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## Appreciating Students' Responses: Verbal and Non-Verbal Compliments Used by English Teachers in Classroom

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### ABSTRACT

Many scholars have investigated how teachers interact with students in the ELT classroom, such as teacher talks and teacher reinforcements. This study aims at investigating the verbal and non-verbal compliments used by the English teachers in the EFL classroom. This study deployed a case study method that involved two English teachers at state junior high school in Seluma regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. The instruments used in this study were an observation sheet, video recording, and unstructured interview. The observation was done for three meetings for each teacher. The data were analyzed using the interactive data analysis model. The results show that the English teachers used five types of verbal compliments (e.g., good, very good, well done, that's right, and nice) and non-verbal compliments (e.g., hand movements, head movements, facial expression, touching the students, and standing near the students) to show their appreciation to the students' responses. In conclusion, the English teachers have used some verbal and non-verbal compliments, but they should use more diverse types of verbal and non-verbal compliments to build students' performances in the ELT classroom. This study gives new insights for English teachers about the types and importance of compliments to boost the students' participation, motivation, and interaction in classroom activities.

**Keywords:** *English classroom; English language teaching; students' responses; non-verbal compliments; verbal compliments.*

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## **1** INTRODUCTION

A compliment is an important element for foreign language learning because it positively impacts the students' motivation to learn the English language. Sari (2009) states that compliment is a kind of speech act that is given explicitly or implicitly to someone or to someone addressed who can respond someone's questions, have good skills and characteristics. In other words, compliment is an art of responding in communication skills.

Additionally, a compliment is regarded as a powerful social skill in which it is one of the fundamental pedagogues that can help foreign language learners communicate with others, maintain a good relationship, and give positive influence for the students (Lulu, 2017). In English language teaching, the teachers used compliments to motivate their students and participate actively during the teaching and learning process.

Moreover, a teacher gives a compliment to a student in the English learning process aiming for several reasons. First, compliments are used as a form of feedback and respect or admiration to students. Second, compliments could build and create a good relationship between teacher and students when communicating in the classroom (Dirgeyasa, 2015). Last, compliments can benefit for students in obtaining appropriate speech acts in giving a compliment to someone (Dastjerdi

& Farshid, 2011). In fact, by giving a compliment, the students' mood to participate in the learning process can increase so that it will create a good atmosphere for both teachers and students.

A teacher gives a compliment depending on the situation and condition of learning activity in the ELT classroom. For instance, a teacher asks a question to her/his students, and then a student answer the question. The teacher should give a compliment to the student who has answered the question. In this activity, communication between the teacher and student happens. This activity is in line with Sutyanto's (2018) statement that communication of verbal and non-verbal is the transmission of knowledge. It means that the compliment is given because there is a transmission of the knowledge in the question and answer activity during the teaching and learning process. To appreciate the knowledge, compliments are needed for the students.

The theory of compliments refers to reinforcement. Usman (2017) divided the compliments into verbal and non-verbal. The verbal compliment is a strategy used by the teachers in terms of positive words. Usman (2017) states verbal reinforcement is a compliment used by teacher in terms of utterances or words. A teacher can say some compliment words in giving feedback to the students such as; "good, "an excellent answer", or "well done", "good job", "very good", "very nice",

**1**  
“good job, and “well done. The students  
**1**  
can receive those words if they can answer  
**1**  
the teacher’s question. So, it is a form of  
appreciation for them to make them more  
active and happier.

**1** Besides verbal compliments, the  
teachers can use non-verbal compliments  
in the teaching and learning process. The  
teacher who rarely gives compliments to  
their students might make them get bored  
and have low participation in the learning  
process. The non-verbal compliments are  
very simple, but it has a significant impact  
on the students’ performance in the  
learning process. The purposes of non-  
verbal compliments are 1) to attract  
student’s attention in the learning process,  
2) to increase student’s interest in learning,  
3) to maintain students’ interest in  
learning, and 4) to control students’  
behaviour. As affirmed by Diedrich in  
Pradana (2014), creating a positive and  
engaging classroom atmosphere is one of  
the most powerful tools used by the  
teachers encouraging children's learning.  
Thus, it is important to make students  
active in the classroom by using a positive  
strategy.

