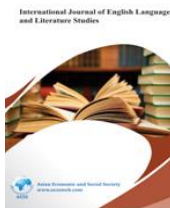




International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies

ISSN(e): 2306-0646/ISSN(p): 2306-9910

URL: www.aessweb.com



THE EFFECT OF DIRECT VS. INDIRECT WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON L2 LEARNERS WRITTEN ACCURACY IN EFL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Controversies still exist as which form of corrective feedback (direct or indirect) is more useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy. The results of previous studies are very mixed. The aim of the present study is to investigate which kind of feedback (direct or indirect) is useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy. For the purpose of the study 30 male and female intermediate English language learners affiliated to Zaban Sara Language Institute, Maragheh Branch, East Azerbaijan, Iran, were selected. They were selected intact group design on the basis of their performance on the pre-test. Their written performance on the tasks was analyzed according to the measures introduced by Ellis (2008). T-test and ANOVA were used as the statistical means of analysis. The result of the study showed that participants who received direct corrective feedback outperformed those received indirect corrective feedback in terms of written accuracy. The study might carry some pedagogical implications for second language teachers, SLA researchers, teacher education, and task designers.

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Keywords: Direct feedback, Indirect feedback, Implicit & explicit knowledge, Written accuracy, Measure, Implication.

Received: 27 November 2014 / **Revised:** 17 December 2014 / **Accepted:** 22 December 2014 / **Published:** 30 December 2014

Contribution/ Originality

The paper's primary contribution is finding which kind of feedback (direct or indirect) is useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy. Since the result of studies done in the past on the issue is very mixed, it seemed necessary to conduct another experiment and provide a satisfactory

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DOI: 10.18488/journal.23/2015.4.1/23.1.10.19

ISSN(e): 2306-0646/ISSN(p): 2306-9910

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answer to it. The paper has also used task as the units of analysis for data collection which was quite different from the studies conducted in the past.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is proved that revision plays a major role in good writing in terms of both content and form. Nevertheless, the debate over how and even whether to give L2 students feedback on their written errors is still a considerable source of interest and discussion among researchers, and instructors in the field of EFL (Ferris, 1999a); Truscott (1996,1999). In previous studies, researchers have typically found that writers who received direct corrective feedback on their errors showed improvement, which in some cases was statistically significant (Lalande, 1982; Robb *et al.*, 1986; Shepard, 1992; Frantzen, 1995; Ferris, 1997); especially when teachers mark student errors. Ferris and Robert (2001) suggest direct CF is probably better than indirect CF with student writers of low levels of proficiency. However, a recent survey by Sheen (2007) showed that direct CF can be effective in increasing acquisition of specific grammatical features. However, it seems that indirect corrective feedback is more helpful in improving student's written accuracy. Some studies (Lalande, 1982) indicate that indirect feedback is indeed more effective in enabling students to correct their own error than direct feedback. "Indirect feedback is often preferred to direct feedback on the grounds that it caters to 'guided learning and problem solving' (Lalande, 1982) and encourages students to reflect about linguistic forms". For these reasons, it is considered more likely to lead to long-term learning (Ferris and Robert, 2001). So the aim of the present study is to investigate which kind of feedback (direct or indirect) is useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy. The results of studies that have investigated this claim, however, are very mixed. Still some other researchers (for example, Ferris and Roberts' own study) found no difference between direct and indirect CF. Then, there is an immediate need to investigate which kind of feedback (direct or indirect) is useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy as many papers referred to it.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies (Lalande, 1982; Robb *et al.*, 1986; Frantzen, 1995; Lee, 1997; Ferris and Robert, 2001) investigated the effects of different types of corrective feedback on student errors in writing. Lee (1997) studied EFL college students in Hong Kong and found that students were significantly more able to correct errors that were underlined than errors that were either not marked or only indicated by a check in the margin.

Findings of different studies which have focused on the difference between direct and indirect CF are very mixed. Some studies (Lalande, 1982) claim that indirect feedback enables students to correct their own errors, however, some suggest the opposite (Chandler, 2003), and others (Robb *et al.*, 1986; Frantzen, 1995) found no difference. However, some experts in the field argue that indirect feedback is superior for most students, because it involves them in guided learning and problem solving (Lalande, 1982), focusing their attention to linguistic forms that may

