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English First Additional Language: Teachers' written feedback practices in multi-grade classrooms in rural South African primary schools

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Multi-grade teaching is a widely accepted phenomenon in both developing and developed countries. In this article I report on a phenomenological inquiry into written feedback practices of teachers in multi-grade classrooms and how they described and interpreted their feedback practices pertaining to learners' writing activities in English First Additional Language. Written feedback is widely believed to be central to learners' learning and achievement. Feedback is assumed to change learners' thinking or behaviour towards their work and is regarded as a tool to focus their attention on improving their learning. Despite the benefits of written feedback, however, there is a widespread belief that many learners are disengaged from the feedback they receive. The population in this study comprised 4 English First Additional Language teachers from 4 multi-grade primary schools. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that participants differed in their understanding of what was involved in feedback, and that there was a shared view that feedback was a product and not viewed as a process that could be used towards developing learners' learning. It was also shown that feedback practices used by the teachers of multi-grade classes included providing correct answers and providing delayed feedback to learners. This study adds to the ongoing debates on multi-grade teaching and attempts to shed some light on the nature and the type of feedback that could motivate and enhance learners' learning in multi-grade classrooms.

Keywords: assessment; assessment for learning; delayed feedback; English First Additional Language; feedback; feedback formats; feedback frequency; multi-grade teaching; timing of feedback; written feedback

Introduction

Multi-grade teaching is a widely accepted phenomenon in both developing and developed countries (Kivunja & Sims, 2015). Different terminologies are used to describe multi-grade settings with scholars using concepts such as multi-age, multi-stage, mixed grade, mixed classes, multi classes (Ronksley-Pavia, Pendergast & Barton, 2019). Multi-grade schools are schools that practise a multi-grade teaching pedagogy as one teacher would teach two or more grades (Joubert, 2010). These are created due to necessity, for instance, where there is low learner enrolment (Cornish, 2010; Proehl, Douglas, Elias, Johnson & Westsmith, 2013; Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019). In South Africa, 5,153 primary schools have implemented and practise a multi-grade pedagogy, which is 27% of the total number of schools nationally (Department of Basic Education [DBE], Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2014). These schools are in rural areas and in some townships in the country.

Teachers in multi-grade classrooms use the mono-grade curriculum and the DBE treats multi-grade schools as mono-grade schools (Du Plessis & Subramaniam, 2014). This means that training and support provided to multi-grade teachers are the same for both multi-grade teachers and mono-grade teachers. In mono-grade classrooms, learners are grouped according to their grades and have different teachers to teach them, whereas in multi-grade classrooms learners of different grades share the same classroom and only have one teacher. The curriculum and the assessment protocols for mono-grade and multi-grade schools are the same. The teachers in mono-grade and multi-grade schools are provided with the same assessment protocols (Department of Education [DoE], RSA, 2005) outlining the type and number of tasks to be completed in each term. These tasks are mandatory and they are packaged according to the separate grades. In multi-grade classrooms, teachers are expected to share the teaching and assessment time among the different grades for which they are responsible. This is a mammoth task for multi-grade teachers and research has shown that teachers cannot cope with the demands of multi-grade teaching (Brown, 2010; Lingam, 2007).

Assessment for learning and the associated importance of feedback practices have been central in curriculum policy reform. Learners receive feedback from their teachers in various forms, namely written, oral and/or digital. Agricola, Prins and Sluijsmans (2020) consider written feedback as a valuable feedback tool, but feedback given in the form of verbal interaction will increase the effectiveness of the feedback. Douglas, Salter, Iglesias, Dowlman and Eri (2016) hold that the rationale for giving learners feedback is to enhance their learning and assist them in achieving the learning outcomes. The focus of this study was on feedback comprising comments about learners' written work like essays and any other written assignments required of learners for English First Additional Language, as set out in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) document (DBE, RSA, 2011).

It is imperative to define the concept of feedback. According to Price, Handley and Millar (2011), feedback does not enjoy a common interpretation, either in pedagogic literature or in practice. Price et al. (2011)

postulate that feedback is a dialogue between the teacher and the learner. This socio-constructivist view of feedback suggests that when learners receive feedback from their teachers, they should perceive it as a conversation and should be able to understand the meaning of the comments made on their work and they must be able to judge their performance based on the comments that they receive. Carless (2015:192) defines feedback as “a dialogic process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.” This means that learners should be able to interpret and make sense of the comments they receive from their teachers and use these to revise work or inform future learning.