**1** Based on Usman’s (2017) theory,  
non-verbal reinforcement is a form of  
compliments used by the teacher without  
saying compliment words; the teacher uses  
the strategy that involves their body part’s  
movements. For example, gestural (head  
movements (e.g., nodding head), hands  
movement (e.g., applause, thumbs), facial  
expression (e.g., smile), contact (e.g., hold

**1**  
or touch a student’s shoulder), proximity  
(e.g., sitting and standing near, in front of,  
besides, and behind of the students), give  
students some sticker (star sticker), and  
give students with some gift (e.g., candy).  
These strategies can be more effective to  
increase students’ interest in learning in  
the classroom.

Numerous studies have  
investigated compliments across countries.  
For example, In Indonesia, Sari (2009) and  
Fatah (2011) investigated compliment  
responses used by Indonesian students in  
learning English. However, they  
investigated the compliments with  
different perspectives. Sari (2009) focused  
on appearance and ability, while the social  
statuses focused on higher, equal, and  
lower addresses’ status. The result  
revealed that the appreciation token was  
the most dominant used in all situations  
given.

**1** Fatah (2011) investigated the  
compliment responses used by students of  
the English Department of Semarang State  
University. This study found that there are  
thirteen types of compliment responses  
used by the students of English  
Department of Semarang State University,  
namely, compliment upgrade, agreement,  
appreciation token, return, explanation,  
reassignment, non-idiomatic, compliment  
downgrade, disagreement, expressing  
gladness, follow up question, and  
doubting question. Among those types,  
appreciation token was the most  
frequently used in all situations given in



this study, while the non-idiomatic response was the least response used.

Then, Arista et al. (2018) investigated the positive and negative reinforcement strategies used by the teacher in motivating EFL students at Kindergarten B Class in Bali Kiddy School. The result of this study shows that the teacher used some reinforcement expressions to appreciate their students' responses and work. However, this study did not provide the data quantitatively so that the frequency of the reinforcements was unknown during the observations.

Outside of Indonesia, Vaneva and Ivanovska (2018) investigated the compliment responses used by Macedonian. This study found that most of the students of Macedonian (52.5%) opted for a direct compliment and this compliment was also supplemented by an expression of praise and an extension.

The previous studies above focused on investigating the compliment responses used by the students and teachers' feedback in English teaching and learning. The compliment focused on verbal compliments, but it was not mentioned and explained in detail in the previous studies. Moreover, studies from Sukarni and Ulfah (2015), Akhyar (2015), Afifah et al. (2017), and Dewi (2018) revealed that most English teachers used asking questions in the classroom to create communication with their students. In addition, the useful synthesis of compliment for language learning context

had been done by Miles (1994; as cited in Tajeddin & Ghamari, 2011). This study provides the existence of the categories of compliment responses. The compliment is categorized in terms of acceptance (e.g. thanks) deflects, (e.g., anyone can do this), rejection (e.g., no, it's not nice), and no response. The compliment in this study was positive expressions consisting of two parts, namely verbal and non-verbal. Therefore, it is rational for this study to fill the gap of the previous studies by investigating the issue of compliments used in answering questions that remain unexplored during the English teaching and learning process in the classroom.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study design. This design was chosen based on some reasons. First, the case study focuses on one particular object as a case to be studied in depth, in which this research investigated the verbal and non-verbal compliments in terms of classroom interaction during the English teaching and learning process. Second, the area of the case study is limited in terms of context, certain cases, places or locations, and within a certain time. In other words, the results of this study only for applying in the area of the study. It cannot describe for all of context because every case study has different results and responses. Third, the aim of case study is knowing the object of the study. Thus, the design of this study was accordance with Creswell (2009), case

**1**  
study is a research that understands a social or human problem, events, and an activity based on building a complex and holistic picture, formed by words, reporting detailed views of informants, and carried out in a natural setting.

