Student-teacher relationship: Written feedback provision and writing performance

Teguh Sulistyo[1], Arie Dewantara[2], Oktavia Widiastuti[1], Saiful Marhaban[3*]

[1]Universitas PGRI Kanjuruhan Malang, Indonesia
[2]SMA Annur Bululawang, Malang, Indonesia
[3]Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Despite several studies on feedback, little is known about the benefits of the student-teacher relationship in providing feedback. This study therefore aimed to investigate the effects of teacher feedback on students' writing performance. The feedback was divided into two formats: Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback. Students' writing performance in the study refers to the quality of students' writing when composing a descriptive paragraph. In addition, this study also explored the voices of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students after being treated with different feedback modes under specific circumstances of the student-teacher relationship. The study adopted a mixed methods design, using a test, a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire as instruments to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. The study involved 50 secondary school students who were divided into two groups of 25 students each. The results showed that direct feedback stimulated students' writing performance better than indirect feedback. In addition, the feedback treatments could maximize students' writing performance if a good student-teacher relationship was developed in the classroom. This implies that maintaining a good student-teacher relationship in the EFL classroom is beneficial.

* *Corresponding author*:

Saiful Marhaban
Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh
Jl. Teuku Nyak Arief No.441, Kopelma Darussalam, Kec. Syiah Kuala, Kota Banda Aceh, Aceh 23111, Indonesia
Email: saiful22@usk.ac.id

1. Introduction

Writing postulated as a complex skill (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019) should focus on the process and the written production (Sulistyo & Heriyawati, 2017). A process approach, to some extent, provides some views in the practice of writing activities. It stresses what the students have to write and how the teacher helps them to accomplish their writing task (Aliyu, 2020; Alodwan & Ibnian, 2014; Davoodifard, 2022). In this context, one of the writing process activities is giving the students written feedback in the step of revising. Feedback provision can improve students' performance if multimodal feedback is delivered by taking into account some aspects covering content, relationship, and management (Yusuf et al., 2017). Nevertheless, students commonly complain that feedback on content is too general and in contrast with students' ideas, so teachers need to consider the capacity of each student as well as characteristics of each feedback (Akpinar, 2018; Graham, 2015; Zacharias, 2007).

The results of several findings indicate that students tend to agree with teacher feedback because they believe that their teacher is fair and provides clear and specific comments which are advantageous to improve their texts. Casey and Mcwilliam (2011) also state that all students need teacher feedback because he is a figure of authority in helping them grow, so teachers need to expand their understanding of how feedback works (Chen & Liu, 2021). Additionally, feedback is valuable and significant; therefore, the recommendation for more feedback does not imply that there should be more summative exams (Brody & Santos, 2019; Gibbs, 2010). Instead, teachers should give students plenty of constructive feedback that outlines "what they can do next time to improve." Feedback for students should be future-focused, precise, and expressed in ways they can understand.

Other studies by Farhah et al. (2021) and Hempel (2008) found that no apparent differences between objective and subjective feedback parts are detected, and minute nuances in the feedback message are lost. Moreover, the students' arguments why the teacher had given feedback were used to regulate student emotions, and these explanations were heavily influenced by prior relationships. Feedback is interpreted as a message about the relationship rather than as bad performance when recipients and the supervisor have a poor relationship. The social (non-task) aspects of performance feedback are found to be just as significant as the task performance-related components.

Studies on feedback conducted by Zacharias (2007) and Sulistyo et al. (2021) found that student emotional states, particularly their motivation and attitudes toward writing, were highly influenced by teacher feedback. Then, Casey and Mcwilliam (2008) proved that Individualized feedback that is based on past observations that have improved is in line with adult education concepts, but it may suffer from not paying enough attention to a performance. In addition, Ackerman et al. (2010) investigating the roles of

teacher feedback found that students react unfavorably when teachers give excessive input rather than little feedback on an assignment. The findings of several studies focusing on the effects of feedback remain unclear and provide different results. It is believed that the voices of EFL students after being treated using different modes of feedback have not been well investigated.

These previous studies then proved different findings. Some found that direct feedback is beneficial to enhance students' accuracy, but others found the importance of good communication in feedback provision between the teacher and the students. As a result, the present study investigates further which feedback - direct or indirect feedback- provides more suitable benefits for the students to improve students' writing performance and how the students perceive the feedback provision when the teacher-student relationship involves. Thus, the research problems are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any interaction between modes of written feedback and students' writing performance?
2. If any, which one promotes students' better writing performance and why?
3. What are the voices of EFL students related to teacher-student relationship in feedback provision?

