TEACHER'S FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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Abstract: This study intends to investigate the way of teacher in providing feedback for students' descriptive texts, and examine the responses of the students toward the given feedback. It employed a descriptive case study, involving an English teacher who taught twenty students as the respondents. The data were gathered from classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The obtained data were mainly analyzed based on Hedge (1988), Kaplan & Grabe (1996), Ferris (2002) and Hyland (2003) explaining forms of feedback. The findings showed that the teacher provided four forms of feedback as proposed by Hedge *et al* (1988); *whole class conference, one-on-one conference, commentary,* and *minimal marking*. Most students tended to respond positively toward the feedback provided by the teacher and they considered it helpful for them to write better. In conclusion, feedback from teacher is an essential aspect for students in helping them make better writing. However, for the sake of clarity and understanding, it is also important to pay attention to the forms of feedback given.

Keywords: Feedback, Writing, Descriptive Texts, Junior High School

Introduction

Writing is challenging for students since it requires an entirely different set of competencies and is fundamentally different from speaking (Brown, 2001: 335). As a consequence, teachers need to offer guidance in helping them write better; the guidance is then called feedback (Lewis, 2002).

Feedback is information that is provided to students about whether or not their production and interpretation of language is appropriate (Cameron, 2001, p.237).

Types of Feedback

Types of feedback have their own characteristics. This is in accordance with Hedge (1988), Kaplan & Grabe (1996) Ferris (2002) and Hyland (2003) explaining those forms in this following table.

Types	Forms	Characteristics
Teacher Written Feedback	Commentary	- The most common feedback - Handwritten feedback on students' paper
	Rubrics	- A variation of commentary - The use of cover sheet with criteria
	Minimal Marking	- A type of in-text, form based feedback - Indication of location and perhaps type of errors rather than direct correction - More effective in stimulating a student response and in developing self-editing strategies
	Taped Commentary	- An alternative to marginal comments - Recording remarks on tape recorder - Saving time and adding novelty
	Electronic Feedback	- Comments on electronic submission by email - Linking to online explanation of grammar
Teacher-student Conferencing	Teacher /Whole class Conference	- Supplements for the limitations of one-way written feedback

		- Encouraging students to think about writing as something that can be organized and improved
	Teacher- Mini Conference	- Giving Writers an opportunity to talk about their writing and reflecting on the process
	One-on-one Conference	- Giving teacher a chance to listen, learn and diagnose.

Table of Forms of Feedback based on Hedge, *et al* (1988)

Strategies in Providing Feedback: Direct And Indirect Feedback

Direct feedback, in which teacher gives comments on the students writing, can be beneficial since it can directly show the students the errors or mistakes that they have made in their work (Harmer, 2007, p.151). In practicing direct feedback, teacher usually explains the reason behind the mistakes, and he or she further explains what the students should do. Since direct feedback has the advantage that it provides explicit information about the correct form (Ellis (2008) in Purnawarman, 2011).

In contrast, indirect feedback takes place when teachers only provide indications in some ways which make students aware that an error exists but they do not provide the students with the correction (Purnawarman, 2011). On the other hand, the danger of giving indirect feedback is about possibility of misunderstanding between what the teacher is trying to say and the interpretation of the students. Hence, it will create relapsing of particular errors (Lewis, 2002).

Types and Strategies of Feedback Provided By a Teacher to Students' Descriptive Texts

This section will discuss various types and strategies of feedback applied by the teacher to the students' descriptive texts observed in this research. Each type and strategy will be discussed below.

Spoken direct feedback

After conducting three times class observation it can be seen that the teacher tended to give direct feedback orally. Therefore, it can be categorized as spoken direct feedback. Meanwhile, there are two forms of it indicated during the observation; Whole Class Conference and One-on-one Conference. **Whole Class Conference** was done by asking one of the students to come forward to show their work. Then, the teacher discussed it with the students. After that, if mistake was available on their text, she informed it first, the reason of it, and how to revise it. This way of providing feedback is also known as *direct feedback with explicit corrective comments* (Purnawarman, 2011) Therefore, the students could directly understand what they have to do in revising their mistakes. Besides, by getting that kind of direct feedback, the students can identify the mistakes they have made, and then they correct them based on the comments given by the teachers (Ellis (2008) in Purnawarman, 2011).