The subjects of this study were two English teachers at junior high school in Seluma regency, Bengkulu province, Indonesia. They were taken by using a purposive sampling technique. Sugiyono (2017) explained that a purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on certain considerations, purposes, and characteristics. Therefore, the considerations for the samples of this study were; 1) The teachers have been teaching English for more than ten years. As stated by Fitria (2015), experienced teachers have teaching experience of approximately ten years. Teachers who have a long teaching experience will have more teaching abilities and higher performance levels (Rakib et al., 2016). 2) The teachers have gotten a certificate as professional competence deals with English mastery as subject-matter and professional development as a teacher. 3) Teachers A and B have the title of Bachelor Degree in ELT and graduated from Teacher Certification Program on English language teaching.

The data of this study were collected by using an observation sheet, unstructured interview, and video recording. The observation sheet was made based on the theory of Usman

(2017). It consisted of verbal and non-verbal compliments. A direct observation technique was done for six meetings to observe the English teachers' performances in using the verbal and non-verbal compliments clearly during the English teaching and learning process. The observation was done at grade VII in the odd semester of 2021-2022 academic years. Each teacher consisted of three meetings. In addition, the unstructured interview was done to support the data of the observation. Meanwhile, video recording was used to avoid the losing data during the observation.

The data of this study were analyzed using the the interactive data analysis model of Miles et al. (2014). The procedures of this method were data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussions of this study are presented into two parts.

### Teachers' Verbal Compliments

The results of the analysis data show that the teachers used six verbal compliments to appreciate their students' responses during the English teaching and learning. The results are presented in the table 1.

**1**  
**Table 1. Verbal Compliments Used by the Teachers in English Classroom**

No	Verbal Compliments	Context Occurrence
1	Good	It was given if the student could answer teacher's question correctly
2	Very Good	It was given if the student could answer teacher's question correctly and perfectly
3	Well done	It was given if the student could answer teacher's question correctly
4	That's right	It was given if the student could answer teacher's question correctly and perfectly
5	Nice	It was given if the student answered teacher' question almost correct

The results of the observation as presented in Table 1 were in line with the results of the interview with the teacher A and B. They stated as follows;

*"In teaching English, I usually use common praises or compliments, and those are also often used by other teachers, such as very good, good, nice, and others. But I often use word "good," when they have a correct answer. It was spontaneously expressed to students to appreciate their efforts. [Teacher A]*

*"... the expressions that I say when responding to students' responses are good, nice, that's right. The expression depends on the quality of the answer. For example, the expression of very good is said when a student can give a correct and perfect answer". [Teacher B]*

The results above show that the teachers used some common compliments when appreciating the students' responses.

Those compliments were given depending on the answer of the students. The teacher would say "very good" for the qualified answer.

These findings are similar to Arista et al. (2018) study. The teachers often used compliments such as good, very good, nice, as reinforcement for students' responses during the teaching and learning English at Kindergarten Kiddy school in Bali, Indonesia. These findings indicate that the teachers seem giving the common compliments in the ELT classroom. Usman (2013) said that verbal reinforcement is words, praise, support and acknowledgement to improve the child's behavior and performances. Teachers are suggested to use various kinds of compliments. It is supported by the statement of Pratiwi et al. (2018), variation in giving reinforcement is very important to avoid boredom so that the students will enjoy studying in class.

Regarding the findings, the teachers actually could use another verbal compliments like the findings of the study conducted by et al. (2018) at the elementary school of Lab Undiksha Bali, Indonesia such as great, good enough, and great. Other verbal compliment can be used are like exactly correct, absolutely correct, good job, 100% correct, wow amazing, excellent etc. Those verbal compliments could increase students' motivation and performance in the English classroom through feedback or praises for them. Moreover, the use of effective

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feedback and praise can alter the students' negative perceptions about feedback provided by their teachers (Al-Ghamdi, 2017). Thus, the teacher could build a positive environment in the ELT classroom effectively.

