

TEACHER'S FEEDBACK AND STUDENTS' RESPONSE ON DRAFT COMPOSITION

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Abstract

It has been the task of teachers try to employ approaches that will improve second language writing instruction so that students can be skillful in their writing. One of them is by giving feedback with the belief that students would understand the feedback and they would use the teacher's comments to improve their work. However, in many cases, teachers find that little improvement has been made when students submit their revisions.

Therefore, this study is to investigate the types of feedback used by the teacher, the response made by the students, and the reasons why students do not improve their work even though teacher's feedback has been provided.

The study was conducted among students enrolled in English 101 Thinking and Study Skills course for the first semester of School Year 2014-2015. There were 110 students who were used as participants. The students were asked to write draft for their descriptive composition and this underwent two revisions: first, on content and second, on grammar or form. The two types of feedbacks used on students' draft compositions were content-focused feedback on the first draft and form-focused feedback on the second draft.

The findings showed that generally most students responded successfully to the teacher's feedback on their first and second drafts that resulted in improved final drafts. However, some students could not respond well to content-focused feedback that specifically asked them to discuss their ideas. This is largely attributed to their limited language competence. Students also found it difficult to respond to form-focused feedback in relation to tenses, word choice, subject-verb-agreement, transitional markers, capitalization and punctuation. The difficulty in employing the rules used in these categories could be the factor in students using different types of revision strategies such as closely followed, initial stimulus, avoidance by deletion and not related. Among these strategies, closely followed is considered successful and it is the most used strategy for both content and form-focused feedback. The recommendation of the study is that giving written feedback to students is beneficial because it improves their essays. However, written feedback should be complemented with oral feedback so that teacher would be able to get to the problems that students face when writing their essays.

KEYWORDS

Draft composition, Teacher's feedback, Content-focused feedback, Form-focused feedback, Students' Response, Revision Strategies

Introduction

Excellent writing skills are fundamental to education and academic achievement where students deal with various research work or write compositions which would be one of the components of the grading system. Even everyday requirements such as assignments and quizzes necessitate students' skill to express their thoughts in writing.

The use of English to express their ideas in writing is one of the difficulties of the college students. Most of the times, the students have already ideas in mind but they cannot think of the proper way of conveying them. However, there are also students who are proficient in using the language but may not have enough ideas to express their thoughts and organize these properly.

One approach in the teaching of writing which is adopted by most teachers is the process approach, where the students start by writing their draft before submitting their final output. Furneaux (1998) explained that a student must learn how to write composition effectively. The process approach undertakes different stages in writing: pre-writing, writing, revising and re-writing. The teacher's role in this process approach is not only the giver of topic but also a provider of feedback to help the students develop

their writing skills. The remarks written by the teacher in their drafts provide suggestion on how they can still improve their compositions.

To address these concerns, language teachers must find ways on how these students can improve their compositions both in form and in content. The students will be able to effectively present the content using coherent structure. The effectiveness of giving feedback in the draft composition relies on the cooperation between the teacher in giving feedback and the students in revising their compositions. Students need to understand the importance of responding to the teacher's feedback giving so that they can produce good quality writing.

Long (2000) points out the relevance of giving feedback to the students. Feedback will be beneficial if it is used to give suggestions on how a student can still improve his writing rather than just give a rating without any comment at all. Feedback must be clear and should not include any symbol that is not understood by the students (Cohen, 2001).

How students incorporate feedback when revising their work can be found in a study done by Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2006). In the second part of the study, 21 participants were drawn from the sample of participants who contributed to study A. These participants were interviewed to see how they used teachers' feedback in their L2 compositions. In this study, the researcher found that students tried to rewrite their composition in response to teacher's marks and comments to eliminate ungrammaticality at the word and sentence level where in actual fact they were aware that their teachers wanted them to add examples or elaborate on certain points in their writing. The findings in this study suggested that students usually associate revision processes with correcting their errors. Porte (2007: 61) contends that, "Unskilled writers have been seen to revise from a narrow outlook and make changes addressing the surface grammatical structure of compositions, usually at the level of the word, rather than deeper issues of content and organization". The findings also showed that students found it difficult to interpret feedback and it became a source of frustration on their part in not knowing precisely what their teachers expected them to do with correction symbols and comments.

