The Effects of Collaborative Feedback on Indonesian EFL Students' Writing Performance

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate whether collaborative corrective feedback could foster better writing ability for Indonesian EFL students. Forty-eight students participated in this study and randomly assigned into two groups; student-student collaborative feedback (SSCF) as experimental group and student-teacher collaborative feedback (STCF) as control group. The students' English proficiency level was more or less preintermediate to intermediate based on the results of TOEFL scores. The students then categorized into higher and lower proficiency level. A pre-writing test was given before providing the treatments. Then, the experimental group was instructed using SSCF in which the students' roles as raters provided correction on peer's writing errors using an assessment form. On the other hand, the students in STCF group only received teacher's corrections. The whole sessions were lasted in eight sessions. The pre-test was administered in the first session; in the six sessions the treatment was applied; and a post test was given at the end of the session to determine the effects of using collaborative feedback on students' writing ability. The result of analysis revealed significant between-group differences, F (2, 816) = 3.440, p (.020) < .05. in which the SSCF group performed better than the STCF group.

Keywords: collaborative, feedback, EFL, writing

INTRODUCTION

The research on EFL students' writing claimed that writing is perceived as the most challenging skill to acquire. Writing needs the involvement of learners' background knowledge and a complex mental process in developing ideas which is acquired. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) state that the writers need to include the purpose or prompt into their unique approach to writing in order to write well. It is acknowledged that the knowledge of the content, organize the content, conventions of writing, and produce a particular type of writing (Hillock, 1987) are the essential knowledge that the writers need to rely on when writing. Moreover, writing is becoming more challenging for the students in EFL context because they also need the knowledge of English including sentence construction

and some other linguistic aspects which has an essential role in making the texts understandable. These aspects were common Indonesian students' problems which is identified from the researcher's observation as an English teacher.

In the context of EFL learning, the learners do not get much exposure to L2. Very often, classroom instructions and the feedback used are in L1. This sort of feedback might experience fossilization as stated by Lightbown and Spada (2011). Instruction and feedback, as they claim, would help students recognize differences between their interlanguage and the target language. Therefore, to help improve learners' L2 language, especially in writing, it is necessary to provide language input. Behaviorist learning theories regard input to form as the necessary stimuli and feedback which learners respond to and imitate. Feedback is the type of interaction which can enhance second language acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2006). While children infrequently receive such negative evidence in L1, and do not need it to achieve full native competence, corrective feedback is common in L2 and may indeed be necessary for most learners to ultimately reach native-like levels of proficiency. According to psycholinguistic and cognitive second language acquisition (SLA) frameworks (see Schmidt, 1990; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; Robinson, 2003), feedback can stimulate students to EFL/English as a second language (ESL) learning (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010) and it is a key element for the teacher to provide learners with plentiful comprehensible input (see Krashen, 1981; 1982; 1985).

The teaching of writing currently emphasizes the writing process and idea generation (Polio, 1997; Hyland, 2003); it has placed a less emphasis on getting students to write error-free sentences. However, the trend toward a more process-oriented approach in teaching writing to L2 learners, as Polio (1997) claims, simply insists that editing waits until the final drafts. She contends that even though students are frequently taught to wait until the later stages to edit, editing is not necessarily less important. In reviewing literature on reducing composition errors, Lalande (1982) comes to the conclusion that the most effective strategy to reduce errors that the students have committed in their composition is to conduct 'feedback'.

The types of strategies in providing feedback, therefore, require further research as whether the feedback should be provided by teacher or peer. Previous studies show conflicting findings of feedback strategies on overall students' writing. Some researchers (e.g. Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Truscott, 1996) argue against such feedback in students' writing, feedback is ineffective and may cause de-motivate students in the writing processes because students contend themselves as weak writers. Further study argue that feedback on writing does not benefit students for their long-term effects of writing performance. It is found that students still continue making language mistakes in their subsequent drafts although they receive considerable teacher's feedback. It might happen because students do not have knowledge on understanding the feedback from teachers or students do not have experience in addressing the accuracy of language forms. The present study addressed a new direction for Indonesian students in EFL writing context by implementing collaborative feedback. The study was expected can provide an answer to the existing conflicting findings and presented a clear result which is relevant to Indonesian EFL student context. Based upon the study by Mardijono (2003) and a pilot

study by present researcher, Indonesian EFL students at the intermediate level often made errors in their composition. For that reason this study selectively provided collaborative feedback whether working with teacher or peers can decrease students' errors in writing composition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corrective Feedback

