

Corrective Written Feedback in L2 Writing: The Impact of Direct Written Feedback

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of direct corrective written feedback on EFL learners writing accuracy and to see on which language component it is more effective in terms of decreasing the number of errors. Two research questions are generated. The first research question seeks to answer which type of errors show decrease when direct corrective feedback is provided: grammar or vocabulary. The second research question is shaped according to the first research question and it aims to find out which grammar category shows decline in terms of number of errors in their first and second drafts. As being both the researcher and the teacher in this study, the treatment is provided by me. The students have received direct corrective feedback on their first drafts and they are asked to rewrite and prepare a second draft afterwards. The sample is chosen according to convenient sampling and the procedure lasted for four weeks. Treatment is given through four weeks of direct corrective written feedback to 13 EFL students. Their first and second drafts are analyzed, the number of errors is counted and the types of errors they made are identified. The results are in accordance with the hypotheses which are generated at the beginning of this paper. Grammar errors show the highest decrease as number of errors than the number of vocabulary errors. As for the second research question, which asks for which grammar component shows the highest decline when direct corrective feedback is provided, it is found out that the number of errors in subject-verb agreement and determiners has been diminished in their second drafts. There are some major limitations in this study. The first one is the number of the participants and the sampling. There are generalizability issues in this study since there are only 13 participants and they are not selected randomly. Second one is the duration of the study. Although I provided feedback only for 4 weeks and that is not enough to come up with a generalization, the study still gives insights about the effectiveness of direct corrective feedback on EFL writing accuracy.

1. Introduction

The development of learners' second language writings mainly depend on the quality and the quantity of feedback they receive from their teachers. Feedback has long been the key to the development of written language. In order to fully understand the issue, a definition of the feedback is needed. According to Keh (1990) feedback is the teacher's input to a composition and additional information which will be used to revise the piece of writing. Providing feedback is one of the indispensable parts of writing classes. Despite its importance,

feedback has just recently been acknowledged in the field of L2 writing classes (Tonekaboni, 2016). Feedback is generally found helpful for learners but future research is needed, as Ferris (2007) states, “Teacher feedback can and often does help student writers to improve their writing from one draft to the next and over time. However, evidence on this is unfortunately quite limited, particularly as to longitudinal analyses” (p. 28). After the advent of feedback, corrective feedback has started to take place. Some researchers found it meaningless and harmful to the learners' development, while some others claim it is an indispensable part of writing classes and it is essential for students' progress in their language development in various ways.

The benefits of feedback have been shown by many studies, but many others did not yield any significant outcomes. When Truscott (1996) claimed that corrective feedback has no use, the debate over the effectiveness of corrective feedback has started to take place. Truscott stated that feedback is not only useless, but it also is harmful to the students. As a result, there have been many studies which are conducted either to agree with Truscott or to disagree. One experimental study by Polio, Fleck and Leder (1998) supports his claim by showing that CF has no significant impact on the students' linguistic accuracy. Many studies after that period of time started to explore the importance of different types and aspects of CF. For example, Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) conducted a study to find out the effects of written feedback along with oral one to one feedback. The results showed that the mixture of these two types influenced the students' writing accuracy.

While CF is still being argued on, the issue of whether direct or indirect written feedback is more helpful in L2 writing development is unknown in the field. There are two main types of written corrective feedback; one is direct and the other one is indirect. Direct corrective feedback can be defined as the type of correction in which the teacher draws students' attention to the error and gives the correct form *directly*. The students are able to see what type of errors they have made and the correct forms of the errors, if they have made any. Indirect corrective feedback, on the other hand, does not provide the correct form; rather, it only shows the location of the errors. The students see where they have made mistakes, but this time, they cannot get the correct form from the teacher (Bitchener and Ferris, 2012).

Some parts of the language may show more development when feedback is provided. For example, in a study conducted by Telceker and Akcan (2010) results show that grammar is positively affected by written feedback, while content does not show any improvement. Whether direct or indirect, the feedback may influence grammar, structure and/or vocabulary; or it may not affect any of them at all. The aim of this study is to find out the effect of direct

corrective feedback on students grammar development in their L2 writings as well as to observe which grammar components show development when direct feedback is provided.

