

**The Impact of Written Corrective Feedback of  
Grammatical points on Intermediate EFL Students'  
Writing Accuracy**

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**IN THE NAME OF GOD THE  
MOST COMPASSIONATE THE  
MERCIFUL**

*Dedicated to:*

*My father who attended my defense session and supported me with his constant smile during the presentation. Although he is not physically with me anymore, I am sure he was so proud of me that day.*

*And also to my lovely mother and sister, for their love, encouragement and support.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title Page	I
Dedication	II
Acknowledgements	III
Table of Contents	IV
List of Tables	IX
List of Figures	XI
Abbreviations	XII
Abstract	XIII

### **Chapter one**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1.1. Preview	2
1.2. Statement of the problem	5
1.3. Objectives of the study	6
1.4. Research questions and hypotheses	7
1.5. Limitations of the study	7
1.6. Delimitations of the study	8
1.7. Definition of theoretical terms	9
1.8. The outline of the study	10

## **Chapter two**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

2.1. Introduction	13
2.2. General concepts and theories of L2 writing and Corrective feedback	14
2.2.1. The place of writing in the syllabus	14
2.2.2. How to teach writing	16
2.2.3. Characteristics of writing	17
2.2.3.1. Permanence	17
2.2.3.2. Explicitness	17
2.2.3.3. Density	18
2.2.3.4. Detachment	18
2.2.3.5. Organization	18
2.2.3.6. Slowness of production and speed of reception	18
2.2.3.7. Standard language	18
2.2.3.8. A learned skill	19
2.2.3.9. Sheer amount and importance	19
2.2.4. Writing: Process versus Product approach	19
2.2.4.1. Prewriting	23
2.2.4.1.1. Brainstorming	23
2.2.4.1.2. Listing	23
2.2.4.1.3. Clustering	23

2. 2.4.1.4. Free writing	23
2.2.4.2. Writing the composition	24
2.2.4.3. Post writing	24
2.2.5. Corrective Feedback	24
2.2.5.1. Direct corrective feedback	25
2.2.5.2. Indirect corrective feedback	25
2.2.5.3. Metalinguistic corrective feedback	26
2.2.5.4. Focused versus unfocused feedback	27
2.2.5.5. Electronic feedback	27
2.2.5.6. Reformulation	28
2.2.5.7. Peer feedback	28
2.2.6. Responding to the feedback	29
2.3. Related research on the use of corrective feedback on writing	30
2.3.1. The continuous debate	30
2.3.2. Research evidence against corrective feedback	33
2.3.3. Research evidence for the written corrective feedback in terms of the effects of different feedback strategy on accuracy improvement	36

## **Chapter three**

### **METHODOLOGY**

3.1. Introduction	45
3. 2. Participants	45
3. 3. Instruments	46

3. 3. 1. Pretest of preliminary English Test (PET)	46
3. 3. 2. Narrative writing tasks	46
3. 3. 3. Cloze test	47
3. 4. Procedure	48
3. 5. Spotting and measuring the errors	51

## **Chapter four**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

4. 1. Introduction	54
4.2. Writing tasks analysis and results	54
4.2.1. Verb errors	58
4.2. 2. Noun ending errors	59
4. 2. 3. Wrong words	60
4. 2. 4. Sentence structure errors	62
4. 2. 5. Article errors	63
4.2. 6. Preposition errors	65
4.2. 7. Total errors	66
4.3. Cloze test analysis and results	67
4.4. Discussion	70

