



An Analysis of Written Commentary Technique on Students' Writing Given by Teachers

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Received: 10-12-2023

Reviewed: 15-12-2023

Accepted: 29-12-2023

Abstract

This research was based on a phenomenon that the students' writing ability was still low. It was assumed that there were two main factors influencing the students' writing. One of them was about facilitating the students with appropriate written feedbacks. In line with that, this research was a kind of descriptive study, which was aimed at finding a deep description of the implementation of written feedback at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang. Participants of the research were all English teachers there. Furthermore, the data were collected by using two instruments, documents and interview. There were two findings of the research. First, almost all of the written feedback items were provided to help students working on their grammatical mistakes or forms of the writing, it was proven by the percentage that 99.66% of the written feedback items were focused on forms whereas only 0.34% of the written feedback items were focused on contents. Second, the technique used in giving the written feedback was written commentary. This technique was used due to its effectiveness in helping the students' writing. In short, giving written feedback through the written commentary technique is really worth for the development of students' writing, especially for non-native of English.

Keywords: Written feedback, written commentary technique, students' writing

Introduction

Being able to write is not as easy as being able to speak or to read. Among the four skills which are writing, reading, listening, and speaking, being capable in writing is the most difficult one. Based on the researcher's experience in teaching English in senior high level, it was found that there were some causes that made them failed in composing a good paragraph or essay. The failure of the student's writing can be proven by looking at a writing sample written by students of MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang. The samples of the writing belong to

the tenth grade students, who were in social and science class which combined in "Lintas Minat Class". In this case, the student composed a recount paragraph which focused on telling their past experiences. The sample reveals that there are still some mistakes in composing the paragraphs. The mistakes are mostly about grammar, especially, the usage of verb-2 to illustrate past events. Briefly, the researcher concluded that the students still got difficulty in writing which was caused by some factors. In addition, this evidence was also supported by the informal interview that the researcher did to some of the students there.

Based on the facts above, the researcher assumes that the failure of the students' writing is caused by two factors, internal and external factors. This assumption is also emerged by some previous studies done by some researchers; one of them was conducted by Nacira (2010). She states that the difficulty in writing lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also translating these ideas into readable texts. In addition, the difficulties are also derived from teacher's approaches, methods, teaching techniques, and ways in reacting to students' writing productions. The idea can be understood that generating and organizing ideas as well as translating these ideas into readable texts are as internal factors which derive from students. It means that to create the readable texts, the existence of sufficient vocabularies as well as the ability to construct those vocabularies into sentences which are called as grammar competence is undeniable. In the same way, the students' motivation brings much influence in students' writing as well. Furthermore, the writing products are also affected by the external factors which generally deal with the teachers' approach, teachers' technique in teaching writing, the class atmosphere, and also the one that cannot be put away from the writing process which is known as giving proper feedback toward students' writing.

Dealing with the external factor in writing which is known as giving feedback on students' writing, somehow this process is sometime ignored by English teachers. In fact, the existence of proper feedback will give benefits to students' writing. Peterson (2010) says "teachers provide feedback on students' writing to support students' writing development and nurture their confidence as writers. It means that the feedback is one of many ways that can help the students' development in writing as well as keep their motivation high as a writer. Besides, it is proved by some studies which discuss about the importance of giving feedback on the students' writing. One of them was done by Ferris and Roberts (2001). They observed that students who received any kinds of feedback significantly gave better writing products than those who did not receive any feedback. This research is also supported by an argument given by Chiang Kwun-Man (2004). He argues that most of writing instructors believe that providing students with effective feedback on their writing is vital as it helps students to correct their own mistakes and be more independent writers, which help them to become better writers. Briefly, in the process of writing, the teachers or English instructors cannot abandon the process of giving proper feedback, which will guide and help them in producing better writing.

Furthermore, the paradigm among English teachers that give feedback on the students' writing is only about marking the students' writing, especially, focusing on the students' errors in grammar should be changed. The reason is that the feedback itself does not only provide the students with grammatical feedback but also the content as well as organization of the writing. In line with that statement, Fathman and Whalley (1990) say that teacher feedback can be in the forms of content and form feedback. It means that the content refers to comments on the organization, ideas, and amount of detail, while form involves comments on grammar and

mechanic errors. In short, proper feedback must contain those items so that it brings improvement to the students writing.