Ferris (2005) also examines how students process feedback when revising their work. In her study, the participants reported that in order to help them in responding to the feedback on their essays, they got the help from instructors, tutors, friends, grammar books, and dictionaries. As for the final drafts, most of these students tried to make the correction themselves and if they do not understand the comments, they took the step of not responding to the feedback. Their way of ignoring some of the feedback might be due to the fact that they do not need to rewrite the final drafts. However, highly motivated students appreciate feedback on final drafts because they could use the comments to improve future essays. Few students in Ferris' study reported having problems in teachers' feedback focusing on the illegibility of teachers' handwriting, problems related with grammar corrections and symbols used to indicate grammatical errors as well as the way teachers posing questions about content in their essays. The questions about content were too general and sometimes too specific which resulted in students' confusion in handling the feedback. Sometimes the feedback may be confusing for it may be content-focused feedback, form-focused feedback or both types of feedback. Students will find it difficult to respond to the comments because Zamel (2005) as cited in Kepner (2001: 306) suggests that, "Written response which combines error corrections and positive comments regarding content or organization can only be confusing and contradictory, as students are not likely to know which type of response deserves higher priority".

Conrad and Goldstein (2002) also did a study on the issue of how learners incorporated feedback in their drafts. The subjects were students taking an advanced ESL composition course at a large urban university in the United States and they were involved in multiple-draft essays. The three students involved in this study had equivalent writing proficiency and minor surface-level problems in their writing. The data collected were drafts of student papers, written comments made by the teacher and transcripts of conferences between teacher and student. The findings in this study showed that students were able to revise successfully in response to feedback when they were asked to add examples, facts or details but few students were able to utilize teacher commentary successfully, when they had to be more explicit in their arguments or when they had to explain or analyze the issue that was raised in their papers.

They later suggest that the reasons for not being successful in incorporating all the feedback were due to some factors such as misinterpretation of teacher's comments, lack of content knowledge, effect of strongly-held

beliefs, influence of classroom instruction, level of self-motivation and pressure of other commitments. They were able to derive the reasons from teacher-student conferences because through these conferences, students were able to express what they thought of their teacher's commentary and also how they revised their essays.

Thus, even though Dheram (2003) says that teachers and learners need to come to a mutual agreement on the nature and function of feedback in order to secure successful feedback utilization in students' revision process, the above findings revealed that teachers are now facing a challenging task in giving feedback. This is because teachers do not only have to think of their students' preference of the types of feedback but they also have to take into consideration factors that affect students' mentality, feelings, and attitude.

A study by Lee (2008) on the reactions of students in two Hong Kong secondary classrooms to their teachers' feedback also revealed that students' reactions and attitudes to teacher's feedback are an intricate matter, intertwined not only with student characteristics like proficiency level, but also with teacher factors, such as teachers' beliefs and practices and their interactions with students.

This study therefore focuses on the students' responses to teacher's feedback on their draft compositions in terms of content and form .

Research Problems

The researcher intended to study how students are going to respond to teacher's feedback on their draft compositions. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1 What type of feedback do teachers employ in the students' draft compositions?
- 2 Are students able to incorporate teacher's feedback into their own revision process?
- 3 What revision strategies are commonly used by the students?

Methodology

Respondents. This research was conducted among students enrolled in English 101 Thinking and Study Skills course for the first semester of School Year 2014-2015. There were 110 students who were used as participants.

Data Gathering Procedure. The students were asked to write draft for their descriptive composition and this underwent two revisions: first, on content and second, on grammar. The two types of feedbacks used on students' draft compositions were content-focused feedback on the first draft and form-focused feedback on the second draft.