According to Hattie and Timperley's (2007:86) conceptual framework for feedback, effective feedback must answer three major questions: a) Where am I going? (What are the goals?); b) How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goal?); and c) Where to next? (What activities must be undertaken to make better progress?). These questions correspond with the notions of “feed up”, “feedback” and “feed forward.” Hattie and Timperley (2007) further suggest that feedback should have the following qualities: it must be timely; it must be intimate and individual; it should be empowering; it should open doors, not close them; and it should be manageable. By and large, feedback must improve learners' learning.

Several authors have written about the value of feedback. Feedback improves learners' learning experience (Al-Bakri, 2016), closes the gap between current abilities and the desired learning goal (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), provides teachers with information to guide their teaching (Al-Bakri, 2016), encourages and consolidates learning, (Wahyuni, 2017), changes learners' thinking or behaviour towards their work and focuses their attention on improving their work (Kheradmand & Sayadiyan, 2016). There are qualities that should be met in the provisioning of feedback; these are that feedback should be specific, it should guide the learner towards the achievement of a goal, it should be carefully presented and the learners should be viewed as active rather than passive players in the learning process.

However, it must be pointed out that not all feedback is beneficial as feedback can be counterproductive especially when introduced in a negative or restorative manner. Although feedback is regarded as a vital aspect of the teaching and learning process, there is a widespread belief that many learners are disengaged from the feedback they receive (Doan, 2013; Price et al., 2011). Jonsson (2013) identified occurrences where learners might not engage with the feedback provided to them. These occurrences are when

feedback may not be helpful, it may not be adequately individualised, it might be excessively definitive, learners may need techniques for utilising feedback and learners may not comprehend the wording used.

With this study I intended to explore practices regarding given written feedback by four experienced multi-grade teachers in multi-grade classrooms. To further understand multi-grade teachers' practices in giving feedback, the following questions were used to guide this study:

- 1) What are English First Additional Language teachers' practices when giving written feedback on learners' written work in multi-grade schools?
- 2) What strategies could be used to enhance feedback practices in multi-grade classrooms?

Studies on how learners perceived written feedback in Higher Education (HE) (Doan, 2013; Douglas et al., 2016; Price et al., 2011), and on the value of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lee, 2008; Merry & Orsmond, 2008) have been done. However, there is limited literature on the written feedback provided by teachers in primary schools, especially in multi-grade classrooms. With this study I aimed to fill this gap and to add to the body of knowledge on feedback in primary schools, especially in multi-grade classrooms.

Literature Review

Perspectives on the role of feedback in curriculum assessment

Feedback is defined as central to curriculum delivery (Wahyuni, 2017). Despite this, Wahyuni (2017) notes that the effectiveness of feedback is conflicting and inconclusive. This is due to the different perspectives on the role of feedback in curriculum assessment. Assessment reforms have brought a paradigm shift in the perspectives on feedback from a technical view to a developmental view. There is a distinct difference between technical feedback and developmental feedback. While technical feedback focuses on error correction, developmental feedback tends to focus more on promoting learning beyond the given tasks. R Lam (2017) argues that there are two main trends on feedback attributable to the advent of the assessment and learning culture, and these are the epistemological and practical prominence on the utilisation of feedback as a supporting tool, rather than a tool used to judge the accuracy of the learners' writing as well as the role and function of feedback in the assessment cycle. Learners are expected to be able to appreciate the quality of the work while engaging with the feedback. Furthermore, both the teachers and the learners need to be provided with the necessary competencies that will assist them in providing and engaging with feedback.

Researchers do not agree on how much feedback must be given on learners' writing, for example, or what form it should take. Researchers

such as Truscott and Hsu (2008), on the one hand, argue that correcting learners' errors in their writing is unproductive and hampers the learning process. Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005), on the other, suggest that error corrections on learners' written work is beneficial and improves their writing. However, there is agreement among researchers that feedback is crucial to successful teaching and is aimed at improving learners' work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lam, R 2017). Another perspective is that feedback should be treated as a dialogic process in which learners use and interpret the information in a meaningful way and use it to improve the quality of their work or how they learn (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Carless, 2015). For feedback to be meaningful, it should be viewed as a collaborative construction of shared understanding between the teacher and the learner.

