



Student' Preferences on the Focus of Feedback in Writing Research Proposals

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Abstract. Students' preferences on the focus of feedback may improve the efficacy and efficiency of the supervisory process. However, there is a frequent misalignment of the focus of feedback among students and supervisors. This research aims to reveal the types of focused feedback preferred by the students and the types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals. The design employed a mixed-method design. The instruments used were a questionnaire and a table checklist. The data were collected through survey and documents analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed quantitatively while the qualitative data were analyzed qualitatively. Based on the questionnaires, the result of the types of focused feedback preferred by the students respectively is content focused feedback with the scores of 154 (25.84%). Meanwhile, based on the analysis of the documents, the types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals is the language form-focused feedback with the scores of 185 (33.27%). It can be concluded that students preferred to get content-focused feedback while the supervisors tend to provide feedback that focused on the language form.

Keywords: Feedback preferences · focused feedback · research proposal writing

1 Introduction

Writing a research proposal is difficult for novice researchers. The difficulties are related to the content and the grammatical rules [1, 2]. Bitchener [3] argued that writing a thesis for the first time is a challenge not only for L2 writers but L1 writers as well. Thus, feedback is needed to guide the students in writing thesis proposals.

Many theories also stated that the focus of feedback significantly affects the outcomes of learning [3, 4]. Supriyadi [2] indicated that the focused feedback will improve the students' writing skills and it should not be comprehensive but gradually from one to the next chapter. Providing specific feedback will make it easier for students to accept and comply [4]. Furthermore, Sheen [5] said that comprehensive feedback or feedback in which it is aimed at all aspects may burden the students and make the feedback ineffective. However Sujarwati *et al.* [6] who investigate the lecturers' beliefs while giving feedback in the students' written text found that the feedback given by the lecturer should be comprehensive. It is because the lecturer believed that the students might think that the error is not a mistake if it is not corrected.

Due to those contrastive findings, preference-based feedback is considered to be a factor of optimal and effective feedback [7]. Previous researchers have investigated the students' liking tendency or preference of the focus of feedback. Irwin [8], in his study, found that the students prefer the teacher to focus on the lexical aspects. Ferris [9] said that the students prefer the teacher to give the feedback in the content for the first draft while the lexical should be in the next draft. Moreover, Yunus [10] found that the provided feedback is not aligned to the focus of feedback that is preferred by the students.

From those explanations, this research aimed to investigate the students' preference of the focused feedback in the students' research proposals based on the categorization of Basturkmen & Bitchener [11]. Specifically, it will try to reveal the types of focused feedback preferred by the students and the types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals.

1.1 Definition of Feedback

A response to someone's performance is called feedback. Feedback, according to Nicole and Macfarlane [12] can be regarded as a troubleshooter of the students' successes offered by the educator. In the learning process, feedback is a response to a student's work or practice for them to improve their performance. Feedback in writing is described as written comments to a student's written product. It is available in written corrections, remarks, or markings [9, 13]. In this study, feedback refers to the supervisor's comments and markings on the flaws and mistakes in the students' research proposals.

1.2 Theories of Feedback in ELT

The use of feedback in English language teaching is extremely significant. It assists students in identifying what they have not yet grasped, boosting their confidence, and understanding and correcting their errors. Lewis [14] stated the purpose of feedback included a) providing information for both teacher and student, b) providing the student with learning advice, c) providing students with language input, d) providing motivation, and e) leading students toward autonomy.

In terms of writing, the student as a writer requires proper assistance from the teacher to become a better writer. One technique to assist students in becoming good writers is to provide feedback on their work [6]. According to Silver and Lee [15], written feedback is essential in the revision process for ESL students since it illuminates their strengths and flaws. Furthermore, written feedback might assist students in becoming more motivated to complete their writing assignments.

Researchers have recently focused their efforts on comparing the many sorts of feedback methods that are most beneficial for second language learners. Many academics used sociocultural theory to examine the relationships between students and teachers to close the gap in feedback effectiveness. This idea emphasizes the importance of communication between the teacher and the students when it comes to delivering and receiving feedback [16]. The studies are mostly concerned with the preferences, attitudes, or expectations of both teachers and students [7, 17, 18].