For regularity, the revisions were done in the classroom. Descriptive type of composition was used where students chose their own topic- person, thing, event, phenomenon, feelings, process, or structure.

The comments were identified and coded using Ashwell's (2000) patterns of feedback. Feedback used was coded as form-focused and content-focused feedback.

On the first draft the teacher gave feedback on the organization and content of the composition based on 7 categories, namely, introduction strategy, thesis statement, major ideas, supporting details and concluding statement. Then, the first draft was returned to the students for them to revise. After the revision, the second draft was submitted and this time, feedback based on form was made. The feedback on form was categorized as follows: (1).tense consistency (2) pronoun antecedent (3) word choice (4) preposition (5) transitional device (6) spelling (7) punctuation mark (8) capitalization (9) subject-verb agreement (10) conjunction.

For the revision strategies, the researcher classified the strategies based on Hyland's study (2001) which were closely followed, initial stimulus, avoidance by deletion and not related. *Closely followed* means the students followed closely to the corrections or suggestions made by their teacher on their drafts when revising their work. *Initial stimulus* was seen by the students as an initial stimulus that triggered them to rewrite in a number of ways and some of which, unfortunately failed to respond to the corrections that the teacher asked them. *Avoidance by deletion* was where the students avoided responding to their teacher's comments by deleting the problematic feature without substituting anything else in their revisions. *Not related* meant that the students tried to utilize teacher's feedback, but their ideas were irrelevant to the teacher's comments that resulted in their failure to revise their drafts.

In determining the revision strategies used by the students, the number of each type of revision strategy was calculated after the students made their revisions based on organization/content focused and grammar/form-focused feedback. These calculations were tabulated for the purpose of analysis.

Results and Discussion

This study was conducted to study students' response to teacher's feedback on their draft composition. The researcher was interested to examine whether or not students incorporated teacher's feedbacks in their revisions. The students in this study had to write two drafts of descriptive composition whereby the teacher provided content-focused feedback on the first draft and form focused-feedback on the second draft. The findings of the study were presented based on the research questions posed.

1.Type of feedback teacher employs in the students' draft compositions

The teacher's written feedback was done in different ways. Some were in phrases (e.g. needs a space, new paragraph, use transitional marker, lacks details). Some were in complete sentences (e.g. This is not a part of the major idea.), questions (e.g. Does this statement make your paragraph coherent?), command (e.g. Remove this phrase.). Symbols were also used by the teacher (e.g. cw-wrong choice of word, cap-capitalize the word, sp-spelling is incorrect).

However, there were content-focused feedback that were clarified by the teacher (e.g. needs transitional markers, idea does not relate to the topic sentence, too vague, elaborate more).

Table 1
Focus of Teacher's Feedback

| Feedbacks | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Content-focused | 55 | 33.95% |
| Topic sentence | 20 | 36.36% |
| Major ideas | 14 | 25.45% |
| Supporting details | 11 | 20.00% |
| Conclusion | 10 | 18.18% |
| Form-focused | 107 | 66.05% |
| Transitional markers | 24 | 22.42% |
| Subject-verb agreement | 20 | 18.69% |
| Tense consistency | 17 | 15.88% |
| Spelling | 15 | 14.01% |
| Choice of word | 15 | 14.01% |
| Capitalization | 8 | 7.47% |
| Punctuation | 8 | 7.47% |
| Total No. of comments: | 162 | 100% |
| Total No. of drafts | 110 | |

Most of the feedback stresses grammar or form. Of the 162 feedback, 66.05% of the comments are form-focused feedback. The most notable content-focused feedback is on the construction of topic sentence with 36.36% out of the 55 comments, followed by the formulation of major ideas with 25.45%. Under the form-focused feedback, the use of transitional device has 22.42% out of the 107 comments. This is followed by the correct verb usage with 18.69% and the consistency in using verb, 18.69%.

