

The Power of Feedback to Enhance Writing Skill

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Writing is not a simple task, even in the first language. Obviously, writing in the second language is more complicated. Teachers should find appropriate techniques to assist students to overcome their difficulties in learning writing. Feedback is one alternative that can be implemented in the classrooms. Teachers provide feedback to support students' writing development and encourage their confidence as writers. Feedback plays a significant role in writing development. According to Ur (1996 : 242) feedback is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance. This article describes three research findings based on the classroom action research of feedback implementation in writing class. The research findings discussed in this article show that the feedback is able to help students to enhance their writing performance.

Key words: Learning, Writing, Feedback

Introduction

Most of students assumed that writing English is difficult to be learned. Their reason are English words are very complicated and English grammar makes them confused. Based on the facts at schools, the students have many problems in English lesson especially in writing ability. The students' skill is weak. It is caused by several factors. They do not have a good writing habit, the students are also poor in vocabulary, so that they have difficulties when they want to write.

Another problem is caused by the teacher. Some teachers think that their job is finished after teaching the class. They do not think about the effectiveness of the learning process in the classroom. Therefore, when the teachers teach without appropriate technique, the students will feel bored and then feel more difficult to learn English. Hence, an English teacher should work hard to change students' belief so that they will think that writing English is easy to learn. For the teacher has a very important role in the teaching and learning process, an English teacher has to try to find out the appropriate technique to teach his or her students, because English teaching and learning process will be able to achieve its optimal result when it is supported by an innovative teacher. The innovative teacher is he or she that can use or make the interesting and creative techniques in the classroom. A teacher as a model in the classroom has to have several ways to make them interested in learning writing.

The role of teacher is very important during teaching-learning process in progress in the classroom. One thing that is related to the role of teacher is how he/she gives feedback to the students. Through feedback, a teacher can help students to compare their own performance and to diagnose their own strength and weaknesses. When a teacher gives a good feedback to students, they will be enthusiastic with the material that is given by the teacher. Once students feel interested in learning English, their learning motivation increases and so they will be easier to improve their writing ability.

In this article, the writer presents the empirical evidences about the effect of giving feedback in writing class based on the three research findings in different setting; Junior High School, Senior High School and university.

Writing Skill

Writing is a productive skill. As a media of communication, writing is different from face to face communication. According to Hefferman and Lincoln (1986 :4) writing is much more

different from other skill especially speaking. It gives time to think, to try out the ideas on paper, to choose the words, to read what have written, to rethink, to revise and rearrange it, and the most important, to consider its effect on a reader.

Trokya (1987:3) states that writing is a way of communicating a message to a reader for a purpose. Accordingly, writing is a skill that must be learned seriously. In order to be a good writer, one needs some aspects and processes. In writing process, the writer usually find new ideas or new ways of conveying and organizing ideas. Writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore their thought and idea.

Process is very important to know the improvement of ability in learning. According to Harmer (2004:4) there are four main elements in the writing processes namely planning, drafting, editing (reflecting and revising), and final version.

Firstly, “planning”, Before starting to write, the first thing to be done is making a plan. The purpose, the audience, and the content structure must be considered. Secondly is “drafting”, a draft can be referred as the first version of a piece of writing. In the drafting process, the writer is focused on the fluency of writing. As the writing process proceeds into editing, a number of draft may be produced in the way to the final version. Thirdly, “editing”, (Reflecting and Revising), after producing a draft, read the draft to know where it works and where it does not work. Sometimes, something is written ambiguous or confusing. Therefore, editing is needed here. Reflecting and revising are often helped by other readers or editors who comment and make suggestions. Another reader’s reaction to a piece of writing will help the author to make appropriate revisions. And the Final Version, once writers have edited their draft, making the changes they consider to be necessary, then they produce their final version. This may look considerably different from both the original plan and the first draft because things have changed in the editing process.

Feedback

Feedback (Hattie and Helen, 2007) is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding. A teacher or parent can provide corrective information, a peer can provide an alternative strategy, a book can provide information to clarify ideas, a parent can provide encouragement, and a learner can look up the answer to evaluate the correctness of a response. Feedback thus is a “consequence” of performance. Likewise, Feedback is defined by Wood (2007) as *‘the way in which learners become aware of the gap between their current level of knowledge or skill and the desired goal’* (p8). (Mills in <http://www.beds.ac.ac.uk>)

One of the ways to make students be able to create a good writing is by teacher’s performance. The teacher should provide constructive feedback to students’ writing. According to Nation (2009:137) positive feedback on the content of learners’ writing can do a lot to increase the amount of writing that learners do and to improve their attitude to writing.

