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EFL STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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Abstract: Written corrective feedback given by the teacher on students' essays plays a significant role in the development of language and writing skills of second language (L2) learners. Whether explicit (direct) feedback or implicit (indirect) feedback should be given to students' errors in essays, and which of these is more beneficial to learners has been a concern of L2 writing researchers for some time. However, the issue of learners' preferences on the types of written corrective feedback has been overlooked. This paper aims to investigate Turkish speaking English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' ideas about explicit and implicit written corrective feedback. The authors attempt to answer the following questions:

1- What are Turkish secondary school students' attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language?
2- What are their preferences in relation to two different types of written corrective feedback (explicit and implicit)?

In order to shed light on the students' opinions and preferences in terms of written corrective feedback, a study was conducted at a Turkish state secondary school in Istanbul. Seventy (70) seventh-grade female students, whose ages were around 12, participated in this study. Half of the students received explicit feedback on their essays, while the other half received implicit feedback. Students' opinions were collected via a questionnaire comprised of nine Likert-type items and one open-ended question during the fall semester of 2016-2017 academic year. The closed items were analyzed by conducting descriptive statistics, while qualitative data analysis was used for the answers to the open-ended item. Results reveal that students in both groups preferred one type of written corrective feedback more than the other type. Various factors that might play a role in this result as well as suggestions for EFL teachers will be discussed.

Keywords: L2 writing, EFL learners, explicit feedback, implicit feedback

Introduction and Literature Review

Feedback to written work is an essential part of writing activities in second language classes and is an area of attention for many teachers. Feedback has been examined and studied for a considerable amount of time by many researchers as well. Whether feedback makes learners better writers and the influence of different kinds of feedback have been the concern of researchers. Feedback in writing has been divided into two main types. First of them is *explicit corrective feedback*, where there is explicit correction of the L2 writers' work by the teacher. Second type of feedback in writing is *implicit corrective feedback,* where learners are expected to make an inference and self-correction about the errors based on the teacher's comments and signs (Bitchener, Cameron & Young, 2005)

There are limited studies on students' reflections on explicit and implicit written corrective feedback types in the area, and most of these studies were carried out with adult learners. There are very few studies conducted in a Turkish context with secondary state school EFL students with low proficiency levels. Based on the lack of

research on this issue, this paper aims to investigate Turkish speaking EFL students' ideas about explicit and implicit written corrective feedback.

Learner Attitudes Towards Different Types of Written Corrective Feedback

Although the need for written corrective feedback and effectiveness of the different feedback types have been widely researched, learners' attitudes towards and preferences for different types of written corrective feedback have not been researched extensively.

Available research shows that learners are pleased with teacher written corrective feedback and they have positive attitudes towards it (Hosseni, 2015; Leki, 1991; Zhang, 1995). However, in these studies, which type of written corrective feedback is more preferable by the students is not specified. Rotim (2015) asserts that students favour written corrective feedback and state that it helps their learning and is influential on their language acquisition.

With regard to this issue, Kalra and Tangkiensirisin (2016) studied students' reflections on the feedback type they received. They expressed that whilst students who received direct corrective feedback were quite content and asserted that direct written teacher corrective feedback led to improvement in their business writings, the second group who received indirect corrective feedback claimed that they felt confused about the feedback and held negative feelings towards it. Atmaca (2016) who conducted a study with 34 teachers and 34 students about their perceptions of written corrective feedback in a Turkish context asserted that some of the students preferred explicit written corrective feedback to implicit written corrective feedback. They especially indicated that they would rather have content and organizational feedback on their written products. In Chandler (2003), although students would rather choose explicit written corrective feedback due to its easiness and rapidity, they acknowledge that they benefit more from self-correction. Lee (2005) claims that students' preferences on different types of written corrective feedback have not attracted as much attention as the efficacy of different feedback types on student writings. In her research dating to 2005, Lee found out that students preferred their teachers to correct all of their errors rather than giving implicit written corrective feedback. Besides, students hold the idea that it is the teachers' responsibility to correct errors. Kahraman and Yalvaç (2015) who conducted a study with Turkish university students revealed results showing that while students prefer implicit written corrective feedback in the first drafts and try to do self-correction, they would rather have explicit written corrective feedback in the final drafts in case they could not find answers to their errors on their own.

