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A Feedback Investigation of Comparing Teacher and Students' Preferences on Writing Conference in a Novice EFL Writing Class

Naria Fitriani¹ and Sabarniati²

^{1,2}Aceh Polytechnic, Indonesia

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A FEEDBACK INVESTIGATION OF COMPARING TEACHER AND STUDENTS' PREFERENCES ON WRITING CONFERENCE IN A NOVICE EFL WRITING CLASS

Naria Fitriani¹ and Sabarniati²

^{1,2}Aceh Polytechnic, Indonesia

¹Contributor Email: nariafitriani@gmail.com

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Abstract

To enrich students writing aptitude, it is significant to identify the effective feedback process in the language classroom. While the teacher is presenting the appropriate feedback strategies, it is needed to find whether the students prefer what their teacher applied in order to solve their writing problems. The teacher carried out both written and oral (writing conference) in giving feedback, however, this study aims at comparing the teacher and students' preferences on the teacher feedback practice qualitatively. The students' writing assignment of 200 words was submitted before the conference schedule. Receiving the written feedback on their writing sheets, the students read and review their teacher feedback. Next, participating in this study, the students were required to contribute on the questionnaire about their preferences during the conference, while the teacher was interviewed. The results show that the students (58%) in the novice writing class preferred on the writing conference. There were 79% students in English writing program would rather work in personal with their teacher which means each of students work one-to-one. Meanwhile, the teacher preferred providing the written feedback, though she realized that the conference might work better on the novice level.

Keywords: *Students' Preferences; Feedback; Writing Conference; Written Feedback*



A. Introduction

It is clearly defined that EFL students need feedback to construct their language purpose of acquiring the target language. The term feedback not only has the meaning inside of classroom environment, but also out side of the classroom. In other words, feedback is well known as any kind of information and material, either verbal or non-verbal, considered giving positive or negative effect. In this case, the student needs to know what others (might be the teacher, pair or the other students) think about his/her language product. To deal with, in this study, the feedback is linked to any beneficial words provided in developing writing skill.

Keh (1990) has defined the feedback process as the drive which steers the students through writing process approach with the aim of producing good writing drafts. He also stressed that the primary point is feedback in the writing process. Moreover, Zachrias (2007: 51) proved her study in Indonesia that most EFL students believed feedback as an important thing for them to improve their language skills. With the teacher feedback which is more qualified, experienced, accurate, valid, reliable and trustworthy, the students were excited and motivated on the learning process. To agree with, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) concurred that feedback works on students' motivation. Teacher feedback on student writing sheet contains a conversation between teacher and student in the writing context involving student's ideas, structures, successes, and difficulties during the acquirement of the language.

Jones (2013: 12) stated that both teacher(s) and students take benefit in the conference since the teacher clarifies the student's taught while the student keeps improving the writing skill through the meeting. During the conferring, both teacher and students play their own roles in two parts (Anderson, 2000). The first part is the students as writers, while they are responsible on their drafts, the teacher talks about their works and finally teaches them. The second one is the students to be better writers. This part guides the students to advance after conference, with



several feedbacks and teaching session, the students definitely improve in the writing work.

However, the acts of teacher and students in the writing conference produced bias output occasionally. The gap between the teacher's feedback practices and the students' preferences in the classroom was necessary to be clarified. Therefore, this research addresses the teacher's and students' opinions and preferences on the students writing performance during the conference in the beginner-writing class.

B. Literature Review

Since feedback plays an important role in students' writing activity, it is truly stated that providing feedback effectively helps students to improve their learning process in writing class (Bookhart, 2008). On the other hand, Hyland (2010) expressed the issues of responding student's writing; teacher written feedback, teacher-student conferencing and peer feedback. Regarding teacher written feedback technique, it is stated that direct feedback is truly beneficial for students to boost their skill (e.g. Suh, 2014; Jalaluddin, 2015). Besides, in Turkey, the students in the indirect coded feedback group committed to produce less error than another group (Erel and Bulut, 2007). Consequently, the way to deliver feedback is important to facilitate students' language development (Richards and Farrell, 2011), since giving feedback effectively for students is meant to improve their language accuracy (Srichanyachon, 2014).

