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Writing Feedback in Tertiary EFL Online Classroom: Indonesian Students and Instructor Perceptions

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Abstract

Considering the widely acknowledged centrality of feedback in EFL writing classes, this study seeks to find out how feedback is provided. While the topic is perhaps outdated, it is interesting to see how feedback is implemented in the online class setting which currently characterizes during and post-pandemic teaching and learning. In particular, this study aims at identifying the types and the function of feedbacks as well as revealing how the students perceive them. This research used case study method and involved 24 university students and 1 EFL writing instructor. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The obtained data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model. The study listed three types of writing feedbacks; oral, written and peer feedback. For the students, the feedbacks help them understand their errors and motivates them to write better. For the writing instructor, providing feedback helps him map the students' writing proficiency and aid reflection on the effectiveness of the chosen teaching method. While most of the students perceived the feedback as beneficial for their writing, some of them admitted that feedback made them feel inferior. These findings resound the earlier findings of studies conducted in the offline context. It means the change in the modes of teaching does not affect how instructors and students perceive feedback. The findings suggest that affective factors have to be considered in addition to the cognitive aspects in giving feedback.

Keywords: Feedback; Perception; Writing

INTRODUCTION

The complexity thinking when producing a piece of writing made most EFL students believe that writing is one of the most difficult skills to learn. Writing process also takes time. To write well, a student must revise and enhance his/her work repeatedly. According to Chen (2002), students are frequently confused about word use, grammatical

precision, sentence structure, alternative phrases, and cultural understanding due to their poor level of competency.

Considering the complexity of writing and potentially high anxiety in writing, EFL writing instructors must devise a variety of strategies to assist students in honing their writing skills and increasing their willingness to complete writing assignments. Giving students feedback on their writing is frequently regarded as one of the most important ways that writing instructors can help students learn. Feedback is defined as “any interaction or method supplied to tell a learner of the accuracy of an answer, often to a question of instruction” (Mory, 2004, pp.745). In the EFL classroom, particularly in a writing class, teacher-written feedback serves as an assessment and a pedagogical tool for improving writing, teaching, and learning.

The central role of feedback in writing class has attracted numerous researchers to investigate how feedback is provided and perceived as well as what effects it has. Those studies primarily conducted in the conventional or face-to-face writing class. This mode of teaching has been abruptly shifted to online distance learning since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. Since the change of mode potentially change many other aspects of teaching and learning (e.g. types of activities, time allotment, and class interaction) it would be interesting to find out if feedback is conducted and/ or perceived similarly or differently in different contexts of teaching and learning.

This exploratory case study focuses on the types of feedback used in Indonesia's tertiary online writing classroom. It focuses on the types of feedback that writing instructors use in their writing classrooms, the function of feedback from the writing instructor's perspective, and the perceived impact of feedback approaches on students' attitudes and writing performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feedback in L2 Writing

Referring to Mory (2004) feedback is a way of telling students the accuracy and/ or quality of their work. Feedback is given (to the students) or exchanged (among students) to help students perform well and achieve, whether online or offline, written or spoken skills (Wiggins, 2012). It's part of a two-way conversation between professors and students to help students become more aware of their strengths and places for improvement, as well as to improve their learning capacity (London Deanery, 2012; Scott, 2014).

Feedback is an important part of good teaching and learning in higher education (Ackerman and Gross 2010; Carless et al. 2011; Hattie and Timperley 2007; Hounsell 2003). Furthermore, research shows that high-quality feedback is the single most powerful influence on student achievement (Brown and Knight 1994; Hattie 1987; Hattie and Timperley 2007), as well as a necessary component of meeting student expectations (Brown and Knight 1994; Hattie 1987; Hattie and Timperley 2007). (Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton 2002). For the higher education environment, students can learn more with the help of feedback from the teacher. Students might achieve more if they are provided with powerful and meaningful feedback. It is possible to provide different types of feedback inside the classroom.

To conclude, feedback can be defined as any contact or procedure provided to inform a learner of a response's accuracy, whether online or offline, written or verbal, to help students perform well and succeed and also to raise the consciousness of students about their strengths and other areas of enhancement and to increase their learning capacity. Moreover, feedback is a critical component of effective teaching and learning and the most powerful influence on student achievement.

