

WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN WRITING CLASS: STUDENTS' PREFERENCES AND TYPES OF ERRORS

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ABSTRAK

Umpan balik tertulis sering dipilih oleh pengajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing dalam upayanya memberikan umpan balik bagi tulisan mahasiswa. Meskipun banyak peneliti sudah meneliti penerapan dari umpan balik tertulis, banyak dari penelitian tersebut difokuskan pada efektifitas umpan balik tertulis dan alasan-alasan penggunaannya dari sudut pandang pengajar. Pilihan mahasiswa pada jenis umpan balik tertulis yang diterapkan oleh pengajar mereka dan jenis kesalahan-kesalahan apa yang harus dikoreksi selama ini tidak diteliti secara mendalam. Oleh karena itu, peneliti bermaksud mengidentifikasi pilihan mahasiswa di kelas Paragraph Writing dalam hal umpan balik tertulis serta jenis-jenis kesalahan yang harus dikoreksi oleh pengajar di kelas writing. Peneliti mendistribusikan kuesioner dalam bentuk uraian dan pilihan ganda untuk mengumpulkan data. Temuan pertama menunjukkan bahwa mendapat umpan balik dari pengajar dianggap sebagai hal yang berguna bagi perbaikan tulisan mahasiswa. Namun, sebagian besar mahasiswa memilih umpan balik tertulis bertipe tidak langsung. Dari tiga bentuk umpan balik tipe tersebut, mereka menyebutkan bahwa bentuk umpan balik dengan cara memberikan indikasi dan lokasi kesalahan (indicating and locating) adalah jenis umpan balik tertulis yang paling berguna. Temuan kedua menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan-kesalahan dalam hal bentuk, seperti tata bahasa, tanda baca, pengejaan, dan kosa kata dianggap berguna untuk diperbaiki oleh pengajar. Hal ini membuktikan bahwa mahasiswa, sebagai mahasiswa yang belajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, memerlukan lebih banyak umpan balik dalam hal ketepatan bahasa agar tidak ada kesalahan dalam tulisan mereka.

Keywords: Written Corrective Feedback, EFL Writing

1. INTRODUCTION

For EFL university students, writing is still considered difficult. However, in this globalization era, it is becoming more demanding for them to master writing well. Santos (2000) mentions three reasons for that: 1) More international linguists specialize their field of interest on writing, 2) more writings like scientific journals are written and published in English, and 3) more EFL students continue studying in English speaking countries. On account of its importance, the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University offers more writing courses in its curriculum.

One of the writing courses in ELESP discussed in this study is Paragraph Writing, which is offered for semester two students. Based on the Paragraph Writing course outline, this course is meant to give students opportunities to practice their writing skills in order to produce a good paragraph.

During the course, students will be introduced to the concept of a good paragraph which covers topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. Students also need to consider other aspects, i.e. concept of unity and cohesion. The focus of the contents is basically genres which include descriptive, narrative and argumentative genres.

Based on the researcher's observation in her previous Paragraph Writing class, content and paragraph organization do not become the main issues for the students. The concern is more about the form (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics). Although form is considered as a supporting element in paragraph-level course, it takes a very important role in making sense of the students' whole paragraph. Therefore, many of the lecturers think that it is important to help students improve their writing by focusing on the form. One of the "favorite" methods chosen when reviewing students' paragraph is giving written corrective feedback (WCF).

For years, many researchers have been examining the implementation of written corrective feedback (WCF). The proponents of WCF claim that this kind of feedback helps students improve their writing. Hartshorn (2008) states that, "WCF helped students improve overall structural accuracy". Further, Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005) explain that, "a combination of WCF and conference feedback improved accuracy levels in some structures". However, Clark and Ouellette (2008) mention that WCF does not help students identify the nature of the errors made by students although it still helps them notice that errors exist in their writing. Moreover, Truscott (1996), the main opponent of WCF, strongly claims that corrective feedback does not affect students' language accuracy in the long term period. Students will still produce errors in their other writing.