On the other hand, successful writing conference helps writers to enhance and revise their works (for example Strong, 2002; Lerner, 2005; Ricks, 2014). Black (1998: 13) also believed that conference is effective since teacher with her students may talk directly to deal with the students' problems during the writing process, while she attempts to motivate them and show the things around them in which they can explore because it is impossible to explain every single thing about their writing works in a particular time.

Liu (2009) who researched on the students' perceptions of the writing conference stated that it is essential to listen the students' voices in order to explore their expectation of the conference during the writing



class. And incorporate students' expectations in conducting conferences. During the discussion, teacher and students play their roles. It is not effective for students to listen to their teacher in whole time yet they speak nothing about their problems during the conference. As the writers, the students should be encouraged to decide what to do next after the feedback given during the conference (Hyland, 2000). Weber (1993) also realized that the writing conference objective is to make the students talk about their obstacles during the writing process. Additionally, it is stated that not only the teacher encourages, questions, and listens, but also she lets them ask confidently about their own drafts. In other words, teacher(s) and students benefit to hold the conference since they know how to take the advantages on it (Jones, 2003). Therefore, the writing conference brings the challenge for its conversation.

On the other hand, Sinchak (2015) wondered about the writing conference for young students. She trained the teachers, mostly young teachers to conduct the conference with effective strategies. On the first-grade students, it is important to understand their interests in order to show their level of motivation. In other words, the greater their interest in narrative writing, the higher level of motivation they get. Moreover, peer review during the conference helps the students to produce better scores on the writing rubrics. The results showed that there is a significant improvement on the students' writing works owing to the useful writing conference. Related to the issue, Diab (2005), reported that it is essential to study students' feedback preferences. Giving precise response for students, teachers need to understand students' preferences on their paper marking and error correction techniques in writing class. The results expressed that most students want to be corrected on both of their drafts.

C. Method

This qualitative study obtained the data on the novice English writing class on the fourth semester with 33 students in Ar-Raniry State Islamic University of Banda Aceh. The students consist of six males and 27 females who were ranged mostly in age from 18 to 20 years and registered



in the writing course. It was convinced that the participants had the capability in English writing, so that the teacher had them compose a 200 word English essay. During the data collection, we also involved the teacher to avoid finding the one way thought or preferences of the students. For the students, five questions on the open-ended questionnaire adopted from Hyland (2010), Lee (2008), and Ferris (1995) were employed while the teacher was interviewed after class-hour. After the teacher implemented the writing conference approach in the classroom, the students were required to write their opinions to response the questions on the questionnaire sheet. Although the language questions provided in English, we also let them answer the questions in their mother tongue to enable students give complete information. Before they answered the questions, we explained the meaning of each questions and also give time for them to ask.

After collecting the data needed, the questionnaire and the interview script were analyzed according to the kind of the instruments. The data were basically analyzed following the steps of data condensation, data display, and verifying conclusion (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2014). In data condensation, the large data from students' questionnaires answers, and interview, were selected, focused, abstracted, and transformed. The irrelevant, overlap and redundancy data were condensed. The pertinent data were blocked, shortened and coded.

D. Research Finding

1. Students Preference on Written Feedback

It is undoubted that EFL students require feedback to boost their language competence. In this case, the students receive both verbal and non-verbal feedback from their teachers. While the teacher delivers for the comments to encourage or suggest on her students' work, it is better to know whether those responses are useful for them or not.

The general question consists of the students' behavior towards teacher written feedback was shown on the first line on Table 1. The students agreed



that the comments provided on their writing assignments involved the significant feedback. It is 52% students who wrote like ‘I always read comments from my teacher’. Meanwhile, other students (21%) convinced that they sometimes read the comments. Although few of the students (24%) expressed their opinions without putting the frequency such as always, often, sometimes, and never. They believe that the teacher’s written feedback is useful to develop their skill by revising the essay.

