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Undergraduate students' perceptions of teachers' written feedback in academic writing class: A survey study

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Abstract

This survey study aims to describe the students' perception of teachers' written feedback in an academic writing class in a private university in Indonesia. 119 students filled in the questionnaire on students' perceptions of teachers' written feedback adapted from Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020). A descriptive statistic measuring mean, frequency, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data from the questionnaire. The results showed that the teacher's written feedback to the writing results in the academic writing class was useful and students did not find it difficult to understand any feedback given by the teacher. Most of the students answered *often* when being asked about their understanding to the feedback. Students were also able to use teacher comments to revise their writing. Revision and rewriting were also found as the follow-up activities that are most often done by students after receiving feedback. Then, it was also revealed that students preferred their teacher to give them correction with comments to all the major errors in their writing. In addition to the feedback, students also preferred their teachers to give praise and criticism. Regarding the correction of students' writing work, students preferred the teacher to correct the errors in content or ideas. Further implications and suggestions are also discussed in this article.

Keywords: Academic writing; students' perceptions; written feedback

1. Introduction

Academic writing is an umbrella term for various types of texts written for academic purposes, including research paper. For higher education students, writing is deemed important as it has become an important tool for people in today's global culture, and it is regarded as one of the technical abilities required to acquire languages (Weigle, 2002). In the educational context, writing is an important skill required to enhance other language acquisition skills (Reid, 2012). The students' mastery of writing skills enables them to express their thoughts and feelings in written form. Their writing meets the organizational, content, grammatical, vocabulary, and mechanical requirements (Listiani, 2017). In addition, Whitaker (2009) explained that academic writing is an essential type of writing required for university students to focus on.

Feedback from the teacher is influential for the writing skills of students in higher education, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, such as in Indonesia, who occasionally still make mistakes in writing. This feedback is needed for all writers to improve their writing so that it becomes even better, and the information or message contained in the writing can be conveyed properly to the readers.

Feedback is frequently given in order to achieve the best results in successful writing, including academic writing. Leaph (2011) explained that feedback is utilized as a trigger, allowing students to create better writing in the future.

According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback is defined as information offered by an agent about an individual performance or perception. It is very important for the learning process. Hyland (2002) investigated that feedback helps learners to evaluate their performance, alters their behavior, and transfers their understanding. Furnborough and Truman (2006) found that the presence of gaps between the materials taught and the learners' target competency, as well as attempts to bridge these gaps, are discussed in feedback. Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) stated that in the context of classroom writing, delivering feedback is deemed important as it leads students to discover their next actions and the way to take them. Teachers provide either positive or negative feedback when they utilize it. To praise students for their good work, "positive feedback" should be used. The teacher congratulates the students for their accomplishments. When a teacher says, "very excellent" or "great," this is considered positive feedback (Fata, 2014). Both of the positive and negative feedback could be provided by the teachers either in written or verbal feedback.

Written feedback is one of the most used types of feedback given by the teachers. It is the process of correcting errors and shortcomings in organization, material, and vocabulary through writing. Fithriani (2016) mentioned that written feedback helps students in improving their writing abilities and quality, encouraging their critical thinking, and promoting their autonomy.

Several studies investigating teachers' written feedback have been conducted. For example, a study conducted by Magno and Amarles (2011) developed an instrument examining teacher's feedback practices in writing class. This

research focused on teacher's feedback conducted in an academic writing class in one of the universities in Philippines. The findings of this research showed that delivering feedback to students is important, and students must understand the feedback to improve the quality of their writing using the feedback provided by the teacher. The research findings of Magno and Amarles (2011) revealed that teachers should continue to provide feedback to students on their writing as it was proven to be useful to students.

In addition, other research conducted by Susanti (2016) focused on written feedback has found that written feedback is more efficient for the students. The results showed that based on the students' level of English proficiency, feedback from their lecturers was more efficient when it was in the written form, while feedback from their peers was more efficient when delivered in the verbal one.

Despite that there has been a lot of research on teachers' written feedback, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there might have been a limited number of research conducted on similar topics for English Education students in Indonesia specifically for those who have taken academic writing class. The previous studies (i.e. Listiani, 2017; Fithriani, 2016; Susanti, 2016) have been conducted on written feedback but after the students have passed paragraph writing, argumentative essays and based on proficiency levels. Some research even included high school and second language learners (e.g. Lee, 2008; Magno and Amarles, 2011). Therefore, this present study aims to answer the following question: *What are the perceptions of English Department students regarding teacher's written feedback in academic writing class?*

2. Methodology

This research employed survey research as a type of quantitative research methods. The data were collected from 119 participants that agreed to participate in this present study. The populations in the study were students who have enrolled in Academic Writing classes in one of the English Education departments in a private university in Indonesia. The 119 samples for this research were determined by convenience sampling.