In order to handle this issue in a clear way, it is necessary to clearly state the following research questions;

RQ1) Which type of errors show decrease when direct corrective feedback is provided: grammar or vocabulary?

RQ2) Which categories of grammar show a decrease in terms of the numbers of errors?

To answer the above mentioned questions, two hypotheses were generated;

H1) Grammar errors will show a significant decrease in terms of the number of errors when compared to the other language components.

H2) Subject-verb agreement and the use determiners will show a development when direct corrective feedback is provided and the number of errors will diminish.

2. Methodology

2.1.Participants & Research Context

The participants were selected according to convenient sampling. They are my own students. As a teacher, I am also the researcher. There are 13 participants in this study. The number is low because the researcher is utilizing her own classroom and is unable to change the number of students. Since the participants are not randomly selected and they do not represent the targeted population due to the sampling method, it may cause population validity threat. The participants are at the same level of proficiency; they are all elementary level students. Their age differ from 18-25. The classes are equally composed of both male and female learners. They have been taking English courses for 7 weeks when I have started to give them direct corrective written feedback on their writings. The institution serves English courses for free, that is why most of the students are voluntarily participating to the classes. They are university students with different majors. There are 2 over achievers in the class and 3 low achievers.

2.2.Data Collection & Analysis

In order to collect as much essays as possible, I spent 4 weeks to give them feedback. Each week on Saturdays they had two readings, and based on those readings the participants were asked to produce one page long essays. The book offers them a very detailed outline and I also explained them what to include and how to develop their ideas. Thus, the students did not have

many problems with the content and the organization. After the two readings, I gave the students 30 minutes to complete their writings. I gave them direct written feedback and they took their paper back. I gave them another 30 minutes to revise their papers and to correct their errors.

The same procedure was followed for four weeks. I divided the types of errors on each paper and counted them to see whether there is a difference in the number of errors or not. Some students asked for further explanations; however, due to the validity concerns I did not provide anything more than what is given to them in their papers. For the first week of the treatment the topic was “Popular Sports”, the second week “Jobs”, third week Lifestyles”, and the last week “Buildings & Environment.” The related vocabulary was provided by the readings, and following the exercises and readings, the students mainly used the vocabulary that was focused. On Sundays the students had listening and speaking classes. The topics for these four skills were the same.

The students were informed of the process. They knew they were going to write a revised paper after their first drafts and feedbacks. The students received only written feedback. The errors were underlined and the correct form was given to them. The students received feedback on grammar and lexicon almost in every piece of writings. Students’ errors were categorized into two groups; grammatical errors and vocabulary errors. When forming my categories, I benefited from previous research conducted by Mubarak (2013). He prepared a very detailed table and included descriptions for each type of errors. I adapted his table and made a few changes according to design.

Table 1 : Definitions and examples of errors corrected.

Error type	Definition	Example
Grammar errors:		
Passive voice	Wrong use of passive voice	“Volleyball <u>play</u> (is played) with ball.”
Prepositions	Wrong preposition or no preposition	“Popular sports <u>the</u> (in) Turkey”
Possessive Pronouns	Wrong use, wrong structure	“ <u>Café name</u> (My Café’s name) is Green Garden”
Auxiliary verb	Missing auxiliary or no auxiliary	Volleyball (is) (a) popular sport in ABD.”

Word order	Wrong word order	“There is food excellent.” (The food is excellent there)
Subject- verb agreement	Missing S-V agreement	“It <u>have</u> (has) big windows.”
Determiner/ Article	Missing article, no use of article, or wrong use of article	“ <u>The</u> basketball is popular.”
Vocabulary errors:		
Wrong combination/phrase	Wrong combinations of words	“My mother’s <u>love</u> (favorite) team is Galatasaray.”
Wrong singular / plural form	Wrong form of singular/plural nouns	“There are popular <u>four team</u> (four teams) in Turkey.”

3. Results & Discussion

Below is a table which illustrates the types and numbers of errors corrected through 4 weeks of treatment. The students received feedback between their first and second drafts, and the number of errors was counted by the researcher who is also the teacher.