lead to long-term learning (Ferris and Robert, 2001). Ferris and Helt (2000) claimed that “direct correction of error by the teacher led to more correct revisions (88%) than indirect feedback (77%)”. This study has not been published, but Ferris (2002) discussed the findings: “however, over the course of the semester, students who received primarily indirect feedback reduced their error frequency ratios substantially more than the students who received mostly direct feedback.” The study in 2000 was, however, descriptive and it was not quasi-experimental. According to Ferris and Robert (2001), the most commonly used type of feedback is underlining with description, followed by direct correction, and underlining was third. In several other studies, students have also indicated that they prefer indirect feedback with error codes or labels attached over either direct teacher correction or errors being simply marked but not labeled. And also, two studies conducted by Lalande and Ferris and Helt (Lalande, 1982) report an advantage for indirect feedback among these studies. Error correction researchers who have examined the effects of these two contrasting types of feedback have reported that indirect feedback provides more help for students to improve in their written accuracy over time more than direct feedback does (Lalande, 1982) or at least equally as well (Robb *et al.*, 1986; Frantzen, 1995). Van Beuningen *et al.* (2008; 2012) and Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) reported that, while it is correct that both direct and indirect corrective feedback has short term positive effect; only this is the direct CF option that had a significant long-term effect. According to Bitchener (2012), it is naive to think that the evidence from the recent studies is sufficient to support the supremacy of direct CF. Van Beuningen *et al.* (2012) 6-week study was conducted in the same condition as Van Beuningen *et al.* (2008) study. However in this study they used 268 participants. Bitchener and Knoch (2010b) also did a 10-week study with 63 advanced learners at a large university in the USA. All these studies found that whereas direct and indirect CF proved to have equal short-term effect in developing learner’s accuracy, only direct WCF had a more significant long-term effect than indirect WCF. The controversy has not finished yet. Recently a study conducted in Iran, shows that participants receiving indirect feedback outperformed those who received direct feedback (Maleki and Eslami, 2013). And also Esfandiari *et al.* (2014) rejected the supremacy of direct feedback over indirect. Given these conflicting results, further evidence is required before any firm conclusions can be reached.

2.1. Research Question and Hypothesis

RQ: What are the effects of direct vs. indirect corrective feedback on EFL learner’s written accuracy?

H₀: There is not any significant difference between direct and indirect corrective feedback.

H₁: Learners receiving indirect corrective feedback will outperform learner’s receiving direct corrective feedback.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 30 male and female intermediate English language learners affiliated to Zaban Sara Language Institute, Maraghe Branch, East Azerbaijan, Iran. In order to ensure about their homogeneity and their proficiency level, a pre-test was administered among the students. The participants were from Turkish linguistic background attending to a conversation course. The participants of the study were selected intact group design on the basis of their performance on the pre-test.

3.2. Instructional Materials

The materials used in this study were 5 units of American English File 3 written by [Clive and Christina \(2008\)](#) which was chosen as the instructional material. The course book American English File is widely used as a resource for teaching English as a foreign language in EFL context like Iran. Unit 1 to 4 of the book was taught to the participants. Participants were asked to do a writing task. The topic was chosen from American English File 3 for all groups. Then they received written corrective feedback (direct and indirect).

3.3. Procedure and Data Collection

The participants were divided into three groups. Each group was asked to write a task (paragraph with a same topic). The topic was chosen from American English File 3 (Student's book). Their written task was collected. Then one group received direct written corrective feedback; correct structure were provided, unnecessary words, phrase, or morpheme crossed out, correct form was written above or near to the erroneous form. The other group received indirect written corrective feedback; this time it is indicated that student has made an error without actually correcting it. The control group didn't receive any corrective feedback. The number and type of the errors was collected. It made known which category students had problems. A post-test has been done. Again students were asked to do a writing task this time. Of course the topics were the same. The second writings of students were collected. There were three kinds of papers; one group received direct corrective feedback, the second group received indirect corrective feedback and the third group received no corrective feedback as control group. The results were compared. The number of the errors and their type were analyzed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

To test the hypothesis of our study the quantified written data were fed into SPSS software (version 19). T-test and ANOVA were employed as the statistical means of analysis for comparing the means of pre-test and post-test. The results are shown in the following sections.

4.1. Comparison of the Means of Pre- and Post-test of Direct Corrective Feedback

The mean differences of written accuracy of pre-test and post-test of the participants who received direct corrective feedback are presented in table 1.

Table-1. The mean differences of written accuracy of pre-and post-test of direct corrective feedback

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	0.4	10	0.12	0.03
Post-test	0.62	10	0.2	0.06

According to the data presented in table 1, the participants who received direct corrective feedback had a better performance in the post-test than the pre-test in terms of accuracy. That is, learners receiving direct corrective feedback produced more accurate language in pre-test (0.62) than post-test (0.4). There was a slight difference between the accuracy of the participants receiving direct corrective feedback in pre-test and post-test.

Figure 1 clearly shows the mean differences of accuracy of the participants in pre-test and post-test with direct corrective feedback.