Referring to those phenomena discussed above, it comes to a conclusion that there are two main factors that influence the students' low writing ability which are internal and external factors. One of the crucial external factors is derived from the way teachers give written feedback on students' writing product. Dealing with the issue, in this research, the researcher tried to analyze deeply about one of the external factors, which is teachers' written feedback at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang. This research tried to figure out the focuses of written feedback given by the teachers and the techniques used in giving the written feedback.

Literature Review

The Concept of Written Feedback on Students' Writing

Feedback is a key element in language learning. Generally, it can promote minimal or deep learning to students. As a concept, feedback itself is defined as any responses which are given to the students' work. Hattie and Timperely (2007) state that "feedback is information provided by an agent regarding some aspects of one's task performance". In addition, Narciss (2008) also defines feedback as "all post-response information that is provided to a learner to inform the learner on his or her actual state of learning or performance". From these two definitions, it can be regarded that the feedback itself is designed to provide an understanding of performance through offering guidance on the knowledge that they possess. One of the factors which seems to be a great influence dealing with the feedback is that it helps students to reconstruct their knowledge or skill to what is desired.

In writing, the term of feedback is found in the writing process which is very worthy for students' improvement in writing mastery. As one of the important processes, feedback is expected to give a significant effect on the students' writing. Some experts have argued that the feedback will be very beneficial for the students. One of them is Brown (1994). He states that providing effective feedback will be one of the keys to successful learning. In other words, it can be said that whenever the feedback given properly, it will bring positive influences to the students' learning, including the improvement on the students' writing ability. However, it can also be time-consuming and frustrating, if the feedback is not given properly and efficiently. Therefore, to be successful in the writing product, teachers must be able to respond to students' work efficiently and effectively.

Dealing with how to respond properly, the term of feedback in writing can be seen by its form, it means that the feedback may be given in the form of written feedback or oral one. Since the research deals with the teachers' written feedback, the further review focuses on the written one. Some studies related to the written feedback have categorized the types of written feedback which are known as direct and indirect written feedback. Farrokhi (2012) defines the direct written feedback as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teachers to the learners above the linguistic errors. It means that the teachers provide the written feedback explicitly on the students' errors. For example, when the students make mistake in the use of verb-2 in simple past tense, the teachers will directly cross the verb and change it into the correct form of the verb. On the other hand, the indirect written feedback

only clues the errors and lets the students think and make the revisions over those mistakes. In line with that, He (2003) states that the indirect written feedback indicates some errors without explicit attention drawn.

Related to those two types of feedback, throwing the written feedback by giving codes and comments will train the students' critical thinking. Gipps (1994) regards that written feedback as a critical feature of teaching and learning process. By providing indirect written feedback, it is hoped that the students will be more critical and will be able to figure out the meaning of codes given to them. This way also guides the students to become autonomous learners because the indirect written feedback makes the students responsible toward the written feedback and it is hoped that the students will give appropriate responses to the written feedback.

Furthermore, William (2004) adds that the most prominently used of written feedback method fall into two common categories, they are the feedback on form and the feedback on content. The most common method of the written feedback on form is teachers' correction of surface errors, teachers' markings that indicate the place and type of error but without correction, and underlining to indicate only the presence of errors. This kind of the written feedback requires the students to be familiar with the codes written on their paper. Usually, such kinds of codes have been introduced by the teachers so that there will be no misunderstanding toward the teachers' written feedback.

Feedback on content mainly consists of written comments by teachers on drafts that usually point out problems and offer suggestions for improvements on the next draft. Students are usually expected to incorporate information from the comments into other versions of their papers. In contrary with the form written feedback which focuses on grammar, the written feedback on content will be more helpful and appropriate for intermediate or advance students where they have been good on grammar, what they need is only to produce a good paragraph, essay, or even paper based on the inputs given through the written feedback.

