

# Enhancing Students' Motivation by Providing Feedback on Writing: The Case of International Students from Thailand

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**Abstract**—This paper mainly investigates on providing feedback to the students' writing in giving fresh impetus and motivation to produce better writing during the SUC-ES Camp. Summer Camp – English for Survival is specifically organized by Department of International Language of UniMAP which involved 34 International students from Thailand. The aim of this camp is to foster language appreciation and motivation in English language. This study examined the impact of feedback to the students' writing during the SUC-ES camp which had been carried out for 12 days at UniMAP. The researcher had conducted the interviews with the instructors of the camp, class observation and analyzed the students' portfolio using a scoring sheet adapted from Arnold (1991) and Tompkins (2004) which is designed for the native-speaking classrooms. It was found that the feedback provided to the students' writing gave a significant impact and increased the students' level of motivation in writing. Consequently, the findings revealed that the students showed the great enthusiasm and motivation to write in English even though some of them were lack of vocabulary and proficiency in English language. The participants responded well to the direct feedback that was constructive and formative given by the instructors (researcher) throughout the camp. The meaningful feedback provided encouraged and motivated them to write and produce good writing.

**Index Terms**—Feedback, language, motivation, writing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feedback is one of the essential facets in inspiring the students' motivation in language learning specifically in writing. Ellis (2009) indicated that in both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. Enhancing the students' motivation in writing is not an easy task for the instructors as they need to know the best way on how to tackle the students' interest especially for the foreign language class. As a matter of fact, English is considered as a foreign language to Thais. Wiriyaichitra (2002) points out that Thais' level of English proficiency is low and has a poor command of English in comparison with many countries in Asia. Hence, the main purpose of the students from Walailak University joining this camp was to improve their English language proficiency to be more competent and motivate them in mastering English language. The Department of International Languages from

UniMAP has taken the task to design an English camp which its main concern is to foster English language and enhance the students' motivation. The four skills of language namely listening, speaking, reading and writing were the main focus of this course.

This study is an action research project which describes the impact of feedback provided to the students to foster their motivation in writing during English language lesson. Feedback can give powerful effect in motivating the students to improve and produce good writing. A substantial amount of work has been published about giving feedback on writing in foreign language classrooms (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Simpson, 2006; McGarrel & Verbeem, 2007; Ellis; 2009) and it has been pointed out that feedback is crucial to support the students' writing and boost up their level of motivation. In fact, feedback is an influential tool to encourage and develop the students' writing skill especially to the lower proficiency students. Receiving feedback from the instructors directly during the writing process in the classroom will assist the students to expand the idea which will give a great impact to the students' writing. Many researchers and instructors acknowledge that incorporating feedback and positive comments will assist the students for the improvement in their writing. For instance, Afshin, Reza and Mohammad Soury (2011) have voiced out their view that adult language learners need to be corrected directly to avoid fossilization and continue developing linguistic competence. They also pointed out that students expect teacher correction on their written errors and believe them helpful. Additional support from Simpson (2006) also mentions that the feedback on the content and organization does help the students to improve the quality of their writing. Glover and Brown (2006) in their study indicated that feedback is effective if students act on it to improve their future work and learning. Brophy (2003) summarizes that student need specific, detailed feedback concerning both the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. Teachers should be prepared to provide the meaningful feedback if the students cannot perform in the writing task well.

It is interesting to note that motivation also plays such an important role on the development of the students' writing as it is a driving force for them to write in a meaningful way. A growing body of researchers has stated that motivation is the most significant factor which can determine the success in foreign language learning. For instance, Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc (2007) cited from Gardner (1960) stated that the motivational factor is characterized by a strong drive to learn the language and determined achievement in L2. Gardner (2001) pointed out, in a series of his studies presenting

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motivation as a dynamic construct, with integrative motivation as its centre whereby the students' emotional and contextually influenced identification with the target cultural group and have positive attitude to L2 learning. Lo and Hyland (2007) highlighted that motivation is influenced by learners' sense of agency and feelings of mastery and control over the learning activity and their interest in it. Hence, it is essential for the instructor to identify the factor that can assist the students in enhancing their self-motivation especially in writing task. Duppenhtaler (2002) quoted from Holmes and Moulton (1997) also mentioned that "through responding to the content of students' writing and not correcting errors, teachers can...[control] affective variables that affect the writer's motivation. The researcher believes that providing feedback is a suitable strategy that can attract the students to focus on the writing tasks and feel motivated to continue improving their piece of writing. In order to make the students motivating during the lesson, the instructors have specifically designed and prepare the writing lesson which can captivate the students' interest in writing. The writing tasks provide the opportunities for the students to write pertaining on their experiences throughout the camp. Hence, it is crucial to design the writing tasks that can encourage and motivate the students to complete the specific writing task given.

This study examines the impact of the feedback to the students' writing from the instructor- researcher' perspectives and fosters their motivation level in the writing skill throughout the SUC-ES camp.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Background

The respondents for this study were from Walailak University, Thailand from different program of study and background. Initially the students took an entrance test prior to the course to determine their level of proficiency. The participants for this camp had been divided respectively into two groups which are beginner and intermediate according to their performance in the test. The researcher had chosen three students from the beginner class and the other two from intermediate to become the respective respondents for this study.