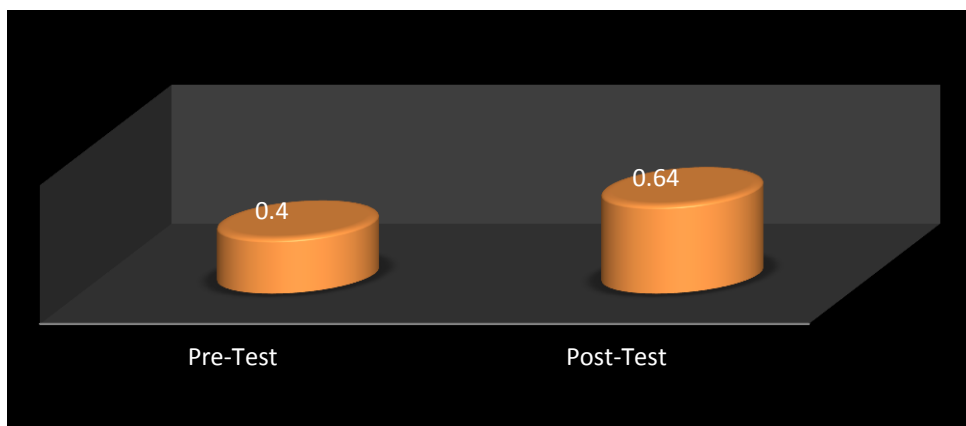


Figure-1. The mean differences of written accuracy of pre-and post-test of direct corrective feedback

Table 2 shows the results of paired-samples T-test for the accuracy of pre-test and post-test with direct corrective feedback.

Table -2. The results of paired-samples T-test for pre- and post-test of direct corrective feedback

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre-Post	-0.22	0.18	0.05	-0.35	-0.08	-3.7	9	0.005

As the data presented in the above table show, there wasn't any significant difference between the performances of the participants in terms of their written accuracy in pre-test and post-test while receiving direct corrective feedback.

4.2. Comparison of the means of pre- and post-test of indirect corrective feedback

The following table shows the mean differences of written accuracy of the participants in the pre-test and post-test receiving indirect corrective feedback.

Table-3. The mean differences of written accuracy of pre-and post-test of indirect corrective feedback

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	0.53	10	0.17	0.05
Post-test	0.64	10	0.22	0.07

As it is presented in table 3, the mean of written accuracy of the participants in post-test is slightly higher than their performance in pre-test. That is, the learners receiving indirect corrective feedback had higher accuracy in post-test (0.64) than in pre-test (0.53). The mean differences of written accuracy of the participants in pre-test and post-test receiving indirect corrective feedback are indicated in figure 2.

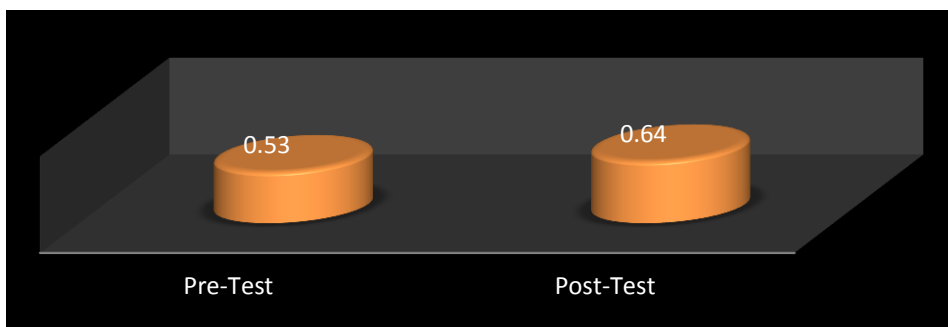


Figure-2. The mean differences of written accuracy of pre-and post-test of indirect corrective feedback

The results of comparison of the means of written accuracy of the participants in pre-test and post-test with indirect corrective feedback by means of paired-samples T-test are presented in the following table.

Table -4. The results of paired-samples T-test for pre- and post-test of indirect corrective feedback

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre-Post	-0.11	0.21	0.067	-0.26	0.04	-1.6	9	0.13

According to the results of the data analysis presented in table 4, there wasn't any significant difference between the participants' performances in terms of their accuracy of the writing task in pre-test and post-test while receiving indirect corrective feedback

4.3. Comparison of the Means of Written Accuracy of Post-Test of Direct, Indirect, and Control Groups

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the written accuracy of the pre-test and post-test of direct, indirect, and control groups.

Table-5. Descriptive statistics of written accuracy of post-test of direct, indirect, and control groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Direct	10	0.62	0.2	0.06	0.46	0.77	0.3	0.9
Indirect	10	0.64	0.22	0.07	0.48	0.79	0.4	0.9
Control	10	0.59	0.15	0.05	0.47	0.7	0.4	0.8
Total	30	0.61	0.19	0.03	0.54	0.68	0.3	0.9

According to the above table, learners who received indirect corrective feedback outperformed the two other groups in terms of the written accuracy in post-test. That is, the participants who received indirect corrective feedback produced more accurate language (0.64) in post-test than those who received direct corrective feedback (0.62) and no corrective feedback (0.59).