Table 1. Blueprint of the questionnaire adapted from Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020)

Aspect	Number of items
Usefulness of teacher's feedback	1
Students' understanding of teacher's written feedback	1
Students' revision of their writing based on teacher's feedback	1
Follow-up activities offered by the teacher	3
Preferences of errors treatment	5
Preferences of correcting students' errors	6
Teachers' reactions towards students' errors	3
Types of students-corrected errors	6

The researchers used a questionnaire for students to measure students' perceptions of teachers' written feedback adapted from Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020). The questionnaires were

presented in English. To ensure the validity of the instrument prior to the data collection, the researchers conducted a content validity process through the expert judgment by consulting the items in the questionnaire. The result of the reliability score for this questionnaire was.802, indicating that this questionnaire has been highly reliable. Table 1 shows the distribution of the questionnaire items.

Since this is a quantitative study, the data collected from the questionnaire were in the form of number and were quantitatively analyzed by SPSS.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Usefulness of teacher's feedback

Majority of the students (64.7%) agreed that written feedback from their teachers was very useful. While few students found it useful (28.6%) and felt neutral (6.7%), no one perceived that written feedback from their teachers was useless.
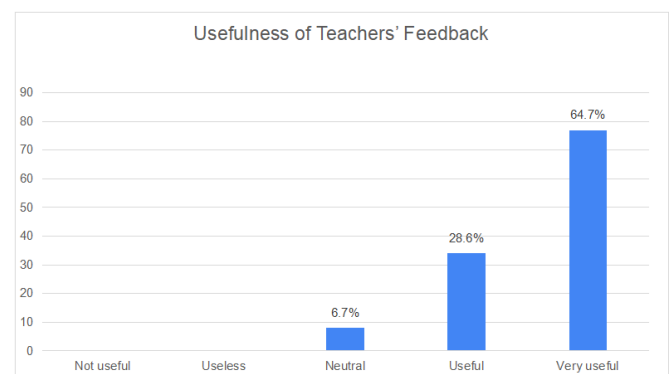

Fig. 1. Usefulness of teacher's feedback

As seen in Figure 1, most of the students (64.7%) agreed that written feedback from their teacher was very useful. Students mostly gave positive responses, and no one perceived that written feedback was useless. Few students agreed with the statement that feedback from their teachers was useful, by choosing other options such as Useful and Neutral with a long range of results with Very Useful being the highest score. This is in line with the Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) research findings, revealing that the teachers' feedback is quite valuable and, as a result, has a beneficial impact on the ability to write. This was also confirmed in previous studies from Lee (2008) whose research focused on student reactions of teacher feedback specifically in secondary classrooms. Respondents in Lee (2008) research were divided into two: HP students (high proficient) and LP students (low proficient). In this item, both respondents stated that the feedback provided by the teacher was considered useful.

3.2. Students' understanding of teacher's written feedback

Figure 2 shows that most participants often understood the comments or feedback from their teachers. As seen from the results, most students had no difficulty understanding comments or feedback from their teachers. From the figure, 58% students often understood the comments or feedback from their teachers, 25.2% of students always understood the

comments or feedback from their teachers, and then 16.9% of them usually understood the comments or feedback from their teachers.
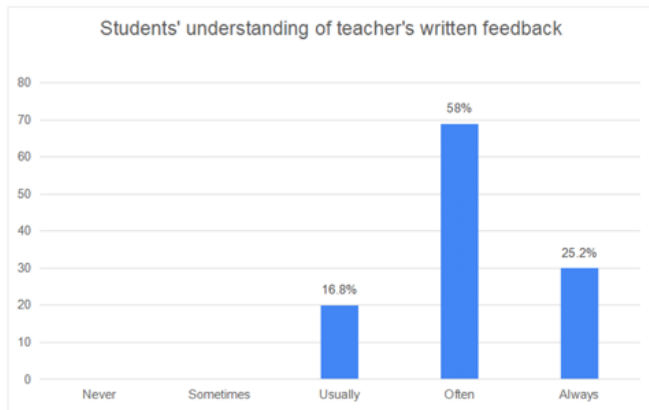

Fig. 2. Students' understanding of teacher's written feedback

This part shows that students mostly choose 'often understand' being the highest score (58%). This could mean that most participants often understood the comments or feedback given from their teacher. Based on this data, mostly students had no difficulty in understanding the comments or feedback from their teachers. None of the participants chose the option 'sometimes' and 'never' indicating that none of them did not understand about the comments or feedback. Looking at this more deeply, it was probably because the teacher used easy-to-follow words when giving the comments even code-switch their comments into students L1, since most teachers have also facilitated students' learning by translanguaging their language instructions (Aribah & Pradita, 2022).

