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Understanding Teacher Written Corrective Feedback Practices in EFL Writing Classroom

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Abstract

Feedback is widely applied as the scaffolding learning techniques in the field of second and foreign language writing. This significance has been recognised as a form of the students' improving control over composing skills key element that is acknowledged as the process-based classroom. However, there is less published literature about how secondary teacher in EFL context responds to the students' writing. Further, little is known about why teachers respond the writing in the ways they do, and the factors behind the current feedback practices. Therefore, this study addressee the tensions in the written corrective feedback type and strategy applied at a secondary school involving a teacher as its participant. It was designed as a case study aiming at (1) examining the actual feedback practice and its reason, (2) describing factors that shape teacher's current practice in providing written corrective feedback. The data were gathered by document analysis and interview consisting of five items related to the actual practices in written corrective feedback type and strategy, followed by factors that shape those practices. The findings showed that teacher was favoured to use indirect, uncoded, hints and selective written corrective feedback. In addition, two factors were found taking the responsibility of those current practices.

Keywords*: Teacher written corrective feedback, practice, factor, EFL writing classroom*

1. Introduction

Despite research on oral response and peer as sources of feedback increase recently, teacher's written feedback continues to play a central role in the most of second or foreign language classroom and lead probably as the most common form of feedback used by second or foreign language teachers (Hyland, 2003, p. 178). Written corrective feedback, referring to the error correction, had a long period of history and become a controversial issue in the second language writing and second language acquisition over previous several decades. Truscott (1996) was the first who called for the error correction abandonment that led that controversial issue, since error correction could be harmful to the students' fluency and their overall writing quality and also harmful for teachers since it turns time and energy away from the more productive writing process aspects. Notwithstanding, Ferris (1999) claimed that Truscott's opinions were too impulsive and excessively strong given the promptly developing research evidence highlighting to the ways in which effective error correction could and does assist at least minimally several students on writing as long as it is prioritized, clear and selective. Moreover, Chandler (2003) argued that Truscott's finding was sometimes lack of data support on the original study with the statistically noteworthy evidence.

Although the effectiveness of written corrective feedback among researchers is yet totally clear, teachers are continuing to respond students' writing by providing written corrective feedback. They still believe that responding to students' error by giving the comments or providing error correction could enhance students' writing accuracy, for the example, the accuracy in grammatical and lexical error, than when they did not (Chandler, 2003, p. 290). Thus, significant amount of research has been conducted to seek on how teachers respond to students' writing and the effect of those ways. These studies focused on short and long term of error correction effects on the students' writing, but less research has explored the actual amount and type of written corrective feedback practices. Whereas, this case is important to know what extent teachers implement written corrective feedback into their actual practice since teachers need to present it effectively in order to make students could fully develop their ideas (Magno and Amarles, 2012). Additionally, knowing teachers' practices is essential as reflective study for the teachers

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to comprehend to what extent of their practices congruent to their beliefs and the reasons behind the teachers' inappropriate written corrective feedback practices in order to design pedagogical improvements (Alkhatib, 2015).

Moreover, mostly published literature of written corrective feedback studies have been done in L1 and L2 context, and in the English Dominant countries especially in the USA (Lee, 2014). Hence, less of the study conducted in Indonesia so far that investigate the actual practices of teacher written corrective feedback and the factors that shape those practices. The existing studies in Indonesia mainly focus on the experimental study about whether corrective feedback could be an effective way to improve writing accuracy and what type of corrective feedback is more effective among others (eg. Septiana, Sulistyo, & Kadarisman, 2016; Kisnanto, 2016). Hence for fulfilling the gap, this current study tries to examine the actual written corrective feedback practices in the EFL context.

2. Method

This present study occupied a case study research design with purposive sampling of its case selection. A teacher was selected for the participant since she met the criteria of teacher who utilises teacher written corrective feedback as their technique in teaching writing. At the time of the study, Nu (pseudonym) has been graduated from English education department at a non-governmental university. She has been teaching English for fourteen years and utilising written corrective feedback around five to seven years.

