

FEEDBACK STRATEGIES: AN EFFORT TO ENHANCE THE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS OF *DAF* LEARNERS IN INDONESIA

Primardiana Hermilia Wijayati^{1*}, Dewi Kartika Ardiyani¹, Edy Hidayat¹
¹*Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia*

*Corresponding author: primardiana.hermilia.fs@um.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the strategy of providing feedback to improve the critical thinking skills of or German as foreign language (GFL) learners in Indonesia. The research data were collected through observations and interviews with German students and lecturers at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia and presented descriptively qualitatively with observation and interview instruments. The results showed that asking questions to students, providing comments, encouraging output, and giving praise are the feedback strategies that can improve students' critical thinking skills. Lecturers provide several questions that lead them to think and answer these questions. The questions should be given to all students in the class, so that students gradually are encouraged to be more active. Through those feedback strategies, learners are triggered to memorize, understand, apply, analyze, reformulate and evaluate the learnt materials. All those strategies are implemented to lead the students to a better critical thinking skill. It is recommended that lecturers apply more types of feedback so that students have more opportunities to improve their language skills.

Keywords: critical thinking skill, feedback strategies, German learners

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INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking has become one of the main education goals in this 21st century as the trend in the global market also requires graduates to be able to apply critical thinking skills to work settings. Education in general should then be geared towards the development of students' critical thinking. Critical thinking refers to students' ability to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). In the context of language teaching in particular, in addition to developing students' skills in using the language, language teachers need to build up their critical thinking. The language being learned should eventually function for students as a tool for communication as well as a tool for thinking critically and for solving problems (Cummins, Baker & Hornberger, 2001; Tapper, 2004; Živković, 2016). Equipped with such skills, students might later be able to collaborate harmoniously, think critically and analytically, communicate effectively, and solve problems efficiently in the workplace.

In order to develop students' critical thinking skills, teachers have been advised to design teaching materials and learning activities which can promote elements of critical thinking skills (Živković, 2016). In other words, language teachers need to regularly and

explicitly teach their students ways how to think critically through their teaching and learning materials and activities. One of the ways to improve students' critical thinking skills is by guiding students to use feedback strategies (Retna & Cavana, 2013). Feedback is crucial input for learning that is openly delivered to persons or groups as responses to or interpretations of their behaviors (Reich, 2008; Wilkening, 2016). Feedback in learning can guide students to close the gap between their current performance and the desired performance (Retna & Cavana, 2013). Besides, positive feedback can have a significant impact on learning outcomes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Young, 2000). In this case, feedback is provided not to assess student performance, but to improve the quality of learning and performance. Additionally, when students are skillful in using feedback, they have the potentials to learn how to assess their own performance in the future.

Lyster and Ranta (2013) have developed six types of feedback used by teachers to respond to students' errors; they are: (1) Explicit correction, which refers to the explicit provision of the correct form, as the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student has said is incorrect; (2) Recasts, which involve the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error; (3)

Clarification requests, used when students' utterance has not been understood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way, so a repetition or a reformulation is required; (4) Metalinguistic feedback, which contains a comment, information, or question-related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without teachers explicitly providing the correct form; (5) Elicitation, referring to a technique that teachers use to elicit the correct form from students directly. Teachers elicit completion of their utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to "fill in the blank."; (6) Repetition, which refers to the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance. In most cases, teachers adjust their intonation to highlight the error (Lyster & Ranta, 2013; Muhsin, 2016). In the Indonesian context, (Ratnah, 2013) found that the types of feedback which have been often used by teachers are (1) praises, (2) affirmation, (3) repetition or echoing, (4) recasts, (5) clarification requests, (6) elicitation, (7) explicit correction, and (8) prompting.

Feedback enables teachers and students to get engaged in dialogues about what distinguishes successful performance from unsuccessful one as they can intensively discuss certain expected criteria and standards (Limbach et al., 2008; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). As also highlighted by Isnawati, et. al (2019) written feedback which was followed with interactions between teachers and students may lead to students' better understanding of feedback. Several research studies on feedback strategies in learning have revealed some important findings. At a university in California, Won, et al. (2019) conducted a classroom action research to explore students' perceptions of feedback. One of the results is that all the students communicated a positive feeling about the usefulness of feedback. Besides, feedback helps to increase students' learning performance. In addition, a study in a university in South Korea analyzed factors affecting student satisfaction with feedback implementation in science classes (Cho & Baek, 2019). One of the affecting factors is feedback provision in class. The result shows that feedback positively affects student satisfaction, they need to be especially in a laboratory class compared to a theory one.