Despite the fact that previous research has discussed written corrective feedback in abundant amount, much of this research focuses more on the effectiveness of WCF and the reasons behind the use of it from teachers' perspectives. The students' preferences on the types of WCF implemented by their teachers and what types of errors students think should be corrected have been left unexplored. Schulz (2001) suggests that finding out students' preferences and opinion on the types of WCF can bring significant influence on their decision to use the feedback in learning. Therefore, this study would like to identify the Paragraph Writing students' preferences regarding written corrective feedback and which errors students think should be corrected.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Written Corrective Feedback

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), corrective feedback (CF) is "any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect" (p. 171). To extend the definition to the written form, they explain that written corrective feedback (WCF) refers to "various ways a reader can respond to a second language writer by indicating that some usage in the writing does not conform to the norms of the target language. In EFL

classrooms, WCF is, in most cases, provided by teachers or instructors in writing classes.

When reviewing students' writing, EFL teachers normally focus on three major issues. The first one is form that refers to linguistic elements such as words, grammatical structures, collocation, mechanics, etc. The second issue is content, which pays more attention on the logic, unity, and coherence of the writing. The third is organization which is related to how ideas are organized into a good paragraph. However, many EFL teachers prioritize more on form-error correction than the others. According to Ferris (1999), the major reason of it is:

Because L2 students, in addition to being developing writers, are still in the process of acquiring the L2 lexicon and morphological and syntactic systems, they need distinct and additional intervention from their writing teachers to make up these deficits and develop strategies for finding, correcting, and avoiding errors (p.4).

Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) conducted a research on what types of errors should be corrected and found out that 71.4% of the respondents thought that grammar, spelling, and vocabulary were more important than the idea development and organization (p. 113).

There are many different forms of written corrective feedback, and the methodologies in giving correction may also vary. However, one of the WCF forms that the researchers have put attention on is direct and indirect WCF. Beuningen (2010) mentions that the difference between these two lies on how far students are involved in the correction. In direct WCF, teachers identify the students' writing errors and directly provide the correct target form.



Since I arrived in Victoria, I ~~am~~ very lonely.

Figure 1. Example of direct WCF (Mirzaii, 2012)

In indirect WCF, on the other hand, teachers only show the students that errors occur by providing error codes such as underlying the errors or circle them. It is students' task to correct their own errors.

Since I arrived in Victoria, I am very lonely.

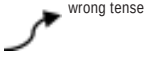


Figure 2. Example of indirect WCF (Mirzaii, 2012)

The following table, which is adapted from Ellis (2009), describes the two forms of WCF:

Table 1: Written Corrective Feedback Forms (Adapted from Ellis, 2009)

Written corrective feedback forms	Description
Direct Written corrective feedback	The teacher provides the student with the correct form.
Indirect written corrective feedback	The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.
a) <i>Indicating + locating the error(s)</i>	This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text.
b) <i>Indication only</i>	This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.

Hypotheses on which form of WCF provides more benefits to students are various. Those in favor of indirect WCF have claimed that it will benefit students more because there is an engaging language process involved when students notice the errors shown by the teachers and, then, revise them. The guided learning and problem solving process in indirect WCF help students understand the norm of the target language better (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). The proponents of direct WCF, on the other hand, argued that it helps students to be directly aware of the errors and the correct form of the target language (Chandler, 2003). In direct WCF, students are most likely to get enough information from the feedback to help them understand the errors and revise their writing.

2.2 EFL Writing

Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh (2007) as cited by Ahmed (2010, p. 212) state, "writing is seen as a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer's communicative skills which is difficult to be developed and learned, especially in EFL context". This is because EFL students mostly learn English writing only in the classrooms. Therefore, limited language knowledge and inadequate linguistic knowledge are often claimed to be the major reasons why writing in English is always problematic (Silva,

1993). Further, Weigle (2002) explains, "because of the constraints of limited second-language knowledge, writing in a second language may be hampered because of the need to focus on language rather than content" (p. 35).