In this study, the researcher employs the qualitative method by conducting the action research project to the students. The students' writing is assessing by using a scoring sheet adapted from Arnold (1991) and Tompkins (2004) which is designed for the native-speaking classrooms focusing on three facets of Content, Organization and Language. The module and tasks designed for the camp had been earlier prepared by the researcher herself as well as the other instructors in the camp which is generally emphasizing on the four vital skills in English language which are speaking, listening, reading and writing. The time allocated for each skill is 2 hours per lesson and for the writing lesson; the topics being covered were based on their experiences throughout the camp. In addition, the researcher had also designed the writing tasks which related to the real audience whereby the students might use the audience from their family members, friends as well as others in their writing. Lo

and Hyland (2007) also suggested the same concept of writing for a real audience, with the audience being gradually widened from the students' classmates, to their friends and family, and finally to the general public. The researcher also conducted the interview with the other instructors of the camp to after the lessons to obtain the information of the students.

### B. Lessons

The first writing lesson assigned to the students was simple where they had to write about themselves and surprisingly, the respondents constructed only few short sentences. Fig.1 displayed the respondent's writing describing of themselves. From the students' piece of writing, it has been identified that the respondents have either no motivation or interests in the English writing lesson. Hence, the researcher had identified and further explored the issue of lack of motivation in writing and attempted to resolve it by providing the positive immediate feedback to the students' writing in order to improve and boost up the student's motivation in writing task.

### C. Change the Way of Teaching by Providing Immediate Feedback

For the next writing lessons, the researcher had taken the initiative to apply the immediate feedback approach to the students whilst they were completing the individual task given. When the respondents were in the middle of completing their task, the researcher observed them and assisted them by giving the immediate feedback to their writing. Obviously, the researcher was satisfied with the students as they gave the positive response to the feedback by producing better content in writing.

Furthermore, the researcher also provided the tasks that were relevant to the experiences that they gained in the camp as it was easy for them to make connections as some of the students were really weak in English language.

## III. DATA ANALYSIS

The data from this study was outlined from classroom observation, interviews and students' writing. I started to observe the students' writing in the beginning writing class and noticed that most of the students were weak in writing despite they have the thought and ideas in their mind. Furthermore, they could not express them well in written form. Thus, I have changed my method of teaching by giving the comment and feedback to the students and the following evidences emerged from the data collected.

### A. Findings

#### 1) Students became more motivated and active in class

Through classroom observation, it is noticed that five respondents had little motivation to write or complete the exercise given. During the first lesson, the task was purposely designed to elicit the response on the students' background information. Nevertheless, it seemed that the students did not perform well in writing in spite of the task was easy. Hence, direct feedback was used to the students for the next lesson in order to boost up their motivation.

In the next class, students were provided feedback and comments specifically on the content to the respondents'

writing. One of the ways in giving feedback is by providing an example for them to expand the ideas that they had in their mind and it was so interesting to see that they could relate their experiences with the topic related. For instance, they were able to convey the idea in making the comparison between their country and Malaysia in their writing. One student wrote his experience in the task of "The most interesting activity":

It has many interesting things that belong to king of Malaysia. I knew that Thailand's history is related to Malaysia's history. I could learn more Malaysia's history from Mr Shariff (one of the instructors in English camp).

Another mentioned that this camp had taught English a lot which linked to the topic of "Biggest hope or improvement":

I'm sure that my English is now better when I'm in Malaysia. Anyway, I'm quite afraid that when I get back to Thailand, I cannot improve my English so fast as when I'm in Malaysia.

After a few lessons conducted, an amazing change took place to the students' writing after the comments on their writing in term of improving the coherence and the presentation of ideas. It is visible that the students were feeling more motivated on the task given and passionately asking me to give comments on the contents of their writing. Srichayachon (2012) cited from Ferris (1997) also acknowledges that the respondents in his study were eager to obtain the teacher comments in their writing and were frustrated if this did not happen. Similarly, Miceli (2006) indicated that the students preferred the feedback as it assisted them to avoid repeating the same error, trigger visual memory and offer a feeling of a security by its provision of exact information about errors and correct alternatives.

Additionally, the students were also active in discussing with me and their friends pertaining on the ideas that appropriate related to the topic given and it was a sign that they were motivated in compared to the first class before. It seemed that the students accepted the feedback provided positively without any hesitance and motivated in producing the good writing. Simpson (2006) in her study also obtained the same finding where her students were feeling more motivated about writing and a few students pointed out that the comments on content would be the best way for them to improve as writers.

### 2) Students lack of English vocabularies

In addition, it is noticed that the other aspect that contributes to the students unmotivated in writing was lack of vocabulary. When the students were completing the task being assigned, it could be seen that they were facing with the difficulties in constructing the sentences and some of them continuously asking their friend to translate the meaning of the words from their native language (Thais) to English. Moreover, they also voiced this matter out in their writing. An extract from one of the respondents from the topic "Letter to friend":

I learned English in this camp. Sometimes, it's difficult for me because I don't have many vocabularies in English. I try to remember the new words and try to play activities with friends.