In Thailand, the critical thinking skills of university students were promoted through peer feedback activity in an online discussion forum (Ekahitanond, 2013). The result shows that the application of the critical inquiry model and peer feedback strategy can promote critical thinking skills. Similarly, a study conducted in the Indonesian context indicated students' acknowledgment that feedback given by university teachers had a positive impact on improving student learning (Wijayati, 2014). Through the feedback, the

students can find out the aspects of their weaknesses, become more open-minded, know the progress of their learning, feel guided in making work improvements, and become more confident. The students seem to feel satisfied when their weaknesses are shown and when corrective suggestions are offered to them. Furthermore, research about feedback in New Zealand showed that feedback helps students to improve their learning and produce better performance and achievement (Retna & Cavana, 2013). Feedback not only clarifies what is expected from students but also improves students' self-confidence and positive self-esteem. Our previous research findings have indicated that many students were suffering from stress and a certain kind of anxiety which lead them to be passive in the class and to rely too much on lecturers and class meetings (Wijayati, et al. 2018). Such a suffering might have been caused by several factors, such as the flat expression of lecturers' face when students speak or answer questions (Wijayati, et al. 2018) or certain ways lecturers employ in giving feedback on student academic performance (Aina & Wijayati, 2019). The learners' dependency on lecturers in the learning process needs to be gradually reduced. They need to be encouraged to be more independent and think critically. Thus, we need to explore strategies that can enhance students' critical thinking, particularly students of *Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF)* or German as a Foreign Language.

Feedback strategies appear most relevant as they have the potentials to promote university students' critical thinking as proven by Ekahitanond (2013) through the use of online discussion forum as well as to train students in critically reflecting on their weaknesses (Wijayati, 2014). The finding that students did not know their weaknesses is a proof that they have less feedback in the class. They need to be led to realize their weaknesses in certain language skills through feedback from lecturers. Even though, we have to consider the way of giving feedback, because as stated before, certain ways lecturer employ in giving feedback could cause students' stresses (Aina & Wijayati, 2019). Besides, there is still less study about feedback related to critical thinking skill, especially in *DaF* context in Indonesia. This present study is intended to explore how lecturers of *DaF* provide various types of feedback in order to develop their students' critical thinking. As studies on feedback strategies for *DaF* students are still few in number, the results of this present study can provide empirical data concerning the utilization of feedback strategies for the development of critical thinking. It also offers various strategies of giving feedback that can be used by teachers or lecturers in language classes.

data collection was conducted from 9 September 2019 to 31 October 2019. The data was taken from the learning processes in the German Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM). The classes being

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive research design, meant to describe various types of feedback that can enhance students' critical thinking. The instruments used were observation and interview guidelines. The

observed were *Deutsch I* (2 classes), *Konversation I* (2 classes), *Deutsch auf B2 Niveau* (2 classes), and *Freier Vortrag* (1 class). Each class was observed six times, once a week. The focus of the observation was to identify various feedback strategies that the lecturers used in the classes in order to develop their students' critical thinking.

In addition to observations in the classroom, the data were collected through interviews with the lecturers and the students to crosscheck the data that had been collected through observations. The selection of the students to be interviewed was determined based on those who were responding to the feedback given by lecturers in order to explore the follow-up information they had done after receiving the feedback.

The research data were analyzed by using content analysis techniques (Krippendorf, 2004), sorted into components that show the same aspects under investigation, that is, the types of feedback provided by lecturers to be analyzed further to examine the feedback potentials to develop the students' critical thinking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The strategy of providing feedback in the learning process can lead learners to think critically. The results of this study reveal that GFL lecturers used various feedback strategies in the classes, as shown in the following figure:

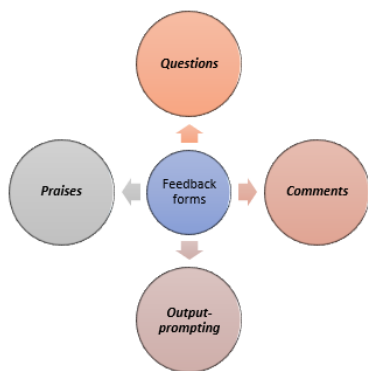


Figure 1. Strategies that are presented or used

Feedback through Questions

Giving question is one type of metalinguistic feedback strategies (Lyster & Ranta, 2013) that is given by the lecturer in the class. The questions were delivered in plenary class so that the other students could listen or evaluate the answer to the question; the lecturers could also evaluate whether the students understood the material well or check if other students paid attention to their classmates' answers. Following data are examples of the questions raised by the lecturer.

