

Discovering the Effectiveness of Direct Versus Indirect Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners' Writings: a case of an Iranian Context

MomenYaseen M.Amin

University of Human Development, Iraq
Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Cyprus

Saeid Saadatmanesh

Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Cyprus

Abstract

Building on Ellis's (2006) study of types of written corrective feedbacks (CFs) in second language acquisition (SLA), this study seeks to account for investigating the extent to which Ellis (2008) typology of options for correcting linguistic errors (in this study direct/indirect corrective feedback) would be more effective in reducing Dulay, Burk, and Krashen (1982) taxonomy of errors among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. In so doing, twenty one homogeneous learners were selected and were divided into two experimental groups (direct and indirect corrective feedback) and one control group. The results demonstrated that those who received feedback outperformed the control group and there was no significant difference between the experimental groups.

Keywords: direct corrective feedback; indirect corrective feedback; omission error.

Introduction

One major problem that has provoked the researchers' minds is how to provide students with effective feedback, so that it could produce a positive effect on students' writing processes and best contribute to the improvement of the overall, long-term quality of their writing. This research has tried to find out the effectiveness of two types of corrective feedback (direct and indirect) on EFL learners' omission errors. In fact, the researcher has tried to investigate the error of omission that the students make, and try to investigate the better solution (direct/indirect corrective feedback). Both Dulay, Burk, and Krashen taxonomy of errors, and Ellis's study of types of written corrective feedbacks (CFs) in second language acquisition (SLA), mentioned bellow, has been used as material to collect the data.

Category	Description	Example
Omission	The absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance.	She sleeping
Addition	The presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed utterances.	We did'nt went there.
Misinformations	The use of the wrong form of the morpheme of the structure.	The dog ated the chicken.
Misordering	The incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.	What daddy is doing?

Table2 :A surface strategy taxonomy of errors (categories and examples taken from Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982).

Type of CF	Description
1) Direct CF	The teacher provide the student with the correct form
2) Indirect CF	The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.
a) Indicating + locating the error	a) This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text.
b) Indication only	b) This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.
3) Metalinguistic CF	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue as to the nature of the error.
a) Use of error code	a) Teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww $\frac{1}{4}$ wrong word; art $\frac{1}{4}$ article).
b) Brief grammatical descriptions	b) Teacher numbers errors in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.
4) The focus of the feedback	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.
a) Unfocused CF	
b) Focused CF	
5 Electronic feedback	The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.

6 Reformulation	This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.
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Table 3: *A typology of corrective feedback types (Ellis, 2008)*

Theoretical background

After Truscott published article in 1996 entitled as: "The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes", giving corrective feedback has been of high interest among different scholars and researchers. Regarding the efficacy of the written corrective feedback, there are contradictions of opinions among the researchers. He strongly believes that giving written corrective feedback may remove the errors in a piece of writing, but it will not remove the new errors in new drafts and it does not lead to acquisition. Ferris(1999) opposed this claim and argued that clear and consistent correction is effective. In further arguments, He also believed that his arguments were premature and mentioned that the growing researches about WCF demonstrate that WCF is effective. The former one criticized the latter of lacking evidence in support of her contention. In his most recent survey of the written corrective feedback research, The former mentioned that correction could also be harmful for students' ability to write correctly (p. 270). Furthermore, He claimed that there is no place for grammar correction in writing and it should be abandoned. Another opposite view to him is a researcher who conducted a research in this area and demonstrated that the teachers believe that WCF could assist the student improve the accuracy of their writings.

As defense and by analyzing some of studies by three other researchers, they concluded that there is no convincing evidence in those researchers that demonstrate error correction ever assists student writers improves the accuracy of their writing. However, students themselves want to receive different corrective feedbacks to improve their writing skills.

Two other researchers reviewed some studies in the area WCF. Their studies were divided into studies with and without a control group. All five of the studies without a control group demonstrated that WCF improved grammatical accuracy. However, as opposite side researchers has pointed out, such studies do not prove the permanent effectiveness of CF, because other factors might have affected the improvement of the learners. Furthermore, in order to improve the effectiveness of CF, a control group is needed. Two other researchers (who are mentioned in the hard copy) reviewed seven such studies. However, these studies deal with different kinds of problems. Some of them do not do not examine the effect of CF on the new pieces of writings and just shed light on the second drafts.

Other researches regarding WCF are mentioned in the following sentences. It was investigated that the type of feedback (direct, explicit written feedback and student–researcher 5 minute individual conferences; direct, explicit written feedback only; no corrective feedback) which was given to 53 adult migrant students on three types of error (prepositions, the past simple tense, and the definite article) resulted in improved accuracy in new pieces of writing over a 12 week period.

Direct and indirect corrective feedback

High number of studies has distinguished between direct and indirect feedback strategies and investigated the extent to which they could be effective and facilitate learning to write correctly. When the teachers identify the errors and try to correct them explicitly, directive feedback occurs, and when the teachers indicate those errors, but do not correct them, indirect feedback. Additionally, there is further distinction between those that do or do not use a code. Coded feedback refers to the exact location of an error, and types of errors are involved with a code (for example, PS means an error in the use or form of the past simple tense). Uncoded feedback happens when the teacher underlines the error and correct it. Contrary to studies that reveal both students and teachers tends to exploit direct corrective feedbacks (Ferris & Roberts, 2001), several studies demonstrate that indirect corrective feedback is more effective in improving the accuracy of learners drafts of writings. Therefore no correlational analysis happened.