This is in line with Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) who found that most students often understand the teachers' feedback. In line with that, this finding also confirmed Lee's (2008) research findings stating that feedback from the teacher was regarded as understandable by the students.

Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) stated that the correction and feedback given by the teachers to their students' writing aim to make the students able to fix their errors and prevent them to repeat in future assignments. Nevertheless, students are not always successful in this attempt. Their inability to respond to their teachers' feedback demonstrates a gap in the learning process. That means it is very important for students to understand the delivery of comments or feedback from their teacher. The writing progress on students will continue if they understand what comments or feedback are given by the teacher so they are able to correct their errors and continue their writing.

3.3. Students' revision of their writing based on teacher's feedback

Item number 3 aims to ask about the ability of the students to use the teachers' comments to revise their essay. Figure 3 shows that more than a half students (52.5%) gave an opinion that they were always able to use teacher comments to revise their essay. Also, few students found it often (39.8%) or felt usually able to revise their writing (7.6%).

In terms of students' ability to use the teacher's comments to revise their essay, this part showed that half of the students were always able to use the teachers' comments to revise their essay. Followed by other statements that students found it often or usually able to revise their writing based on the teacher's comments. In this part, no one stated that students never used the teacher's comments to revise their essay. This is related to the importance of comments and feedback from teachers to students, which turns out to be very useful for students to revise their writings. There are some differences from the data results as described by Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) showing that most students (55.17%) seemed to find it more difficult to revise their writing from the teachers' comments. Only a few students assumed that they were able to work on and correct their errors. This might be because the delivery of comments from the research respondent teacher in the Academic Writing class provided the clearer, understandable, and more comprehensive comments or feedback. Thus, the students thought that comments or feedback from the teacher were very important, and they often used it to revise their writing.
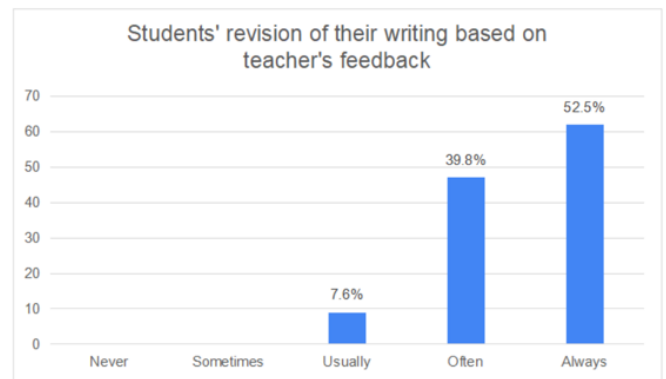

Fig. 3. Students' revision of their writing based on teacher's feedback

3.4. Follow-up activities offered by the teacher

In terms of follow-up activities offered by the teacher, the majority of the students chose revision and rewriting as the most-offered follow up activities from the teacher in academic writing (M=4.28 and SD=.724). Then, it was followed by individual tutoring by the teacher (M=3.57 and SD=1.017). Meanwhile, the lowest results for the most offered follow-up activities by the teacher was "usually no follow up activities" with the results of (M=2.84 and SD=1.169).

After the teacher returned the student's writing, there should be follow-up activities offered by the teacher to the students to continue the follow-up writing activities. Being at the highest score chosen by many students, revision and rewriting became the follow-up activities offered by teachers to students after students received their writings back. It was followed by individual tutoring activities with the teacher that occupied the second highest score. It was only a few of the students who did not get follow-up activities from the teacher by choosing the option "usually no follow-up activities" which had the lowest score. Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents of this study were usually provided with feedback in terms of revision and rewriting as follow-up activities offered by the teachers for academic writing courses.

The finding related to the follow-up activities after feedback in this present study was found very different from the results in Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020), which stated that this step

of the writing process is often skipped by teachers. Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) have found that the option "usually no follow up activities" was the most chosen option among students. This showed that the teachers in Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) study only provided feedback but did not follow up on follow-up activities that must be carried out by students.

3.5. Preferences of errors treatment

In terms of preferences of error treatment, students mostly preferred corrections added with some comments from the teachers, with the results of $M=4.59$ and $SD=.643$. Besides, the least preferred error treatment was when the teacher only gave the score without feedback with the results of $M=2.10$ and $SD=1.062$.

In terms of preferences of error treatment, 'correction with comment' was the highest result chosen by the respondents. Most students had the opinion that they liked it better when the teacher corrected the errors supported with some comments. On the other hand, in the lowest option, the students did not like when the teacher only gave the score without any feedback on their writing.

This is in line with Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) who described that students clearly stated that they preferred errors that were recognized by their teachers by giving the choice to the 'Correction and Comments' option with the dominating choice. On the other hand, some students chose the 'Teacher correction' option, meaning that students thought that the teacher only needed to correct errors. Some students also chose the 'Comments' option, meaning that the comments or suggestions were also needed to determine the type of error and students could determine the right way to correct these errors. Meanwhile, only few students from all respondents considered grades to be more important than feedback by selecting the 'No Feedback' option.