In providing corrective feedback on students' written errors, the teacher has a wide variety of choices that are potential to be employed. As the choice may be somewhat diverse, it shows the creativity and inquisitiveness of teachers and researchers who strive to find the most effective means to give feedback in an attempt to enact the greatest change. The written corrective feedback can take many forms with varying degrees of success. The effectiveness of feedback in EFL writing classrooms can help students observe or notice the targeted features of writing such as form, content, and organization, which in turn helps them improving writing performance. They proceed to compare the original with the revised drafts and try to identify a gap or problem in both of drafts. After receiving feedback either from their peers or from their teachers, students need to notice gaps or problems found in their pieces of writing. As a result, they try to improve their subsequent written drafts by incorporating the solution(s) into them. These processes suggest that promoting students' writing process through the activity of feedback in writing classrooms can help students improve their writing learning. Nevertheless, the most consistent finding (e.g. R. Ellis et. al., 2008; Bitchener, 2008; Beuningen, 2012) has been proved that the use of corrective feedback on students' writing outperforms no feedback at reducing error.

Selective and Comprehensive Corrective Feedback

Selective and comprehensive corrective feedback deals with the extent in which the language features in students' composition are targeted. Other terms commonly used to refer to selective and comprehensive are focused and unfocused corrective feedback. While selective strategies take the form of concentrating on one specific linguistic feature, regardless of the other errors that may occur in the writing, comprehensive corrective feedback addresses all of the errors in the student's text. Sheen (2007) employed a focused strategy successfully to improve grammatical accuracy of students' writing by using written corrective feedback in trying to influence the correct use of definite and indefinite articles. The benefits of focused strategies, as she argues, are that they are able to better pinpoint problem areas, and thus reduce the potential confusion and cognitive overload of the students. She puts forward her argument as follows:

Written corrective feedback is complex. It addresses different aspects of writing—content, organization, rhetoric, and mechanics, as well as linguistic accuracy. The question arises, however, whether written corrective feedback should deal with all these aspects at the same time or address different aspects selectively when correcting different pieces of writing. L2 learners have limited processing capacity and asking them to attend to corrections that address a range of issues at the same time may tax their ability to process the feedback. One reason that previous studies of written corrective

feedback have failed to demonstrate any effect on students' accuracy in subsequent writing may simply be that the linguistic feedback was not sufficiently focused and intensive. (Sheen, 2007, p. 278)

It appears that unfocused corrective feedback, which deals with a variety of features, becomes the norm for research and practice in written corrective feedback. Vast majority of teachers (and also researchers) might have a difficult time ignoring large segments of problematic areas by concentrating only on one specific feature, over a significant period of time. Focusing on limited features in the classroom may practically be difficult due to the students' (and/or other stakeholders') expectations. And yet, as Sheen's study maintains, there may be some important lessons to be learned from the focused-unfocused dichotomy in written corrective feedback and from further investigation into the impacts each one has on the improvement of writing.

Collaborative Feedback

Feedback in writing is the process of negotiating students' pieces of writing with teachers or peers who are considered as real audiences or readers. Significant achievement in writing requires students to experience short-term revisions to particular texts as a starting point for long term achievement in writing (Ferris, 2004). EFL students are often not developmentally ready to self-correct, and therefore they learn through feedback by teachers and peers to become adept at correcting their own errors (Beuningen, Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). Therefore the notion of doing corrective feedback collaboratively begins to be considered as an effective strategy in reducing EFL students' errors in writing composition.

Collaborative feedback has been suggested to be implemented under the reasons of the lack of teacher's feedback. The effectiveness of teachers' corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy is found to potentially damage students in making error. In line with Hillock (1987) that teacher must have enough time for individual error, otherwise, feedback will not be understandable. This is what Krashen theory of input+1 (1985) suggests that the input to be changed into intake, it should be within the present level of competence of the learner. Therefore, students' extensive experience with the target language is believed can be facilitated through the activity of collaborative feedback.

The term collaborative learning is usually perceived as joint intellectual efforts among students and between students and teachers. It is drawn as a mutual engagement of students group in a coordinated effort to accomplish particular task (Min, 2006). In collaborative corrective feedback, students are supposed to work in the number of two or more students. They share mutual knowledge and linguistics resources, negotiate the meaning by explaining and arguing ideas with peers. There will be the activities of constructing, de-constructing, re-constructing, and co-constructing the ideas in the process of writing with the help of expert students.

