Focused Written Corrective Feedback: EFL Students' Engagement in Online Asynchronous Platform

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to investigate the students' engagement on teacher's focused written corrective feedback (FWCF) on their writing in online asynchronous platform. Data gathered from students' written drafts and reflective journal were analyzed using Ferris' (2012) FWCF framework as well as sociocultural and activity framework in the online instructional setting. The findings of the study indicate that the students' cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement in online asynchronous platform with FWCF portray their learning beliefs as they are exposed to written feedback. Students engagement with online FWCF reveal that such online platform feedback helps students check their progress without time and place boundary. Such feedback also facilitates them to do self-revision because the feedback raises their awareness of their mistakes leading them into more autonomous learners. Moreover, the online platform is considered to be effective due to its mobility. Students' only complaint is when they are encountered with limited data usage and network around campus.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk mengeksplorasi keterlibatan partisipan pada focused written corrective feedback (FWCF) oleh guru pada tulisan mereka di platform asinkron daring. Data yang dikumpulkan dari draf tulisan partisipan dan jurnal reflektif dianalisis menggunakan kerangka FWCF Ferris (2012) serta kerangka analisis sosiokultural dan aktivitas dalam pembelajaran online. Hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan kognitif, perilaku, dan afektif partisipan dalam platform asinkron online dengan FWCF menggambarkan keyakinan belajar mereka saat dihadapkan pada umpan balik tertulis. Keterlibatan partisipan dengan FWCF daring mengungkapkan bahwa umpan balik dalam platform online dapat membantu mereka memantau kemajuan mereka sendiri tanpa dibatasi waktu dan tempat. Umpan balik ini juga memudahkan mereka untuk melakukan revisi sendiri karena umpan balik tersebut membangkitkan kesadaran mereka akan kesalahan dalam tulisan mereka yang akhirnya menuntun mereka menjadi pebelajar yang lebih mandiri. Wadah belajar daring ini dinilai efektif karena mobilitasnya. Satu-satunya keluhan mahasiswa adalah ketika dihadapkan pada keterbatasan penggunaan data dan jaringan di sekitar kampus.

1. Introduction

The study of written corrective feedback (WCF) in second or foreign language writing has been very well documented for the past two decades (Bitchener, 2012; Ferris, 2015; Ferris, 2012; Han, 2017; Lee, 2019b; Storch, 2018) in various disciplines, including studies focusing on feedback on EFL students writing (Ferris, 2012) using sociocultural and activity theory as the framework (Lee, 2017; Storch, 2018). As regards issue of providing students with focused WCF (FWCF), a growing body of recent studies have examined its effectiveness (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009b; Lee, 2019a; Nemati, Alavi, & Mohebbi, 2019) with feedback targeting on one category of error (highly focused feedback) or feedback focusing on a few categories of error (less focused feedback) (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008).

The importance of FWCF is closely related to Schmidt's (1994) and Ellis' (1999) work on cognitive theories of second language acquisition (SLA) regarding the concept of students' attention and understanding. Their work's relevance to FWCF in that students tend to being attentive to feedback on their composition and understand the justification for their errors when intensive feedback is provided on only certain area of errors. However, FWCF exploration in Indonesian instructional context is

somewhat limited (see Kisnanto, 2016; Saukah, Dewanti, & Laksmi, 2017) since the corrective feedback tends to explore more on students' oral competence or oral and grammar (Liskinasih, 2016).

A proliferation of empirical study on FWCF in English as second or foreign language classroom context focus on providing highly focused feedback and less focused feedback (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009a; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Most of recent studies took place in face-to-face classroom context. Obviously, less has been done on FWCF in online platform. Meanwhile, in fact, FWCF exploration in online platform, synchronously or asynchronously, has been one of global concern due to technological advances and students' engagement with technology in the classroom, especially foreign language classroom (Kessler, 2018). What needs to be explored further is the way to provide effective FWCF to students as individuals or groups (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012) in online platform (Kessler, 2018). Therefore, this study investigates on FWCF in online asynchronous platform through mobile assisted language learning using Schoology in order to engage EFL students in attending their feedback given within sociocultural and activity framework.

Sociocultural theory argues that writing development considers time for revision and redrafting as key aspect for student development (Bitchener, 2012). It is in line with Han's (2017) study which suggests teachers to "consider students' beliefs when providing WCF, and foster the development of learner beliefs conducive to deep engagement with WCF" (p. 133). Bitchener (2012) highlights how social interaction plays important role in the students' development of L2 writing. The so-called scaffolded interaction between teacher and students could help students' development under the consideration that the scaffolding is not a one-off treatment (Nassaji & Swain, 2000, Nassaji, 2011).