## **Chapter five**

### **CONCLUSION**

5.1. Introduction	74
5.2. Brief overview of the findings	74

5.2.1. Objective 1: The short and long term effects of the direct feedback on writing accuracy.

75

5.2.2. Objective 2: The short and long term effects of the indirect feedback on writing accuracy.

76

5.2.3. Objective 3: Use of avoidance strategy due to the provided CF

77

5.3. Implications of the study

77

5.4. Suggestions for further research

78

**References** 81

### **Appendices**

**Appendix A:** The Pretest of Preliminary English Test (PET) 86

**Appendix B:** Example of error correction in the direct feedback group 93

**Appendix C:** Example of corrective feedback provision in the indirect group 94

**Appendix D:** Example of commenting on student writing in the control group 95

**Appendix E:** Examples of cloze tests constructed based on students' committed errors 96

## List of Tables

Table 3. 1: Topics which were chosen to be written about	46
Table 3. 2: Data collection timetable	50
Table 3. 3: Description for error categories	52
Table 4. 1: Means of errors in three writing tasks ___ Control group	55
Table 4. 2: Means of errors in three writing tasks __ Direct group	55
Table 4. 3: Means of errors in three writing tasks __ Indirect group	56
Table 4. 4. ANOVA analysis in Direct Feedback group	57
Table 4. 5. ANOVA analysis in Indirect Feedback group	57
Table 4. 6: Means of errors for verb errors in the Direct group	58
Table 4. 7: Means of errors for verb errors in the Indirect group	58
Table 4. 8: Means of errors for Noun ending errors in the Direct group	59
Table 4. 9: Means of errors for Noun ending errors in the Indirect group	60
Table 4. 10. Means of errors for Wrong words in the Direct group	61
Table 4. 11. Means of errors for Wrong words in the Indirect group	61
Table 4. 12: Mean of errors for Sentence Structure errors in the Direct group	62
Table 4. 13: Means of errors for Sentence Structure errors in the Indirect group	62
Table 4. 14: Means of errors for Article errors in the Direct group	63
Table 4. 15: Means of errors for Article errors in the Indirect group	64
Table 4. 16: Mean of errors for Preposition errors in the Direct group	65

Table 4. 17: Means of errors for Preposition errors in the Indirect group	65
Table 4. 18: Means of errors for Total errors in the three groups	67
Table 4. 19: examples of using avoidance strategy	68
Table 4. 20: percentages of error correction	69

## List of Figures

Figure 4. 1: Error reduction in verb tense	59
Figure 4. 2: Error reduction in noun endings	60
Figure 4. 3: Error reduction for word choice	61
Figure 4.4: Error reduction in sentence structure	63
Figure 4. 5: error reduction in articles	64
Figure 4. 6: error reduction in prepositions	66
Figure 4. 7: error reduction for total errors	67
Figure 4. 8: The graphical illustration of the error correction percentages	70

## **Abbreviations**

**CF:** Corrective feedback

**VE:** Verb Errors

**NEE:** Noun Ending Errors

**WW:** Wrong Words

**SS:** Sentence Structure

**AE:** Article Errors

**PE:** Preposition Errors

## **ABSTRACT**

Controversy over the value of providing corrective feedback on L2 writing has been noteworthy in recent years as a result of Truscott's (1996) claim that it is not only ineffective but also harmful and should therefore be abandoned. This was followed by a rejoinder by Ferris (1999) which resulted in a growing body of empirical research investigating the value of corrective feedback. Contributing to this research base, the present study investigated whether the type of feedback (direct or indirect) given to 41 intermediate EFL learners on six types of errors (verb tense, noun ending, word choice, sentence structure, article and preposition ) resulted in improved accuracy in narrative writing both in the short and long term periods. The study found a significant effect for the indirect feedback on accuracy improvement in the use of the verb tense, noun ending, sentence structure and article in both short and long term periods but no significant effect for word choice (in either time periods) and preposition ( in the long term). Although the direct feedback showed a significant effect on accuracy level for the use of noun ending, preposition, article and sentence structure in the short term, it did not demonstrate any statistical significance in the long term. Moreover, there was not any significant effect on verb errors and wrong words in either time periods. Finally, the indirect group outperformed the direct group on accuracy improvement for total errors. The study also considered the use of avoidance strategy due to the provided corrective feedback and found that in spite of the probability of the tendency towards using it, providing corrective feedback is still necessary in improving L2 writing accuracy.

*Key words: Student Writing; Corrective Feedback; Linguistic Error; Accuracy Improvement;*

*Avoidance Strategy*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

## Chapter one

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Preview

Feedback in teaching all subject areas is considered as the crucial factor. It provides any information on what the students do as a result of teaching. Therefore it probably bridges the gap between teaching and learning by reinforcing correct points and rejecting incorrect ones to prevent fossilization. As far as second language teaching is considered, feedback refers to any comments or other information that second language learners receive on their learning activities and tests. It can be from teachers or other people such as classmates, parents, friends and etc.....

Teachers are the most prevalent providers of feedback because they evaluate learning based on the instruction during teaching period. They confront many situations in which learners indicate some sorts of errors in what they have learned. This is the time when the teacher provides corrective feedback and uses different strategies to correct errors. Corrective feedback is provided for two productive skills which are speaking and writing. Written discourse is different from spoken one and the fundamental difference as Penny Ur (1996) mentions, is 'between formal, detached discourse and informal, interactive discourse (p. 172). Spoken language contains lots of Ellipsis (words are omitted without changing the meaning). The grammar of speech is arranged in different way from writing. In formal writing grammatical errors are more noticeable. Penny Ur (1996 ) lists the probable reasons for this:

1. Mistakes in spelling or grammar catch the eye and seem to demand to be corrected and are very difficult to ignore.

2. Students also want their language mistakes to be corrected.

3. Language mistakes are far more easily and quickly diagnosed and corrected than ones of content and organization (p. 170).

As a result, grammatical errors call for more attention from second language teachers. It is obvious that language teachers spend hours correcting students' writing in different ways. They spend a great deal of time marking, grading, commenting and responding to students' written works and on top of this list, for the second language teachers – correcting grammatical errors.

