

ERROR FEEDBACK IN STUDENTS' WRITING: HOW THE TEACHERS MANAGE IT

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Abstract: This study focused on teacher's feedback in writing classes. Particularly, this study focused on English teachers' perspectives, practices, and problems in giving error feedback to students' writing. Three English teachers from SMAN 1 Tumpang were taken as respondents. The findings showed that the teachers only give feedback or correction when the students make errors. They agreed that giving error feedback is necessary for their students. They stated several reasons and advantages of giving error feedback. The influencing factor of giving and not giving error feedback is time. Because of error feedback giving, they notice that there were students' skill improvements even though it took time. However, it also depended on students' willingness to pay attention to and learn the errors feedback given. Although the teachers had similar perspectives, they had different preferences in actual practice.

Keywords: *error feedback, writing*

INTRODUCTION

English is considered as foreign language in Indonesia. In order to be able to master English, students have to be able to read, write, listen, and speak English. Based on Harmer (2004, p.31), writing is one of the important productive skills which contributes to student's English language learning. In writing, students are encouraged to focus on the language accuracy (Harmer, 2004:31). Since they have to think as they write, writing may stimulate their language development while they solve problems. In other words, writing can help students learn better.

Making errors is common for the students who learn English as a foreign language. Even though students get much time to spend on writing, many of them still think that they cannot perform it well. When the students' error in their writing is pointed out, they cannot correct it by themselves (Owu-Ewie and Williams, 2017:464). Therefore, teacher has a responsibility to guide his or her pupils in finding the best way to correct the errors in the editing phase.

In Chaudron's research (1977), he defined correction as teacher's reaction which transforms, disapproves to, or requires improvement of, a student's behavior or utterance. The definition of feedback is made by Lalande (1982, p. 141) in his experiment of reducing composition errors to the sixty intermediate level German students. In short, he defined feedback as any procedure used to inform a student if an instructional response is correct or wrong. In writing context, it can be concluded that corrective feedback means any procedure used by teacher to inform the student which transforms, disapproves to, or requires improvement of, a student's errors found in their composition. The attention of corrective feedback is usually on the ideas, content, organization of paragraph, mechanics, or language issues such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and others (Ferris, 2011). There are three types of feedback in writing, which are self-feedback, peer feedback, and teacher feedback. In this study, the focus is on teachers' feedback given to their students.

There are not many researches can be found which focused on teacher's perceptions regarding error feedback as its main subject. The researches on this subject are mostly focused on the effectiveness of it or the students' perceptions toward it. Therefore, treatment on student's error still becomes a dilemma for most teachers until now because it has several issues to be considered. Teachers must decide whether they have to correct or not to correct errors and how

they should do it, to identify or not to identify error types, to locate errors directly or indirectly (Lee, 2003). Moreover, its effectiveness has still been debated. Some studies point out that error feedback is useful (Lalande, 1982; Ferris 1997). However, some studies also doubt its benefits and should be abandoned (Truscott 1996, 1999).

Teacher's perspectives toward the importance of error feedback have gone through several changes. Ferris (2011) explained that in the 1970s, teachers had a big attention to students' writing accuracy. After some periods, teachers and theorists then began to focus on and prioritized the writing process rather than the accuracy, which are idea discovering, drafting, revising or editing, group working, and sharing. In 1986, Horowitz and other researchers began to raise their concern to notice accuracy issues again. It was because L2 writers' work was not error-free unlike the L1 writers. In 2008, Lee studied about the mismatch between teachers' beliefs and feedback practice to secondary teachers in Hong Kong. The result showed that teachers pay their attention most on the language form in their students writing in the real practice of giving error feedback. However, they believe and are aware that good writing is more than accuracy but ideas development and organization.

Teacher's practice in giving feedback is divided into two categories which is direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback or direct correction identifies the error and the target form then correct it directly into the right one. In contrast, indirect correction consists of an indication of an error without correcting it. Teacher uses error code in the student's work like circle, underline, small check, cage, or cross without giving the correct version of the errors. Thereby, the students have to solve the problem by themselves and correct the error. In marking the error, the teacher can mark the error selectively or comprehensively. In Lee's study in 2003, she explained that selective marking means teacher will only mark some of the errors that his or her students make. The teacher does not mark all the error in order to focus at the specific error which needs student correction the most. Usually, teacher will only point the severe error or the error that the students are unable to correct. Comprehensive marking is the opposite of selective marking. It means that teacher will mark and point all the errors that are found in the students' work.

