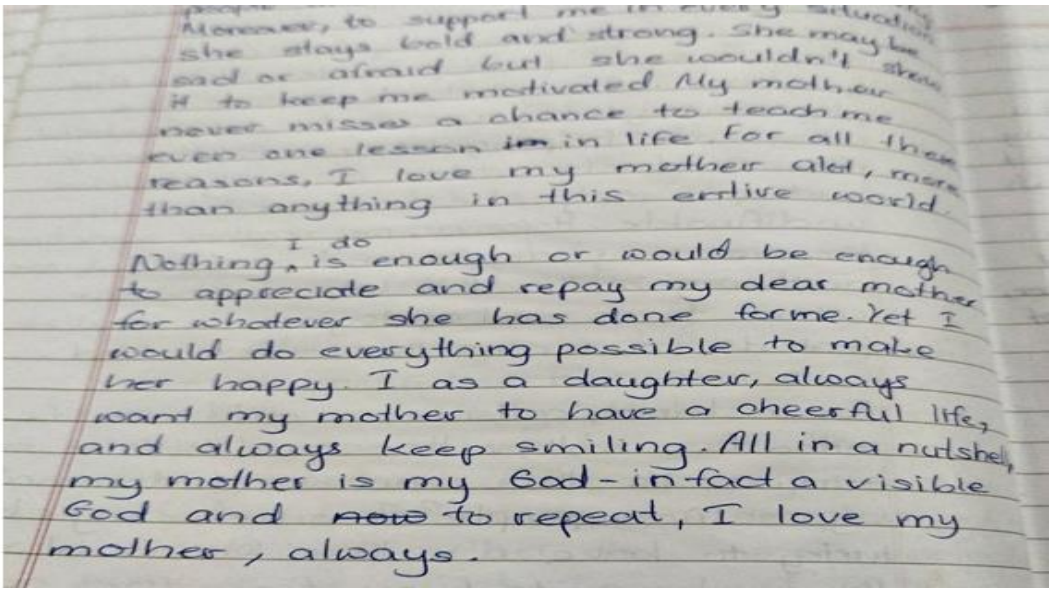


Figure 3. Note book not corrected

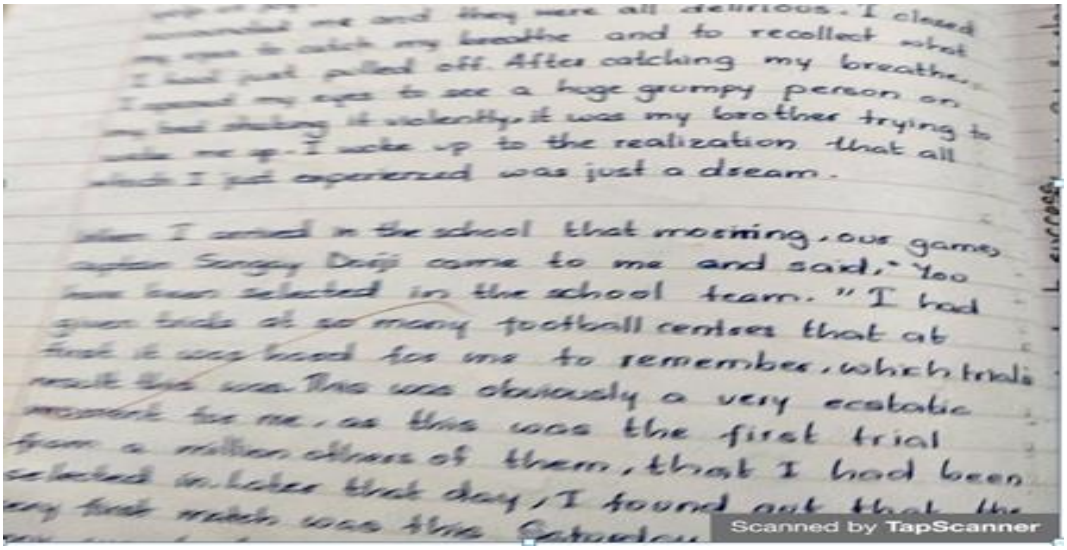


Figure 4. No positive and negative feedback provided

Similarly, the above figure 5 indicates that 29 students found written correction useful and effective and 31 students showed that feedback was not useful because there was inadequate and ineffective feedback. Further, interview data reveals that "Tick mark is good", while another student (No. 2) said, "Cross mark is not happy." Therefore, the correction had some effect on students learning and attitude.

