

## EVALUATION OF TEACHING METHODS USED IN A CLASS OF WRITING THROUGH OBSERVATION

Ahmad Mohammad Taye

Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages  
University Utara MALAYSIA.

### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to evaluate methods of teaching that was used by a teacher in a writing class to teach senior students how to write a letter. The lesson was evaluated through observation notes (see appendix). Many of points were investigated such as description of the lesson, management of tasks, skills used in the class, teaching aids, commentaries on strengths and weakness of the methods used and the evaluator mentioned the way he would like to give the lesson in if he were the instructor.*

**Keywords:** Teaching methods, Writing, Observation

### INTRODUCTION

**Class Profile:** The numbers of the students in the class were twenty five Students; aged between 20 – 22 years old. There are eighteen females and seven males. All of the students are high level. They are Malaysian except one Chinese guy.

Business and professional communication course is based on theories designed to high proficiency level students to enable them communicate formally through learning how to write and respond to formal letter, report speech .....Etc. The class I observed (for 80 minutes) is based on a previous class through which the teacher explained to the students how to write a formal letter.

The experienced teacher, who has been working as a teacher for six years in field of teaching, uses the head projector on her explanation to view a sample of formal letter and analysis it.

**Course Description:** Business and professional communication course is an advanced level writing proficiency course which introduces students to the basics of formal writing in an integrated manner, using the modes of speaking, listening, reading and writing. However the main emphasis is on developing formal writing skills. Simple language task and activities help developing basic formal writing skills and lay the necessary foundation for confidence building in achieving writing proficiency. The course provides students with many opportunities for extensive writing language practice in a wide variety of social contexts and language situations.

The objective of this lesson was to enable students to write and reply to formal letters. For example, How to start, end and reply to a formal letter, formal

**Description of the Lesson:** There were many of methods that teacher used. Teacher starts lesson by using the principles of community language learning methods this in agreement with Larsen-freeman (2000) (community language learning principles) .This methods in fact reflects the mainly the relation between students and teacher and how it should be. Both teacher and students should exchange respectful and trustful relation. And create a suitable atmosphere for learning. This is represented in the lesson through greeting and asking students different kind of personal questions during the lesson, another kind of methods which teacher uses is communicative language teaching in which focuses on communicate

appropriately to build up speaking skills and to be reflected on other skills. Moreover, CLT is an appropriate locus for process of writing. The best way that enable students communicate during this method is to divide them up into groups and they present their works in front of the class (build up communication) this in agrees with Larsen-freeman (2000) (communicative language teaching principles). However, during the lesson, the teacher provides feedback by asking question based on the previous lesson. The salient technique which the teacher uses clearly was depending on the analyzing of the student's errors while they were presenting their works. All of us know the advantages stretch out beyond group work. The main method in which the teacher starts and ends the lesson is the principle of direct method this in consent with Larsen-freeman (2000). Which in turn make the target language is the only way to communicate mutually among students and the teacher. The teacher depends only on the reading techniques to find out the errors. The main important thing the students' interaction with each other and with the teacher this in agreement with direct method, community language learning communicative approach the free-man, (2002). The authentic materials which have been chosen help students to ability of use language inside and outside classroom.

**Skill:** The language used during the whole class was the target language this is one of the direct method principle Larsen-freeman (2000) (direct method principles).

During the lesson not only the writing skills focused on. The teacher focuses on the reading skill as well .in addition to listening skill (students are listening to the presenter while he was reading his letter.

**Teaching aids:** Concerning the teaching aids used in the classroom were restricted to the over head projector and she rarely use to white board. Teacher was depending on accomplishing the tasks of the lesson on dividing students into groups. On my point of view the diversities in teaching aids enhance the process of learning specially in the rigid materials are used .why she didn't provide students with more authentic material to make students understand much better. Even she didn't depend on the text book directly.

**Management of tasks:** In real there were too restricted in types of activities used during the class, since the types of the activities used were limited to two kinds only; reading to check for errors, and rewriting the letters after making correction. Brown (2001) states students learn to write in part by carefully observing what is already written. That is they learn by observing or reading the written texts.

