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The Provision of Written Corrective Feedback on Students Writing: Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract-- This article is aimed at describing a lecturer's beliefs and practices regarding the provision of written corrective feedback. The data was taken from a lecturer of English Education Department who taught writing course at a State Islamic University of Lampung, Indonesia. Interview and feedback analysis were used to collect the data. The data analysis revealed both congruence and incongruence between lecturers' beliefs and their practices. The congruence was obtained on the focus and the explicitness of written corrective feedback done by the lecturer. Meanwhile, the incongruence were found at the amount of written corrective feedback, and positive versus negative feedback used by the lecturer. The incongruence found in this study, thus, could be used as a springboard for meaningful discussion between lecturers, which could hopefully raise the awareness about their beliefs.

Keywords: written corrective feedback, writing, beliefs, classroom practice

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing has the most important role in academic success [1] especially for Indonesian university students. It is because the universities in Indonesia has the rule which mentioned that students have to write a final project in terms of *skripsi* as one of requirements to finish their study. As the result, no one can deny writing as the part of syllabus in English subject [2]. However, writing in second or foreign language is not simply a matter to do. As stated by [3] that writing activity is not as simple as transcribing language into written form. Moreover, as the ultimate skill of language, writing becomes the most difficult ability to be mastered. This difficulty is in consequence of some problems faced by the students such as how to get an idea, organize the ideas, develop the details, choose the appropriate words and arrange the ideas into correct sentences, and also maintain them into unity paragraph [4].

Due to the importance of writing and the problems faced by students in writing, teacher has to find a suitable and effective technique to improve students' writing skill [5]. Further, teacher needs to scaffold students to solve this problem [6]. Providing written corrective feedback (henceforth WCF) on students' paper is one of the ways to

encourage students to be better student-writers. WCF refers to all reactions to, formal or informal, in the written commentary form, error correction on students' writing draft or final version [7]. In line with, [8] mentioned that WCF can be defined as grammar/error correction.

For more than twenty years, WCF in L2/FL writing classroom has obtained a special attention by scholars in applied linguistic field. As [9] pointed out, giving feedback on students' works became one of the most important tasks of the writing lecturers. Furthermore, [9] mentioned that there are three reasons why writing lecturers should provide feedback, from lecturers' point of view, namely: react to the effort of students, help them to enhance their writing ability, and justify the grade obtained by the students [9]. It means, giving WCF on students' works will encourage them to be better in writing. By its importance, much of scholars investigated the implementation of teacher's corrective feedback in the teaching learning activity [8, 10, 11, 12, 13].

The way how lecturers provided feedback is strongly affected by their personal theories, assumptions, beliefs, and teaching experiences [14, 15]. The term 'belief', as one of topic would be investigated in this recent study, is one of the most complicated concepts to define [16]. In addition, the difficulties in studying lecturers' beliefs have been caused by poor conceptualizations, problems of definition, and differences in understanding of beliefs and structures of beliefs itself [17]. Based on [18] beliefs are "statements lecturers made about their ideas, thoughts and knowledge that are expressed as evaluation of what should be done, should be the case and is preferable". To get a clear understanding, the present study defines beliefs as a set of assumptions or knowledge, which may be consciously held by the lecturers of writing, that are evaluative in nature and that can be disclosed in the statement.

Although errors correction and feedback are closely related to classroom practices, but, most of the literature on teacher cognition regarding corrective feedback is based on data obtained from outside the classroom contexts [19]. Few studies have explored what lecturers, in practice do, on

WCF, aligning lecturers' beliefs and their practices [20, 21, 22]. To fill the identified research gaps, this study proposed to take up deeper into the issue. The writers investigated the lecturer's beliefs and her practices in the provision of WCF on students' writing. By this, the writer attempted to formulate research questions to meet the research objectives of this study as follows.

1. What were lecturer's beliefs regarding the provision of WCF?
2. What were lecturer's practices regarding the provision of WCF?
3. Is there any in/congruence between lecturer's beliefs and her practices?