Table 1. The types of the focus of feedback

Focus	Description	Example
Content	Arguments, information [11] Ideas, theories, gaps in literature [3]	I tend to associate this with the model put forward by...
Requirements	Genre expectations and academic convention, formatting, referencing and APA type concerns [11]	References? A literature review or introduction?
Organization	Cohesive and coherence-section links, consistent ideas, accessible to reader understanding [3, 11]	Which condition, learning difficulty (unclear)? 2. Things are a bit jumbled here
Language form	Linguistic accuracy and appropriateness-including surface-level language forms and clarity of meaning [11]	<i>'To bring the meaning of messages'</i> Feedback: ...to accurately reflect meaning... error correction on grammar, suffixes etc.

1.3 Focus of Feedback

The focus of feedback may vary according to the context. According to Sujarwati *et al.* [6], there are three focuses of feedback which are divided into content, organization, and language-form. Moreover, Basturkmen & Bitchener [11] stated that the feedback in the research context is divided into the content, the language accuracy and appropriateness, the organization, and the requirement. The focus of the feedback can be seen in the Table 1.

Many studies are also giving attention to the focus of feedback. Some studies found that written feedback is should be focused on the content at the first draft [9]. Yet, some studies also found that the students prefer the supervisor to focus on all aspects of the error [6]. In students' thesis, Jiang and Yan [4] state that feedback that focuses on details is easier to accept and follow, while some broader content is ambiguous to understand. Alam and Singh [19] indicates that graduate students appreciated the straightforward feedback, provided clear instructions, directed them to the other related resources, and the feedback which was detailed or specific.

1.4 Students' Feedback Preference

Students aren't just objects. Students, according to Hyland and Hyland [20], are active agents in the feedback process. They argue that to have the desired effect, students' feelings about teacher feedback should be understood. Many studies have revealed that providing comments to students might have a negative influence. According to Taggart & Laughlin [21], students' negative expressions often reflected hierarchically into contempt and bewilderment.

Furthermore, Razali and Jupri [18] suggest that overly vague and generic written comments from the teacher might be misleading to students, while too much criticism on faults can demotivate students to improve. Preference-based beliefs are formed as a result of these factors [7].

Students' feedback preference is favourable feeling of feedback. Researchers believed that the differences in the students' and the teachers' feedback preferences are major gaps to provide optimal feedback [22]. However, many studies revealed the disparities in the feedback practice. Trabelsi [23] found that there is a misalignment between the students' and the teachers' beliefs. The misalignments are related to the praise, the comment, the redrafting, the feedback amount, the explicitness of the feedback and the focus of the feedback. Additionally, the students' feedback preference can be influenced by contextual factors and beliefs [10], students' educational context [24], students' motivation [25], and the student's language proficiency [25, 26]. Another study found that the students' responses to feedback may be influenced by the learners' traits and unique requirements [27]. As a result, teachers should be prepared to modify who, when, and how they correct feedback based on the cognitive and affective needs of each student [9]. It may be claimed that students' preferences for teacher feedback are diverse, and this must be taken into account for the feedback to be beneficial.

1.5 Feedback in the Research Proposal

The research proposal is the foundation upon which a thesis is built. Writing a research proposal for a thesis is a scholarly and systematic activity of writing. Its goal is to discover, validate, and develop specific information. Furthermore, it actively plans and assesses anything to persuade the readers and to make them believe in the researcher's solution [28]. Unfortunately, second language learners may encounter difficulties along the way.

There are some writing issues in the process of research proposal writing. According to Firza & Aisiah [1], faults in scientific papers are largely related to written systems (letters, words, and phrases) and contents. When students were writing the standard words, they might encounter font errors. Furthermore, the students are unable to distinguish between oral and written language, as well as standard and non-standard vocabulary. In terms of the sentence, it is disorganized and hard to be understood.

Additionally, many factors are affecting the students' problems in research writing. Brown in Dwihandini *et al.* [29] formulated the factors which affect the undergraduate students' difficulties in writing a thesis in English included the psychological factor, the socio-cultural factor, and the linguistic factor. Chugh *et al.* [30] found that the feedback problem in the process of thesis writing was caused by the content, the processes which were involved and the expectations of those who were involved in the process. Thus, further improvements to the feedback process should be developed by the institutions, supervisors and the students.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research conducted a mixed-method design. Mixed method design utilized and combined both quantitative and qualitative methods [31]. The quantitative method was used to answer the first question while the qualitative method was used to answer the second. The findings of the quantitative data and qualitative data completed one another.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants of this research were the last semester students of the English Education Study Program academic year 2020/2021. There were 39 students selected by purposive sampling to gain the quantitative data. On the other side, the qualitative data samples were 16 documents selected from five random students taken from the quantitative samples.