Table 1 Students’ Responses on the Teacher Comments

Questions	Response	Percentage
Do you read your teacher’s comments and corrections on your writing sheet?	Yes.	24%
	Yes, always	52%
	Yes, sometimes	21%
Do you use your teacher’s comments or suggestions when you write your revising or next writing task?	A little bit	3%
	Sometimes	9%
	Yes	88%
Does your teacher give you positive or encouraging comments?	Yes.	67%
	Yes, always	27%
	Yes, sometimes	6%

From the table above, it was investigated of the students’ attitude toward the teacher feedback, whether it was useful or constructive to the forthcoming performance. The finding shows that all of the students answered either the teacher’s comments or suggestions were useful for them to revise and to be aware on writing process in the future. There were 88% students totally used the teacher feedback to revise their writing assignment. They believed that the teacher’s comments or suggestions help them to be better for the next writing performance. While most of the students stated ‘it is so important and I always use that (the teacher feedback) to develop my skills’, three students (9%) stated that ‘sometimes teacher’s suggestion make my writing move better and amazing’. Moreover, a student wrote on the questionnaire sheet that he sometimes uses both the teacher responses and suggestions to his work, it means that he kept concurring that the teacher feedbacks are useful. However, one



student stated (3%) that he used 'a little bit', he might be confused with the teacher's comment on both marginal and end comment on his essay.

According to Table 1 on the third question, it illustrated that the teacher behaved on giving either positive or encouraging comments to their 200 words essay writing. Based on their opinions, all of them (100%) say 'yes', though 67% say 'yes', 27% said 'yes, always', and 6% said 'yes, sometimes', it still has the meaning that their teacher gave them positive feedback and motivated them through their works. However, another student wrote on his paper that "Of course, the comment is really important to make me better and my teacher sometimes gives me positive comments and sometimes she gives me negative comments but I like it. It can make me try, try and try, to be a good student". It is implicitly stated that the teacher not only put the positive comment but she also wrote the negative response to her students. Additionally, another student also argued on his questionnaire sheet that 'Sometimes, my teacher gives me the positive comments, but some comments make me wondering why it is wrong although it is also good for my next writing'. The student's statement seems that he is confused on his teacher comments on the essay which means that he/she needs to clarify it.

Oral feedback therefore needs to be conducted in order to avoid those puzzles and misunderstanding among students. During the conference, the students have opportunity to talk about their writing works and the teacher on her way might encourage them to achieve the target language. At the same time, both teacher and students could overcome the issues emerged such as unclear statement or comment during the written feedback.

2. Students Preferences on Writing Conference

Based on the questionnaire required to the students, it was found that most of the students preferred their teacher to hold the writing individual student conference. It means that the teacher managed the class with the student's turn for certain time. The following table is the



explanation of the students' preferences on teacher-student conference feedback in the writing class. The reasons of the students' choices to the answer on the questionnaires were also explained on the table below.

Table 2 Students Preferences on the Writing Conference

Questions	Response	Percentage
Which type of feedback would you like your teacher to give more in future? In written, conference or others?	Conference	58%
	Written	30%
	Both	12%
The students' preferences on teacher are writing conference method to respond their error in the future.	One-to-one	79%
	In group	15%
	Both	3%

According to the table above, it delineates the students' preferences on the types of teacher feedback such as oral and written feedback they should receive more in the future. The results indicate that more students (58%) preferred oral feedback to the teacher written feedback. It was also demonstrated that teacher conference or teacher feedback directly makes the students simple to understand. Additionally, on the student's sheet, it was illustrated that "actually I prefer oral system because when I do mistakes I can ask teacher face/directly and the teacher can explain which part is wrong". Moreover, the other stated that "I like teacher to give me more conference in future, because I can ask her directly and I can understand well". The students who liked the conference better than written feedback speculated that the oral method is the way to catch the whole information about doing error(s) in the class. This kind of feedback was also trusted for the students to improve their language oral skill during it as both teacher and student do the conversation naturally.

