

# COMPLIMENTS GIVEN BY A TEACHER IN SYMPHONIA MUSIC SCHOOL SURABAYA TO HIGH-, MID-, AND LOW-ABILITY STUDENTS

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## Abstract

This research aimed at observing compliment and non-compliment feedbacks between a teacher at a private music school and her students who had different abilities. The data were the recorded piano lesson of each student and the analysis was focused on the compliments and exchange structures as directed by Holmes (1988) and Coulthart (1992). The findings showed that all students received more compliments than non-compliments. For the compliment, all types of student received 'Good' token the most. On the second place high-ability student received 'Very Good', while mid- and low-ability student got mitigation. As for the non-compliment feedback, high- and low-ability student got criticism the most and it was found that the frequency of no feedback in mid-ability student occurred the most.

Keywords: Compliments, complimenting, exchange structure, teacher-student relations.

The act of giving compliment commonly occurs in daily conversation. The given compliment may have different topics, such as on appearance, ability, possessions and specific acts. It is also common to see a teacher give compliment to his/her students. In fact, complimenting is not only found in teacher-student relations, but it is also one characteristic of teacher-student relations (Docan & Morgan, 2009, p. 88). If a teacher gives compliments to a student because he/she could answer the teacher's question correctly, it means that the teacher gives a reward to the student. Moreover, the compliment given to the student may tell the student about his/her performance. It suggests whether he/she has already done a good job. However, sometimes the teacher does not give any compliment after a student perform and/or answer the given question. If this is the case, the student may have a clue that his/her performance and/or answer is not yet correct or perfect and that he/she still need to relearn the lesson. Therefore, it can be concluded that teacher's responses either by giving the compliment or no compliment play an important role to the development of the students' performance.

The interaction between the teacher and his/her students as explained above not only happens in the formal school, but also in many other education centers such as in languages course, foundations, including music schools. Different from what a teacher does in the formal school, the teachers in a music school can pay more attention to the details of each student's performance, either it is his/her strengths or weaknesses. In addition, in formal schools, the way the teachers teach the students is different. They only come to the class and explain the material, and they pay less attention to the students' understanding. They will just follow the schedule; and therefore it lessens the role of the teacher in the students' understanding.

Common to any classroom situation, students have different abilities. The teacher may have to apply different treatments during the lesson. It can be by giving compliments or, conversely, teachers can give critics or suggestion or other responses. Knowing the different situation between in a music school and a formal school makes the writer curious about how the teacher treats students with different ability in a music school, especially in terms of giving compliments; and since not every performance gets compliments, it is also interesting to know what kind of follow-up given to the students with different ability.

According to Holmes (1988, p.446), a compliment is "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly gives credit to someone for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which positively valued by the speaker and the hearer." The act of giving compliment is context-dependend. When compliment is uttered, a context must be understood to describe the belief,

knowledge of the participants in a discourse (Levinson, 1983, p. 276). In this research, the context that needs to be seen is the ability of the students and how the students perform during the teaching learning process in class. Therefore, if the students know the context on which and how the compliment is given to them, it would help to create the understanding of the given compliment. Besides giving compliments, there are times when the teacher's compliments are considered asmitigation. It is described as "the linguistic communicative strategy of softening an utterance, reducing the impact of an utterance, or limiting the face loss associated with a message" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this research, exchange structure theory is used to analyse the utterances between the teacher and her students. According to Coulthart (1992, p. 64), "an exchange is the basic unit of interaction which consists minimally of two participants to form the largest unit of interaction." This exchange consists of three parts, namely Initiation, Response and Follow-Up (Coulthart, 1992, p. 16).

Example:

A: What time is it?

B: *Six thirty.*

A: Thanks.

In the example above, the first line showing the initiation part, which is about asking question. On the second line, the initiation was answered (verbal answer). After the initiator got the answer, he/she gave feedback by saying 'Thanks'.

During class, usually the teacher gives initiation by giving either question, command or information to the students. After that, the students respond the teacher initiation by doing what the teacher told them to, such as doing the exercise and performing something which is considered as non-verbal response; and answering the teacher's question, which is known as verbal response. After that, it is expected that the teacher gives feedback toward the students' response in the Follow-up move. A teacher can produce a follow-up move which consists of accepting, commenting and even evaluating. If the follow-up move is filled with positive evaluation, it might be the teacher gives compliment as a reward to a student's good job. The focus on this research will be on the feedbacks given by the teacher, whether it is in the form of compliment or non-compliment.

## **METHOD**

In this research, the writer used qualitative approach. The participants of this research were one piano female teacher and three of her students. The students were in high, mid and low ability at that time. These students were selected based on the teacher's assessment in terms of their proficiency of playing the piano. The source of the data of this research was the transcriptions of the audio recording of each student's lesson in three meetings. The data of this research was the feedbacks given to the students, either the compliment or not-compliment feedbacks.

