THE USE OF TEACHER CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK TO HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR ESL WRITING

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To my beloved husband and daughter

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out whether teacher's corrective grammatical feedback could help improve students' English as a Second Language (ESL) writing, Besides, it also to find out how far the feedbacks given help in enhancing students' ability to self-correct the tenses errors as well as to improve their skills in writing and to determine the students and teachers' views on the impact of corrective feedback in English as a Second Language (ESL) writing lesson. Data were gathered using qualitative means; from the students' essays and semi-structured interviews. A total of thirty students and two teachers participated in this study. Both data were analyzed separately but were triangulated to give a more comprehensive account of the study. The results of the analysis showed that (1) despite the challenges both teachers faced in providing and students had in responding to the corrective feedback, they were aware of the importance and purpose of giving corrective feedbacks to help the students to be better in their writing, (2) even though the students had learned the basic rules of grammar in their previous lessons; they still have the tendency to make mistakes in their writing, (3)) the role of teachers in providing good corrective feedbacks could be a tool for the students to be more proficient in their writing, and (4) there were tremendous changes in terms of the quality of the students' ESL writing product after they had received the corrective feedbacks from their teachers. The study concluded that using corrective feedback in helping students is seen as positive and effective approach to be practised by ESL teachers. Both teachers and students believed that corrective feedback should be used widely as it could enhance the students ability in ESL writing classroom as it could enhance the students' ability in ESL.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti jenis maklum balas yang diberikan oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah menengah; khususnya aspek tatabahasa, mengetahui sejauh mana maklum balas yang diberikan dapat membantu dalam meningkatkan keupayaan pelajar untuk membuat pembetulan serta meningkatkan kemahiran mereka dari segi penulisan dan menentukan pandangan pelajar-pelajar dan guru mengenai kesan maklum balas pembetulan dalam pengajaran penulisan Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL).Data dikumpul secara kualitatif ; melalui esei pelajar dan temubual separa berstruktur. Seramai tiga puluh pelajar dan dua orang guru mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Kedua-dua data dianalisa secara berasingan tetapi telah digunakan bersama-sama untuk memberikan dapatan kajian yang lebih komprehensif. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahawa (1) walaupun terdapat cabaran yang dihadapi oleh para guru dan pelajar dalam memberi respons terhadap maklumbalas pembetulan, mereka menyedari kepentingannya dalam membantu menghasilkan penulisan yang lebih baik, (2) walaupun pelajar telah mempelajari asas tatabahasa sebelumnya; mereka masih cenderung untuk melakukan kesilapan dalam penulisan mereka, (3) peranan guru dalam memberikan maklumbalas pembetulan yang baik boleh menjadi alat untuk meningkatkan kemahiran para pelajar dalam penulisan mereka, dan (4) terdapat peningkatan kualiti dalam penulisan pelajar ESL setelah menerima maklumbalas pembetulan daripada guru-guru mereka. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa penggunaan maklumbalas pembetulan dilihat sebagai pendekatan yang positif dan berkesan untuk dipraktik secara meluas oleh guru-guru ESL kerana dapat meningkatkan kebolehan pelajar dalam penulisan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

In order to help the students master their writing skills, according to Hyland (2003), feedback is one of the most vital tasks to promote the development of students' writing.   However, the efficacy of teacher's error/grammar correction in second language writing classes has been thesubject of much controversy.   Truscott (1996) believes that grammatical correction is not only ineffective but should not be practised entirely.   He further argues that the grammatical feedback given by the teachers can bring negative effects to the students as they may feel demotivated and become more stressful in completing their writing task.   However, Glover and Brown (2006)   point out that in order to make the feedback to be formative, sufficient information should be given to close the gap in students' understanding and enable them to use the information.   The controversy continues with an issue which has not adequately examined; how explicit the corrective feedback should be in order to help students to self-edit their writing text.

In the real classroom scenario, students always make the same mistakes although the feedback is given to them all the time. The students have never learned from the errors they have made in their writing. Most of the time, after receiving the papers with discouraging red pen, they just look at the score, fold it desperately, kept it and never look at it again. So, the traditional way of error correction has not proved successful and might not be appropriate for teaching writing.