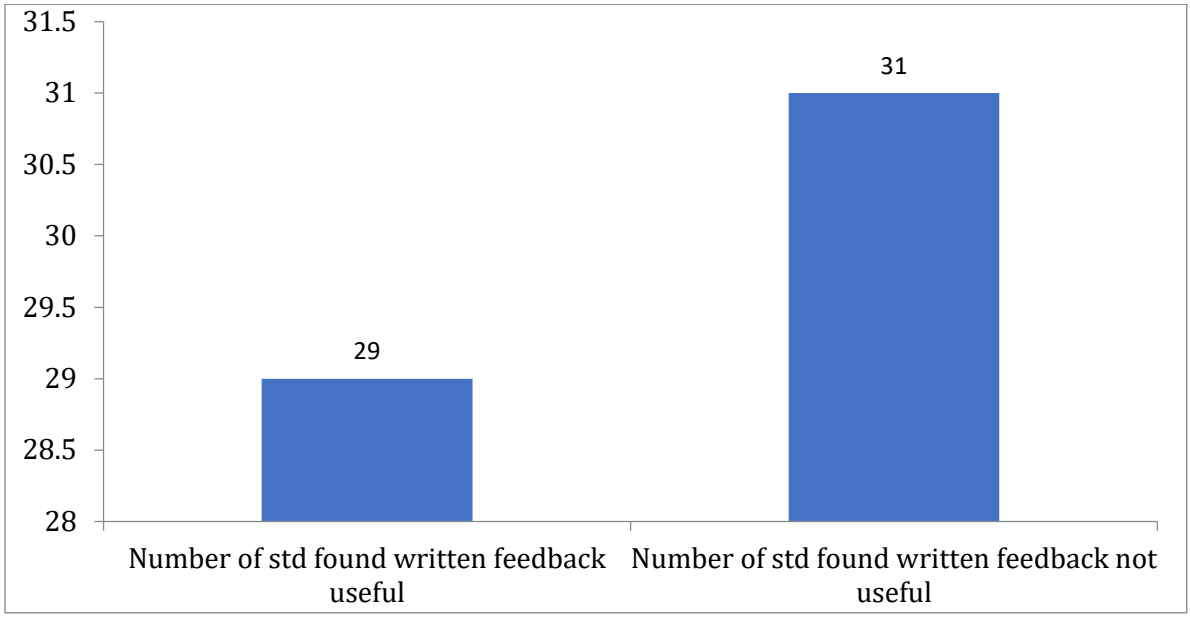


Figure 5. Effect of inadequacy and ineffective written feedback

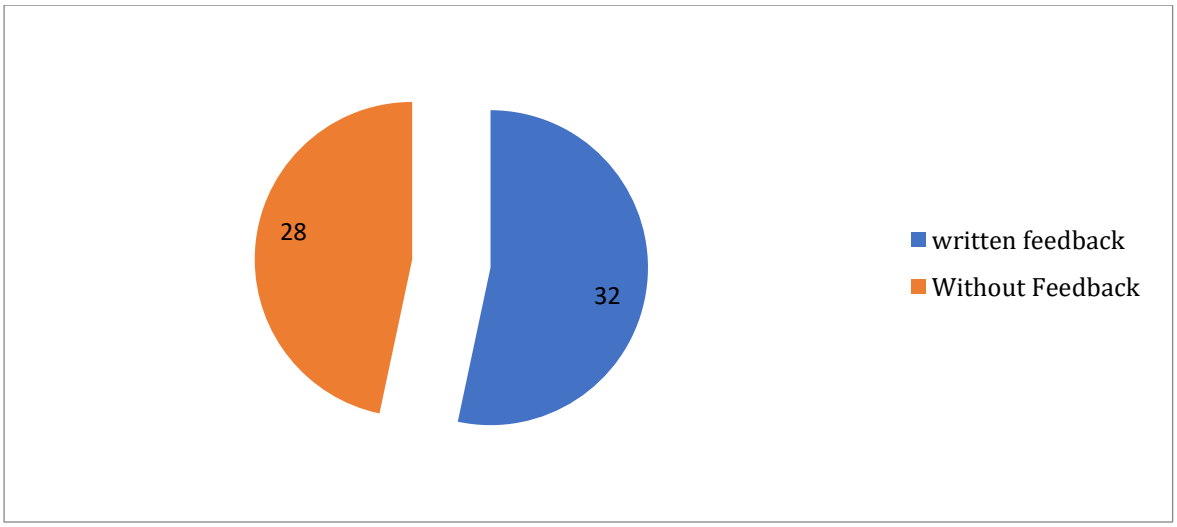


Figure 6. Written feedback provided to students

Additionally, the figure 6 shows that 28 agreed that teacher provides written feedback on their notebooks, while 32 students agreed that there was no feedback on their written work. This is also confirmed by interview data that majority of the students expressed that teacher provided vague feedback without consistent follow up.

Intervention

The data from the base line study revealed that I provided poor quality feedback on students' work. Following a thorough examination of the baseline data, it was discovered that students preferred quality feedback and consistent follow-up on their written work. I adopted the following intervention strategies, which are suggested in the literature. These invention strategies were designed and implemented during the September and October months.