In getting the data, the writer asked for permission from the music school to do the recording. After that, she introduced herself to both the teacher and student; and asked their permission to do the recording. Then, the writer put her recorder in the classroom without staying in the class. After the writer got the recorded utterances, she typed every utterance during the recording. Because the students' performance during the class was also important for the analysis, therefore, the writer interviewed the teacher to evaluate every performance done in the class based on the recording, and categorized it into excellent, average and poor while taking note about the interview result. Next, the writer started to omit conversations which did not have any relation with the lesson. Then, she identified all feedbacks containing compliment and non-compliment expressions given by the teacher from the transcription and bolded those utterances.

Finished with the transcription, the writer gave number to each utterance. After that, she identified the utterances by giving a letter [I] for Initiation given by the teacher, a letter [R] for Response given both by the teacher and student, and a letter [F] for Feedback by the teacher. Finished with those steps, the writer started to identify the feedbacks given by the teacher. If the feedback slot is filled with a compliment, the writer gave a check mark in the sub-column Compliment. However, if the feedback is filled with something else, it is classified as Non-

Compliment and the writer then gave a check mark in the sub-column Non-Compliment Feedbacks. Lastly, the writer calculated those data in the total now and presented it in chapter four.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The table of compliment and non-compliment feedbacks on three types of student below showed that all types of student, high-, mid-, and low-ability student, received more compliments than non-compliment feedbacks. The high-ability student received 61.45% compliments and 38.55% non-compliments, the mid-ability student was complimented 54.1% and not complimented 45.9%, and the low-ability student was complimented 54.23% and not complimented 45.77%. It might be related to the music school's belief that giving compliment to the students will help to increase the students' motivation and to grow their interest in learning music. It might be also that these students really did a good job during their performance and theory session in the class; therefore, they really did deserve to get compliments.

Table 1. Compliment and Non-Compliment Feedbacks on High-, Mid-, and Low-Ability Student

Students' Ability	Compliment (%)							ST (%)	Non-Compliment Feedbacks (%)			ST (%)
	EX	VG	GR	G	QG	O	MI		CR	CM	S	
High	1.43	18.57	10	22.86	-	7.14	1.43	61.45	22.86	4.23	11.43	38.55
Mid	1.33	4	6.67	24.1	4	4	10	54.1	4	16.87	26.51	45.9
Low	0	6.78	0	22.03	-	5.08	20.34	54.23	22.03	8.47	15.27	45.77

### Notes:

- |    |             |    |                          |
|----|-------------|----|--------------------------|
| EX | : Excellent | QG | : Quite Good             |
| VG | : Very Good | O  | : Others                 |
| GR | : Great     | MI | : Mitigation             |
| G  | : Good      | CR | : Criticism              |
| CM | : Comment   | S  | : Silence (no follow-up) |
| ST | : Sub Total |    |                          |

If we pay more attention to the sub-total of each student, high-ability student got the most compliments (61.45%) compared to the other two students, that is, the mid-ability student (54.1%) and low-ability student (54.23%). Meanwhile, mid-ability student got the most non-compliment feedbacks (45.9%) compared to the other students, while high-ability student got the least non-compliment feedbacks. Although the findings of mid- and low-ability students did not show significant result of the total compliment and non-compliment feedbacks, each part was considered interesting because they got different number of compliment's tokens and non-compliment feedbacks, which convey different interpretation of the findings. The result of different tokens and non-compliment feedbacks given by the teacher will be discussed further below.

From Table 1, it can be seen that all students were complimented with "Good" the most. Firstly, it might be because the student's performance in the class was really in average level although he is considered as high-ability student. As for the two other types of students, the mid- and low-ability one, it could be that they also performed in average level, and that is why they got "Good" token. Furthermore, it was also possible that those students sometimes did more than average, yet the teacher did not want them to be overconfident.. From the explanation before, it could be concluded that all types of student got "Good" token the most with the same reasons.

Besides the "Good" token, different students seemed to receive different types of compliments. For instance, the high-ability student got "Very Good" token (18,57%) after the

“Good” token from his teacher. This is interesting because the other two other students rarely received “Very Good”. Extract 1 below showed how this student got “Very Good” token.

Extract 1:

- 16 I1 T: You have to count now, can you? Can you try? One more time,  
ok?  
17 I2 T: One two three, one to go!  
18 R [Student plays the song]  
19 F1 T: **Very good!**  
20 F2 T: In this part you can hold.

By looking at the interview result, it was true that he played the song very well, yet a ‘very well’ playing is not the same as a ‘perfect’ playing. Therefore, for this performance in Extract 1, he got ‘Very Good’ token. It also could be proved that the student’s playing was not perfect from Utterance 20 when the teacher asked him to hold certain part of the song. This token was given quite often (18.57%) and it might be because of the ability of the student himself who can play the song and/or answer the questions very well. The purpose of giving this token was to give a description to the student that actually he had played very well, but it was not yet perfect. Therefore, he still had to work a little bit in order to fulfill the teacher’s expectation.

