



The Effect of Corrective Feedback Strategies via Email on Writing Accuracy Improvement; A case of Iranian EFL Learners.

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Abstract

Indubitably, The efficacy of feedback has long been an area of great interest in recent years. In this respect the importance of Corrective feedback in learning has taken the notice of scholars. There are various strategies of providing corrective feedback which are the aims of this present article. In addition, student writing in different contexts of ESL/EFL has heightened the need for this study, too. Accordingly, the main objective of the present study was to investigate the provision of corrective feedback on student writing via new media of communication as Email and Microsoft Word software. To this end, from the population of 84 Iranian EFL students of higher intermediate levels, 4 groups of indirect feedback (IF), direct feedback (DF), indirect followed by direct with explicit corrective comments (IDECC), and no feedback (NF) were selected. these groups were observed concerning the impact of feedback each group received the results of this study are in line with the effectiveness of corrective feedback in student writing The analysis of the data revealed that all three treatment groups achieved better results than the control group after two stages of revisions . Among treatment groups, the IDECC which received instruction of both strategies of providing feedback gained the most impact in the new essay and in a long run.

Keywords: corrective feedback, indirect feedback, direct feedback, explicit corrective comments, writing

Introduction

So much so the past two decades have witnessed a growing interest of feedback among many researchers and teachers. Taking a broader view of the concept, feedback plays a crucial role in the phenomenon of learning and it cannot simply overlooked. A quick glance at the literature available in second language acquisition and language teaching reflects disagreeing findings of feedback which need further investigation. the second or foreign language learning includes four important skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. With regard to the writing of ESL/EFL students, there have empirical investigation focusing on various aspects of writing. Yet, student writing requires further research so as to improve their writings.

The pendulum of English language teaching has swung back to the extent that teachers and researchers once again are talking about the importance of the context of a real classroom. A new direction of investigation is dealing with the role of feedback through new technologies. due to the fact that most of the students today have easy access to their emails on their laptops, smart phones, etc. they can be provided with feedback by their teachers, peers, etc. the majority of Iranian EFL students these days spend most of their time surfing the net, checking their emails, and taking part in social networks. Therefore, it was assumed that the role of feedback needs to be examined in their writing tasks via new means of providing feedback as email.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to investigate the efficacy of written corrective feedback (WCF) and its various strategies by means of email and new technologies. Since previous studies have focused on one of feedback provision strategies at the time, this study considers a complementary strategy of providing feedback; i.e. feedback in two stages. Moreover, there is a hunch that students would benefit the most if they are provided with both strategies of direct and indirect along with explicit corrective comments to make them better able to recognize the intended feedback.

According to the above-mentioned issues, the current study has certain questions: 1) to investigate the impacts of various strategies of teacher WCF on learner writing, and 2) to investigate the longer-term effects of teacher feedback on students writing accuracy.

In this study four strategies of providing feedback are taken into account to provide learners with feedback as Indirect Feedback (IF), Direct Feedback (DF), Indirect Feedback then Direct Feedback along with Explicit Corrective Comments (IDECC), and No Feedback (NF).

Background

In the new global professionalism in the domain of language teaching there have been many attempts for a long time to investigate the efficacy of feedback in language learning. Various learning theories as Behavioral learning theory, Cognitive Information Processing theory, Skill Acquisition Theory, Interactionist theory, etc. have put strong emphasis on the role of feedback Bitchener, J. (2012). Yet, findings of a number of research studies (e.g Kepner, C. G. (1991)., Rob, T., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986) , Semke, H. D. (1984), Sheppard, K. (1992) and Sheppard, K. (1992) conclude that feedback is neither influential nor usefulness to students while doing their writing tasks. He further contended that the practice of providing feedback in student writing should be avoided and quit. Ferris, D. R. (1999) in response to his claims, stated that Truscott may have not been attentive enough in drawing a line between the well-done studies and the poor ones, or that he may have neglected some points within such studies. Moreover, Guénette, D. (2007) proposed that such contrasting results could be due to

a couple of reasons such as research design, mistakes in methodology, and external variables. Thus, further studies are needed to reach a more decisive answer to such a sparked debate by these researchers.