Regarding motivation, it was well-formed and student's interaction was salient through asking and answering questions. Regarding correction, the teacher doesn't correct student directly, she prefers to use student-self correction. This is one of the principles of community language learning method and direct method. This way of correction is desirable and effective since it lead students to feel comfortable and secure to build up students' self-confidence. Freeman, (2000). (Community language learning principles) states that self correction facilitates language learning. Both teacher and the students communicate with each other verbally (instructions) and nonverbally (eye contact, facial expression, vocal aspect position and movement)

## COMMENTARIES ON STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF THE METHODS THE TEACHER USED STRENGTHS OF METHODS

The teacher was using the main principles of direct method since the communication from the beginning of the lesson to the end was in the target language, native language was not used .According to Larsen-freeman, (2000) in direct method principles, there is no translation

between the first language and the second language. Moreover, communication in target language is not only the one principles of direct method, but it is also considered as a main principle in CLT (Freeman, 2000). Other principles which the teacher used are the principles of community language learning due to her concern about the students feeling. Furthermore, the teacher didn't only care about students feelings but she was trying to build up a good relationship with her students as well. According to Larsen-freeman (2000), one of the community language learning principles states that building relationships is an important concept in creating positive energy in the class room. The other principle is communicative language teaching principle represented in group work which apply the principles of CLT in (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, CLT is not only fundamental in group work but is also effective in writing process as the learner depends on their own ability to develop their own ideas. According to Brown (2001) CLT is an appropriate locus for process of writing .as students are encouraged in reading to develop their own ideas, in addition , Larsen-freeman (2000) states that students should work with language at the discourse or supra sentential level. They must learn about cohesion and cohesive, and coherence. Working within group is an effective way of teaching according to one of CLT principle in Larsen-freeman (2000).it states that group work generates communicative interaction encourages cooperative relationship among students , offers an embracing affective climate, promotes learner responsibility and autonomy, and is step toward individualizing instruction. Using overhead projector is a kind of use technology (visual aids) in the classroom which facilitates learning process .According to Brown (2001) who claims that availability of the head projector enhances a text book lesson, offers stimulating visual input for students. Regarding The movement and position of the teacher between students, standing behind the student instead of standing in front of him, makes student feel secured and non- threatened, and enables him to learn more easily. According to Freeman (2000), the superior knowledge and power of the teacher can be threatening if the teacher doesn't remain in front of the classroom, the threat is reduced. Teacher indicates for students what they are going to do today

In respect of motivation, teacher motivates students and rewards them appropriately .This is in agreement with one of audio lingual method principle in Freeman (2000) which states that positive reinforcement helps the students to develop correct habits,(praise thanks, reinforcement) .in respect of to the student –teacher role during the learning process as we have seen ,the relation between the students and the teacher is mutual and they are like partners , In addition to neither of them is dominant. This is in agreement with the CLT, direct method and community language method in (Freeman, 2000). However, Brown (2001) asserts that the teacher should be facilitator and coach not an authoritative director and arbiter.

**In respect of the techniques (as a point of strength)** that the teacher uses to make correction for the students' errors in their letter was through reading. Connecting reading and writing is an effective way to learn students how to write different type of texts since they will get the relevant knowledge through reading according to Brown(2001) states students learn to write in part by carefully observing what is already written. That is they learn by observing or reading the written texts.

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There were varieties of techniques which the teacher uses such as asking different kinds of questions, and correction

Both teacher and the students communicate with each other verbally (instructions) and nonverbally (eye contact, facial expression, vocal aspect position and movement).

The teacher didn't evaluate students at the end of the lesson (mean evaluate their understanding of the lesson) due to the difference way of evaluation writing process which is not as similar as evaluation of other skills. According to Brown (2001), evaluation of writing is a thorny issue. If you are a guide and facilitators, how can you also be a judge? What do you judge?

The level of questions which students were expose to were factual (answer teacher question) and empirical information (analysis of the letter to find errors). Obviously, this course emphasizes on listening, writing, speaking and reading skills, but the main emphasis is on writing skill .The necessity for integrating the four skills is sometimes not necessary. According to Brown (2001), there are certain specific purposes for which students are studying English that may best be labeled by one of the four skills. Especially at the high intermediate to advanced level.

## WEAKNESS OF THE METHODS

Regarding the weakness points related to the lesson, .there was some points. Firstly the teacher begins the lesson without writing any kind of information on the board, (Date, Title, and Day) Secondly, The teaching aids which were restricted to the use of head projector and limited use of the white board. However, there are many teaching aids such as: wok sheets, samples of formal letter from other resources, writing letters that contains errors and ask student to find these errors in addition to workbooks. All of these aids can be used to enhance the learning process .According to Brown (2001) much of richness of language instruction is derived from supporting material.