2.3 Research Instrument

There were two instruments used in this research. The researcher gathered the quantitative data by using a questionnaire and the qualitative data by using Checklist. This recent study classified the feedback based on the focus of feedback by Basturkmen & Bitchener [11]. The focus of the feedback is divided into the content feedback (feedback focused on the content), the language-form feedback (feedback focused on the language form), the organization feedback (feedback focused on the organization of the paragraph), and the requirement feedback (feedback focused on the requirements e.g. APA style).

In addition, the statement which represents the focus of the feedback preference is divided into 1 point statement of each category according to the name of the feedback. So, the statement of the focused feedback consists of 4 statements. Meanwhile, the options were arranged respectively as follows: *Strongly agree-5; Agree-4; Neutral-3; Disagree-2; Strongly Disagree-1.*

2.4 Data Collecting Technique

There are two types of data collecting techniques. The quantitative data were collected by using a survey. The researcher made the survey questions in the form of a Google Form. It was distributed to the students via Whatsapp Application. At the same time, the qualitative data was collected from the students' research proposals. The data were coded carefully and added to the instrument for further analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

In the mixed-method research, the researcher organized the report of the procedures into quantitative and qualitative data collection followed by the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Then, in the conclusions or interpretation phase of the study, the researcher commented on how the qualitative findings helped to elaborate or extend the quantitative results [31].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 The Types of Focused Feedback Preferred by the Students

The result of the types of focused feedback preferred by the students of English Education Study Program in their Research Proposals is shown in Table 2:

The table shows that the participant (n) of the survey consists of 39 students. The total score of the focused feedback preference is 596. The score of the types of focused feedback preferred by the students in their research proposals respectively are the content-focused feedback with the score of 154 (25.84%), the language-form focused feedback with the score of 145 (24.33%), the organization focused feedback with the score of 148 (24.83%), and the requirement focused feedback with the score of 149 (25%). To sum up, the most dominant focused feedback preferred by the students is the content-focused feedback followed by the requirement focused feedback, the organization focused feedback and the least preferred is the language-form focused feedback.

Table 2. Calculation of Focus Feedback Preference

Feedback	N	Options		Score	%
Content	39	Strongly agree	70	154	25.84
		Agree	56		
		Neutral	24		
		Disagree	2		
		Strongly Disagree	2		
Language Form		Strongly agree	50	145	24.33
		Agree	48		
		Neutral	42		
		Disagree	4		
		Strongly Disagree	1		
Organization		Strongly agree	40	148	24.83
		Agree	76		
		Neutral	24		
		Disagree	8		
		Strongly Disagree	0		
Requirement		Strongly agree	45	149	25
		Agree	64		
		Neutral	36		
		Disagree	4		
		Strongly Disagree	0		
Total				596	100

The table also shows the response of the students to each feedback option. From Table 2, it can be seen that the score of the student's response to the content focused feedback respectively are the *strongly agree* option with the score of 70, the *agree* option with the score of 56, the *neutral* option with the score of 24, the *disagree* option with the score of 2, and the *strongly disagree* option with the score of 2. The most dominant answer that is chosen by the students is the *strongly agree* option. Whilst, the lowest is the *disagree* and the *strongly disagree* option. In brief, the total response of the content focused feedback is 154 (25.84%) of the total focused feedback.

Based on the displayed table, the score of the student's response to the language form-focused feedback respectively are the *strongly agree* option with the score of 50, the *agree* option with the score of 48, the *neutral* option with the score of 42, the *disagree* option with the score of 4, and the *strongly disagree* option with the score of 1. The most dominant answer that is chosen by the students is the *strongly agree* option. Whilst, the least dominant is the *strongly disagree* option. In brief, the total response of the language-form focused feedback is 145 (24.33%) of the total focused feedback.

Based on the displayed table, the score of the student's response to the language-form focused feedback respectively are the *strongly agree* with the score of 40, the *agree* option with the score of 76, the *neutral* option with the score of 24, the *disagree* option with the score of 8, the *strongly disagree* option with the score of 0. The most dominant answer that is chosen by the students is the *agree* option. Whilst, the lowest option is the *strongly disagree*. In brief, the total response of the organization focused feedback is 148 (24.83%) of the total focused feedback.