Teachers play a critical role by organizing the learning environment to provide students with active, hands-on learning and authentic tasks and audiences for their work (Darling-Hammond, Austin, Orcutt & Rosso, 2001). Research on learner-centered, active learning strategies supports the effectiveness of these approaches for increasing student learning and achievement (Michael, 2006; Prince, 2004). Additionally, in a learner-centered model, teachers build social interactions among learners and promote learning as a partnership (Salonen, Vauras, & Efklides, 2005). Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others, and learners need opportunities for positive interactive and collaborative tasks (Darnon, Butera, & Harackiewicz, 2007). Research suggests that collaborative learning promotes critical thinking and helps students retain information longer (Johnson & Johnson, 1986), and helps students to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own

learning, and become critical thinkers (Gokhale, 1995). More recent research suggests that collaboration online promotes sustained task orientation and advanced knowledge construction (Zhu, Valcke, & Schellens, 2010).

There is a growing interest in creating active learning spaces that support learner-centered practices (Kessler, 2018). With an experienced, technology-committed languages teacher working in the context of mainstream secondary schooling, integration between use of the medium and subject-related objectives takes on a different form (Hawkes, 2009). In this context, teacher use of the digital medium is interwoven into a wide range of different pedagogical functions and contexts for a given class of learners. The social framework of teaching and learning is thus stretched beyond conventional boundaries. Therefore, technology in this example is in the same vein with an explorative and experimental pedagogy that seeks out different learning contexts within classroom practice, and in doing so allows the medium to create new pedagogical opportunities (Oliver & Herrington, 2001).

Although studies addressing issues of written corrective feedback in favor of online platform approach have proliferated, less is known about those of within asynchronous platform, engaging online learning and reflections, to help the learners develop their L2 writing skill in Indonesian instructional contexts. Therefore, to gain insight into how the EFL student teachers contend with L2 written feedback through online feedback platform and their perception towards such experiential learning in enhancing their writing skill, further study needs to be pursued.

Within the study of feedback given by the teacher in the instructional setting, this study was only limited to addressing issues of the written corrective feedback (WCF) as given by the teachers to the students with regard to tertiary-level students majoring in English language education within the span of time a semester course. Focusing on feedback strategies, mistakes or common errors, and writing skill awareness, students were asked to be engaged in online feedback in their writing course. Their engagement was examined in light of the effectiveness of online feedback platform and their response towards WCF given by the lecturer. Likewise, their preference of online feedback and in-classroom feedback in writing course were also considered.

2. Method

Relevant to the research problem posed in this study, a qualitative study was employed. Based on the classification of research designs from Creswell and Poth (2016), this research can be considered as a phenomenology study since

data was primarily gathered from students' experience of their engagement with FWCF in an online asynchronous platform.

With regard the participants, this study involved two classes comprising of 39 EFL students majoring in English education. They took Writing course focusing on paragraph development. The course was taught by the researcher since she has been in charge of this course for years and she has competence in giving feedback on students writing. This is in line with Lee, Mak, and Burn's (2016) argument for the necessity of teacher's innovation of feedback strategies in the writing classroom. In these two parallel classes, the researcher took data from high achievers and mid achievers in writing since the low achievers in writing were not approved to get into this course. They have to retake their Basic Writing course. This case proves that the participants are chosen purposefully. This present study employed qualitative study design in order that the students' writing development could be captured comprehensively (Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013). Using Ferris et al.'s (2013) study as the reference, this study tends to replicate Ferris' study the extent to which the methodology was utilized with additional data gathering through reflective approach (Nurfaidah, 2016) in students' L2 writing feedback.

Content analysis was used as data is being gathered (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). Data from students' written documents—first, second, and third draft—was analyzed using Ferris et al.'s (2013) written corrective feedback framework. This also applies for data from Schoology which was compared to the quality of the students' revision upon being exposed to direct feedback from the teacher researcher. Regarding students' reflective journal, Nurfaidah's (2017) framework in analyzing the content and level of students' reflection applied. Data from transcript of interview was analyzed using sociocultural and activity theory (Storch, 2018).