Another one is **One-on-one Conference.** It was clearly applied in the second observation in which the teacher had a chance to listen, learn, and diagnose the students' needs for their writing (Hedge, *et al*., 1988). The teacher did it by coming closer to the students' table and check their work one by one. Since the practice of One-on-one Conference was applied to the whole students, they can have a chance to be closer with the teacher. Moreover, they will get the input which is more specific and personal, thus addressing his or her needs (Lewis, 2002).

Written Indirect Feedback

Unlike direct feedback that was given orally, indirect feedback was mostly given in written form. This can be seen through the students' descriptive text that was revised and scored by the teacher. In terms of the forms of it given by the teacher, there were two forms indicated during the observations; Commentary and Minimal Marking. **Commentary** was applied to the whole students' descriptive texts revised by the teacher. The teacher gave comments on the each student's work. On the other hand, the comments were not in a detail way. There were various comments given by the teacher, among others: Very Good, Good, Not Bad and Poor. **Very Good** was given to the students who had no mistakes at all on their work. On the other hand, **Good** was given to those who had one until four mistakes. Then, **Not Bad** was given to those who had more than four mistakes. Last, **Poor** was given to those whose texts cannot be understood as a whole.

Another form of written indirect feedback was **Minimal Marking**. It was given by giving several signs indicating location and perhaps type of errors rather than direct correction (Hedge *et al*, 1998). The teacher gave it in, mostly, three ways; circling, underlining and giving an arrow. **Circle** was given to indicate mistakes mostly on grammar and spelling. **Underline** meant that the there was an incomplete sentence that should be revised by the students. **Arrow** indicated that there was something wrong with the word order made by the students. Those signs can encourage the students to do self-editing on their writing in order to revise it well (Hedge *et al*, 1998). Besides, it also leads the students to think the clues given by the teachers related to their errors and find the solution (Lie, 2007, p.55).

The Students' Responses Toward The Teacher Feedback

Based on the result of questionnaire, distributed to twenty students, and interview, conducted to ten students coming from low, average and high achievers, it is safe to say that students gave parallel responses toward the importance of teacher's

feedback for their writing development. In relation to the need of teacher's feedback, all students spoke as one voice that they need feedback from their teacher to their writing. The reason why they need it is explained by Lewis (2000) stating that feedback can encourage students to learn and to use language to improve their ability by taking into account every comment given by the teacher.

Although students gave parallel answers to both the questionnaire and interview about the need and benefit of teacher's feedback on their writing development, it is important to note that not all students could directly understand what and how they should revise the errors they made. However, one thing that the students understood from the feedback is that they made a mistake because there are underlines, arrows or circles.

Therefore, based on the interview, low achieving students tended to choose oral or spoken direct feedback from the teacher in order to fully understand what they should do. They mentioned that spoken direct feedback could explicitly show their mistakes, reasons of their mistakes and possible solutions for them. Meanwhile, the interview also showed that the average and high achieving students could understand what their mistakes are and how they should revise them based on the written indirect feedback from the teacher. The responses explained earlier basically shows that feedback can be beneficial or even harmful. It basically deals with the way of teacher in providing it to the students, as stated below:

> Teacher knows that affective aspects f feedback can be as important as the factual aspects. They also know that students sometimes misunderstand the teacher's feedback. Feedback can be like conversation between learner and teacher, and in the case of conversation, things can sometimes go wrong (Lewis, 2000, p.5).

Therefore, since feedback is information that is provided to students about whether or not their production and interpretation of language is appropriate (Cameron, 2001, p. 237), the teacher needs to ensure that all of the students are following the guidelines for appropriate participation, thus encouraging them to engage with the activity in the class (Kayfetz and Stice, 1987, p.7).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the research concludes that feedback was delivered in spoken direct feedback with two forms; Whole Class Conference and Onne-on-one Conference and written indirect feedback with two forms; Commentary and Minimal marking. In terms of students' responses toward the given feedback, it can be concluded that the students responded positively and negatively to the teacher feedback. This negative response came from low achieving students who had difficulties in understanding written indirect feedback from the teacher.

Therefore, it is recommended for further researchers to find other feedback strategies in different contexts to get richer and more reliable data for student writing development.

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