In brief, feedback as one of the processes in writing still needs to be considered in order to help students in improving their writing skill. Generally, feedback can be defined as teachers' response toward the students' work whether in the form of direct or indirect one. In addition, the written feedback means any comments or marks given on students' piece of writing. The written feedback might be explicit or implicit; it depends on the teachers' interest or the students' need.

Focuses of Teacher's Written Feedback toward Students' Writing

Giving written feedback is not merely about writing something on students' writing or marking toward the students' writing, it is more about how the written feedback can be accepted as a tool to help the students in revising their writing. It means that exposing too much on the students' writing will not warranty that the students will be able to produce a proper revision or vice versa. Thus, deciding a workable written feedback toward the students' writing is another work that teachers should do. Here, some experts have discussed theories related to

what to response. They argue that whether the written feedback is only in the term of form-focused feedback or content-focused feedback.

The term of the form-focused written feedback refers to any responses in which the emphasis of the responses only takes place on grammatical and mechanical aspects. Such kind of feedback is usually found in the form of written feedback, such as minimal marking or correction codes. In certain occasions, the form-focused feedback is not only delivered through written one but also can be done orally. Furthermore, some experts have argued that such kind of feedback is beneficial for students' improvement in writing. Ferris (1999) says that form-focused feedback cannot be abandoned since students rely heavily on it to improve their grammar in writing. He emphasizes that the existence of form-focused feedback will affect positively on students' grammar, especially for novice writers. This argument is also supported by Ashwell (2000) by comparing to content-focused feedback. He argues that feedback on content has only moderate effect on revision because the students really depend on form feedback. It means that the content feedback will not be successful if it does not come along with the form feedback.

Besides the form-focused written feedback which aims in improving students' grammatical competence, another term which is also found to enhance the quality of the students' writing is a content-focused written feedback. This written feedback is needed since the academic writing is not only about writing sentences which are grammatically correct but also producing paragraphs which are meaningful. It means that the ability to arrange those sentences becoming a good paragraph will consider some aspects such as topic sentences, details, and concluding sentences. Therefore, exposing written feedback which aims to improve those areas need to be given to the students. Some experts have argued the advantages of giving written feedback on the content of students' writing. Zamel (1985) states that exposing the students with grammatical feedback only is not enough, there is a need for more content-based feedback. In line with that argument, Truscott (1996) states that grammar correction in writing classes should be abandoned, since it is not only inefficient but also rather harmful. In other words, these two experts emphasize that giving written feedback on the students' grammar only is not enough. As a result, the combination between the two focuses of written feedback will be much better for students' improvement in writing.

For more detailed, the feedback on those two aspects are shown in the following table;

Table 1. Feedback on Forms and Contents

FEEDBACK	
Form-focused categories	Content-focused categories
1. Tense	1. Topic
2. Word orders	2. Main idea
3. The usage of modals	3. Topic sentence
4. The usage of nouns	4. Details

5. Articles	5. Conclusion
6. S-V-agreement	
7. Adjective	
8. Adverb	
9. Preposition	
10. Pronouns	
11. Writing mechanics	
12. Insertion of words/phrases/sentences	
13. Deletion of words/phrases/sentences	
14. Passive voice	
15. The usage of conjunctions	

Adapted from Begham and Mohamad (2009)

In conclusion, what to response is another crucial thing that contributes much on students' writing. The quantity of the written feedback items will not warranty that the students will get benefit from. In other words, it can be said that the workable written feedback items are needed by the students. As a result, understanding the two focuses of the written feedback, form and content focused feedback is a key to be successful in responding to the students' writing.

Written Commentary Technique

One of the written feedback techniques proposed by O'muircheartaigh (2002) is written commentary techniques. This technique is mostly used by English writing teachers in giving written feedback. This technique involves writing detailed comments on the problems that exist in the learners' work. The idea is to guide the learner so as they can try to self-correct. At times this may not be easy or possible for them so you might want to give them the correct version or advise them on where in their dictionaries or grammar books that they are able to find the correct answers. Here, you will be giving feedback on both content and language. As a result, it is probably the best to read over the piece once or twice, thinking about what areas you are going to focus on most before giving the feedback on paper. An alternative is doing this type of feedback by e-mail and/or using the Insert Commentary facility in Microsoft Word.