3. Findings and Discussion

Overall, the result of data analysis pertaining to written corrective feedback based on Ferris' (2012, 2015) framework, which emerged in the EFL students' process of writing, was as expected. This section focuses on the presentation and discussion of the findings based on the findings pertaining to the research questions. The flow of findings will be discussed from the participants' demographic data, students' perception towards teacher's WCF on their L2 writing in online asynchronous platform, the extent to what WCF in online asynchronous platform help EFL students in their drafting process, and the types of WCF EFL students value most.

3.1 WCF in Online Asynchronous Platform: EFL Students' Perceptions

Pertaining to students' perceptions of teacher's WCF on their L2 writing in online asynchronous platform, the participants revealed that they are helped by the online learning because they can access it anywhere. For example, when they had to go back to their hometown, they still have access to the class and the lesson.

"Because at any time we can access the material we want to learn and if we are sick and can't take classes we can go to the online classes to learn." (Participant #4)

"When we are not able to go to class, we can study the material that has been given by the lecturer through the application and we can submit assignments without having to meet face-to-face." (Participant #7)

"Because online classes can make it easier for us to learn. For example, when we are sick and cannot go to campus, we can take lessons through online classes so that we are not left behind. Also, when lecturers do not have time to attend class, with online classes lecturers can teach even though they are not face to face." (Participant #18)

"Because online classes really make it easier for me to access my lessons given by the lecturer." (Participant #12)

Students' perception towards online feedback, in this case written corrective feedback, was realized through reflective learning activities. This present study, based on Hawkin's (1984) language awareness, found that feedback activities could help the students realize their weaknesses in L2 writing, value the importance of writing deficiencies, and believe that transformation or betterment is viable. The following presentation will demonstrate the representation of participants' awareness revealed in their data.

The participants' acknowledgement as illustrated in Table 1 shows that online class facilitate them to do self-revision on their writing assignment. Also, the online class is deemed to be more effective due to present students' life more with technology and internet things. Participant #3's and Participant #5's revelations, for example, prove that online class is considered to give them more time to do self-revision on their writing assignment. Moreover, the online class is preferred to be mode of feedback due to its clarity of written-based rather than oral-based as in the classroom. Meanwhile, Participant #4 and Participant #6 acknowledged that online class helps them to spot mistakes in their writing assignment. Also, the online class is acknowledged to be of help in realizing the students of their shortcomings in writing.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Written Corrective Feedback in Online Asynchronous Platform

Sample of Participant	Data of WCF in Online Asynchronous Platform: EFL Students' Perceptions
1	I also like the feedback given through Schoology, because my lecturer gives feedback via google doc, and also adds comments in the review, so that it makes it easier for me to improve my essay.
2	Even though the class is good, the feedback given through the online class is also very effective for students. There are about 99% of the students already using smartphones where all their daily activities are spent on social media. With this online class, it really helps students in the learning process.
3	The feedback given online, I think, it is helpful because we know where the error is, compared to general feedback in the classroom.
4	I think the written feedback on Schoology is good but sometimes there are people who don't understand it, the good thing is that we can check for errors one by one and mark errors in writing.
5	Being given online feedback is great because we can revise our paragraphs based on the feedback and we are more comfortable about doing it.
6	Feedback in the online class is enough to help us find out the writing mistakes we made by looking at the writing with different colors along with the feedback listed in our writing. In addition, the feedback provided online can make us learn to process questions as well as answers about our mistakes in writing.

Although online class is considered to facilitate them to do self-revision on their writing assignment, however, there are also students who perceived that online feedback needs more support with individual or in-class empowerment in terms of giving clarity to mistakes they made in their writing assignments. The followings are the students' representation of such perceptions.

"I think it is less effective because I can't get in detail or clearly about how to compose a good essay just by following the instructions given in Schoology." (Participant #7)

"I don't really understand when feedback is given through online classes because I understand better if the feedback is given in person. In addition, some of the words in the feedback provided were a bit difficult for me to understand." (Participant #8)

"In my opinion, the online feedback that was given took my time to get the idea on how to revise my writing. Sometimes I need to see what other people have written to get ideas or examples to make it better and more interesting." (Participant #10)

Some students also revealed that online feedback needs more support with individual or in-class empowerment in terms of giving clarity to mistakes they made in their writing assignments. The followings are the students' vignette illustrating their complaints.

"My response is that when I am given written feedback in the online class (Schoology), I sometimes feel confused because it is difficult for me to understand without a direct explanation from the lecturer or from my friends. So, I really need a direct explanation of the meaning of the feedback." (Participant #13)

"Feedback in online class is very useful to help us with our essay writing. However, there is a drawback when someone does not understand the meaning of the written feedback. So, it makes it difficult for someone to revise his/her essay." (Participant #15)

Such students' perception mirrors that online feedback still need support from in-class consultation session in terms of feedback to their mistakes in their writing assignments. In studies concerning written corrective feedback, learner belief is one of aspects having great impact on their learning process and outcomes (Han, 2017).