The researcher finds the teacher's giving of comments in topic sentence construction relevant for this will help the students show what the topic is all about and what they want to say about the topic.

Excerpt from student's first draft (S1):

The importance of knowing your learning style. One, you can learn easily, comfortably and fits to your needs.

Teacher's feedback:

Follow the formula in constructing the topic sentence: topic + controlling ideas

Student's Revision:

Knowing your learning style may help you learn easily, study comfortably and answer your needs.

Excerpt from student's first draft (S2):

Learning style is classified into three types: auditory, visual and kinesthetic. Auditory style is more on listening while kinesthetic is more on movement.

Teacher's feedback:

Add detail on visual learning style

On the content-focused feedback, students are asked to revise the topic sentence, re-construct major ideas and add supporting details. This finding requires that teachers need to reassess their focus and see what most of the researchers like Dheram (2003) who considers content as the first to be given attention to. Most of the students' written composition need comments to improve their style of writing. The teacher as shown in the data, concentrates on the giving of form-focus feedback.

Excerpt from student's second draft (S3):

One can focus and excel in studies if he knows he's learning style.

Teacher's feedback:

he's- cw

Student's Revision:

One can focus and excel in studies if he knows his l earning style.

Excerpt from student's second draft (S4):

It is easily to you to understand.

Teacher's feedback:

_to you to -change prep.

Student's Revision:

It is easily for you to understand

The focus on form in giving feedback is supported by Beason's argument (2003) that no element of writing is purely an organizational concern, a mechanic concern or a stylistic concern. All the other aspects have to be considered. The production of a composition which is appropriate in style does not always guarantee quality. All the other aspects have to be considered. The form-focused feedback is important because the changes that the students do require cognitive skills, having too many possible choices for their revisions.

2. How students were able to incorporate teacher's feedback into their own revision process?

Table 2
Content-focused feedback and Revision Success

| | Content-focused Feedback | Successful | Not Successful | Not Attempted |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|
| Topic sentence | N =20 | 13 = 65% | 5 = 25% | 2 = 10% |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|
| Major details | N = 14 | 9 = 64.8% | 2 = 14.8% | 3 = 21.44% |
| Supporting details | N = 11 | 7 = 63.63% | 3 = 27.27% | 1 = 9.1% |
| Conclusion | N = 10 | 6 = 60% | 4 = 40% | 0 |

Table 2 shows that students were successful in revising most of the categories commented by the teacher. There were 13 or 65% of the feedback given about the topic sentence was successfully done followed by 9 or 64.28% success in the revision pertaining formulation of major details; two (2) or 14.28% of the comments on major details was not successfully done.

This failure in incorporating the feedback on this category could be due to the difficulty in understanding teacher's commentary. The following was an example taken from a student's writing:

Excerpt from student's first draft (S 5):

Education is our key to success. It is our only weapon to have a bright future but how can we succeed if in this early stage, we criticize schooling like living in a hell.

Teacher's Feedback:

You may add details on comparison.

Student's Revision:

*Education is our key to success **while lack of it is failure**. It is our only weapon to have a bright future but how can we succeed if in this early stage, we criticize schooling like living in a hell.*

From the example, it appeared that the student did not understand where the comparison will be inserted. The teacher was not able to add in her feedback the comparison she wished to be done, schooling and living in a hell. As a result, the student was less able to incorporate the feedback in her revision.

Excerpt from student's first draft (S 6):

It is important to know our learning styles so we could identify what are our weaknesses and improve them. Knowing our learning style also helps us on how we could plan and organize our schedule for studying and relaxation.

Teacher's Feedback:

Sentence number 2 should support your topic sentence.

Student's Revision:

It is important to know our learning styles so we could identify what are our weaknesses and improve them. Knowing our weaknesses in learning style also helps us on how we could plan and organize our schedule for studying and relaxation

When the teacher asked the student to focus sentence 2 to the topic which is on the weaknesses of learning style, the student misinterpreted it by just adding the word 'weaknesses' to the second sentence. This could be due to the fact that she had not really understood the meaning of 'coherence' and she might think the comment was asking her to add the word in the second sentence.