Research Method

This research was a descriptive research since the main aim of this research was to find out and explained deeply the phenomenon of written commentary technique on students' writing at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang. The data were collected from January to February 2023 through two instruments, document observation and interview. The participants of the research were all English teachers at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang consisting of six teachers. The procedure of data collection was as the following; to answer the first question dealing with focus of the written feedback, the researcher gathered the data by collecting the

students' writing which had been responded by teachers. It means that the researcher gathers all of the students' writing, one class for each participant (six English teachers). Similarly, to answer the second question in this research which was about the techniques used by the teachers, the researcher also used the same collections of writings, however, it was analyzed differently. Then, the data were analyzed through the following steps; the data collection (students' writing) was analyzed through tabulating. It means that written feedback items provided by each participants were put based on the table of teachers' responses on students' writing. Next, based on the table, the researcher grouped the teachers' written feedback whether they belong to form-focused feedback, content-focused feedback, or they use both of them. Then, to gain the pattern that each teacher applied, the researcher put percentage for each participant. In addition, the percentage was described to conclude the focuses of the written feedback provided by each teacher. Next, the researcher identified the written feedback techniques used by the teachers which were shown on the students' writing. Then, the data were put in a table that contained written feedback techniques used by the teachers. Next, the researcher counted the written feedback items used by the teachers. To figure out the pattern that was used by each teacher, the researcher gave percentage and described them in detail. To report the findings of the research, the researcher used narrative discussion which was meant that the researcher tried to explain the findings deeply. Furthermore, the researcher also interpreted the findings by reviewing the major findings, comparing with the previous studies.

Results

Focuses of the Written Feedback Given by the Teachers

To identify the focuses of the given written feedback, the researcher collected the students' writing which had been responded by all the teachers and grouped them. The table below shows the written feedback items provided by all the teachers.

Table 2. Focuses of Written Feedback Given by All Teachers

No	Teachers	Focuses of Written Feedback and Their Percentage				Total
		Form	%	Content	%	
1	A	223	100	0	0	223
2	B	270	98.54	4	1.46	274
3	C	308	100	0	0	308
4	D	378	100	0	0	378
5	E	263	99.25	2	0.75	265
6	F	296	100	0	0	296
	Total	1738	99.66	6	0.34	1744

An Analysis of Written Commentary Technique on Students' Writing Given by Teachers

The table above describes that almost all of the written feedback items focus on the form of the writing. It is proved by the total percentage of written feedback items given by all participants (English teachers), in which 99.66% of the given written feedback items focus on the forms of writing, while only 0.34% of the written feedback items are on the contents of writing. In detail, it is described that there are four teachers, teacher A, C, D, and F, who give all of the written feedback items to help students working on the form of their writing. Otherwise, two teachers, teacher B and E, put few written feedback items to help the students with contents of their writing.

Written Commentary Technique Used by the Teachers in Giving Feedback

The table below shows the written feedback techniques used by all the teachers.

Table 3. Written Feedback Techniques Used by All Teachers

Teachers	Written Feedback Techniques and Their Percentage												Total
	T C	%	CC	%	PR	%	SW	%	WC	%	MM	%	
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	221	99.1	2	0.9	223
B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	267	98.52	4	1.48	271
C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	308	100	0	0	308
D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	131	34.66	247	65.34	378
E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	89	51.15	85	48.85	174
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	166	56.08	130	43.92	296
Total									1182	71.64	468	28.36	1650

*Note: TC=Tick Charts, CC=Correction Codes, PR=Peer Reviews, SW=Self-Monitored Writing
WC=Written Commentary, MM=Minimal Marking*

Based on the table 3, it was found that all of the participants applied written commentary technique in order to respond to students' writing. It is indicated that the percentage of applying written commentary by teacher A is 99.1% and the rest of the written feedback items which are in the form of the minimal marking technique are only 0.9%. The percentage shows us that the common pattern used by teacher A in responding to the students' writing is through written commentary. In the same way, teacher B responded to students' writing through written commentary. It is proved by the percentage of the given written feedback in which 98.52% of the feedback items are in the form of written commentary technique while only 1.48% of them are in the form of minimal marking. In addition, teacher C provided all of the written feedback items by applying written commentary technique. The percentage of the given written feedback shows that 100% of the feedback items are exactly in the form of written commentary technique.