Figure 3 vividly illustrates the mean differences of written accuracy of the participants in post-test with direct, indirect, and no corrective feedback (control group).

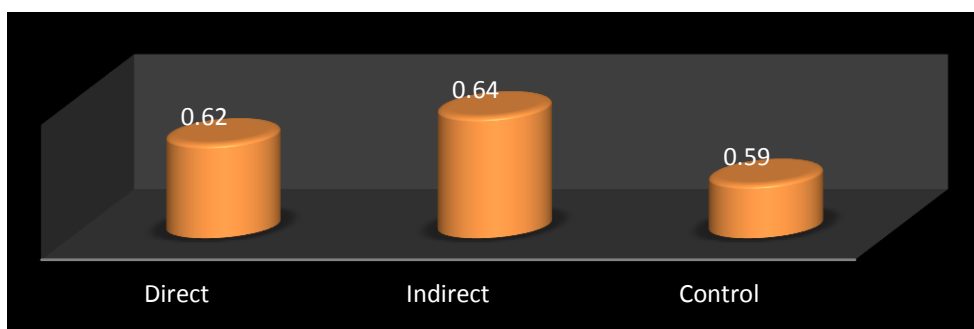


Figure-3. The mean differences of written accuracy of post-test of direct, indirect, and control groups

The following table shows the results of comparison of the means of written accuracy of the three groups using ANOVA.

Table-6. The results of ANOVA of means of written accuracy of direct, indirect, and control groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.01	2	0.006	0.16	0.85
Within Groups	1.06	27	0.04		
Total	1.08	29			

According to the data presented in table 6, there is a slight difference between the performances of direct, indirect, and control groups in terms of written accuracy in post-test. Post Hoc LSD test was employed for further analysis of the means of accuracy of the performances of the participants. The results of LSD test are presented in table 7 as following.

Table-7. The results of LSD of means of written accuracy of direct, indirect, and control groups

(I) CF	(J) CF	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct	Indirect	-0.02	0.08	0.82	-0.2	0.16
	Control	0.03	0.08	0.73	-0.15	0.21
Indirect	Direct	0.02	0.08	0.82	-0.16	0.2
	Control	0.05	0.08	0.57	-0.13	0.23
Control	Direct	-0.03	0.08	0.73	-0.21	0.15
	Indirect	-0.05	0.08	0.57	-0.23	0.13

As the results of LSD test presented in the above table show, there were no significant differences between the performances of the participants of direct, indirect, and control groups in terms of their written accuracy.

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to investigate which kind of feedback (direct or indirect) is useful in improving EFL student's written accuracy. Considering the results of Statistical analysis (Table 3) for the effect of direct Vs indirect corrective feedback, it is revealed that the two group's performance wasn't statistically significant. However means of accuracy of direct corrective feedback was higher than indirect corrective feedback. The findings of the study are in line with [Van Beuningen et al. \(2012\)](#), [Bitchener and Knoch \(2010a\)](#), [Lee \(1997\)](#), and [Frantzen \(1995\)](#) who found that while direct and indirect CF proved to have equal short-term effect in developing learner's accuracy, only direct WCF had a more significant long-term effect than indirect WCF. However, the results ran against [Esfandiar et al. \(2014\)](#), [Maleki and Eslami \(2013\)](#) and [Lalande, Ferris, and Helt \(Lalande, 1982\)](#) who found that indirect corrective feedback was more effective.

Considering the null hypothesis the results are significant and show effectiveness of feedback. Post-test results are higher than pre-test. Regarding the hypothesis and the results of statistical analysis for the difference between direct and indirect feedback on written accuracy of participants null hypothesis was rejected. The result of ANOVA (Table 6) showed significant difference between two groups. Written accuracy of students received direct feedback improved in

comparison to those who received indirect corrective feedback. According to table 4, figure 5, direct feedback proves to be more helpful than indirect one in improving written accuracy of participants.

The results can be attributed to explicit guidance of teacher, raised consciousness of the participants, and because of depth of processing involved in direct written corrective feedback. Low number of participants is due to different level of students and lack of access to students in the same level. And also due to the fact that they were carefully selected and if we wanted to increase the number of participants, some other factors came to affect the results, the number of the student was low. And of course Non-parametric test are robust tests.

6. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

The present study has a number of pedagogical implications for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers and teachers. Language teachers and educators need to consider that direct feedback is better than indirect and leads to better performance in students. They should adopt more direct strategies in correcting student's errors. Some level of consciousness is necessary for SLA. Consciousness provides an opportunity to unite useful concept from cognitive psychology. This point should be taken into account by SLA researchers to relate feedback to SLA theories.

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