Exploring the use of direct corrective feedback in writing an undergraduate thesis

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Abstract

This study explored the use of direct corrective feedback in the Thesis Proposal writing course where the students are expected to develop their undergraduate thesis proposal at Universitas Brawijaya and how to direct corrective feedback can help the students to deal with their academic writing. The data were obtained from six students who have taken the Thesis Proposal Writing course and one lecturer who taught the course using two instruments: an interview guide and observation checklists to triangulate and ensure validity. The result showed that: (1) direct corrective feedback was employed by the teachers to help the students to deal with their writing because direct corrective feedback was the most suitable and comprehensive feedback (2) the lecturer provided direct corrective feedback through Google Classroom and Google Documents for asynchronous meeting and Google Meet for the synchronous meeting (3) Direct corrective feedback helped the students to deal with their writing since the students had a high positive attitude and are preferred by the students to revise their drafts. In teaching writing, the result implied that it will be very beneficial for the teacher to provide direct corrective feedback to the students as teaching strategies and for the students to correct their drafts easily.

Keywords: *direct corrective feedback; writing; undergraduate thesis*

Introduction

In learning English, writing skill arguably is the most complex and difficult language skill since it requires perfect grammar, cohesion, coherence, development, and focus (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). For example, in the aspects of grammar and structure, there are some factors that affect the quality of writing such as singular–plural, word form, word choice, verb tense, word addition or omission, word order, incomplete sentence, capitalization, article, unclear meaning, run-on sentence, and subject-verb agreement. In addition, the

use of proper vocabulary is a pivotal aspect of writing. However, these factors can contribute to creating anxiety for the learners (Pratiwi, 2016; Rahmatunisa, 2014; Toba & Noor, 2019), so it can influence learners' achievement (Fitrinada et al., 2018).

One of the solutions that can be used in teaching writing to help the learners deal with their drafts and anxiety is using feedback. Hyland and Hyland (2006) mentioned that feedback can be defined as key element of the scaffolding provided by the teacher to build learners' confidence and literacy resource to participate in target communities. Lumetta (2004) mentioned that feedback as a process of the teacher providing learners with information about their performance in oral or written to improve their performance. Then, Hyland (2003) mentioned that feedback is beneficial since it can encourage the development of students' writing and is critical to improve the learning process. The importance of providing feedback has been explored by many researchers (Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2015). (Brown, 2000) & Harmer (2007) mentioned that the teacher should guide and facilitate students when they write. Nunan (2015) added feedback must be in positive ways or engage the students to write. In conclusion, feedback must be provided by the teacher. To deal with the learners' grammar ability and lower their anxiety about linguistics problems, there are three types of feedback that are commonly used such as peer feedback, teacher feedback (corrective feedback), and automated written feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The type of feedback that is used in the teaching of the undergraduate thesis is corrective feedback.

An undergraduate thesis can be categorized as one of the types of academic writing. Academic writing can be defined as the kind of writing you do when you write stories in formal language without any slang words (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Since an undergraduate thesis is related to writing, the teachers should be more aware of the teaching strategies. Nation (2008) stated that the principles of teaching writing are meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. The teacher sometimes may face difficulties in teaching writing. Moses and Mohamad (2019) mentioned that the difficulties in teaching writing are having different levels of the students, lacking of students' motivation, lacking of teachers' professional development, and lacking of students' interest in writing. Ali and Ramana (2018) added that to improve the teaching and learning process in academic writing, feedback is needed.

One of the types of feedback that can be used is corrective feedback. There are two types of corrective feedback such as direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback. Ferris and Roberts (2001) defined direct corrective feedback as feedback that is given when the lecturer provides the correct form to the students' draft, and students need to replace the errors. Meanwhile, indirect corrective feedback can be defined as feedback that is given by the lecturer in the form of an indication of students' errors in their drafts.

