THE EFFECT OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON STUDENTS' WRITING*

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Abstract

The role of written corrective feedback (WCF) in language classrooms has been a controversial issue among researchers over two decades. While many researchers supported the necessity of WCF in L2 writing, some researchers argued that it is ineffective and should not be provided. This paper intends to determine whether direct written feedback facilitates L2 student writing by reviewing two consecutive essays of 60 first grade English Language Teaching trainees. The essays of the trainees were written in "Advanced Reading and Writing" courses in the second semester of academic year. Direct and indirect feedback given to essays were examined and reviewed separately. The number of the student corrections between the students' first and second drafts after direct written feedback was analyzed. The study examines two research questions: (1) Do students make fewer errors in their second essay assignments after having received direct feedback on their first essay assignments? (2) Is there any considerable improvement in the accuracy and fluency of the second essay assignments? The findings demonstrate that most of the students managed to correct their errors after receiving direct corrective feedback and the improvement was observed mainly on accuracy of the students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Whether teachers should correct errors made by students in second language L2 writing sessions has been debated for decades. Researchers have sought answers to many questions related to written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 writing. For instance: Does it facilitate or block writing? (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2007; Truscott, 1996, 2007); Should WRF be given directly or indirectly? (Ferris, 1997, 2001, 2006; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ellis, 1998); Does the students expect WRF? (Lee, 2004). Though several meta-analyses have examined the impacts of corrective feedback, their findings have been contradictory, and there is still a gap in the literature for profound studies.

Truscott (1996)'s review article in *Language Learning* claimed that error correction does not have any effect on the improvement of L2 writing. He stated that the contribution of error correction to student writing cannot be proven, and the previous studies are unreliable since they have not included control groups. He strongly argued that in the absence of a control group, it is not possible to relate the achievements to only correction. Furthermore, Truscott stated that all forms of error correction in L2 student writing are not only ineffective but potentially harmful and should be abandoned (Chandler, 2003). Ferris disputed this claim, indicating that clear, selective, prioritized corrective feedback can help student writing since some students need and want teachers' feedback. Ferris (1999) maintained that Truscott's arguments of inefficacy of error correction due to lack of proper studies were premature.

After Truscott and Ferris raised concern over written corrective feedback in L2 writing, discussions of the contrast between direct and indirect error correction erupted. On one hand, advocates of indirect feedback claimed that students need to self-edit their writing

in order to promote acquisition (e.g. Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, p. 415). On the other hand, direct CF has been claimed to be more detailed in terms of solving complex errors. Chandler (2003) highlighted the necessity of demonstrating students their errors and corrections clearly.

The only point that both Truscott and Ferris agree in their studies was that further research to provide necessary data is necessary in order to properly acknowledge whether error correction can improve the writing accuracy of L2.

1.1 Literature Review

The role of WCF in language classrooms has been searched for over two decades. However, there are still clashes in literature. Many researchers supported the necessity of WCF in L2 writing (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al., 2005; Chandler, 2003; Lalande, 1984). On the other side, some researchers argued that it should not be provided (Semke, 1984; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007). While the arguments over the necessity and unnecessity of WCF have been maintaining among the researchers, some claimed that published studies needed to be reviewed in order to spot the inconsistencies and variations in them (Bruton, 2009; Ferris, 2004; Russell & Spada, 2006).

Studies that did not regard error feedback as an effective factor for L2 student writing development need to be worked through. Semke (1984) carried out a 10-week study in which students were divided into four groups: direct correction; coded feedback with self-correction; comments on content only; direct correction and comments on content. As a result of the study, she detected no significant difference between the outcomes of three correction groups and the comments group. She concluded that the effect of error correction may not have been due to different correction types but also to the quantity of writing sessions. Ferris (2004) stood up against this study stating that Semke (1984) did not report absolute gains, only the final comparisons, i.e relative gains were included. Sheppard (1992) compared the gain of two groups by providing individual conferences about their errors to control group and providing individual conferences about meaning to content group. He pointed out that the only significant difference between the groups on the percentage of correct punctuation. This study was criticized by Ferris (2003, 2004) stating that the instruction included student-teacher conferences.