1. „Was macht man im *Feierabend*? Wann habt ihr *Feierabend*?“ (What are people doing during *afterwork*? When do you have *afterwork*?)

The question above was addressed in the class hoping any students who knew the answer would explain it so that all the other students would understand the term *Feierabend*. This question also led the students to associate the theme with their own experiences.

2. *Warum im Herbst machen die Leute Fotos?* (Why do people take photos in autumn?)

In this sample question, the students are required to think critically about the reasons why many people in Germany take photos in the fall or why they think that Germans do that. The students were indirectly asked to analyze and find out the reasons for the question.

Feedback in the form of questions used by lecturers is also related to the grammar and vocabulary mastering such as the following data:

3. *Was ist "beschweren"?* (what is *beschweren*?)
4. *Was ist der Unterschied zwischen als und wenn?* (What is the difference between "wenn" and "als")

That question tests the students' grammar knowledge and evaluates if they have truly mastered the material they have learned. Through this kind of feedback, they can enrich and strengthen their language knowledge.

The lecturers use the feedback strategies through questions aimed at correcting the use of words and sentences by the students as well as to provoke their responses. Regarding feedback through questions, according to Ellis (2009), lecturers can use feedback through questions so that learners can find out what was wrong. Questions can aim to correct learners' errors and to test learners' knowledge about German vocabulary and structure.

Giving feedback through questions is useful both for the lecturers and the students. The lecturers can simply self-evaluate whether they already transfer the knowledge well or not and know how far the learners receive it. At the same time, students can self-evaluate whether they already understand a particular structure or vocabulary they have learned or not and even learn something new; in this case, they have not learned it yet. It strengthens one of the research findings from (Won et al., 2019) that feedback is useful and it also can increase learning performance. It could be seen from the student's response of an interview in the following data.

5. "If there is new vocab, sometimes the lecturer writes it on the board and asks us what does it mean or if anybody knows this word. Thus, we look forward about that word and its function or how we should apply it in a sentence".

From that statement it could be seen that learners are having process to think and get a new information about particular vocabulary and learn even more about the structure.

The questions that are delivered as feedback from the lecturers are guiding the learners to think critically. Through questions from data 3, the learners need to recall their prior knowledge. It belongs to the first stage of critical thinking skills based on 21st Revised Taxonomy Bloom (Anderson & Krathwohl,

2001), *remembering*. There, the learners are required to recall and remember the information. The second stage, *understanding*, can be seen from data 1. The question on data 1 leads learner to explain ideas or concepts. The third stage, *applying*, can be found on data 5. Through lecturers' questions, learners are provoked to know certain information more and then apply it in a sentence. The process itself (looking forward about the meaning of the word and its function, and then apply it in a sentence with their own version) shows that this question leads learners to use information in a new way, which belongs to the stage *applying* as well. The fourth stage, *analyzing*, is shown by data 4. Through that question, the learners are required to distinguish the difference of certain language structure. Data 2 also shows the stage of *analyzing*, because it leads learners to develop their awareness of context and they are expected to imagine, to share their experiences as well as their opinion and to think independently.

Feedback through comments

Giving comment, also as one of metalinguistic feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 2013), is intended so that learners can understand the material taught in a proper context. Comments are given as a form of confirmation that what learners have done is correct or not. The following data are some examples of situations, in which comments are delivered.

6. The learners made a poster about common activities of certain season in Germany and presented it together with their group in front of the class. The lecturer gave comments about the poster look from each group and confirmed its content.
7. Lecturer gave a comment on a presentation from the learners about German local food, confirmed its content, and then explained it further and compared it to Indonesian local food.