Despite the controversies regarding feedback and its content, feedback remains standard practice among teachers. Teachers follow a linear model of teaching, which starts with the delivery of the content, followed by assessment and then feedback is given (Lam, R 2017). Ajjawi and Boud (2017) consider the view of feedback as a finished product that is given to learners to correct their errors as a narrow view of learning that does not consider the dialogic nature of feedback. In agreement, Kivunja (2015) mentions that there should be a paradigm shift from summative assessment to continuous assessment in which assessment is viewed as a process and not a finished product. Feedback should be considered as a conversation between the teacher and the learner which feeds back and then feeds forward to inform future learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Written feedback in Second Language (L2) learning

Written corrective feedback (CF), also termed error correction or grammatical correction, is a debatable issue among researchers in L2 teaching (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Ferris, 2010; Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beuningen, 2010). There are two types of strategies that L2 teachers use when giving feedback – these are direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategy involves focusing on form and structure whereas indirect feedback involves highlighting the incorrect form without providing the correct form. The latter strategy provides learners with the opportunity to interpret and figure out what corrections need to be made.

Although research has found that CF improves learners' academic skills (Knight, Greenberger & McNaughton, 2021), the question that is perplexing is which errors should be focused on when giving written feedback. The question that arises is whether the focus should be on local errors such as spelling and tenses or global errors that include content and organisation (Junqueira &

Payant, 2015). Despite this controversy, in studies conducted by Gu nette and Lyster (2013), Junqueira and Payant (2015) and Van Beuningen (2010) it was found that even though teachers were giving feedback on different aspects of learners' written work, the dominant feedback focused on local errors. Hyland (2013) postulates that L2 feedback must scaffold learners' cognitive development and make them aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Wahyuni (2017) argues that written feedback is informational, and it is a means of guiding learners' reactions to the comments given to them and boost the development of their writing skills. Research has identified several factors that influence L2 teachers' feedback. These factors include a lack of time to provide comprehensive feedback (Ferris 2014; Lee, 2008), L2 teachers' beliefs about feedback (Junqueira & Payant, 2015), and not knowing how much feedback is enough (Gu nette & Lyster 2013; Junqueira & Payant 2015). L2 teachers are ill-prepared to deal with diverse L2 learners' needs and L2 teachers do not acknowledge learners' language backgrounds (Ferris, 2010, Ferris, Brown, Liu & Arnaudo Stine, 2011). These factors make error correction and feedback a daunting task for L2 teachers.

Forms of feedback

Two main forms of feedback are distinguished in the literature. These have been described by R Lam (2017) as formative and summative feedback. Summative feedback focuses on the technical aspects of writing such as spelling, tense and punctuations and usually takes the form of marks and grades while formative feedback takes the form of qualitative comments and specific comments related to the task (Lam, LW, Peng & Lau, 2017). Researchers are not in agreement as to which form of feedback is more effective in improving learners' learning. Agricola et al. (2020), however, consider both summative and formative feedback as important and valuable feedback tools and as a form of interaction that will increase the effectiveness of feedback. Both summative and formative assessment feedback should include the provision of quality, and constructive and timeous feedback.

Assessment and feedback in multi-grade education

Mulryan-Kyne (2004) reports that a significant proportion of primary school teachers throughout the world are practising multi-grade teaching. It is a pedagogical practice in which at least two or more classes are taught by one teacher, notwithstanding the grade level (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; Proehl et al., 2013). Multi-grade classes are formed due to low learner enrolments and where there is no economic justification for the employment of one teacher at each level (Cornish, 2010; Ronksley-Pavia et al.,

2019). Teaching in these classes is considered to be difficult and challenging (Motamedi & Khajouie, 2020). A study conducted by Mulryan-Kyne (2004) indicates that teachers are critical of this pedagogy, as teaching in these classes requires more preparation time than single-grade teaching. In addition, teachers in multi-grade classes do not have enough time to reflect on their teaching (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007) and they feel isolated (Motamedi & Khajouie, 2020).

Teaching in a multi-grade context is challenging (Juvane, 2005) and teachers tend to have a negative attitude towards it (Cornish, 2010) resulting in numerous assumed challenges of giving feedback in multi-grade classrooms (Joubert, 2010). This puts more pressure on the teacher, as they must design separate lesson plans and assessments for each grade. One of the factors that influence the provision of feedback is context. Teaching and learning happen in a complicated and ambiguous context and the decisions made are influenced by the context in which it operates (Cranton & Carusetta, 2002; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lee, 2008). Hattie and Timperley (2007) posit that feedback does not occur in a vacuum and different contexts in which teachers operate will influence how they give feedback to their learners and what the impact of the feedback is. Studies have shown that teachers are constrained by the expectations of education authorities (Ball, 2004). The current educational context of accountability requires teachers to report and record formal assessment tasks. As a result, teachers do not use formative feedback; they rather focus on summative feedback.