Feedback is a kind of assessment that concern to give information about students’ writing performance. According to Ur (1996 : 242) in the context of teaching in general, feedback is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance. From those definitions, it is clear that feedback is very important in teaching and learning process, because students will learn how to evaluate themselves and helps the students to be more confident in their learning. Feedback can be given from the teacher to students (teacher feedback) and also from students to students (peer feedback).

Peer feedback, also termed peer assessment, has been defined as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status” (Topping, 1998, p. 250). The process of reviewing peer work, reflecting on it, and providing feedback can help improve students’ work in a course (Dunlap, 2005; Ertmer et al., 2007), but several variables such as the types of feedback provided, the number of peers providing feedback, and student perceptions of peer feedback can influence the usefulness of peer feedback (Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Van Gennip,

Segers, & Tillema, 2009). Ertmer et al. (2007) and Shin and Dickinson (2010) suggest that providing a timeline for peer feedback, ensuring timeliness and explaining the benefits of peer feedback to students at the beginning of the course can increase students' motivation to provide feedback and improve their perceptions of its value of peer feedback. Kumar (2012).

Feedback from the teacher on the students' writing can play an important role especially in the teaching and learning process. Harmer (2004:108) said that students expect feedback on what they are doing or what they have done. It indicates that under teacher's feedback, students will know the appropriate of the language feature for their composition, how their composition should be arranged and their composition will be better.

According to Harmer (2008:142) there are two types of feedback: The first is Oral Feedback. Oral feedback refers to personal consultation between teacher and student during evaluation of a composition. This kind of feedback is expected to help the student to overcome the problems that cannot be handled by written feedback. The obstacle in doing this type of feedback is that it takes a lot of times.

The second is Written Feedback. In written feedback, comments/response, correction and marks are given on the students' written work draft. According to Harmer (2004:108) the ways teacher reacts to students' work will depend not only on the kind of task the students are given, but also on what teacher want to achieve at any one point. Those ways including "responding" and "correcting". Harmer (2001:110) said that one way of considering feedback is to think of it as 'responding' to students' work rather than assessing or evaluating what they have done. He added that when responding to the students' work a teacher not only concerned with the accuracy of their performance but also with the content and design of their writing. According to Harmer (2004:108) "correcting" is the stage at which a teacher indicates when something is not right. From that statement, it is clear that in this case, a teacher corrects mistakes in the students' written performance.

Nevertheless, a teacher has to remember that his/her task is not to say what is right or wrong, but to ask questions, make suggestion, and indicate where improvements might be made. This kind of feedback becomes more appropriate as the students' level improves and they can take advantage of that help.

Ways of Giving Feedback

Feedback from the teacher is very important in order to improve students' ability in English, especially writing. According to Harmer (2004: 110) there are some ways of giving feedback to the students. The first is Oral Feedback. When students are involved in a writing task in class, especially where this is part of process sequence, teachers will often visit students and talk to them about what they are writing. Teachers may ask what a certain sentence means, or wonder why they have started a composition in a particular way, or suggest that they have to re-check some informations that they have made in a note. The second is Written Feedback.

Written feedback can be given by responding and correcting. In giving responding teachers can use some forms; Responding by Written Comment, Post-task and Electronic Comments.

Besides responding, correcting is also given in written feedback. For correcting students' works, teachers can use several ways; selective correction and using correction symbols, reformulation, referring students to a dictionary or a grammar book, remedial teaching.

Purposes of Teacher's Feedback

There are many reasons why it is important to give students feedback. Wood (2007) in Mills (<http://www.beds.ac.ac.uk>) described the main purpose of giving feedback as to promote improvement of the student's performance. Some of the reasons you may have considered include:

- 1) Giving feedback to the student about their strengths is likely to increase the student's confidence, motivation and enthusiasm for learning and will help them to continue to learn and to further develop their strengths.