Through those kinds of feedback, the lecturer guides learners to imagine and compared the information they already have with the information they get from lecturer. The lecturer also invites the learners to understand the context of the material through comments such as the following data:

8. The lecturer responds to the student's presentation that the preposition "nach" is not appropriate use to refer to the place referred to in the sentence. Example: *Ich gehe nach Park*. (I am going to the park).
9. The lecturer corrects the inaccurate sentence from "Er geht nach Hause" (I am going home) to "Ich bin zu Hause" (I am home.)

Those kinds of feedback aim to confirm whether the learners' answers are correct or not. Not only confirmative, but comments can also be corrective. This type of comment is given to complete and correct incomplete sentences and refine them so that they are correct and understandable. The following are examples of lecturers giving comments.

10. A learner made a mistake using conjunction "denn" in a sentence. As that learner finish the sentence, the lecturer commented, "Repeat it. If we use *denn*, then the verb stands normal (in the second position of the sentence, not in the end of it), repeat it, please".
11. A learner made a mistake using preposition "zu". After the presentation, the lecturer commented on that and explained the structure of *zu + Dativ*.

In this study, learners are getting feedback through comments. The comments in this study are delivered verbally and face to face. It is different with the study from (Al-Bashir, et al. 2016) which are giving feedback through comments as well. Both studies are online-based. Cavanaugh and Song (2014) offered comments through written and audio feedback, while (Al-Bashir et al., 2016) study that suggested comments as feedback in a various ways such as through email, audio and video, screencasts, and recycling written comments.

Comments as feedback are mostly given after the learners presented or finished a task. It leads learners to evaluate their work and their understanding which is the fifth stage of critical thinking according to 21st revised taxonomy bloom (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). It also provokes learners to make their work better.

Feedback through output-prompting

The strategy of giving feedback through output-prompting is related to corrective feedback (Ratnah, 2013). Hinkel (2011) also present findings regarding to corrective feedback. In the research findings, as well as the result of the study conducted by Wijayati (2014), learners almost always show expressions in order to be given corrective feedback by lecturers. It is also found in this research, where the learners expect corrective feedback from the lecturer as follows.

1. "...if we do mistakes, we should be corrected
2. "...correct us if there is grammar mistake which are quite fatal and dominant while speaking.
3. "When I'm making mistakes, I have to be corrected".

Corrective feedback both oral and written is effective because it increases language acquisition in terms of linguistics. The positive effect of corrective feedback is that learners can use language knowledge learned implicitly and explicitly. Implicit in this case is that learners understand the meaning and the use of language unplanned, whereas what is meant explicitly is learners use language that has been learned and after they got feedback by the lecturer with caution and planned (Hinkel, 2011). However, we should consider the way we provide corrective feedback, whether it should be given directly or indirectly, because each has certain impact.

According to some studies on second language acquisition, indirect feedback is more preferable to direct, because it involves learners in the correction process which may help them foster their long-term acquisition of the target language feedback (Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Robert, 2001; O'Sullivan &

Chambers, 2006; Sheen, 2007). While Mahfoozifard and Mehdiabadi (2016) argued that indirect feedback is more effective compared to direct feedback. In this study, most learners are glad to get indirect feedback because it does not push the learners and drop their mental health.

Many learners worldwide suffer fear of negative feedback (Awan, et al. 2010; Barahmeh, 2013; Fischer & Modena, 2005; Nazir, et al. 2014). One of examples from negative feedback is giving corrective feedback directly. Thus, lecturers use output-prompting as one of feedback strategies such as following data

4. "...if there was something wrong, (the lecturer) lets us to speak freely and then corrects it".
5. "...the lecturer) was not directly lecturing, prompting first, ... we were not immediately corrected but we were given the opportunity to think as well".

It is called output-prompting feedback because they withhold the correct form and invite self-correction (Li, 2018). Output-prompting is a form of indirect corrective feedback and positive feedback that can encourage learners to keep learning and increase their skills. Following data show some examples of output-prompting:

6. The lecturer prompts a learner to reformulate a sentence, as she forgot the subject and verb in a sentence. "*Die Frau...*". *Die Frau fährt im Frühling nach Hamburg.*"("The woman...". "The woman goes in spring to Hamburg")
7. As learner made mistake to use the word *Student*, the lecturer tried to correct it through prompting, "*Er ist Student oder er ist Studenten?*"("He is student or he is students?")

