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ACADEMIC WRITING ANALYSIS OF PESANTREN-BASED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, PRACTICES, PREFERENCES, AND ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on teachers' feedback and students' responses, the study investigated students' challenges in conducting academic writing, their preferences, and attitudes toward feedback, and teachers' strategies to handle feedback on students' written works. A case study was administrated. Three teachers and twenty-six undergraduate students were involved in the study. The findings demonstrated that the students were challenged in terms of grammar/surface structures, content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanism. Then, the teachers practiced various feedback i.e.; correction without comment, comment without correction, correction with comments, suggestion, and identification errors. Furthermore, in language use, the teachers' preferences varied namely Indonesia/L1, English/EFL, and a combination between L1 and EFL. Students preferred those various teachers' feedback. Then, the students' attitudes toward handling feedback varied depending on every teacher's feedback type. Furthermore, the study unveiled that students responded positively to their teachers' feedback such as requesting a more thorough explanation from their teachers, reading earlier pertinent research to improve their writing, and requiring some reflection time in response to their teachers' revisions.

Keywords: Academic writing; Teacher's feedback; Student preference.

ABSTRAK

Merefleksikan umpan balik guru dan tanggapan siswa, penelitian ini menyelidiki tantangan siswa dalam melakukan penulisan akademik, preferensi, dan sikap mereka terhadap umpan balik, dan strategi guru untuk menangani umpan balik pada karya tulis siswa. Sebuah studi kasus diadministrasikan. Tiga guru dan dua puluh enam mahasiswa sarjana terlibat dalam penelitian ini. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa ditantang dalam hal tata bahasa/struktur permukaan, konten, organisasi, kosa kata, dan mekanisme. Kemudian guru mempraktekkan berbagai umpan balik yaitu; koreksi tanpa komentar, komentar tanpa koreksi, koreksi dengan komentar, saran, dan kesalahan identifikasi. Selanjutnya, dalam penggunaan bahasa, preferensi guru bervariasi yaitu Indonesia/L1, Inggris/EFL, dan kombinasi antara L1 dan EFL. Siswa lebih menyukai berbagai umpan balik guru tersebut. Kemudian, sikap siswa terhadap penanganan umpan balik bervariasi tergantung pada jenis umpan balik setiap guru. Selain itu, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa siswa menanggapi umpan balik guru mereka secara positif seperti meminta penjelasan yang lebih menyeluruh dari guru mereka, membaca penelitian terkait sebelumnya untuk memperbaiki tulisan mereka, dan membutuhkan waktu refleksi sebagai tanggapan atas revisi guru mereka.

Kata Kunci: Kecenderungan Siswa; Tulisan Ilmiah; Umpang Balik;

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian students of higher education are commonly obligated to write academic writings to hold scholarly achievement. Therefore, they are encouraged to construct scholarly writing. However, the effective approach of teachers' feedback practices and students' responses to the provided feedback to develop students' academic writing was still debatable. The previous studies provide some different views. But the accessible references indicate that grammatical correction, commentary, suggestion, and identification errors are widely practiced by the teachers in providing feedback. Furthermore, the study of corrective feedback is important as Ellis (2009) declared that corrective feedback is a complex issue that is surrounded by the questions of whether or not to correct, how to correct, what to correct, and when to correct.

Moreover, students of ESL or EFL contexts are commonly challenged in composing scholarly writing. Salarge-Meyer (2014) stated that non-native English students experienced various challenges when composing their academic writing. Furthermore, students have manifold problems, such as English expression, vocabulary, claiming research with the appropriate amount of force, timing to write in English, and being influenced by their L1 in composition Flowerdew (1999). In addition, Petrova (2018) declared that students were poor in their skills to arrange logical ideas in their writing. In a more recent study, Yu (2020) who researched genre-based peer feedback on linguistics features, content, and organization of postgraduate student thesis found that the participants perceived the feedback as challenging and difficult.

Furthermore, the surface structure/grammar correction of actual errors in student academic writing is commonly conducted by EFL teachers. Even though, the approach has been criticized by some scholars (see Truscott, 1996, 2007; Semke, 1984), different views are demonstrated by other scholars, such as Saeb, 2014; Saito 1994; Feeris, 1999). The first argued that direct grammatical correction has no impact on students' writing development skills. On the contrary, the latter revealed that students still have the benefit of their writing if the teachers provide the grammatical correction. Furthermore, Ferris & Robert (2001) declared that error feedback in ESL writing contexts mostly verified that students with error feedback developed their writing perfection over time. Even though, it is the same as Ferris & Robert's (2001) declaration that students got the advantages from error correction, the study of Fathman and Whalley (1990) revealed the feedback was limited to revising the text and not the different pieces of writing text over time.