Also in Lee's research, she explained the teachers' problem regarding corrective feedback. She said that giving error feedback could waste teachers' time and energy. The worse thing is that not all of the students are cooperative with the teacher. They may not pay their attention to the comments, and do not want to learn or revise the errors. Zamel stated the other problem of error feedback faced by teachers in her researches in 1982 and 1985. She pointed out that giving overmuch corrective feedback to the students make writing teachers into grammar teacher. It is undeniable that error-free writing is a desirable goal. However, too much corrective feedback will only change teachers' priority concerns from writing instruction to the other.

To further understand how Indonesian teachers' think or believe regarding error feedback, how they implement it, and what obstacles that they have, this research was done in SMAN 1 Tumpang, Malang, East Java, Indonesia. This research was inspired by Lee's research in 2003 with the same variables which are teachers' perspectives, practices and problems regarding error feedback. The gap in the previous study is it only uses questionnaire and interview as their research media. Lee believed that her survey could not study deeper about teachers' thinking as she studied teachers' beliefs and problems even though she had also done the interview. She stated that it is essential to supply the study with more concrete data, such as analysis of teacher's error corrections in student writing. For that reason, different research media is intended to be used. First, interview as the media to study deeper the teacher's perceptions and

problems in giving error feedback. Second, the analysis of teacher's error correction in students' writing and observation were added to supply the concrete oral and written data. Three research questions are formulated as follow:

- a. What are the teachers' perspectives regarding error feedback in students' writing?
- b. What error feedback practices do teachers implement in students' writing?
- c. What problems do the teachers face in giving error feedback in students' writing?

METHOD

Descriptive-qualitative method was applied in this study. This method was used because its objective is to describe social phenomena that occur naturally, which means that it takes place in the natural setting without being manipulated or changed.

The study was conducted in SMAN 1 Tumpang, located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Three of six English teachers who teach in this school were selected as respondents. The subjects were chosen based on three criteria. The first criterion was based on their teaching experience. Those who have the longest time in teaching English in this school would be chosen. The second criterion was based on his or her teaching certification. Those who have been professionally certified would be picked. The last criterion was the respondent's agreement and willingness to become the respondent.

Three types of data were collected for this study to answer three research questions. The sources were interview, observation, and written document. The interview guide and observation checklist were developed based on the blueprint and had been validated by the expert. The interview guide was adapted from the questionnaire made by Lee (2003) in her research which had similar variable with this research. The suitable statements in the questionnaire were chosen and changed into question form for the interview purposes. Written document was the students writing result after the class observation ended. The classes were chosen by the teacher themselves. All the data was in the form of words. The data were collected during 2018 – 2019 academic year.

In order to establish the comprehension of the data, the result of the study was studied and analyzed by reporting it in description since it is descriptive qualitative research. The result of the interview were transcribed and reported clearly into description form based on the variable indicators in the interview guide blueprint (appendix 1). The result of the observation were reported and analyzed to identify the oral error feedback given by the teacher during the writing class. The analysis of the observation was based on the checklist indicators (appendix 2). The teacher's error feedback in the students' work were identified and classified based on the error feedback types by checking every paper intently. The results of class observation and written document were taken based on the frequencies of the teacher feedback. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher's Error Feedback Perspectives

Mrs. RP and Mrs. A agreed that giving error feedback to their students is necessary. They thought that it is important for the students to know why or aware that they should not make any errors in their writing. It is in line with Lee's research finding in 2003 that teachers' main concern were to increase students' errors awareness and helped them to avoid the same errors. In addition, the teachers' purpose in giving error feedback is they could know their students' skill, knowledge and understanding of the material from the errors. Moreover, the teachers wanted to

increase her students' self-confidence in learning English. Meanwhile, Mr. HE believed that giving direct error feedback in students' work is not necessary for the students. Since the errors are mostly the same, he still believed that giving oral direct error feedback in form of class discussion is more effective rather than on-paper error feedback. This actually also found in Khanlarzadeh research (2017). Teachers' motivation was decreased in providing much time and effort in giving error feedback. It is because students made the same errors repeatedly although the errors had already been addressed. However, Mr. HE agreed with the other teachers that giving error feedback could make the students learn from their errors so they will not make same mistakes again in the future.