In conducting this study, the researcher analysed the students text containing teacher written corrective feedback done by Nu followed by an interview adapted from Lee (2009). The interview had two major parts. The former part deals with the type and strategy of written corrective feedback implemented by teacher, while later part deals with factors that shape those current practices. The interview data were transcribed, coded and summarized. Meanwhile, the document analysis were subjected to the frequency of written corrective usage. The research question that guide this study were (1) What are the type and strategy teachers' practiced on providing written corrective feedback and (2) what are the factors that shape teachers' practices in providing written corrective feedback.

3. Findings

3.1 Teachers' practices on providing writing correcting feedback

The first research question explored Nu's practices related to type and strategy of teacher written corrective feedback. Each practices is first described and then illustrated collected from document analysis and interview. Thus, the last attempt is to explain the practices on the data collection.

a) Practice 1: The teachers' practices for marking error by direct vs. indirect

"Giving feedback should be indirect"

From the document analysis, of the 144 points marked on students' text showed that Nu emphasized indirect corrective feedback type over the direct with 140 points dedicated to indirect while remained the direct corrective feedback. When interviewed, Nu stated that feedback should be given without providing the correct answer. Nu explained the reason of choosing indirect over the direct as shown in the following excerpt:

Saya memilih menggunakan yang kedua, tanggapan tidak langsung. Karena bisa membuat siswa lebih mandiri. Mampu mengoreksi kesalahannya sendiri dengan menyadari kesalahan dan berusaha untuk tidak mengulanginya lagi. (I choose to use the second one, the indirect feedback. Because it makes my students becoming autonomous. Able to correct their writing error independently by realising their error and try not to it again). (Interview 1)

b) Practices 2: The teachers' practices of marking error by coded vs. uncoded strategy

"Marking error by circling or underlining the error is preferable"

Associated to the document analysis, the majority of marked error, 120 from 144 of total feedback, was uncoded feedback. It means that Nu preferred marking the students' error without giving any further clue except underlining and circling. However, this feedback analysis was not in line to Nu's stated practice that favour to the coded feedback rather than uncoded feedback. The evidence of this stated practice as shown as follows:

Saya menggunakan kode agar lebih spesifik. Itu akan memudahkan siswa dalam mengenali kesalahannya. (I used error code in order to be more specific. It sould ease the students recognise their error). (Interview 1)

Nevertheless, Nu realized that she might find the challenge in marking code for students' error even though it was rare. That was about the limited knowledge of students in identifying the codes. This evidence of this stated practice as shown in the excerpt below:

Tetapi terkadang saya menemui masalah. Misalnya saya menggunakan kode V untuk Verb ya, untuk siswa yang memang tidak mengerti ya mereka akan bertanya "V itu apa?". Atau untuk adjective "adj", mereka masih menanyakan hal ini. Tapi cukup jarang ditemui. (However, sometimes I find the problem. For instance, I used V code for Verb, for the students who do not understand would ask, "What is V?" or adjective "adj", they still asked this question). (Interview 1)

c) Practices 3: The teachers' practices for marking error by explicit vs. hints strategy

"Marking students' error should be hints over explicit strategy"

In the feedback analysis, Nu was noted using some hints strategy with no reported explicit strategy. She was underlining or circling the students' error with additional mark such as question mark in the edge of the margin of the line. That reported feedback actually was in accordance with the interview that has been conducted. She stated:

Saya langsung menunjukkan letak kesalahan. Misalnya ini begini ya "The kitten was gone". Maka saya akan menggaris bawahi yang "was", kemudian "was" ini saya beri tanda panah ke "kittens" agar mereka tahu bahwa mereka seharusnya tidak menggunakan "was" karena "kitten" nya ada banyak. Saya beri tanda panah ke sana kemudian disertai tanda silang diujungnya. Bahwa tulisan mereka itu salah telak begitu. (I directly locate the error. For example, "the kitten was gone". Thus, I will underline the "was", giving it arrow mark direct to the "kittens", so they will know they should not use "was" because there are so many "kitten". I give it arrow mark direct to it then I give a cross mark on the margin of the line. In order knowing, they are very wrong). (Interview 1)

Additionally, Nu stated her aim in doing hints strategy, creating arrow to relate or to indicate one word to another word, was for creating logic to the students' thinking process. Therefore, students could rethink about what was wrong and how to deal with it.

d) Practices 4: The teachers' practices of marking error by selective and comprehensive strategy

"Focus on several aspects leads to selective strategy"

Nu thought that every aspect on the writing composition was important to be corrected. However, she believed that those aspects could not be corrected once time. Therefore, she stated that her error correction practice should be selective.