1. Adopting Various E-feedback techniques
2. Consistent follow up on the course of work
3. Provide Positive feedback
4. Adequate correction of students' written works
5. Written feedback on students' works

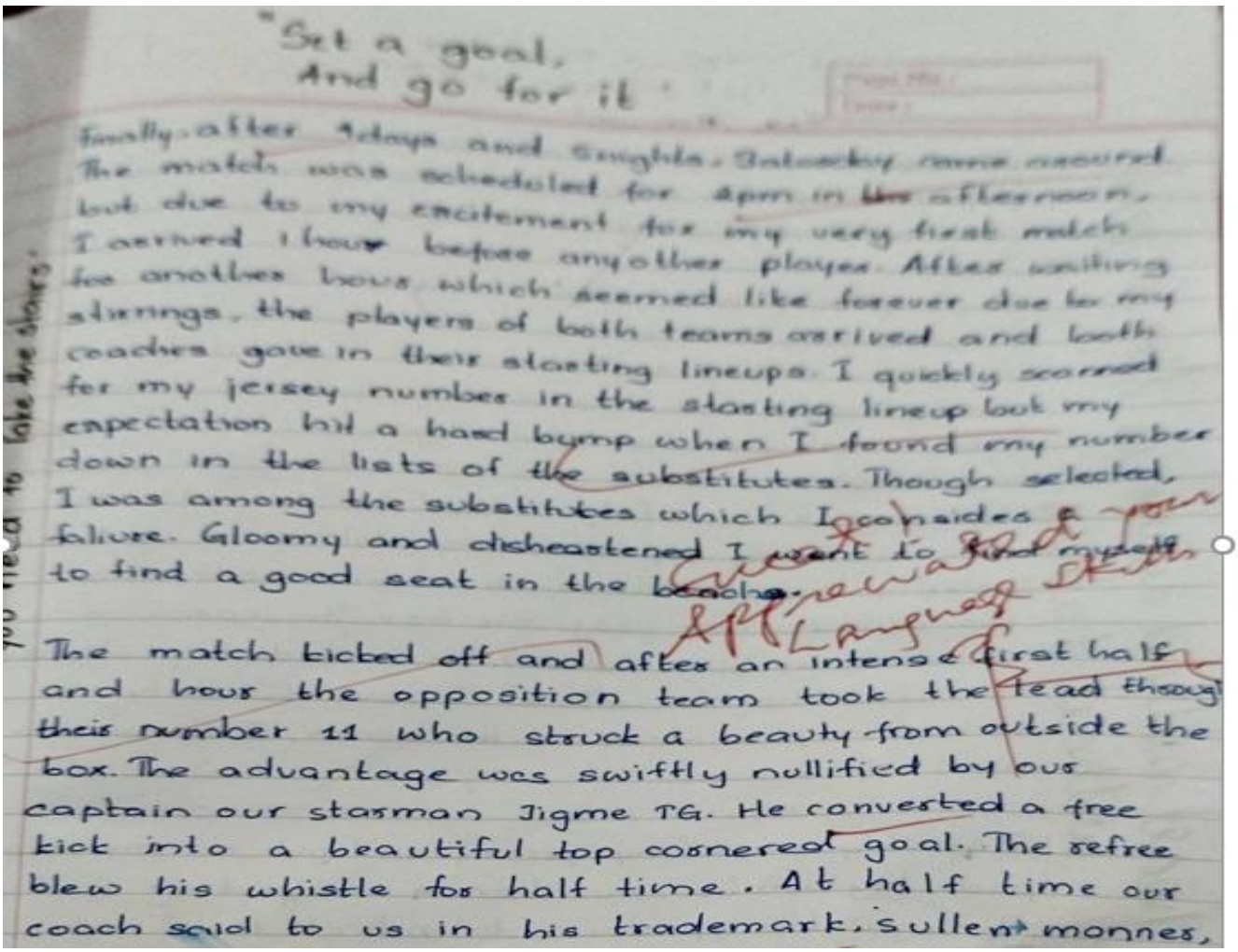
I used different techniques to provide quality feedback on the course of students' work. Further, I used Google classroom and messenger to give feedback after the work. Moreover,

I also had made a schedule to provide feedback on the students' written work. In this connection, it was found out that I provided positive feedback to motivate the students and students utilized the feedback they have received meaningfully. Feedback should not be discouraging for the students at any cost. According to Piccinin (2003), providing feedback is important and after reading that, a student should have positive feeling about that feedback.

In the similar vein, I provided specified information about the mistakes by students: information which helps them to improve their learning and performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Thus, quality feedback improves students' work and their performance.

Post-Intervention

After the intervention, individual student's notebook were collected again to confirm and see whether I provided them with quality feedback on their written works. It was seen that each of the students' notebook was corrected with meaningful written feedback when compared and analysed the data.The figure 7 and 8, below clearly show that I had collected all their notebooks and corrected the written works with comments. I did this by collecting the notebooks sections wise and went through the written assignments, it was noticed that I provided quality feedback on the students' written work. This happened series of time. Further, the post-intervention data discloses that I improved in giving feedback to students on their notebooks concerning their performance in the works provided to them. For example, one of the kids wrote in his diary, "Sir writes many things in a notepad" (Diary, 2019). Some of the comments written in the notebook included things like "your handwriting has improved. Keep up", or "Most answers are correct", or "The spellings are written correctly" or "Handwriting is good" (Diary, 2019)


"Set a goal,
And go for it"

finally, after 4days and Sunghila Saturday came around
The match was scheduled for 4pm in the afternoon,
but due to my excitement for my very first match
I arrived 1 hour before any other player. After waiting
for another hours which seemed like forever due to my
stirrings, the players of both teams arrived and both
coaches gave in their starting lineups. I quickly scanned
for my jersey number in the starting lineup but my
expectation hit a hard bump when I found my number
down in the lists of the substitutes. Though selected,
I was among the substitutes which I consider a your
failure. Gloomy and disheartened I went to find myself
to find a good seat in the benches.

