

# Exploring Lecturers' Written Corrective Feedback on Students' Research Proposal Writing

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## ABSTRACT

During the corona pandemic, face to face learning process is not allowed, so that the guidance of thesis writing for students must be done online. Lecturers have to provide written corrective feedback in responding to their students' writing. This study explores the lecturers' written corrective feedback on students' research proposal writing. It describes giving direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback regarding types of writing errors students have made. This descriptive research used a qualitative approach, by using documentation in collecting the data. Personal research proposals of postgraduate students of English Education Graduate Program of Universitas Negeri Padang were collected to get lecturers' feedback on the students' weaknesses in their research proposals. The result revealed that indirect corrective feedback was the most frequent type used by the lecturers. The findings indicate that written corrective feedback might improve students' writing accuracy in research proposal writing; however, it depends on the error types of writing. This study needs additional information of written corrective feedback, especially indirect corrective feedback in improving students' writing accuracy.

**Keywords:** research proposal writing, writing accuracy, writing compositions, written corrective feedback

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing has been a hurdle for students, particularly for university students in writing their thesis. Although writing skills have been taught to university students since their first semester, including skills of scientific writing, many students continue encountering a number of difficulties in writing their thesis. While learning writing, they are taught how to write grammatically correct sentences, how to connect one idea to other ideas in the text, how to provide logical arguments, and how to revise their writing. Therefore, it is assumed that university students, especially graduate students, already have a lot of writing knowledge. Besides that, the students also have experience of writing, where lecturer gives them exercise in writing activities during learning process. However, when students wrote a scientific work, most of them encountered a number of writing problems.

A number of mistakes occurred due to lack of students' writing skills. It was a factor that caused students to be unable to write properly [1], [2]. As stated by [3], the first semester students' academic writing, though not totally incoherent, is weak. Then, when Satariyan and Mohseni [4] did a study to identify and analyze the common errors in writing skill of university students, they found that the students had greater difficulties in organization, content, and vocabulary. Yuliana et al. [5] also found that students had writing errors in language use as the most frequent errors. This becomes a concern for many researchers and they try to find the most applicable method to solve the problem. One of the efforts is shown by Bin Tahir and

Aminah [6] who used Facebook as the media to improve the students' writing skills at University of Iqra Buru. They found that it was applicable in improving the students' writing skills. Other researchers, Sari et al. [7], have examined that the use of think-talk-write strategy gives a significant effect on the students' writing performance. This implies that lecturers need to explore the more applicable methods, techniques or media in teaching writing to university students, especially in guiding the students' research project writing, because they need good writing.

In writing a research project, lecturer must guide the students, where Gagne et al. [8] argue that teacher has role as a guide in teaching and learning activities. Mahmood [9] states that lecturers are one of the factors affecting the quality of research. Qasem and Zayid [10] who did a study regarding the students' research project writing suggested that lecturer should provide students with good guidance. In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, face to face learning process is not allowed, so that the guidance of thesis writing for students must be done online and or the students may send the draft of their writing to the lecturer's office. Therefore, lecturers have to provide written corrective feedback in responding to their students' writing during writing process.

In providing written corrective feedback, there are some types can be applied [11]. Lecturers can give feedback in the form of question to ask for clarification or suggest expansion. Then, Park [12] reviews the lecturer's written feedback in three types, form-focused feedback, content-based feedback, and integrated feedback. Meanwhile, the other researcher [13] classifies that it consists of six types,

which are direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective feedback, the focus of the feedback, electronic feedback, and reformulation. These types have been studied by researchers, however it has different findings.

The study by Razali and Jupri [14] explored teacher written feedback and student revisions on ESL students' writing by giving suggestion, critics, and praise (indirect feedback), and found that teacher written corrective feedback did not necessarily lead to successful revisions and did not satisfy the students' preferences. Whereas Iswandari [15] did a study on written corrective feedback in writing class and found that the majority of the students preferred indirect written corrective feedback. Then, Farjadnassab and Khodashenas [16] explored the effect of providing direct and indirect corrective feedback on EFL students' writing accuracy. They found that WCF had contribution in improving students' writing accuracy, but with varying degrees and suggested that for some future studies need to look into the differential effect of the types of WCF over longer time spans (e.g a semester or a year) and/or over different linguistic structures with other proficiency levels. Chen [17] also did study regarding direct and indirect feedback and found that providing direct corrective feedback tends to be more effective for the word choice errors, sentence structure errors and discourse errors, whereas indirect corrective feedback leads to collocation errors, wordiness, fragment, run-on sentence, tense, agreement, and voice. He suggests for future research can try to analyze more sample from different universities and finding out whether the students given a combination of corrective feedback strategies can outperform those given just a certain type of feedback. Al Harasi [18] also suggested that researchers need to explore direct and indirect written corrective feedback to establish whether indirect CF is superior to direct CF in new writing when targeting more than one linguistic structure.