2. Literature review

2.1. Feedback in written production

Writing is considered very complex to master, and Sulistyo (2018) claims that the difficulty of writing assignments forces both students and teachers to work hard in writing classes. Many teachers believe that student written products are tricky to assess, mark, and grade (Karlsson, 2019). In addition, Xiao (2008) believed that writing class is the least rewarding course for teachers and the most frustrating for students, so teachers should help students understand the suitable writing process. In reality, the writing process is complex, so the writing process is seen as a series of activities which consist of steps that may serve the needs of students (Davoodifard, 2022; Tahira et al., 2022). One of the steps in writing is the revising phase in which a teacher plays his role as a student tutor providing feedback.

Feedback refers to specific information which a teacher gives their students inputs that are linked to the assignment or learning process. The goal is to bridge the knowledge gap between what the student requires and understands (Blake, 2020; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). According to Yusuf et al. (2017), there are five goals of feedback. First, feedback is an information resource for teachers and students. Second, feedback promotes advice for students about their learning. Next, feedback supports language input provision for students. Fourth, feedback promotes a form of motivation. Last of all, feedback leads students towards learning autonomy.

Written feedback is basically divided into two: direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback is corrective feedback which is provided directly, but indirect feedback, often known as expanded feedback, differs from direct feedback because it

includes clarification or revision-related clues rather than being offered directly (Yusuf et al., 2017). The practice of feedback in encouraging and reinforcing learning has been advantageous in second-language writing. Feedback is crucial in second language writing courses all over the world, where product, process, and genre methods are used as a core component of teaching repertoires (Hyland, 2007; Karlsson, 2019).

Direct feedback is referred to as correction when a teacher marks the appropriate format on a student's paper (Budianto et al., 2020; Irwin, 2018). As a result, teachers are responsible for direct correction; they know their students' mistakes and are aware of the proper versions; and they give students the appropriate forms. On the other hand, indirect feedback is given when teachers highlight, underline, or circle a mistake on a piece of writing without supplying the right form. This type of indirect feedback is likely referred to as "coded error feedback" (Budianto et al., 2020; Irwin, 2018). In contrast to editing a paper using direct feedback, which just requires the student to copy the teacher's edits onto the paper, indirect feedback requires the student to both recognize the sort of error and to self-correct it (Alodwan & Ibnian, 2014).

2.2. Student-teacher relationship

A good student-teacher relationship is commonly pivotal in efficient teaching and learning processes. students who have a positive behavioral engagement with their teachers tend to experience positive motivational convictions about school and classroom commitment (Iqbal et al., 2019; Monteiro et al., 2021; Ramberg et al., 2019). This positive relationship also stimulates not only students' development but also teachers' professionalism (Hershkovitz, 2018) since it affects the learning process (Al Nasseri et al., 2014).

The positive relationship, in general, influences student engagement in the learning process because this will enable the student to study more efficiently (Farhah et al., 2021; Isnawati et al., 2019) which, in the long run, empowers students' writing achievement. Firdaus (2015) and Siswanto and Kuswandono (2020) revealed the benefits of constructing a positive student-teacher relationship that affects students' positive body language, consistent focus, verbal participation, confidence, and enjoyment. It shows the importance of cultivating student-teacher relationships not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.

2.3. Writing performance

To enhance writing performance successfully, students need to master a wide variety of skills and information gained from education and training outside the school because writing involves the simultaneous coordination of several cognitive and linguistic processes (Ghaemi & SaeidRezaei, 2023; Perdana et al., 2023). That is why, learning to write is more challenging than learning another language's abilities. To write successfully, students need to master a wide variety of skills and information gained via education and training (Perdana et al., 2023). The complexity of acquiring writing performance makes

students work extra hard, and instructors have to guide them in the trajectory of the performance acquisition. However, Xiao (2008) claims that many EFL learners are frustrated by the fact that it is difficult for them to obtain sufficient progress in writing. Thus, scholars believe that writing performance should be based on analytical elements of writing. Some of them score students' writing performance based on complexity, accuracy, and fluency (Johnson, 2024; Lin, 2020; Sulistyo et al., 2019; Khaki & Tabrizi, 2021). In contrast, others analyze the performance based on content, organization, grammar, vocab, and mechanics (Budianto et al., 2020; Noyan & Kocoglu, 2019; Ruru & Sulistyo, 2020; Sulistyo et al., 2020). As a result, writing performance should be focused on elements of texts rather than holistic belief which considers that texts should be scored as a single unit of work.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

