

LECTURER'S WRITTEN FEEDBACK AND STUDENTS' RESPONSE IN "PROPOSAL WRITING" CLASS AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF JEMBER

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan umpan balik dosen dan respon mahasiswa di kelas *Proposal Writing*. Fokus kajian dalam penelitian ini diarahkan pada strategi dan teknik dosen dalam memberikan umpan balik tertulis, persepsi, dan respon mahasiswa terhadap umpan balik tersebut. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dosen menggunakan strategi mitigasi dengan teknik komentar berpasangan dan interogatif. Persepsi dan respon mahasiswa terhadap umpan balik dosen sangat positif. Sebagian besar mahasiswa memperhatikan umpan balik yang diberikan. Hal ini terlihat pada hasil perkembangan tulisan mereka.

Kata-kata kunci: *written feedback, perception, response*.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is mostly regarded as a complex skill. Besides writing requires basic proficiencies on vocabulary, grammar, and structure, it also needs one's ability to formulate ideas into readable text. Consequently, understanding organization, genre, and text rhetoric are important in writing. Without mastering those proficiencies, it seems impossible to master writing.

For learners, writing in English is extremely a hard task. McCrimmon (1984: 6) presents a similar view, saying that writing is hard work. In reality, learners of English often find it difficult in writing. Richards and Renandya (2002: 303) even state, "writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master". For EFL students, moreover, the difficulties in writing usually occur because of insufficient English proficiency. This specific problem has triggered many instructors to develop performance in their writing instructions. So it undoubtedly needs appropriate strategies to improve EFL learners' writing skill.

One of the strategies that might be effective for students' writing development is providing feedback on learners' writing papers. The goal of feedback, in this context, is to respond and influence the writing (Hyland, 2003: 186). Feedback is given to engage teachers-students in writing improvement. Furthermore, feedback cannot be separated from pedagogical process. Hyland and Hyland (2006: 206) pointed out:

Feedback plays a pedagogical role by pointing forward to other texts students will write, assisting students to work out the text's potential and to comprehend the writing context, and providing a sense of audience and an understanding of the expectations of the communities they are writing for. The substantial comments that many teachers write on student's paper thus do more than simply justify a grade. They provide a reader reaction and offer targeted instruction.

Many researchers have investigated feedback on second language (SL) writing as well as on foreign language (FL) writing. Those investigations have much focused on error-correction, context, pedagogical goal, and teacher-student relationship (Leki et al., 2008: 85). However, Manchon (2009: 14-15) states, "the study of feedback is certainly under-research area in FL writing". Therefore, research of feedback on SL writing up to now overshadows FL writing. Here, the research of feedback on FL writing becomes important to enlarge the perspective of SL writing. Practically, those researches can give valuable significances to improve students' skill in writing English compositions.

In general, feedback is also part of evaluation of teaching and learning. This evaluation is useful to know how effective the teaching-learning is. The goal for any evaluation system should be to improve teaching and learning. O'Neill et.al (2009:146) points out that this approach to surveying students not only enhances the formative aspect of the evaluation for the individual instructor, but it also works to make the assessment align with the particular context of the program since the survey is tailored to the course and program goals.

This research attempts to investigate the lecturer's written feedback in the process of teaching and learning "Proposal Writing" in EFL classroom. The problems will be answered are focused on: 1) what kinds of strategies and techniques do the lecturer implement in providing written feedback on the students' paper?, 2) how is the students' perception to lecturer's written feedback on their writing drafts?, and 3) how is the students' response to the given written feedback on their writing improvement? The purpose of this study is describing lecturer's strategies and techniques in providing written feedback on students' paper, students' perceptions to the given feedback, and students' response.

METHOD

This research was a survey to obtain primary information about written feedback provided by the lecturer, students' perceptions, and their response to the feedback. The

participants of the research were the students of semester VI of the English Department at Unmuh Jember who take “Proposal Writing” subject. They were 140 students divided into 4 classes. Sample was taken from these students by applying systematic random sampling. By this technique, the sample was taken randomly by determining similar characteristics of the members of population in which they were chosen systematically by using interval (Sukmadinata, 2007: 257). After numbering the members of the population in sequence and taking them by interval, it determined 14 students as data source. The data were collected from the result of questionnaires and students’ portfolios during their participation in “Proposal Writing” class in semester VI. Close-ended questionnaires were used to obtain the data of students’ perception to the feedback, while 3 pieces of portfolios that reflected the students’ progress were used to get the data of lecturer-students’ responses. To analyze the data, coding the students’ drafts was applied before classifying those drafts into categories. For quantitative data, it was analyzed statistically by applying percentage formula.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Lecturer’s Written Feedback

Conventionally, teachers are assumed to have a professional responsibility for assessing students’ writing. To enable to do so, they are assumed to have proficiency in the L2, knowledge about writing and the local curriculum, and a repertoire of relevant techniques for responding to their students’ writing (Leki et al., 2008: 83). Based on this opinion, lecturer’s written feedback in the EFL context can also be assumed as a professional work of the lecturer.

Many scholars argued that ‘research proposal’ is one of the difficult genres to produce and the role of supervisor to writing the proposal is urgently needed for students. Swales as quoted by Paltridge and Starfield (2007: 55), calls it as “occluded genres; that is genres which are difficult for students to have to access to, but play an important part in the students’ lives”. They also quoted Meloy’s view that “proposal writing does not appear to be something that comes naturally and what we learn not only by example but also by the reactions and suggestions of our supervisors and our thesis committee members (2007: 55)”. Based on this opinion, it can be said that being able to write a research proposal needs long-term process in which it includes the involvement of supervisors.

