The Effect of Reactive Focused Corrective Feedback on Iranian EFL Learners' Writing performance

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Abstract

The role of corrective feedback in language acquisition has been a highly controversial issue. The present study aims to investigate the effects of direct and indirect corrective feedback on intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing. To this end, sixty intermediate EFL learners, aged 16-17, of a language institute in Tehran, Iran were selected as the participants of this study. After administering Nelson Test to 90 students, sixty homogeneous subjects were chosen and assigned to three groups including one control, and two experimental groups. Participants in experimental groups received treatments, that is, one experimental group (N=20) received directive corrective feedback and the other experimental group (N=20) received indirect corrective feedback and control group (N=20) didn't receive any corrective feedback during the course of teaching EFL narrative writing. Finally, at the end of the course participants in these groups sat for the posttest. Results of t-test analysis indicated that participants in indirect corrective feedback significantly outperformed those in control and direct groups in narrative writing. The results of the present study can also provide pedagogical implications in employing corrective feedback in writing classes.

Keywords: Narrative Writing, Indirect Corrective Feedback, Direct Corrective Feedback

Introduction

One of the areas in which second language teachers are interested is errors produced by learners as evidence showing a problem in their inter-language system. Errors by learners while learning a language is inevitable and natural part of language teaching and learning process. Such errors should be corrected in a variety of ways. If the errors are systematically and effectively corrected they would be expected to be of great significance. In language learning and teaching, the critical role of feedback in learning is clear. Feedback that students receive from a source, or a combination of sources, provides them with information about what is correct and what needs to be corrected so that they can incorporate and use the feedback in their revisions and in their learning improvement process (Purnawarman, 2011).

Writing in L2 seems to be challenging to its learners. Also in many educational contexts, teaching writing is based on examination, with accuracy as the most significant criterion of assessment (Ghassemi, &et.al. 2013). As previously mentioned student writers might commit some errors while completing their writing tasks. Committing errors by all learners is inevitable.

The current study is relevant to writing ability aiming to explore the effects of direct vs. indirect corrective feedback on improving students' narrative writing. Sain and et.al. (2013) suggest that feedback can be categorized as content comments only, error correction or combination of contents and error correction, and error identification but no correction.

Literature review

In the field of foreign language learning and teaching, researchers and teachers have long tried to find ways to facilitate their students' learning (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Corrective feedback is essential in the field of education and in learning generally. Many studies have been done on corrective feedback (Li 2010; Lyster & Saito 2010; Mackey & Goo 2007; Russell & Spada 2006; Sheen & Ellis, 2011).

The role of corrective feedback in language acquisition has been a highly controversial issue. Some believe that exposing learners to naturally occurring samples of a target language is the only way that they need in order to develop their second language, and error treatment is harmful rather than helpful (Krashen, 1981; Truscott, 1999). In both behaviorist and cognitive theories of L2 learning, feedback is considered as contributing to language learning. In both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is seen as a means of motivating learner guaranteeing linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009).

"Feedback has long been regarded as essential for the development of second language (L2) writing skills, both for its potential for learning and for student motivation" (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 83) . With the advent of English as a global language, the ability to write well in English across diverse settings and for different audiences has become crucial in language education programs. English writing constitutes a problem for many language learners in the world because it requires writers to have a great deal of lexical and syntactic knowledge as well as principles of organization in L2 to produce a good writing (Rouhi & Samiei, 2010). However, the Iranian English foreign language (EFL) setting has a less emphasis on English writing, despite all the efforts and investment devoted to other aspects of English teaching.

Based on the complexity of various modes of writing in L2 it seems that committing errors by learners while completing a writing task is inevitable. They are natural part of language teaching and learning process. Such errors should be corrected in a variety of ways. If the errors are systematically and effectively corrected they would be expected to be of great significance. In language learning and teaching, including writing in ESL/EFL context, the critical role of feedback in learning is clear. Student writers benefit from enough writing practice and revisions on their drafts to produce a final written text. In these processes, writers often depend upon feedback received either from a teacher, peer, or self. Feedback that students receive from a source, or a combination of sources, provides them with information about what is correct and what needs to be corrected so that they can incorporate and use the feedback in their revisions and in their final produced writings (Purnawarman, 2011).

Feedback might be done either directly or indirectly (Ellis, 2009; Ferris and Hedgocok, 2005; Ferris and Roberts, 2001). In the case of direct CF the teacher provides the correct form for the learners. Direct CF explicitly directs learners to correct their errors. This is clearly helpful if learners don't have the capability of self-correcting the error. Ferris and Roberts (2001) believe that direct CF sounds to be better than indirect CF with less proficient student writers. While, Indirect corrective feedback indicates the occurrence of an error in some way without explicit attention drawn. This can be done by underlining the errors or using cursors to show omissions in learner's text or by placing a cross in the margin next to the line including the error. In fact, this is done to show the exact location of the error.