Russell and Spada (2006) stated that corrective feedback is any feedback provided to a learner, from any source that contains evidence of learner error in language form. Ellis (2009) stated that types of corrective

feedback that can be given in the writing class are direct corrective, indirect corrective, metalinguistic, focus, electronic, and reformulation. In this study, I focus on the use of direct corrective feedback. The definitions of direct corrective feedback have been explored by many researchers (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2003) mentioned that direct corrective feedback is feedback in which the teacher provides the student with the correct form. While, indirect corrective feedback only indicates that the student has made an error without actually correcting it. (Ferris, 2003) also stated that direct corrective feedback can be defined as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the student above the linguistic error. (Bitchener, 2008)also stated that direct corrective feedback is the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure above or near the linguistic error.

While delivering corrective feedback, the teacher should understand the strengths of giving direct corrective feedback. The strengths of giving direct corrective feedback has been explored by some researchers. (Ferris & Roberts, 2001) and (Ellis, 2009) stated direct corrective feedback provides learners with explicit guidance on how to correct their errors, so it is helpful for the learners if they are not capable of correcting their errors by themselves. Sheen (2007) found that giving direct corrective feedback can be effective to help the learners to acquire grammatical structures. Yet, delivering direct corrective feedback to the learners also has weaknesses. The weaknesses of providing direct corrective feedback has been studied by many researchers. Ferris et al. (2013) found that direct corrective feedback is less valuable than indirect since indirect corrective feedback requires reflection and problem-solving skills of the learner, leading to a more long-term growth in writing/self-monitoring ability. (Mollestam & Hu, 2016) added that giving direct corrective feedback sometimes can discourage the learners because they have to see numbers of errors they have made, and it makes them embarrassed.

Referring to direct corrective feedback, many researchers have investigated the use of direct corrective feedback in writing classes. (Septiana et al., 2016), (Aridah, 2016), (Nematzadeh & Siahpoosh, 2017), and (Benson & DeKeyser, 2019) found that there is a significant improvement through direct corrective feedback in terms of level of grammar accuracy in university level, and Hashemifardnia et al. (2019) found that direct corrective feedback enhances learners' grammar accuracy in junior high school level. All of them were conducted in an experimental study. Additionally, (Listiani, 2017), (Tursina et al., 2019), (Hartono et al., 2019), and (Sabarun, 2020) found that university students are satisfied, preferred to be given direct corrective feedback, and felt assessed after being given the direct corrective feedback in their writing. In line with the previous finding, Yunus (2020) found that high school students are preferred to be given direct corrective feedback since it is comprehensive and easier to be understood.

However, only a few studies have investigated direct corrective feedback in a qualitative design, this research fills in the gap, especially during online learning and used different participants in terms of level and writing course. Therefore, it is significant to explore and understand the use of direct corrective feedback in writing an undergraduate thesis since it would be a reflection of the

teaching and learning writing, helping the teacher to enrich their teaching strategies in writing, and guiding the teacher on how the corrective feedback should be delivered to have a better undergraduate thesis. It leads the researchers to research the use of direct corrective in the teaching of thesis proposal writing and the way direct corrective feedback is used to help the learners to deal with their writing.

Research Methods

A case study was employed because I want to analyze and explore EFL learners' understanding and opinion toward their lecturer's direct corrective feedback, so a case study is the most suitable method (Creswell, 2002). To determine the participants, purposive sampling is used based on their level of achievement such as low, mid, and high achiever students which can help the researcher to understand the use of direct corrective feedback. I divided the participants based on the students' grammar achievements and the lecturer's recommendation.

To accommodate this study, I combined and adapted two interview guides from Han and Hyland (2015) that were used to interview the students, and Rajab et al. (2016) that were used to interview the lecturer. To verify the finding, I used observation checklists. The observation checklists were adapted from Han and Hyland (2015) and Rajab et al. (2016). Expert validation is used to see the trustworthiness of the language used.

In collecting the data, I used one-on-one interviews that were conducted via Google Meet due to the covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, I also observed the class. To ensure the verification of the findings, I conducted data triangulation which can be defined as combining two or more data. Here, I used observation. The observation was used to determine the direct corrective feedback to which a particular behavior is present (Ary et al., 2018). I observed the recording of the Google Meet classroom when the lecturer provided direct corrective feedback. After I collected the data that was obtained through interviews, I analyzed the data by coding the data manually. Then, I ensured the validity by comparing it with the result of the observations.