No.	Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
1	There were no culture misunderstanding					0
2	The class understood what was wanted at all times					*
3	All instructions were clear					*
4	Every student was involved at some point				*	
5	All student were interested at the lesson					*
6	The teacher carried out comprehension check				*	
7	Materials and learning activities were appropriate				*	
8	Student grouping and sub grouping were appropriate		*			
9	Class atmosphere was positive				*	
10	There was teacher skill in organizing group work			*		
11	The pacing of the lesson was appropriate				*	
12	There was genuine communication				*	
13	Error correction and feedback was appropriate	*				
14	There was enough variety in the lesson				*	
15	The teacher didn't talk too much				*	
16	There were opportunity for controlled practice				*	
17	Students were enthusiastic					*
18	General classroom management was good					*

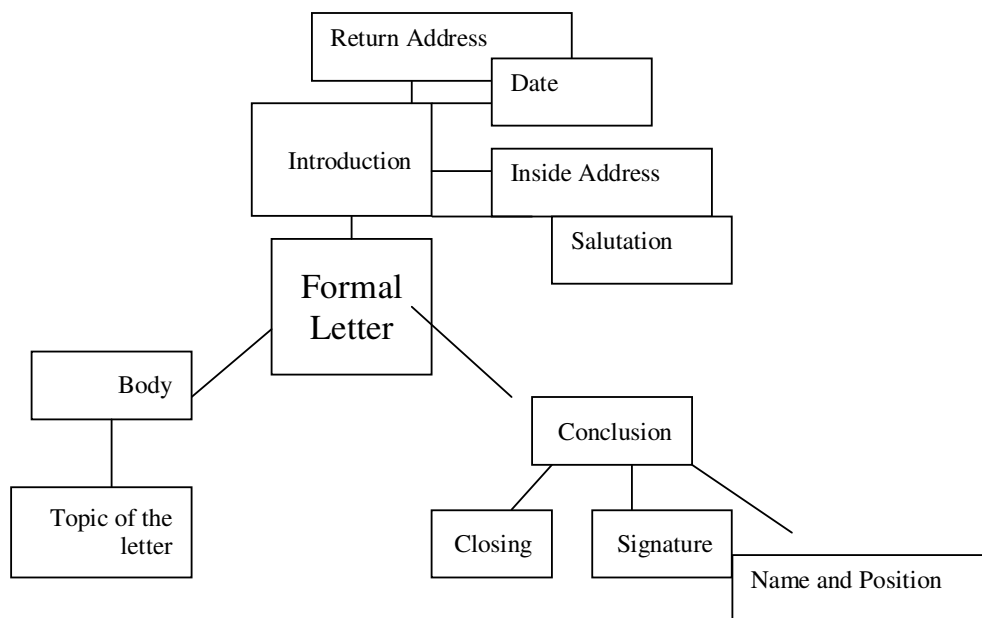
**Classroom observation checklist (from Nunan1988:147-48)**

1. Does not at all reflect what went on.
2. Only marginally reflects what went on.
3. Neutral.
4. Describe rather well what went on.
5. Is a totally accurate reflection of what went on.

The check list reflects for us the points of strengthens and weakness which the lesson involves. There are some activities conducted in the class such as: reading letters and making correction for the error, and rewriting the letter after make correction. Regarding a material which is used during the lesson, is just the student's book used indirectly in the classroom. There is no any supported material.

**If I were the instructor**

If I were a teacher I would begin the lesson by greeting the students and ask them some questions related to their life to less students' stress and make it enjoyable, for example asking the students about the weather or about themselves. I write down the main information which is necessary to indicate day date and lesson title. Then I may ask or write a question to which answer will guide us to begin our lesson. I would prefer to use process-oriented approach ( pre-writing re-writing) .After that I begin the lesson by writing the headline on the board then ask students to tell me what they know about formal writing .I write every word students utter on the board then start discussing each idea with students. (Brainstorm)



The aim of this method is to give the students main ideas of the lesson, and then ask the students about these ideas to encourage the students to speak in class. For example. When I set the idea on the board, I ask students general questions such as: Is the formal and informal letter included the same components? (Introduction- body- conclusion) to make students feel they have general idea about writing letter .What are kinds of the formal letters? To enable them differentiate between different types of formal letters .What is the main

difference between the formal and informal letter? This is to make them know how to start writing a formal letter.

After finishing discussion, I view a sample letter through power point and ask students to analyze its parts, and then I provide them with sample of sentences which is used to start writing formal letter. After that, I divide students into group and provide them with samples of a formal letter, and ask each group to analyze a specific part of these letters. (view it on power point to make editing easier (deleting, adding), After finishing, each group should exchange their works with other groups. then each group choose one person(of the group) to view their work and when the presenter exposes to any question after he read the sample letter, one of his group should answer this question. This is to ensure that all students work together. Later on, I ask students to open their books and discuss some activities related to the topic. I focus more on practice in the class because it will help the students to develop their skills; some students might not be familiar with the skills, since they may feel shy or threatened in formal situation (I mean they don't ask the teacher during the lesson). To avoid this situation and to encourage students express their own ideas, I like to be clear and easy going with students since I believe in "learning by trial and error". At the final stage of the lesson I will hand out to students other worksheets which include either sentences or phrases including errors related to formal and informal style and ask students to read these sentences or phrases and correct their errors then come out and write these sentences on the board after editing. After that I end the lesson by asking students to help each other and come out to the board and write a formal letter (main parts) related to what they have learnt Finally, I assign students two kinds of home works, one to be done in groups and the other to be done individually. These home works will enhance students learning of the new topic in the lesson explained by me, and by the participation of the students.