All participants believed that time is the influencing factor to give or not to give error feedback. It is because the teacher should provide or make time to correct the students' work. Mrs. A added that because teacher should teach based on the lesson plan in teaching learning process, she had to finish teaching all the material on time. Therefore, she could only give error feedback if the time and situation is possible for her. Time was also became an important factor for teachers in giving or not giving error feedback in Khanlarzadeh research in 2017. It would also affect on what method that the teacher would use in giving error feedback.

Each teacher stated the advantages of error feedback differently. Mrs. A said that teacher could know if her teaching method is suitable with her students or not. From Mr. HE, he said that error feedback could make the students to avoid making the same mistakes. It is in line with his main purposes in providing error feedback to his students' work. On the other hand, Mrs. RP stated that sometimes she found new word that she rarely used before from her students' work. Meanwhile, the disadvantage is taking teachers' time. Since the amount of students' work and the available time for teaching the next material is limited, teachers said that giving error feedback could lessen their time for the next teaching learning process. It is in line with Lee's statement (2003) that giving error could waste teacher's time.

In terms of writing, teachers believed that giving error feedback could improve their students' skill even though it takes time for the students to make progress. Therefore, the students' score would be getting better from time to time. However, Mrs. RP highlighted her point that the students' skill will be significantly improved if they pay attention to the given error feedback and learn from it. These results were in line with Beuningen et al. (2008) studies that giving error feedback, especially comprehensive error feedback, could aid students writing accuracy development over time.

Teacher's Error Feedback Practices

All of the teachers said that they would give error feedback to their student's writing task. For the frequencies, both Mrs. RP and Mrs. A would always give it every time they give writing task to the students. Meanwhile, Mr. HE preferred to give error feedback orally in the class because he wanted to discuss and explain the error to all of the students directly. For the error marking, Mrs. RP and Mr. HE chose to mark the errors selectively because they wanted to point the most important mistakes that the students should not make. It is in line with Lee's statement in her study in 2003 that selective marking is done with pointing the severe error only. In contrast, Mrs. A preferred to mark all of the error she found in her students' writing. The reason why she chose comprehensive method is that she wanted her students to know how to be good writer with good sentences. She wanted her students know what error they make and how to fix it. Also, she wanted to know her students' ability whether or not they can implement the theory she had given to them in their writing. This reason was actually also found at Lee's research (2003). From several reasons, one of them was teachers wanted to look at students' overall performance.

After getting the writing data from class observation, each of them were analyzed one by one to know the teacher's written error feedback. The following table shows the total number of data as well as the errors.

Table 1 Number of Students, Corrected Writing Data, and Errors

Teacher	Class	Students	Corrected Writing Data	Errors with Feedback
Mrs. A	X Science 4	32	30	190
Mr. HE	XI Language	28	16	32
Mrs. RP	XII Science 2	32	32	193
Total		92	78	415

From 32 students, only 30 papers contain errors feedback from Mrs. A. The rest two does not contain any error feedback and get excellent scores which is 96 (student APM) and 98 (student NS). The total of errors found in Mrs. A's class is 190. Each of the paper contains various number errors, starting from one to 15 errors. In Mr. HE's class, only 16 papers out of 28 students are given error feedback from the teacher. Each paper has one to four errors feedback(s). The total number of the errors is 32. Some of the papers do not have any errors or error feedback. It is because the teacher thought that the texts are not originally written by the students. He assumed that these students did plagiarism. Therefore, he gave them lower score than other students. In Mrs. RP's class, all of the students' work has error feedback ranging from one to 13 errors. The errors in total are 193. To sum up, there are 92 students from three classes, 78 corrected writing text, and 415 errors along with the teacher's feedback.