On the other hand, several studies investigating the impact of error correction on student writing have obtained important conclusions. For instance, Ferris (1999, 2004) stated that most students need and want to be corrected by their teachers; therefore, error correction cannot be excluded from L2 writing classrooms. In Chandler's study (2003) based mostly on corrections and rewriting, she concluded that teachers should give error correction feedback and require students to make correction in order to increase accuracy in student writing. This was followed by Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) in their study on the effects of correction and conferences on the development of three aspects of English: prepositions, simple past tense and definite articles. They found that the combination of full, extensive written feedback and individual conference feedback improved students' usage of past simple tense and the definite articles with greater accuracy. Also Russell and Spada (2006) intended to examine the effectiveness of corrective feedback on second language grammar through meta-analysis including oral and written feedback. They concluded that corrective feedback is effective with a large effect size (1.16). Another recent study demonstrated the short term and long term learning impacts of error correction on students' writing accuracy (Van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2011).

At this point, it is necessary to mention the studies about teacher autonomy. Kumaravadivelu (1994) and Richards (1998) supported teacher autonomy noting that the teachers actively construct their own personal theory of teaching. Surprisingly, Truscott (1999) who denied the effectiveness of WCF in his studies has suggested that "teachers must make decisions about what to do –and what not to do- in their classes". Favourably, in their study on teachers' autonomy in L2 writing, Evans, Hartshorn and Tuioti (2010) claim that corrective feedback has an important impact on what learners achieve and that there is a correlation between WCF and linguistic accuracy.

1.2. Effectiveness of Different Kinds of WCF on Student Writing in L2 Classrooms

A great number of studies have also been investigating whether some feedback types are more likely to result in improved accuracy than others for decades. To review these studies, it is seen that two major written corrective feedback types have been examined and overly discussed: direct or explicit feedback and indirect corrective feedback.

The first one, direct or explicit feedback may be defined as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure above or near the linguistic error (Young & Cameron 2005). In this feedback type, the instructor identifies the type of the errors, clarifies the ideas, crosses out the irrelevant words, insert the necessary phrases and provide the correct forms. Additional form of direct feedback includes metalinguistic feedback which is defined as comments, information, or questions related to the correctness of the student's utterance. For Ellis (2009), "metalinguistic CF involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of the errors they have made" By way of explanation, the instructor gives grammatical rules and structures with their examples at the bottom of the students' scripts in a detailed way.

The second one, indirect corrective feedback, on the other hand, may be defined as the mere indication of the error without supplying the correct form. In other words, the teacher does not provide any correction, but instead she spots and underlines the error and leaves the rest of the learning process to the diagnosis and self-correction of the students. This type of correction is subdivided into two categories, coded and un-coded feedback. Coded feedback is a combination of direct and indirect feedback. In this feedback type, the teacher indicates the location and the type of the errors with symbols predetermined in the classroom. Un-coded feedback, however, is the simple marking of the errors without using any codes, signs or symbols. The teacher simply circles or underlines the error and asks for a learner generated correction.

In earlier years, although it was considered that students and teachers were more in favour of direct approach, indirect corrective feedback was valued more than direct corrective feedback since students need to be engaged in a more complex language process when self-editing their writing. According to Ferris (2002), once the learners have noticed their errors, indirect feedback can help them to activate the hypothesis testing process which may promote deeper internal processing and improve the internalization of correct forms and structures. However, Chandler (2003) argued this view by saying that the indirect approach may fail since it will be left unclear whether the students' own hypothesized corrections are indeed accurate. In addition, Roberts (2001) reported that indirect feedback may not supply the learners with adequate information to resolve complex errors such as idiosyncratic errors; hence, direct feedback may be convenient to prevent the kind of confusion resulted from the learners' incomprehension of the forms and structures. In conclusion, findings from Van Beuningen's study (2008) shed a light on this controversial issue and suggested that the efficacy of direct and indirect correction be analyzed separately for each type of errors since

all types of errors (f.e morphological, syntactic, lexical) come from different domains of linguistic knowledge (Schwartz, 1993)

METHODOLOGY

1) Participants

The study comprised 60 advanced teacher trainees in their first year of tertiary education at Gazi University's ELT department. The participants' ages ranged from late teens to early twenties, but the most of the student teachers were in their late teens. The subjects were all Turkish citizens having similar educational backgrounds. They all had been given formal instruction on grammar, vocabulary and reading in the target language, but only few of them had received proper writing and speaking training. They were graduated either from Anatolian High Schools or Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools, and they had scored between "450-500" on LYS 5 exam by answering at least 65 grammar and reading comprehension questions correctly out of 80. The students had all followed grammar translation based curriculum in their high schools: however, they were introduced communicative approach at the university and aimed to improve all of the macro skills equally.

2) Setting

These college students were exposed to major foreign language teaching methods from the very beginning of the term. Communicative oriented and student centered approaches were applied in classes, and all four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) were equally focused in this period of time.