Last but not least, the table above shows that the score of the student's response to the language form-focused feedback respectively are the *strongly agree* with the score of 45, the *agree* option with the score of 64, the *neutral* option with the score of 36, the *disagree* option with the score of 4, and the *strongly disagree* option with the score of 0. The most dominant answer that is chosen by the students is the *agree* option. Whilst, the lowest option is the *strongly disagree* option. In brief, the total response of the requirements focused feedback is 149 (25%) of the total focused feedback.

3.2 The Types of Focused Feedback Provided by the Supervisors in the Students' Research Proposals

The focused feedback is found in students' research proposals. The feedback is categorized into content-focused feedback (focused on the information, idea, theory, argument, and claim), the requirement focused feedback (expectations for the section and academic, conventions, such as *APA style format*), the organization focused feedback (cohesion/coherence), and the language-form focused feedback (linguistic accuracy/appropriateness). The results of the types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals are displayed in Table 3.

The total focused feedback found in the students' research proposal is 556 feedback. It is distributed into 185 (33.27%) of the content feedback, 209 (37.59%) of the language-form feedback, 24 (4.32%) of the organization feedback, and 138 (24.82%) of the requirement feedback. The highest number of types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals is the language-form focused

Table 3. Calculation of Focused feedback

Feedback	Number of Feedback	%
Content	185	33.27
Language Form	209	37.59
Organization	24	4.32
Requirement	138	24.82
Total	556	100

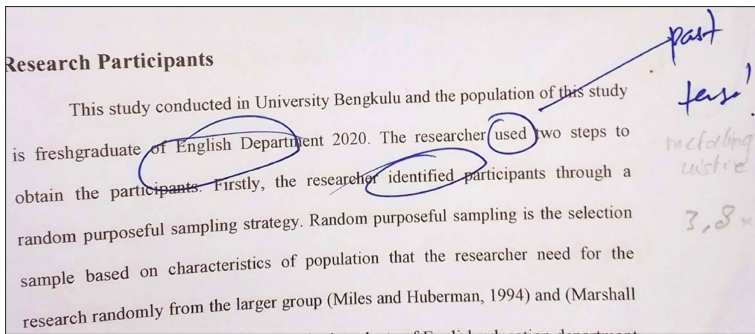


Fig. 1. Language-form Feedback (Source: Student 2, Doc 1)

feedback. The example of the feedback focus on the language form can be seen in Fig. 1.

Figure 1 shows that the supervisor focused on language use. The appropriate language use in the students’ research proposal in the methodology is future tense. Yet, the students seem to write in the past tense. So the supervisor gives a comment that said ‘Past tense’ with the additional exclamation ‘!’. The other focused feedback found is feedback focused on the content. The example of the feedback focus on the content can be seen in Fig. 2.

Figure 2 shows the content focused feedback. This is because that feedback is focused on the theory used by the students. It says ‘*jelaskan teori yang mau dipakai di instrumen oleh siapa ahlinya kemudian diapakan*’ [explain the theory that will be used in the instrument. Who is the expert, and what to do with it]. It seems that the students did not explain the theory clearly so the supervisor asked the students to give additional content about the theory. The next feedback count as feedback focused on the requirement. The example of the feedback focus on the requirement can be seen in the Fig. 3.

Figure 3 shows that the comment that is given by the lecturer is focused on the requirement of the reference. The reference is not based on APA 7. So, the lecturer wrote ‘*gunakan APA 7*’ [use the APA 7]. Meanwhile, the lowest among the other feedback is feedback focused on the organization. The example of the feedback focus organization can be seen in Fig. 4.

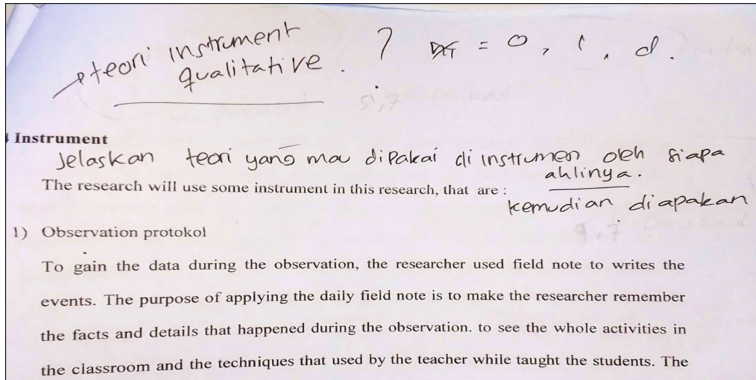


Fig. 2. Content-focused Feedback (Source: Student 4, Doc 1)