II. METHOD

The purpose of this present study was to explore the lecturer's beliefs and her practices in the provision of WCF on students' writing. At the end, the writers analyzed whether or not any congruence between lecturer's beliefs and her practices. The study was carried out through a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is often used with the aim of understanding and exploring people's thoughts and experiencing their lives [23]. More specifically, it was a case study, "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution or community" [24].

The study took place in an English Education Department of a State Islamic University in Lampung, Indonesia. One lecturer of writing subject namely Mrs. NPS (pseudonym) was purposively selected as participant of the study. She is 32 years old. She has been teaching in the university for 4 years and teaching writing course for 3 years. Further, she is a PhD candidate or an ongoing doctoral degree student in a state university in Indonesia.

In-depth interview and feedback analysis were used as the instruments of the study. An in-depth interview was done as the first phase in collecting the data. It is aimed to engage in an informal dialogue with the lecturer to acquire her beliefs regarding WCF provision on students' writing before her teaching practices. The interview protocol was developed by the writers based on the relevant literature. It consisted of study background of the lecturer, her teaching and learning experience. While, regarding the topic of WCF, the questions asked included the amount, the focus, the explicitness, and the positive vs. negative WCF. Henceforth, the second phase was analyzing students' writing papers. This phase was done after some meetings of teaching practices. The aim was to know the lecturer's WCF practices. Five papers

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data gained from interview. It was adopted from [25]. This is a method which is used to identify, analyze, and report the patterns within data [25].

Meanwhile, the students' writing papers were analyzed by using descriptive analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As noted, the focus of this present study were on a selected lecturer's beliefs and also her practices in the provision of WCF. Further, it aimed to know whether her beliefs are reflected on her practices when correcting students' work.

In this section, firstly, the writers provide the data from interview to know the detail beliefs had by lecturer. Then, the lecturer's practices on the provision of WCF taken from students' papers are explained later on. At the end of the section, the writers discuss the overall findings to come to the answer of the last research question whether or not, lecturer beliefs are match with her practices.

a. Lecturer's beliefs

Based on lecturer responses from interview, the data revealed the lecturer's conceptions, assumptions, and knowledge about WCF. The detail is described in the following explanations.

As regard to the question about the amount of WCF should be provide, the lecture responded by delivering her opinion that she has to provide WCF comprehensively. The following excerpt is taken from the interview.

"All of students' errors on their papers should be corrected. There is no reason to leave some errors. If we let them [errors] to be left, the students will think that it is not error and they will do the same errors in the next time.

The question related to the focus of WCF on students' writing, the lecturer gave an answer by saying:

"Actually, we have to correct all the errors made by the students. Because, they need it to be better in writing. But, it is very impossible to do that in a big class. So, I think, language comes first, content and organization are also important but it comes later, because a writing which has no unity, no coherence, and not correct organization but written in correct sentences will be understood if it's written in correct language".

On the question of how lecturers should deliver WCF, explicitness of WCF, the lecturer was in favor to provide feedback directly (i.e. provide a correct answer, mention the error causes, cross-out the word or sentence). She stated "The correct answer should be provided otherwise students will not pay attention to that error".

As regard to the provision of negative vs. positive WCF, the lecturer realized the importance of using positive comments to encourage students. She mentioned that "It is importance to encourage the students and motivate them by praising what

they write and not undermining whatever effort they do”.

In short, the lecturer believed that she has to give a comprehensive feedback when correcting students’ paper. However, she still in her assumption that language form should be the focus of providing feedback rather than content and organization. Regarding the explicitness of the feedback, the lecturer justified that direct WCF is the best way in delivering feedback. Further, related to the positive versus negative feedback, she mentioned that positive comment would help students to be better in writing.

b. Lecturer practices

The data regarding lecturer practices in providing WCF was taken from 18 sheets of students’ papers. The following table describes the detail of the data obtained.