Over the years, there have been different approaches to error correction. According to behaviorists, error would lead to fossilization and classroom drills were designed to help learners avoid making mistakes. However the communicative approach has sent a different message to the teachers. It asks them to get their students to communicate at all cost. This means that teachers should be tolerant to their students' errors.

However, there is not still a sense of certainty about how best to provide such corrective feedbacks. Some educators even believe in abandoning the whole practice of grammar correction (Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2007, for example). Truscott (1996, 1999, 2007) argued that all forms of error correction of L2 student writing are not only ineffective but also harmful and should be abandoned. On the other hand, Ferris (1999) claimed that Truscott's arguments were premature and he overlooked some positive research evidence on the effects of grammar correction.

Today the controversy continues between those who believe in providing feedback on students' writing and who do not. This continuing debate is the outcome of the many experimental studies on written corrective feedback carried out over the last 20 years. What is almost clear is that language learners desire CF on their writing and report that they

expect and want their instructors to provide them with feedback and believe that it is necessary in improving writing skill. However, Truscott (1996) believes that teachers should not provide it even though their students ask for it.

The usefulness of teacher feedback in writing is a subject of lively debate. As Lee (1998) has noted attitudes toward error correction evolves from the strict avoidance of errors and quick and direct correction as harmful and unnecessary in the late 1960s, and to a more critical view of the need and value of error correction in 1970s, 1980s. After many years of conducting different research on CF, it is not worthy to discuss about having or not having it, but when to have it, how to have it, how often to have it and the other questions as to how carry it out. Providing students with CF becomes more acceptable when writing is considered as a process not just as a product. In this model of writing, providing CF at the revision stage is one of the necessities.

The ability to write well is not naturally acquired. It is learned as a set of practical and learned experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability to tell the information. The introduction of process approach in writing helps the students to understand better the process of writing and this approach eventually helps the students to build their own strategies in writing. As stated by Flower (1981), by using process approach in writing, students will have much time to discover their reading strategies and to consider feedback from teachers. As stated by Zamel (1983) 'By studying what it is our students do in their writing, we can learn from them what they still need to be taught'. That is one major reason why teachers' feedback is crucial in helping students to improve their writing.

This study will then attempt to explore the impact of two kinds of CF (i.e. direct and indirect) on intermediate student writing accuracy both in the short and long term periods. It will also compensate for the students' use of avoidance strategy by providing them with two

different posttests which are a writing task as well as a test on grammatical errors they made on the pretest.

### **1.2. Statement of the problem:**

Two factors are considered in teaching writing: methodology and teacher. Considering teachers' role, feedback provision is one of the instruction's components. Although Teachers do give feedback to the students, their feedback on the form and content are often vague, contradictory, unsystematic and inconsistent. This leads to various reactions by students including confusion, frustration and inattention the comments. There is a growing body of literature on the impact of CF on students' writing skill, but the controversy has not ended. Some believe the present studies ' that exist are limited in both research design and sample size' (Ferris, 1997, p. 316).

A central issue, when correcting written work of the students, is deciding how to correct errors. Despite the findings of related studies, many teachers still tend to respond to their students' written works by using the traditional method of correcting all grammatical errors in a piece of written work. They impose themselves as authorities and make comments. Similarly, Zamel (1985) has criticized the responding behaviors of ESL/EFL teachers on the grounds that ESL/EFL writing teachers misread student texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to text as fixed and final products, and rarely make content-specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising the text (p.86).

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF) has always been a matter of controversy (Truscott 1996, 1997, 2007, and Ferris, 1999, 2001). One position is that CF only leads to L2 explicit knowledge (not implicit knowledge) and as a result has only a very limited effect on learners' writing. An alternative position believes that CF leads to the development of implicit knowledge (either directly or indirectly) and thus will have a noticeable effect on the accuracy of learners' writing. Researchers need to know whether it helps students to improve written accuracy over time. But, at present, there is no clear answer, because past research has failed to provide clear evidence of the effectiveness of written CF (see Ferris, 2004; Guenette, 2007; Wei, 2008).

As a result, the overall objective of this study is to investigate the probable effects of written CF on EFL learners' acquisition of grammar at intermediate level. To achieve this goal, the specific research objectives are to:

1. Explore the short and long term effects of direct feedback on six targeted grammatical errors.
2. Explore the short and long term effects of indirect feedback on six targeted grammatical errors.
3. Evaluate the role of avoidance strategy as a response to the provided feedback.

As it is mentioned above, the present study will investigate whether the distinction between indirect (implicit) and direct (explicit) written CF can account for the effect CF has on writing accuracy by considering the probable effects of such feedbacks on six linguistic categories to investigate whether the type of feedback on six types of errors will result in improved accuracy in new pieces of writing. It will also explore the role of avoidance strategy which is one of the opponents' reasons for not providing it.