Developing Teacher Feedback on Written Work within the Process Approach: One Way of Improving the Students' Composition

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Abstract: Issues in EFL and ESL have revealed that students' performance in writing remain unsatisfactory although the teacher has tried to apply an appropriate technique as maximally as possible. This article discusses about how a teacher can develop feedback technique on Writing by applying the process approach as one way of improving the students' composition. On the basis of the technique, there are two types' techniques the teacher may apply in Writing by using the process approach, namely written comment and student-teacher conference. The use of both forms will simultaneously maximize the amount of feedback and the quality of feedback required for effective revision of the working draft. The appropriateness and accuracy of these techniques as matter of fact depend on several factors: ability, personality, and attitude of the teacher towards a particular technique, and the learners' need, abilities, and attitude, the number of students in the class, and the time allotment in the actual teaching –learning situation. Consequently, the students need to be encouraged to see Writing as a means of learning rather than demonstrating learning. Furthermore, the teacher feedback activities will be seen as a vehicle to lead the learner towards the path of self feedback in the process of writing.

Key Words: *teacher feedback, written comment, student-teacher conference.*

INTRODUCTION

Issues in EFL and ESL have revealed that students' performance in writing remain unsatisfactory although the teacher has tried to apply an appropriate method (Mukminatien, 1997 and Widdowson, 1979). In the classroom setting, it is shown that writing is considered the most complicated for the students to learn and to master (Latief, 1990 and Mukminatien, 1997). Seriously speaking, to enable students to write actively and confidently as often discussed in seminars and other academic forums is a very complicated job for a teacher of writing. The out of date style of teaching writing is that the teacher usually sets a topic and instructs the students to write on a piece of paper. During the class hour, the students develop naturally with the mysterious process of composing. When they have finished, the teacher then reads, corrects, and grades the paper. The teacher is too demanding about grammatical correctness and focuses primarily on language structure because he pays a detailed attention to mistakes in language forms as he thinks that mastery of forms is an important prerequisite for writing (Leki, 1994).

Consequently, the students get very bored and tend to work passively from the beginning to the end because they just get good grades if they write texts with as few errors as possible. Looking at the facts, the teacher usually complains that the students' writing is uncreative and poorly organized. One of the previous researches in writing has been conducted by Mukminatien to all English Department students at IKIP Malang. Based on the result of the analysis, it was found that the students showed a little progress in having learnt writing for four semesters (Mukminatien, 1997). This happens because they are often so concerned with

the surface structure of their writing that they have little to think of the ideas they are writing about (Dixon, 1986). The assumption is that writing is a creative process which the students will somehow acquire through writing an essay as the continuous practice. If they fail to learn to write effectively, nothing much can be done because, unlike grammatical correctness, the creative process cannot be taught.

Based on the facts above, the students' grammatical mistakes should not be the end purpose of the teaching of writing because good writing cannot develop merely from exercises in grammar and vocabulary choices. Instead of paying attention to grammatical mistakes, the teacher should help the students develop a different attitude towards writing by encouraging them to concentrate on contents and organisation in their thought clearly. They should be encouraged to write abundantly through the constant provision of feedback other than those of grammatical points in order to produce readable English composition. Using the teaching styles called the process approach, the teacher is required to concentrate on helping the students to write, rewrite, and to develop mostly the contents.

Considering the explanation above, the paper discusses a technique for developing teacher feedback on written work within the process approach as one of the ways to improve the students' composition. With the introduction of the process approach to the teaching of writing starting in the 1970s, much thought has been given to ways of providing feedback to learner-writer during the writing process. However, as feedback takes on greater significance within the process approach, a preliminary consideration must be an attempt to describe this approach to the teaching of writing.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative approach focusing on the general principles underlying the realization of a meaning of social phenomena in society. The object of analysis in a qualitative approach is social phenomena in culture by using the culture of the community concerned to obtain a picture of certain categorizations. According to (Cresswell John. W.: 2010). The location of the research was at IKIP Budi Utomo Malang, located at Citandui Street No 46, Blimbing District, East Java 65126. The focus of his research is how a teacher can develop feedback technique on Writing by applying the process approach as one way of improving the students' composition. On the basis of the technique, there are two types' techniques the teacher may apply in Writing by using the process approach, namely written comment and student-teacher conference (Keh, 1990a). The use of both forms will simultaneously maximize the amount of feedback and the quality of feedback required for effective revision of the working draft. The appropriateness and accuracy of these techniques as matter of fact depend on several factors: ability, personality, and attitude of the teacher towards a particular technique, and the learners' need, abilities, and attitude, the number of students in the class, and the time allotment in the actual teaching – learning situation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
The Process Approach to the Teaching of Writing

The process approach to the teaching of writing is based on writing multiple drafts of a paper before presenting the final product. In the

process of writing multiple drafts, a writer works through certain phases in a recursive manner. In other word, the process approach emphasises on the process of writing in the fact that what is important for a writer is not only the end product and the audience for whom it is intended, but also how he starts and writes it well. Since the number of phases and the terminology for each phase differ from one process theorist to another, this paper adopts Lapp's classification of the major phases of the writing process: prewriting, composing, revision, and post writing (Lapp,1985).

The prewriting phase includes everything that precedes the first draft (Murray,1978:86). This phase involves the selection of a topic, the generation of ideas through an accumulation of topic-related information, and the incubation, planning, and organization of ideas. When the ideas are transferred onto paper to produce a first draft, the composing phase takes place. The primary focus is to get meaning down on the paper. Meanwhile, the revision may begin during writing the fist draft. Improvements are made to the meaning and the overall quality of the text for better communication of ideas.