For the enhancement in student teachers' reading and writing skills, a two-semester course 'Advanced Reading and Writing Skills' became a part of the curriculum. The students met for 2 hours twice a week over 14 weeks for this compulsory subject, and this class time was divided into two sessions as reading and writing sessions. During the reading sessions, various paragraphs, autobiographical writings, reviews and essays were read, examined and overly discussed to improve students' comprehension skills and to provide a topical guide to them on the features of genres for their writing assignments. In addition, the students were given a novella, a novel and several short stories to read and analyze so that they could deduct some effective writing strategies for their writing assignments. During the writing sessions, on the other hand, teacher trainees were taught how to write paragraphs, stories and essays in compliance with genre rules first. Then they were asked to hand either a paragraph or an essay (expository, cause and effect or argumentative) in each week to help them build their writing confidence. Multiple drafts were assigned through the semester. The teacher checked the drafts every week and gave written corrective feedback to them on cohesion and coherence. In addition to providing written corrective feedback, the teacher also carried out student-teacher conferences to discuss the errors remained unnoticed.

The student teachers reported that they hadn't taken any training on writing, and they hardly read anything in English except reading passages in high school; therefore, they were given extensive practice in reading and writing.

3) Design and Measures

This study was conducted to answer two main research questions:

- Does written corrective feedback result in improved accuracy and fluency?

- Does direct and indirect feedback's efficacy change according to coherence and cohesion, or is it equally effective on every type of error?

The writing classes at Gazi University's ELT Department presented a convenient setting to analyze these questions since direct corrective feedback was regularly given to student teachers' drafts through the semester. Three classes of advanced students took part in this study. All of the classes were taught by the same teacher in the same way. The same amount of time was spent to teach effective writing strategies in each classroom. Further, all of the students received direct corrective feedback on their insufficiencies and personal feedback on their accomplishments. "One group pre-test and post-test group design" was chosen as a method in this study to measure the degree of change occurring as a result of direct or indirect written corrective feedback.

In the first part of the research process, the experimental group was asked to write a paragraph on a given caricature and submit their first drafts in due time. After the errors were marked and explained, the student teachers were required to edit their assignments in accordance with the corrections made by the teacher and hand in their second drafts on schedule. All of the students were provided direct corrective feedback on targeted errors, and some of them were given indirect feedback on vocabulary and spelling errors and positive personal feedback for their well-structured, smooth flowing text. Metalinguistic explanation was not given to the students' drafts in this process; however, student-teacher conferences were carried out to discuss the common errors, clarify the rules and give additional explanations and examples for the errors left unsolved. No control group was used while implementing the study.

The dependent variable in this study was the number of errors corrected between the first and second drafts of the student teachers with the provision of direct and indirect corrective feedback.

Since Ferris (1996) stated that all errors belong to a separate domain of knowledge and should not be evaluated in a single group, all errors were analyzed in several categories. Errors were divided into two main categories as coherence and cohesion. These categories were also sub-divided into minor categories such as topic, thesis statement, level of formality, capitalization, cohesive devices, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, sentence structures, spelling and grammar. Several grammar points took part under the grammar category in like manner. In the measurement of the data, the number of errors on students' first and second drafts was counted according to the categories above. The results obtained from these drafts were compared, and the number of corrections made and the number of errors left unsolved between first and second drafts of the students were demonstrated in a table chart. Frequency analysis which is one of the techniques of descriptive statistics was used.

4) Procedures: Marking of Errors

The categorization of the errors was performed without consulting to any possible error categorization system. A brand new separation of errors was formed by the researchers. The errors were handled in two main categories as cohesion and coherence. At this point, the need to divide these two categories into more elaborate items occurred and sub-categories were determined as topic, thesis statement, level of formality, capitalization, cohesive devices, punctuation, vocabulary, sentence structures, spelling and grammar.

The fact that the researchers did not apply any present categorization was due to the different error types and feedback types observed in the student essays. Also the weighted distribution of the feedback affected the determination of the error types. It is not suggested

that the previous categorization systems used in other studies were better or worse than this one, but the different amount of errors and corrections made it necessary to form a new categorization system. Since the researchers are undergraduate students, the error categorization may not have been prepared by professionals but still it includes more elaborately chosen items than many categorization systems available. For instance, Ferris and Roberts (2001) conducted their research according to five categories and they did not measure the weight of different kinds of errors. It can be concluded that what matters the most is the implementation of the same system for pre and post measures, rather than the categorization system type.