- 2) Students need to be given feedback about their weaknesses and areas for development. The student may not know that they are not achieving the required level and without this feedback will not be able to take the actions necessary to improve. Being given feedback will enable the student to focus on these areas and to take actions to progress their skills so that they are performing at the required level.
- 3) Giving a student regular feedback will help them to develop their skills of self assessment so that they can recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and areas for development.
- 4) Some students have difficulties reaching the required level. Giving regular feedback and developing action plans to develop the student's skills and knowledge ensures the student is appropriately supported and that a fair process of assessment is carried out.
- 5) Student have identified that they find feedback useful. Being given feedback increased their confidence and self esteem, increased their skills and knowledge, enhanced their learning and enabled them to identify where they needed more practice.

Empirical Evidences

1. Giving Feedback to Junior High School students

The first evidence was reported by Rahayu in 2013 after conducting class room action research for Junior High School students. She found the improvement of the students' writing ability through teacher's feedback.

After analyzing her research result on each cycle, she displayed the evidence that using teacher's feedback in teaching and learning process could improve students' writing ability. The result of students' score increased in every cycle. The improvement of the students' score in writing ability can be seen in the figure 1.

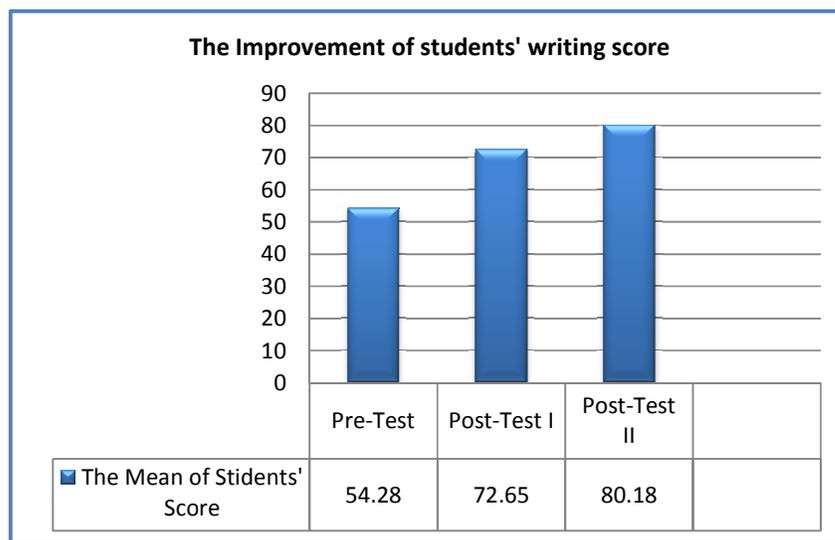


Figure 1: graphic of the mean of students' writing score (Rahayu, 2013)

Based on her research finding, Rahayu (2013) reported that the students' score in writing increased after she gave feedback. She states that this technique is appropriate to teach English especially in writing. The improvement of students' score can be seen from the result (figure 1). Moreover, the students gave good response in teaching and learning process after she applied teacher's feedback as a technique. It was proven from the observation she did during the research in the classroom. The students were more active and enthusiastic in learning writing. Based on the result of the research, She concludes that using teacher's feedback as a technique in teaching and learning can improve the student's writing ability.

2. Giving Feedback to Senior High School students

Sulistianto, Ridwan. 2014. reported his research entitled *Improving The Students' Writing Skill Through Teacher's Indirect Written Feedback (A Classroom Action Research for The Second Grade Students at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Bantul, in the Academic Year of 2013/2014)*. He conducted a classroom action research in a writing class of a Senior High School. Figure 2 shows the improvement of students' writing skill.

