Dialogues During Distance: Feedback Practices in the New Normal English Language Classrooms

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Abstract— This study sought to determine the feedback practices and responses of the learners and their parents to marginalia and digital annotations provided by the English teachers in the Self-Learning Kits (SLKs) used for a blended modality. The participants were the eight English teachers and 156 learners with their parents. This is a one-shot descriptive study. The participants were given hybrid questionnaires to identify dialogs during distance learning regarding the learners' preferred types, interaction with, and perceived effectiveness of written or digital feedback. Parents answered a survey about their observation on how learners interact with these feedback mechanisms. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine the preferred feedback and if there is a significant relationship among the results set at 0.05 level of significance. A questionnaire was also used to gather information on the teacher's feedback practices. The results revealed a significant relationship in the mean scores on the learners' preferred types of and interaction with the marginalia or digital annotations which indicates a positive effect to the development of their English language skills. The same significant relationship is observed by the parents. With the use of the interview protocols, teachers identified common types of marginalia and digital annotations that engage or limit learners in a blended learning modality. Having this, an informed and contextualized delivery model will engage learners through feedback to have better gains in learning the salient concepts through the SLKs and their ability to participate meaningfully despite certain limitations of blended delivery mode English classes.

Keywords— Feedback practices, new normal English language classrooms, digital marginalia and annotations, blended learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Shifting the delivery format from face-to-face to distance learning, English teachers in the Junior High School (JHS) have to provide appropriate feedback mechanisms to the learners applying the interim guidelines for assessment in the Philippines [15]. With the school learning continuity plan or the SLCP and the Department of Education's (DepEd) implementing guidelines on making locally produced learning material [8], the JHS English teachers have collaborated to work on Self-Learning Kits (SLKs) or modules [1] [16] [17] aligned to the Most Essential Learning Competencies or MELCs [14]. Having limited interactions due to the threats posed by the current health crisis, both the learners and the teachers face a challenge to maximize learning outcomes [24] with the need to master the MELCs during the school's pioneer implementation of the blended learning delivery [13] [22].

Through written feedback [2] [21] [25] as a form of assessment in a blended learning, teachers can promote to the learners a self-reflection and personal accountability of their own learning [10] given the fact that they have utilized the SLKs within the safety of their homes with their parents or guardians as household or learning partners [22] who are also expected to support them during the entire academic year. As this is a pioneer implementation, understanding the use of

feedback as indicated in the Learning Delivery Modalities (LDM) Course 2 [22] is necessary.

Parents were also involved who are considered as household partners referred to by the LDM Course 2. Marginalia as provided by the teacher becomes a tool or guide for learners in accomplishing tasks and informing or providing them a specific, immediate and/or concrete assessment of their academic performance in an English class [9] [15]. As part of a public secondary school's program options, the advocacy behind the blended delivery coupled with marginalia is aligned to an inclusive way of teaching and learning for no learner must not be left behind during COVID-19 [9] [22] [31].

The present study looked into the theoretical design of the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD by Vygotsky [3] and the degree of the interaction between the teacher's marginalia or digital annotations written on the margins of the SLKs or on the comment sections of online platforms to scaffold their English language skills with implications to the new normal pedagogy [28]. Specifically, this research also determined the level of engagement of learners to the concepts in class through the teachers who provided the feedback written on the school-based MELCs-compliant SLKs. This, in turn, identified the most effective and meaningful feedback [2] [21] [25] for a blended delivery of teaching and

learning using marginalia or digital annotations during a pandemic.

Another purpose of this study was to document the practices of English teachers in the new normal classrooms [6] [29]. Through the results, a more appropriate and needs-centered blended modality was recommended to provide a better way of communicating and/or transferring learning to the English language learners. Marginalia or digital annotations as a feedback can be applied in the form of reporting learner's progress or even anecdotal reports on the effectiveness of implementing such learning delivery mode. [2] [21] [25]. All these are hoped to optimize the learning experience in English as a second language while outside the usual classrooms. Hence, results of this study can be used as a reference for the English teachers who are assigned to teach in a blended modality [22] which will encapsulate education for all [31] and language learning via distance education [34].

II. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to determine the feedback practices (marginalia and annotations) and responses in the blended modality in a public secondary with Special interest programs [7] during the school year 2020-2021. Based on the findings, a contextualized delivery model is proposed for blended learning. The respondents of the study were the eight English teachers assigned in the blended modality in the Junior High School-Special Interest Programs. Out of the total population of JHS learners (n= 1, 067) and parents, a sample size of 156 were identified using a probability sampling [18]. This study utilized the one-shot descriptive survey [19] [20], one of the most common forms of research and, for some research questions–especially descriptive ones–is clearly a strong design [30]. The data analysis software used was the SPSS Statistics version 22. Questions for the teachers in the open-ended questionnaire, adapted from the strategies to help learners understand feedback by Brookhart in 2017 [4], included the marginalia or annotations teachers' provide, the reasons for the provision, and their observations from learners' submitted SLKs either through the modular approach or through the Google Classroom or any online platform used for submitting the outputs. Meanwhile, a survey questionnaire inspired by Butz in 2003 [5] was used to secure responses to certain statements to evaluate the perceptions and responses of the learners and the parents to the feedback provisions given by the teachers in the blended approach. Pearson r was the statistical tool [26] was employed to understand whether the grade levels of the learners and the socio-economic status and academic achievement of parents affect their perception and experience of the marginalia or digital annotations. Thematic analysis [32] was employed for the narratives [23] [27] from teachers on feedback.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analyses of data obtained from the study revealed the following findings:

1. Generally, learners identified that their English teachers would give other sources of information or tips on how to improve my language skills (M=3.50, SD=0.58). Most students preferred a marginalia or digital annotations that answer their questions related to the topics (M=3.47, SD=0.64), express appreciation for an insight gained from the reading or a contribution to the discussion (response or comment) (M=3.35, SD=0.67), validate or acknowledge the ideas of others (including the author of the article) (M=3.28, SD=0.68) and make an association or referring to a source that is either external or internal to English class (e.g., course readings, in-class discussion, forum discussions, books, films, pop culture, website, etc.) (M=3.26, SD=0.58).

Table 1: Learners' Most Preferred Marginalia or Digital Annotation

Types of Marginalia or Annotation	M	SD
a. Provide a brief comment that is shorter than the length required for a discussion comment.	3.50	0.68
b. Answer my questions related to the topics.	3.47	0.64
c. Express appreciation for an insight gained from the reading or a contribution to the discussion (response or comment)	3.35	0.67
d. Validate or acknowledge the ideas of others (including the author of the article).	3.28	0.68
e. Make an association or referring to a source that is either external or internal to English class (e.g., course readings, in-class discussion, forum discussions, books, films, pop culture, website, etc.).	3.26	0.58

2. Parents observed that the learners preferred marginalia or digital annotations that appreciate insight gained from the reading or a contribution to the discussion (response or comment) (M=3.42, SD=0.69), provide other sources of information or tips on how to improve their language skills language skills (e.g. listening, writing, speaking, reading) (M= 3.33, SD=0.75), acknowledge or validate student's ideas

(M=3.32, SD=0.65), indicate how the learner shared or made another person's idea interesting or useful (M=3.32, SD=0.64), ask a question or make a comment that encourages learners to elaborate on something they already improved in their language skills (M=3.29, SD=0.74), give constructive criticism on the learner's responses or a comment from my child (M=3.26, SD=0.73), and make an inference from the idea in the reading selections (M=3.26, SD=0.72).

Table 2: *Learning Partners' Observation of the Types of Marginalia or Digital Annotation Preferred by Learners*

Types of Marginalia or Annotation Observed by Learning Partners	M	SD
a. Appreciates the learner's insight gained from the reading or a contribution to the discussion (response or comment).	3.42	0.69
b. Provides other sources of information or tips on how to improve their language skills (e.g. listening, writing, speaking, reading).	3.33	0.75
c. Acknowledges or validates a student's ideas.	3.32	0.65
d. Indicates how the learner shared or made another person's idea interesting or useful.	3.32	0.64
e. Gives constructive criticism on the learner's responses or a comment from my child.	3.26	0.73

3. Notably, there was a significant relationship in the results of the survey to the learners' preferred type of marginalia and their level of interaction (p>.000), there was a significant relationship between learners' interaction to and effectiveness of marginalia or digital annotations (p.>.000), and a significant relationship between learners' preferred type and effectiveness of marginalia or digital annotations (p>.000).

Table 3: *Significant Relationship among Learners' Preferred Type, Interaction with, and Effectiveness of Marginalia or Digital Annotations on SLKs*

		Type	Interaction	Effectiveness
Preferred Type	Pearson Correlation	1	.875**	.829**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	156	156	156
Interaction	Pearson Correlation	.875**	1	.895**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	156	156	156
Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.829**	.895**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	156	156	156

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Meanwhile, a significant relationship existed between parents' observation of the preferred type and interaction of the learners to marginalia or digital annotations (p>.000).