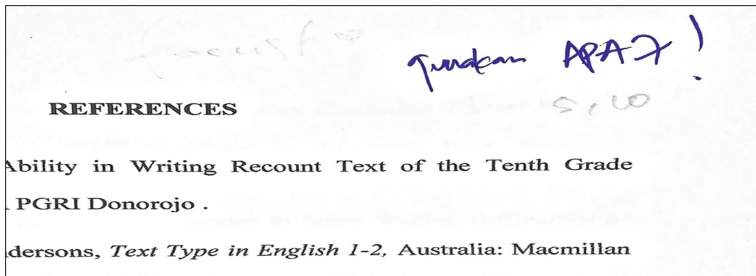


Fig. 3. Requirement focused Feedback (Source: Student 4, Doc 1)

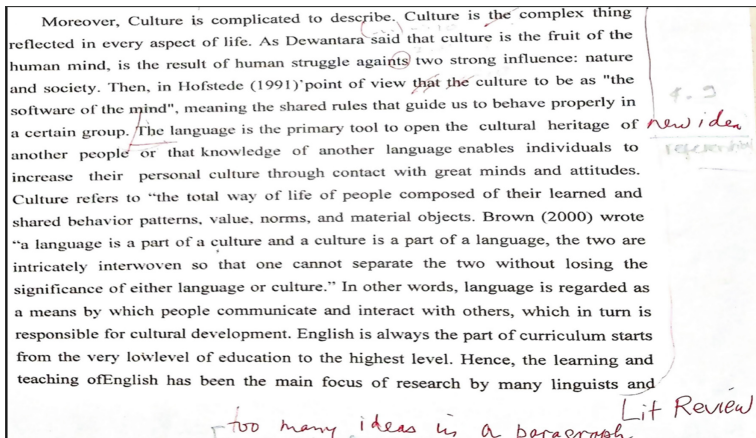


Fig. 4. Organization focused Feedback (Source: Student 3, Doc 1)

Figure 4 shows that the students put two ideas in one paragraph. Consequently, the supervisor said '*too many ideas in a paragraph*'. In terms of the Organization feedback, the students should write one idea in one paragraph.

3.3 Discussion

Based on the result, the type of focused feedback preferred by the students is content feedback followed by the requirement feedback, the organization feedback and the least preferred is the language-form feedback. It indicated that the students found the feedback that focused on the content is more important than another aspect. Probably, the students find themselves weak on the aspects of argumentations, information, ideas, theories, and gaps in the literature. So, they want their supervisors to give feedback that is more focused on those aspects.

This result confirmed the theory of Basturkmen & Bitchener [11] which classified the focus of the feedback into the content feedback, requirement feedback, organization, or cohesion/coherence feedback and the linguistic accuracy/language form feedback. Further, the result of this research is in line with Agbayahoun [27] who also found that the students prefer the feedback in which it takes the content of their written production into account. In contrast, Irwin [8] found that the students wanted their teacher to focus on lexical mistakes and grammatical corrections. He found that very few students felt their teacher should focus on the content and the ideas and even fewer felt that the structural mistakes were important.

In addition, the types of focused feedback provided by the supervisors in the students' research proposals respectively are the language-form focused feedback, content-focused feedback, requirement focused feedback, and the last is organization focused feedback. It indicated that the supervisors mostly focused on the language form mistakes. This is probably because the supervisor found it easy to decode due to the minimum consideration.

This result confirms the theory from Basturkmen & Bitchener [11] which classified the focus of the feedback into the content, requirement, organization or cohesion/coherence feedback and the linguistic accuracy/language-form feedback. Additionally, they stated that the language-form feedback does not need deep consideration and is easy to decode. Furthermore, the result of this research is similar to Jiang & Yan [4] who found that the feedback on the language form is the most frequent error feedback that is found in the students' research proposals.

4 Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the result and discussion of the research, it is concluded that the types of focused feedback preferred by the students are content focused feedback and the types of feedback provided by the supervisors were mostly the language-form focused feedback. Thus, it is suggested that the students learn more about the language form. Meanwhile, it is suggested that the supervisors provide more content-focused feedback.

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