In a study conducted by Lee (2008), it was found that teachers were held accountable if they deviated from the school policy in terms of how they responded to learners' writing. Teachers were expected to conform to certain standards, which impeded their initiative when giving feedback. In addition, the Department over-emphasised the number of hours for language teaching in different grades. For example, in the South African context, and specifically related to this study, the teaching hours indicated for English First Additional Language in the Foundation Phase range between 23 and 25 hours per week (DBE, RSA, 2011). The mandated and inflexible number of hours to teach English First Additional Language prohibits teachers from spending extra hours to ensure that learners act on the feedback provided. Another challenge that multi-grade teachers face is time constraints as they need to teach more than one grade in the same teaching time (Mulaudzi, 2016). This multi-teaching approach presents challenges to teachers of multi-grade classes particularly with giving written feedback on learners' writing tasks. Furthermore, time constraints could make it impossible for teachers to engage in dialogue with

the learners so that they understand the feedback and can implement it (Jonsson, 2013).

In this study I investigated the feedback practices of teachers who gave written feedback to learners on their written English tasks in a multi-grade context.

Methodology

This study was a phenomenological inquiry into written feedback practices of teachers in multi-grade classrooms, following the procedures outlined by Mertens (2015). The participants, who gave written feedback to their learners on their written English tasks in multi-grade contexts, constructed an in-depth description of the meaningful reality (Harlow & Cobb, 2014) of their feedback practices, that is, how they give feedback and the meaning that they attach to such feedback. A phenomenological perspective was used to explore the practices of four teachers of multi-grade classes and how they described and interpreted their feedback practices (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Purposive sampling involved four teachers who taught English First Additional Language (EFAL) in a multi-grade classroom and had 2 or more years of teaching experience. The study was conducted in four multi-grade primary schools in the Sibasa District of the Limpopo province. The selected schools used Tshivenda as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and English was taught as a subject. All participants were not native English speakers and their command of the English language was minimal. Many of them did not get the opportunity to use English outside their English Second Language (ESL) classrooms.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection included semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Separate interviews were held with participants upon confirming their availability. All the interviews were recorded, with the consent of all the participants. An interview schedule was developed, piloted and adapted to ensure that the research questions reflected the focus of the study and that the language used was accessible to all participants. To avoid disrupting the teaching and learning processes, the interviews were conducted after school, in a staffroom – a venue that was convenient for the participants. For triangulation purposes, document analysis was used. Learners' essays and other examples of learners' written work, such as assignments and drafts, were perused for the kind of comments that teachers made on written work, to determine the content and form of feedback provided to learners.

Data were analysed using content analysis. Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection to ensure that the researcher followed up on interesting issues that might surface during the

data collection process (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). The content analysis involved identification, analysis and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Using this approach allowed a systematic and inductive analysis process to unfold. The transcripts of the interviews were read several times to extract meaning and categorise them into themes. The themes were used in the interpretation of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

I sought permission to conduct the study from the DBE, district officials and participating schools before embarking on the data collection process. Participants were informed that they could terminate their participation without penalty if they so wished. Participants also gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded. All the participants signed the consent form. I used pseudonyms in referring to the participants to protect their identity, for example, T1 referred to teacher number one, T2 to teacher number two, et cetera.

Findings

The data focused on teachers' annotations and comments on learners' essays and other examples of learners' written work, such as assignments and drafts. Based on the analysis, three themes emerged. The themes were: teachers' descriptions of feedback; the frequency of feedback, and forms of feedback. The latter two themes both relate to the feedback practices of the teachers.

Teachers' Description of Feedback

The participants were asked about their understanding of feedback. Two divergent and often conflicting discourses emerged on participant understanding of feedback, what it means and what it is used for. For these teachers, feedback involved corrections made on learners' work and marks or grades given in response to the learners' work. Here is what they said:

Feedback is giving learners correct answers. I need to make sure that they know the correct answers (T2).

Feedback is the mark that I give my learners (T3).

