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## TEACHER ORAL FEEDBACK IN THE WRITING CLASS OF EFL STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*It is essential for language learners to get feedback either from peers or teachers because feedback is helpful for students to achieve the target language. In writing class, it is common for teachers to give written feedback during the learning process, yet, the teachers' written feedback are sometimes not well-understood by the students because the feedback are not further clarified by the teachers. We knew a teacher who has successfully to not just provide written feedback, but also oral feedback to her students' writing essays in her English Beginners course at a university in Banda Aceh. Providing valuable feedback and building good relationship with each student in the writing class is important because these students can achieve better compared to those who do not receive any feedback from their teachers. Therefore, it is essential for us to understand how this teacher has meaningfully gave oral feedback to her students and how she sets forth the feedback because they are the key processes in her teaching. Accordingly, our paper presents the process of the oral feedback done by this teacher. The data were collected by an observation checklist and audio recording during the writing conference in which the oral feedback took place in the classroom. The results indicated that the teacher mostly focused on the explanation of the grammar errors conducted by her students in their writing and she also worked one-to-one with each student in which each of them had a chance to ask and clarify the mistakes or errors produced in his or her essay.*

**Keywords:** *Feedback, teacher oral feedback, writing conference.*

### INTRODUCTION

To develop writing ability in the EFL classroom, students need to accept several oral and written feedbacks from either their peers or teachers. During this process, both students and teachers unconsciously build interactions. Although feedback has not been taught in the classroom formally, this notion plays a central role during the teaching learning process, because the teacher-student interaction on the feedback process is essential to build the high level of the students' motivation. It has also been found that students with feedback provided are more successful rather than students who received no feedback from their teachers on their learning (e.g. Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Nunan, 1999; Chaudron, 2004).

In a writing class, it is common for the teachers to deliver their feedback through the written form directly on the students' essays. While the students are required to revise their writing, thus it is quite often that teachers provide them with comments in the paper without being aware that there may be students who do not fully understand the comments and what they are required to do for corrections. Consequently, this may lead to the learning target of the writing class that is not

achieved due to the students' incapability of learning through the written feedback. Besides feedback through the written form, there is also feedback through the oral form.

Mahdi and Saadany (2013, p. 7) defined oral feedback as "one of many communication forms where students receive feedback from their teacher who either corrects them implicitly or explicitly or asks them to clarify what they say". In their study on students' perspectives of this activity, it was found that most of the girl students wanted explicit correction on their pronunciation meanwhile a majority of the boy students wanted explicit correction on grammar and words. Hawe, Dixon and Watson (2008) believed that the oral feedback use during writing tasks is influenced by the success criteria. They found four types of oral feedback during writing class which specifies attainment, specifies improvement, constructs achievement, and constructs the way forward. Nonetheless, the oral feedback or writing conference program has been claimed by Eckstein (2013) to better promote the teacher-student relationship compared to written feedback.

In relation to oral feedback, teacher-student interaction in order to improve the students' writing ability, it is also well-known as a teacher-student conference (Hyland, 2003; Ferris, 2011). Through the face-to-face conference, it gives opportunity for the students and teachers to negotiate the meaning in the context of students' language work. The questioning process also helps the students to generate their critical thinking (Bayraktar, 2012). However, the conference should be scheduled and well-managed because it contributes both to the teachers and students. Furthermore, several advantages of classroom conferencing as proposed by Reid (2006) are that:

- students understand better by listening to their teacher's comments rather than reading them on papers,
- they are able to ask questions immediately to their teacher,
- it is easier for the teacher to diagnose his/her students' comprehension, and
- the teacher can easily individualize his/her students' remediation.

Accordingly, this study observes a teacher's oral feedback in an English Beginners course. Consequently, a teacher's feedback practice, how the feedback worked in the classroom was investigated on this study. It is important for us to conduct this research because meaningful feedback from the teacher and how he/she sets forth the feedback are the key processes in language learning because "authentic communication [is seen] as the primary focus of the learning process" (Anthony, 2008). The result of this research is expected to gain more understanding for the language teachers on how interactional feedback in the classroom can assist their students in learning in the classroom.

## METHODS

To obtain the data on the teacher's oral feedback in the writing class, an observation sheet was designed. We had adopted the 15 items of teacher-student conference from Hyland (2011) and White and Arndt (1991). This instrument shows the teachers' activity (i.e. *criterion*) in the process of teacher-student conference. It contained four columns with numbers, criterion and yes/no (see the Appendix). Both note-taking and recording was also applied to obtain more information besides the observation sheet.