In the case of Indonesian students, English writing is often viewed difficult due to the different

syntactic properties between Indonesian language and the target language, English. As a result, many students rely heavily on their mother tongue when writing in English. As mentioned by Wang and Wen (2002), they are so dependent on their mother tongue and, as a result, they tend to combine the system of their mother tongue with the one in the target language. Bhela (1999) conducted a research on EFL writing errors where the participants were from four different EFL places. The result showed that the errors caused by the interference of mother tongue were related to apostrophe, spelling, prepositions, punctuations, tenses, passive and active forms, vocabulary, and agreements.

3. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to identify the Paragraph Writing students' preferences on written corrective feedback and the types of errors should be corrected. This research was conducted in Paragraph Writing class. Paragraph Writing is one of the subjects that must be taken by the second semester students in English Language Education Study Program, Sanata Dharma University. The class is normally divided into 6 parallel classes. There were 31 participants for this research and they were

from class D. They were chosen because they had experienced getting written corrective feedback, both direct and indirect WCF, from their Paragraph Writing lecturer.

This research implemented both open and close ended questionnaire to gather the data. In order to identify students' preferences on written corrective feedback, the researcher administered two items of questionnaires. On the first item, the researcher presented seven sentences which were the same. The sentences had the same error and the researcher gave a different type of feedback for each. Then, the participants were asked to circle the number that best described how useful the feedback

was. The number started from 1 indicating not useful at all (useless) to 4 indicating very useful (See table 2). This first item was aimed at giving participants clearer concept on direct and indirect WCF through real examples of errors in a sentence.

In order to answer the second formulated problem, the researcher listed the types of errors that students think should be corrected by the lecturer. The participants were asked to circle the number that best described each statement. The number started from 1 indicating not useful at all (useless) to 4 indicating very useful. The following table presents the questionnaire statements.

Table 2: Sentence Analysis to Indicate Students' Preference on the WCF

No.	Sentence	1 (not useful at all)	2 (not useful)	3 (useful)	4 (very useful)
A.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 				
B.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night.				
C.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 				
D.	I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night. – wrong tense				
E.	I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night.				

Table 3: Questionnaire Related to the Types of Errors that Should be Corrected
(Adopted from Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010)

1. If there are many different errors in your written work, which type(s) of error do you want your lecturer to point out most? Circle one number that best describes each statement. *Note:*

1 = not useful at all (useless) 2 = not useful 3 = useful 4 = very useful

No	Statements	1	2	3	4
1.	The lecturer points out organization errors. (example: paragraph structure, sentence order)				
2.	The lecturer points out grammatical errors. (Example: tenses, word order, sentence structure)				
3.	The lecturer points out content/idea errors. (Example: comments on your idea)				
4.	The lecturer points out punctuation errors. (Example: , . ? ;)				
5.	The lecturer points out spelling errors. (Example: beautiful is spelled wrong)				
6.	The lecturer points out vocabulary errors. (Example: wrong word choice, wrong meaning)				

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Paragraph Writing Students' Preference regarding Written Corrective Feedback

This section presents the result of the study. In order to find out the Paragraph Writing students' preference on written corrective feedback, the researcher distributed two items of questionnaires. On the first item, the students were asked to identify which type of feedback that became their preference. There were seven sentences presented in the questionnaire. Those sentences had the same error and each of them was given a different type of feedback. This first item was aimed at giving participants clearer concept on direct and indirect WCF through real examples of errors in a sentence. The result is presented as follows.

Further, the result reveals that indirect feedback was more preferred by the students. According to Ellis (2009), there are three forms of indirect feedback: (1) locating only, (2) indicating only, and (3) indicating and locating the errors. Sentence B used the first form of indirect feedback, which was locating only:

I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night.