The match kicked off and after an intense first half
and hour the opposition team took the lead through
their number 11 who struck a beauty from outside the
box. The advantage was swiftly nullified by our
captain our starman Jigme TG. He converted a free
kick into a beautiful top cornered goal. The refree
blew his whistle for half time. At half time our
coach said to us in his trademark, sullen monnes,

Figure 7. Students' note book found with meaningful feedback after interventions

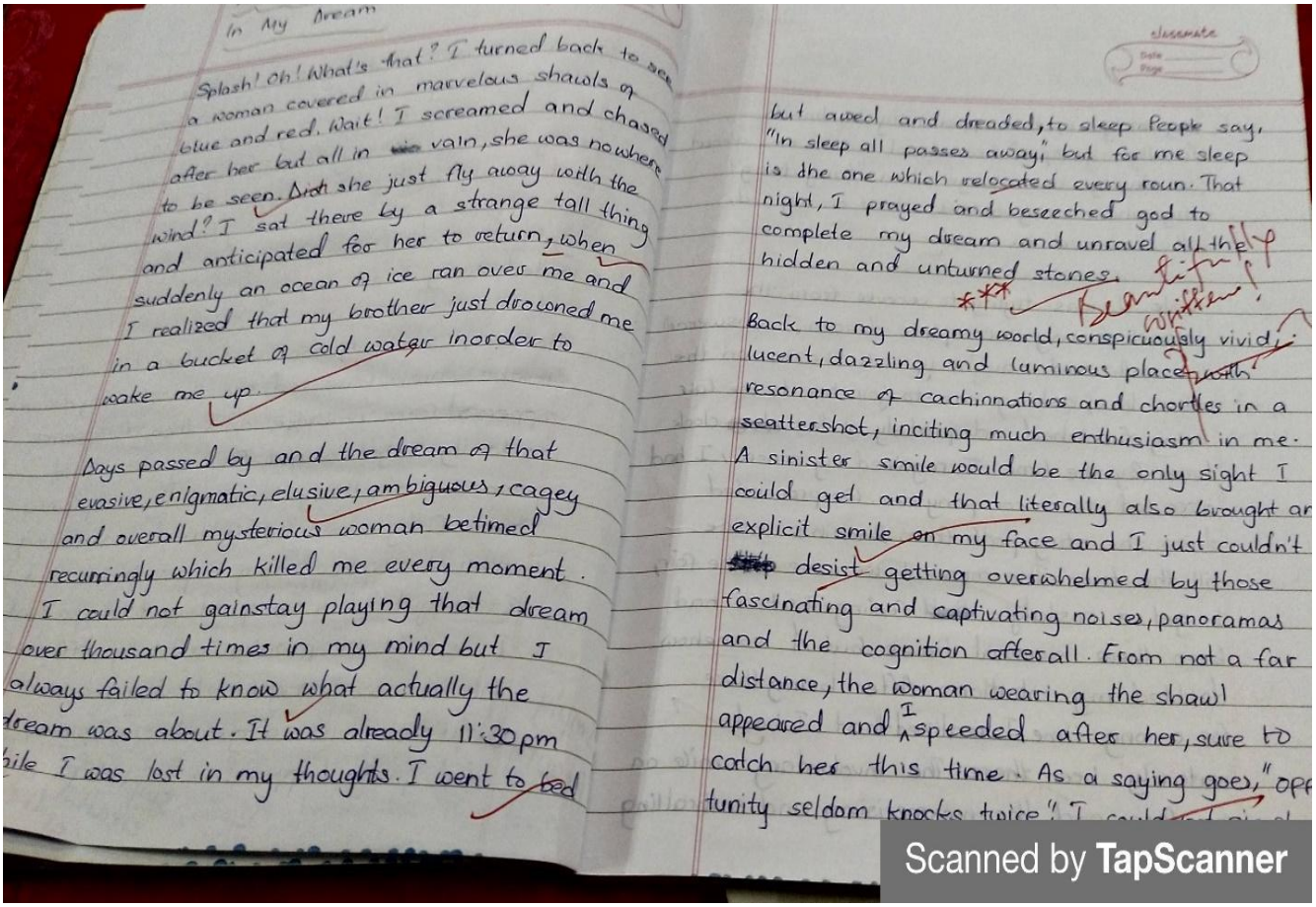


Figure 8. Quality written feedback provided to students on their written works

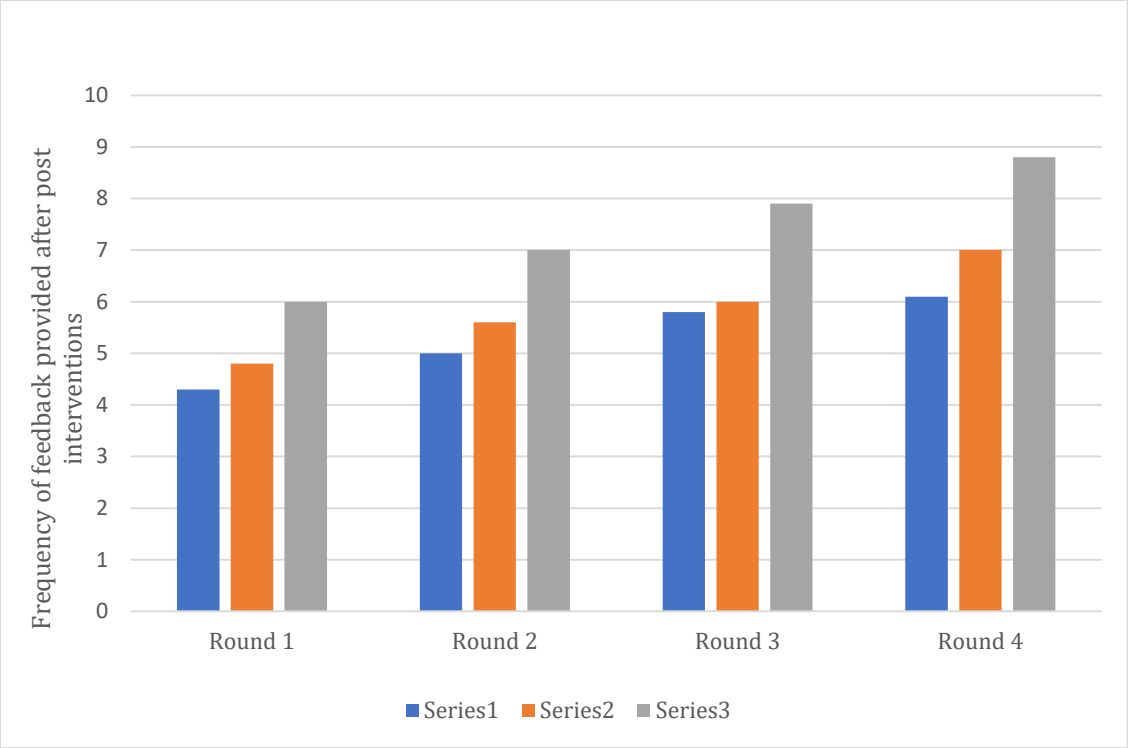
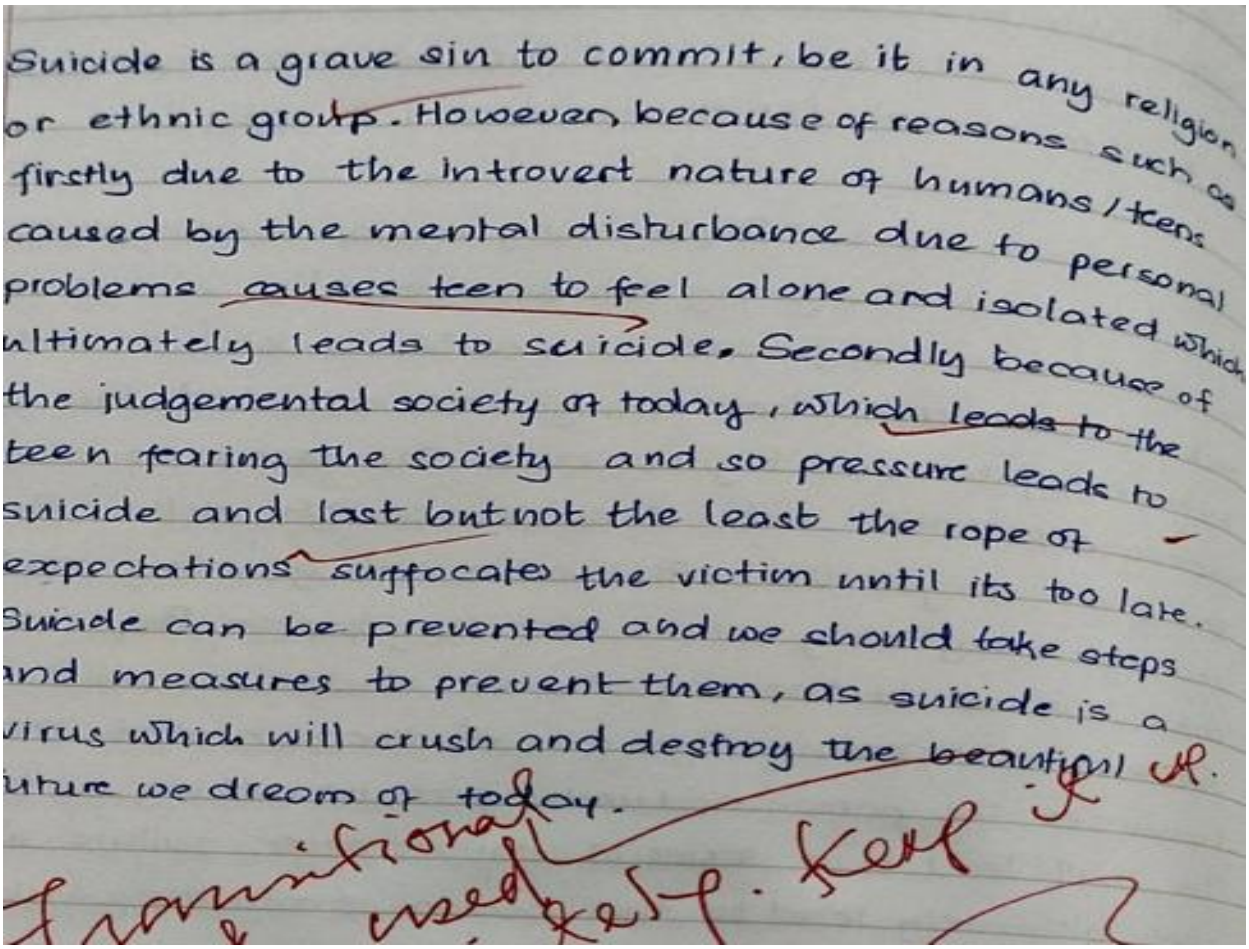