Findings and Discussion
1. Findings

This study was conducted for one semester, so during the class, I observed the way the lecturer provide direct corrective feedback both on synchronous and asynchronous meetings and the way the learners respond to the feedback. Then, to identify the participants' names more easily, assigned some codes for them such as S1 and S2 stand for High achiever students, S3 and S4 stand for Mid achiever students, and S5 and S6 stand for Low achiever students.

Direct Corrective Feedback Use in Undergraduate Thesis Writing

From the interview and observation, I find that the lecturer gave direct corrective feedback in the *Thesis Proposal Writing* course as a strategy to help

the students with their drafts. First, the lecturer gave the learners an assignment to write an undergraduate thesis draft, so the students had a chance to develop their ideas for the draft. Then, the students needed to submit the task. Next, the lecturer gave direct corrective feedback on students' draft through Google document for the grammar, mechanism, and vocabulary, Google classroom for the content and organization, and Google meet after giving task to write introduction, literature review, and method. In the Google Documents, the lecturer only highlighted students' mistakes in their draft and directly gave the comments on students' mistakes and stated what errors need to be fixed in the comments section, what additional ideas the students need to add, and organization. For example, the students wrote "*Feedback acknowledge as an essential…*". The lecturer directly corrected the sentence into "*is acknowledged*" because it was a passive sentence. In addition, the students also wrote "*But, there are still many students who are not interested in learning English Phonology*". The lecturer then directly explained that it is not correct because coordinate conjunction has never been put in the beginning of a sentence.
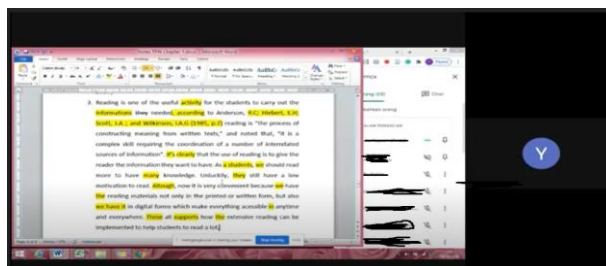
Figure 1. Direct Corrective Feedback Application during Synchronous Meeting

In the process of online learning, the lecturer also stated students' errors in front of the class through Google Meet to tell and encourage the learners not to make the same errors again. One of the examples from the figure above showed that the students made errors in the form of construction, space, and citations. Then, the lecturer gave the correct form directly during the course and encouraged the students not to make the same errors again.

When interviewing the lecturer, I find the reason why the lecturer gave direct corrective feedback. It is because the lecturer found many errors in students' drafts related to the grammar (tenses), vocabulary, content, and organization, so it led the lecturer to give direct corrective feedback as a teaching strategy to help the students with their drafts. The lecturer chose direct corrective feedback because it is the most suitable, comprehensive feedback based on his/her experience. Before the lecturer used direct corrective feedback, the lecturer decided to use indirect corrective feedback on students' drafts. The lecturer only highlighted the word and wrote check your grammar, but the students did not respond to it seriously, so the lecturer decided to use direct corrective feedback. By using direct corrective feedback, the lecturer expected that it could be an example that can help the students with their academic writing.

During the process of teaching the *Thesis proposal Writing* course, the lecturer also faced problems. The lecture stated that the biggest three problems are the number of students in the class, limited time, and range of students' proficiency. There were 25 students who joined *the Thesis Proposal Writing* A-Class. The lecturer needed to read each draft meticulously. The lecturer did not check the grammar only, but the lecturer also checked students' ideas, vocabulary, and format. It indicated that the lecturer faced a problem regarding to the number of the students in teaching *thesis proposal writing* class. It leads to the second problem which is timconstraintnt during delivering direct corrective feedback. Due to time constraint, the lecturer could only provide direct corrective feedback to one or two students as a review strategy which was expected to help students in learning grammar. Lastly, the lecturer also stated that he/she did not know the range of students' proficiency. For example, when the lecturer provided indirect feedback, the lecturer was worried that the students were not be able to understand the feedback. Another example, when the lecturer provided too much direct corrective feedback on students' drafts, the lecturer was also worried because the feedback could demotivate the students.