It is a worthy discussion on collaborative feedback in writing (e.g., Nelson & Carson, 2006; Villamil & de Guerrero, 2006), but few studies have addressed the issue of assigning student' groups in EFL writing classrooms across different proficiency level. Grouping more and less capable students should open the chance for students to negotiate and

select their own group members and in turn work at their convenience (Jacobs, 2006; Storch, 2005). In implementing collaborative feedback, writing teachers may rotate group members to give more interacting and different experiences for the students.

METHOD

The design of this study was a quasi-experiment which aimed at investigating the effects of collaborative feedback on EFL Indonesian students' writing for different proficiency level. The treatment, the independent variable, was two different types of written collaborative feedback; student-student collaborative feedback (SSCF) and student-teacher collaborative feedback (STCF). 48 Indonesian students were involved in this study. They were randomly assigned into two groups and labelled as SSCF group and STCF group.

A post-test was held at the end of experimentation to measure the students' writing outcome. Two experienced raters were involved to score students' writing by using an argumentative rubric developed by the researcher. The rubric covered five different rating dimensions of writing quality with 100-point scale, each dimension having a different weight: introduction (15 points), argumentative points (40 points), organization (15 points), sentence structure and convention (20 points), and relevance (10 points). To estimate the reliability of the scores, the measurement of inter-rater reliability was used in this study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to estimate the internal consistency between the two raters. The correlation was performed in coefficient alpha.

Six argumentative essays were assigned to the students and 45 minutes time allocation were given to them to study and to revise the given feedback collaboratively before starting to write a new piece of writing in each session. Table 1 shows the provision and Table 2 shows the scheme of the treatment for the two groups. In carrying out the treatments to the groups, peer rater1, peer rater 2, peer rater 3 in SSCF group with different proficiency level have experiences on providing scoring as well as feedback and comments to their higher/lower peer' works as can be seen in the following scheme.

Table 1. Collaborative feedback provision

Writing Task	SSCF (N=26)	STCF (N=22)
1	Rater 1&2	Rater1&2
2	Rater 1&3	Rater 1&3
3	Rater 2&3	Rater 2&3
4	Rater 1&2	Rater 1&2
5	Rater 1&3	Rater 1&3
6	Rater 2&3	Rater 2&3

Table 2. The scheme of collaborative feedback treatment

| Meeting	Session	SSCF	STCF
1		Writing essay 1 Feedback_essay #1 Revision_essay #1 Writing Task 2	Writing essay 1 Feedback_essay #1 Revision_essay #1 Writing Task 2
2		Feedback_essay #2 Revision_essay #2 Writing Task 3	Feedback_essay #2 Revision_essay #2 Writing Task 3
3	Treatment	Feedback_essay #3 Revision_essay #3 Writing Task 4	Feedback_essay #3 Revision_essay #3 Writing Task 4
4		Feedback_essay #4 Revision_essay #4 Writing Task 5	Feedback_essay #4 Revision_essay #4 Writing Task 5
5		Feedback_essay #5 Revision_essay #5 Writing Task 6	Feedback_essay #5 Revision_essay #5 Writing Task 6
6		Feedback_essay #6 Revision_essay #6 Writing Task 7	Feedback_essay #6 Revision_essay #6 Writing Task 7

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The hypotheses was tested after the statistical assumptions (independence of the dependent variable, normal distribution, and the homogeneity of variances) had been fulfilled. The results of Shapiro-Wilk test shows that the essay writing test scores gained by lower proficiency students in the SSCF group students was D(14) = .978, p = .964, and those students with lower proficiency level in STCF group was D(14)=.905, p = .134 were normally distributed. For those higher proficiency students in SSCF group was D(12) = .886, p = .106, and those higher proficiency students in STCF group was D(8) = .952, p = .735 were also statistically normal. The result of homogeneity test was, p=.601 > alpha (.05).

Based on the statistical output, the results show that the SSCF group students (lower proficiency level) was in significantly difference with STCF group students (lower proficiency level) by the evidence that p (.020) < .05. The study revealed that lower proficiency students had better writing performance in the SSCF group than the lower and higher proficiency students in STCF group (see Figure 1).