In addition, looking closely at the syllabus, the materials, however, are focused on giving feedback on the content of a paper rather than the form or grammatical aspects. Some researchers claim that grammar correction was ineffective in facilitating improvement in students' writing (Truscott,1999).

Furthermore, more evidences are still needed to determine the level of explicitness of the feedback required to help the students in improving their writing. The issue on the best way to correct the students' errors in writing; whether the teachers need to indicate all the types of errors when they mark the students' work or just simply underline or circle the errors and leaving them to the students to rectify them, has led to various views. Undoubtedly, different ESL teachers address grammatical errors in the ESL classroom in various ways, yet the best way is yet to be discovered.

Thus, this study hopes to find answers to what are the teachers' practices in giving feedbacks in order to ensure that the students will be able to comprehend, reflect and transfer the corrective feedback given to their writing. Besides, this study also focuses on to what extend the students are able to use the feedback received from the teachers to self-edit their ESL writings.

1.2   Background of the Study

Taking place in a secondary school situated in Kuantan, Pahang, this study focused on the importance of teachers' feedbacks in helping the students improve their wEnglish Language writing skills. The focus was given on tenses; specifically present and past tense. Simple past tense (regular and irregular) was chosen as the target structure of the study for two solid reasons. Firstly, the students are familiar and have explicit knowledge of this structure. The emphasis is not on whether corrective feedback assists learning a completely new structure but whether it enables the students to gain greater control over a structure they have already been exposed to. Secondly, the simple past tense is known to be problematic for students. Even by right, the Form Four students should be familiar with this structure, they still have tendency to make errors in its use.

At present, the teaching and learning session in the selected setting is carried out according to the syllabus that has been provided by the Ministry of Education. Learners are taught how to write the essays, and most of the time, the teachers highlight the errors made by the learners, however the emphasis is more on the content rather than the grammatical aspects. The concern is placed more on the students' ability to understand the content and the grammatical errors are highlighted indirectly during the lessons.

Meanwhile, corrective feedback is still widely seen as crucial and essential in developing students' writing skills. Hyland (1990) and Richards and Lockhart (1994) have mentioned that in language teaching and learning, feedback is commonly used to facilitate the learning process. Keh (1990) further adds that feedback is a fundamental element of a process approach to writing. In her point of view, feedback is defined as an input from the readers in the context of writing with the purpose of providing information to the writer for further revision. In addition to

this, Chandler (2003), Ferris (2003) and Lalande (1982) have also emphasised that feedback on errors can help students improve grammatical accuracy in writing.

Bitchener and Knoch (2009) also believe that coded and non-coded corrective feedback will affect accuracy in second language writing differently. They further stated that the learners are more likely to attend to corrections directly given to them and develop a clearer understanding of the nature of the error and the correction needed. Besides, Ellis (2005) and Schmidt (1994) claimed that if attention and understanding are important for acquisition, focused corrective feedback is more likely to produce positive results. Since the issue of the use of corrective feedbacks in helping the students to be better in their ESL writings had received various justifications from many researchers, this study was carried out to justify the views and help to englighten the teachers in the quest of finding the best way to help enhancing their students' skills and ability in ESL writngs.

1.3   Statement of Problem

Teachers are often frustrated that students do not automatically process and transfer the corrective grammatical feedback given to the writing in the language they are learning; in this case English Language. Instead, the students seem to be unable to comprehend the feedbacks given and this makes them repeat the same errors; specifically the tenses. During the lessons as well, the students are not able to understand the teachers' mitigated comments implying that the implementing indirectness seems to be a counter-productive act when attempting to convey messages; in this case the corrective feedback. This can be seen from the essays written by them whereby they still make the same errors.

Besides, some teachers believe that grammar rules should not be taught in isolation has somehow made the process of correcting the students' errors even more difficult. The comments or feedbacks regarding these types of errors are commonly given in indirect way; normally in spoken form. This causes difficulties to some students because they can process the information better when dealing with direct comments compared to hedging and indirect speech acts. Apart from that, politeness which comes along with hedging causes difficulty in understanding for the students' part as well. This occurs most probably because the teachers try to appear more polite and to secure the relationship between the student and teacher.