From those data it could be seen that the lecturers do not give the learners direct feedback. The lecturers give the learners a chance to make self-correction. The self-correction itself contains a complex process which reflects the critical thinking skills. The learners have to recall and memorize, understanding the idea or concepts, apply it in a new sentence, analyze and then evaluate (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Zapalka, et al. 2018).

This study shows us that feedback strategies in the classroom can be used as alternative strategies as an effort to enhance learners' critical thinking skills. It is supporting the result study conducted by (Ekahitanond, 2013) which states that university learners' critical thinking skills can be promoted through peer feedback activity. The difference was that study was in an online discussion forum and the feedback was a peer-feedback, while the feedback in this study is face to face in the classroom from the lecturers to the learners. In Addition, as the research findings conducted by (Retna & Cavana, 2013) and (Wijayati, 2014), the result of this study also reveals that feedback strategy has a positive impact to the learning process. Feedback helps the learners to improve their learning and produce better performance and achievement.

Feedback through Praises

Praises are also given by the lecturers as a strategy of giving feedback to the learners in the classroom. Praising is a form of approval expressions to show learners that they have done the task properly. Praising is also a form of lecturer's appreciation because the learners have completed the task as expected by the lecturers. Usually the praise is in the form of phrases or expressions like:

8. Gut! (good!)
9. Sehr good! (very good)
10. Super! No problem! (super! no problem!)
11. Perfekt! (perfect!)
12. Alle sind richtig! (all of them are correct!)

Praises are used as motivation that can improve learner's performance in the classroom and motivate learners to talk in the class. In this study, the lecturers appreciate the answers to both the correct and wrong answers. Various praises given by the lecturers in class are as follows.

13. The lecturer praises "danke schön, gut!" (thank you so much, good!) as the learner presents dialogues about unique houses in Germany even if the learner still made some grammar mistakes.
14. As a learner said *das ist kein Buch, sondern eine Mappe*, the lecturer complimented, "*Sehr gut, am 1. Semester benutzt er "sondern"* (very good, in the first semester he already uses the word "sondern")
15. "*Ich glaube alle haben versucht Deutsch zu sprechen. Das ist schon gut. Vielleicht noch Fehler ist kein Problem. Fehler ist menschlich. Sie sind noch am 3. Semester. Das ist sehr gut. Ich bin stolz auf euch*". (I think everybody tried to speak in German. It's good. Maybe some mistakes are okay. Doing mistake is human. You are still in the third semester. It's pretty good! already. I'm proud of you)

From the learner's perception, praise is the most pleasure feedback that boost their motivation and willingness to perform better. The result of the interview show that all learners are happy to get praise-feedback and they even need it, so that they are more motivated and not feeling down. It could be seen from students' responses from an interview as follows.

16. "...Praise can also give encouragement rather than (mental) dropping or just telling mistakes without being rewarded with praise".
17. "...during our presentation we were praised *super* or *sehr gut*".
18. "I want to get more praise from lecturers when we have courage to answer, (the praise) like the phrase "good" because we feel more appreciated.
19. "What I want for me and others after presentation, even though the presentation was not good, we were praised first and then criticized".

The expected feedback of learners in improving understanding in the lecture is input that motivates and does not drop their mental. Lecturers are expected to show the strengths of the presentations first, then

provide a solution to the weaknesses of the presentations.

About praise as feedback, Grief and Breckwoldt (2012) stated that praise was included in the minimal feedback because lecturer only gave praise with the aim of appreciating learners. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the role of praise “only” as a compliment. We should consider the effect of the praise to the learners. Praise is a powerful tool for improving academic performance and it can promote a warm and lovely mood in classrooms (Al-Ghamdi, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, one of the strategies of giving feedback that can lead learners to think critically is throwing questions to learners. Questions given by lecturers aim to correct errors in the use of words and sentences by learners and provoke learners' responses. In addition to giving questions to learners, feedback strategies are provided through comments. Giving feedback through comments is aimed to improve language acquisition in terms of linguistics. Both of them are a form of metalinguistic feedback that can be a trigger to learners to think more critically. Besides, output-prompting is also used by lecturer as one of feedback strategies to enhance learners' critical thinking skills, while giving feedback through praise can motivate learners to improve their ability to continue learning in the classroom. Through those feedback strategies, learners are triggered to remember, understand, apply, analyze, and evaluate. All those strategies appear to lead the students in the end to create, which reflects the critical thinking skill taxonomy.

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