The error feedback is classified into three types. First is direct method which the teacher gives direct correction to the targeted errors. Second is indirect method which the teacher only gives indication to the errors with any symbols or notes. The last is mixed method which the teacher can give any symbols or notes also with the direct correction of the errors. The error feedback classification from each teacher is presented in this following table.

Table 2 Error Feedback Classification

Teacher	Direct Method	Indirect Method	Mixed Method	Total
Mrs. A	87	68	35	190
Mr. HE	1	29	2	32
Mrs. RP	81	72	40	193
Total				415

According to table above, Mrs. A used direct method most in correcting the students' work. This method appears 87 times. Then, it was followed by indirect method 68 times and 35 times for the mixed method. In her direct method, mostly she wrote the direct correction but she added circle symbol to emphasize it. On the interview, Mrs. A said that she preferred to use direct method error feedback. It is because she wanted to be more focus on the students' error and to ease her in giving mark to the students' work. On the other hand, Mr. HE used indirect method for 29 times, 2 times for indirect method, and only one time for direct method. The result is the same to what he said on the interview. He would only give some marks as the indication of the error rather than giving the direct correction. Also, he added that he chose to give the feedback in the class orally so his students could know directly the error and learn together. Mrs. RP, just like Mrs. A, also applied direct method most in the written data. It was used for 81 times. Then, it was followed by indirect method for 72 times, and 40 times for the mixed method. However, she said

on the interview that she preferred to mark the error both directly and indirectly. She would fix the error directly with the correct form, or indicated it with underline or circle. To sum up, from three teachers, there are 415 error feedbacks in total.

The teacher gave direct correction like adding the correct suffixes also rearrange the words and/or sentences. For indirect and mixed method correction, the teacher would use one or more symbols to indicate the errors and/or added some notes in the student’s paper. The numbers of correction notes written in each student’s work are 117 notes from Mrs. A, 5 notes from Mr. HE, and 120 notes from Mrs. RP. The following table shows the correction symbols used by each teacher to locate the error indirectly.

Table 3 Correction Symbols Classification

Correction Symbols	Mrs. A	Mr. HE	Mrs. RP
Arrow	5	7	11
Circle	55	28	45
Comma	0	0	3
Cross	32	0	5
Double Strikethrough	0	0	42
Question Mark	1	0	13
Small Check	0	1	0
Strikethrough	31	4	3
Underline and/or Double Underline	5	7	23
Total	129	47	145

Based on the table above, all of the teacher mostly use circle in indicating the errors. Followed by circle, Mrs. A used cross symbol for 32 times, Mr. HE used arrow and underline for 7 times equally, while Mrs. RP used double strikethrough for 42 times. Mrs. A rarely used arrow, or question mark. She never used comma, double strikethrough, and small check. Meanwhile, Mr. HE rarely used strikethrough and small check. He never used comma, cross, double strikethrough, and question mark. On the other hand, Mrs. RP infrequently used comma, cross, and strikethrough symbols. She never used small check.

After marking students’ writing, all of the teachers would tell and discuss the students’ error. After they explained the errors, they would give back the students’ work so they can learn their errors. They would not ask the students to edit and rewrite the work. The reason was that the students would not rewrite it even though the teacher asked it. In addition, they could not do it because of the limited time. Therefore, the teacher would ask them for not repeating the same mistakes in the next task in different topic. Discussing or reviewing the common error in the classroom was also done by teachers in Khanlarzadeh’s research (2017). This activity was favored 68% TEFL-degree holders (TDH) teachers and 64% non-TEFL-degree holders (NTDH) teachers.

All of the participants would make time in correcting students’ work outside the teaching learning process because of the limited time. For marking each work, Mrs. RP spent one to two minutes, and Mr. HE needed five to ten minutes depends on the length of the students’ work. Meanwhile, Mrs. A did not define her specific time in it. She only said that she needed one week in correcting the students’ works.

Teacher’s Error Feedback Problems

In the previous point, it is stated that the disadvantage of giving error feedback is time. The teachers said the same statement for the problem. It took much time for them to correct all the

students' work. In fact, they only had limited time to do it because they had to prepare other material for the next meeting.