However, generalization could not simply be made with regards to the students' opinions of indirect criticism. This is because; some students do appreciate the indirectness and considered those as a way to maintain their confidence and motivation. Conversely, there are students who consider indirectness to be a waste of time as they know that teachers are simply trying to be nice and polite. Some of the students prefer to be told straightforward so they can rectify their errors immediately and corrections need to be made without initial praises and hedging. Hence, this study is meant to identify the types of corrective feedback commonly used by teachers and to discover how far feedbacks enhance the student's ability in correcting their own errors and do not repeat the same mistakes in their writing.

Even though many studies have been conducted to examine this issue; there is still a lot of confusion regarding the types of corrective feedback which can improve the students' writing skills. This has caused difficulties to many ESL/EFL writing teachers since they do not have some vivid guidelines to help their students. Hence, since the debates over the value of providing corrective feedback and the efficacy of certain feedback options on writing have been prominent in recent years, so it calls for further research.

1.4   Purpose of the Study

This study intends to find out whether teacher's corrective grammatical feedback could help improve students' English as a Second Language (ESL) writing.

1.5   Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1) To identify the types of teachers' grammatical feedback

2) To see how far the feedbacks given by teachers help the students to do corrections as well as improve their English Language writing

3) To determine the students and teachers' views on corrective feedback in ESL writing lesson

1.6   Research Questions

1) What are the types of grammatical feedbacks the teachers commonly give to students?

2) To what extend the feedback given by teachers help the students to rectify the errors and write better?

3) What are the students and teachers' views on corrective feedback in ESL writing lesson?

1.7   Significance of the Study

The finding of the study is important as they can help the teachers to identify the types of corrective feedbacks that can be used to help the students to write better. They can also provide other educational practitioners a new insight on the use of corrective feedback strategies and the impacts developing students' proficiency in writing classroom.

1.8   Scope of the Study

The study was based on one of the secondary schools in Malaysia. This study only focused on 30 Form Four students. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the other secondary schools. Apart from that, this study focused solely on the teachers' feedbacks related to grammatical errors made by the students for writing purposes. Thus, this result cannot be based on in other types of errors in writing.

1.9   Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study is illustrated as below.
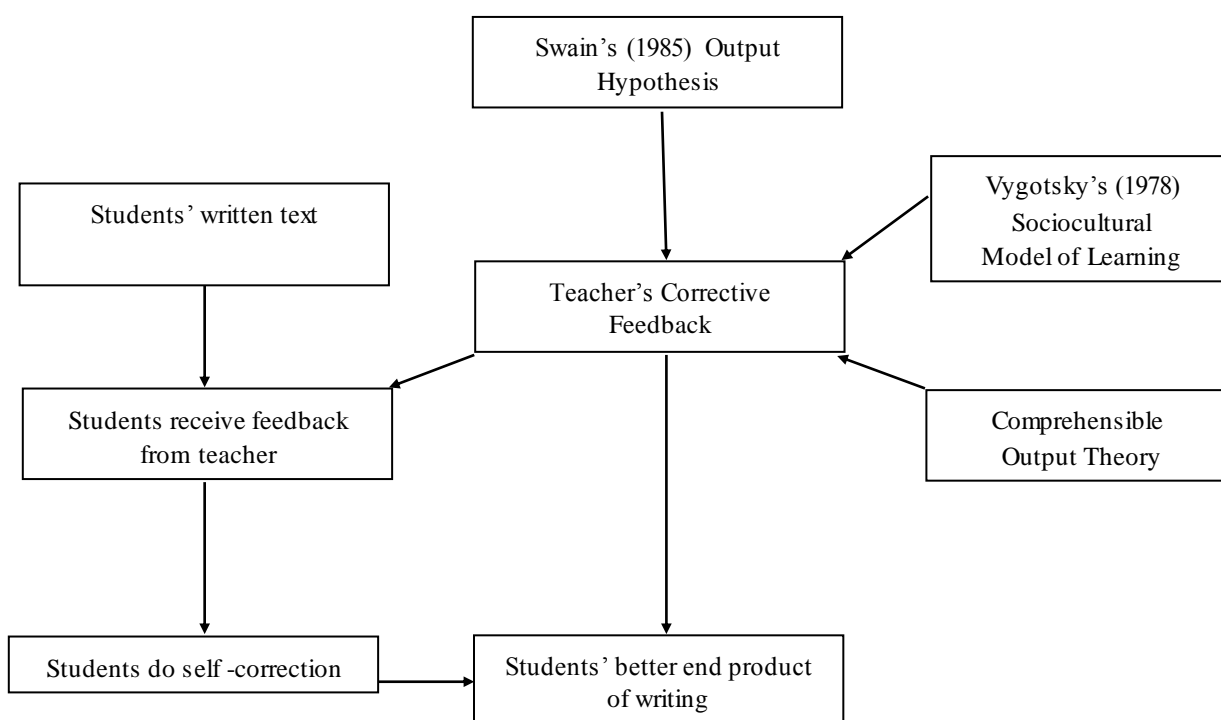
Figure 1.1 : The Conceptual framework of the Effect of Teacher's Corrective Feedback