The finding of this study shows that all participants in this study perceive the beneficial part of having being engaged in an online feedback platform. This online activity was enjoyed by the participants due to its flexibility to conduct. While students are connecting to their study room in virtual world, they are also able to surf around the world without leaving their assignment behind. This finding is in line with Hawkes' (2009) who shows how ICT and online platform become transparent yet ubiquitous medium in pedagogical approach, which is broadly encapsulated under the category of 'active learning'. Bitchener (2012) highlights how social interaction plays important role in the students' development of L2 writing. The so-called scaffolded interaction between teacher and students could help students' development under the consideration that the scaffolding is not a one-off treatment (Nassaji & Swain, 2000, Nassaji, 2011).

3.2 Online Corrective Feedback: EFL Students' Preference

Data analysis on the students' attitudes after being given feedback both in the classroom and in online platform indicate that the students mostly were happy to be able to have feedback from their teacher. The finding is discussed as follows based on the students' reflection on their writing lesson.

"I prefer and choose to be given direct feedback in class because I can find out more about mistakes in my essay. And I prefer to be given direct feedback (in class) because I can ask the teacher questions directly about my mistakes. Also, I can directly ask for the explanation from the teacher" (Participant #2)

"I would prefer to be given feedback directly in the class because it's easier for me to understand what the errors really are from my writing activities and I can get the explanations about them as well as suggestions and examples that are quite easy to understand. My difficulty in accessing Schoology class is when the network is weak and the assignment is due." (Participant #4)

"I prefer direct feedback in class because it is easier to understand and gives me examples so that I can draw out the ideas that are in my mind. The direct corrective feedback in the class affects me better in improving my essay later. Also, the feedback given is more embedded in my memory so that I can remember it for a long time. The difficulty I have in accessing the writing class at Schoology is that some of the attached files can't be opened in my mobile phone so I have to use a notebook. It happens because I didn't install the application directly, but accessed it via web. I feel easier to access it via the web and it doesn't make my gadget's memory full." (Participant #11)

Data analysis on the students' attitudes reveal that the participants' engagement in this study with written corrective feedback is believed to be mediated by their experiences of processing and using written corrective feedback. It is in line with Han's (2017) study which reveals that "person-related beliefs, task-related beliefs, and strategy-related beliefs exerted direct and indirect influences on the students' cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement with written corrective feedback" (p. 133). Finding of this study confirms that their beliefs or perception about written corrective feedback are mediated by their engagement as they experienced more processing and using written corrective feedback.

In this study, findings have revealed some important points. First, data has indicated that in general, today's learners rely on not only in-class activities, but also off-class activities in form of online classroom interaction. Second, students' engagement with written corrective feedback in online asynchronous platform is perceived of beneficial for the students since it facilitates learning with adjustable time relative to the students' flexibility. Third, as data unfolded, students of this study revealed that they do learn a lot from the drafting process during the Writing course and from the feedback given within the online platform. Last, in terms of preference, data of this study indicate that despite their preference having more flexibility in doing their drafting, they opt to having in-class or face-to-face feedback from the teacher rather than in online classroom.

This study implied that English language teacher education program, in this case writing course, should equip and encourage L2 learners with more exposure to feedback activities which may enhance their awareness through realization on what informs L2 writing development. Moreover, teacher educator should provide opportunities and activities which could

reinforce L2 learners to engage in sustained language awareness such as self-correction, self-evaluation, and improvement.

4. Conclusion

In terms of students' perception, the findings of this study indicated that the participants' reflections demonstrated their reaction towards feedback given by the teacher. Furthermore, regarding the role of feedback activities in online platform in raising the students' awareness of their written performance, the findings of this study indicated that the participants' reflections demonstrated their awareness. This study revealed that feedback learning activities could help the students realize their weaknesses in L2 writing, value the importance of writing deficiencies, and believe that transformation and betterment is possible. With reference to the extent to what written corrective feedback in online asynchronous platform help EFL students in their drafting process, the students' reflection and their artefact (written drafts) revealed their ability to mentally evaluate their writing activities during classroom and online experience. As the students experienced more engagement with the feedback activities, their ability to develop writing capacity to attend more complex and problematic matters in their drafts was revealed through their reflective deliberations.

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