Regarding to these previous studies, this study would like to explore lecturers' written corrective feedback on postgraduate students' research proposal writing. It focuses on direct written corrective feedback and indirect written corrective feedback by describing lecturers feedback, students' writing errors and the writing accuracy of the feedback. The writing errors include the composition of writing, which consist of language use, mechanics, organization, content, format, reference to source, vocabulary, and clarity.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive study, where it describes types of lecturer's written corrective feedback and in which writing errors students should be corrected. The participants in this research were postgraduate students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang in the 2018 academic year who took research proposal writing and there were 10 postgraduate students of English Department in the 2018 academic year as the participants in this study.

Related to this study was qualitative study, then the researchers were the main instrument. In addition, the instruments of this study were phone camera to take picture of students' research proposal when the students did not allow the researchers to bring the authentic document, as well as notes to write additional information. In collecting data, this study used documentation. Cresswell [19] states that it is enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of participant. The researchers collected personal research proposal of students in two sections sequentially. The first section was the collection of the first draft of the research proposal of each student to find out types of lecturers' written corrective feedback and students' writing error. The second section was the collection of the second draft of the research proposal of each students (repairing) to find out students' writing accuracy.

In analyzing the data, the researchers used Gay et al. theory [20] in identifying the steps in analyzing the data of the research, i.e. by reading/memoing, describing and classifying. Then, this study used quantitative calculation to show the number of the percentage of each type of written corrective feedback, writing errors and writing accuracy. Furthermore, measuring writing accuracy was analyzed based on counting the number of errors in the writing that lecturers corrected and then classifying them into types.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To find out types of lecturers' written corrective feedback, it collected writing draft of postgraduate students' research proposal and the data was analyzed. Based on data analysis, the result showed that indirect corrective feedback was the most frequent type used by the lecturers. The following table presents types of lecturers' written corrective feedback on students' research proposal writing.

**Table 1 Sensor network experimental results**

Types of WCF	Students										Percentage
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
Direct CF	v	v	v	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23%
Indirect CF	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	77%

Table 1 reveals types of lecturers' written corrective feedback on students' research proposal writing. There are three students get direct corrective feedback from the lecturer and all students get indirect corrective feedback. In providing written corrective feedback on student research proposal writing, 23% lecturers provided direct corrective feedback and 77% lecturers provided indirect corrective feedback on students' research proposal writing.

In addition, lecturers provided written corrective feedback reveal to help students avoid writing fossilization, where they encountered the number of errors in the writing. The feedback was used to correct students' writing errors, then the following table presents students' writing errors that students should be revised.

**Table 2 WCF for students' writing errors**

Error types	Types of WCF		Total	Percentage
	Direct CF	Indirect CF		
Language use	13	49	62	17,27%
Mechanics	41	11	52	14,49%
Organization	3	64	67	18,66%
Content	0	68	68	18,94%
Format	3	2	5	1,39%
References to source	0	33	33	9,19%
Vocabulary	18	7	25	6,96%
Clarity	0	47	47	13,09%
Total	78	281	359	100%
Percentage	21.73%	78.27%	100%	

As is shown in Table 2, most students encountered the number of writing errors in research proposal writing. It could be seen that providing written corrective feedback on language use was 17.27%, mechanics was 14.49%, content was 18.66%, organization was 18.94%, format was 1.39%, references to source was 9.19%, vocabulary was 6.96%, and clarity was 13.09%. It showed that the use of feedback was useful in correcting writing composition, and content error was the most corrected by lecturers. Then, the lecturers provided direct corrective feedback was 21.73% and indirect corrective feedback was 78.27%. The use of direct corrective feedback revealed to language use, mechanics, organization, format, and vocabulary. Meanwhile, indirect corrective feedback revealed to all writing error types, language use, mechanics, organization,

content, format, reference to source, vocabulary, and clarity.

After lecturers gave correction to the first draft of research proposal writing, the students revised the writing. The writing revised was collected to find out the use of WCF in improving writing accuracy of students' research proposal writing. The accuracy rates in the revised draft was calculated by using a formula, where accuracy rate= total no. of correct improvements of each type of errors / total no. of each type of errors x 100% [17]. Based on the calculation for each types of writing corrective feedback, then the result of providing direct corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy, as bellow:

**Table 3 Students' writing accuracy of providing direct CF**

Error types	No. of errors in the first draft	No. of correct improvement in the revised draft	Accuracy rate of correction
Language use	13	13	100%
Mechanics	41	41	100%
Organization	3	3	100%
Content	-	-	-
Format	3	3	100%
References to source	-	-	-
Vocabulary	18	18	100%
Clarity	-	-	-
Average			100%

As is shown in Table 3, direct CF can help students to eliminate 100% of their writing errors. It showed that the use of direct corrective feedback on students' research

proposal was useful in improving students' writing errors, where the students corrected the errors easily without encountered errors in the revising. Despite the lecturers

only provided direct corrective feedback on language use errors, mechanics errors, organization errors, format errors and vocabulary errors, it might be useful on another types of errors, including content, references to source and clarity. The postgraduate students were very aware of the writing errors and they corrected the errors. Meanwhile,

providing indirect corrective feedback on students' research proposal writing, it was different with direct corrective feedback, the following table presents the students' writing accuracy of providing indirect CF.