The result of questionnaires showed that all students (100 %) answered that the lecturer gave all their drafts written comments. The techniques usually used by the lecturer

were commentary. According to Hyland (2003: 180), instructors or supervisors can provide feedback on commentary, cover sheets, minimal marking, taped comments, and electronic feedback.

The comments were provided on the page. Those comments should be understood by the students what the lecturer was doing and why, what the lecturer was not doing and why and what the lecturer would do on a later draft (Raimes, 2002: 307). The techniques found in the data were combination of criticism and suggestion and questioning:

Firman, to investigate the correlation between parents' attention and learning achievement is interesting. But I thought you have to determine the clear variables. 'Learning achievement' is too general. Perhaps you can specify it on one of the English skills. Good luck!

Aulia, you have had a good topic to develop...Some paragraphs in the background are still not relevant to the topic. Be careful next time! I hope you can make a better one.

You have to support the main idea of the paragraph with current theories, arguments, and empirical facts. Find that to complete the paragraphs.

These examples made clear that the lecturer started to give criticism followed by suggestions. These expressions of feedback described the lecturer's consideration of the possible interpersonal impact of positive and negative feedback. The students would usually be motivated by positive response of the lecturer, but they could feel burdened by the negative judgment.

Feedback was also expressed in interrogative form. Here, the lecturer tried to give intention on certain aspects and expressed doubt and uncertainty:

Be careful to use punctuation, Imdad! And also spacing...Why can't I see the process of your work? Have your friend proofread it?

To support students' self confidence, the lecturer provided feedback with praise and suggestion:

That's good Wiwik! But, I think you have to develop and explore more some statements you made in the paragraph and don't forget to include credible sources.

Ok, Sa'adah! Your draft is good enough. But I remind you to be careful in writing operational definition. What you have to define is the research variables with clear indicators.

Praise can be implemented to motivate the students and to raise their self-esteem as writers. As Hyland and Hyland (2006: 209) wrote:

We may also believe that praising what a student does well is important, particularly for less able writers, and use praise to reinforce good writing and foster students' self esteem. We may also feel that some of our suggestions for improvement carry an implied criticism and choose to take the sting from these by toning down the force of our comments. The ways we convey our praise or criticisms, and how we phrase our suggestions, are central to effective feedback; they represent key interpersonal resources for negotiating judgments and evaluations of student writing.

Hence, it was found that the lecturer implemented mitigation strategies. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006: 210), these strategies function to reduce critical force. The lecturer provided feedback in paired comments and interrogative form. In paired comments, the lecturer has combined criticism with praise and suggestions. But, some experts argued that the writing teacher should not make any judgements to students' draft. Murray, for instance, pointed out, "As much as possible in responding orally or in writing the teacher should not praise or criticize. We need to discuss with the students how the piece is going, what is working, what needs to be done, focusing on a discussion of what is working, and what needs work (in Penafiora, 2002: 352)". Murray's statement indicated that the teacher should be able to stimulate and encourage the students to write rather than to analyze their work. This opinion might be useful for beginners. So, the writing lecturer can use any strategies and techniques as far as they fit to the goal of teaching and condition of the writing class.

Students' Perception

Students' perception on lecturer's written feedback is important to make an evaluation for further response. Those perceptions reflect students' feelings and hopes for their revisions.

Based on the above explanation, 14 students (100 %) stated that they needed written feedback for their progress in writing. It was an evidence that the students wanted their writing to be commented by the lecturer as reference to improvement. Concerning to the students' acceptance of the feedback, the majority of students (80 %) liked to be given comments on their writing. But, two of the students dislike the feedback. This reflected that many students valued the feedback and made it as their preferences.

Meanwhile, providing feedback was also regarded as a useful activity in teaching and learning writing. 60 % of the students noted that the provided feedback was important and 60 % of them also stated that the written feedback was more effective than oral feedback. According to the participants, lecturer's written feedback could encourage them to write better (90 %).

Thus, although lecturer's written feedback was needed by all students because it encouraged them to write, its' importance and effectiveness did not show high percentage (table 1). It means that the existence of feedback was much needed by the students as writers. However, some of the students regarded the given feedback was not important and not effective for their writing improvement.

Table 1. Students's perception on the lecturer's written feedback

Students' Perceptions	Percentage (%)
need	100
acceptance	80
importance	60
effectiveness	60
encouraging	90

Students' Response to Lecturer's Written Feedback

It was always debatable whether teacher's written feedback contributes to students' development in writing. Some experts said that few students respond to the feedback for their improvements. But, some said that many students have progress from teachers' feedback.

Early L2 writing researchers argued that feedback on error was both discouraging and unhelpful (Hyland and Hyland, 2006: 3). This approach focused on the accuracy and it often made students discouraged. Therefore, Hyland and Hyland (2001) suggest teachers often seek to mitigate the full force of their criticisms and suggestions, taking the sting out of them with hedges, question forms, and personal attributions (in Hyland and Hyland, 2006: 5).

Students' response to lecturer's written feedback can be reflected from to what extent they use it as preference for revision. After analyzing the students' portfolios, 60 % of the students responded the lecturer's written feedback. They followed the given comments for revisions. It means that the mitigation strategies applied by the lecturer made the students improved their writing for the next drafts. So, the students wrote better and better from drafts to drafts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this study and discussion, it can be concluded that the lecturer of proposal writing implemented the mitigation strategies in providing written feedback. The techniques used by the lecturer were paired comments and question form. The students

perception on the lecturer's written feedback was positive and many students accepted their lecturer's feedback as reflecting their own perception of their writing and used it when assessing their goal attainment and texts.

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