With regard to the effectiveness of feedback, there are no definite answers to which feedback is better, but selective written feedback seems to be more effective to learners than comprehensive one. However, this seems to be true considering just one specific grammatical feature, like definitive articles. Recently, a positive trend to develop the research on providing feedback in a focused manner using metalinguistic explanation has been increasing Ellis, R., Sheen, Y., Murakami, M., & Takashima, H. (2008). The influence of written corrective feedback (WCF) on EFL learners' performance after completing output activities was examined by Abadikhah, S., & Ashoori, A. (2012). They conducted a study on two groups of students (24 male ones) at an intermediate level. Text editing, composition, transformation and substitution were utilized as output activities for two groups; one receiving WCF and the other suffering no WCF. Results indicated that the participants who received WCF after completing the activities outdid those who did not receive written feedback. They found that if learners are provided with corrective feedback they may become more aware of the differences in their interlanguage and the target language they are learning.

Azizi, M., Behjat, F., & Sorahi, M. (2014) carried out a study within a process-oriented framework to determine the extent to which the metalinguistic corrective feedback may affect writing performance of the Iranian EFL learners, and to compare the efficiency of two sorts of metalinguistic feedback, error codes feedback and description feedback on students' writing improvement. Conducting the research study on 69 female students, they found that the metalinguistic teacher corrective feedback, especially along with describing points, had a positive effect on the writing improvement of the Iranian EFL students.

As a further attempt to investigate the value of feedback in an online learning environment, Alvarez, I., Espasa, A., & Guasch, T. (2012) conducted a study to examine the improvement of collaborative writing of university students in Spain. They aimed at analyzing the nature of teacher feedback during assignments. By e-learning and over a period of two weeks, 83 students were under examination. The results expressed that when teacher feedback involves suggestions and questions, instead of just direct corrections, the students performed more constructively, they make discussions on the content they are dealing with. Such results may imply that explanation and other meta-linguistic tools to make students aware of their mistakes may be more efficient in helping learners improve their works after they are provided with due feedback.

A large and growing body of literature has been published to further investigate the effect of metalinguistic feedback and the efficiency of computer-mediated-communication (CMC) in aiding learners to improve their writing skill, AbuSeileek, A., & Abualsha'r, A. (2014) carried out a research study on sixty-four intermediate-level learners consisting of three treatment groups as recast, track changes, and metalinguistic feedback. Conducting research study over 8 weeks, they found that those students who received CMC corrective feedback while doing writing tasks outperformed in their overall test scores than students in the control group who did not receive feedback. Students in the recast treatment group also outdid compared to those who received metalinguistic corrective feedback.

More on metalinguistic feedback, Ebadi, E. (2014) made an attempt to examine the influence of focused Meta-linguistic highlighted error feedback on accuracy of writing among Iranian intermediate students. After 12 sessions of treatment on 60 university students, they were exposed to focused meta-linguistic feedback on the submission of their essays. Once the

analysis was done, it was found that experimental group who received metalinguistic feedback could outperform the control group.

Regarding the type of feedback and strategies by which learners are provided with, there have been abundant studies focusing on just one way or another. Indirect and direct strategies have been the concentration of certain previous research studies. Yet, there have been no controlled studies which accentuate the significance of complementary manner under investigation. In this line, Rahimi, M., & Asadi, E. (2014) conducted a study in order to examine the long term influences of different types of feedback as indirect, direct, and content feedback on EFL learners' writing accuracy and overall writing quality. Three treatment groups were under investigation; indirect and direct receiving both formal and content feedback, but content group receiving just content feedback. Findings of their study indicated that there was a significant but scant difference between formal feedback groups (considered as direct and indirect) and just content group with respect to the long-term improvement observed in their writing accuracy. They also found that content feedback appears to be the most efficient method in providing feedback, when we deal with the long-term improvement accuracy of writing.