Table 2: Types and numbers of errors corrected

Types of Errors	Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
	1 st draft	2 nd draft						
Grammar errors:								
Passive voice	13	4	0	0	3	0	0	0
Prepositions	5	1	2	0	4	1	3	2
Possessive	1	2	2	1	2	1	6	0
Pronouns								
Auxiliary verb	1	4	14	1	6	2	6	3
Word order	1	1	2	0	15	5	7	0
Subject- verb agreement	10	2	2	0	2	0	6	2
Determiner/ Article	12	2	18	3	2	1	4	1

Vocabulary								
errors:								
Wrong combination	5	5	1	0	3	2	3	2
Wrong singular / plural form	2	0	1	0	1	0	4	1

When analyzing the results, it was obvious that some students did better than others. However, since this table illustrates the overall numbers of errors regardless of the students, the difference is not the main concern. It is seen from the table that students produced more errors in some categories. As it is hypothesized at the beginning of this study, grammar errors outnumbered vocabulary errors. Although the type and the number of errors differ from week to week, it is still clear that there is a decrease in the number of the errors when feedback is given.

First week the topic was to describe favorite sports in Turkey. The students tried to use passive voice because the readings on this unit included passive voice and I as a teacher taught them the rule of it. They included passive voice but seemingly they could not manage to handle it. The main mistakes were as follows; “Volleyball play with a ball.” “Football is play in the field.” They either forgot auxiliary verb “be”, or they did not use V3. After the correct form was provided, the numbers of errors decreased from 13 to 4. Another big difference was in the use of determiners. When teaching them the use of determiners, the students had difficulty in understanding. They looked for a Turkish equivalent for the/a/an and each time they tried to translate them. It was not surprising to see that there were so many errors in determiners. Although they lowered their errors from 12 to 2, some students kept making mistakes. Following this, the students made the third most errors in subject-verb agreement. I relate this again to the differences between Turkish and English. Most of the errors were as follows; “Everybody like playing football.” Surprisingly, they made more errors on the use of auxiliary verbs after receiving feedback. They tried to improve their content, but they failed in grammar.

In the second week, there are two types of errors that were frequently made; determiners and auxiliary verbs. One example for determiner error is “ It was sunny day.” Since it is challenging for the students to understand the use of “be”, I found it normal to come up with this much of errors in their writings. One example of this type of error is “I proud to show it.” When I asked them why they did not understand auxiliary verb, they mainly said they could not

find a Turkish equivalent for it. After giving them the correct form, they made only one error in their second drafts.

In the third week, they made errors in a different grammar category; word order. Although they made 15 errors in their first draft and 5 in the second draft, the errors did not entirely disappear. I explained them the word order and sentence structure in English. The students were taught that English has SVO structure, while Turkish structure is SOV. There were some errors that belonged neither to English nor Turkish sentence structure. Some examples of this sort of errors are; “There is food excellent.” “Country club plaza the number is of 57 shops.”

In the last week, errors are equally distributed. There is not one specific category that the students made the most errors. The effect of direct feedback is obvious. The students made more errors in word order than they did in the other categories.

The results are in accordance with the hypotheses which are generated at the beginning of this paper. Grammar errors do show a higher decrease as number of errors than vocabulary errors. As for the second hypothesis, the number of subject-verb agreement and determiners errors decreased. Except for one case, (first week, auxiliary verb use) direct written feedback has been proved to be effective in lowering the number of errors in the second writings that the students make in their first drafts. The overall results show that grammar is more complicated for the students than vocabulary is, and direct written feedback can lead to more accuracy in L2 writing. The results reveal that there is a significant effect of direct feedback on students’ first drafts and second drafts.

There are some limitations of this study. The first one is the number of the participants and the sampling. It is not rational to make general claims from this study since there are only 13 participants and they are not selected randomly. Second one is the duration of the study. Although the results are satisfying, I gave feedback only for 4 weeks and that is not enough to come up with a generalization. One threat to validity might be the way of my teaching. I tried not to give details on their errors after I gave written feedback, but when teaching I might have focused on some aspects that I found inadequate. The students might have learned some rules, and that might be the reason why they made less errors in their last writings when compared to the previous ones.

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