As previously mentioned, all student teachers involved in the study were taught by the same teacher, with the same technique and in the same amount of time. Moreover, no other teacher was consulted in the marking of the errors. All error marking of the students were carried out by the same teacher in the same way. Since the all students were educated by one particular teacher, it would be difficult to provide interrater reliability with another rater in the marking of errors stage.

Figure 1: Examples of error types
Topic: *Lie Death*
Thesis statement: *I guess losing weight is no longer impossible with the help of these steps.*
Level of formality: *Foreign languages are so important*
Capitalization: *Learning a foreign language is a part of Education.*
Cohesive devices: *Smoking can be inevitable for people therefore these reasons*
Spelling: *It is the main entartainment of Ramadan feasts.*
Punctuation: *Even if, you cannot follow this list…*
Vocabulary: *I heard this event, I passed out.*
Sentence structures: *Uniforms enable students to live feeling of belonging.*
Grammar: *He can find a way to relaxed us.*

5) Results

The first and second drafts of the writing assignments of the 60 teacher trainees were analyzed in terms of error types and their corrections. The main focus of the analysis was on the corrections depending on the feedback types. Whether the student teachers corrected their errors after being given direct, indirect or personal feedback was studied and the corrections were counted and classified according to error types.

The number of student teachers that made errors on the 1st draft and their error types are given in Table 1. After the students were given direct and indirect feedback on their first draft, their errors were classified and they were asked to correct their errors on the second draft

Table 1

The error types	Students	Frequency
Topic	21	%35
Coherence	30	%50
Cohesive Devices	19	%31,6
Spelling	26	%43,3
Punctuation	3	%5
Vocabulary	10	%16,6

Level of Formality	25	%41,6
Capitalization	2	%3,3
Subject-Verb Agreement	19	%31,6
Word Order	13	%21,6
Title	3	%5
Sentence Structures		
-Prepositions	22	%36,6
-Singular/Plural	31	%51,6
-Word Choice(act/pass)	5	%8,3
-Gerund/Infinitive	8	%13,3
-Article "The"	26	%43,3
-Article "A/An"	14	%20,3
-Relative Clauses	3	%23,3
-Tenses	18	%30

On the second draft, student teachers' corrections were analyzed and categorized in terms of error types and feedback types. It was observed that most of the students managed to correct their errors after getting direct written corrective feedback. The number of student teachers that corrected themselves on the second draft with direct feedback and their correction fields are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Error Types	Student teachers that corrected	Student teachers that could not correct
Topic	5	16
Coherence	9	21
Cohesive devices	12	7
Spelling	17	9
Punctuation	6	4
Vocabulary	11	14
Level of Formality	0	2
Capitalization	10	9
Subject-Verb Agreement	9	8
Word Order	7	6
Title	3	0
Sentence Structures -Prepositions	12	10
-Singular/Plural	19	12
-Word Choice(act/pass)	1	4
-Gerund/Infinitive	5	3
-Article "The"	14	12
-Article "A/An"	5	9
-Relative Clauses	2	1
-Tenses	12	6

Since no control group was included in the research, the effectiveness of direct corrective feedback was determined by the number of corrected errors on the second draft. According to Table 2, the direct feedback of the teacher helped students correct their spelling errors the most. However, it was not efficient enough to have students realize their errors on topic, coherence, level of formality. Especially the excessive number of coherence errors indicates that direct feedback is not adequate and they need to be handled in different ways.

The teacher that gave feedback on the assignments applied indirect feedback particularly on vocabulary and spelling errors and it was seen that indirect feedback on vocabulary and spelling errors helped the students more than direct feedback did. When the students obtained indirect feedback and realized their errors themselves, they increased their authenticity and paid more attention to these errors on the second draft. However, direct feedback given to other fields such as sentence structures, capitalization, word order, punctuation was proven to be more effective on student corrections than the indirect feedback since it requires more detailed and explicit demonstration. It can be inferred that while the indirect feedback may somehow be efficient on accuracy, the direct feedback covers both accuracy and fluency and also it produces more rapid and permanent results. The limitations of indirect feedback may block students' realization of the error but providing direct feedback aims at the primary objective of learning.

Moreover, 22 of the student assignments were provided with personal feedback. This feedback was given on student teachers' improvements, deficiencies in a friendly manner, besides they included some encouraging expressions. Though there was no significant difference in the accuracy and fluency error corrections of the assignments that were provided with personal feedback, still it constitutes a great place on student for sure.