The other problem is students mostly did not pay attention to the teacher's feedback. They just did the task just like what the teacher asked without thinking whether their work was correct or not. Therefore, teachers were hesitant that the students were learning and wanted to make a progress from their correction or not. The result is the students would always make the same mistakes in the next work.

These problems are in line with Lee's statement in her research in 2003. Besides wasting time and energy, not all students were cooperative with the teacher. They might not pay attention to the teacher's feedback and had little intention to learn or revise the error.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has three conclusions to be drawn. First, every teacher had similar perspectives in giving error feedback to their students' work. They agreed that giving error feedback is necessary for the improvement of students' progress. They believed that if the students want to pay their attention and learn from the error feedback, they would make good improvement in their writing skill as well as other skill even though it takes time. Second, even though they agreed in some circumstances regarding the perspectives in giving error feedback, they had different way in marking the students' work in actual practice. Last conclusion, the teachers agreed that the influencing factors for giving or not giving error feedback were time. It thereby also became the disadvantages of error feedback. Since the abundant amount of all the students' work and the limited time to prepare the next teaching learning materials, correcting all students' work could lessen their time for the next meeting. Besides taking too much time, the other problem in giving error feedback is that not all students pay attention to the error feedback. However, teachers are expected to keep giving error feedback to students' work. Teachers can choose their best way to give error feedback so that it will not burden them. To get the students' attention, the teacher should also provide classroom conferences to discuss the students' errors and their explanation of the chosen error feedback techniques to avoid students' misunderstanding. Therefore, it is hoped that students will not neglect teachers' error feedback. This research only involved limited participants, which is not a representative of all Indonesian teachers. Thus, the results of this research cannot be generalized. It is then suggested to involve more subjects and do the research in longer time to get more complete and better data. Moreover, it would be better to improve and add more various research instruments.

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Appendix 1 Interview Guide Blueprint

Variable	Indicator	Questions
Teacher's perspectives in error feedback	a. Necessity	1. In your opinion, is it necessary to provide error feedback to your students' composition? 2. Why do you think so?
	b. Purpose of giving error feedback	3. What is your main purpose of providing error feedback?
	c. Influencing factors of giving error feedback	4. Between student's request, your perception of students' need, and the time you have, which one of these factors that affect you to use the error feedback technique?
		5. What other personal factors that may influence you to use the error feedback technique?
	d. Advantage and Disadvantage of error feedback for teacher	6. What is/are the advantages of giving error feedback for you personally?
7. What is/are the disadvantages of giving error feedback for you personally?		
e. Students' writing improvement	8. Do you see any significant improvement of error feedback to your students' writing?	
	9. Do you see any significant improvement of error feedback to your students' English learning in general?	
	10. In your judgment, how do you measure your students' progress in their writing after giving the error feedback?	
	11. Is it effective or not for your students learning?	
Teacher's practices in error feedback	f. Existence of error feedback	12. Do you give error feedback to your students' writing task?
		13. How frequent do you give it?
		14. Do you mark all the errors or just mark them selectively?
		15. Why do you prefer to mark it all/selectively?
		16. Do you mark your students' error directly or indirectly?
	g. Type of error feedback and marking codes	17. <i>(If he or she corrects error directly)</i> Why do you prefer to correct the errors directly?
		18. <i>(If he or she corrects error indirectly)</i> What marking codes do you use to locate the errors you found?
		19. What do you usually do after you have marked student's writing?
	i. Time spent on marking	20. Do you make a special time inside or outside the classroom in marking your

	students' composition?
	21. How much time approximately do you spend in marking each of your student's writing?
Teacher's problems in error feedback	22. Could you please state and elaborate any concerns or problems you face when you give error feedback to you students?

Appendix 2 Observation Checklist

Name of Respondent :

Date/Place :

Class/Material :

No	Activity	Yes/No	Notes
1.	Teacher gives oral error feedback during the class		
2.	Teacher gives oral error feedback of the students selectively		
3.	Teacher gives oral error feedback of the students comprehensively		
4.	Teacher gives oral error feedback of the students directly		
5.	Teacher gives oral error feedback of the students indirectly		
6.	Teacher makes the students correct the errors		
7.	Teacher makes the students edit and rewrite their composition		