Teacher's Feedback on Arabic Student Writing Process

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Abstract

Teacher feedback is an essential component of the instructional process and assessment. The aim of this study is to explore teacher feedback practices in the classroom context of Arabic language writing to determine the roles of teacher feedback from an assessment-for learning (AFL) perspective. Three questions guided the analysis of the data: (a) how teachers' practice feedback in the classroom, (b) the type of feedback used by teacher and (c) the students' perception toward teacher feedback. Using single case study design, this qualitative study draws on multiple sources of data generated through classroom observations, field notes, interviews and documents. Results indicated that teacher feedback provided verbally, written and nonverbal. Feedback strategy can be categorized into types; judgemental, corrective, descriptive, prescriptive and motivational. In addition, the findings suggest that corrective feedback consider as a useful pedagogical device to improve second language pupils writing development. The paper concludes with implications for classroom teaching and learning as well as recommendations for the future.

Keywords: Feedback - second language writing- assessment for learning -writing development- case study

1. Introduction

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of teacher feedback in daily classroom practices, particularly in the context of assessment for learning (AfL). Furthermore, feedback to students has been identified as a key strategy in learning and teaching (Black & William, 1998a, 1998b). In terms of second language writing, teacher feedback can serve both as assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL) purposes (Wiliam, 2001) and good feedback should be used to empower students as self-regulated learners (Nicol & Dick, 2006).

In this study, we aim to explore and obtain a deeper understanding on teacher feedback practices throughout Arabic writing class and students' responses. During the study, the researcher explored and documented how Noor, an experienced teacher provided feedback in her writing class. Our emphasis will be in the process rather than the outcomes and give a more in-depth understanding of teacher feedback using qualitative methodologies.

Relatively, little has been done to explore teachers' feedback in the larger classroom context of teaching and learning Arabic Language writing to ascertain the functions of teacher feedback serves from an AfL viewpoint. The study calls for greater attention to the implementation of assessment for learning in the writing classroom, and specifically the use of feedback for formative purposes.

2. Literature Review

Many previous studies carried out at the practice of teachers' feedback associated the written feedback, verbal feedback, types of feedback, feedback strategy, effective feedback, including feedback relationship with the attitudes and pupil's performance. Probably the most widely used feedback form nowadays in L2 classrooms is corrective feedback (CF) as mentioned by De Jong & Kuiken (2011) both direct and indirect comprehensive CF led to improved accuracy of writing.

Ruiz-Primo & Li (2013) indicated that teachers provided written feedback on their student science notebooks in some form, including 61% were grades, numbers, or symbols, and only 33% were comments. Furthermore, evaluative comments occurred nearly as frequently as descriptive comments (10% and 14%, respectively) but only 4% of the comments were prescriptive. Although, Mohamad Azhar & Shahrir (2007) indicated that teacher should check on student assignments for a particular comment without assigning scores, so as not to rule out the effects of feedback applied.

In order to provide quality written feedback on student writing, teachers should be equipped with pedagogical content knowledge related to quality feedback that serves AfL functions which can support the development of student writing (Parr & Timperley, 2011). Nonetheless, Lee (2007) revealed that teacher feedback focuses largely on assessing writing summatively, primarily serving the aim of AoL, rather than AfL. Teacher emphasis more on the 'outcome essay' rather than the composing process itself and instructional design is more oriented to prepare students for the examination and not to enhance the writing skills practice (Marohaini & Zulkifli, 1997).

While the pattern of teacher feedback within a process writing approach recommended by Ashwell (2000) was a content-focussed on the first draft of writing followed by a form-focussed feedback on the second draft. This is consistent with Teh's (2001) findings as teacher provides feedback on the content (the idea of a topic) on the first draft of students' writing before moving on to the second draft of the writing.

In addition, teachers can support for students' writing through modelling and providing examples of effective feedback and good writing in whole-class or small-group lessons and in one-on-one verbal feedback on student writing (Peterson & Portier, 2012). Furthermore, face-to-face group feedback was found more effective than it was in the virtual group (Thurlings, Vermeulen, Kreijns, Bastiaens & Stijnen, 2012).

In contrast, teachers found more difficult to provide feedback that was likely to move students forward in their learning than it was for them to analyse a student's response or to determine next instructional steps (Schneider & Gowan, 2013). Yet basically, teacher provided feedback explicitly and implicitly. Linguistic feedback given verbally was categorized into acceptance, non-acceptance, check, nomination, elicitation, correction, exclamation and opinion (Tunku Mohani, 1998).

On the other hand, previous researchers concluded that feedback does impact learners on certain faces. The effects of teacher feedback on student behaviour is distinctly visible in terms of the contribution of information by students, discourse occurrence, completing information, correction, signal understanding and no response (Jefridin, 2012) and Zawiyah (1997) indicated that teacher corrective feedback based on error correction code contributed to improving the quality of students' essay.