Ahmadi, D., Maftoon, P., & Gholami Mehrdad, A. (2012) compared two types of feedback on EFL students' writing. Feedback groups as direct and un-coded one along with a control group were under investigation. 60 EFL students took part in this study to write paragraphs on the assigned topics. Teacher feedback was found to be of high significance in aiding students to improve their writing accuracy. Also, better results were found on the un-coded feedback group in comparison to the direct one. Jokar, M., & Soyoo, A. (2014) compared two Iranian EFL learners in terms of their writing accuracy after receiving implicit and explicit feedback. Two pre-intermediate learners of English in an institute were chosen to participate in a case study. Once they completed their tasks they were provided with implicit (for one of them) and explicit (for the other) feedback. Findings of their study suggest that the one who received explicit feedback could better absorb the grammatical points.

So far it has been revealed that various recently done studies attempted to concentrate on one or more aspects of writing with respect to the teacher corrective feedback. Certain studies dedicated to investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback, with or without using new technologies. Some others considered the metalinguistic, direct, indirect, or other ways of providing feedback. Yet, there hasn't been an individual study dealing with a complementary manner of providing feedback via new means of communication to investigate the effectiveness of feedback on Iranian EFL learners. Thus, a new way of providing feedback as giving feedback in two stages was taken into consideration; firstly indirect feedback, then direct one along with explicit corrective comments.

Methodology

To come up with suitable responses to the proposed research questions, a number of Iranian EFL learners from various English language institutes were asked to cooperate in this study. Since this study was to exert new technologies and examine the effectiveness of feedback by the help of such new means of providing feedback, all communications were made through emails. Students who were learning at higher intermediate levels were chosen to participate in this study. They were asked to send their email addresses to the teacher. Once their emails were collected, they were sent an email consisting of a consent letter and a prompt to write a 300-word paragraph on their experience of learning English through previous years. Having

consented, they sent their first narrative essays. Their writings were written by Microsoft Word software so that teachers could put their comments, which were considered as provision of feedback, on each intended grammatical error. Just three frequent English errors had been selected prior to the study; English articles, verb agreement, and question forms. Being randomly assigned, 84 students fulfilled the whole tasks. Writing tasks included 5 phases: Essay 1, Revised Draft 1, Revised Draft 2, Essay 2, and Delayed New Essay. Following is the description of how feedback was provided for students in their groups.

In the first treatment group as Indirect Feedback (IF) they were provided with two stages of indirect feedback, and they were permitted to revise their works after each feedback. A new essay was written in the fourth step to investigate the effectiveness of the feedback. To further investigate the longer impacts of feedback, a delayed new essay was written a month later after the last essay (essay 2). The same process was carried out for the second treatment group. Direct Feedback (DF) group received two stages of direct feedback and wrote a new paragraph at last. A delayed new post test was conducted to investigate the longer term effects of feedback one month afterwards. However, the procedure for the third treatment group was different. They were asked to write the first paragraph. They then were provided with indirect feedback. As the third stage came, they were provided with direct feedback along with explicit corrective comments. In the end, they produced a new paragraph. Again, a month after the 4th essay, a delayed new essay was composed as a delayed new one. To the last group, only placebo was exerted as telling them that their works just needed certain revisions. Table 1 shows the stages of providing feedback.

The process of data collection took 5 months, and was carried out in Isfahan, Iran. Prior to running the experiment, a pilot study was carried out. Then, students were randomly assigned and distributed into 4 groups.

Table 1. Design of the Experiment

Groups	Stages					
	Essay 1	Revised Draft 1	Revised Draft 2	Essay 2	Delayed Essay	New
IF	IF	IF	X	X	X	
DF	DF	DF	X	X	X	
IDECC	IF	DECC	X	X	X	
NF	X	X	X	X	X	

Note. * Direct feedback with explicit comments
X No feedback treatment provided

Results

After data analysis, a repeated ANOVA was conducted. Also, the means of errors and standard deviations of each group in each stage of writing are presented in Table 2. Further, a figure is used to indicate the means of errors (Figure 1).