Table 4: *Significant Relationship Between Parents' Observation of the Preferred Type of and Interaction of the Learners with the Marginalia or Digital Annotations*

		Type	Interaction
Preferred Type	Pearson Correlation	1	.636**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	156	156
Interaction	Pearson Correlation	.636**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	156	156

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. With the use of an open-ended questionnaire, English teachers assigned in the Special Interest Programs identified the types of marginalia or digital annotations for a blended modality: pointing out errors, commending achievements, using markings for digital annotations or marginalia, communicating to the learners through comments, suggestions or explanations, giving examples, providing opportunities for reflections on the errors found in the Self-Learning Kits (SLKs). Among these, pointing out errors made in

the SLKs and giving correct examples, using markings on the SLKS, and providing time for reflections on the errors for independent learning are considered by the teachers to engage learners in a blended modality. On the other hand, features of marginalia or digital annotations that were found by the teachers to limit the student-teacher interaction in the new normal are about providing comments, suggestions or explanations and allowing learners to explore more resources on their own.

5. English teachers also consider marginalia or digital annotations as an instructional tool for a blended learning. Based on the English teachers' responses, giving feedback can provide learning in an area through a blended modality to monitor progress. In this manner, learners would feel that their outputs are valued and their efforts are appreciated by their English teachers.

The use of the types of marginalia or digital annotations used in an English Class delivered through a blended modality has a relationship to the learners' interaction and has an impact to the effectiveness of developing the English language skills of the learners in an inclusive manner [9] amidst the constraints brought by the pandemic. Learners' preference of the type of marginalia must be considered by the teachers to satisfy both the learners and their parents [5] in a new normal English classroom.

As observed by parents, learners become more interactive to the given marginalia which has a correlation to the effectiveness of enhancing their skills in English. Hence, working with parents and emphasizing their roles while there is distance in the modality of the teaching-learning process [22] can mitigate the limitations experienced by the learners to master the MELCs presented in the SLKs which in turn will aid in the development of English language abilities [16] [17].

Given the fact that English teachers have identified various types of marginalia or digital annotations that may engaged or may cause difficulty for the learners to understand concepts presented in the SLKs, language teachers must consider how the need for feedback affects to the level of engagement of the learners in a blended modality daily lessons [11]. The English teachers may vary the types of marginalia or digital annotations that they use inside the class but should focus more on the contextualizing these to the needs or preferences of feedback the learners could easily relate with. All these have theoretical significance based on Vygotsky's ZPD [3] [28].

In general, the ultimate decision on the use of the types of marginalia or digital annotations to be used lies on the

consensus among the learners, teachers, and the administration. The school should not just focus on a linear monitoring of the learners' progress through the scores gathered from the SLKs but must also be a two-way process of communication through feedback [2] [4] [25] using marginalia or digital annotations [21]. Parents should also support the educational innovations by collaborating to the school's foregoing policies and guidelines in accordance with DepEd's learning continuity plan in light of the COVID-19 pandemic [13] [22].

Furthermore, learners should also partake in the process of continuously being accountable for making meaning with the marginalia or digital annotations provided by the teachers. In this way, a more informed, contextualized, grassroots model [29] [31] [34] of blended delivery mode may be implemented in the succeeding learning quarters or even during the post COVID-19 era [6].

IV. CONCLUSION

The practice of using marginalia or digital annotations used in a blended modality must be aligned to the learner's preference. In order to achieve the purpose of having the interaction and/ or engagement of learning in the new normal classrooms, English teachers must identify the specific type of marginalia or digital annotations that cater the learners' needs.

Determining the preferences of the learners in terms of the types of marginalia they wanted to receive as a feedback, this can build their language skills. Considered as household partners, parents must also monitor if learners do take notice of the feedback given by the teacher in the printed SLKs or those uploaded through online communication tools.

Consequently, teachers must have a more systematized manner of providing effective feedback practice to the learners in a blended modality. Teachers should have the necessary skills to provide preferred feedback to promote a strong communication using the marginalia or digital annotations.

As mentioned in the findings, there must be a guided manner of implementing feedback starting off with orienting the learners, providing the marginalia in the SLKs, monitoring results and/ or progress.

Given the opportunity to communicate through the marginalia or digital annotations, the teachers can better state the competencies to be improved more by the learners and ensure quality access and learning to occur.

In turn, learners who take notice of the teacher's marginalia can develop an autonomous way of learning

English macro-skills such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and even viewing.

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