Besides, the distinguished number of the students' answer written and both oral and written feedback is extremely closed. There were 30% preferred written and 12% students decided to choose both feedbacks. A student who preferred written feedback said that "I prefer written teacher feedback because I can see that again and again and I can know the point



of mistake". This respond has the meaning that written texts are easy to read and to review. Meanwhile, more than 10% students preferred on both of the teacher techniques. On a student sheet, it was stated that "both of them I like, depend situation written oral make me better". This situation distinctly indicates that the teacher should organize and realize in which the method is more practical and effective.

The table above also indicates that all of the students' preferred the teacher-student oral conference in the classroom. Both teachers' methods on teacher-student oral conference which are face to face and in group are sought toward the students' questionnaires. It is required the students to voice their preferences to teacher oral feedback, which method is appropriate to them. The findings illustrated that 79% of the students prefer the conference the way one-to-one. A student wrote on the sheet that "I prefer oral feedback one by one because the teacher can explain it more intensive", and the others wrote "one by one, because it makes me more comfortable and easy to ask face to face or directly".

On the contrary, five students (15%) preferred to be implemented in group. They thought that working in team is easier for them to understand. In addition, it was written while teacher was responding their error(s) in group, the students might share their opinions each other. Some students considered that grouping generally helps the students' common problem during the writing process; therefore they felt more comfortable to work with their friends than with their teacher.

3. Teacher's Belief on Feedback

Comparing the teacher belief and the students' opinions, this study also acquired the data from the teacher's interview. The teacher was personally enquired several questions about the teacher feedback she carried out in the writing class. Either through written or oral in providing feedback to the students was investigated during the interview. Finally, the structure interview was organized after the class hour. The further explanation about the data obtained is presented as follow:



The results described that the teacher believed in the written feedback at the beginning (see E1). Though she said that most students did not understand with the written feedbacks, as adult students, they should take more time (if they need) to understand the feedback. In addition, for this beginner writing level, she realized that oral feedback is more effective because they might do several errors even in one sentence. Consequently, she told that her written feedback is not quite effective for them as beginners.

(E1) I do believe that because in written feedback, most of students do not understand with the feedbacks and it takes more time for them to understand it. I mean they couldn't directly ask to me what do you mean by these corrections, what do you mean by this, by that. It depends, really depends of the levels of student proficiency. For this beginner level, yes, oral feedback is more effective because they're- sometimes in one sentence there are like three or more errors in the single sentence. That's why written feedback is not so effective for beginners.

Relating to the explanation above, this study attempted to recount the teacher preference on the conference. It was interviewed whether the teacher prefer to work one-to-one or in small groups. To make the students easily comprehend on the feedback, the teacher preferred to work individually for each student. Her belief relies on each student's opportunities to ask freely because their problems to develop this language skill cannot be generalized (see E2). Therefore, she was sure that working on one-to-one was able to reduce the students' apprehension.

(E2) To make the student understand individually what because-- because different student wrote different things, right, different sentence, they create different errors. If the individual has the ability in their writing, that's why I prefer to come to the student individually to see what they have got in their writings and to make them like comfortable to ask questions to me. Sometimes they feel shy to ask the questions in front of class. One-to-one reduce their awareness.

During the writing conference, the topic discussed was also ascertained toward the interview. The data found that the teacher never made any kind of notes before the conference (see E3). Although she prepared for the teacher-student oral feedback, the topic was going to be

discussed rested on the students' problems during the writing process. It usually depends on what common area of the student makes the errors. However, she mostly covered grammar topic in the conference as it related to the syllabus and the number of students' errors. Thus, the oral feedback held in the beginner writing class depends on the students' errors and their understanding of teacher written feedback.