Furthermore, teachers are likely to engage in commentary on their students' writing supervision. The commentary discusses particular aspects. The aspects generally include the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanism of students' academic writing Cohen and Calvacanti(2009). However, Chanock (2000) perceived negatively to commentary on students' writing, he manifested that commentary on students' writing may likely cause students'

confusion. This is because the supervisors' commentary may include ambiguity. In contrast to Chanock, Pham (2019) stated that the lecturer's comments affected greatly the students' writing quality.

Then, the identification of location errors that can be done by marking, highlighting, underlining the parts of, or circling students' errors looks to be an effective technique for developing students' writing quality (Fathman and Whalley, 1990). Furthermore, Cumming (1985) argued that the technique may appear as the most commonly used mean in students' writing supervision that was conducted by veteran English teachers. However, the appropriate ways to show identification errors should be implemented since it may be more effective for the students to increase their writing grades. Lee (2019) revealed that fewer underlines, circles, and error codes could make students easier to understand the teachers' feedback purposes. Furthermore, Lee stated that the procedures may avoid the ambiguity of the given feedback.

Regarding the typology of feedback, Ellis (2009) classified the feedback into some categories. Those are direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focus, electronic, and reformulation feedback. Furthermore, the feedback typology that is conducted by teachers in their students' feedback practices may affect the students' writing development. For example, Van Beuningen, De Jong and Kuiken (2012) declared that direct and indirect comprehensive feedback affected positively students' writing development. In line with them, Diab (2015) unveiled that the number of errors decreased significantly for students that received direct as well as metalinguistic feedback. In a more recent study, Li and Roshan (2019) who studied the effects of working memory on feedback revealed that working memory affected positively metalinguistic explanation and direct corrective feedback plus revision.

The fact that corrective feedback research conducted by many researchers proves that the topic may interest them. However, the research that is conducted in a particular site such as developing Islamic institution in Indonesia has less intention since the researchers conventionally focus on the outstanding institution (for example, Budianto, Sulistyo, Widiastuti, Heriyawati, & Marhaban, 2020). Therefore, the present study was directed to investigate students' challenges, preferences, and attitudes in conducting academic writing, and teachers' practices to provide corrective feedback in developing Islamic universities in Indonesia. The research was conducted with three teachers that acted as supervisors and supervised students in a developing pesantrenbased university in Indonesia. Furthermore, the following research objectives were investigated. (1) What are the students' challenges in conducting academic writing?, (2) what do the teachers provide feedback on their students' academic writing, in terms of corrective feedback and language use?, (3) how do the students prefer to respond to their teachers' feedback?, and (4) what are the students' attitudes toward their teachers' feedback?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature of Academic Writing

Academic writing is referred to as a style of expression used by researchers, which is commonly impersonal and faceless (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Furthermore, it is not only

impersonal or objective but also quite technical and formal (Sydney University, 2022). In terms of faceless or impersonal, authors of academic writing are suggested to avoid personal pronouns, such as "I". Harwood's (2007) study proposed different perspectives. It revealed that the personal pronoun "I" that was expressed in researchers' articles published in scholarly journals contained an implicit message. The certain message that was uncovered in his interview-based study was self-promotion. Harwood's finding is also strengthened by his previous research (2005). He stated that an academic writer can employ the pronoun "I" and "we" to create a self-promotional tenor in his/her prose (2005). Then, academic writing is defined as formal by fending off casual language. And it is called technical by employing peculiar vocabulary to the disciplines (Sydney University, 2022).

Previous Researches

Academic writing in the contexts of ESL, EFL, and English as a first language has been conducted by many scholars (for example, Harwood, 2007, 2008, 2019). Its rich discussion, therefore, is related to particular aspects of writing, such as corrective feedback, students' response, etc. Related to corrective feedback, the study of contexts has profoundly been conducted by experts (see Lee, 2008; Saito, 1994; Budianto, Sulistyo, Widiastuti, Heriyawati, & Marhaban, 2020; Rizkiyah, & Prianty, 2020). Lee (2008) who studied the feedback of teachers discovered that teachers' feedback was influenced by particular contextual factors, such as teachers' beliefs, understandings, knowledge, and values. Furthermore, Saito (1994) declared that students of engineering writing classes in the ESL context preferred feedback from teachers to feedback from non-teachers, such as self-correction and peer correction.