Sebenarnya seluruh aspek menulis itu penting, seperti isi atau ide, tata bahasa, organisasi, mekanik dan kosa kata. Cuma kalau dilakukan satu waktu akan membebani siswa. Itu kalau menurut saya. Banyak sekali yang harus dikerjakan dalam satu waktu. Kesannya seperti itu. (Actually all aspects are important, like the content or idea, grammar, mechanics, organisation and vocabulary. Nevertheless, if I do that at once will surely make students suppressed. It seems like that). (Interview 1)

This statement actually in accord to her feedback analysis that select some aspects to be corrected. Those were vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

e) Practices 5: The teachers' practices of the focused aspect in providing written corrective feedback

"Contextualizing feedback practice is the priority"

Corresponding to the data analysis, Nu was more focus to correct vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics with a few correction to the content and organization. This findings was little bit different to the stated practice that mentioned content, grammar, and diction or vocabulary as the focused items as stated in the following excerpt:

Kalau misalnya fokusnya saat itu sedang belajar diksi dan plus grammar misalnya, maka hanya diksi dan grammar yang akan saya perhatikan. Yang lainnya saya biarkan dulu dan akan kemudian saya koreksi di kesempatan yang lain. Tapi, biasanya saya focus pada isi, kemudian ada tata bahasa dan juga ada diksi. (For instance, if my learning focuses at that time is about diction and grammar for example, so I will only pay more attention on diction and grammar. I will ignore other aspects, and it will be corrected another time. However, I usually focus on content, then grammar and also diction). (Interview 1)

Although the document analysis and the stated practice have a difference, Nu persisted to believe that her practice should be focus on several aspects rather than all aspects since it may make students supressed and dislike English subject as stated by Nu below:

Karena beigini, kalau semua kesalahan yang ada itu harus dikoreksi akan tidak focus dan membuat siswa terbebani akhrinya mereka tidak suka sama Bahasa Inggris. (It is because if all errors should be corrected, it would be unfocused and make students feel suppressed which may lead them dislike English). (Interview 1)

3.2. Factors of the practiced written corrective feedback

The second part of this study pursued to examine the factors of Nu's practices concerning providing written corrective feedback. Each factor that has been gathered from the feedback analysis and follow-up interview would be pronounced and illustrated before it is explained.

a) Factor 1: Personal experience as a factor that shape teacher's practice in providing written corrective feedback

"*Adapting her former teacher feedback practice when Nu was on senior high school"*

On shaping Nu's practice in providing written corrective feedback, personal practice came at very first place since she did not get the written corrective feedback theory from any seminar, training, or academic background. Therefore, she got written corrective feedback when she was on senior high school. Nevertheless, Nu got bad experience from her teacher by getting abundance of feedback that made her feel depressed. Therefore, she adapted that knowledge into this current practice of feedback. She stated:

Bagi saya dulu, begitu ada tugas kemudian dikoreksi oleh guru. Begitu banyak kesalahan itu sudah membebani bagi saya. "Ko banyak sekali yang harus dikerjakan; ternyata ruwet sekali bahasa Inggris". Kita sadar bahwa Bahasa Inggris itu memang tidak mudah. Tapi kan kita harus selalu berusaha membuat bahwa Bahasa Inggris itu mudah dan bisa dikuasai. Salah satunya ya itu, step by step. Kita mulai sedikit demi sedikit dulu sampai akhirnya mereka mengerti. (For me, once there was an assignment then the teacher corrected it. So many errors were made, it was already burdening me. "There is so much to do, it turns out very complicated in English". Even though we realize you are studying in English and I teach English. We realize that English is not easy. However, we must always try to make English easy and able to be mastered. One of them is that, step-by-step. (Interview 1)

b) Factor 2: Practical experience as a factor that shape teacher's practice in providing written corrective feedback