In that sentence, the lecturer only indicated that there was an error and the error was on the verb do. However, he/she did not indicate the type of error in that sentence. 28 out of 31 students (90.32%) stated that this form of indirect feedback was useful because it could help the students to be independent, as stated by student 24 (S24):

Table 4. Sentence Analysis to Indicate Students' Preference on the WCF

No.	Sentence	1 (not useful at all)	2 (not useful)	3 (useful)	4 (very useful)
A.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 	16.13%	54.84%	29.03%	0%
B.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 	0%	9.68%	61.29%	29.03%
C.	I <u>do</u> my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 	0%	0%	32.26%	67.74%
D.	I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night. – wrong tense 	0%	48.39%	51.61%	0%
E.	I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night. 	90.32%	9.68%	0%	0%

The table shows that the students prefer to get feedback from the lecturer. It can be seen from their answer for sentence E. In that sentence, feedback was not provided at all. The data shows that all of the students (100%) claimed that having no feedback from the lecturer was not useful for their writing improvement.

Indirect, because we can try to find our own errors by ourselves. I know the wrong parts from the lecturer's clue, I revise them and know the correct ones and learn from the errors. I am independent.

Besides, this form could help the students remember the correction in the long term so they would not repeat the same error, as it is also stated by Bitchener & Knoch (2008). Student 12 (S12) stated:

I always enjoy trying to correct the errors in my writing after I get indirect feedback from my lecturer. It is challenging when the lecturer circles the error and I try to find out what the errors are and finally can correct them. I can remember longer so I will not repeat the same error in the future.

Sentence D, however, shows indirect feedback form of indicating only:

I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night. (wrong tense)

In the above sentence, the lecturer only indicated that grammatical error occurred in that sentence by mentioning wrong tense. However, the lecturer did not locate the error in the sentence. Although 16 out of 31 students (51.61%) preferred indicating only type, this type of feedback was not really favorite considering that the rest 15 respondents stated that it was not useful.

Sentence C that used indirect feedback in which the lecturer indicated and located the error became the most popular type of feedback:

I do my homework before I went to the cinema last night.
→ wrong tenses

All of the students agreed that this type of feedback was useful, as claimed by student 29 (S29):

When the lecturer circles the error and tells me what's wrong with that part, I am motivated to find the correct form by myself. For example: I know that the tense is wrong, but I am challenged to find the correct one. As a result, I am more aware on the errors and will be careful on my next writing.

The results show that the majority of the Paragraph Writing students prefer indicating and locating

errors form of indirect written corrective feedback. This form of feedback allows the students to be able to solve their problems with some clues from the lecturer and be more aware on their next writing.

4.2 Types of Errors Students Think Should be Corrected

The second formulated problem is related to types of errors that students think should be corrected by the lecturer. During one semester, the lecturer focused on 6 types of errors adopted from Amrhein & Nassaji (2010). Those 6 types are as follows:

- 1) Organization errors (paragraph structure, sentence order)
- 2) Grammatical errors (tenses, word order, sentence structure)
- 3) Content/idea errors
- 4) Punctuation errors
- 5) Spelling errors
- 6) Vocabulary errors

The participants were asked to circle the number that best described each statement. The number started from 1 indicating not useful at all (useless) to 4 indicating very useful. The following is the presentation of the result.

Figure 1 shows that the 6 types of errors are all important to be corrected by the lecturer. However, the result shows that only 51.61% of the students thought that pointing out on content/idea errors was useful. In Paragraph Writing class, the students learned about how to write a good paragraph on particular topics. Using the topics, the students had to be able to develop a good topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. According to the lecturer, developing ideas into a paragraph was not really the students' main issue. They were already able to do it by looking at the models and discussing it with their lecturer and friends, as it is shown by the result that only 35.48% of them thought that pointing out organization (paragraph structure and sentence order) error was useful. They claimed that they were not really worried about paragraph organization.