From another perspective, we should understand students' perceptions and views on feedback in order to make it more effective and lead to improve their achievements. A feedback typology was designed by Gamlem & Smith (2013) to provide a framework which can be used to reflect on useful classroom feedback based on lower secondary school students' perceptions. The typology distinguishes two sets of options relating to (1) strategies for providing feedback (for example, direct, indirect, or metalinguistic feedback) and (2) the students' response to the feedback (for example, revision required, attention to correction only required) (Ellis, 2009).

Students' emotions strongly mediated their perceptions of written feedback. Therefore, in order to accommodate students' emotional responses, effective written feedback should be aligned with pedagogies which specifically include the development of rich dialogue within the teaching and learning context **(**Dowden, Pittaway, Yost & McCarthy, 2013). As Young (2012) revealed that while some students were able to minimize the impact of negative criticism or unwelcome feedback, for others their entire sense of self was at stake.

Relatively, little has been done to explore teachers' feedback in the larger classroom context of teaching and learning Arabic Language writing to ascertain the functions of teacher feedback serves from an AfL viewpoint. The study calls for greater attention to the implementation of assessment for learning in the writing classroom, and specifically the use of feedback for formative purposes.

3. The Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and obtain a deeper understanding on teacher feedback practices throughout Arabic writing class and students' responses. Emphasis will be in the process rather than the outcomes. During the study, the researcher explored and documented how Noor, an experienced teacher provided feedback in her writing class.

Feedback in this study refers to both written comments such as grades, symbols, scores and verbal feedback. The broad research question that guided this study was: a) how teacher practices feedback in the classroom, (b) the type of feedback used by teacher and (c) the students' perception of teacher feedback.

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4. Methods

This study is qualitative in nature using case study or a single-site case design (Yin, 1994) focuses on the subject with the criteria and characteristics to be studied hence to give an overview of the phenomenon (Silverman, 2000). A case study approach was employed in this study to get a more comprehensive investigation of a particular event from the view of all the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Furthermore, it offers detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). Which in this case meant the teacher feedback practices in the classroom. Thus, a school has been selected as a site to conduct this study. The researcher was present as a non-participant observer along the study to evade interference in teaching during the actual lessons (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Data sources comprised of thirteen writing classroom observation, field notes, teacher interviews, focus groups interviews and documents. Following the lessons, Noor was interviewed based on an interview protocol to clarify her feedback strategies. Each interview were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Recording of videos was studied simultaneously by the researcher to find out particular prevalence of teacher feedback.

The data were subjected to grounded analysis, both manually and by using the software program ATLAS.ti 7 (Friese, 2012).The great advantage of this version of ATLAS.ti over its predecessors is the ability to upload sound files, videos as well as text. Thus, the collected audio and visual data could be directly transcribed, and then managed, coded and categorized and aligned with other documents.

4.1 Setting and Participants

The study was took place in two Arabic writing classroom at a religious secondary school located in Banting district, about 40km from Putrajaya city. The participant is a female experienced teacher, who will be known as Noor. Noor has taught Arabic writing lesson for almost ten years and had much exposure to the subject matter and assessment.

Two classes; 6 Karomah and 6 Siddiq were involved in the classroom observation. These are 17 year olds students who are in the Year 12 or 6th form studying Arabic language as a foreign language. Classroom observations were conducted over eight months. In addition, two focus groups were identified as multiple ability learners by Noor for group interviews according to the criteria predetermined by the researcher.

5. Results and Discussion

The results of this study manifested how teacher provided feedback in the writing lessons.

Noor usually began her lesson by supplying the relevant main ideas for the essay writing. Then, she guides the class discussion through ideas brainstorming and then expanding the ideas into paragraphs. Pupils were asked to compose a paragraph assigned by the teacher in small group consist of five to seven students. They drafted their answers in groups within the prescribed time, and then presented the draft in front of the class. Eventually, their writing will be combined into a complete essay immediately after the class discourse. Students worked together in groups, helping each other and sometimes acquiring assistance from their teacher.

The findings of this study identified how a writing teacher provided feedback in the writing lessons.

5.1 Question 1: Teachers' feedback practice

Feedback to writing is considered a significant part of instructional practices. We found that teacher provided feedback which is mostly done verbally and in written form according to purpose, format and focus. The teacher usually provides verbal feedback after the discussion on task writing and interaction with the students followed by written feedback.

However, Noor regularly gives chance for learners' responses and encourages peer feedback. The findings showed that teacher feedback motivated students to participate in classroom discourse, encouraged students to think critically, provided information to the students, guided students to correct their errors and encouraged students to give opinions. In particular, this finding parallels to Ellis (2009)) and Zawiyah (1997) studies.