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## APPENDIX

**Classroom Observations Notes**

We enter the class together .the teacher smiles and greets her students as usual the students greet her too. She introduces me to the class and asks me to have seat I greet the student and have a seat at the back of the class. A teacher continues her talking with the class and asks them about their exams. after that the teacher asks students about the tasks they are going to accomplish that day .students seem eager to do the task since they start replying yes, yes, we have to present our works related to the writing of a formal letter.

Teacher asks question about the parts of the letter (what are the parts of the letter) students answer the question teacher enhance their answer (yes the introduction is the first part) and thanks them.

The students were divided into five groups .each group has appointed one person to present their job. The student of the first group comes out in front of the class and greets his classmates and views his sample letter through head projector. Student reads the letter (complaining letter) students pay attention to them. After he finishes reading students ask his classmates if they need any clarification. Some students raise their hands to ask question one student asks who should be addressed in this letter. The presenter replies the assistant manager another student says it should be a manger the teacher asks others what you think. Let's look at the letter (students look at letter carefully) after that another student raises his hand and says the manger, the teacher enhances his answer and says that's right thank you. Teacher comes across the letter, she asks students about the components of the letter and corrects an error (addresser name) that students made and asks them to cross it out. Students cross out the error. Teacher asks students if everything is clear, students say yes. After that teacher rewards and thanks student in a warm voice and ask the presenter of second group to come out in front of the class to present their sample letter. Then she asks question related to writing formal and informal letter. (How do we address a manger of accompany?) Students answer the questions teacher thanks them.

Student of the second group comes in front of the class greet his classmates' teacher and view her sample letter and reads it after the presenter of second group finishes his presentation. Teacher comes cross the letter and asks students about the content of this letter (complaining letter too) she asks about the problem written in the letter .students answer the question. one of the student who belongs to the presenter group ask questions about minimizing the problems written in the same letter .teacher thanks him for his question and ask if any one of students can answer the question one students answer the question teacher nods her head when student answer the question and reinforcement her. . Teacher asks question related to how end a formal letter before your sign it (faithfully or sincerely). The teacher says who is next the presenter of the third group comes in front of the class greets his classmates and view his samples letter. Teacher reads the letter after he finishes reading teacher come across his letter and asks students what they think about the introduction of the letter. There was an error in the address which teacher asks students to cross out student cross out the error. Teacher asks students if everything is okay and clear. This time the teacher pays students' attention to such error that leads them to lose marks in the exam. Teacher thanks presenter of the third group. later on the presenter of the fourth group comes out in front of the class greets his classmates and views his sample letter through head projector student reads the letter when he finishes reading. Teachers read the letters and she comes cross the letter and shows student how to start a formal sentence letter. Then while she was standing behind student she asks them to cross out the error related to informal sentence. Students cross out the error .teacher thanks group four presenter.

The last group presenter, who presents a replying letter related to the same topic, comes in front of the class greets his classmates and views his work through head projector student reads the letter student was listening and looking at the letter after he finishes reading. Teacher comes across the letter and crosses out the error related to the punctuation rules. Students ask question related to punctuation of the letter (what follow the initial name in the letter comma or dot) teacher asks any of the student's classmates to clarify this point for him then sets on the board what he asks about. At the end of the last presentation the teacher asks student of each group to rewrite their letter after they make correction and submit it to the teacher to check their works again teacher asks students if they have any question .after that the teacher shift to introduce a new topic related to the job's interview. She starts asking questions while she was smiling e.g. have any one of you have done any interview before? Students answer the question one student talked about his personal interview he did with a private company teacher asks him to explain for his students the procedures of the interview students focus on explaining one points during the interview (interviewer's questions )teacher thanks him. She asks again what is the most important things to prepare for the interview but this time students keep silent for awhile then they give some short answers one student say by surfing the net another student say the appearance to which teacher respond ,yes, but , there something we should know before. Teacher uses the black board to write the most important things to prepare for the interview [location, company, background, operation of company, position] then the teacher asks about the most important things that they should take for the interview. Students answer question (certificate, resume....etc), after that the teacher discusses with students the kind of clothes they should wear (dress, accessories, shoes) (appearance) students make suggestions. Teacher indicates for the students how they should be well dressed she use her dress to show them what kind of dress the girls should wear (here, she uses a kind of humor during here illustration) .she starts discussion related to the girls' appearance finally she tells the students the subject to be continued next class. And she asks students to put themselves into groups. Each group not more than three person s to be ready for the assignment related to the job's interview. Teacher thanks the students and wishes them a nice weekend.