Types of Feedback

In the writing classroom, a teacher typically provides extensive error feedback to pupils, emphasizing the mistake as it occurs (e.g., Cumming, 1985; Zamel, 1985). For both teachers and students, concentrated WCF is more manageable than unfocused WCF (e.g. Bitchener and Ferris, 2012; Evans et al., 2010). Focused written corrective feedback is more beneficial for learners since their documents are no longer saturated with red ink, which is likely to injure their ego and their written trust, and may, in turn, influence feedback (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2010). In addition to choosing between focused and non-focused WCF, educators must decide whether to respond to student writing with direct or indirect WCF. Direct feedback entails providing the right responses to errors. Indirect feedback, on the other hand, occurs when errors are displayed without the proper answers being provided.

Students' writing benefits from peer evaluation because it pushes them to consider the task-specific processes and needs (Huisman, 2018). According to Flower et al., three distinct processes occur when a learner analyzes a text (1986). The first step is to pinpoint the problem. Second, there's problem identification, which helps with writing improvement when feasible revision approaches aren't obvious, such as basic edits or rewriting. Third, after a problem has been recognized and diagnosed, revision strategies are implemented. Giving peer review allows students to look for and analyze problems, as well as explore and offer remedies and changes. Students who provide peer review gain problem-solving skills may become more aware of (types of) writing challenges and may discover new rewriting techniques as a result (Patchan and Schunn 2015).

Function of Feedback

According to Ciftci and Kocoglu (2012) and Kitchakarn (2013), students who receive feedback appear to do better in their revised drafts and have a better comprehension of the writing abilities needed for more difficult writing tasks. Those who provide feedback, primarily professors in academic institutions, must consider the context and culture of teaching and learning, as well as the beliefs and principles that students attach to feedback as a good learning tool (Watling, 2014). (Scott, 2014). Cox, Black, Heney, & Keith (2015) define feedback as "more than just pointing out or correcting faults," as well as "more than just reviewing or grading" (Bailey & Garner, 2010). Students will advance more as a result of feedback.

Student's Feeling and Perception of Feedback

Professors, colleagues, family members, private tutors, or even the student themselves may supply feedback information to students. Higher education students

frequently receive feedback in the form of written or typed remarks on evaluation assignments (Gibbs and Simpson 2004). Regardless of the method chosen, learners must be sensitive to the data's messages to be sufficiently motivated to act on them (Poulos and Mahony 2008; Telio, Ajjawi, and Regehr 2015; Pitt and Norton 2016; Winstone et al. 2017). Unfortunately, when students have negative emotional reactions as a result of the feedback process, their receptivity can be harmed (Carless 2006; Molloy, Borrell- Carrio, and Epstein 2013).

Several studies have indicated that feedback has an impact on learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Shute, 2008). Students appear to be enraged, disappointed, and perplexed as a result of ambiguous comments (Price et al., 2010). Students frequently misunderstand and misperceive instructor feedback (Higgins et al., 2002; Hyatt, 2005), and they are never inspired to think about it (Duijnhouwer, 2010).

For the students to gain from feedback, they should have a positive opinion of it. Students' opinions of feedback are important in higher education because they see feedback as a guide to success, a form of academic interaction, and a sign of respect and caring (Rowe, 2011). Because students' interpretations of feedback are frequently inconsistent with the teacher's intent (Van der Schaaf et al., 2011), understanding students' perceptions of feedback are critical.

Feedback in Online Writing Learning

Based on students' opinions, online learning provides a variety of benefits and drawbacks. When defining online learning, students identified the option to study from home as a benefit (AlHamad et al., 2014). In reality, students mentioned the flexibility of online classes as a motivation for their decision (Fish, 2016; Horspool & Lange, 2012; Platt et al., 2014). According to Horspool and Lange (2012), students in both online and face-to-face situations have high-quality contact with professors, with some students reporting having as much or more involvement with online course instructors as in face-to-face courses (Boyd, 2008). Students frequently reported having trouble interacting with peers in an online environment, in addition to challenges interacting with the instructor (Al Hamad et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008; Dyrbye et al., 2009; Horspool & Lange, 2012; Waldman et al., 2009).