The following example provides evidence about the teacher's feedback practice. The task was to make a complete sentence from the phrase underlined in pairs.

هم اكراما لاحترام بعضهم بعضا

Noor: Kalau ayat begini, berapa markah nak bagi? (merujuk ayat pelajar kumpulan 4 tadi). Kalau kamu sebagai pemeriksa. Berapa kali nak baca?	Noor asks students to give marks
Pelajar: 2 kali, 3 kali…berkali-kali	Student response
Noor: Kenapa? Sebab cuba nak memahami apa yang hendak disampaikan	Noor identifies why the sentence cannot be understood
Noor: Nak terjemah ke bahasa Melayu pun susah. Dengan menghormati sesama mereka….kena tambah satu lagi ayat, kemudian kena takwil apa yang dikehendaki oleh pelajar. Betul tak?	Noor explains why the sentence is difficult to understand
Noor: Ikmal, Cuba terjemah ke Bahasa Melayu.	Noor asks to translate into Malay language
Tiada respon.	No response
Pelajar: Boleh buat ayat yang baru tak?	Noor asks whether he can construct a new sentence
بالسرعة*Masa kita tak banyak ni…*	Wait time
Guru buat terjemahan: Mereka memuliakan untuk menghormati sebahagian mereka.	Noor translates to Malay language and explains the need to add another sentence
Noor: Ayat tergantung ke boleh faham?	Noor identifies error
Noor: Kalau kamu nak bagi berapa markah	Noor asks her students to give a mark for the sentence
Pelajar-pelajar: 1, 1	Students give a mark
Noor: Rasa tak dapat markah. Siapa setuju dengan Ustazah?	The teacher doesn't give any mark
*Noor: Satu lagi ayat, nak bagi markah*مفعول لأجله مفعول به *atau jadikan* اكراما	She suggests how to improve the sentence
Noor: Kena datang apa sebelumnya?	Noor asks what comes before?
Kump.1 : فعل وفاعل	Students response

Figure 1 : Extract from classroom lesson -Observation 7 (Year 12, 6K)

From the above classroom observation, a student cannot produce a complete sentence. Noor posed a few questions to his peers so that they can think about the sentence structure. Teacher challenged students to imagine their duties as an examiner. Some errors have been identified by teachers. Then, students were requested to translate the sentence into the native language so they are capable to detect the error. They are given the opportunity to give score for the sentence made by their peers. Students suggest one mark, but unfortunately teacher did not give marks for the sentence. Finally, the teacher suggested sentence reformulation cause of errors that have been identified.
In an interview, she explained further:

> *Noor: (Gelak).Ye la…aaa. Dia dapat kemahiran, dia dapat* ممتاز *tu? Dia kalau dia dapat, lebih kepada natijah sebab dia pun periksa kan…untuk periksa. Kemahiran tu kalau setakat yang melekat kat dia, tu la yang dia dapat kemahiran*

There are also several incidents during lesson 2 when the teacher provides feedback in the form of nonverbal. The first incident when the teacher smiling reading the phrase made by student... تنظيف المال . When the teacher asked in the interview afterward, the teacher said it was hard for her to say it was wrong due to the phrase appears correctly when translated into Malay. Similarly the thing happens in lesson 3 as the teacher scratches her head while reciting the students' paragraph.

5.2 Question 2: Feedback strategies

This section will consider the type of feedback provided to learners, including whether it was verbal or written, and provide individual feedback to each student, or small groups or the whole class. We found that Noor provided descriptive comments more frequently than grades, scores or symbols.
From multiple data sources, researcher concluded that the feedback strategy adopted in the context of teaching and learning writing was corrective feedback is direct, indirect and metalinguistic. In the following example, we can see that feedback became increasingly explicit.

T؟أسلوب تغير من ؟عربي أو ملايوي أسلوب هذا :	Noor asks whether the sentence structure is correct
..لديهم المحتاج تساعد التي الإنسان تولد الزكاة	Noor reads the sentence
T؟محتاجين أو محتاج :	Noor asks for the right word
S : محتاجين	Students response
T ثالثة ،ثانية ،أولى فرقة ؟والصحابية الصحابة:	Noor asks for the right word
S : الصحابية	Students response
(guru tambah kalimah الله سبيل في أموالهم ينفقون … 'hum' di awal ayat)	Noor adds a pronoun before
sebelum النبوية الزمان في الحرب … المثال سبيل على عند الحرب' guru	Noor adds a conjunction
Dan potong frasa (Guru ulas أسلوب النبوية الزمان في (غير صحيح)	Noor deletes a phrase and gives comment about the sentence structure
baca ayat seterusnya dan beri komen كثير أسلوب خطأ الرقيق تحرير -الرقيق حرية membebaskan hamba	Noor reads another sentence and mentions there are errors-sentence structure
كثير لنحو والتعاون روح محبة. Guru tambah alif lam pada kalimahمحبة	Noor adds the article 'al'
كل تغيّر ،تغير لو	Noor asks to construct a new sentence or rephrase the sentence structure

Figure 2: Extract from instruction- 'The role of Zakat' Observation 4 (Year 12, 6S)

Students gained assistance on how to improve their work as the teacher provided feedback in the form of identifying pattern of error, focusing on certain features of the writing. So, that could be improved their writing skill as they know what to do next and how to respond to a particular feedback approaches. Aspects concerned by the teacher were mechanical, content, grammar, text structure, syntax, lexical choice and spelling.