To find answer to the first research question which asked if the number of errors on across the writing stages are consistent, a repeated-measures ANOVA was exerted. Since there were five levels of independent variables and five levels of dependent ones (feedback strategies as IF, DF, IDECC, NF, and number of errors in 5 stages of writing as in Essay 1, Revised Essay 1, Revised Essay 2, Essay 2, and a delayed new essay, respectively) the between subject and

within subject methods were used. Repeated measures ANOVA in table 3 below, indicated that the number of errors across all 5 writing stages in treatment groups are not consistent.

Table 2. Presentation of means of errors in each writing stage by different feedback groups

group		Essay 1	Revised Draft 1	Revised Draft 2	Essay 2	Delayed New Essay
IF	Mean	27.0476	10.2857	5.9048	11.8571	12.2857
	N	21	21	21	21	21
	Std. Deviation	10.80498	3.49489	3.01504	3.59563	3.49489
DF	Mean	26.5714	12.5238	3.6667	17.8571	18.3333
	N	21	21	21	21	21
	Std. Deviation	12.79286	6.46235	1.42595	5.60612	5.82523
IDECC	Mean	24.9048	14.7619	2.3810	8.6667	9.0952
	N	21	21	21	21	21
	Std. Deviation	9.12088	4.33480	1.07127	3.48329	3.31519
NF	Mean	25.8571	23.7619	22.1429	23.9524	24.4762
	N	21	21	21	21	21
	Std. Deviation	9.91103	9.28388	8.82772	9.18410	9.21748
Total	Mean	26.0952	15.3333	8.5238	15.5833	16.0476
	N	84	84	84	84	84
	Std. Deviation	10.58029	8.05004	9.26904	8.28151	8.32749