The design used in the present study was a mixed method design since it aimed at investigating the effect of different modes of feedback (the independent variable) on students' writing ability (the dependent variable). The independent variable was divided into two formats: direct feedback and indirect feedback. The students' writing performance in the study was the writing quality of the students in writing a descriptive paragraph. In addition, this study also investigated the voices of EFL students after being treated using different modes of feedback.

3.2. Participants, data collection instruments, and procedure

The participants of this study were the second-year students of an Islamic boarding school in Malang, East Java. There were two parallel classes altogether in this population. The individuals of two classes (N= 50) where each class consisted of 25 secondary level students were chosen to obtain two different treatments: direct and indirect feedback. To collect the quantitative and qualitative data, the researchers applied three instruments: a writing test, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. The first meeting (Meeting 1) was employed to have a pre-test to measure the homogeneity of the groups in which the participants had to write a descriptive text. Based on the pre-test, it was shown that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their writing performance before the treatment (see Table 1) after being administered by using an independent sample t-test.

Table 1

Test of homogeneity of variances.

Levine statistics	f1	df2	sig.
2.552	1	48	.117

Then, there were ten meetings (Meetings 2 - 11) which were administered to employ the treatment in order to investigate the effect of different modes of feedback on students' writing performance. The students in the two groups were treated using two different modes of feedback. The first group was treated using direct feedback, and, in contrast, the second one was treated using indirect feedback. The last meeting (Meeting 12) was administered to have the post-test, and all texts were scored by two raters: one of the researchers and the class teacher based on a scoring rubric adapted from Cohen, and the scores obtained of each format were analyzed by using independent sample t-test of statistical computation of SPSS version 22 because there were two different groups: indirect feedback and direct feedback groups. Last, Meeting 13 was the questionnaire session intended to investigate the EFL students' voices after the treatment followed by an in-depth interview involving ten students representing the two groups.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The effect of feedback on students' writing performance

Due to the aims to investigate the effects of different modes of feedback, the researchers compared the two groups by using descriptive statistical analysis. The results show that Direct Feedback Group obtained better average score than Indirect Feedback Group after the treatment as stated in Table 2.

Table 2

The post-test between direct feedback group and indirect feedback group.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct Feedback Group	25	70.5	87.5	78.42	4.9533
Indirect Feedback Group	25	56.5	79.0	67.82	6.8782

In addition, Table 3 shows that the statistical significance level between the two groups using Independent Sample t-test obtained was .000. It implies that there was a statistically significant difference in terms of scores between the two groups indicating that the different modes of feedback applied to the two groups affected the students' writing performance.

Table 3

Comparison of the post-test scores using independent sample t-test.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

S C O R E	Equal variances assumed	2.296	.136	6.253	48	000	10.6000	1.6952	7.1915	14.0085
	Equal variances not assumed			6.253	43.617	000	10.6000	1.6952	7.1826	14.0174

The results of the present study prove that feedback was useful to improve students' writing performance, and direct feedback provided greater effects on students' writing performance. It is in line with the results of the previous studies which proved that direct feedback is beneficial to improve students' writing ability (Budianto et al., 2020; Khaki & Tabrizi, 2021; Khodadadi, 2021; Valizadeh & Soltanpour, 2021). In addition, Gibbs (2010) and Bijami et al. (2016) revealed that feedback is useful and meaningful in language learning. It makes sense that direct teacher feedback helps students to identify the errors existing in their texts since the teacher provides the correct forms. It is supported by a study conducted by Saragih et al. (2021) claiming that direct feedback is the most favored students' writing performance because students become aware of their errors. It was also found that direct feedback is the most effective mode of feedback (Goldouz & Baleghizadeh, 2021). By indicating the students' errors directly, the teacher helped the students with the correct forms and how to make their texts much better. Students believe that a teacher is considered the right person understanding how to provide feedback, and students prefer their teacher addresses direct lexical and grammatical error corrections and to attend to all of their errors (Irwin, 2018; Saragih et al., 2021).