Figure 9. Frequency and positive feedback provided after post interventions

The above figure 9 indicates the improvement of feedback given to students during the time of implementation of intervention strategies. Many students voiced that they were assisted in the class with their works and learning of the subject. Around 55 students said that they have improved their writing after the post-intervention period. Similarly, almost all the students expressed that consistent and adequate corrections helped them to work more and write without errors. Further, one of the students (No. 11) said, "I feel motivated to write correctly and with less errors." However, a few students revealed that they are not contended with the feedback provided by the teacher, "Sir had checked our notebook only twice till midterm." (No. 21 and 37)

In the same way, the above figure represents those 44 students who agreed that they found the feedback meaningful and effective. Further, students were able to improve their written work day after shown above in the graph.

Comparison of Baseline and Post-Intervention Data



The following figure 10 and 11 illustrate the comparison between the baseline data and post intervention data on documents and questionnaires.

Figure 10. Observation of critical friend on meaningful feedback after the interventions

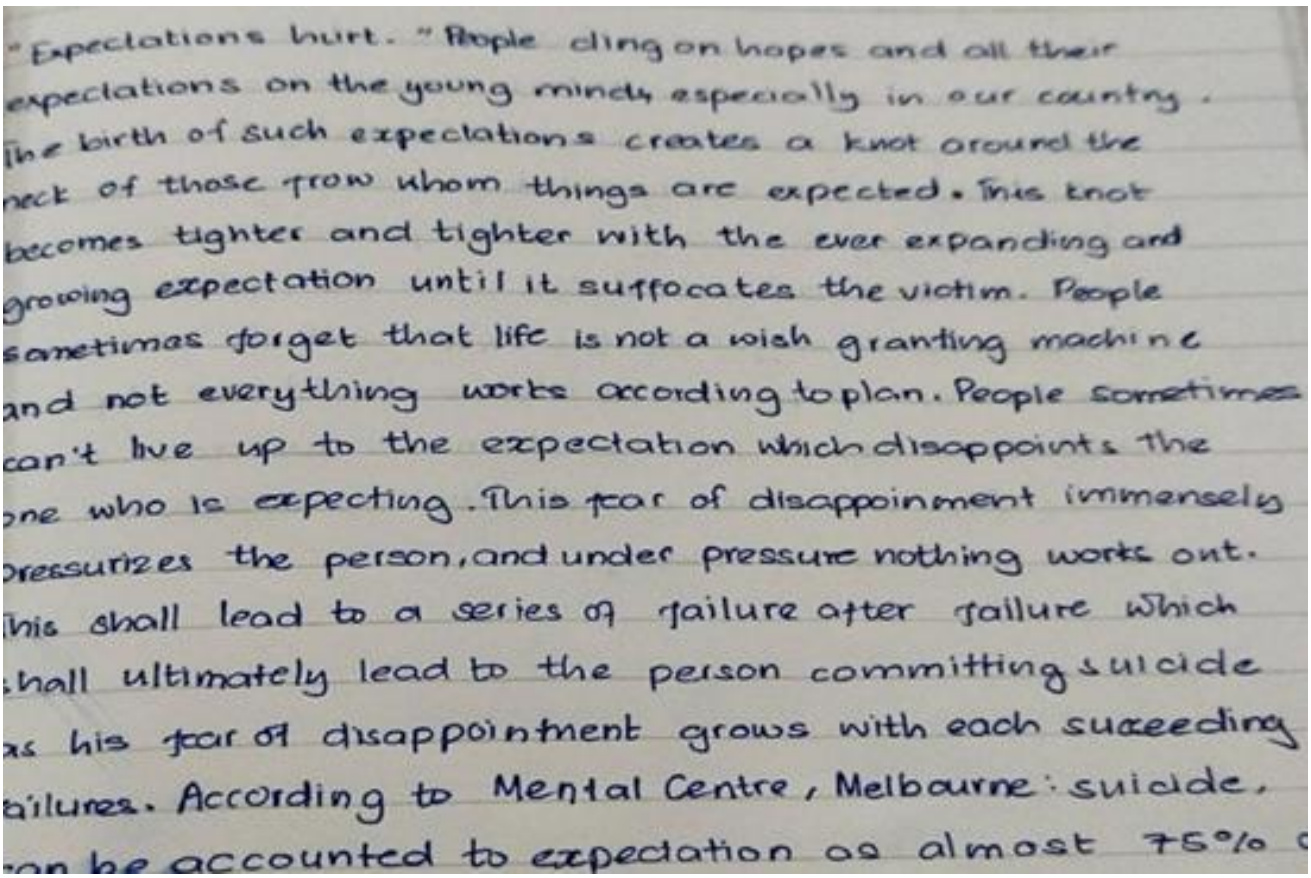

"Expectations hurt." People cling on hopes and all their expectations on the young minds especially in our country. The birth of such expectations creates a knot around the neck of those from whom things are expected. This knot becomes tighter and tighter with the ever expanding and growing expectation until it suffocates the victim. People sometimes forget that life is not a wish granting machine and not