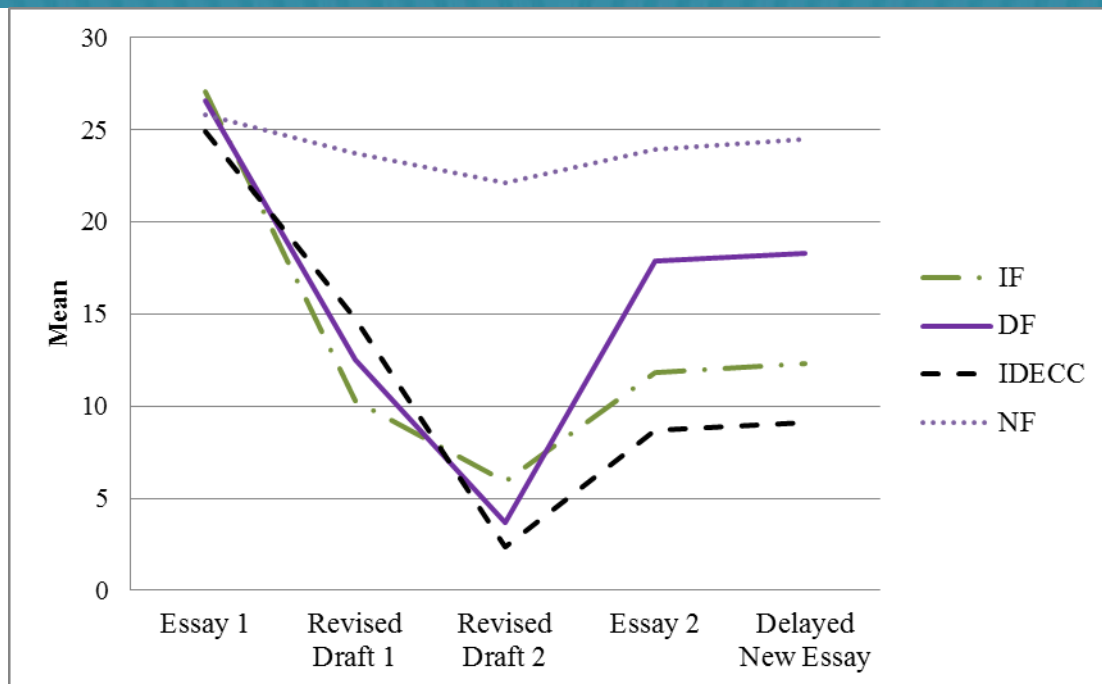


Figure 1. Mean number of errors of each group in each essay writing stage

Table 3. Repeated ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Essay 1	Between Groups	54.762	3	18.254	.158	.924
	Within Groups	9236.476	80	115.456		
	Total	9291.238	83			
Revised Draft 1	Between Groups	539.524	3	179.841	5.272	.002
	Within Groups	2729.143	80	34.114		
	Total	3268.667	83			
Revised Draft 2	Between Groups	2094.702	3	698.234	39.560	.000
	Within Groups	1412.000	80	17.650		
	Total	3506.702	83			
Essay 2	Between Groups	1156.607	3	385.536	12.755	.000
	Within Groups	2418.095	80	30.226		
	Total	3574.702	83			

The second question aimed at investigating the longer effects of feedback on treatment groups. It also attempted to investigate the extent to which the provision of corrective feedback from teachers could be brought over to a delayed new piece of writing in response to a new prompt. In this test, a comparison was made to examine the impacts of three feedback strategies of teachers and no feedback group. The number of errors on the first essay (essay 2) was compared to the one on the fifth (after the last essay writing of students as essay 2). In other words, this test was to investigate the carrying over of the treatment effect on a delayed new piece of writing.

To find the answer to this research question, four Paired Samples T-Tests were run. Since there were 4 paired t-tests, and in order to control for experiment-wise error, the alpha level had to be set at $p < .0125$. Such step included 84 students and their 168 essays. Data analysis by SPSS software indicated that in all three treatment groups, i.e. IF, DF, and IDECC, the number of errors in the delayed new post test was not significantly different from the post test (essay 2). Such a consistency between the numbers of errors in two groups along with considering the Table 5 suggests that the mean number of errors from Essay 2 and delayed new essay are to an extent consistent which further suggests that these two tests are to an extent the same as each other. The consistency between these two sets of scores and their means of errors highlights the point that the feedback was carried over to a longer term to a new essay.

Discussion

This research study aims at bridging the gap in the current literature on the impacts of teacher WCF on EFL learner writing accuracy. Since there is no consensus agreement on efficacy of provision of feedback on learner writing, the findings in this study have important implications to find out what exactly could be the proper answer to such a problem. In other words, the present study was carried out to investigate the provision of different types of teacher WCF strategies with due concentration on English grammatical points such as English articles, verb agreement, and question forms. Such provision of feedback was conducted via email by the help of Microsoft Word's comments and track changes features. 84 students of higher intermediate levels of three institutes of English higher intermediate took part in this study. They all took part in 5 stages of writing experiment consisting of the first writing task as a draft (Essay 1), making two subsequent revisions (as Revised Draft 1 & 2), and writing the new essay (Essay 2), and the delayed new essay to be examined regarding the effectiveness of teacher written corrective feedback.

Considering the first research question, researcher was to find the consistency in the mean number of errors across the 5 writing stages and among the 4 feedback groups. The findings suggest that there were differences in the mean number of errors between the treatment groups and the control one regarding the effect of feedback. Also, differences in the mean number of errors were found across first four stages of writing among Essay 1, both revisions, Essay 2. It could be concluded that the provision of feedback in this study was influential in the decrease of grammatical errors in subsequent revised drafts. Since there was a considerable significance between results of the two revision scores and the first essay, one can conclude that it is due to the provision of teacher WCF, while the decrease in the mean number of errors in the final essay (Essay 2) shows that the WCF could have a long term impact on students' writings.