In contrast, the findings of the present research are different from some research done by some researchers. Hartshorn et al. (2010) surprisingly indicated that writing accuracy showed a considerable improvement despite rhetorical ability, writing fluency, and writing complexity being essentially unaffected by the dynamic written corrective feedback. Kusumaningrum et al. (2019) and Hartshorn et al. (2010) found that there was no significant effect of corrective feedback on students' writing performance in terms of complexity and fluency but corrective feedback was beneficial to improve accuracy of the students' texts. Even Sherpa (2021) demonstrated that improving students' writing skills utilizing indirect feedback is more fruitful than direct feedback.

The results of the present study somewhat convincingly indicated that direct feedback was more powerful than indirect feedback. However, direct feedback is more meaningful if it deals with grammatical errors or other linguistic issues but other issues such as content and organization (Budianto et al., 2020). Perks et al. (2021) claim that students need teacher feedback to improve their linguistic competencies in writing, but teachers have to be aware of the students' needs. It implies that teacher direct feedback is advantageous to help students identify their errors in written production, and the students still need frequent reminders in accomplishing their texts.

4.2. *Students' voices on student-teacher relationship in feedback provision*

Regarding the students' voices, the questionnaire which was followed by a semi-structured interview revealed some findings focusing on what the students want and hope in writing classes, specifically feedback. In common, students preferred direct feedback to indirect feedback because they could directly understand their errors and how to fix the errors. Somehow, they still thought that feedback given to them did not really help them increase their confidence in accomplishing the writing tasks since writing, according to them, was the most complicated skill to achieve.

In addition, getting too much feedback reduced their confidence in writing a text and even made the students confused if it did not involve discussion between the teacher and the students as stated by Respondent 7 "OMG. Too much feedback again! I got really frustrated. Too many notes from my lecturer. It seems that I make no progress in writing." The statement is in line with Ackerman et al. (2010) who found that students react badly when teachers give excessive comments on an assignment as opposed to little to no feedback. In other words, they perceive negatively after receiving too much feedback which finally may influence their ways of studying as well as motivation. A study on feedback conducted by Zacharias (2007) found that students' emotional states, notably their motivation and attitudes toward writing, were strongly influenced by teacher feedback.

However, students generally preferred direct feedback to indirect input and had somewhat positive impressions of feedback as stated by Respondent 2 "When receiving feedback, I try to identify my errors, so I can make my text better. Thus, I look forward to getting more feedback since I know that my teacher is caring and friendly enough."

The comment indicated that they became aware of the importance of feedback provision in helping them understand their errors in writing. Carless et al. (2010) say that feedback is a social practice in which maintaining student-teacher relationship is a source of emotional issues that affects how students learn. As the students' complete tasks for learning and assessment, their emotions are involved. Ramberg et al. (2019) found that feedback will be accepted by students when there is a good student-teacher relationship. In order to create more effective learning activities, feedback can also be utilized to promote self-regulation through modelling ways for controlling motivating beliefs (Al Nasseri et al., 2014; Boekaerts, 2010; Monteiro et al., 2021).

Throughout the process, in light of discipline-specific goals and standards, effective students are more likely to self-regulate their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Barnett (2007) assumed that effective students must possess the necessary levels of self-drive, self-assurance, and resolve to exercise agency when facing emotional risks. The power of student-teacher relationship is typically unequal in different cultures, which might prevent students from participating actively in the feedback process (Boud, 2007). Price et al. (2010) revealed that students may become untrusting of their teachers' dedication to improving their performance if they feel they have an unequal power

relationship with them. These can include less dramatic occurrences like failing to solicit feedback or help or the stress of obtaining a failing mark (Price et al., 2010).

5. Conclusion

Direct feedback empowered students to perform better than indirect feedback and students made progress in their writing performance in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics after being treated with direct feedback. With direct feedback, students were able to improve their ideas or opinions in writing. The content of their texts also increased and students found it easier to complete their texts. In addition, students had positive perceptions about the implementation of direct feedback in writing activities. Feedback gave them confidence in writing a text when the relationship between students and teacher in writing class was in a good atmosphere and managed accordingly. Due to various potential limitations of the study, such as the sample size and the length of treatments, it is suggested to further reveal the type of feedback that provides better performance of EFL students in writing activities and how to build an appropriate relationship that maximizes students' constructive emotions in providing feedback.

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