All of the students agreed that the lecturer should help them correct the grammatical errors, which included tenses, word order, and sentence structure. The Paragraph Writing students learned English as a foreign language (L2), and, thus, their writing was still unavoidably influenced by their

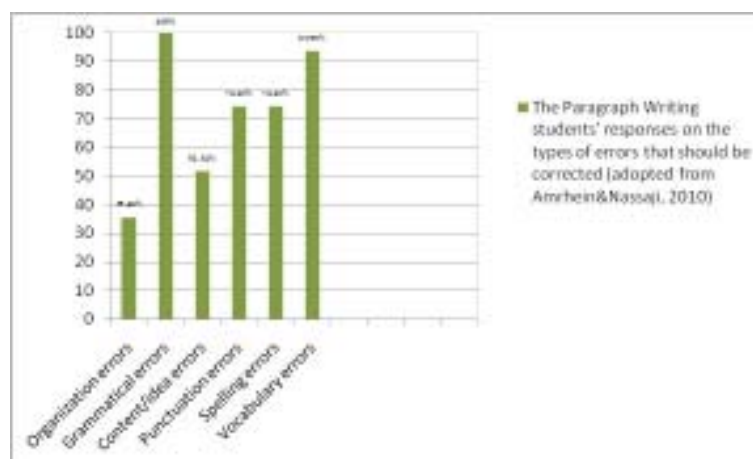


Figure 1. The Paragraph Writing Students' Responses on the Types of Errors that Should be Corrected (Adopted from Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010)

native language (L1). One of the obvious parts is the tenses. The students tended to use their L1 grammar knowledge for their L2 writing, as one of the students wrote:

I **have** some best friends when I **am** in senior high school. [writing assignment on past experience]

The student was supposed to use the verb had and was since the sentence was referring to her experience in the past.

Besides, the students claimed that understanding the four English sentence structure was challenging. While simple sentence could still be understood by most of the students, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences were still hard to produce correctly. One of the examples was:

Book shop also helps us to find the information we need **but** to get the information, we have to buy the book **because** the book is sold. [writing assignment on describing places]

The second type of error that the students thought the lecturer should correct was vocabulary. The Paragraph Writing students were still in their first year of university study. The major problem they found was related to choosing the appropriate word to use as shown by the student's writing below:

Although we **scarcely** meet because we live in different cities, we still keep in touch.

Further, 74.19% of the students thought that the lecturer should also correct punctuation and spelling errors in students' writing. The punctuation here was related to the use of comma (,), semi colon (;), quotation marks ("..."), period (.), etc. They still got confused on how to use them correctly. One example of punctuation errors made by one of the students when writing about describing others is as follows:

I choose her to be my best friend, because she is kind and helpful.

The student was not supposed to put a comma before the word because.

Overall, the students' responses showed that form error corrections, including grammatical, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling errors were more useful than content and organization. This indicated that it was important for the students to focus more on language accuracy as to make their writing error free. Their choice of focus was mostly influenced by their personal experience in the previous writing class, in which the lecturer put high emphasis on correcting students' grammatical and mechanical errors.

5. CONCLUSION

The major findings of the study can be concluded as follows. The Paragraph Writing students believe that getting feedback from their lecturer is considered useful for their writing improvement. However, the majority of the students prefer indirect written corrective feedback. The lecturer provides some clues on the errors and allow the students to correct them by themselves. There are three forms of indirect written corrective feedback, they are locating, indicating, and locating and indicating. Among these three, they claim that indicating and locating form is the most useful form of indirect written corrective feedback. This form allows them to know that errors have occurred but

they have to be able to correct them. By finding the correct revision, the students will become autonomous and will be more aware on their next writing.

The second finding is related to the students' opinion on which types of errors should be corrected by the lecturer. The types of errors were adopted from Amrhein&Nassaji (2010), they are organization errors, grammatical errors, content/idea errors, punctuation errors, spelling errors, and vocabulary errors. The findings show that form-focused errors, including grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary are found useful to be corrected by the lecturer. This is evident that the students, who are EFL students, need more feedback on language accuracy as to make their writing error free.

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