Direct Corrective Feedback Ways in Helping Undergraduate Thesis Writing

From the interview, I find that each student from different achievement had different ideas and opinions toward whether or not the students understood direct corrective feedback given by the lecturer, especially linguistics errors, mechanism, organization, ideas, etc. First, I asked the students' understanding of lecturer direct corrective feedback. Most of the students (S1, S2, S3, S4, S6) replied that they were able to understand the lecturer direct corrective feedback, by replying "*I easily understand my first draft with the teacher include the grammar and linguistics errors*". However, there was a student (S5) that did not understand the lecturer direct constructive feedback by answering "*I did not understand enough of my draft with teacher's feedback, but I have to read some articles or references to ensure my understanding*".

After receiving direct corrective feedback on linguistics errors in the first and second drafts, some students were interviewed to identify what the students feel and respond to the given feedback. Interestingly, I find different opinions toward students' feelings with the lecturer's feedback. Most of the students (S1, S2, S3, S4, S6) stated that they had positive attitudes and feelings after receiving the feedback by replying: S1: "*My teacher's feedback was enlightened me to revise my drafts*", S2: "*I feel good after receiving my teacher's feedback*", S3: "*I feel so motivated after receiving my draft with teacher's feedback*", S4: "*I was so excited after getting my draft with teachers' feedback*", S6: "*I was satisfied since my error gets some feedback, so I could do better*". However, S5 replied differently "I *feel afraid after getting my draft, but I have to be able to understand it, so I can get something from this*".

I also asked what the students did with their draft after receiving direct corrective feedback. Each student had different actions. Two out of six students (S1, S2) fixed and revised their draft immediately after receiving the feedback by replying "I fix it according to the feedback given by my teacher", *"I revise my*

drafts according to the teacher's feedback which has been provided to me", but four students (S3, S4, S5, S6) did other activities while revising and fixing their drafts. S3 and S4 tried to find other sources by replying "*After I receive my drafts with teacher's feedback, I try to find the other sources which can help me to increase my understanding, so I can revise it better and clearer*", "*While I revise, I try to find the other sources such as Grammarly, Google Docs, dictionary, etc. to assist me*", "*After I receive my drafts with teacher's feedback, I try to read other articles to accommodate my understanding*", "*I try to understand my teacher's feedback by checking it on an online platform such as Grammarly, Google Docs, etc. and I also asked my lecturer to clarify it*".

To ensure whether or not direct corrective feedback can help the students with their academic writing, I asked the students' experience of joining the *Thesis Proposal Writing* class. Each student from different achievements had their own opinions. Most of the students (S1, S4, S5, and S6) agreed that writing drafts were quite difficult, but each student expressed different reasons. S1 said that "*writing drafts were very challenging because I did not understand what I write in my drafts*", S4 replied, "*It is difficult to write drafts because a good essay requires perfect grammar, ideas, organization, coherence, and cohesion*". S5 mentioned that "*writing drafts was quite difficult because when I wrote, you needed a big idea, mood, and motivation*". S6 expressed "*writing a draft was quite difficult because English is not my first language, so I made many mistakes while writing drafts*". In contrast, S3 expressed different ideas "*writing drafts in Thesis Proposal writing course was helpful for me to develop drafts for my undergraduate thesis*". Furthermore, S2 talked about her experience of joining the *Thesis Proposal Writing* course by replying "*Since covid-19 pandemic, the process of teaching was done online especially for thesis proposal writing course. At first, the lecturer assigned us to prepare our drafts, then we submitted them. After we submit, the lecturer provide feedback to us, so we have to revise it*"

