Teacher’s Feedback on Students’ Writing

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to find out the kinds of written feedback and the reasons for using those feedbacks on students’ writing by English teachers of SMA Negeri 11 Banda Aceh. This research used descriptive qualitative method and the data were collected through documentation and interview. The framework undertaken is proposed by Harmer and the interview question was adapted from Thorsteinsen. The findings found that there were two kinds of feedbacks namely, direct written feedback and indirect written feedback. Eighty-four direct feedbacks were found which consisted of 70 direct answers and 14 responding by written comments. Meanwhile, 49 indirect written feedbacks consisted of six coded and 43 un-coded feedbacks. In conclusion, teachers’ written feedbacks are important to make students aware of making mistakes on writing tasks. The findings suggested that English teachers should give written feedback to students’ writing task to enable them improve the skill.

Keywords: Feedback, teacher written feedback, students’ writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Communicating ideas in a piece of writing seems to be very challenging for Senior High School students in Indonesia. Writing is considered as a crucial skill to be learnt especially for EFL learners (Harmer, 2004). In order to master English as has been targeted, Indonesian government has changed its curriculum for many times. The current curriculum is curriculum 2013 which emphasizes the English subject to four skills namely, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In curriculum 2013, teachers are expected to assist students’ knowledge and skills to communicate in English either in speaking or writing (Narwianta, 2014). Thus, the curriculum expects the students to be able to write or express their ideas in English well.

The process of writing as a media to communicate ideas involve four important stages namely, pre-editing phase, and editing, re-drafting, and final version of the work (Harmer, 2007). Those stages are intended to guide students in composing a
piece of writing while trying to write in foreign language. One of the techniques that teacher can apply to solve students’ writing problem is written feedback. Muncie (2000) stated that teacher’s feedback on students’ writing is a compulsory notion that the feedback can help students to improve their writing skill. The written feedback is aimed to give information and advice to facilitate students’ improvement teachers are also expected to discuss the feedback clearly with students that often ignored (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Elashri (2013) provided two forms of feedback in writing: direct and indirect feedback. Direct feedback means the teacher gives the correct form to students toward their errors and mistakes. Another form is indirect feedback where the teacher does not provide them the correct form (Yuhardi & Kustati, 2014). The indirect written feedback is divided into two types; coded and un-coded indirect feedback. Harmer (2007) pointed out two ways of giving written feedback in writing class; responding and correcting. Responding means the feedback is given by providing comments. While correcting means the correction is done by marking the error part in writing without providing any comments.

Several studies concerning teachers’ written feedback have been conducted. Jamalinesari et al. (2015) carried out a research on teacher’s feedback in Iran. The result of this research showed that the students who received teachers’ indirect feedback performed better than those who received direct feedback. Widyasari (2014) who conducted a research in SMA 1 Bandung found that the teacher used more indirect feedback by using code and symbols than the direct ones. However, there is still very few research conducted in Aceh regarding the use of feedback to improve students’ writing skill. Thus, this study would fill in the gap by discovering the kinds of written feedback that teachers used in correcting the students’ writing and the reasons of the use the teachers’ written feedback on students’ writing that were the aims of this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Writing

Writing is one of skills in English that should be mastered by foreign language students. Nunan (2003) states that writing is the way of thinking to create (invent) some ideas, express the sentences into a good writing, and arrange those ideas into statements and paragraph clearly. This activity is progressive activities that need several processes to make it done. Bryne (2007) says that writing is believed as the most difficult skills to be learnt since it is a productive skill in language learning.