According to Williams (2003), the failure of students' revisions on content might be due to three reasons: the students may not read the comments at all, may read them but not understand them, or may understand them but not know how to respond to them. Teachers' comments on content are less beneficial if students are clueless of what they mean or how to use them productively to improve their skills as writers.

The study also intended to see how students incorporated form-focused feedback in their revisions. It was found that most students were able to respond to this type of feedback. This can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Form-focused feedback and Revision Success

| Form-focused Feedback | | Successful | Not Successful | Not Attempted |
|-----------------------|--------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| Transitional Devices | N = 24 | 20 = 83.33% | 4 = 16.67% | 0 |
| S-V Agreement | N = 20 | 15 = 75% | 3 = 15% | 2 = 10% |
| Verb Consistency | N = 17 | 14 = 82.35% | 3 = 17.65% | 0 |
| Punctuation | N = 8 | 8 = 100% | 0 | 0 |
| Spelling | N = 15 | 15 = 100% | 0 | 0 |
| Word Choice | N = 15 | 8 = 53.33% | 12 = 13.33% | 5 = 33.34% |
| Capitalization | N = 8 | 8 = 100% | 0 | 0 |

Table 3 shows that most students were able to revise successfully for all categories found under form-focused feedback. The reason for this success could be due to the fact that whenever the teacher commented on students' errors, she usually provided the correct response for the errors. This made it easy for the students to incorporate the comments in their revisions. The analysis showed a high percentage of revision success for all categories as compared to the percentage of revision failure for similar categories. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that students had difficulties in 4 out of 7 categories, namely, transitional markers, word choice, subject-verb-agreement and verb consistency. This low percentage of revision success under these categories infers that students generally found it hard to grasp the rules embedded. This finding is supported by Ma (2006) who reveals that explicit form-focused feedback might only be beneficial to specific error categories.

The analysis showed that most students responded well to teachers' feedback and they were able to incorporate content and form-focused feedback into their revisions. The students did follow teacher's feedback and they believed that these comments were helpful to them. The few students who had not incorporated feedback in their revisions and had not tried revising at all may have other difficulties that the teacher needs to address in her next study.

3. Revision strategy considered as successful and commonly used by the students

The students received 162 feedback from the teacher and the result of these comments could be seen on how they devised their revision strategies. The findings showed that out of the 162 comments, 123 comments were *closely followed*. This type of revision strategy was most used by the students because they just incorporated whatever comments given by the teacher without deviating from what had been asked for. The least number of revision strategy used by the students was *avoidance by deletion*.

According to Garcia (1999), text-based writing feedback has its limitations whereby in her study she said that, "New texts pose fresh problems to writers, so knowing what was wrong with one text written in the past may not help a writer overcome the problems encountered while writing a new one". She suggests that students need to be given 'real-time' feedback on the questions that they have in their minds at the time when they are struggling to write their drafts. She further stresses the fact that text-based writing feedback leads learners to resort to reduction strategies because they are unable to express their original ideas.

However, Hyland (2001) and Garcia (1999) both agree that when students exercise the avoidance strategy, they believe that their texts are flawless and their quality has improved.

Conclusions

To summarize, the most commonly used revision strategy used by students in both content-focused and form-focused feedback was the *closely followed* strategy. When a student used a closely followed revision strategy, it means he had understood the teacher's comments, or he followed the comments closely without really understanding why the teacher made such comments. The latter situations could be found frequently occurring when students revised form-focused feedback on their composition. This is synonymous to Hyland's (2001) view that states most of them followed closely the feedback given without really understanding the rules of grammar that were

needed when revising their composition.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1 Written feedback should be complemented with oral feedback so that the teacher would be able to get to the problems that students face when rewriting their compositions.
- 2 Research should be undertaken to find out the difficulties of the students in not incorporating feedback on their revised draft.

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