### Teachers' Non-verbal Compliments

The results of the analysis data show that the teachers used five non-verbal compliments to appreciate their students' responses during the teaching and learning of English. It is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Non-Verbal Compliments used by Teachers in English Classroom

No	Non-verbal Compliments	Context
1	Gestural- Hand Movement (Applause, and thumbs)	It was given when the student's answer was excellent
2	Gestural- Head Movement	It was given when the student could answer the teacher's question correctly
3	Gestural: Facial Expression (nice smile)	It was given when the student answered teacher's question almost correct
4	Contact- Touching the student	It was done when the student's answer teacher's question with a good answer
5	Proximity- Standing near the student	It was done when the teacher wanted to approach the student by asking a question and the student answered it whether it is correct or not

The results presented in Table 2 were also supported by the results of the interview with the teacher A and B. They stated as follow;

*"We must use non-verbal compliments when giving some appreciation to our students who have participated in the learning activity, because students have different characters, and the approach or method used is also different. For example, we use facial expressions such as smiles, and nodding heads, etc."*  
[Teacher A]

*"Non-verbal compliments are important to do when I teach English. ... for example, giving an applause. Sometimes I give my student a nice smile when she or he answer my question, and I often do this way. The most important is, ... I must give appreciation to those who respond to my questions so that the student feel appreciated for her/his effort by teacher"*  
[Teacher B]

The results of the observation and interview show that the teachers used some non-verbal compliments when teaching English. Teacher B stated that she often used facial expressions to reply to the student's responses related to their question such as a nice smile. This compliment means that the student's answer is almost correct.

Moreover, based on the observation, compliment in terms of hand movement used by the teachers was



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applause and thumbs. Sometimes they also invited other students to give applause for those who were able to respond to the teachers' questions. In classroom interaction, giving applause shows the teacher agrees with the students' efforts and work. This way shows the cultural norms of the language learning class that focuses on the teacher's exhibited frame rather than communicative achievement success (Hosoda & Aline, 2010). These findings indicate that the teachers have tried to increase student enthusiasm in learning with a variation of non-verbal compliments.

These findings are the same as Pratiwi et al. (2018) and Arista (2018), but in their studies, the teachers used more various compliments strategies. It implies that the students also need non-verbal compliments in the learning situation because they have different characters so that the teachers must use a different approach. Also, they students will feel valued for all the efforts they put in during the process of learning English in class.

Non-verbal compliment is a form of positive compliments used by the teachers in terms of praise, agreement, rewards without using words. Djamarah (2005) states that some types of gestural reinforcement show non-verbal compliments from the teachers, such as nodding heads, thumbs up, and applause. However, this study found new kinds of gestural reinforcement, such as a nice

smile. The compliment in terms of contact was done by touching the student's body.

Moreover, the teachers did proximity by standing near the students who could respond to the teacher's question. These actions show that the teacher had tried to create a close relationship with the students. It could make the students feel comfortable and not be afraid of the teacher (Pratiwi et al., 2018). As a consequence, a comfortable atmosphere can be created in the English learning class.

The findings of this study also show that the teachers have used verbal and non-verbal compliments in the ELT classroom. It implies that the teachers have shown their positive attitudes towards their students. They have raised the learning spirit and avoided the loss of enthusiasm of the students in the teaching-learning process (Akhyar, 2015). The use of both verbal and non-verbal compliments depends on the situation of the classroom. However, in a foreign language learning context, verbal compliments are suggested to do more frequently because the students can copy the verbal compliment expressions to be used in their daily lives.

## CONCLUSION

As argued in the results section, it can be concluded that compliments are important elements of the teaching and learning process in the EFL context. The teachers have used some common verbal and non-verbal compliments to praise

1 their students' efforts in responding to the teachers' questions, instructions, and commands in the ELT classroom. Those compliments are in terms of positive acceptance. Based on observation, although the teachers tended to use non-verbal compliments rather than verbal compliments, they have tried maximally to motivate their students and appreciate the students' efforts, responses, and work.

Regarding the results of this study, hopefully, the teachers are suggested to use verbal and non-verbal compliments and more various types of compliments in the ELT classroom. It aims to increase students' motivation towards learning by better understanding the effects of compliments on students and help them learn how to provide these factors effectively. Also, this study benefits students by allowing them to use compliments supplied by teachers to improve their learning outcomes in learning the English language.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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