According to Harmer (2004), there are four stages in writing process: planning takes as the first important role in writing. In this stage, the writer needs to collect certain points to elaborate as the whole ideas. Drafting is a process of producing the first rough of writing that a writer has been planned before. This stage forces the writer to write his/her ideas as what they have planned into a first piece of writing, considering the purpose, audience or reader and the content structure before turning into the editing process. In this stage, a writer can improve the progress through reflecting and revising the draft by receiving feedback both from the teacher and his/her peers. The first draft reviewed to find the mistakes and errors in it. It then rewrite into a correct form. The last stage in writing is called final version. It is a process in which a writer finishes adding or diminishing the plan and draft, and right after that he constructs the final version.
2.2 Feedback

There are three types of feedback in writing; peer feedback, conferences and written comment (Keh, 1990). Peer feedback is a technique where the students read each other’s paper and provide some feedbacks to the writer (Bartels, 2003). The second type, conference, is the feedback using interaction between teacher and students by adding oral comments. The last type, the written comment, is the feedback that provided by the teacher to communicate the error or mistake to the students. According to Hyland and Hyland (2001), written comment can be categorized into praise, criticism and suggestion. Hence, the feedback on students’ writing is needed to help them improve their writing. Fata, et. al (2016) asserts that feedback mostly occurs in the editing stage during the writing process.

The written feedback is defined as comments, questions or error correction on students’ writing (Mack, 2009). Both teacher and students believed that teachers’ written feedback can give the students’ opportunity to improve their writing (Montgomery & Baker, 2007). According to Srichanyachon (2012), teachers’ written feedback can be served as a powerful tool to motivate students in the writing process if done well. From those explanations, it can be concluded that teacher’s written feedback has pivotal role in students’ writing. Teachers’ written feedback is the most widely used form of feedback that students receive on their writing work (Elashri, 2013).

2.3 Direct Written Feedback

Direct feedback is the feedback given by the teacher to provide the correct form of the error or mistakes that students made. Responding is a part of direct feedback. In responding, teacher gives comments on the students’ error, after that, teacher gives recommendation towards the errors that students made (Harmer, 2007). Below is a student’s writing about the childhood memories with responding feedback by written comment.

![Figure 1. Sample of responding feedback by written comment (Harmer, 2004).](image)

Responding is an effective feedback on the student’s writing because it discusses the problem rather than judges the students work. Furthermore, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) give the example of direct feedback on students’ writing by giving the recommendation or the correct form.
Everyone has been a liar \(^\text{(at least)}\) once in their life. People who lie intentionally to harm others are bad people\(^\text{(c)}\) and their lies are harmful too. However, there are lies that are done \(^\text{(told)}\) with good intentions. So, there are times that lies are appropriate. Only one person can \(^\text{(The only person who can)}\) really tell whether a lie is intended to harm or do good is the one who told the lie.

**Figure 2.** Sample of student text excerpt with direct feedback. Source from Ferris (2008a).

The form of direct feedback as claimed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012) is the most effective way to help the students in mastering specific targeted on the structural writing over a short term process. Moreover, Ellis (2009) claims that direct feedback provides the explicit guidance about the errors given by teacher to students and it helps those who are not able to do self-correcting by themselves.

### 2.4 Indirect Written Feedback

Indirect feedbacks are divided into two parts. First, coded indirect feedback means the teacher underlines the students’ errors or mistakes, then the teacher writes the symbol above the targeted errors or mistakes and the teacher gives the composition for the student to think what error the student made as the symbol can helps the student to think (Elashri, 2013).

Harmer (2007) considered the use of coded or symbols make the correction much neater, less threatening and more helpful than random marks and comments. These symbols are defined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>A spelling error</td>
<td>I recieved your letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>A mistake in word order</td>
<td>We know well this city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>A grammar mistake</td>
<td>I am going to buy some furnitures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Wrong verb tense</td>
<td>I have seen him yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Concord mistake (e.g the subject and the verb agreement)</td>
<td>People is sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\lambda)</td>
<td>Something has been left out</td>
<td>He hit me on (\lambda) shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW</td>
<td>Wrong word</td>
<td>I am interested on jazz music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{ }</td>
<td>Something is not necessary</td>
<td>It was {too} much difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?M</td>
<td>Meaning is unclear</td>
<td>That is a very excited photograph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Punctuation mistake</td>
<td>Do you like London,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/I</td>
<td>Too formal or informal</td>
<td>Hi Mr. Franklin, thank you for your letter...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, un-coded indirect feedback, where the teacher underlines or circles the error or the mistake, but the teacher does not write the correct sentences or any symbols. The students should think clearly by themselves what the errors are and how to correct them accurately. Below is the example provided by Bitchener & Ferris (2012).
3. METHODS