I also asked students' opinions and ideas about the lecturer's direct corrective feedback. All of the students mentioned that they had positive attitudes. S1, S2, S5, and S6 replied that teacher's feedback on their draft was very clear and comprehensive, so they did not face any problems when trying to understand the feedback by replying: "*In my opinion, my teacher's feedback was clear and detail, so I did not ask anymore to her*" (S1), "*The feedback was effective and comprehensive, I could easily understand what I have to revise*" (S2), "*I think the feedback is very clear since I understand when I produce errors on my essay*" (S5), and "*I like the way my lecturer provide feedback, The feedback was clear, so I could understand easily*" (S6). Then, S3 and S4 replied that the teacher's feedback was very helpful for them to assist them in writing drafts by answering "*The feedback was very helpful for me to assist me to revise my drafts*" (S3) and "*The feedback was helpful for me, so it can be my references or sources to produce better essays*" (S4).

In addition, I also asked students' opinions about the way the lecturer gave direct corrective feedback. All of the students agreed that they preferred to be given direct corrective feedback because they thought that the way the lecturer gave the feedback did not need to be changed. Lastly, as a reflection

for joining the *Thesis Proposal Writing* course, I also asked about future comments and directions from the students. Three out of six students (S4, S5, S6) stated that they did not have any suggestions or comments for the future because what the lecturer did was very good for them. They like what the lecturer taught during the process of the teaching *Thesis Proposal Writing* course. However, other students (S1, S2, S3) had different comments and suggestions. S1 mentioned that the lecturer should attract and motivate the students to write drafts. In contrast, S2 stated that the lecturer can give other types of feedback which can accommodate the students. S3 remarked that the lecturer should give direct corrective feedback because S3 had been given indirect corrective feedback and it was very confusing for her.

2. Discussion

The results showed that the lecturer utilized direct corrective feedback as teaching strategies in the thesis proposal writing course to help the students to deal with their draft during synchronous and asynchronous meeting because it is focused and easier to understand based on her experience. The lecturer just provided the feedback in Google Documents, comment on Google Classroom during asynchronous meetings and directly stated what the errors such as grammar, mechanism, and spelling needed to be improved during synchronous meetings. It is in line with (Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2007; Nation, 2008; Nunan, 2015) who stated that providing feedback is pivotal when teaching writing. Then, it was found that the lecturer preferred to give direct corrective feedback because it is focused, comprehensive and the most suitable feedback based on her experience. It is supported by (Sheen, 2007) and (Ellis, 2009) who found that providing direct corrective feedback can be more focused when acquiring the structure and (Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010), (AlBakri, 2016), (Hamouda, 2011), and (Aseeri, 2019), in terms of providing feedback, who stated that the teacher preferred to give direct corrective feedback on students' writing due to students' linguistics problems and it is comprehensive and detailed feedback that can ease to revise students' writing . However, it is in contrast with (Black & Nanni, 2016) preferred to use meta-linguistics and indirect corrective feedback to correct students' essays, especially on students' grammar because it triggers students' critical thinking while correcting errors in their drafts, and Nassaji and Kartchava (2020) preferred to use recast feedback because it hinders students' discouragement in writing. It is also supported by Mollestam and Hu (2016) who found if the lecturer gave too much correction on students' drafts, it could discourage the students.

Other finding is problems related to the process of teaching. The lecturer faced some teaching problems when performing feedback in the class such as the number of students, time constraints, and range of students' proficiency. It is similar to (Hamouda, 2011), and Leki (1991) who found that time is the biggest issue, followed by students' papers, and the number of students' mistakes in essays. It is also supported by Nunan (2015) who stated that teaching writing can be time-consuming. Moreover, the range of students' proficiency can be a problem when teaching writing because every student does not have the same opinions about the lecturer's feedback. Sometimes, the

direct feedback could discourage and demotivate the learners to write (Mollestam & Hu, 2016).

