TEACHER’S WAYS OF WORKING WITH GIVING FEEDBACK: PRACTICES IN ELT CLASSROOM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract
In relation to assessment, giving feedback is considered a valuable form of input for students to enable them to improve. Feedback in the form of comments may have the purpose to indicate the correct or incorrect responses (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) or it may have other purposes, depending on what the teachers want to focus on with the feedback. Since feedback might be given for different purposes, it might also come in different formats. This means that different forms of feedback might be used for different purposes. The teachers’ ways of giving the feedback may be influenced by their beliefs about the feedback itself. This study aims at investigating primary school teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about the English program in primary schools in Indonesia, focusing on their pedagogical knowledge and how it influences the way they give feedbacks and work with the feedbacks. The study reveals that all teachers believe that feedback is given for correction. This is why most of the teachers focus their giving of feedback on indicating the students’ errors. They know how to indicate correctness or incorrectness is by using codes and most of the teachers also provide the correct answers, and this way of giving correction is called as ‘direct feedback’. By doing this, the teachers expect that the students will be able to learn from the correction.

Keywords: teachers’ knowledge, teacher’s beliefs, feedback, assessment, English language teaching

A. INTRODUCTION
The introduction of English into the primary curriculum has taken place in a context where few teachers are qualified to teach English to young learners. The ways in which programs are established in Indonesia has consequences for program quality. In relation to teacher quality, research about English teaching in primary schools has revealed that most of the teachers in primary schools in Indonesia are not qualified and that the majority of teachers have insufficient command of English to be able to teach effectively (Kasihani & Chodijah, 2002; Mursalim, 1997; Suherdi & Kurniawan, 2005).
The policy to introduce English into primary schools results in situations in which teachers need to develop their pedagogical competence to be able to conduct English teaching. However, most teachers who teach English are not prepared for the teaching they need to do. There are two main problems related to the quality of teachers of English in primary schools: 1) the majority of teachers do not have qualifications in English education, and 2) those teachers who do have an English education background were not trained as primary school English teachers. Teacher education programs in Indonesia currently prepare pre-service English teachers for teaching in junior high and high schools and not in primary schools, because the national curriculum for English language education in Indonesia focuses on junior high and high school students (Yuwono, 2005) Their pedagogical knowledge is not adequate for teaching English as they do not have an English education background relevant for teaching primary students. Teachers often do not have qualifications in teaching English or if they have do them, they are educated to teach secondary rather than primary schools. This means that teachers have not been well prepared for the implementation of the new policy.

This study aims to examine how teachers’ knowledge and beliefs affect what is done in primary school programs in Purwareja Klampok district of Central Java. This paper presents the discussion of teachers understanding of assesmen and more specifically about feedback. Teacher’s understanding about assessmen of English language teaching has implied to their classroom practices. This paper also discusses teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about working with feedback.

**Background**

The lack of qualified teachers in Indonesian primary schools has been documented in a number of studies. A study by Faridi (2011) of teachers of English in Central Java reported that of 200 teachers of English only fifty-six teachers had formal academic qualifications in English education. The remaining one hundred and forty four teachers were formally trained in other majors. This study showed that around seventy-two per cent of teachers of English in Central Java did not have an English
education background. From these findings, it is obvious that there is a problem related to the provision of eligible and qualified teachers of English in primary schools, and this has an impact on the quality of teaching including the assessment quality. This situation does not match the requirements stated in Ministry of National Education’s decree No.16 of 2007 about the standards of academic qualifications and competence of teachers. In this decree, it is stated that teachers of English in primary schools, secondary schools, and high school should have knowledge of many aspects of English (linguistics, discourse, sociolinguistics, and strategies) and should have mastered written and spoken English, both receptive and productive. Teachers are also demanded to be able to carry out and provide qualified assessment. Uncovering teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about assessment is crucial since their knowledge and beliefs influence the way they undertake assessment in practice (Magnusson, et al., 2002; Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). Different individual teachers may hold different notions of assessment. These differences are likely to be influenced by the knowledge they develop as in-service teachers and their experiences in relation to their work as practicing teachers.

Undertaking assessment is very important in the teaching and learning process because it helps teachers to understand students’ achievements and to identify whether or not their teaching is effective for their students. When teachers ask themselves a question: ‘How do I know that my students are learning something effectively?’, Smith and Lovat (2003) notice that teachers are asking themselves a question about assessment. In addition, assessment can be one way for the teachers to motivate their students in learning because some students will be more encouraged to work on their language learning in order to succeed on a test (Marsh, 2008).

