CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the general issues related to the present study. These include the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of key terms, and organization of the paper. A further description of them is presented in Sections 1.1 through 1.7.

1.1   Background of the Study

In educational settings, feedback is widely regarded as an important part for both encouraging and consolidating the students' learning, and its importance has been recognized in the areas of second language writing (Hyland & Hyand, 2006). This is notably true now with the predominance of writing processes that requires some kind of second party feedback, usually the teacher feedback, on the students' writing (Kroll, 2001). As Hyland (2003) sees this, the teacher feedback is deemed as an inseparable component in language learning, most specifically in learning to write.

A number of studies draw attention to the fact that the teacher feedback is beneficial for the development of students' writing skills, both for their learning potential and for their motivation (Hyland & Hyand, 2006; Raimes, 1983). Those who receive feedback from the teacher may have a clearer sense of how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991; Radecki & Swales, 1988). It also guides them to do self-revision, in which they correct their errors by themselves (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Sommers, 1982). A similar idea is shown by Hyland and Hyland (2006) who say that the teacher feedback raises the students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in writing, maximizes their potential at different stages

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of writing, and plans the remedial actions to improve their writing performance (see also Keh, 1990; Kepner, 1991).

Additionally, several studies indicate that the teacher feedback can be on the form and content of students' writing (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 2002; 2003; Krashen, 1984), but the teacher comes to the question of what focus of feedback should be prioritized in EFL writing classes. Ferris (1997) highlights the necessity of feedback on the form, especially grammar, because it highly leads to the most effective revision. The majority of students at different proficiency levels attach a great deal of importance into their writing accuracy (Ferris, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). They expect the teacher to comment on their grammatical errors as they think that no matter how interesting their ideas are, the grammatical errors possibly distract and frustrate the teacher (Ferris, 1997; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). While feedback on the form has gained significant attention, the students also want the teacher to address the content of their writing (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991). It is then believed that the students who receive the teacher feedback, both form-focused feedback and content-focused feedback, show a much greater improvement on the accuracy and overall quality of their writing (Fathman & Whalley, 1990).

On the contrary, some viewpoints contradict the aforementioned heartening findings. For instance, the teacher feedback on the form of students' writing is deemed unclear, inaccurate, and unbalanced (Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985). When this type of feedback is provided, the students for the most part just simply copy the teacher's corrections into their subsequent writing, thus they become passive and are not able to recognize, nor rectify the errors by themselves (Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985). Just as with feedback on the form, many drawbacks have also been found with the practice of providing feedback on the content, as argued by Leki (1990). The teacher may impose his/her ideas on the students' writing where the content is addressed. This conceivably causes a misinterpretation that changes the original meanings that the students intend to express (Jerry, Jan, & Samuel, 2013). While studies by Cohen (1987), Conrad and Goldstein (1999), and Ferris (1995)

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hint that the students find the teacher feedback on their writing confusing and/or think they understand it but in fact, they do not. Even though when the students understand feedback provided by the teacher, they may not know how to use it on their revision (Cohen, 1987; Conrad & Goldstein, 1999).

In spite of the facts that feedback from the teacher has not always been effective, or sometimes been futile (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1981; Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985), the teacher's contribution to providing feedback on the students' writing is still needed, as contended by Ferris (1997). The studies of students' responses to the teacher feedback consistently report that the students treasure feedback given by the teacher and attach much greater importance to it (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995; 1997; Hyland & Hyand, 2006). They are eager to have their grammatical errors to be pointed out (Lee, 2004; 2008; Leki, 1991), but expect the teacher to address the content of their writing as well (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Leki, 1991). Moreover, studies by Lee (2004; 2008) have shown that the students want to receive direct feedback from their teacher (see also Radecki & Swales, 1988), while other studies (e.g. Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994) reveal that the students prefer to have indirect feedback than direct feedback on their writing, where they are encouraged to rectify their own errors (Lalande, 1982).

Regardless of various positions regarding this issue, many researchers still seeks to explore new insights of providing effective feedback due to the fact that L2 writing teachers regularly assess a considerable amount of students' writing (Jerry, Jan, & Samuel, 2013). However, the study on the practice of teacher feedback on the students' writing in Indonesian EFL contexts has not been largely observed. For this reason, this study aims to investigate how the teacher provides feedback on the students' writing and how the students respond to feedback given by the teacher on their writing.

1.2   Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How does the teacher provide feedback on the students' writing?
2. How do the students respond to the teacher feedback on their writing?

1.3   Purposes of the Study

With reference to the research questions, this study is intended to meet the following purposes:
1. To investigate how the teacher provides feedback on the students' writing.
2. To investigate how the students respond to the teacher feedback on their writing.

1.4   Significance of the Study

The present study is believed to offer several theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, the findings of this study are expected to provide new information that contributes to research on the practice of teacher feedback on the students' writing. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to benefit teachers, students, and policy makers. For teachers, the findings are expected to lead them to the development of their professionalism in teaching writing, especially in giving effective feedback. In addition, teachers are expected to seek proper ways of providing feedback to suit their own teaching contexts. For students, the findings are expected to raise their awareness of how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve their writing skills. For policy makers, this study gives information that may be useful for developing the teachers' professionalism, especially to enhance their capacity in improving the students' writing.

1.5   Scope of the Study

This study limits the observation into two issues. The first issue is how the teacher provides feedback on the students' writing. The second issue is how the students respond to the teacher feedback on their writing.

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1.6   Clarification of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding, the following is the clarification of key terms used in the present study.

1.   Teacher feedback is deemed as a critical part in language learning generally and in learning to write particularly. It provides the value-laden information in order to raise the students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in writing, maximize their potential at different stages of writing, and construct their remedial actions (Hyland & Hyand, 2006; Keh, 1990; Kepner, 1991).

2.   Students' writing are written works composed by the students, especially with regard to their style or quality (Gerot & Wignell, 1994).

3.   Form-focused feedback, known as grammar feedback, is feedback provided by the teacher on the students' writing which concentrates on the surface-level issues, such as grammar, vocabulary (i.e. the correct word usage, such as word choice, word form), and mechanics (e.g. capitalization, punctuation, and spelling) (Grami, 2005; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994).

4.   Content-focused feedback is feedback given by the teacher on the students' writing which focuses on the meaning-level issues, including organization (e.g. paragraph unity and coherence) and content itself (e.g. idea generation) (Grami, 2005; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994).

5.   Direct feedback is a kind of feedback where the teacher explicitly addresses the students' errors and gives them the correct answers (Ferris, 2002; Ferris, 2003).

6.   Indirect feedback is a kind of feedback where the teacher highlights the students' errors through circling, underlining, crossing, placing clues, codes, or symbols, and asking them to make corrections themselves (Ferris, 2002; Ferris, 2003).

7.   Marginal feedback is a kind of feedback which is placed in the margins or between the words or sentences of students' writing with the purpose of stressing their errors briefly (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998).

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8. Endnote feedback is a kind of feedback which is placed at the ends of paper to summarize the teacher's perception to the whole students' writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998).

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This thesis paper consists of five chapters. To begin with, Chapter 1 introduces the general issues related to the present study by presenting the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarification of key terms, and organization of the paper. Chapter 2 elaborates the theoretical frameworks that are relevant to this study. Chapter 3 sets out to discuss the methodology used in this study, which covers the research design, research site and participants, data collection, and data analysis. The validity and reliability of the study are also discussed. Chapter 4 deals with the findings and discussions of this study. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of this study and recommendations for further research.

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