The method applied in this research was qualitative research and the data was gathered from the students’ writing and teacher’s interview. The subjects were four English teachers of SMAN 11 Banda Aceh. The researcher conducted a preliminary study by managing an interview to an English teacher who taught and used written feedback in teaching writing in the second grade of the school. The result showed that the teacher admitted that the students were confused in revising their writing because of the unclear instructions on the teacher’s feedback given on their work.

The data from students’ writing showed kinds of written feedbacks are given by teachers on students’ writing tasks. The researcher collected five students’ writing tasks randomly from each class. Four classes involved in this study, and one of the four English teachers were the participant of this study. Thus, there were 20 students’ writing tasks analyzed and classified. Those students’ writing documents were an essay task given by their teacher in certain topic. The classification was based on the two types of written feedback adapted from Harmer (2007) those are; responding (direct written feedback) and correcting (indirect written feedback).

The interview questions were adapted from Thorsteinsen (2010). The data from interview was investigated the teachers’ reasons in term of using written feedbacks. The results of interviews were analyzed by using analytical method proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). In this study, the data reduction was taken from the data interview that related to the research questions which focused on the kinds of written feedback and the reasons for using those kinds of written feedback on students’ writing by the informants. The data display showed two kinds of written feedback used by the informants on students’ writing, namely; direct and indirect written feedback. Furthermore, all of the informants agreed that the use of written feedback can improve the students’ writing skills. The researcher then summarized the result of this study and made conclusions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The following table shows the frequency and percentage from the kinds of written feedback used by English teachers at SMAN 11 Banda Aceh;

![Figure 3. Student's text with indirect (underlining) correction.](image-url)
Table 2. The findings of the category of teachers’ written feedbacks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Written Feedback</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Feedback (Direct Answer)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Feedback (Responding by written comment)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect feedback (Coded)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Feedback (Un-coded)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above showed that direct answer was the kind of written feedback mostly used by the teachers in correcting the students’ writing. The researcher counted from 20 students’ writing there were 70 direct answers (53%) out of 133 total feedbacks and followed by 14 responding by written the comments (11%), 6 coded (4%) and 43 un-coded feedbacks (32%). Further explanation of the kinds of written feedback is as follow:

From the student’s writing above there were found some of the feedbacks that written by teacher. On the first line, the teacher marked the word ‘I’ in order to inform the students that the sentences were not complete. In this case, the teacher used the indirect written feedback by marking as the un-coded feedback to correct the grammatical error on the writing. Similarly, Harmer (2007) states that the correcting form of the indirect feedback with the teacher marks or errors, usually appear for instance; in word order, grammatical error, collocation and word choice. Then in the third line, the teacher provided the direct answer in form of the direct written feedback, the teacher directly put the ‘ing’ on the incomplete word. According to Bitchener & Ferris (2012) state that in mastering specific structural writing, the direct written feedback helped the students in correcting over a short term process.
After that, in line six, the teacher put the underline on the word ‘been’ and ‘ed’ on the word ‘prepare’, she combined the direct and indirect written feedback to make the students focus on the topic given. After that, in line six, seven, and eight, the teacher put the circles as un-coded feedbacks. Moreover, in the end of the paragraph, the teacher added a comment as the feedback with responding by written a comment in form of the direct written feedback. In responding, teacher gives comments on the students’ error, after that, teacher gives the recommendation of the errors that students made (Harmer, 2007).

In the interview session, there were four English teachers invited. The purpose of the interview is to discover the reasons of using written feedback on students’ writing. The researcher provided 10 items of questions for the interview. The result of the interview showed that all English teachers agreed that the use of feedback can improve the student’s skills, especially in writing because the students know directly the mistake or the error that they made in writing.

