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DIRECT AND INDIRECT CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON EFL STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Most studies have shown that students' writing performance improves in accuracy over time after receiving written feedback from teachers, but there is little research adequately examining how different types of written feedback help the writing of students with different proficiency levels in general, and in relation to specific aspects of the content and form of writing, nor investigating students' preferences when receiving feedback. Therefore, to fill this gap, a study was conducted to achieve two research purposes: (1) to assess students' writing performance after doing revisions based on written feedback, and (2) to understand the preference of students with different proficiency levels toward feedback strategies. The study involved 60 college students; 40 from NCYU and 20 from UT. The students were divided into four groups to receive two types of written feedback—direct corrective feedback in endnotes and indirect corrective feedback in endnotes. Student essays and responses to feedback preference questionnaire were analyzed to answer the problems. The results indicated that significantly, the low proficiency writers who received direct corrective feedback performed better than the low proficiency writers who received indirect corrective feedback. While, no matter whether direct or indirect corrective feedback was received by the high proficiency writers, they performed equally well. Moreover, all students had a positive attitude towards the teacher's feedback. Also, they preferred receiving direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback focused on content and form.

Keywords: Direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback.

INTRODUCTION

A limited number of studies have investigated whether direct or indirect corrective feedback is more beneficial to improve the accuracy of L2 writing (Lalande, 1982; Semke, 1984; Robb, *et al.*, 1986; Ferris, 2000; Chandler, 2003); the effectiveness of different types of direct and indirect feedback has also been compared. The results showed that no matter whether it was direct or indirect, corrective feedback significantly improved students' performance.

The effect of direct corrective feedback and student-researcher conferencing on overall accuracy and accuracy in the use of prepositions, the simple past and the definite article was investigated by Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005). This study showed that while there was no significant difference in overall accuracy, experimental group 1, which received direct corrective feedback and conferencing, significantly outperformed the other two groups in the use of the simple past and the definite article. In addition, when 500 word compositions written by three groups of students were corrected and returned with content and form based feedback for revision and re-

drafting, all three groups were almost equal, implying that students who receive content and form feedback are able to revise and redraft their writing (Ashwell, 2000). Although the number of studies into the effect of feedback is limited, the tendency seems to be that whether feedback on content and form is combined or separated, students will be able to revise and re-draft their writing effectively.

Before deciding on what types of feedback students prefer to receive in terms of content and form, when and how to provide the feedback is another issue the researcher has to address when considering the proficiency level of learners. Having accurate data of their proficiency level helps the researcher to measure the effect more easily or to know whether the effects of feedback might be attributable to the learners' proficiency levels, rather than the feedback itself (Guenette, 2007).

Moreover, a study by Ferris and Roberts (2001) that addressed the issue of proficiency levels found that direct feedback is more effective for lower proficiency learners because it reduces other potential areas of misunderstanding, namely confusion about the location or type of the errors. Meanwhile, indirect feedback is better for high proficiency learners, because it not only requires the learners to notice the errors that have been made but it also challenges the learners to correct them (Bitchener, *et al*, 2005).

To fill in the gap about the appropriate feedback received by the students with different proficiency levels in terms of content and form, the study reported in this paper involved both high and low level college students in two different treatments, one group receiving direct and the other indirect corrective feedback to improve content and form. The feedback was provided in an endnote. This study had two main purposes. The first purpose was to see whether the students' essays improved when the students use the feedback to revise their essays and the second purpose was to know the students' preference toward feedback strategies.

This study set out to find the gap in the EFL research through the following research questions:

- RQ1: Are there any significant differences between students' revisions after they received either direct or indirect feedback?
- RQ2: How do students at different proficiency levels perceive direct and indirect corrective feedback for improving content and form in writing?

Types of Feedback

There are several studies of the three types of feedback that a teacher can offer students (Alwright, *et al.*, 1988; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). The first, direct corrective feedback, occurs when the teacher or researcher not only marks the error but also provides the correct form and content (Hendrickson, 1984). The second, indirect corrective feedback, occurs when the teacher underlines circles or highlights errors on students' original texts, indicating the location of these errors without correcting them (Ferris, 2000). The third is an end note, in which the instructor writes or provides encouragement and summarizes several specific suggestions for improvement at the end of paper (Ferris, 2003a).