Feedback in Indonesian Tertiary Writing Classroom

Teacher feedback is vital for students in Indonesian classrooms because it allows them to modify their work and eliminate faults (Iswandari, 2016). In addition, learners prefer indirect input to direct feedback. Learners who receive indirect feedback become more self-sufficient in their learning (Iswandari, 2016). Direct written remedial input, on the other hand, is preferred by certain students above indirect written corrective feedback. Direct written corrective criticism, rather than indirect written corrective feedback, helped some students improve their performance (Kisnanto, 2016).

Feedback from instructors has a tremendous impact on students in Indonesia. According to the findings, written feedback has a substantial impact on students' recall writing skills (Wihadi and Martiana, 2015). Additionally, pupils were pleased with the

instructor's written feedback. Also, written feedback prevents learners from losing confidence, and it makes them more interested in studying recount writing (Wihadi and Martiana, 2015).

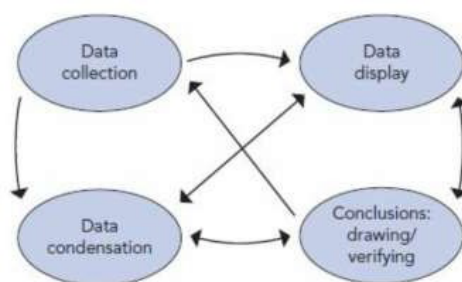
Giving feedback showed that delivering comments in the classroom improved students' writing accomplishments. There are various reasons why giving written feedback to students and teachers is important in the classroom. First and foremost, providing written comments can help students become more conscious of their mistakes and misconceptions, and eventually, it can help them minimize their mistakes. The second reason is that, based on written input, the teacher might quickly speak with each student about their requirements. Finally, giving written comments to students shows that you care about them individually. Because of the specialized approach, the writing instructor provides review and advice in the specific assignment; the teacher is also open to addressing students' errors without interfering with other students' concentration (Wihadi and Martiana, 2015a).

RESEARCH METHOD

This case study took place in one of the universities in Surakarta, Indonesia. Twenty-four students and one writing instructor are the participants of this study. The students sit in the 4th semester of the Department of English Education. Generally they were in the intermediate level of English proficiency. The students took a compulsory writing class which was conducted fully in online mode for the whole semester due to the pandemic.

To collect the data, we conducted classroom non-participatory observation, distributed questionnaires, and interviewed focal student-respondents and the writing instructor. Students writing artifacts were also collected and analyzed to answer the research question.

After all data were collected, the researcher analyzed the data in three interactive stages i.e. data reduction, data presentation, and data verification, as shown in Picture 1.



Picture 1

During data reduction, we sort data that we obtained based on the frequency of emergence and significance. Then we coded and organized the data into display tables to ease the analysis and conclusion drawing. These stages were not linear but cyclical.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Feedback

In this research, there were found three types of feedback which are Oral Feedback, Written Corrective Feedback, and Peer Feedback. Oral feedback was delivered in the middle of the teaching and learning activities. Written Corrective Feedback was delivered in the students' tasks submissions. Peer Feedback also occurred in several meetings, which were delivered on students' submissions.

Oral feedback is mostly delivered when the writing instructor reviews students' works inside the online class. These oral feedbacks can be divided into two different types, which are holistic comments on students' works and analytical comments on students' works. The example for the holistic comment is like *"That's a great job, I'm happy for you"* (Observation 3), while for the analytical comment, the example is *"I'm very happy that you don't have any problem with grammar again..."* (Observation 4). All of that feedback and comments are given orally.

Another type of feedback found was written corrective feedback (WCF). Written corrective feedback was given on students' submitted works. Written corrective feedback here has two functions for the students, which are commenting on students' works and giving suggestions on students' works. The example of commenting on students' works is *"Good Job, Rara."* (WCF3), while for the giving suggestions, the example is *"Good job, Zaza. However, you might still need to simplify the thesis statement."* (WCF1). Most of the delivered feedback was in the form of holistic feedback and the rest were analytical feedback. The holistic feedback was encouraging students while the analytical feedback highlighted the lacking aspects from students' works.

The last type of feedback that was found was peer feedback. The feedback was submitted in the assessment column that has been made by the lecturer, and the student filled the column with their assessment based on their point of view. From the data analysis, the researcher found that the function of peer feedback is to comment on peers' works and give suggestions on them. An example of peer feedback is *"Your thesis statement is good, but maybe you need to fix a little on the grammar. Maybe you can use Grammarly to make your thesis statement better."* (Peer Feedback 1). All of the students actively give feedback and suggestions in correcting the weaknesses of each other's works. Peer feedback sessions happened in two meetings.