Hence, in solving this particular problem, the students were encouraged to look up the words in the dictionary when they were constructing the sentences and assisted them along

the way. They were also asked them to bring the dictionary along every time they attended the class so that they can refer to the dictionary instead of pestering other students during the lesson. It was evident that their effort was fruitful as they were improving in term of gaining new vocabularies through their writing when I marked them.

### 3) Interviews with instructors

The interviews were carried out with the two instructors of the camp to elicit their response concerning of the providing feedback approach to the students during the lesson. They also shared the same point of views with me by stating that the students demonstrated the good progress in writing after they gave the comment to the content of writing. They also expressed their great feelings as the students have shown improvement in motivation toward writing and enjoyed the writing tasks. They acknowledged the importance of providing feedback and comment given to the students as the students felt more confident to convey their ideas and thought in written form.

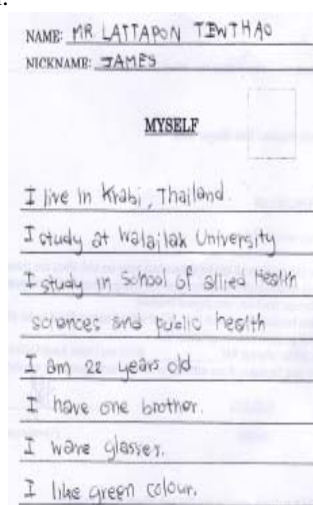


Fig. 1. Student's writing before receiving the feedback

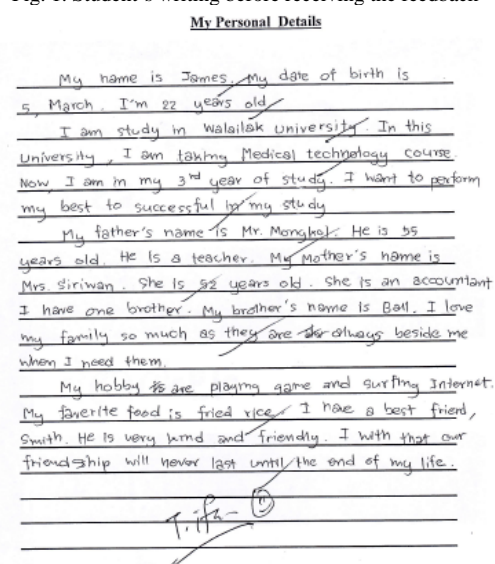


Fig. 2. Student's writing after receiving the feedback vng the feedback

### 4) Impact on students' writing

Analysis of the focused student' writings have proven that the students have been motivated to write and expand the ideas clearly after receiving the feedback from the instructors. In order to assess the writing, I had adapted and utilized the scoring sheet from Arnold (1991) and Tompkins (2004) in

Appendix A. It can be seen from the sample of writings that the constructive and immediate feedback have enhanced the students' writing convention and assisted them to communicate their ideas effectively for audiences.

Fig. 1 revealed the sample of the student's writing before receiving the feedback from the instructor whereas Fig. 2 was evidence that the student was motivated to convey the thought after received the feedback during the lesson.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

In terms of motivation in writing, the data in this study revealed that the impact of incorporating immediate feedback have changed the students' behaviour as they became more motivated and have great enthusiasm to accomplish their goals in writing after the instructors provide comment to the content of their writing as well as reward such as praise to them. The reward also plays the vital role as it can nurture the students' self-confidence in writing and give a positive impact to them.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the focused students whom received the immediate feedback on content made short-term improvement in writing. It is really effective to the students as they can obtain the ample amount of language input from the instructor's feedback. Hence, they are able to improve their language proficiency in writing as well as foster the motivation in writing skill. In addition, Gue'nette (2007) cited from Fathman and Whalley (1990) reported that students who received the feedback on content showed gains in formal accuracy. Simpson (2006) cited from Semke (1984) also indicated that the students who received comments on content wrote much more than students who received grammatical corrections. Wiltse (2002) also supported by stating that instructor's feedback can inspire and motivate students to work harder on improving their writing.

Moreover, by incorporating the immediate feedback, the students would experience the process of writing as the instructor addresses directly the strength and weakness of the content of writing to them plus it can keep the students on the right track. Turner (2004) in her study stated that all students agreed that the feedback was there in order to help them improve or identify strengths and weaknesses of their essays. Vengadasamy (2002) also emphasized that students need to know when they are doing something right and teaching students to write involves pointing out the strengths as well as weaknesses. Therefore, the students would be able to think and identify their strength and weaknesses in writing, revise and develop their skill of writing.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, incorporating feedback in writing is an effective approach in writing lesson as it can foster the students' motivation, improve their language proficiency as well as promote their great achievement in writing performance. Instructors need to offer the suggestive feedback and identify the potential areas in writing in order to ensure that the students can develop their skills and gain the beneficial experience to become better writers.

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