**Table 4 Students' writing accuracy of providing direct CF**

<b>Error types</b>	<b>No. of errors in the first draft</b>	<b>No. of correct improvement in the revised draft</b>	<b>Accuracy rate of correction</b>
Language use	49	36	73.47%
Mechanics	11	6	69.09%
Organization	64	35	54.68%
Content	68	22	32.35%
Format	2	1	50%
References to source	33	15	45.46%
Vocabulary	7	2	71.43%
Clarity	47	17	36.17%
Average			48.76%

As is shown in Table 4, indirect CF can help students to eliminate 48.76% of their writing errors. It showed that students had difficulty in revising the writing, where they encountered the number of writing errors. Types of errors was very difficult revised, like content, clarity, and references to source, with the accuracy rates of 32.35%, 36.17%, and 45.46% properly corrected. This feedback can help students to eliminate 73.47% of language use errors, 71.43% of vocabulary, 69.09% of mechanics errors, 54.68% of organization errors, and 50% of format errors. However, based on the analysis of all the revised drafts of students, a few of the errors even did not corrected by the students. Some students did not revise what lecturers corrected and there were the students who deleted and ignored lecturers' correction. It might be the reason why students encountered the number of errors in the revising. Overall, these findings showed that indirect CF was the most frequent used by lecturer in giving correction on students' research proposal writing. It supports Wicaksono [21] finding that indirect CF has always been used, not the direct feedback. However, in improving writing accuracy, direct CF was more helpful in improving students' writing accuracy. Direct CF is better than indirect CF to detect the correct form Sheen [22]. It also supported Sarvestani and Pishkar [23] finding that using direct written corrective feedback during teaching writing promoted writing skill rather than using indirect corrective feedback. Providing direct feedback more helps students to correct the writing correctly in responding students' writing [18], [24], [25]. In addition, providing written corrective feedback might improve students' writing, but direct and indirect corrective feedback have different role in improving students writing. It agrees with Farjadnassab and Khodashenas's finding [16] that WCF has contribution in improving students' writing accuracy, but with varying degrees.

### **3.1 Direct corrective feedback**

Direct corrective feedback can help students to eliminate writing errors. In providing this feedback on students' research proposal, students did not encounter writing errors in revising. Soori et al. [26] stated that it might help students to notice their errors and internalized a system to correct them. When the student had errors in research proposal writing, the lecturer directly wrote the correct form in the students' draft. The use of this feedback revealed to some composition errors of language use, mechanics, organization, format, and vocabulary, and it was helpful in improving these errors. Direct corrective feedback can be effective in promoting acquisition of specific grammatical features [22], [23], [27]. This study also agrees with Chen's [17] finding that providing direct corrective feedback tends to be more effective for the word choice errors, sentence structure errors and discourse errors. Kisnanto [28] stated that direct CF was the type that students' accuracy improved the most.

### **3.2 Indirect corrective feedback**

Indirect CF also can help students to eliminate writing errors. In providing this type, lecturer mark/underline/cross out/comments students' writing error in the written work without gives the correct form. The student has a challenge in learning and solving the writing problem by understanding the reason of it is incorrect [14]. Feedback that was vague and to general could be confusing to the students, making it difficult for them respond and incorporate the comments in their revision process and this feedback could demotivate students to revise. This feedback can be promoted in improving students writing accuracy especially on language use errors, vocabulary, mechanics errors, organization errors, and format errors. However, in giving correction on writing errors of content,

clarity, and references to source, students might take more time in understanding the correction, because this study found that there were writing errors that encountered by students in the revised draft. It agrees with Ellis [13] that indirect CF is considered more likely to lead to long term learning. Contrary to the claim of Wicaksono [21] that direct CF might take more time to do the correction. Then, there were different responses of students in revising the writing, which are they did not correct the lecturer's correction by ignoring lecturer's feedback and deleting the correction. Wang [29] argued that some students might not be willing to deal with or not interested in understanding how CF could work and help improve their writing.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

During the corona pandemic, face to face learning process is not allowed, so that the guidance of thesis writing for students must be done online. Lecturers provided two types of written corrective feedback that applied in giving correction on students' research proposal writing which are direct and indirect corrective feedback. Indirect corrective feedback was the most frequent type used by lecturers in responding research proposal writing of postgraduate students, however, there were students who did not corrected lecturers' correction. This study reveals that students have difficulties in responding indirect corrective feedback on content errors, clarity errors and references to source errors. This study needs more information of written corrective feedback, especially indirect corrective feedback in improving students' writing accuracy. Therefore, this study suggests to explore written corrective feedback on postgraduate students by considering students' attitudes toward types of written corrective feedback given by the lecturers during research proposal writing.

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