METHODS

Design

The research was designed based on a case study. Furthermore, the research investigated the pesantren-based university undergraduate students' challenges in academic writing, the supervisors' feedback preferences to the students' academic writing, and the students' strategies to handle the teachers' feedback. The academic writing used in this study was thesis completion writing. The WCF was done by three teachers that supervised their students.

Participants

Three supervisors participated in the study. These two participants worked in applied linguistics and linguistics studies, whereas the other was an expert in literature studies. All of them achieved Master's degrees and worked professionally as assistant professors at a private university. Besides, they actively wrote scholarly articles, they had thought at least 10 years of their expertise. Therefore, these participants were not only experienced teachers but also qualified.

Furthermore, the study also involved 26 undergraduate students in the English Literature study program of an Islamic university in Indonesia. The students had been provided with relevant courses before they were encouraged to construct the thesis. Those were intensive courses such as advanced writing sentences and paragraphs, linguistics and literature research methodology,

seminar on linguistics, and seminar on literature. The theme that students composed was 65, 4% literature, and 34, 6% linguistics. During thesis completion, the teachers supervised these students in a manner of online and offline. The teachers also gave written and oral feedback that was believed to provide student writing improvement. However, the study focused on the written feedback proposed by the teachers.

Data Collection

The students wrote their thesis compositions from March until August 2021. The theme could be linguistics or English literature studies. During the thesis writing completion, the teachers provided feedback on their students' writing. After completing the thesis writing, the students were asked to fill out the questionnaires. The questionnaires were responded to by choosing the optional responses. Furthermore, to provide deep information, the students were also asked to write their comments relating to their supervisors' feedback. The questionnaires were conducted in the participants' L1 language as the teachers' and students' first language. The aims were to get accurate information since the students often faced difficulties in understanding and expressing their ideas in EFL. The questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms. Furthermore, the data that were gathered in this study were gotten from online supervision manners via E-mail.

Data Analysis

The researchers assessed the student thesis composition to grasp the student challenges in constructing academic writing. Therefore, all teacher corrective feedback in thesis completion manuscripts was investigated to unveil all possible difficulties faced by these EFL students. The data of the thesis manuscripts were analyzed using reduction of data, display of data, and verification or conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, the assessment of the data that was grasped from the teachers' feedback in the students' manuscripts was referred from Cohen and Cavalcanti (2009). The teachers' feedback was also analyzed to categorize their preference feedback types. Then, the frequency of students' responses relating to the strategies they use to handle the teachers' feedback was counted. A qualitative analysis of the student responses in open-ended questionnaires was undertaken to explore the students' underlying reasons related to their attitudes toward the supervisor's feedback.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Students' Challenges in Conducting Academic Writing

The manuscripts showed that EFL students faced particular challenges to compose academic writing. All of them construct surface structure errors. The surface structure errors that EFL students committed were varied. The data unveiled that those errors involved omission, addition, miss ordering, and miss formation (see Fig. 1, 2, 3). Furthermore, EFL students are also challenged to compose good content. They struggled to arrange a systematic flow to strengthen their idea. Therefore, the content of the academic writing they constructed seemed inaccurate. The students often faced difficulty in building their argumentative discourse in a paragraph (see Figure 2).

Another challenging process of writing academic writing faced by the EFL learners was how to construct citations and references. Therefore, their writing seemed unorganized. Frequently, the students cited experts' statements in their body papers without providing the mentioned references that they cited in the listed bibliography. Besides, they were also challenged by composing the writing format appropriately (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). Additionally, the students were also challenged in dealing with mechanisms. The data showed that the students-participants failed to demonstrate the right capitalization in particular letters, such as letters at the beginning of sentences. The data also revealed that punctuation was sometimes written incorrectly. Furthermore, the data also highlighted that vocabulary in respondents' manuscripts contained inappropriate diction. Therefore, the sentence meaning they demonstrated appears unnatural. The erroneous vocabulary that appeared in students' manuscripts was varying, such as wording, phrasing, and language style.