Erel and Bulut (2007) did a comparative study of direct and indirect coded feedback in Turkish EFL context. Their findings indicated that the number of errors of participants in indirect coded feedback strategy group gradually was decreased during throughout the course of the study. However, the statistical analysis did not show any meaningful difference across the three periods (before mid-term 1, before mid-term 2 and before mid-term 3) during the study for this group. Also

based on their results it was manifested that direct feedback strategy group lessened the number of their errors during the study, and statistical analysis didn't reveal any significant difference across the three periods during the course for this group as well.

Abedi et.al. (2010) also found that the type of feedback significantly influenced the learners' writing improvement. It was observed that learners provided with indirect feedback on their writing through error detection along with codes, manifested greater improvement in producing new written discourses. And, they also welcomed this type of feedback more than the direct corrective feedback type.

Sivaji (2011/2012) at theUniversity of Jaffna explored the effects of direct and indirect error correction feedback on the grammatical accuracy of ESL writing of undergraduates. Sivaji (2011/2012) states that in the present research setting, ELT teachers appear to believe that if a teacher identifies exactly the grammatical errors made in students' written productions, students would identify such errors and not repeat them again.

Srichanyachon (2012) in a study entitled "Teacher Written Feedback for L2 Learners' Writing Development" state that direct feedback is a technique used to correct students' error by giving an explicit written correction. On the other hand, indirect feedback is when the teacher indicates that an error has been made by using an underline, circle, code, etc.

Srichanyachon adds that indirect CF is very helpful when it incorporated with student self-revision, but students with lower proficiency of language may be unable to recognize and correct errors even when they have become aware of the errors made.

Kim (2012) did a study on linguistic accuracy in an EFL writing class and found that both the direct and indirect CFs influence form-related writing accuracy, but such an effect was not obvious for the learners in the control group who didn't receive any treatment regarding direct or indirect CF. Under the traditional experimental setting, this study showed the effectiveness of CF confirming the significance of error correction in L2 writing.

Research questions and Hypothesis

The questions of the current study were:

Q1: What is the effect of direct corrective feedback on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing?

Q2: What is the effect of indirect corrective feedback on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing?

Q3: What is the position of indirect vs. direct effective feedback?

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H01: Direct corrective feedback doesn't put meaningful effects on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing.

H02: Indirect corrective feedback doesn't put meaningful effects on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing.

H03: Indirect corrective feedback isn't more effective than direct feedback.

Methodology

This study is an investigation of two research questions related to the impact of reactive focused corrective feedback on learner's essay writing ability. This chapter describes the research methodology beginning with the participants and setting, research instruments, and research procedure and design.

Participants

Participants of the present study were intermediate EFL (N=60) learners selected from 90 students of a language Institute, in Tehran, Iran. All participants were females around 17 to 19 and

their level of proficiency was intermediate at the time of research. They were assigned to three groups including control, and two experimental groups. Participants in experimental groups received treatments, that is, one experimental group (N=20) receive directive corrective feedback and the other experimental group (N=20) received indirect corrective feedback and control group (N=20) didn't receive any corrective feedback during the course of teaching EFL narrative writing.

Materials and instrumentation

Nelson English Language Test : To assure the homogeneity of the participants, a Nelson proficiency test series 200A (developed by Fowler and Coe, 1976) containing 50items in MC vocabulary and cloze-test forms was given to a population including 90 participants. The time allotted was 25 minutes. Sixty participants whose scores were one SD above and below the mean were selected as the participants of this study. Therefore, they were randomly assigned into two experimental and one control groups. While Nelson is reliable, in order to test the reliability of the test in this study for these participants in Iran a Kuder-Richardson was estimated to determine the degree of internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability of Nelson English Language Test

	Kuder-Richardson	N of Items
Nelson English Language Test	.72	50

Pretest : To check the participants' ability in narrative writing 60 participants in these three groups were asked to write the story about "their first day in school". Their performances were evaluated considering spelling, vocabulary usage, grammar, coherence, cohesion. The pretest will be administered to students at the beginning of the experiment. Then the students' pretests will be scored for analysis. The scores will be used to assess students' performances as a result 20 students get 16, 15 students get 18, 20 students get 17 and only 5 students get 19.

Touchstone 3: Touchstone 3 was employed by the researcher as a textbook in these three groups. This book covered vocabulary, reading, grammar, pronunciation and so on, but just writing section was practiced during the course and the rest of sections were excluded.