Research Questions

Erel and Bulut (2007) also state the necessity for further research on types of written corrective feedback from students' perspectives and reactions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the attitudes of the students to writing in English and their preferences on explicit and implicit written corrective feedback types. The specific research questions are:

 1- What are Turkish secondary school students' attitudes towards writing in English as a foreign language?
 2- What are their preferences in relation to two different types of written corrective feedback (explicit and implicit)?

Methodology

Context and Participants

This study took place in a vocational state secondary school located in Istanbul, Turkey. In order to ensure homogeneity, two similar seventh grade female student classes out of eleven seventh grade classes were chosen.

Class H was comprised of 33 female students; 32 of them were Turkish citizens, one of them was a Syrian student who had migrated to Turkey four years ago. Class K contained 37 female students all of whom were Turkish citizens. All of the participating students were around 12 years old and were pre-intermediate level English learners.
In both classes, except the Syrian student, all students had been taking English lessons since fourth grade, where they received two hours of English lessons in a week. At fifth and sixth grades, they had three hours of English lessons in a week. During the year of data collection, at seventh grade, they had four hours of English lessons per

week. The Syrian student stated that she had been taking English lessons since first grade, however, she had forgotten most of what she learned due to personal reasons.

Both classes had numerous non-native English teachers in fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The students were not exposed to organized and detailed writing instruction prior to 7th grade. At the time of the data collection which is the third month of the term of seventh grade, both groups had the same non-native English teacher, who is also the first researcher of this study (henceforth Teacher S). Teacher S had graduated from the Foreign Language Education department of a competitive state university in Istanbul and had more than two years of experience in teaching primary and secondary state schools.

Data Collection

The data collection started in the middle of the fall semester and lasted for four weeks. The research process began with the assignment of a writing topic to the students in both classes and provision of fifty minutes for the students to write. The students worked for fifty minutes, and Teacher S collected all the essays at the same time. During week two, Teacher S analysed the essays, giving explicit corrective feedback to essays of Class H, while giving implicit corrective feedback to essays of Class K. One week later, she distributed the first drafts back to students and assigned them to write the second drafts by taking the corrections into consideration. At this stage, fifty minutes of class time were allocated to the students to write their second drafts. At the end of fifty minutes, both first and second drafts of essays were collected from the students. During the third week, Teacher S distributed a questionnaire to the students. The questionnaire was comprised of nine Likert-scale statements and one open-ended question to elicit students' ideas and preferences on two different types of written corrective feedback. Even though there were 70 students in both classes, a total of 46 students answered the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Open-ended and closed items were analysed differently. For the nine Likert-Scale items, reliability analyses were run and the results showed that the questionnaire has internal consistency. Then, a test of normality was conducted and normal distribution was found. Therefore, an independent samples t-test was applied using the statistical data analysis program. For the item analyses, nine statements have been grouped into three main headings:

- Students' attitudes towards writing in English
- Students' attitudes towards implicit written corrective feedback
- Students' attitudes towards explicit written corrective feedback

For the analysis of the open ended question, all student responses have been read, coded and grouped under relevant themes. Five major categories were deduced from the data which are the main highlights from the student answers. For each feedback type, these categories are 'awareness raising benefit of the feedback', 'dealing with that type of feedback', 'long-term effect of that feedback type', 'positive attitudes to that feedback type', and 'negative attitudes to that feedback type'.

Students' answers for these five main categories were counted and frequencies in the form of percentages have been calculated. During the analysis of the open ended question data, two raters worked together in order to ensure inter-rater reliability, with 90% consensus rate.

Results

First of all, there were two Likert-type items under 'Students' Attitudes to Writing in English' category. Mean scores for the explicit feedback group is 8.38 and for the implicit feedback group 9.40. In other words, the mean scores of the students' attitudes to writing in English is around 9 out of 12, which means that the students' are mostly positive (74%) about writing in the L2. It is also seen that the scores of the two groups are quite similar. There is no statistically significant difference between the two groups, which means that students who received different types of feedback have similar attitudes towards writing in English.

Secondly, four statements existed in the 'Students' Preferences for Implicit Feedback' category. In this category, scores are 15.07 and 15.80 for explicit and implicit written corrective feedback groups respectively out of a total

score of 24. This means that students' preference for implicit feedback is around 64% positive. Moreover, t-test results show that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups on this issue.