As for mid- and low-ability student, it was found that they got mitigation quite often. Extract 2 below showed how mitigation was given to mid-ability student.

Extract 2:

- 507 I2 T: *Coba sekali lagi ya.* (Try one more time.)  
508 R [Student plays the song]  
509 F1 T: **Yes.**  
510 F2 T: *Yang ini crescendonya kurang keluar sedikit.* (**You need to add more crescendo in this part**)

In Utterance 507, the teacher gave initiation to the student to replay the song one more time. The student responded by playing the song. The quality of the playing according to the interview result was just average. In utterance 509, the feedback given by the teacher was ‘yes’. The ‘yes’ here given not because the student deserved to get a praise due to his quality of playing, but because after that the teacher wanted to criticize this student’s playing. In other word, the ‘yes’ here wanted to convey the message that the teacher actually used mitigation. The reason of using mitigation was not to make the student felt upset due to the bad playing. Instead, the teacher actually wanted to motivate this student to do a better playing. Actually, there was no significance different from the way the teacher gave mitigation to mid- and low-ability student.

It can be seen in Table on page 5 that there were three kinds of non-compliment feedbacks occurred during the lesson of all types of student, which are criticism, comment and silence. Moreover, the occurring of each kind was different one to the others depended on the ability of the student. So, the next part would like to discuss in details about this non-compliment feedbacks given by the teacher, starting from the one with high ability. If you look at table on page 5, it is seen that high ability student got criticism the most.

Extract 3:

- 1 I T: I count for you, one two three, one two three.  
2 R [Student plays the song]  
3 F1 T: Ok.  
4 F2 T: **Your counting here [sic] at the beginning, not right.**

The teacher’s purpose of giving criticism was to tell the student that he was wrong, and therefore, he could fix the playing into the correct one. In other word, criticism might function as a tool to give improvement toward what had been learned before. In line with this explanation, student with

high ability got 'Criticism' as the highest non-compliment feedback (22.86%). A better way to get the idea is that the teacher might not hesitate to criticize the student.

There might be some reason on why the teacher without hesitation criticized the student. Firstly, it might be that the student really played badly, and need some correction to fix the way he/she plays the song. If that was the case, the criticism functioned as an improvement tool as explained above. Secondly, the teacher might feel it necessary to criticize the student in order to balance it with the compliment. However, it did not mean that the teacher criticized the student without clear reasons or just for the purpose of balancing the compliment and criticism. It was just the teacher was more direct in giving criticism rather than giving mitigation toward the high ability student.

The same with the previous type of student, there was a moment when mid ability student did not get any feedback. In Extract 3, it showed how the student's playing did not get any feedback from the teacher.

Extract 3:

341 I T: A major hands together.  
342 R [Student plays the song]  
343 F T: *Yak*. Good!  
344 I T: A major right hand.  
345 R [Student plays the song]  
346 F T: -

In this extract, the teacher asked the student to play the scale (utterance 341) and it was responded by the student. The teacher then complimented the student by saying 'good'. Because the teacher found that there was no problem with the playing, she then moved to the next scale (utterance 344). However, after the student played what he/she?? had been told, there was no feedback occurred.

What is interesting found in low-ability student is that this student got criticism as the most non-compliment feedback. Extract 4 showed the criticism was given to low-ability student.

Extract 4:

605 I T: *Tangan dua*. (Hands together, please.)  
606 R [Student plays the song]  
607 F1 T: *Iya*. (Yes.)  
608 F2 T: *Itu kurang lambat mainnya, kurang sambung juga*. (**You played it too fast, less smooth too.**)  
609 F3 T: *Jangan diputus-putus*. (**Don't detach it.**)  
610 F4 T: *Makanya tangannya harus nempel di piano*. (**Your hand should have stuck on the piano.**)

In that part, the teacher criticized the tempo and the smoothness of the playing. However, after the teacher gave criticism, it was followed by other feedback, which is the suggestion or comment which could be a help for the student's improvement (utterance 610).

In conclusion, all students did get feedbacks, both in the form of compliments and non-compliments. Students who could perform minimally at the 'average' level in the eyes of the teacher got complimented. While students who did not do a good job got other feedbacks, that is, non-compliment feedbacks.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this research showed that all types of student received more compliment than non-compliment feedbacks. It might be related to the music school belief which want to motivate the students to do better job and/or performance, and also to grow the students' interest in learning music. Moreover, both compliment and non-compliment feedbacks were given to different types of student. Student of high ability received various token of compliment in high occurrence, while mid- and low-ability student received many mitigations. It could be because the teacher

wanted to soften the criticism part in order not to make the student feel upset about the has been done performance.

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