Among the teacher feedback provided in classroom and on students' exercise book, we differentiated at least five types of feedback, (a) judgemental, indicating if student work is right or wrong, (b) descriptive, providing justification on why and how the work right or wrong but not suggesting further action, (c) corrective, giving the correct answer, (d) prescriptive, advising or encouraging for improving and extending the learning, (e) motivational, using praise to boost student self-regulation and self-esteem.

5.3 Question 3: Feedback from the students' perception

Two main themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of the data elicited by two focus groups discussion. Firstly, students have emotional responses to teacher feedback and secondly, feedback in the form of corrective feedback has positive impact on students' writing development.

Feedbacks do have emotional impacts on learners. However, the study showed majority of students appreciate their teacher's feedback positively considering their teacher's knowledge and experience in comparison with their peers. Although a few of them expressed sense of embarrassment when reproved their mistakes in public, but they move forward to be open minded and felt relieved.

P6: Bagi saya kan sebab kita pelajar memang lebih kepada cikgu. Kalau cikgu bagi penilaian, kita boleh terima sebab kita tahu cikgu tahu. Tapi kalau kawan, kita belajar sama-sama	*(teacher experience)*
P1: Ustazah yang komen Ustazah punya lagi berkesan la	*(Feedback effectiveness)*
P4: Kena terima berlapang dada- dapat betulkan kesilapan	*(feedback acceptance)*
P3: Gembira sebab mewujudkan situasi dan suasana pembelajaran yang menarik	*(enjoyment)*
P5: Malu juga segan	*(embarrassment)*
P9: Ulasan yang membina. Dia banyak membantu la.	*(descriptive feedback)*
P7: Belajar dari kesilapan	*(learning experience)*
P10: Ustazah bagus dia tak marah. Bagi support	*(supportive teacher)*
P2: Kalau kita salah, lepas tu Ustazah tegur semua mata tertumpu pada kita, rasa tak boleh salah lagi nanti malu	*(Learning experience)*

Figure 3. Transcript from focus group interview

Teachers' feedback and descriptive comments to students is essential in improving the quality of their writing and grade.

Most students prevailing prefer feedback in the form of error correction than grades, marks or scores. Moreover, they believe that they can learn from this method to improve their writing skills in the future.

The effects of feedback may vary depends on learners. For instance, one of the students valued the marks given by teachers because she was satisfied and pleased of her accomplishment. She felt sad and discouraged when she got low scores. While the others don't recognize the grade given by the teacher as mentioned beneath.

P4 6K: Mungkin bagi saya, saya suka no, 2 dan 3. Bagi markah kita rasa puas… bila ustazah bagi markah kalau tinggi seronoknya belajar hari ni, kalau rendah tu rasa sedih la

P10 6S: Rasa markah tu macam tak beri apa-apa. Macam tak sesuai markah tu sebab dapat lebih, macam tak layak la. Ustazah bagi markah banyak sangat

Most pupils look at the score and the red pen signs only when the teacher returned the assignments that were reviewed. They do not make any correction to the revised writing by teachers afterwards. Even, one of them kept the reviewed assignment immediately and don't even revised the task. Conflict arise as teacher perceived that students valued scores but not.

PK: Bagi skor kot. Hmm…bagi skor sebabnya bila bagi skor dia lebih bersemangat untuk menambah baik dia punya kumpulan (Interview 5)

6. Conclusion

Feedback can be provided in various modes; verbal, nonverbal and written. Teachers can use the information reflected in the students' process of writing and the writing product as an assessment data to determine the level of students' understanding and performance. Therefore, teacher feedback should be descriptive and clearly communicated. So, the students will know their current performance and understand what they can do next to improve learning. Such approach is conducive to encouraging students to think deeply about the writing task. Furthermore, results underscore the emphasis of having students actively involved in the writing process. They should be given more autonomy in terms of learning writing process and assessment.

Finally, we anticipate that the results will be useful for the researchers interested in understanding teacher feedback in classroom-based investigation and for teachers to gain insight into the integration of feedback practices provided daily; and the impact on student writing and learning.

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