In comparison to treatment groups which revealed that they could outperform the control one in immediate and later draft revisions no significant difference could be observed from the results of control group in order to claim that they have made a significant difference in their works results; only a slight and inconsiderable decrease was observed. The third feedback group called IDECC which received feedback in two separate segments, one via indirect feedback in the first stage of provision of feedback and one after that via direct one along with explicit corrective comments, outperformed the other two feedback groups which received one type of feedback in both their two revision stages. The IDECC group of treatment indicated a decrease of their errors by 90.5% in Revised Draft 2 as in comparison to the IF one (78.19%), the DF counterpart (86.3%), and obviously the NF group which was under control (14.4%). Findings of the study propose that provision of feedback in a written form from teachers, regardless of the type of feedback strategy, was perceived as influential in decrease of the number of errors on intended grammatical items. Such results are in line with the results obtained from previous studies conducted by Abadikhah, S., & Ashoori, A. (2012) Ahmadi, D., Maftoon, P., & Gholami Mehrdad, A. (2012).

To more meticulously compare differences between the IF and DF groups in their two immediate revision stages after being provided with two levels of teacher WCF, differences were examined and it was found that the DF one performed more accurately than their counterparts in IF group. This is justifiable due to the fact that the DF group received not only the signals regarding place of the errors, but also the correct and accurate form of the errors. On the other hand, the IF group wasn't provided with the correct form, and just received certain points regarding the existence of an error in the written text. However, regarding the long term effects of provision of feedback one month after the last feedback it was theoretically expected that the IF group would outperform the DF one in the final essay which became as a real one. This is due to the assumption that indirect feedback provides learners with more opportunities for learning deeply in the long term than the direct feedback. Once learners are given indirect feedback, they are subconsciously cognitively challenged to think more deeply on the clues they are given by their teachers, are more engaged in figuring out the correct forms since their attention is given to the errors and grammatical forms, and are more involved and asked to do the process of problem-solving in which some experts believe learners are more benefited in regard to the long-term learning improvement [3].

The third group of treatment which was IDECC outperformed all the other ones in regard to the grammatical accuracy in both stages of revisions and in the new essay. It has been supported by previous research studies stating that the provision of explicit corrective comments along with description of what the grammatical rule is, or with metalinguistic information, is of importance and beneficial for learners in long term, which can make learners more attentive to grammar and/or engage them in the process of problem-solving in order to find the correct form by themselves ([1], [4], [5], [7], [13], [11]). Moreover, once the learners are provided with indirect feedback followed by direct one and explicit corrective comments, as was done in IDECC, they could more effectively correct their grammatical errors than the other strategies consisting of only direct or indirect feedback. This is true for both the second revisions and final essay writing. Considering the results of this study, there is more evidence in line with the effectiveness of teacher corrective feedback, more specifically along with metalinguistic explanation in the form of ECC on grammatical rule, in improvement of learners' grammatical accuracy in writing.

The second research question sought to find the answer to the question the extent to which the provision of teacher WCF could have a longer-term impact on learner production of a delayed

new essay errors committed by participants in the final essay, almost 4 weeks after the last essay production. To find the proper answer, 4th written essays and the delayed new ones were compared in order to identify the long term effects of WCF by teachers. Findings suggest that the mean number of errors on grammatical items being examined in this study were consistent in all three treatment groups while there was none in the control group or at least it wasn't considerable enough. Such findings may imply that provision of WCF by teachers have a more lasting impact in terms of reducing the errors on grammatical items when new essays were written.

Another conclusion which could be drawn out of such findings is that provision of indirect feedback followed by the direct one along with explicit corrective comments on grammatical items seems to have had more impact on participants' writings in decreasing their errors while they were writing the fourth essay (Essay 2), especially, when it is compared to other groups which employed only one method of feedback provision. This may suggest that the impacts of providing feedback are transferable to the subsequent levels in writing new essays. Such findings are in line with the findings of previous studies by Abadikhah, S., & Ashoori, A. (2012). Rahimi, M., & Asadi, E. (2014).

They found that provision of some types of explicit corrective comments or metalinguistic explanations are influential in language learners' improvement of their grammatical accuracy in the long run.

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