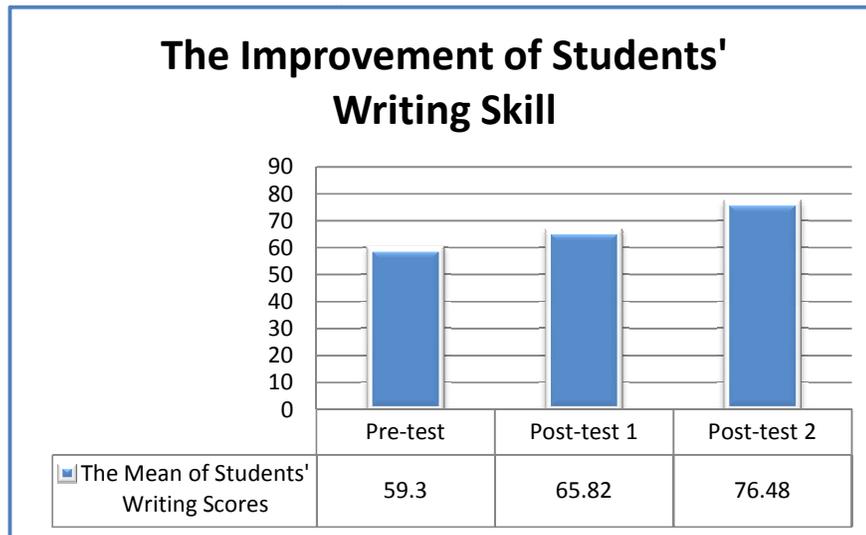


Figure 2. graphic of the students' writing mean score (Sulistianto, 2014)

Sulistianto (2014) reports that the implementation of giving written feedback was conducted in two cycles. It is aimed to help the students' writing skill in the class during the learning process. He got the data about students' interest after conducting the research. Based on the result of observation, interviewing with the students and distributed the questioner to the students, indicated that the students got more motivation and interested using written feedback as the correction in their students' work. By giving written feedback the students also become more active and got a good enthusiasm in learning English, especially in writing. Besides, they said that, they were appreciated by the researcher as the corrector, because they were not only given the score but also written feedback as the correction. Therefore, the students get more motivation in writing.

In his research, he informs that the students writing skill increases after given treatment. It can be seen from the students' improvement result (figure 2). It shows that giving written feedback as the correction of the students' task can improve the students' writing skill.

3. Feedback for University students

The third evidence is shown on the graphic. It based on the research done by Sucipto, 2014. He did a classroom action research in his writing class in Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta. He implemented peer feedback in the classroom to improve the students' writing skill. Figure 3 shows the development of students' writing skill.

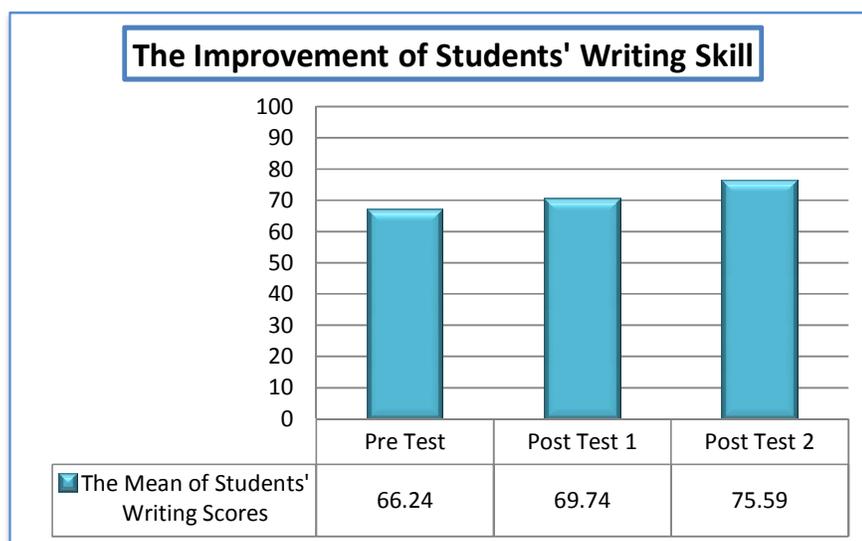


Figure 3. graphic of the students' writing mean score (Sucipto, 2014)

Based on his research finding, Sucipto (2014) reported that the students' score in writing increased after she implemented peer feedback as a learning technique in the writing class. He states that this technique is appropriate to teach writing class in the university. The improvement of students' score can be seen from the result (figure 3). Furthermore, the students gave positive response in teaching and learning process after they practiced giving feedback to their peers. It was proven from the questionnaire filled by the students. The students agreed that by giving feedback they can improve their writing skills.

Conclusion

English teaching and learning process will be able to gain its optimal result when it is encouraged by an innovative teacher. The innovative teacher is he or she that can use or make the interesting and creative techniques in the classroom. A teacher as a model in the classroom should have several ways to make them interested in learning writing. The implementation of giving feedback in writing class can enhance students' writing skill. It has been proven with the reports of some classroom action researches that were done for different students' level; junior high school, senior high school and university.

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