

**THE USE OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK
AND CONFERENCING
IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING**

MUMTAZ BINTI V.C NAIDU @ MAHADIR NAIDU

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**Faculty of Education
in collaboration with
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Faculty of Management and Human Resource Development,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia**

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ABSTRACT

The use of written feedback and conferencing are crucial in the learning of English as a second language. If teachers and students can manipulate well the use of written feedback and conferencing, both parties will benefit. This research looks at the types of feedback given to ESL students and to investigate what are the students' responses towards the use of written feedback and conferencing session in the writing class. It also provides guidelines for teachers on how to give appropriate feedback and how to handle the conferencing session. The six respondents chosen for this research are students whose proficiency was below average in ESL writing. In this research, the researcher used the Writing Task, Questionnaire and Interview Questions to gain data from the respondents. The findings of this research show that the respondents gave positive responses towards the use of written feedback and conferencing session in ESL writing. The two types of feedback given to the respondents were feedback on content and feedback on form.

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan maklumbalas bertulis dan sesi konferensi adalah sangat penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Jika guru dan pelajar dapat menggunakan metodologi maklumbalas bertulis dan sesi konferensi dengan baik, kedua-dua pihak akan mendapat manfaat. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan tujuan untuk meninjau jenis maklumbalas bertulis yang di beri kepada pelajar dan menyiasat apakah reaksi yang diberikan oleh pelajar terhadap penggunaan maklumbalas bertulis dan sesi konferensi semasa proses penulisan. Kajian ini juga menyediakan panduan untuk guru dan memberi maklumbalas bertulis dan cara-cara bagaimana untuk menjalankan sesi konferensi. Enam responden yang di pilih di dalam kajian ini adalah pelajar-pelajar yang mempunyai tahap profisiensi di bawah aras biasa dalam penulisan bahasa Inggeris. Untuk mendapatkan data daripada responden, pengkaji telah menggunakan Tugas Penulisan, Soalselidik dan Temuramah sebagai instrumen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan responden telah memberikan respon positif di dalam penggunaan maklumbalas bertulis dan sesi konferensi di dalam penulisan. Terdapat dua jenis maklumbalas bertulis yang diberikan kepada responden iaitu maklumbalas iatu dari segi isi dan bahasa.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as Foreign Language
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background knowledge of the research, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study and the significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

There are several ways to think about errors in writing in light of what we know about second language and what we know about how texts, context and the writing process interact with each other. As mentioned, students' writing in ESL generally produces texts that contain various degrees of grammatical and rhetorical errors. This kind of error is especially common among ESL writers who have a lot of ideas, but not enough language to express what they want to say in a comprehensible way.

According to Myles (2001), there are several factors that deter the students from performing excellently. Both social and cognitive factors affect language learning. Social factors like learners' attitudes, motivations and goals can explain why some second language learners perform better than others. If the students have negative attitudes toward the target language itself, they will have problems understanding the language. Many students learn the second language for career purposes or as a part of the education system. Students' love in using L2 in e-mails is deterred due to challenges of getting started and finding the correct words. However, students' interest was improved with the support of extrinsic motivation. Students who view ESL writing as a part of career purposes found it less motivated to write poeries or short stories as they think this is a waste of time. Since they are less attentive to their writing assignments, they could not fully comprehend the needs to write well. However, highly motivated students would welcome any written assignments in English.

The ability to write well is not naturally acquired. It is learned as a set of practical and learned experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability to tell the information. The introduction of process approach in writing helps the students to understand better the process of writing and this approach eventually helps the students to build their own strategies in writing. As stated by Flower (1981), by using process approach in writing, students will have much time in their hands to discover their reading strategies and to consider feedback from teachers. As stated by Zamel (1983), “By studying what it is our students do in their writing, we can learn from them what they still need to be taught”. That is one major reason why the teachers’ feedback is crucial in helping students to improve their writing

1.3 Statement of Problem

Some of the issues raised for the lack of confidence in ESL writing are connected to the teacher and the methodology in teaching writing. The methodology is an important factor in the teaching process. The debate on the decline of the English language has seen much discussion falling on teaching methodology (Star, Nov.8 2000). It has been suggested that the teaching methods selected have not been effective in delivering the lessons to the students.

In addition to the methodology, the issue raised for the lack of confidence in ESL is connected to the teacher who teaches it. Teachers do give feedback to the students,

however their feedback on the form and content are often vague, contradictory, unsystematic and inconsistent. This leads to various reactions by students including confusion, frustration and neglect on the comments. Hence, to help the students to improve in writing, both aspects of the teacher and the methodology must be looked into.

This research suggests feedback, which is "...as an input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision" (Siti Hamin, 2001) and conference "where students are invited to further develop their stories, to add more information, to include descriptive language" (Taylor, 1994, cited in Jarvis, 2002).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To find out whether the use of written feedback help students to improve their writing.
2. To investigate whether the use of conferencing helps students to improve their writing.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the types of feedback given to students?
2. What are the students' responses towards the teacher's written feedback?

3. What are the students' responses towards the teacher's conferencing sessions?

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on secondary school students from a sub-urban school in Johore. In addition, the margin of improvement studied in the research is not the main focus. The focus is only on the students' reactions on teacher's feedback and conferencing session.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The use of feedback and conferencing is important in improving students' writing. It is significant because students need the skill of writing in academic as well as professional contexts. The importance of writing skill to students call for adjustments to be made to the methodology of teaching writing and the use of feedback and conferencing are of significant value in this research.