Furthermore, the last three teachers, teacher D, E, and F applied written commentary technique less frequently compared to teacher A, B, and C. From table 10, it is seen that teacher D provides 34.66% of the written feedback by applying written commentary technique while

65.34% of the feedback items are in the form of minimal marking technique. On the other hand, teacher E gave more feedback in the form of written commentary one rather than minimal marking. The percentage indicates that 51.15% of the feedback items are the written commentary and the rest of them which are 48.85% are on minimal markings pattern. Equally, the last participant that is teacher F provides more feedback by facilitating students with the written commentary technique than minimal marking one. It is seen from the percentage that 56.08% of the given feedback items are the written commentary technique and 43.92% of them are the minimal marking technique. To be clear of how the written commentary given by the teachers, the following sample of writing is displayed and discussed.

Recount Text

(4.) NO. _____ DATE: _____

Name: Mira ARL Hayati Class: X PPI

☐ Last year at the time holiday ~~I and my friend~~ ^{My friend and I} went to Botani Square in Bogor city. her name ~~is~~ ^{Putri}. We went to Botani Square ~~at the~~ ^{on} Sunday after zuhur at 14.35 AM.

☐ With ~~Good~~ ^{on foot} food. Because ~~it is~~ ^{to} very near ~~going~~ ^{to} there.

☐ After and we had to there at 14.35 am after that

☐ We ~~were chosen~~ ^{decided} to watching a movie. We are very different

☐ I like watching a funny film and she like watching a Romantic film. Finally we chose to watching "Cinta Suci Zahara" I

☐ I remember there are so many memories with her. ~~been~~ ^{were} when we playing together. and she ~~had~~ ^{made} me happy with her cuteness. Suddenly my mother called me to come back home. ~~because~~ ^{that's} my experience holiday I was so happy.

Figure 1. The Sample of Student's writing

The writing above was written by student 4. It is about her last holiday. The writing consists of three paragraphs. In the first paragraph, it is seen that all the feedback items given are in the form of written commentary. One of the examples is found in the first sentence. Here is the sentence, "I and my friend went to Botani ...". Here, the written commentary technique is used to revise the subject in that sentence. The teacher revised the phrase, "I and my friend" to be "My friend and I". Then, the next sentence like "her names Putri" was also revised by the teacher becoming "her name is Putri".

In the second paragraph, the feedback items are also found. There are two feedback items drawn which are found in the same sentence. The first one is in this sentence, "We were chosen to watching ...". Here, the written commentary technique is used to revise the predicate of that sentence. Another feedback which is stated in the same sentence is about the word after "to". There, the student wrote gerund instead of base form of the verb. Thus, the teacher gave feedback by underlying the word. In addition, in the last paragraph of the writing is only found one feedback which is drawn in written commentary technique. There, the feedback is given to revise a verb in a sentence.

To sum up, it was found that there were three English teachers at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang who dominantly applied written commentary technique. Besides, the last three

teachers, teacher D, E, and F applied the written commentary technique less frequently than the first three teachers, A, B, and C. In other words, the last three teachers used the two techniques, written commentary and minimal marking, in balance. The written commentary technique was carried by providing the correct versions of the mistakes done by the students.