The Importance of Feedback

Based on the interview results, the writing instructor revealed two functions of feedback, which are diagnosing students' competencies and reflective points for the writing instructor. According to the writing instructor, feedback can be a tool to know how deep the students' understanding of the material is. In this function of feedback, it is clear that feedback is important to be applied in the class because feedback can help both students and the writing instructor in the teaching and learning process. Another importance of feedback, according to the writing instructor, is a reflective point for the writing instructor. Feedback can be a reflective tool for the teacher or writing instructor because, with feedback, the writing instructor can measure the way he taught in the class.

If the majority of the students in the class are still struggling with the material, the writing instructor can change his method or extend the material so the students can understand the material.

Feedback Perception

In this section, the findings can be grouped into three main results, which are students' preference on feedback, how the students perceive the feedback and the effect of feedback on the students. From the questionnaire's results, 61.9% of the students preferred oral feedback, while 33.3% chose written corrective feedback, and the rest loved peer feedback. To validate the data, the researcher conducted a further interview with the respondents. For the students who chose written corrective feedback, they chose it because the written corrective feedback that the writing instructor gave was to-the-point, and there were examples in every feedback given so that, the students could catch the meaning and message from the feedback easily. Students who chose oral feedback explained that they chose oral feedback because it is clearer for them on how to receive the feedback, and there is an interaction between the writing instructor and the students. There is one student who chose peer feedback, and she stated that peer feedback helped her understand more about the material rather than the feedback from the writing instructor.

Based on the questionnaires, the majority of the students felt motivated after receiving feedback from the writing instructor. Students believed that feedback from the writing instructor helped them in learning writing, and the students needed the writing instructor to give feedback on their works. Feedback also helps the students to identify the areas that need improvement for their learning process. Students can learn more in the material that they are less understanding with the feedback from the writing instructor. After receiving feedback, the students mostly revise their works and feel challenged and more passionate about learning. Despite the positive perception of the feedback, there is a student that felt inferior after receiving feedback. He felt that his work could be better than the submitted one. He felt that he should have been more than the previous works.

After being given feedback, most of the students are directly revising their works, while some of them are not directly revised. All of the students are challenged to do more and learn more about writing after giving feedback. Feedbacks mean so much for them, and the students felt more appreciated after giving feedback. On the contrary, some of the students felt inferior after giving feedback. Some students were also shown a different reaction in receiving feedback. Some in positive ways, some in negative ways. Some of the students felt inferior after receiving feedback because they thought they could be more in their work and they could learn better, so they did not have to address some feedback. The other students felt challenged in learning and wanted to improve their works with the given feedback. The students know much about their errors and mistakes after being given feedback. Moreover, they know much of their current knowledge about writing, and with feedback from the writing instructor, they can grow much better and write much better.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Feedbacks found in this research are oral, written corrective feedback, and peer feedback. All of the feedback was delivered through the online class platform. All of the feedback contains the same function, which is commenting on students' works and giving suggestions. In addition, feedback also has importance not only for the students but also for the writing instructors too. Feedback can be a measurement tool to know how deep the students' knowledge about the material is; feedback can be a reflective tool for the writing instructor so the writing instructor can reflect on how he taught in the class. Despite different types of feedback that were delivered, students mostly felt challenged and wanted to learn more about the material, while there was also a student who felt inferior after receiving feedback. Feedback can be perceived in positive and negative ways in this research. The findings from this research are similar to the offline classroom environment. There is no different outcome in giving feedback between the online classroom and offline classroom. Teachers should give feedback to the students whenever they teach, so they can encourage students to be better. Moreover, a teacher can evaluate their method of teaching, and if there is a mistake, the teacher can learn and overcome it. Feedback can help students understand more about the material, so students do not have to be anxious or inferior with the feedback from teachers or peers. The next researchers may conduct any further research that talks about the reasons why such kinds of feedback are applied inside the class. The future may research different education levels like in senior high school or junior high school so that they can find the differences of feedback perception in the secondary classroom. The researcher acknowledges that the study isn't ideal. There is still a lot of information about the subject that needs to be looked into. As a result, this study can serve as a resource for future academics who want to perform a more in-depth investigation of feedback in the writing classroom.

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