Finally, three statements were related to 'Students' Preferences for Explicit Feedback' category. The mean scores are 14.23 for the explicit feedback group and 13.90 for the implicit feedback group. It can be stated that around 78% of students in both groups rated explicit feedback positively. In addition, the comparison between the two groups' ratings did not yield any statistically significant differences.

In conclusion, it can be said that explicit and implicit feedback groups share similar ideas about writing in English, and implicit and explicit feedback types. The general attitude towards writing in English seems to be positive for most students in both groups. It can also be expressed that explicit feedback is slightly more preferred compared to implicit feedback by both feedback groups. Detailed results can be seen in Table1.

Table 1. Attitudes of feedback groups compared

Themes	Feedback Groups	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Students' Attitudes to Writing English (2 items)	Explicit F. Gr	26	8,3846	2,95401	44	,207
	Implicit F. Gr	20	9,4000	2,23371	43,995	,191
Students' Preferences for Implicit Feedback (4 items)	Explicit F. Gr	26	15,0769	3,79392	44	,625
	Implicit F. Gr	20	15,8000	6,13532	29,858	,647
Students' Preferences for Explicit Feedback (3 items)	Explicit F. Gr	26	14,2308	3,52486	44	,750
	Implicit F. Gr	20	13,9000	3,38573	41,805	,749

Qualitative analysis methods were used for the open ended question. First of all, two independent raters read all the answers and formed categories from the students' answers. Similar categories were then combined under main headings and themes. The three most frequently mentioned themes are 'awareness raising benefit of the feedback', 'dealing with that type of feedback', and long-term effect of that feedback type'. The results can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Opinions about feedback types

Ideas	About Implicit Feedback		About Explicit Feedback	
	n	f (%)	n	f (%)
Awareness raising benefit	21	45%	9	20%
Develop strategies	35	76%	4	8%
Long term effect	4	8%	14	30%

Out of 46 students who answered the open-ended item, 21 students (45%), mentioned the awareness raising benefit of implicit written corrective feedback ("I notice my error"). However, half as many, only nine students (20%) mentioned the awareness raising benefit of explicit written corrective feedback. 35 students out of 46 (76%) stated that they tried to correct their errors in various self-discovered ways and developed strategies when they received implicit feedback ("I look for ways to correct my errors"). Yet, very few, only four students (8%) mentioned the strategic development effect of explicit feedback. Participants also stated the long term influence of written corrective feedback in their answers to the open-ended question ("I try not to repeat my errors"). Only four students (8%) highlighted this feature of implicit feedback while this feature was attributed to explicit feedback by almost three times more, 14 students (30%).

Discussion and Implications

The results of the quantitative data present that students in both feedback groups have a high level of positive attitude towards writing in English. Although their proficiency level is low, they are quite enthusiastic about writing in English. This result might motivate English teachers who work with lower level students to do more writing activities. Even if the number of errors are quite high in students' essays, their effort and willingness to write in English is praiseworthy. Besides, practice may make their writing skills better.

Secondly, it was found from the questionnaire ratings that both groups of students gave higher credit to explicit written corrective feedback. This result is in line with the findings of Chandler (2003), Lee (2005), Kalra and Tangkiensirisin (2016) and Atmaca (2016) whose participants also favoured explicit written corrective feedback more. Students in both implicit and explicit feedback groups seem to be in favour of explicit feedback. This might stem from the reason that their proficiency level is low, thus they might find explicit WCF more helpful and easier to them and that they might feel confused when they get implicit feedback.

According to the analysis of the open-ended item, it was noticed that although students prefer getting explicit feedback to their written work, they are aware that implicit feedback leads to more awareness, exploration, autonomy and self-improvement. This result coincides with the findings of Chandler (2003) who claimed that even though students prefer explicit feedback because of its rapidity and easiness, students accept that they learn more from implicit feedback and benefit more from self-correction. Therefore, it can be inferred from the results that even if students would rather have explicit written corrective feedback for their essays, they find implicit written corrective feedback more effective in terms of awareness raising and discovery and implementation of strategies to correct their errors.

All of these findings suggest that teachers need to create a balance between explicit and implicit written corrective feedback in their EFL lessons. In addition, students need to be trained in terms of various strategies to deal with implicit feedback.

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