Discussion

Focuses of the Written Feedback

Dealing with the finding where almost all of the teachers provided the written feedback in order to help students working on the forms, the interview done gave some inputs why those teachers did that. Generally, the interview emerged a major reason that encourages the teachers focusing their written feedback on grammar (form). It was done since most of the students were categorized as beginners in writing. In line with that, Ellis (2008:355) has stated, "the effectiveness of direct and indirect feedback is likely to depend on the current state of the learners' grammatical knowledge". It means that considering the students' ability is really crucial to determine what focuses of the given written feedback. By considering the fact, form-focused written feedback is the best way to help the students improving their skill, especially on the English basic skills. It is supported by the idea proposed by Ferris (1999:9). She argues that form-focused feedback cannot be abandoned since students rely heavily on it to improve their grammar in writing. Similarly, Porte (1997:61) states that unskilled writers have been seen to revise from a narrow outlook and make changes addressing the surface grammatical structure of compositions, usually at the level of words, rather than deeper issues of content and organization. In other words, these two ideas precisely prove that beginner writers or unskilled writers seem relying much on the feedback that is focused on the forms of writing.

Furthermore, the previous research findings also support this finding that feedback on form is appropriate to be implemented, especially for students who are considered beginners in writing. Some of them are studies done by Chandler (2003) and Hyland (2003). They showed that teachers' feedback on students' grammatical and lexical errors resulted in a significant improvement in both accuracy and fluency in subsequent writing of the same type over the same semester. Moreover, research done by Ferris (2006) showed that students made statistically significant reductions in their total number of errors over a semester in five major grammar categories with a particular reduction in the verb and lexical errors. In other words, it can be said that by proving students with corrective written feedback on form, it is expected that there will be changing and improvement on the students' grammar competency which aims to improvement on the students' writing.

In contrast, written feedback on forms only does not warranty that the students' writing might improve significantly. As it is shown in this research in which generally the students' still get problems in writing might be affected by the teachers' written feedback where the written feedback mostly focuses on forms. This is in line with some researchers who already did researches on the form-written feedback on writing. They are Kepner (1991) and Sheppard (1992). They argue that the grammar corrections or correction on forms do not have a positive effect on the development of L2 writing accuracy. Similarly, Truscott (1996) claims that error corrections that are on forms should be abandoned. He argues that direct corrections on form are not useful for students' development in accuracy and that grammar correction might bring

about harmful effects on both teachers and students. In short, providing the students with both written feedback, form-focused and content focused, is suggested to be applied to help the students in writing.

Written Feedback Techniques Applied by the Teachers

The next finding deals with the written feedback techniques applied by the English teachers at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang. It was found that all the teachers there applied two techniques which are known as written commentary and minimal marking technique. All of the teachers there applied the written commentary technique in order to respond to their students' writing products. This kind of written feedback is commonly used by English teachers especially for students who consider English as foreign or second language. The feedback is given to correct any mistakes by providing the correct versions; it can be done to improve the students' writing on forms as well as contents. This is in line with O'muircheartaigh (2002:7) who states that written commentary feedback involves writing detailed comments on the problems that exist in the learners' work. Similarly, Hyland (2003:180) argues that probably the written commentary technique is the most common type of teacher written feedback which consists of teachers' handwritten commentary on the students' work. These two theories give the general frame that the written commentary technique applied by providing the students with correct forms of the mistakes and let those feedback items help the students to revise their writing.

In addition, providing such kind of written feedback technique brings positive inputs toward the students' willingness to revise their writing. It happens since the written commentary technique gives the feedback explicitly in which the correct forms are provided. According to O'muircheartaigh (2002:7), the idea of written commentary technique is to guide the students so as they can try to self-correct. To reach that point where the students can do self-correcting, at times teachers may provide the correct versions or advise them on where in their dictionaries or grammar books they could find the correct answers.

Conclusion

Here are some points that can be drawn to give conclusions. First, almost all of the written feedback items given by English teachers at MAN Koto Baru Padang Panjang focus on the form of students' writing. Kinds of the form are varied; however, the most dominant one is about the written feedback toward the students' mistakes on S-V agreement and the least dominant ones deal with the written feedback on the usage of adverb. Next, the written commentary technique is used because of the effectiveness of that technique for students, especially for students with low level of proficiency. This technique allows the students to know their mistakes as well as to get the correct versions of the mistakes. Besides, the written feedback items delivered through this technique can be used later on as a reference in the next writing activity. Shortly, giving feedback is really worth for the development of students' writing, especially for non-native of English. It is crucially recommended for the further

researchers to conduct research dealing with the effectiveness of other techniques in giving feedback.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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