From the observation during the experimentation, the students who received revisions from SSCF peers had better revisions as compared with the students who received revisions from STCF peers. It can be seen from the description of students' focus assessment criteria of essay writing (Table 1). The students with lower proficiency level in SSCF group gained the highest improvement of macro and micro writing aspects. The results was in line with Larsen (2006) that students build their learning through writing, talking and interacting with peers. Peer feedback promotes assessment experiences for students which can help them understand their learning progress through assessing

peers and being assessed by peers, as students obtain valuable information about their learning progress through receiving peers' feedback. Through the experience of implementing collaborative feedback, the students have self-reflection and self-correction as a result of peer feedback. As supported by Lee (2007) that argument and discussion that followed peer feedback provides the students with better understanding which will invariably improve their interest in solving learning problems.
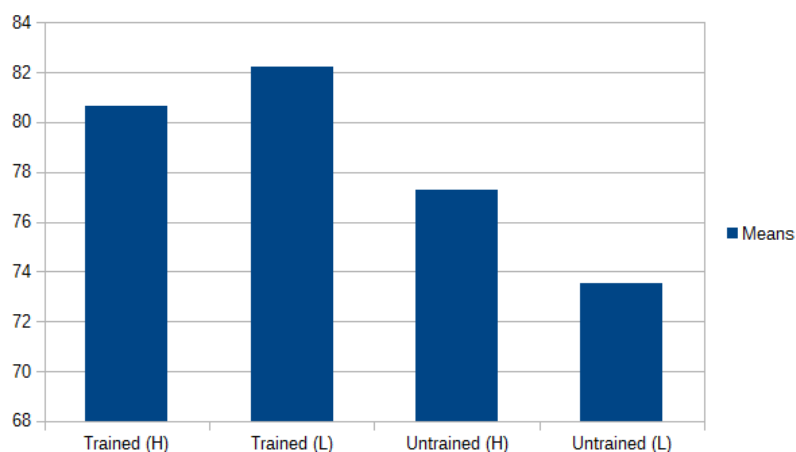
Figure 1. Overall mean scores of SSCF and STCF groups across proficiency levels

Pertaining to the research question of the study, whether the effects of collaborative feedback depend on English proficiency level, the study found that the lower proficiency students in the SSCF group gained better writing performance as compared with those higher and lower proficiency students in both of SSCF and STCF groups. During the observation, the researcher found that the peers' interaction between the lower and higher proficient students was different in terms of asking for clarifying the feedback given. The lower proficient students tend to maximize their discussion with the higher proficiency peer as more capable peers, while the higher tend to talk out of discussion points.

Table 3. Percentage of Students Writing Revisions for Writing Aspects

Groups	Macro Level		Micro Level	
	High (%)	Low (%)	High (%)	Low (%)
SSCF	4.04	20.37	4.5	24.57
STCF	8.05	12.54	14.5	19.5
Total (N=48)	12.09	32.91	19	44.07

This interaction benefitted the lowers in improving their revisions. The assessment form as the supplement for giving feedback which was distributed by the teacher, gave effective contribution for students' different experience to practice on how to score objectively based on certain criteria. As pronounced by some students that they were becoming familiar with the criteria, therefore motivated to improve their writing and eager to fulfill the criteria rather than just accepted teacher's score without having knowledge of good writing criteria, as experienced by the students in STCF group. It is in line with Rahimi (2013) who confirms that the practice or training in learning will be effective only when the students' interaction and negotiation is both focused and meaningful for them. The researcher confirmed through the activity of observation

during the experiment, the treatment in the present study was conducted in a systematic and careful guides. Therefore, the effects of students' collaborative feedback can be controlled effectively to improve students' writing performance.

CONCLUSION

The results of analysis revealed that there were differences in the mean scores of EFL students' writing performance amongst the collaborative feedback treatment groups– student-student collaborative feedback (SSCF) and student-teacher collaborative feedback (STCF). Although the present research provides clear evidence in favor of SSCF, there are various limitations to this empirical work that need to be acknowledged. First, the context of this study was preintermediate to intermediate level of EFL students studying English at university. Thus, it is not self-evident that the findings of this study are readily comparable to other research contexts. Second, the scope of this research was the effects of collaborative feedback on students' development in writing. The present research therefore only enabled further understanding of collaborative feeedback's potential in yielding a learning effect, in terms of writing performance. In addition, the target of a specific essay writing feature used was the argumentative essay. Hence, it cannot be generalized that the treatment is effective when the focus of essay features is changed.

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