(E3) I never make that kind of notes. I just come to the class and ask, "Any questions? What do you want to ask? Any confusing comments on your notes?" It depends on the areas that the student makes. (It's grammar)

Dealing with the information above, it was also imperative to find how the teacher assessed the effectiveness on her feedback practice. It was identified on the students' essays progress, whether the errors kept emerging or becoming less. In other word, the better paragraph organization they perform, the more effective feedback works.

(E4) I see the effectiveness on the feedback through the progress of the student writing. So, I'll see the next writing assignment of the student. If they come with the better style of writing or with better paragraph organization, it's mean that the feedback is effective.

From the data gathered, it was clearly shown that the teacher preferred the written feedback though she realized that the conference practice employs better on the beginner students. Additionally, her certainty signified that the feedback provided to the students depends on what level they were learning the EFL.

E. Discussion

The results of the students' questionnaire brought several implications on the teaching writing process in the classroom. First, the beginner students preferred their teacher to implement teacher-student oral conference. The majority of the students felt comfortable to talk with their teacher during the conference. It was 58% of the students who were also free to ask and confirm the misunderstanding on their essays on face-to-face. Bayraktar (2013) also approved that teacher-student writing conference like one-on-one conversation is such an effective strategy in the



writing class. Although few students would rather work in group since they independently consult with their peers, teacher keeps playing her essential role during the conference.

On the other hand, the teacher-student relationship attempted built during the learning instruction. It is verified that the teacher called the students' names on both the conferring and on the writing text which make the students relax though they were being criticized. Ferris (2003: 119) also identified sound principles for responding to students' writings. She expressed that the feedback should include encouragement by considering the use of student's name, making comments in the margins and in end notes and also show interest in their ideas of writing.

During the conference, the teacher seems to control the activities by predicting the topic discussed, the problems located, and duration spent. As indicated in Hawkins (2016: 20) teacher should manage the conference talk such as students' attitude and motivation in order in the writing class. Moreover, it is important that the teacher know the effective interaction and the students' needs in the conference. Therefore, the teacher can prepare the best strategy applied during the conference in the writing class.

The result of this study showed that 88% students apply the teacher's comments on their next works. This huge number implied that teacher's feedbacks are undoubtedly necessary in teaching writing. Conrad and Goldstein (1999: 149-150) stressed that it is an essential thing for students to revise their writing drafts according to the teacher feedback. It is also stated that teacher feedback and students' writing revision relate each other. The success of student revision showed their understanding of the teacher comments'.

It could also be concluded based on the tables in the results, that both the teacher and the students prefer the exact similar type of feedback in writing class: oral and one to one. As Ferris (2014: 8) stated that one-to-one writing conferences may be more effective than written teacher commentary. In her study, the students showed their contentment



towards the conference. On the other hand, the combined written teacher feedback such as suggestion about content, organization and language also occupied the high percent of the responses.

To overcome the writing issue on the EFL writing class, it is advocated that the feedbacks are varied. To improve the students' writing ability, the teacher should combine her responses. Wen (2013: 430) expressed that both teacher and students should cooperate to reach the language acquisition in teaching learning process. The students should commit on improving their language work while the teacher should understand what the students' needs.

F. Conclusion

Teacher feedback has closely related to the encouragement of the students. In this study, it described both opinions of the teacher and students on the feedback practice during the writing process approach. Although the teacher certainly stated that the written feedback is effective for the students in developing their writing skill, she did not deny that oral feedback works better in the beginner writing class. On the other hand, the students expressed that they read their teacher feedback since the words written are helpful and encouraging.

The findings showed that the students in the beginner writing class preferred on the teacher-student oral feedback. 58% of the students answered to the oral feedback rather than written feedback. Moreover, they were eager for the one-to-one conference which means that the teacher came to each of them and so they might clarify what they have written and what the teacher has commended and suggested. Although the teacher had less agreement with the students' oral preference, she presupposed that teacher-student conference could properly work on the beginner class. However, she kept giving them written feedback as it was easy to observe the students' progress of the teacher feedback comprehension. In addition, the next writing task or revision will show the students feedback understanding by producing or minimizing the equal error(s).



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