Considering the studies on the revision changes during the writing process, Lapp outlines two major types of changes: text-based changes and surface changes (Lapp,1985). Text-based changes are changes in content that affect meaning. These changes might occur at the lexical, phrasal, clausal, sentential or paragraph levels. One form of text-based changes is to revise the meaning of a portion or all the written text to maintain the intended focus, while another one is to revise the text to change the intended focus to influence the entire meaning of the text. On the other hand, the surface changes refer to changes in form which have

minimal effect on the meaning of the text such as formal revision (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc) and syntactical changes.

In the process of revising the draft, new drafts will be produced. Each subsequent draft is an attempt to improve the previous one. However, when writer ceases to revise a draft and views it as a complete product to be read and evaluated by a reader, they have entered the post-writing phase. Thus, the writing task is regarded complete.

Providing Feedback on Written Work

Feedback is defined as the input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision (Keh,1990a:294). During the process of writing, feedback is an important element to encourage and improve the students' composition. By offering comments, asking questions, and giving suggestions, a reader can help the writer to produce reader-based prose. Therefore, reader's feedback on the various drafts can serve as the drive to push the writer through the writing process on to the eventual end-product (Keh, 1990a).

Based on the description above, there are two types of feedback which are generally viewed as appropriate and effective tools to encourage the students' composition in English Department, namely **teacher feedback and peer feedback**. This paper is just going to emphasise its detailed discussion on **teacher feedback** which the teacher of writing can pay much attention to enable their students to express and communicate their ideas much better in their writing. As explained above, the feedback which the lecturer provides his students on written work is mainly focused on the **content** (C) such as the development and organisation of the ideas without neglecting the concern on

the **form** (F) where grammatical correctness and syntactical errors are involved. The method of implementing the teacher feedback will be discussed below.

Teacher Feedback in the Teaching of Writing

Teacher feedback constitutes an important means whereby a student's can receives input from a teacher for revision during the process of writing. In this case, two types of teacher feedback, **written comments** and **student-teacher conferences**, might be paid serious attention by the teacher to improve their students' composition. Within each method, the teacher provides feedback on content as the major concern before moving on to feedback on form.

Written Comments

Written comments are classified into teacher feedback containing teachers' praise, questions, criticisms, suggestion, and encouragement written on the students' composition. The teacher has to restrict his comments to fundamental issues and provide enough information or examples for possible revision. In order to give effective and efficient comments, the teacher respond as a concerned reader to a writer and is recommended to make his written comments based on the following criteria: (1) connect all comments to course objectives; (2) note the students' improvement "good" or "excellent", and give reasons why; (3) refer to a specific problem in the student's paper and provide a strategy for revision or improvement; (4) give a possible example, provide choices; (5) write a summative comment at the end of students' paper of strengths and weaknesses; (6) ask real questions as a reader to a writer rather than statements which assume too much about the

writer's attention (Kehl, 1970, Keh, 1990a). By following such criteria, written comments can be made more useful in pointing out specific problems, explaining the reasons for them, and making suggestions.

Student-Teacher Conference

Student-teacher conference belongs to a type of teacher feedback on the students' written work by carrying out face-to-face meeting (conference) between a teacher and students in the classroom. There are essentially two forms of student-teacher conferences: **individual conference** and **group conference**. At an individual conference, the teacher as usual speaks individually with the students about their papers by involving a clarification of the teacher's written comments or a student's response to some questions which the teacher has asked. Another way of implementing an individual conference is to provide the students with a set of questions to prepare before the actual conference takes place. The questions are designed to focus on **content** (C) before **form** (F) as follows: (1). What is the topic of your essay; (2). How have you organised your ideas in your essay; (3). Who are you writing to; (4). Who is your audience; (5). What do you want to achieve; (6). Are there any words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that you feel worried about.

When the group conference (two or three students per group) is used, students are given the sole responsibility for deciding the agenda for the conference, and the manner in which the conference will be conducted. This form of conferencing is better than individual conferencing during the initial stages of introducing the teacher-student conference. The students feel comfortable speaking and expressing their thought freely in a group than in

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one-to-one meeting with the teacher. As a result, more discussion will take place. Nevertheless, both individual and group conferences require the teacher to assume the role of a counsellor rather than an authority. In addition, the teacher builds the students' self esteem, convinces them, and gives them further confidence to write as well.

That is why, such conferences between the student-writer and teacher-reader have several advantages. By interacting with the students, the teacher is able to ask for clarification, to check the comprehensibility of oral comments made, to help the students to sort through problems, and to assist the student indecision making. Hence in comparison with written comments, conferences allow more feedback and more accurate feedback to be given by the teacher of writing.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In considering the relative strengths of teacher feedback in helping the students of English Department in the teaching of writing through the process of revising a piece of written work, one sees two forms of feedback: written comments and student-teacher conferences as complementary in nature. The use of both forms will simultaneously maximise the amount of feedback and the quality of feedback needed for effective revision of working drafts. The appropriateness and accuracy of these methods as a matter of fact depend on several factors: ability, personality, and attitude of the teacher towards a particular method, and the learners' need, abilities, and attitudes, the number of students in the class, and the time allotment in the actual teaching-learning situation.

Considering all these factors carefully, the teacher then decides on the method of feedback which would be more appropriate in his situation and determines when these methods should be introduced during the process of revising drafts.

Finally, learners need to be encouraged to see writing as a means of learning rather than demonstrating learning. Therefore, the teacher feedback activities will be seen as a vehicle to lead the learner towards the path of self feedback in the process of writing

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