Table 1. The Challenges in Academic Writing Faced by the Students

No	Types of Challenges	Checklist	
		Yes	No
1	Content	V	
2	Organization	$\sqrt{}$	
3	Vocabulary	$\sqrt{}$	
4	Surface Structures	$\sqrt{}$	
5	Mechanism	$\sqrt{}$	

Figure 1.

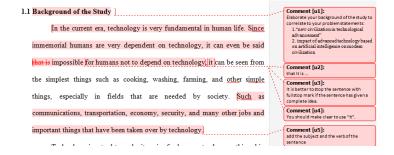


Figure 2.

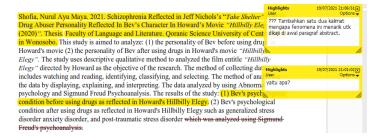


Figure 3.

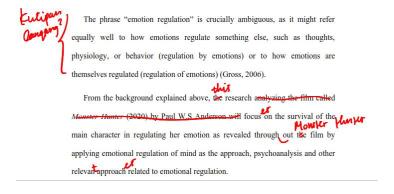
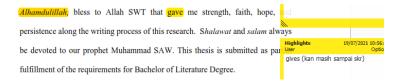


Figure 4.



The first result of the research that focused on students' challenges in academic writing in the EFL context demonstrated that students faced various challenges. The present study therefore in line with Saito (1994) and Cohen and Cavalcanti (2009) that had manifested. The challenges revealed are varied. However, one of them can be detected as surface structure. In contrast with Truscott (1996) who stated that grammar correction should be abandoned, the present study revealed that students believe that correction of grammar is still needed. Therefore, it may give a different perspective for the supervisors of EFL contexts, that they should provide surface structure correction in their supervision process.

B. Teachers' Feedback Practices

Every teacher has different practices to provide written corrective feedback. Teacher 1 focused on correction without comment and commentary without correction (see picture 3). She corrected her students' writing in terms of surface structure errors. Furthermore, the comments she gave were related to academic writing organization such as how to write a direct quotation. In terms of the language used, she mostly preferred to use Indonesian as the first language in her feedback practices. She was indicated mostly to use correction without commentary. However, she also sometimes used commentary without correction to supervise her students. In contrast to Teacher 1 who supervised with 2 feedback types, Teacher 2 provided more varied feedback to improve students' academic writing. The feedbacks were correction without commentary,

commentary without correction, identification error, and suggestion (see Figure 1). Not only did he focus on surface structures, but he also sharpened students' writing ideas by providing beneficial suggestions. Again, contrary to Teacher 1, Teacher 2 seemed to be consistent to use EFL for feedback practices.

Compared to Teachers 1 and 2, Teacher 3 has different feedback for her students. Teacher 3 mostly highlighted the students' writing feedback by providing suggestions and identifying errors (see Figure 2). In addition, she also provided her students with direct corrections with comments (see picture 4). In terms of language use, the supervisor 3 was similar to the supervisor 2. She preferred to use Indonesian L1 rather than English. Therefore, the study uncovers that supervisors' practices in supervising their students' academic writing may vary between supervisors. However, the study can confirm that their practices are the combination of correction without commentary, correction with commentary, commentary without correction, suggestion, and identification errors.

C. **Students' Preferences Toward Supervisors' Written Corrective Feedback**

Table 2. Students' preferences toward supervisors' feedback

No	Preferences	Percentage (%)				
		4	3	2	1	
		Strongly Useful	Useful	Useless	Strongly Useless	
1	Supervisors only correct surface structure errors without giving any comments/suggestions	11,5	46,2	38,5	3,8	
2	Supervisors only provide comments without making corrections	7,7	34,6	53,8	3,8	
3	Supervisors correct surface structure errors with comments/suggestion	80,8	11,5	3,8	3,8	
4	Supervisors give suggestions to revise the parts that still need to be developed/corrected	76,9	23,1	0	0	
5	Supervisors identify the parts of the writing that still need to be revised	76,9	19,2	3,8	0	

Based on Table 2, the respondents (46, 2%) admitted it was useful that their supervisors corrected surface structure errors without giving any suggestions/comments. Regarding grammar correction without comment/suggestion, respondent A argued that the supervisors should correct and give advice; therefore, the students understand their mistakes and know what to do. Then, questionnaire question number two unveiled that it is useful that the supervisors provided comments without correction on their supervised students' manuscripts (53, 8). Driven from the open questionnaire, even though respondent B argued that the supervisors' comments without giving corrections to students writing made the students not know the incorrect parts that the students made clear however the respondent perceived that the comment could benefit the students in revising their manuscripts.