Since L2 learners find writing in an L2 quite challenging, there have been many attempts to help learners to improve their writing quality and increase their motivation for writing tasks. One of the attempts is to provide feedback which has already been deeply investigated in different contexts. Feedback is generally seen as a key for encouraging and consolidating learning (Zacharias, 2007). This view is supported by Swain's (1985) output hypothesis; which argues that when learners receive direct metalinguistic feedback on their output, this is used to confirm or disconfirm rules of form, which helps acquisition. Corrective feedback given by teachers is believed to be a great tool in enhancing the students' ability in ESL writing. Those feedbacks will enable the students to respond and apply the inputs given and transfer them in their writing.

Referring to Figure 1.1, this conceptual framework was designed to show how corrective feedbacks can affect the students' ability in writing. By providing ample feedbacks on the students' work, it is believed that they can produce better product of writing. To support this view, the importance of corrective feedback can also be found in Vygotsky's (1978) socio cultural model of learning, and in particular his notion of the zone of proximal development . The correction code (or the provision of correct forms) is a form of scaffold help, or supportive instructional dialogue, provided by a knowing other (in this case the teacher) and which marks "critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution" (Wood et al., 1976; cited inMitchell and Myles, 1998: 147).

It is believed that with practice, learners move from other-regulation provided by the teacher (through feedback) to self-regulation and greater independent control over target language forms. They become more fully integrated, meaning a greater number of forms are restructured and stored in the memory. So it is expected the increment of frequencies of correct forms to be produced independently.

1.10   Definitions of Terms

1.10.1 Corrective feedback

Corrective feedback can be defined as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the learner on the linguistic error. This feedback may consist of direct and indirect feedback. Generally, direct feedback is on grammatical errors, followed by a discussion with teachers regarding the errors. (Bitchener, et.al,2005, Bitchener&Knoch,2009, Bitchener& Knoch,2010). As for

indirect corrective feedback, it indicates in some ways that an error has occurred without drawing attention explicitly (Ferris,2003).

1.10.2   Coded feedback

Coded feedback involves the use of symbols to encourage learners to self-correct. (Lee, 2004:287). In this study, the coded feedback will be used by the raters as a guide to the learners in order to produce better writing.

1.10.3   Non-coded feedback

Non coded feedback refers to writing the correct forms above each error. (Lee, 2004:287). In this study, non-coded feedback will be used by the students when they determine the correct answers of the errors and rectify them.

1.11   Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the background of the study in relation to with the present research. Apart from that, it also states the purpose of the study, which aims to identify the types of feedback given by teachers, to what extend the feedback helps the learners to correct the grammatical errors; specifically present and past tense and to determine the students and teachers' view on corrective feedback.Besides, this

study is also meant to determine the students and teachers' views on the impact of corrective feedback in ESL writing lesson. Lastly, the conceptual framework and definition of terms are also discussed to give a clear picture of the issue highlighted in this study.

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