Table1. Lecturer’s WCF practices

Amount		Focus		Explicitness		Positive vs. negative	
Sel	Com	La	co	Orga	di	in	Posi
ective	prehensive	ngu	nt	nizat	re	dir	itive
ive	nive	age	en	ion	ct	ect	ve
		for	t				ive
		m					
			10		7		3
15	5	45	(1	15	4	54	(2
(75	(25%	(64	5	(21	(5	(4	5
%))	%)	%)	%)	7	3	%)
)		%)	%))

c. Discussion

The lecturer believed in using comprehensive approach to correct student’s writing errors. It is done to prevent error fossilization if the errors are corrected selectively. This finding corresponds with a study of [21] who investigated university writing lecturers. The findings of their study mentioned that lecturers were in favor to correct errors comprehensively. The lecturers-participant believed that many feedbacks give more motivation to the students comparing to little feedback that may be able to make students frustrated. However, there is a discrepancy between lecturer’s belief and her practices. It can be seen from the table1 that practically, the lecturer tended to provide feedback selectively. This means the lecturer practice was not in line with her beliefs regarding the amount of WCF.

By seeing the data taken from interview, the lecturer believed that language form should get more attention when correcting students’ paper compared to other writing aspects such as content and organization of writing. Further, the analysis of students’ papers revealed that language form became

the most favor aspect to be focused by the lecturer. It means that the there is a consistency between her belief and practices. This finding similar to a study conducted by [20] which reported that lecturers gave precedence to language accuracy. The finding that lecturer paid more attention on the errors of language form and neglected the errors related to content and organization can be linked to the result of study which mentioned that lecturers treated writing as a product and they rather to look at themselves as language instructors than writing lecturers [7].

The question related to the explicitness of WCF growth a knowledge that the lecturer believed that the most effective technique in marking students’ errors is direct feedback. This is in line with the studies done by [21], and [26] which are the lecturers of the 9 studies justified that providing WCF by using direct feedback technique is more beneficial than using the indirect feedback. The lecturer belief, then, confirmed by her practices on her students’ papers. Most of the feedback provided by the lecturer was delivered directly. Lecturer’s beliefs in the importance of direct WCF differs from WCF literature [e.g. 27, 28] which mentioned that the use of indirect technique is more suitable as it can foster students’ encouragement to be more analytical and critic on their writing errors.

According to [29], correcting errors explicitly can make students too dependent on the teacher. The result that lecturer-participant in this present study preferred to use explicit approach shed a further indication that her beliefs are in the teacher-center approach rather than student-center one.

Discussing about the positive vs. negative WCF, in this present study, the lecturer believed in the usefulness of giving praises in fostering an urge to the students. This result is in line with previous researches [e.g. 20, 26, 21]. However, discrepancies between beliefs and practices were found out during the analyzing process of students’ works. Analysis of the data of lecturer’s WCF practices portrayed that lecturer rarely to use praising terms to motivate students. Nevertheless, she tended to use negative feedback in harsh terms, especially for low-achiever students. Furthermore, the lecturer gave her more attention on the students’ weaknesses than appreciate their strength.

To sum up, there is a tendency between lecturer beliefs and her practices regarding the amount of WCF and the positive versus negative WCF. However, the congruence also can be seen from the findings. In terms of focus of WCF and explicitness of WCF, the lecturer practices are match with her beliefs.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is widely claimed that teacher’s beliefs have a big impact to the teacher’s practices. This study

sets out to examine a lecturer's beliefs and practices about WCF at university level and investigate whether or not her beliefs are match to her practices.

The findings shown in this present study that the lecturer believes in giving WCF explicitly and responding the errors comprehensively. In terms of the focus of written corrective feedback, she prefers to focus on language form rather than the content and organization. As for the positive and negative feedback, she agrees to use positive feedback in appreciating students, and ignores to use negative comments. Furthermore, both match and mismatch between lecturer's beliefs and her practices are found in this present study. The match is in terms of focus and explicitness of WCF. while, the mismatch is found in terms of amount and positive vs. negative WCF.

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