This study focuses on how teachers understand assessment and its importance. It focuses on teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about why they assess, how they assess, what they do with the results of assessment, and how they give feedback to their students. This paper presents some descriptions of what teachers do in the classroom related to assessment activities.
because what teachers do in the classroom is evidence for their knowledge and beliefs, especially about assessment.

Method

There were two groups of teacher participants: teachers of English with an English education background (EB), that is qualifications related teaching English, and without an English education background (NEB), that is without relevant qualifications. Interview with the Head of Education of Purwareja Klampok has revealed that in 2010 there were only ten primary schools that employed teachers of English with English education backgrounds out of forty-two primary schools, and each of these ten schools employed only one such teacher. Of these ten teachers, only three had been teaching English for more than three years, the other seven teachers of English had been teaching for three years. The teachers of English in the remaining thirty-three primary schools in this district do not have English education backgrounds.

From the teachers in Purwareja Klampok district, nine teachers from nine different primary schools participated in this study. Most of the teachers were aged between twenty-three and thirty years. Four of the teachers of English had an English education background (EB) and five teachers did not have an English background (NEB). There were thus fewer teachers with an English education background than those who did not have English education backgrounds.

The data for this study was collected through interviews and documentation. The interview data was the main data used in this study and a semi-structured interview design was used to give more opportunities to develop participants’ accounts of their teaching. According to Burns (2000), a semi-structured interview “permits greater flexibility and permits a more valid response from the informant’s perception of reality” (p.424). The interviews were based on a common set of questions but each interview followed up issues as they were raised by the teachers so that their knowledge and beliefs could be explored in detail. The documentation data was used as supplementary data in this study to confirm evidence of teachers’ knowledge and beliefs drawn from the interviews in their practice. The documents used in this
study was students’ worksheet with teachers’ feedback on it. In working with the data in this study, thematic analysis was employed to analyse information in a systematic way in order to make the data understandable (Boyatzis, 1998).

Teacher’s understanding of assessment

Knowledge about assessment may be articulated in various ways. With regard to the teaching of English in primary schools, most of the teachers in this study, regardless of their education backgrounds, hold similar understandings of assessment. They define assessment as testing. These ideas of assessment in terms of testing are presented by these NEB teachers:

[Assessment is a test.] (TPG2/NEB)

[My understanding of assessment is testing.] (TPG1/NEB)
The teachers share the same view of assessment; to assess means to test. The last comment of the NEB teacher reflects her understanding that assessment is the process of giving a mark or score on students’ test. She emphasizes the notion of assessment as relating to scoring the test. The EB teachers also express similar views as NEB teachers about assessment that they conceive of assessment as assessing students through tests and assignments which they consider as two different types of work with different purposes, as the following EB teacher explains:

[A test is an examination, which is more formal and undertaken at a particular time, such as mid semester test or final semester test. Meanwhile, assignments are less formal. They can be given at any time and the objective is for practice so that the students can understand the material.] (TPG3/EB)

The way this teacher differentiates tests and assignments as students’ work to be assessed reflects the teachers’ understanding about assessment itself. The teacher believes that tests and assignments contribute differently to students’ learning; however, both tests and assignments can be used to inform the teacher about how much the students have learned and understood the material. The intention of knowing how much the students have learned from the lesson or the content reflects teacher’ general pedagogical knowledge and belief about
assessment as a way to do evaluation, following (Sikka, et al., 2007) who claim that many teachers undertake assessment to evaluate their students’ learning and get the data about their learning achievement. Moreover, most of the teachers in this study understand any test as an examination which is administered by the teacher or the school at a specific time in order to find out about the students’ progress in learning. The teachers reported that usually the assignments are given in the form of homework, where the students can have more time for completion. This means that students have more time to work on the material and to complete the assignment than they would in a test. Sometimes the teachers may give a task in the classroom to see how much the students have understood of the lesson for that day. These teachers’ practices very much reflect their general pedagogical knowledge about assessment as evaluation. They believe that the students’ ability or inability in completing the assignments given by the teachers can give information about their understanding of the material.

Another EB teacher demonstrates her idea about the problems in current approaches to assessing English.

[The assessment in the form of tests is important, however, for ELT in primary school the test is still not designed appropriately, because there are speaking and listening skills but they are tested in the form of written test. In my opinion, the test needs to be well structured and designed to be able to measure the student’s achievement comprehensively.] (TPW5/EB)

This teacher believes that undertaking assessment by giving the students a test is important; however, she has concerns about the format of the test, which she thinks is still not adequate to assess the full range of students’ learning. She understands that English comprises the four macro skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but she believes that most of the tests used are designed and created in a written form. For her, this format for testing is less adequate to measure the students’ overall skills because this sort of test focuses on and emphasises measuring students’ reading and writing skills not their oral skills. By criticising the forms of tests available, her comments imply that this teacher does not create her own tests, but uses tests made by
other people. That is, she does not design the assessment; she implements it. However, she expects the people who create the test to design better tests, which reflect her understanding of English teaching and learning. She positions herself as a consumer of tests not a creator, and as a consumer, she expects a test to be well designed for her purposes.