The reason why the teachers of SMAN 11 Banda Aceh use the kinds of written feedback on students’ writing was because those kinds of written feedbacks are effective in solving the students' writing problems. The students were found to learn more from both direct and indirect written feedback from the teachers, they know and find the mistake that they made. The direct and indirect written feedback were commonly used by the teachers in correcting the students’ writing since those feedback made the teachers easier to measure the level of the students’ writing.

4.2 Discussion

The researcher found that the use of the direct written feedback is discovered more than the indirect feedbacks. There were 84 direct feedbacks found from 20 students’ writing. Then, the most common feedback appear was directly answer with the total number of 70 feedbacks and responding by written the comment with the total of 14 feedbacks. Presumably, the direct answer occurred because it is a simply way to correct the students’ writing. For example,

E1: “I felt (felt) boring and I have taken (taken) bath.”.

It can be seen that the teacher directly correct the students work by giving mark and writing the proper word. According to Bitchener and Ferris (2012) the form of the direct written feedback is the most effective way to help the students in mastering specific targeted on the structural writing over a short term process. The use of the direct written feedback in the students’ writing can help them to focus on the specific matters for instance; grammar, vocabulary, word order and many more.

E2: “...and we was (got) punishmented (punishment) by Mrs. Cut...”.

“Focus on past tense, please!”

The teacher (TC) 1 wrote the direct answer with responding by written the comment. The teacher mixed the direct answer and the responding feedback by written the comment on the students’ work. Victoria (2001), as cited by Harmer (2007) explained that the teacher needs to provide the students with guidelines or a short list of sentences in order to make sure that the comment given is focused. In this case, the teacher used the direct feedback and added the responding comment to make a clear explanation about the feedback given.

E3: “Excellent and more focus on past sentence”
In this case, teacher gave comments on the students’ error as responding, after that, teacher gave the recommendation of the errors that students made (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, the teacher puts recommendation for the students to be more focus on past sentence. Indirect written feedback is a kind of feedback indicates the error by giving marks on it. It was divided into two categories, namely; coded and un-coded feedback (Lee, 2003). The coded feedback is the feedback that specifies the errors by providing several codes or symbols while un-coded feedback is the feedback that indicates errors by underlining or circling Bitchener, et al. (2005). In this study, the total feedbacks produced in the form of indirect written feedback were 49 feedbacks. The majority of the indirect feedbacks revealed into un-coded form.

According to Elashri (2013) the teacher writes the symbols on the errors or mistake and the teacher gives the direction for the student to think what error that the student made as the symbol can helps the student to think. For example,

E4: “\ lift a brokenteam?...”

The teacher put the circle and the question mark which means she combined the coded and un-coded on the students’ writing. The symbol is similar to the symbols provided by (Harmer, 2004) for the unclear meaning. She also combined the responding and un-coded feedback.

E5: “I hope went we study English...”. “Do you mean ‘when’?"

Based on the excerpt above, the teacher put the circle and wrote the comment to make clear the correction, thus it would be easier for the students in correcting their works. In practice, all of the teachers have applied the direct and indirect feedback, but they have been confused the detail information about the written feedback in correcting the students’ writing. They frequently used that kinds of feedback but did not know the exact name of those feedbacks.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study reveals that kinds of written feedback used by English teachers in correcting the students’ writing. There were two different feedbacks involved, namely direct written feedback (responding) and indirect written feedback (correcting). In direct written feedback there were 84 feedbacks which consisted with direct answer and responding by written comments. In indirect written feedback (correcting) there were 49 feedbacks involved which were covered in coded and un-coded feedback.

The direct and indirect written feedback were commonly used by the teachers in correcting the students’ writing since those feedbacks made the teachers easier to measure the level of the students’ writing. It is suggested that the teachers should know the kinds of the feedback before using them in correcting the students’ writing. The teachers must give clear marks, codes or symbols on the students’ writing to help the students find their errors or mistakes. The teachers are also suggested to read the students’ writings carefully and thoroughly since the researcher found many mistakes that the teachers missed during correcting the writings.
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