"Practices are changing during experiencing feedback practice"

Second factor came from her practical experience. Since she practice written corrective feedback at first time, some modifications have been added in order to have more effective written corrective feedback practices. Those modification are recorded as follows:

Saya menggunakan written corrective feedback mungkin sekitar lima sampai tujuh tahun. Dibandingkan dengan yang sekarang, dulu saya melingkari, saya tandai kemudian saya katakana bahwa ini salah, seharusnya seperti ini. Kalau sekarang lebih ke yang saya tandai, atau saya lingkari, kemudian anaknya saya beri pertanyaan untuk trigger, agar mereka menggali, apa kesalahan ini. (I use written corrective feedback maybe around five to seven years. Compared to current practice, former I gave a mark, circled the error and gave them the correct way. Now, I just give a mark or circle, and then ask questions to trigger my students to analyse the error). (Interview 2)

She further explained the reasons of her changing practice. Those reasons related to the students that tend to forget the given feedback and the students' dependence to get teacher's scaffolding as noticed in the following excerpt:

Yang saya tandai, atau saya centang kemudian mereka saya beri tahu "seharusnya seperti ini". Ketika saya beri itu, anak cenderung lupa dengan kesalahan yang dibuat. Dan mereka cenderung terlalu bergantung dengan guru. Tentu saja ini kurang baik untuk mereka. (The one with a mark and then I give the correction "should be like this". When I did that way, students tend to forget about their errors and tend to rely on the teacher. Of course, it would be bad for them). (Interview 2)

3.3. Discussion

This current study is pursued to examine teacher's practice in providing writing corrective feedback at EFL setting. The findings showed that the teacher employed indirect corrective feedback rather than direct corrective feedback. Her reason of utilising indirect corrective feedback was because she wanted to make students become an autonomous learner, able to find and correct their own errors. This reason actually in line to Al-Hajri and Al Mahrooqi (2013) who stated that indirect corrective feedback aims at encouraging students to analyse their error in order that they could build problem-solving skill. However, Nu still used direct corrective feedback although it was in very limited portion. Further, the majority of teacher written corrective feedback practiced by Nu was uncoded. Uncoded means underlining and circling the error without giving any further code to indicate the error category. Responding to this result, Ferris (2002) argued that identifying the error code could be unpractised for the teacher and confusing for the students. Furthermore, Nu favoured to practiced hints rather than explicit written corrective feedback aiming at creating logic to the students' thinking process. Lee (2003, p. 146) suggested that higher language proficiency students may benefit more by applying hints written corrective feedback strategy. Meanwhile, Nu chose selective corrective feedback over the comprehensive corrective feedback to be practiced, which was not in line with the Junqueira and Payant's result (2015). Nu's focused aspects were local issue such as grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. In regard with this result, Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) argued that selecting focused aspect at a time has been proven to be better for both and short and long-term written accuracy.

According to Borg (2003, p.81) subject knowledge, personal knowledge, practical experience and also academic background are the aspects which come at the very first place that responsible for affecting on teachers' practices. Hence in this study, factors that affected Nu's practices were related to her personal knowledge and practical experience since she did not get any knowledge from her previous college, training or seminar.

4. Conclusion

This research is aiming at examining the teacher's actual practices in providing written corrective feedback at EFL setting and factors that shape those practices. In regard with Lee's framework, it presents some types and strategies namely direct, indirect, coded, uncoded, hints, explicit, selective and comprehensive written corrective feedback. In the type of feedback, Nu favoured indirect corrective feedback to be practiced. Therefore in practicing indirect corrective feedback type, she preferred to practiced uncoded, hints and selective written corrective feedback. Thus, personal experience and practical knowledge were the factors that affecting her practices in providing written corrective feedback. Nevertheless, the findings of this research only examine one participant representing teacher in EFL setting. It is suggested that further research related to practices and beliefs could be conducted in order to get comprehensive description about teachers' actual practice in the classroom.

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