These quotes show that there are different understandings conveyed by the teachers about assessment. Five out of the nine teachers define assessment as testing. However, four of them further elaborate this as the activity of allocating marks. When the teachers understand assessment as testing, they are talking about an activity of examining the students’ progress in learning through a formal controlled task done in the classroom at the end of a period of learning (Magnusson, et al., 2002). This understanding describes teachers’ beliefs about assessment as an evaluation of students’ learning. This is why some EB teachers suggest that tests of English for primary students need to be structured and designed more appropriately to be able to do comprehensive evaluation. This suggestion reflects a situation where teachers do not see themselves as designers of assessment. The teacher’s reliance on the tests designed by others (textbooks, education authorities) seems to be related to teachers’ limited subject matter knowledge, especially for the NEB teachers, and their beliefs about those external sources of assessment are more reliable and legitimate to measure the students’ learning. When the teachers understand assessment as allocating marks, they are talking about the process of making judgment about the students’ work. They see marking as a routine activity. Marking includes providing a number which demonstrates the quality of a students’ performance (McMillan, Myran, & Workman, 2002). Currently, there is a dissonance in practice, if teachers believe the teaching of English for young learners must be presented in fun and enjoyable ways, the use of tests seems to disrupt the students’ enjoyment of learning. One EB and all NEB teachers believe that assessment is important, however, that the procedures they use are not appropriate. The test or assessment tasks should be able to assess the students’ language skills not only in reading and writing but also in their speaking and listening skills (c.f.Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009).
Teachers’ beliefs about giving feedback to students

In relation to assessment, giving feedback is considered a valuable form of input for students to enable them to improve. The teachers in this study say that giving feedback is one of the main purposes of assessment. Feedback in the form of comments may have the purpose to indicate the correct or incorrect responses (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) or it may have other purposes, depending on what the teachers want to focus on with the feedback. Since feedback might be given for different purposes, it might also come in different formats. This means that different forms of feedback might be used for different purposes. The teachers’ ways of giving the feedback may be influenced by their beliefs about the feedback itself. The teachers’ comments below describe their knowledge and beliefs related to their way of giving feedback on students’ work.

The following comments reveal teachers’ ideas that indicating errors is the main purpose of giving feedback.

[When correcting the students’ work, I give feedback in the form of improvement or correction of the students’ wrong answers. The purpose is to indicate the errors and to show the students the correct answers.] (TPG2/NEB)

[I give feedback in the form of revision if the students’ answers are incorrect so that the students are aware of their error and they are expected not to make the same mistake in the future.] (TPG3/EB)

From the comments of these teachers, it can be seen that they believe the main activity in giving feedback is indicating errors. When indicating the errors, these teachers also feel it is necessary to provide correction and this correction is expected to help the students to be more aware so as not to make similar errors in the future. The teachers believe that the students will learn from the correction. The teachers’ understanding of the purpose in giving feedback is similar that teachers from both EB and NEB groups who believe that the idea of giving feedback is to indicate errors in order to help the students in locating their errors and to model accuracy.

The teachers know a number of techniques for giving feedback. Most of the feedback given by the teachers is immediate
feedback (Shute, 2008). According to Shute (2008) immediate feedback is “feedback delivered right after a student has responded to an item or problem or right after a quiz or test has been completed” (p.163). In discussing feedback, one NEB teacher shows a strong preference for immediate feedback.

[I immediately correct the students’ errors. If the error occurs in the students’ speaking, I stop him and I correct his error to make the student remember as well as the teacher. If the correction is done after, the teacher might forget it. If the error happens in the written assessment, I write the correct response above or beside the students’ responses.] (TPG2/NEB)

This teacher uses two ways to give feedback on the students’ assessment task based on the assessment formats: verbal and written feedback. These ways of giving feedback are related to the timing of feedback. This teacher explains that she immediately provides verbal correction on the students’ speaking when the error occurs. The teacher does not delay the feedback by giving it another day or after the students finish their speaking practice. He believes that immediate feedback given during the assessment of speaking is effective because it helps both the teacher and the students to remember the correction. Another NEB teacher presents her knowledge about giving feedback as follows:

[To correct the students’ errors in writing I cross out the wrong word and then I write the correction next to the word. When correcting errors in their speaking I usually remind them, have the children repeated the words that were spoken, and if the error still occurs I will fix it immediately.] (TKD2/NEB)

She believes that immediate feedback, in term of correcting the errors, is the best way. In her comment, this teacher is also talking about ‘coding’ (Lee, 2008) the errors. She explains that to indicate the students’ errors she uses a ‘crossing’ code. However, she uses a different technique in giving feedback to the students in their speaking practice. When she finds the students make an error in their speaking, she will ask them to repeat the mispronounced word and to listen carefully to the word they had pronounced, if the student still is not able to correct the error, the teacher would do the correction.
Furthermore, most of the teachers also provide a correct answer to the students’ errors. Ferris (2002) defines such feedback as direct feedback, that is “the teacher providing the correct forms—and the opportunity to revise or recopy the text with the correction is inserted” (p.57). All teachers in this study believe that direct feedback is effective because the students are at the beginning level of English language learning and they might face difficulties in doing self-correction, as this teacher explains:

[I usually provide the correct answers to students' incorrect answers to help them understand the correct answer, so the same errors are not repeated in the future. Because students are just learning English, they need help to fix the error.] (TPG3/EB)

This teacher feels that she needs to provide the correct answers to the students’ errors to help them recognize their errors and know the correct answers. This idea is in agreement with Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) conception about feedback as functioning to indicate whether the response is correct or incorrect. The teacher believes that since the students are still at the beginning level of learning English and they are young learners, they need more support from the teacher in their learning. Giving corrective feedback is a kind of support that enables the learners to improve their learning. This teacher believes that giving corrective feedback is sufficient for the students to be able to understand, interpret, and reflect on their errors and to learn from them. From the teacher’s direct correction, the students can recognize their errors and know the correct answers and they are expected not to make a similar error in the future. What the teachers do in relation to giving direct feedback to the students’ errors is in agreement with Ferris’ (2002) conception that direct feedback is beneficial because it makes them aware from the very beginning stages that they need to be careful of their work and that accuracy counts.

However, five out of nine teachers do not write the correction to the students’ errors in giving written feedback. They just indicate the errors by putting the ‘slash’ code.

All EB teachers put forward the idea of giving positive feedback in the form of compliments, which can be considered as a form of personal feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This
personal feedback usually is intended more for engaging or enhancing the students’ self-efficacy. Quite often, the personal feedback is not related to the task, but it might influence the students’ motivation (Tsui, 1995).

This EB teacher below presents an idea of giving feedback that is aimed at encouraging students.

[Feedback is also given through comments on the students’ work, sometimes the comments are to correct the students’ errors so that students know the wrong answers and know the correction or sometimes I give compliments directly to the student who can complete the task well in order to be more motivated, I usually say 'good' or 'excellent' or 'very good.'] (TPG3/EB)

With regard to the way of giving feedback, this EB teacher believes that giving feedback may benefit the students in two ways; learning from the error when the teacher provides a corrected response and increasing motivation when the teacher praises the students’ performance. Giving feedback in the form of compliments both written and verbal is important when considering the affective aspect of students’ learning (Tsui, 1995) as compliments can be very encouraging for students. This EB teacher believes that expressing compliments to the students is a positive way to value their work and it leads to them being more motivated in learning. For this teacher, feedback is aimed at commenting not only on errors but also on the students’ success. This teacher believes that using some simple expressions of judgement such; good, excellent, or very good are useful to enhance the students’ motivation. All of the EB and three of the NEB teachers practice giving similar positive personal feedback in their class, although the NEB teachers appear to do this less frequently compared to the EB teachers.

Another EB teacher comments:

[I give feedback in two forms: written and oral. Usually I give comment on the errors made by the students in their assessment or comment on the errors that the students make when speaking. I also give positive feedback to students such as giving compliments although their work is not yet satisfactory, because for me the most important thing is that students do not]
The two different approaches in giving feedback are used by this teacher for different forms of assessments. Commonly she gives comments as the feedback to the students, and the comments may come verbally or in written form. She explains that a verbal comment is given when the students do speaking activities. There is an important issue here, as this teacher believes that it is important to consider the students’ psychological condition when giving feedback. The students need to get positive encouragement to maintain their motivation in learning. She believes that just indicating errors and showing the correction, feedback should also be performed to encourage the students in learning. This way of giving feedback is understood as feedback about self (Barry & King, 1998) which occurs when the teacher comments or gives praise about the students’ effort in completing particular tasks. Hattie & Timperley (2007) argue that feedback about self is less effective compared to other types of feedback because it does not give information to students in relation to the tasks they perform. However, they also believe that feedback about self in the form of praise directed to students’ effort in relation to their ability to complete the tasks helps the teacher to enhance students’ self-efficacy. This teacher feels that she needs to give positive feedback even though the students could not achieve complete success in their assessment task because she believes that keeping the students motivated is important. She understands that appreciating students’ efforts in completing assessment tasks is as equally significant as appreciating their achievements.