METHODS

Participants

The participants in the study were 60 college students, 40 from NCYU and 20 from UT. The students were divided into four groups to receive two types of written feedback: direct corrective feedback in an endnote and indirect corrective feedback in an endnote. Before joining the study, students participated in a mini-workshop on how to write a short narrative essay. After submitting the first writing task and receiving a score, the students were classified according to whether their proficiency was high or low, each student receiving direct or indirect feedback in an endnote.

Research Design

The researcher applied two different types of feedback in the endnotes: first, direct corrective feedback in an endnote and second, indirect corrective feedback in an endnote. The feedback covered aspects of content and form. The researcher then monitored the students' improvement after revising their writing and recorded the students' preference toward the two types of feedback.

Procedure

After joining the mini-workshop, the students were required to write five narrative essays on three different topics: *My First Day at School*, *My Most Memorable Journey* and *The Moment of Success*. In Phase 1, the participants joined the mini-conference and learned “how to write a short narrative essay”. They were then given their first writing task and were required to submit the first essay. In Phase 2, the second writing task was submitted. One week after submitting the second task, all participants in each group received feedback that focused on content errors (including organization of content) and form errors (past tense and mechanics) via e-mail based on which group they were in. In Phase 3, all participants were asked to revise their original writing followed by the preparation of a new piece of writing. In Phase 4, all groups wrote the fourth writing task and received feedback again. In Phase 5, both groups were asked to complete the last writing task and to answer the questionnaire.

Instruments for Data Collection

Writing task

Each participant completed five writing tasks, with each one consisting of 200-250 words, over a nine week period. The participants were given one week to finish and submit each essay. Then, the following week they received their feedback and were required to revise and resend the essay. These processes were repeated until the last topic had been completed.

The marking rubric contained 12 items that included six organization items, four content items and two language use items, for which the highest score was 4 and the lowest score was 1. Then, using two scoring ranges, students whose scores were in the range from 25 to 48 were categorized as high proficiency writers while students whose scores were between 0 and 24 were categorized as low proficiency writer.

Feedback preference questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 10 items, corresponding to two main themes: first, the students' perception toward receiving the teacher's feedback per group and, second, each group's preference towards the two types of feedback provided by the teacher in correcting both content and form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Students' Revision

To compare types of feedback effects on the students' revisions, a paired sample t-test was performed. Table 1 presents the significant differences between writing performances revision 2 and revision 3 after feedback, between those low proficiency writers who received direct corrective feedback (LD) and the low proficiency writers who received indirect corrective feedback (LI). The results indicated significant difference for the LD group; $t = -20.00$, $p < .05$ and LI group; $t = -11.25$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). As shown in Table 1, those low proficient writers who received direct corrective feedback, the LD group, improved their writing from the second revision score mean of 25.53 to a third revision score mean of 40.86. Similarly, the low proficient writers who received indirect corrective feedback, the LI group, improved their writing scores from a second revision score mean of 24.53 to a revised score mean of 37.00. Since subjects in both the LD and LI groups significantly improved their writing performance in terms of content and form, these findings indicate that providing either type of corrective feedback had a positive effect on students' writing performance; with direct corrective feedback have a slightly more positive effect than indirect corrective feedback.

Table 1. Result of Paired-Sample t –test for Essay Revision between LD and LI groups.

Focus Rubric	Group	M	SD	T	P
ConRe2	LD	20.13	2.87	-16.24	.000
ConRe3		33.00	1.60		
ConRe2	LI	19.26	3.69	-10.12	.000
ConRe3		30.33	3.01		
ForRe2	LD	5.46	.91	-11.22	.000
ForRe3		7.86	.51		
ForRe2	LI	5.26	1.03	-4.36	.001

Table 1 continued...

ForRe3		6.67	.81		
TotRe2	LD	25.53	2.87	-20.00	.000
TotRe3		40.86	1.76		
TotRe2	LI	24.53	4.22	-11.25	.000
TotRe3		37.00	3.40		

Note: $p < .05$ LD = Low Direct; LI = Low Indirect; ConRe = Content Revision; ForRe = Form Revision; TotRe = Total Revision

Table 2 presents the comparison of the writing performance of highly proficient writers who received direct corrective feedback (HD) and those who received indirect corrective feedback (HI). The results revealed significant differences for the HD group; $t = -8.30, p < .05$ and HI group; $t = -8.75, p < .05$ (see Table 2). As shown in Table 2, those highly proficient writers who received direct corrective feedback improved their writing from the second revision score mean of 32.06 to a third revision score mean of 45.26. The highly proficient writers who received indirect corrective feedback also improved their writing scores, this time from a second revision score mean of 29.13 to a revised score mean of 44.66. These findings indicate that providing direct corrective feedback has a more positive effect than indirect corrective feedback in terms of content and form. Overall, the results suggested that in the case of either low or high proficiency writers, those students who received direct corrective feedback, as expected, performed better than those students who received indirect corrective feedback in terms of content and form.