On the other hand, the studies by the other researchers did have control groups. In their researches the students received direct feedback and the errors were underlined. These groups were compared with those who did not receive any corrective feedback. They examined the effects of three different feedback treatments (errors marked with codes; errors underlined but not otherwise marked or labelled; no error feedback) and investigated that both error feedback groups significantly outperformed the no feedback control group, but, they found that there were no significant differences between the group given coded feedback and the group not given coded feedback. Furthermore, there should be mentioned that they investigated text revisions rather than new pieces of writing over time.

Theoretical issues that Truscott believe in

Truscott claims derive from the theories that simple correction of error will not enhance the learners' knowledge about the corrected form of the error. This theory contradicts the fact that learners who notice the difference between target-like input (be it oral or WCF) and their non target-like output are able to change and modify it as target like output.

The aims of the study

The present study aims at investigating the extent to which direct vs. indirect corrective feedback could be effective in removing the EFL learners' emission errors.

Methodology

Design

There are twenty one participants in this quasi-experimental research. There is a pretest and a posttest and treatment. The data itself is qualitative but the data analysis is quantitative. The time is not the matter in this research, therefore the research is considered as cross-sectional.

Context

The research is conducted in the context of Iran. The institutional context in which the research is conducted is the “Iran English School” in the City of Arak, located in the west center of Iran.

Participants

The total number of participants in this research is sixty five. In order to homogenize the participants, they were given a test of nelson and the most homogeneous one who were twenty one were selected for this research.

Instrumentation

As mentioned previously, in order to homogenize the learners a test of nelson was given to the students. In the pretest writing draft, the students were supposed to write a paragraph about spring. In the post test they were supposed to chose from other three seasons (fall, winter, and summer) and write another writing draft (after they have been given treatment).

Procedure

The research is implemented in the context of Iran. In order to make sure of the general proficiency of the subjects, a test of nelson has been given to thirty nine EFL learners in English school of Jihad in Arak. Arak is a city located in the west-center of Iran. Twenty one students who were most homogeneous participated in the study. In order for the gender and age not to interfere in the study, male students who aged between sixteen to eighteen have been chosen for the study. In order to homogenize the students in terms of writing skills, the teacher gave the students a writing assignment. The difference among the students mean scores was not significant.

In this research, there are two experimental groups and one control group, and there will be four sessions: pre test session, omission error identification in students’ writings, treatment, and a post test session. In the first session (pre test), the students were given a writing assignment about spring. They were supposed to exploit past, present, and future tense sentences in their writings, ten sentences for each tense.

The researcher and the teacher (table 1) contact with each other through email. The email address and the writing samples will be attached in the appendixes.

Group	Teacher	n
Direct Corrective Feedback	Davoodabadi, H.	24
Direct Corrective Feedback	Davoodi Nasr, H.	21
Control	Davoodi Nasr, H.	20

Table 1: *Group Distribution*

Data Collection and Material

The students' writings in pretest and posttest will be scanned and emailed to the researcher through email. Then the scores of two experimental groups and one control group will be correlated using one-way ANOVA.

Data analysis

In order to analyse the data, the researcher gathered the qualitative data and coded them to turned them into quantitative and analyse them. In this case the researcher has conducted analytic scoring and has chosen omission errors. One way ANOVA has been exploit to get to the results.

Descriptive Statistics							
	N	Total num. of errors mean (pretest)	Total num. of errors (mean posttest)	Omission errors (mean pretest)	Omission errors (mean posttest)	Std. Deviation	Variance
DCF	7	14.52	7.28	11.54	6.19	0.84	0.7
ICF	7	12.46	4.19	10.41	3.88	0.51	0.26
Control group	7	15.73	12.09	13.02	10.37	0.69	0.47
Valid N (listwise)	7						

Table 2: *Descriptive Analysis of Variables*

Figure 1: Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Correlations		
	<i>P</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Control and ex1 and ex2</i>	1.98	.266*
<i>Sig.</i>	1.98	.000
<i>N</i>	21	21
<i>Ex1 and ex2</i>	1.21	1
<i>Sig.</i>	.000	.546
<i>N</i>	21	21

Table 3: Analysis of Variance in two experimental groups and one control group
According to table 3 there is a significant difference between control and each of experimental groups and there is not any significant difference between the experimental 1 and experimental 2.

Results and conclusion

As mentioned previously one way ANOVA has been exploited to demonstrate whether the differences among variable is significant or not. In table 2 the descriptive analysis is mentioned. Accordingly, the number of omission of errors has decreased in both experimental group but in ICF the difference is more than the DCF one. The low standard deviation of the three groups emphasizes the homogeneity of the groups. According to table 3, the difference between the control group participants is significant with each of experimental groups. Therefore, the two groups who received direct and indirect corrective feedback outperformed those who did not receive feedback. In addition, there was not any difference between the performance of the two experimental groups.

Implications for further studies

There are many ideas regarding effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback in learners' writing accuracy. This study focused on one type of error called omission error. This type of error is one of the common errors that happen in the writings of the learners. This research introduced two solutions to control those errors. The first one is directive feedback and the second one is indirect feedback. But according to the results of the research indirect feedback is advised more. However, the statistics displayed no significant difference between DCF and

ICF. Students will benefit from the research either. They will not continue making the same errors in their second and third drafts and would progress with a higher speed.

Limitations and delimitations

One of the limitations of the study is the other factors of indirect corrective feedback namely metacognitive CF, the focus of feedback, electronic feedback, and reformulation that could also be taken into considerations. Another limitation to be notice is the extent to which gender effects the results of the study. Because of the lack of participants, this issue has been left for other researchers who are interested in this area.

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