When – eh, I give my learners and give them homework. When I correct that, I must give them feedback. I give them marks and that will show them where they go wrong (T4).

I understand that feedback is correction and giving learners the right answers (T1).

Because I need to know where they got wrong [sic]. I show them on the chalkboard (T1).

A common view among interviewees was that feedback was grading the learners' work and there was no acknowledgment of feedback as a developmental intervention. The learners were given the correct answers and no explanation was given to ensure that the learners understood what was incorrect and why they did not get the answers

correct. The focus was more on the right answer and not on guiding the learners through the answers so that they would understand where they had gone wrong. The learners were not guided on how to approach future items similar to those that they had answered incorrectly.

The results also showed that participants did not treat feedback as a "dialogue" with the learner, but rather as a once-off process. Feedback was "given" to the learner and was not interpreted as a process of making meaning and developing the learner's learning. The participants mentioned that feedback was about giving learners the correct answers and giving them a mark. This practice is in contrast to the literature where feedback includes the aspect of feeding forward in order to improve learners' learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The Frequency with which Feedback is Provided

The frequency of feedback is debated among researchers. When the participants were asked about the frequency of feedback, the majority commented that they did not provide timely feedback. In this regard, the participants commented as follows:

I give them feedback on the work that I have marked on the previous day. When I am attending the other grade, I usually have feedback written on the chalkboard and ask learners to copy it down in their books. I usually do that the following day when I am busy with the other group. (T1)

It takes a week or so for learners to get feedback (T4).

It depends, but, in most cases, it takes some time because I need to attend to other learners. I find that I do not have time to give them feedback every day, other grades need to be taught (T2).

The most striking result to emerge from the data is that the participants attributed the delay in giving feedback to a lack of time as they taught more than one grade in a one-lesson period. For example, one interviewee said: "I must teach other grades, so I don't have enough time." Having to juggle their teaching time between the different grades that they had to teach seemed to create problems for them – as a result they did not give learners the attention they deserve with feedback that assisted them with their learning.

The recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense among interviewees that feedback was about giving learners the answers. One interviewee said: "I write answers on the board. I also write on their books" (T1). Learners were expected to just copy down answers that the teacher wrote on the board (even the answers that they got right) without any explanation which might help learners understand where they went wrong, so that these kinds of mistakes were avoided in the future.

Forms of Feedback

When the participants were asked how they provided feedback, the majority commented that

they wrote comments in their learners' work and provided written answers on the chalk board for learners to copy:

If I teach them maths, then I write the sums on the chalkboard. Where there are mistakes, I will give them the correct answer. I correct them, to say no the answer is this. Sometimes. If there is no answer, I am forced to give them the answer. (T2)

I check the length of the topic and, if they are relevant to the topic, I then write the comment 'relevant' on the learner's work and if not relevant, I will write 'irrelevant.' If I score 90, I must show how I got the 90. I will then write length = 20, relevance = 10 and spelling = 10, etc. (T3)

Summative assessment was evident from the document analysis. Several form-focused errors were identified; these were comments such as: "Well done"; "Good"; "Brilliant"; "What is this?"; "Why?"; or "Meaning?" It was not clear whether the learners understood the comments made by the teachers, because, in some instances, it was found that learners did not complete the corrections in their books to improve on their work, based on the comments made by the teacher. The results of this study show that writing was reduced to a technical exercise that did not take into consideration communication and the thinking process that went into the production of a piece of work by learners.

Issues related to learner engagement with feedback were not particularly prominent in the interview data. Learners might not understand why they were wrong, but, because there was no opportunity to engage with the teacher, they would never know why their work was marked as incorrect and how to go about not making the same mistakes in future tasks.

Upon perusal of the learners' books, it was found that comments written on the learners' work were vague, thus not providing learners with clues on how to better their performance. It appears that the teachers wrote broad statements when giving feedback. In addition, teachers did not offer practical suggestions on how learners could improve their work which means that learners were unable to use feedback to improve their performance.

Discussion of Results

An initial objective of the study was to describe current feedback practices in EFAL lessons and how such practices related to improving learning. In this study, I found that teachers understood what feedback entailed and what it was used for, differently. These findings are consistent with those of Agricola et al. (2020) who hold that there was a mismatch in teachers' conceptualisation of feedback. They argued that this mismatch was because feedback had multiple purposes and providing feedback was complicated.