Table 2. Result of Paired-sample t-test for essay Revision between HD and HI groups.

Focus Rubric	Group	M	SD	T	p
ConRe2	HD	25.20	5.44	-7.72	.000
ConRe3		37.13	1.55		
ConRe2	HI	22.60	6.90	-8.27	.000
ConRe3		36.80	2.62		
ForRe2	HD	6.86	.63	-6.85	.000
ForRe3		8.00	.00		
ForRe2	HI	6.53	1.45	-40.0	.001
ForRe3		7.86	.516		
TotRe2	HD	32.06	5.53	-8.30	.000
TotRe3		45.26	1.7		
TotRe2	HI	29.13	7.56	-8.75	.000
TotRe3		44.66	2.87		

Note: $p < .05$ HD = High Direct; HI = High Indirect; ConRe = Content Revision; ForRe = Form Revision; TotRe = Total Revision

Students' Perception towards Feedback

The percentage questionnaire was analyzed by using Google document to analyze the students' responses; the questionnaire consisted of ten items per each group using a 5-point Likert Scale. This corresponds to two main themes, first, the students' perception toward receiving the teacher's feedback per group (questionnaire number 1 to 3, 8 to 10) and the last one, each group's preference towards two types of feedback provided by the teacher in correcting both content and form (questionnaire number 4 to 6) and the results are shown in Figure 1.

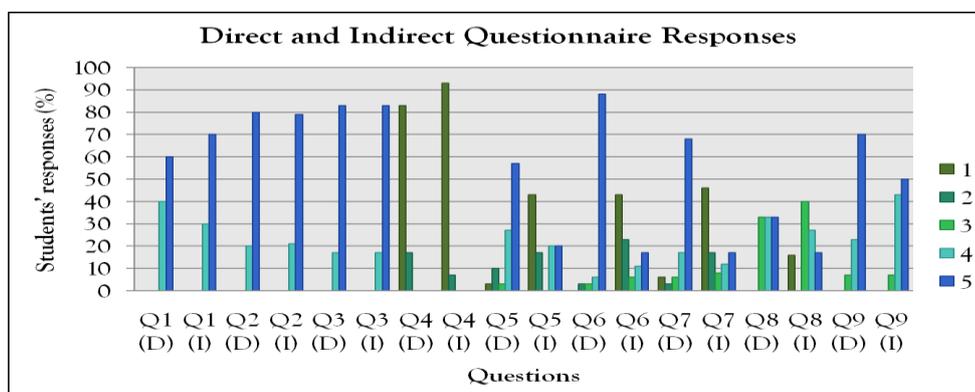


Figure 1. Direct and indirect questionnaire responses.

To sum up, no matter whether students were in the direct corrective feedback or indirect corrective feedback group, or whether they were low or high proficiency writers, the students all appreciated the teacher's feedback. Also, all the groups prefer receiving direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback from the teacher in terms of content and form. Moreover, they agreed to revise their work to produce a better piece of writing.

Turning to the findings of their questionnaire, there were many indications that feedback, as expected, was highly appreciated by students because they believed that receiving the teacher's feedback improved their writing in terms of content and form. In addition, the findings are consistent with the findings of previous researchers who suggested that students themselves definitely felt that teacher feedback was valuable to them and that it helped them to improve their writing (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Furthermore, most of the students preferred to receive direct corrective feedback to improve both content and form. This finding aligns with findings by Mubarak (2013) who showed that students preferred the teacher writing the correction of errors onto their paper instead of underlining the errors without providing any corrections.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that all groups significantly improved their writing performance in each revision. No matter whether students were low or high proficiency writers or whether they received direct corrective feedback or indirect corrective feedback, any feedback significantly improved their writing performance. It might be assumed that the endnote provided by the teacher also contributed to the quality of their revision, as demonstrated by their revision scores. For instance, to those students who received indirect corrective feedback, the endnote might clarify the unclear correction or instructions given by the teacher and it might stimulate the students' motivation to revise and produce a better essay. Moreover, no matter whether students were low or high proficiency writers if they received direct corrective feedback, they performed better than those students who received indirect corrective feedback when focused on content and form.

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