
RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' WRITING: WHY AND HOW?

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Abstract

EFL students are required to have a good writing skill. Of course, it will take a process; students should practice a lot and teacher should respond students' work in order to be better. Many studies have investigated the effect of teacher's feedback on students writing. In general, the finding showed that there was a positive effect of giving feedback on students's writing; giving feedback on an assignment helps learners reduce their errors on that assignment during the revision process, the accuracy of students who received written feedback in the immediate post-test outperformed those who did not receive feedback, feedback given by teacher can improve students' writing performance, and so on. In giving feedback, teacher should consider several things in order that the feedback provided gives good result.

Keywords: *feedback, EFL writing*

1. INTRODUCTION

Having mastered 3 other language skills (listening, speaking, and reading skills) first, a language learner should master writing skill because mastering all language skills, including writing skill, will make him/her more competent in a language. In addition, writing skill is considered to play a role in the learner's academic achievement. Graham and Perin (in Wulyani, 2009) state that writing skill is a predictor of academic success and a basic requirement for participating in civic life and the global economy. It means that if someone has a good writing skill, it can be predicted that s/he will have a good academic achievement. Related to learning to write, Harmer (1998) says that writing should be taught for several reasons. First, writing is useful for reinforcement. Most students acquire a language from seeing the language written down. Even, the students often find it useful to write sentences using new language shortly after they have studied it. Second, writing is also useful for language development. The actual process of writing helps the students to learn as they go along. The mental activity they have to go through in order to construct proper written text is all part of the ongoing learning experience. Third, it is a learning style. Writing can be a quiet reflective activity. Some language learners will be able to master a language if they experiences using the language, like writing activity. At last, writing is a skill. The students need to know how to write letter, how to reply to advertisement, etc. In addition, they also should know some of writing convention (punctuation, paragraph construction, etc). It is considered to play a role to someone's academic achievement.

There were many studies conducted by researchers related to students' writing ability. Some of them are Attamim (2007), Ulfiati (2010), and Isnawati (2010). They reported that the students, in general, had problems in writing. The students had low motivation, poor writing ability, and lack of confidence. Referring to low motivation, the students did not do the exercises seriously and did not bring dictionary into classroom to help them in writing. Their poor writing ability was reflected in the facts that they often did not know what to write, how to organize ideas well, could not explore ideas, and did many mistakes related to grammar (ungrammatical sentences and inappropriate transitional signal) and vocabulary (wrong words choice). If they could complete the writing task, the result was far from what was expected. Related to this, Spelkova and Hurst in a study (...) also say that the most problematic problems in writing were inappropriate grammar and structures and Strong influence of mother tongue. Talking about self-confidence, they were also not confident with what they wrote. They tend to rewrite or change what they had written. For them, what they had written was not good.

Actually, writing is considered to be relatively difficult by some students for, at least, two reasons. First, writing is really difficult. Related to this, Nunan (1999) states that writing is something

native speakers never master. It means that English native speakers themselves cannot master writing skill, let alone foreign language learners. Furthermore, he says that for second language learners, the challenges are more enormous, particularly for those who go on to university and study a language that is not their own. Second, Richard and Renandya (2002) also say that the skills involved in writing, particularly in English, are highly complex. It consist of the higher level skills of planning and organizing ideas as well as the lower level skill of spelling, punctuation, word choice, etc. From what Nunan and Richard and Renandya said above, it can be seen that writing skill, particularly in English will be a challenging for language learners.

In order that EFL students have a good writing skill, students should practice a lot and teacher should respond students's work in order to be better. Many studies have investigated the effect of teacher's feedback on students writing. Elshirbini, I. I. & Elashri, A. F. (2013) found that teacher feedback improved students' writing performance. Lee, I. (2008) & Grami, M. A. G. (2005) found that students wanted more written comments from teachers. Baleghizadeh, S. & Gordani, Y. (2012) found that corrective feedback prompted the students to try and modify their developing interlanguage system. Based on the finding, it can be concluded that there was a positive effect of giving feedback on students's writing: giving feedback on an assignment helps learners reduce their errors on that assignment during the revision process, the accuracy of students who received written feedback in the immediate post-test outperformed those who did not receive feedback, feedback given by teacher can improve students' writing performance, and so on.

2. RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' WRITING

The fact that writing is used reqlently to communicate with each other is not the only reason to teach writing. Raimes (1983:3) states that the students need writing because writing helps EFL students to learn in several ways. First, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary taught to students. Second, when the students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have just learned to sy, to take risks. Third, when they write, they necessarily become very involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eye, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning.

The availability of teacher response to students writig is really required because responding to students' writing is very much a part of the process of teaching writing (Raimes, 1983:139). Therefore, responding to students' writing cannot be separated from writing instruction itself. It should be carried out carefully in order that the feedback provided gives good result. In addition, Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lilis, & Swan (2003:104) mention the purposes of providing feedback. They are to support students' writing development, to teach or reinforce a particular aspect of disciplinary content, to teach specific academic writing conventions, to indicate the strenghs and weaknesses of a piece of writing (perhaps in relation to a set of criteria), to to explain or justify a grade, to suggest how a student may improve the next piece of writing.

Hammer (2004:112-115) purposes some ways of responding to students' work. The first is responding to work-in-progress. When the students are involved in a writing task in class, teachers will visit the students and talk to them about what they are writing. We may ask what acertain sentence means, or wonder why they have started a composition in a particular way. When we, as teachers, are involve d with work-in-progress, we have to think carefully about the way we give advice or make suggestions. Student often are satisfied with personal attention from teachers. We need to approach the task with great sensitivity, doing our best to draw decisions from the students themselves rather than telling them what gto do.

The second is responding by written comment. Sometimes, teacher's response is delivered in written form when students submit a draft of what they are working on. In this condition, it is always a good idea to write down what teachers thinks is good in students' writing. No one appreciates empty compliments, but encouragement is exteremely important at this stage. Comments and suggesntions written down in students' work can be extremely useful and should help students to avoid mistakes in their final version.

The third is taped comments. If teachers cannot give face-to-face feedback, they might well consider taping their comments about a piece of student writing on tapes provided by students. the

students may well enjoy getting reactions in this format because it is more personal and more immediate than written comments at the end of a paper.

The next is electronic comments. A lot of feedback can now be given electronically, either via e-mail or through text editing programmes. For the growing number of students who have access to computers and do their writing via a keyboard, feedback of this kind is extremely useful.

Raimes (1983:143-147) also states ways of responding to students' work. They are written comment, talking about the paper, and checklists. Before writing anything on the student's paper, teacher should read the paper through once first and then to note what the student has done well, from organizing ideas to using the apostrophe correctly. Comments on students' papers that take the form of paraphrase of the ideas expressed, praise, questions, or suggestions are more productive than comments like "Only fair," "Good," or "Needs more work." Response in terms of talking about the paper can be done if the teachers find it impossible to respond to the content of the piece of writing. Checklist can be used to comment grammatical items and give questions about manuscript form.

3. CONCLUSION

EFL students should be facilitated to have good EFL writing ability. EFL teachers can help them to have the ability by responding to students work completed. The teacher can employ some ways of responding to students' work in order that the feedback provided gives good result.

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