During data collection, the first author conducted the non-participant observation. She attended and sat at the corner of the classroom when the writing conference held. The tape recorder was turned on with the consent from both the teacher and her students. The class lasted for one hour and forty-five minutes. After the observation sheet was filled in and the recording was done, we transcribed the recording to further make analysis on the data collected. The information retrieved were then coded and categorized to further find and mark the underlying ideas in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher-student writing conference was held on the writing class after the final drafts were submitted via the teacher's email. Through the email, the teacher had earlier checked, reviewed and commented on each of the students' essay through Track Changes. The following week, the teacher held the writing conference with her students on those essays. Each student brought their own printed essay that had been assessed by the teacher before the class started. When the class started

and after a brief greeting and introduction on the activity that was going to be conducted in class that day, the students sat in the circle to ease the teacher to approach them one by one.

From the 15 criterion in the observation sheet, it showed that 11 criterion were found to be conducted by the teacher while the other four were not (see the Appendix). Those that were not done were: teacher allocates 5 minutes to each student, teacher gives students planning worksheet before the conference, teacher asks students to prepare for the next conference and teacher asks student to sum up the changes they need to make for revision. The findings are further elaborated below.

### Classroom Writing Conference

We observed that the time that was allocated to the students was different; some oral feedback went up to more than 10 minutes because of similar mistakes or errors that were made by the students. Therefore, the teacher had started the writing conference with the group or the whole class by explaining errors or mistakes that were mostly made by the students in their essays. She gave the explanation on those problems for the whole class to hear to save time. There were a couple of these problems and they were on the use of grammar and spelling. Some excerpts from this process are as shown below (T is for the teacher, S is for one student, and SS is for more than one student):

E1 T: *Ni...wanna, gonna itu tidak dipakai dalam academic writing.* [This...“wanna”, “gonna” is not used in academic writing]

S: *Karena slank word?* [Because of the slank word?]

T: *Itu adalah bahasa percakapan. Bahkan isn't juga nggak boleh, don't juga nggak boleh, can't juga nggak boleh, harus is not, do not, cannot. Oke? Jadi jangan ditulis singkat-singkat, ini kita belajar menulis untuk academic writing.* [Those are for spoken language. Even “isn’t” is also not used, “don’t” cannot be used, “can’t” also cannot, it must be “is not”, “do not”, “cannot”. Okay? So, don’t shorten them, we are learning to write for academic writing]

E2 T: *Yang paling banyak kesalahan itu di spelling. Kenapa bisa gitu? Kalian nggak edit ya?* [The most errors are in the spelling. Why? Didn’t you edit (double check) (by yourself) first?]

Ss: *Ada miss.* [We did it, miss]

T: *Jadi kenapa bisa salah? [So, why is it still wrong?]*

In E1, the teacher informed her students to not use colloquial vocabulary and avoid contractions in academic writing. These errors were commonly made by most of her students in writing. Meanwhile, in E2, she regretted that most students still made spelling mistakes despite that they could still consult the dictionary when the essay was assigned to them. Therefore, she brought up these two problems for the whole class to discuss and solve. Eckstein (2013, p. 235) informed that the oral feedback or writing conference program can promote the teacher-student relationship rather than written feedback. He found that the highest percentage response of the purpose of oral feedback or writing conference is to discuss the student writing or teacher feedback.

### One-to-One Writing Conference

Once the group or the whole class writing conference was done, the teacher asked the class whether there were individual students who did not understand her comments in their essays. Hands were raised, and she approached them one by one to further clarify her explanation and help them correct their errors individually. Thus, time allotment was unpredictable for each of these students; it depended on the ability of the students to comprehend her explanation because some could understand in just several minutes while others would need more time. To keep the class under control while she was working one-to-one with the students, the others were to revise their essays while working in pairs so that they could also get assistance from their peers. Providing a clear explanation to students on their errors is important, because Hawe, Dixon and Watson (2008) has

stated that a teacher's oral explanation can determine the students' 'success criteria' in enhancing and focusing the learning of writing language.

In E3, the teacher had approached a student who had problems with grammar mistakes in his writing. He seemed confused at first on why the teacher had underlined and commented "grammar problem" on the sentence. However, after the teacher attested his understanding towards his error, he was aware of his mistake and could provide the correct answer without the teacher telling it to him. To make sure that he fully knew why his sentence was wrong, she then ascertain the reason for it. Bayraktar (2012) said it is often for teachers to answer the questions they asked to students because this shows their attempt to build the students' critical thinking.