Furthermore, correction with comments/suggestions of supervisors in surface structures was perceived positively by the students. Most of them (80, 8%) argued that corrections with comments/suggestions were very useful to develop their writing. It was strengthened by respondent B that stated that if supervisors correct and provide comments/suggestions at once, it will make it easier for the students to understand and correct mistakes. Then, the suggestion was preferred mostly by the students (76, 9%). However, identification error was also preferred by the students (76, 9%). Therefore, the study confirms that students' preferences to handle feedback were varied. Even though correction did not develop students' writing skills (Semke, 1984), however, the majority of the students in this study admitted that surface structure correction with comments/suggestions was very useful. The present study of the EFL contexts, therefore, strengthens Saito's statement (1994) stating that the students in ESL contexts need more help with surface structure errors.

D. Student Attitudes

Table 3. Students' attitudes to supervisors' feedback

No	Attitudes	Percentage (%)			
		4	3	2	1
		Always	Often	Seldom	Never
1	I revised surface structure errors based on the supervisors' feedback	96,2	3,8	0	0
2	I opened the dictionary if I have vocabulary problems	61,5	23,1	15,4	0
3	I used a translation tool [e.g., Google Translate] when I faced difficulty in structuring phrases or sentences in English	15,4	61,5	23,1	0
4	I identify the sections highlighted/commented on by the supervisors	88,5	11,5	0	0
5	I asked for a more detailed explanation regarding the parts highlighted/commented on/revised by the supervisors if I did not understand the purpose of the supervisors' comment/revision	42,3	42,3	15,4	0
6	I read the previous relevant research to my research to sharpen the research I conducted	53,8	42,3	3,8	0

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7	It took me a few days to think about the supervisors' revision, the next day I just revised the requested parts	19,2	42,3	26,9	11,5	
8	I did not revise any part referred to by the supervisors	3,8	0	11,5	84,6	

As presented in Table 3, most of the participants indicated that they revised grammatical errors as supervisors' comments (96, 2%). Then, they also consulted the vocabulary difficulty in the dictionary (61, 5%). Regarding the problems of constructing phrases and sentences, a translation tool was mostly the students' preferences (61, 5). However, it is interesting that the data also revealed that many of them (23, 1%) seldom referred to a translation tool. Furthermore, the students preferred identifying the parts that were commented on/highlighted by their supervisors (88, 5%).

Then, many students (42, 3% for always and 42, 3% for often) asked for a more detailed description if they felt difficult to understand the supervisors' comments/revisions or not. To develop students' research, they admitted that they read the previous researches that were relevant to their study (53, 8%). Then, they often (42, 3%) needed a few days to think about the purpose of the supervisors' comments. And mostly students (84, 6%) revised the highlighted sections that supervisors gave. However, 3,8% of students admitted that they did not do any revision.

At last, the students' attitudes toward supervisors' feedback especially in terms of surface structure revision, dictionary needs, translation tools, mismatch identification, further supervisors' explanation, reading previous relevant research, and contemplation are responded positively. The present research confirms that revising is the attitude that the students do mostly. Therefore, the study corresponds to the study of Hillocks (1986) and Rizkiyah and Prianty (2020). It was arguable that students revise their writing as supervisors' feedback because their supervisors always follow up on their writing development.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that EFL students of the pesantren-based university are challenged by some aspects. Those are content, organization, vocabulary, surface structure, and mechanism. Regarding teachers' feedback preferences, the study showed that the teachers applied various types of feedback in their supervision process. The confirmed feedback types in the study are correction without comment, commentary without correction, identification errors, suggestion, and correction with comment. Regarding students' preferences in written corrective feedback, the students perceive positively correction without comment, comment without correction, commentary with correction, suggestion, and identification errors. Regarding language use, the teachers have various preferences, i.e.; L1, EFL, and a combination between L1 and EFL. Then, students show some attitudes toward supervisors' feedback, such as always revising the surface structures as supervisors' feedback, if they face vocabulary problems they use the dictionary, using a translation tool to construct difficult English phrases and sentences, identifying their highlighted sections, consulting a more detailed explanation from their teachers, reading previous relevant research to sharpen their works, and needing time to think about their teachers' revision.

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