DISCUSSIONS

Over decades, there has been disagreement between researchers on the value of corrective feedback in students' writing. Two opposite views concerning the positive or negative impacts of written corrective feedback have taken part jointly in the Global ELT Research Field. Therefore, this paper aimed to analyze the effect of direct and indirect written corrective feedback on students' writing and to contribute to this research field.

Truscott (1996) claimed that correcting the students'errors is futile and potentially harmful; hence, provision of written corrective feedback should be excluded from the content of the writing classes. Furthermore, he supported his subsequent view in Journal of Second Language Writing (2007) by pointing out that the correction of students' writing does not affect the real usage of the language for communicative purposes positively although many disputes on the effectiveness of WCF are settled in favour of the necessity of it. In the similar fashion, Fazio (2001) detected in his research that the comments group outperformed the correction group; thus, corrective feedback harmed the students' accuracy. In the present study; however, it is found that accuracy levels of the students advanced between first and second drafts with the provision of direct and indirect corrective feedback. For the evaluation of the long-term communicative gains which Truscott suggested in his article (2007), the student teachers should be monitored, though.

Chandler (2003) worked on a study on the effectiveness of various types of error feedback and concluded that provision of corrective feedback between assignments contributed to students' accuracy significantly; therefore, the assertions that error correction is useless is invalid. In addition, she found in her study that both experimental and control group showed improvement on fluency in preceeding assignments. In the present study, however, no progress was observed on students' fluency although significant progress was discovered on students' accuracy. It was displayed in this study that students were incapable of detecting and correcting their errors on coherence.

Bitchener (2005) carried out a study on the impact of different feedback types on students' writing and exposed that providing WCF together with teacher-learner conferences rendered to students' accuracy on definite article and simple past tense to a great degree. The present

study also found that direct corrective feedback resulted in improved accuracy of the students' writings on the whole; nevertheless, it was observed that some students are still unable to correct their errors on definite and indefinite articles.

Russell and Spada (2006) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the efficacy of corrective feedback on second language grammar. They included both oral and written studies and found that corrective feedback is effective for L2 grammar learning with a large effect size (1.16). In this present study, it is found that students who obtained direct corrective feedback improved their writings in terms of sentence structures. Therefore it can be concluded that the present study is parallel with the article of Russell and Spada (2006).

Although disagreements on the L2 learning potential of written corrective feedback were debated, there currently seems to be growing studies suggesting that error correction is effective for improving L2 learners' written accuracy over time. Recent written corrective feedback studies were able to show that learners improve their earlier writing after they receive WCF. Therefore Bitchener and Knoch (2010a) were right in stating that these findings counter the Truscott (1996)'s claim that corrective feedback only leads to "fake learning". Also Van Beuningen et al. (2010) found that corrective feedback leads to greater accuracy gains than mere writing practice. After examining the efficiency of direct and indirect feedback given to student writings, the present study concluded that direct feedback helps students correct their both accuracy and fluency errors in a short period of time and with more permanent results. These findings are parallel with the study of Bitchener and Knoch (2010b). The current study and Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) both found that learners benefit from direct correction than from indirect correction.

SUMMARY

The effectiveness of WCF in language classrooms has been researched for decades. However, there are still clashes in literature. While many researchers regarded corrective feedback as an effective factor (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener et al., 2005; Chandler, 2003), some researchers argued that it is not effective and should be constrained (Semke, 1984; Truscott, 1999, 2007). To this end, the efficacy of written corrective feedback on improved accuracy and fluency is overly examined and discussed in the present paper. The study comprised 60 advanced teacher trainees in their first year of tertiary education at Gazi University's ELT department. In the first part of the research process, the experimental group was asked to write a paragraph on a given caricature and submit their first drafts in due time. After all the errors were marked and explained by the same lecturer, the students were required to edit their assignments in accordance with the corrections made by the teacher and hand in their second drafts on schedule. All of the students were provided direct corrective feedback on targeted errors, and some of them were given positive personal feedback for their coherent text. No control group was used while implementing the study. The first and second drafts of the writing assignments of the participants were analyzed in terms of error types and their corrections. Whether the students corrected their errors after being given direct, indirect or personal feedback was studied and the corrections were counted and classified under categories such as topic, thesis statement, level of formality, capitalization, cohesive devices, punctuation, vocabulary, sentence structures, spelling and grammar. It was found at the end of the analysis that indirect feedback on vocabulary and spelling errors helped students more than direct feedback did. However, direct feedback given to other fields was proven to be more effective on student corrections.

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