- E3 T: *Tiba-tiba di awal paragraf, paragraf kedua diawali seperti ini "and also the bus cheaper* [stressed her voice] *than other transportation in our country". Ini salahnya dimana? Yang betulnya gimana? Coba baca ulang sekali lagi. [Suddenly, at the beginning of the second paragraph, it is written "and also the bus cheaper than other transportation in our country". What is wrong with it? What is the correct way (of writing it)? Please read it again]*  
[Gave time for the student to think]  
S: *Oh ya... "is cheaper". [Oh, right... "is cheaper"]*  
T: *Oke, good, dia nggak ada "is". [Okay, good, it is without "is"]*  
S: *Iya. [Yes]*  
T: *Jadi, karena tidak ada verb di kalimat ini, makanya salah. Misalnya, "the soup is delicious" kan gak kita bilang "the soup delicious", iya kan? Sudah paham? [So, it has no "verb", that's why the sentence is wrong. For example, we say "the soup is delicious", we don't say "the soup delicious", right? Is it clear, now?]*  
S: *Iya, Miss. [Yes, Miss]*

After the teacher delivered oral feedback for each individual with problems, she went back in front of the class and posed some more questions which were essential for all students to pay attention to. Most of the problems encountered in the class were grammar errors. Consequently, the teacher also gave homework about the grammar which was considered still lacking by the students. She wanted them to study further at home due to the time constraint, as shown below:

- E4 T: *Apa perbedaan another, other, dan the other? [What is the difference between "another", "other" and "the other?"]*  
S: *Another? Other? ... [students talked among themselves]*  
T: *Ada yang mau jawab? Sebelum kita kasih pe-er? Nggak ada ya? Jadi, ini menjadi pe-er ya. [Is there anyone who would like to answer? Before I give it to you as homework? No one? So that will be your homework, okay.]*

Furthermore, another activity that was not conducted by the teacher was she did not give the students planning worksheet before the conference. This is perhaps she had expected the students to bring their essay that had been accessed in the printed form to class. The students were to highlight comments or corrections that she made and were still unclear to them, and they were to ask them to her during the writing conference. Finally, she teacher did not ask the students to prepare for the next conference because in their case, their next classroom meeting was to discuss about a different topic. Therefore, the teacher only asked them to revise their essay accordingly and submit them to her in the next class meeting. It was unclear why the teacher did not ask the students to sum up the changes they need to make for revision but we assume her instruction to submit the revised essays next week was also part of this process.

It was obviously identified that through the conference, the teacher kept an open discussion on the mistakes and errors that the students had made. They were resolved in group and on the one-to-one discussions. The central issue discussed in the oral conference was mostly on the students' grammar problems found in their essays.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that a writing conference helped the students to enhance their understanding on the use of the language that they were learning and becoming more aware of the mistakes or errors they made. Out of the 15 items in the observation sheet, 11 criterions were conducted by the teacher, whereas four others were not. Thus, those that were not conducted did not seem to affect the teaching and learning process during the writing conference. The data from the observation illustrated that the teacher mostly worked one-on-one with students so that they could gain accurate information about their writing problems and how to correct them. Most of the mistakes and errors discussed were in the use of English grammar. Moreover, during the conference, the teacher attempted to construct good interaction and motivation with her students.

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## APPENDIX

Observation Checklist		Yes	No
1.	Teacher holds the conference in class	√	
2.	Teacher works one – to – one	√	
3.	Teacher holds the conference in schedule	√	
4.	Teacher allocates 5 minutes to each student		√
5.	Teacher covers/explains the topic including content, structure, grammar and mechanics.	√	
6.	Teacher gives students planning worksheet before the conference		√
7.	Teacher prepares for the conference by making notes of points to discuss on a draft of the students writing that need attention	√	
8.	Teacher asks students to prepare for the next conference		√
9.	Students underline what they want feedback on or circle possible errors to discuss	√	
10.	Teacher allows the student to talk about the issues that concern him or her about text improvements	√	
11.	Teacher helps student to relax	√	
12.	Teacher established a collaborative relationship with student	√	
13.	Teacher engages student in the analysis process by giving chance to talk and make the revision decisions	√	
14.	Teacher responds the student work from global problems on sentence and word level problems	√	
15.	Teacher asks student to sum up the changes they need to make for revision		√