everything works according to plan. People sometimes can't live up to the expectation which disappoints the one who is expecting. This fear of disappointment immensely pressurizes the person, and under pressure nothing works out. This shall lead to a series of failure after failure which shall ultimately lead to the person committing suicide as his fear of disappointment grows with each succeeding failures. According to Mental Centre, Melbourne: suicide, can be accounted to expectation as almost 75%

Figure 11. Observation of critical friend lack of corrections and feedback before the interventions

As explained above, attempts were made to correct as much of the students' written work as possible. It was done on a rotation basis section-wise to ensure that each student's written work was fixed. The observation of the Critical Friend, the Co-English teacher, read as "most notebooks in English had been checked and the written work corrected." Another comment by the Critical Friend read as "Sir had made an effort to check every page of the notebook."

In the interview with the eight students, it was also revealed that "sir checked a lot of our work." (Student 2). My reflections in the diary mentioned that I corrected work in student's presence and gave oral feedback on the performance. Students also put pressure upon me to correct their books and return them on time. For instance, I had entered in my diary on 2/9/2019 that one student said, "Sir, we have no notebooks", to mean that I had

taken their notebooks for correction, but I had not done it and returned the books to them. From the chart below it was understood that I improved in giving meaningful written feedback to students.

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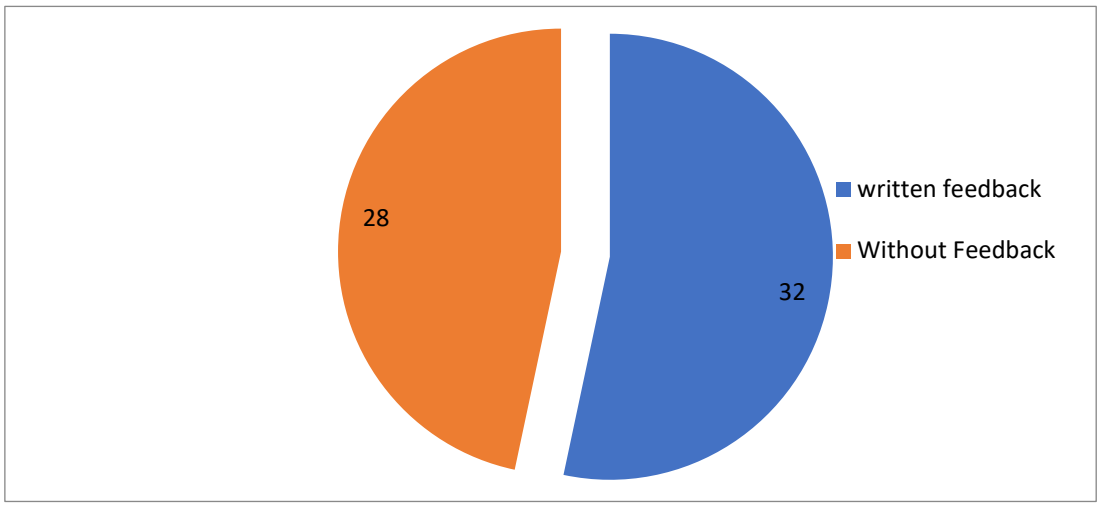