From the interview with the students, this study found direct corrective feedback helped the learners to deal with their writing because the students had high positive attitudes, direct corrective feedback is easier to understand, helpful, and beneficial for them to improve their writing. Moreover, the students also faced some problems during writing drafts in the Thesis Proposal Writing course, so direct corrective feedback was utilized to help the learners. From the interview, students were able to understand the given feedback. Only one student stated that she needed to read more references to have a better and clearer understanding. After receiving the feedback, most of the students felt satisfied, enlightened, and motivated. Yet, one student felt afraid because of the mistakes. Most of the students also fixed their drafts, but some students also tried to revise their drafts using automated online feedback such as google docs, Grammarly, etc. These interview results are in line with Jodaie et al. (2011), Mohammad and Rahman (2016), Elhawwa et al. (2018), Listiani (2017), Luan and Ishak (2018), Tursina et al. (2019), Hartono et al. (2019), Sabarun (2020), & (Yunus, 2020) stating that most of the students had positive attitudes towards their lecturer direct corrective feedback because it is very helpful, beneficial for the learners; students preferred to have comprehensive, direct, and specific feedback; and students also felt satisfied. This finding supports idea that by giving direct corrective feedback, the students will acquire grammar with specific features (Sheen, 2007). However, the learners should be careful and aware of the feedback since direct corrective feedback does not require minimal processing (Ellis, 2009) and direct corrective feedback does not train the students to be more critical (Ferris et al., 2013). Yet, this study is in contrast with (Mustafa, 2012)who found that Saudi EFL learners preferred feedback that can accommodate students' proficiency rather than direct corrective feedback.

Since the students are required to write an undergraduate thesis, it was found that the students faced some problems because writing requires good ideas, perfect grammar, coherence, cohesion, and energy. One of the students added that since English is not our first language, sometimes students might produce some errors. This finding was in line with Rahmatunisa (2014) who stated that there are 3 factors that make writing difficult such as linguistics problems, cognitive problems, and psychological problems, Pratiwi (2016) found that grammar is the biggest factor that contributed to making writing difficult, and Toba and Noor (2019) who found that grammar, and organization are the biggest challenges faced by EFL learners' in writing.

The findings imply that lecturer should provide direct corrective feedback during teaching writing because it can help students to improve the grammar as it is one of the principles of teaching writing that is lecturers should provide and arrange for feedback that encourages and improves students' draft (Nation, 2008). Direct corrective feedback can be suitable feedback to the students because it is simple and comprehensive. However, the lecturer should be aware of the students when providing feedback because it can be harmful or discouraging them as found in the interview. In teaching writing, the lecturer can use Google Classroom or Google Documents, especially in the emergency

remote learning situation. The teacher can use Google Documents to give direct corrective feedback in terms of grammar, vocabulary, mechanism, and organization to the students. In addition, the lecturer can conduct an online consultation through synchronous tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, etc. since some students need to have a one-on-one consultation related to the content, topic, or grammar to help them improving their drafts.

Conclusion

This study has identified that during teaching Thesis Proposal Writing course, the lecturer employed direct corrective feedback as a teaching strategy that can help the learners to deal with their drafts in the synchronous and asynchronous class because it is the most simple and easy type of feedback that can be understood by the students based on the experience. While delivering the feedback, the lecturer faced problems and issues such as the number of students in the class, time constraints, and the range of students' proficiency. Moreover, the study has shown that direct corrective feedback is a type of feedback that can help the learners to solve students' problems during writing an undergraduate thesis since the result of the students' interviews indicates that students had positive attitudes toward their lecturer's direct corrective feedback. It was also found that most of them felt motivated, enlightened, and satisfied with the feedback. With the feedback, most of the students revised and fixed their writing errors immediately since writing drafts were very challenging for the students. Some students also tried to save the file and cross-check with online automated feedback. It implies that in teaching writing, the lecturer can give direct corrective feedback because it is comprehensive and easier for the student

I highly suggest future researchers conduct an experimental study. There are many types of research on students' perceptions using direct corrective feedback; case studies on students' opinion and experimental studies. Future reresearcheran conduct a true experimental study at different achievement levels to see the effectiveness of direct corrective feedback to improve students' writing ability with participants in the same achievement level.

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