3.6. Preferences of correcting students' errors

When correcting their writing, most of the students clearly stated that the teachers should mark all major errors, with the results of $M=4.38$ and $SD=.773$. Then, only few students perceived that teachers only responded to the ideas and content without marking errors with the results of $M=2.79$ and $SD=1.244$.

Occupying the highest score, the option "Teacher should mark all major errors" means that students preferred when the teacher marked all major errors in their writing. This is in line with what Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) who explained that students seemed to prefer when the teacher applied to mark all major errors with 30% of respondents saying that students wanted the teacher to correct major errors. It is then suggested that teachers should mark all major errors as written feedback given to students' writing.

3.7. Teachers' reactions towards students' errors

In response to an error, "Praise and Criticize" was highly chosen by participants with the results of $M=4.11$ and $SD=.821$. Other participants chose "Criticize" only with the results of $M=$

4.01 and $SD=.768$ and "Praise" only on the lowest score with the results of $M=3.70$ and $SD=.949$.

In response to an error, most of the respondents in this current study chose 'Praise and Criticize' followed by the option 'Criticize'. In contrast, 'Praise' had the lowest score. The results in this item were slightly different from the description in the results from Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) stating that 'Criticism' was the highest choice chosen by respondents. The most possible reason for this was that the respondents in this study in the academic writing class gave an opinion that, in addition to being criticized by the teacher regarding their writing errors, they also needed to be given praise. Criticism was also needed to make them aware of the mistakes they have made in their own writing. However, this result was different from the results from Leaph (2011) revealing that students preferred 'Praise' that could be very helpful for their revision, instead of 'Criticize".

3.8. Types of students-corrected errors

In terms of correcting students' errors, the type of errors most students wanted to be pointed out most by the teacher was content or ideas errors with the results of $M=4.21$ and $SD=.77$, while spelling errors were the errors that the students wanted their teachers to point out the least ($M=3.85$ and $SD=.958$).

There are differences from the results described by Ouahidi and Lamkhanter (2020) describing that most students selected 'grammar' followed by 'organization'. Also, a different result with Chen et al (2016) stating that the most important aspect of students' writing performance based on the Chen et al (2016) respondents' answers was organizational errors. This difference might be due to the importance of having the content or ideas with an interesting discussion. Since writing with a creative discussion might be very good, the students thought that content and ideas are important things to consider in terms of types of correcting student errors.

Of many things to be corrected, students preferred if the teacher corrects the contents or ideas first. Additionally, during online learning, grammar probably is not a big problem for students in academic writing class because they probably use Google Docs as a platform for writing. In addition to the writing progress, which can be monitored directly via online by the teacher, in Google Docs, any grammatical errors of students' writing are automatically corrected by Google Docs. Therefore, respondents in this research preferred to be given feedback more on contents or ideas rather than grammar. In addition to Google docs, during online learning students can also use Microsoft Word with English settings that can automatically correct any grammatical errors found in their writing.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to describe the students' perceptions of English Education Department students regarding teacher's written feedback in academic writing class in a private university in Indonesia, and to describe the techniques of written feedback mostly chosen by the students.

Overall, the data showed that most of the participants perceived that the feedback given by the teacher to the students' writing results in the academic writing class was very useful.

Students also did not find it difficult to understand any feedback given by the teacher. Furthermore, students could more easily use feedback from the teacher to revise any errors in their writing and then continue writing. It can be concluded then that the delivery of feedback from the teacher turned out to be very useful for students' writing results. The teacher also need to ensure whether the feedback given is quite understandable by the students considering its significance for them in correctly and well accomplishing the writing.

From the results of the research in this study, it can be concluded that the students in the academic writing class gave the opinion that the feedback given by the teacher was very useful. After receiving feedback from the teacher, students always did revision and rewriting as the follow-up activities to continue their writing assignments. Students preferred their teacher to not only correct their errors but also to provide comments.

In addition, students also preferred the teacher to correct all major errors contained in the students' writing. When responding to errors made by students, the teacher preferably is asked to give praise and criticism. When receiving a praise, students became more motivated to do their writing assignments. In addition, students could also realize their mistakes when given criticism and would not repeat their mistakes. Regarding correcting students' writing work, students preferred the teacher to correct the error regarding the content or ideas.

This study, however, is limited to only English Education students from one university. Hence, future researchers can use qualitative studies to deepen the results of research, such as interview and narrative inquiry methods to seek wider research results and get student opinions. The future researchers may be able to conduct similar research with different respondents, for example with different contexts, such as students from other majors, other than the English Education Department.

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