Another important finding in this study was that teachers of multi-grade classes did not provide

timeous feedback. There are several possible explanations for this result. The multi-grade context makes it difficult for teachers to provide learners with immediate feedback. Lingam (2007) mentions that teachers of multi-grade classrooms cannot cope with the demands, such as assessment expertise, required to function effectively in a multi-grade context. For example, the DoE expects a certain number of tasks to be completed in a term (DoE, RSA, 2005) for each grade. This is additional work for teachers of multi-grade classes as they must deal with the tasks for more than one grade during the same time period. In addition, the prescriptive syllabus and bureaucracies that exist in relation to assessment and feedback do not provide leeway for teachers in multi-grade contexts to be flexible and adapt their teaching according to the context in which they find themselves. Prior studies have noted the importance of timeous feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Masadeh and Elfeky (2017) argue that the timing of feedback determines the learners' achievement and the extent to which they will correct their mistakes. They further argue that the timing of feedback has a direct impact on the success and value of the feedback. Carless (2006) affirms that learners who receive immediate feedback, receive information on how well they are doing in a particular task and will have a clear sense of what they need to do to improve. Learners in multi-grade classrooms, due to their context, are deprived of immediate feedback and its benefits. Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Lee (2008) reiterate that teaching occurs in a context and the context will affect the decisions that teachers make regarding teaching and learning.

In addition, a lack of time was cited as the reason for delayed feedback. According to Hyland (2013), when teachers do not have time, providing feedback to the learners no longer takes priority. This finding is in line with Joubert (2010) and Taole (2014) who found that teachers in multi-grade classrooms did not have enough time to spend with each grade level in each subject that they taught. They are expected to teach all subject across different grades. This finding suggests that teachers' teaching time in multi-grade classrooms does not necessarily adhere to the notional hours specified for each subject. This could have serious implications on the completion of the anticipated curriculum for different grades.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that learners were expected to copy the answers given by the teachers. This does not give learners the opportunity to engage with feedback and learn from it. The practice of copying corrections is criticised by researchers; however, feedback, in this instance, is used as a tool to judge accuracy rather than as a supportive tool to emphasise the other aspects of writing development such as coherence

(Lam, R 2017). R Lam (2017) further argues that teachers believe that after giving feedback, learners will automatically use it to improve learning. A possible explanation for these results may be that teachers are ill-prepared to address learners' needs (Ferris et al., 2011). Therefore, these results suggest that there is a need for teachers to be trained on the use of feedback and how to give effective feedback to ensure improved learner performance.

The other result of this study shows that summative (form-focused) feedback was the predominantly used form of feedback. This finding corresponds with Hyland's (2013) findings which show that, in most instances, the teachers' comments were summative and provided little information on how the learners could improve their work. When giving feedback, the teacher should help the learners to understand where they went wrong and what they needed to do to improve their work (Bruno & Santos, 2010).

Conclusions and Implications

Feedback remains an important activity in the teaching and learning process. How the teacher gives feedback will determine whether learners benefit from the task or not. In this study I explored how feedback was applied in a multi-grade classroom. Four experienced teachers of multi-grade classrooms were interviewed on their practices and views regarding feedback on learners' written work. I found that generally teachers had a varied understanding of feedback and its purpose. It was also shown that the feedback practices used by teachers in multi-grade classrooms included giving the correct answers and providing delayed feedback. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was that teachers predominantly used form-focused feedback.

The results of this research support the idea that treating feedback as a product (summative) and not as a process (formative) defeats the developmental aim of feedback. The study has somewhat enhanced the understanding of teachers' feedback practices in multi-grade classrooms and has shed some light on the nature and type of feedback that could motivate and enhance learners' learning in multi-grade classrooms. Although I explored feedback practices based on a small sample of multi-grade schools, the initial findings and recommendations are still relevant to comparable multi-grade schools, namely to stay resolute to the developmental view of feedback. Regarding future research studies, it would be valuable to triangulate these findings by using observations by examining learners' perspectives and experiences on feedback in multi-grade classrooms. These results should provide further support for the proposition that feedback on

literacy remains the viable alternative to ensure that teachers of multi-grade classes can meet the diverse needs of their learners. To enhance learners' learning in multi-grade classrooms, a key policy priority should be on the provisioning of ongoing support and professional development activities for multi-grade teachers.

Notes

- i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- ii. DATES: Received: 15 December 2020; Revised: 1 October 2021; Accepted: 4 February 2022; Published: 30 November 2022.

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