Figure 12. Improvement in the corrections and written feedback

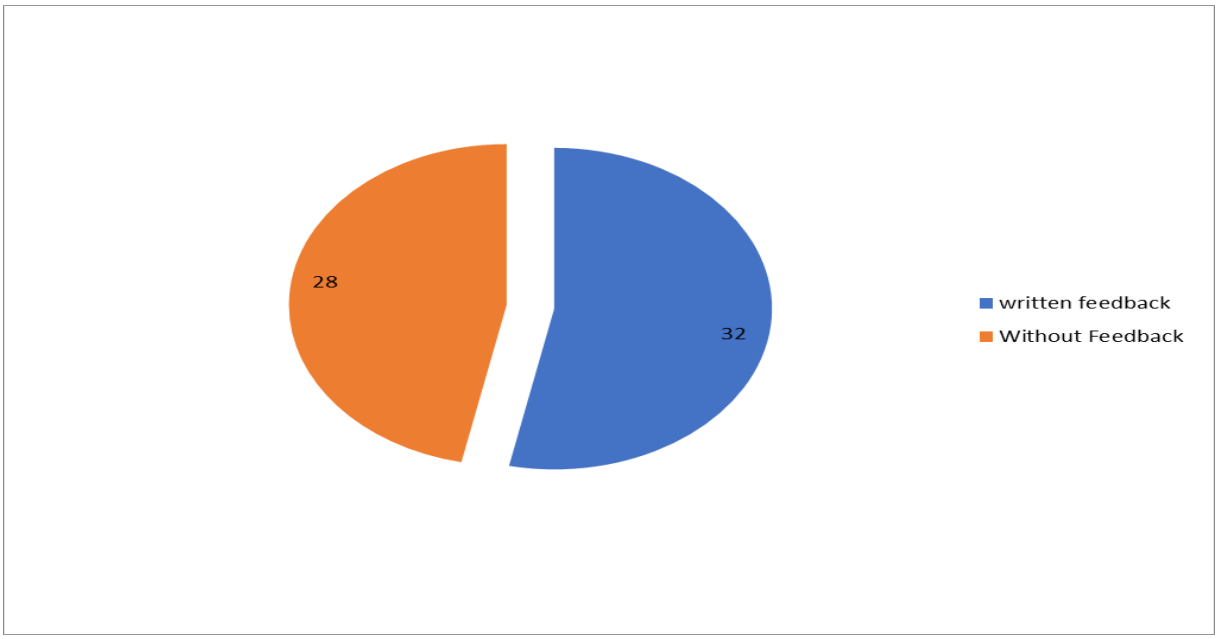

Figure 13. Drastic improvement in providing written feedback both in quality and quantity

The figure 12 shows that 28 agreed that teacher provides written feedback on their notebooks, while 32 students agreed that there was no feedback on their written work. On the other hand, figure 13 shows the positive responds of 44 students who said that the quality feedback had improved their writing as well as speaking. In addition, interview data demonstrates that students' writing had improved due to the consistent corrections and follow up on their work as said by Co-English teacher

Result

This action research shows that when feedback is overwhelmingly negative, it might hinder student effort and accomplishment. I must provide encouraging, and positive feedback to students. As a teacher, I must find time for corrections of students' work and always provide suitable and meaningful feedback so that students learn with minimum mistakes. This is how I become one of the best teachers, that students can remember me fondly for the rest of their lives. A teacher has the distinct responsibility to nurture a student's learning and to provide feedback in such a manner that the student does not leave the classroom feeling defeated.

The participants' knowledge, abilities, and attitudes toward feedback mechanisms improved me a lot as it is evident form the result of the study. As a result of the attentive and methodical use of feedback, it was seen that most of the students came forward and

interacted with increased interest, active participation, and better learning in my subject areas. The findings of the study further corroborate the theory put forth by various authors that feedback can be thought of in several dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and motivational (Brookhart, 2008; Dweck, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperlay, 2007). It is clear that the students highly value the feedback given by their teacher. In terms of the effects on the teacher's feedback and performance, the findings were also consistent with the literature. Teachers have a critical influence on student engagement in the classroom and the development of academic paths for students. The ability to relate to students through the use of meaningful feedback is a crucial component of the teacher's function in the classroom (Black & William, 2014; Black et al., 2000).

Students' work has to be assessed to find areas where students need assistance in their learning and feedback. In addition, Brown, et al., (2004) state that "assessment is the engine that drives learning; how we give feedback is an important way of gearing the engine so that maximum effect is achieved from the effort put in by all concerned" (p. 30). Only then will the students' input be meaningful to them, and they will be able to make sense of what was written in their notebook by their teacher.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Feedback must be educative in nature. It should be given in a timely manner and must be sensitive to the individual needs of the student.

2. To keep students on track in their learning, provide specific feedback. Besides positive verbal and non-verbal feedback, most students prefer feedback in written form with genuine praise.

Conclusion

Teachers' involvement, knowledge, and competencies in the use of feedback strategies, lead to greater learning. Giving positive feedback is key to improving students' involvement and thinking skills that brings the maximum participation in the sessions and the follow-up classroom application. I have learnt that a greater awareness of the value of feedback, particularly appropriate written feedback can help students learn more effectively. This action research has opened a new window of opportunity to try new things in the classroom and teach meaningfully. First, it enabled me to think critically and analyze ideas and phenomena in an informed way. Second, it paved the way for me to be receptive to new

ways of doing things when old methods fail. Finally, it has made me a professionally sound teacher.

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I want to express my sincere gratitude to the academic head, and the head of subject departments, for sparing their instructional time for me. Furthermore, this study would not have been possible without the valuable participation of the students of class XII. I have learnt different aspects of research and feedback from his comments and suggestions. Mr. Tshering Wangchuk's efforts, insights, skills, and persistent sacrificing of his time and energy proved invaluable to me in completing this research. He has been instrumental in helping me to conduct this research on time. I owe him my deepest gratitude and appreciation for his timely feedback and support. My studies would not have come this far without his valuable guidance and support.

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