To conclude, from the discussion about the teachers’ ways of giving feedback on students’ assessment, there are a number of important points to highlight. All teachers, regardless of their education background, seem to believe that the feedback is provided for two main purposes: indicating errors and helping the students to identify the error in order that they can learn from the correction. These understandings relate to what Hattie & Timperley (2007) call feedback about the task. Feedback about the task is also called corrective feedback (Ferris, 2002), where the feedback is given in order to correct the students’ errors in their
work. Ferris (2002, 2005) calls this form of correction direct correction, which means that the teachers provide the correct forms of the answers for students’ errors. The teachers’ understandings about feedback influence their practices in giving feedback. The feedback they give is focused on the students’ errors because they believe that this kind of feedback helps the students improve their learning and avoids re-producing similar errors in their future learning. The practice in giving feedback is also reflecting teachers’ knowledge. Teachers’ general pedagogical knowledge about giving feedback constructs the purpose of indicating errors and helping the students to identify errors to make improvements. They mostly treat feedback as immediate feedback, feedback about task and feedback about self. All of the EB teachers and four of the NEB teachers also believe that they need to give compliments or praise as feedback to their students, although they do not do it regularly. Hattie & Timperley (2007) refer to this kind of feedback as feedback about self, where the teachers give comments such as “good, well done, and excellent” and other positive expressions. This belief relates to Tsui’s (1995) argument that such feedback about self can enhance the students’ learning motivation. It becomes clear to say that the teachers’ knowledge of this value of feedback about self leads him to give praise or compliment as a way of showing appreciation to students and to boost their motivation.

The teachers seem to understand that the assessment types influence the way they give the feedback. Some teachers tend to give feedback immediately when the students make errors in their speaking practice. These teachers believe that immediate feedback given in a verbal activity is effective and give a number of reasons for this. They believe that immediate feedback prevents teachers forgetting the errors made by the students. It is also done because the teachers believe that feedback is most effective when given as close to the errors occurring as possible. In giving feedback on written work, the teachers use particular codes to indicate correct or incorrect responses on the students’ work. The ‘tick’ is used to indicate correctness and the ‘slash’ is used to indicate incorrectness. This reflects the teachers’ belief that the main purpose of feedback is to indicate errors. Overall,
the teachers believe that feedback is given primarily to indicate errors and these are shown by specific codes.

Conclusion
All teachers believe that every assessment task has different purposes. There are two main understandings of assessments: formal assessment, which includes tests, and daily assessment, which includes assignments and other tasks. The assignments are aimed at gaining knowledge of the students’ progress in learning. The results of the students’ performance tasks and assignments helps the teachers to identify their students’ learning difficulties, as a result, the teachers can make changes in their teaching to improve students’ achievement. All teachers in this study know that assessment is a valuable means of gaining insights into learning and therefore they give daily assessment, such as homework and in-class assignments as a component of formative assessment.

All teachers believe that feedback is given for correction. This is why most of the teachers focus their giving of feedback on indicating the students’ errors. They know how to indicate correctness or incorrectness is by using codes and most of the teachers also provide the correct answers, and this way of giving correction is called as ‘direct feedback’. By doing this, the teachers expect that the students will be able to learn from the correction. They know that assessment can be used to inform further teaching and learning and they believe it is a motivator for the students to improve. In this case, the teachers believe that feedback is given for further learning. However, some of the teachers believe that instead of only indicating errors, feedback can also be given in the form of praise or compliments. The teachers believe that positive expressions such as ‘good’, ‘well done’ or ‘excellent’ can enhance the students’ motivation and their self-efficacy.

Overall, the teachers all seem to understand assessment, as assessment of learning, where the assessment is designed to get data on students’ learning achievement. They have procedural knowledge of how to conduct testing, scoring and reporting achievement. They know that the purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning and provide accountability to
stake holder. They know that an individual teacher alone cannot design an effective standardized test according to what is expected in their context. They know that their knowledge of English limits their capacity to design good quality formative and summative assessment. These teachers knowledge and beliefs about the purpose of assessment is in agreement with one of the ideas of assessment proposed by Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) that assessment is intended to “serve the purposes of accountability or of ranking or of certifying competence” (p.69) and their practices reflect such beliefs.

References