Posttest: To check the participants' ability in narrative writing at the end of the course a posttest was administered to 60 students and they were asked to write a narration with the same topic which had been selected for their pretest. Among all students, 10 students get 18, 25 students get 19, 20 students get 20 and only 5 students get 17.

Procedures for Data Collection

The general purpose of this study was to examine the impact of using two types of corrective feedback, indirect vs. direct CFs, on the EFL learners' ability in narrative writing. The academic semester for this study lasted for 20 sessions. At the beginning of the course, the Nelson English language test including 50 items was administered to 90 EFL intermediate learners. The test takers were 90 female students, and only 60 students whose scores were one SD above and below the mean were selected as the participants of the study. After ensuring the homogeneity of the participants, they were assigned to two experimental and one control groups. In the next step, a pretest was administered to three groups.

During the course students in three groups received writing materials and were taught by the same teachers. One experimental group received direct corrective feedback and the other experimental group received indirect corrective feedback (using codes or writing on the margins and etc.) while control group didn't receive any corrective feedback from teacher but their performances during the course were assessed.

Finally, at the end of the course participants of three groups sat for a posttest. They were asked to write about their first day in school. Their performances were evaluated and the means obtained were compared to those obtained from pretest.

Results and Discussions
To check the normality of distribution of the scores obtained by a specific group, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was employed. Null-hypothesis in this test indicates that the research distribution of scores is normal while the research hypothesis indicates that the variables aren't normal. The following table illustrates the obtained findings.

Table 2. Results of the Normality of Research Variables Using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		Cont. pre	Di pre	In pre	Cont post	Di post	In post
N		20	20	20	20	20	20
Normal parameters	Mean	13.70	13.65	13.90	16.00	16.15	17.05
	Std. Deviation	1.658	1.089	1.252	1.556	1.424	1.432
Most Extreme Differences	absolute	.172	.226	.232	.160	.192	.196
	Positive	.128	.135	.168	.140	.192	.154
	Negative	-.172	-.226	-.232	-.160	-.160	-.195
Kolmogorov-Smirnov		.768	1.011	1.037	.717	.858	.879
Asymp.sig (2-tailed)		.596	.259	.233	.684	.453	.423

As Table 1 shows, the test probability (p-value) for all variables is greater than 0.05 (sig>.05) thus supporting null-hypothesis indicating the normal distribution of research variables. Therefore, to check the research hypotheses the parametric t-test is used.

Results of Nelson Proficiency Test
To select homogeneous participants with the same level of language proficiency Nelson test was administered to 90 intermediate EFL learners. Table 2 shows the data obtained from SPSS.

Table 2. Results of Nelson Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
nelson	90	28	49	35.88	5.941
Valid N (list wise)	90				

Based on data in table 1 ninety participants sat for the test; its mean is 35.88; standard deviation (SD) is 5.94; as previously mentioned those participants whose scores were one SD above and below the mean (between 29.94 and 41.82) were selected as the participants of this study.

In order to ensure the differences of groups at the beginning of the research, one-way ANOVA (or equivalent tests such as Welch if needed) was used. Table 3 shows that there is no significant

difference among the experimental and control groups, regarding their language proficiency at the outset of the study.

Table 3. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
5.92	2	57	.005

As the table 3 displays P-value is .005 which is less than α = .05, so the null hypothesis of Levene test which is the equality of variances, is rejected.

Since equality of variance which is one of the ANOVA defaults is not established, it is better to use ANOVA equivalent tests such as WELCH and Brown-Forsythe. The results are listed in the table 4:

Table 4. Results of WELCH, Brown-Forsyth for Nelson

	Statistica	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	3.74	2	36.103	.053
Brown-Forsythe	2.94	2	50.89	.062
a. Asymptotically F distributed.				

To ensure consistency of data collected from pretest, the ANOVA equivalent tests such as WELCH and Brown-Forsythe tests were used. As it can be seen in table 4, there is no significant difference among the three groups. Results show that Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests' p-value are and .053 and .062, respectively, which are more than α = 0.05.Therefore, the null hypothesis of these tests which is the equality of means in the three groups is accepted.

Results of Pretest

To ensure the homogeneity of variances with respect to writing ability, the following procedures was done:

Table 5. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Levene Statistic	**df1**	**df2**	**P-value**
1.086	2	57	.344

As the table 5 displays, P-value is more than .05(that is .344), so the null hypothesis of Levene test which is the equality of variances, is accepted. So ANOVA can be used.

Table 6. Results of one-way ANOVA for pretest

	Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**P-value**
Between Groups	.700	2	.350	.191	.827
Within Groups	104.550	57	1.834		
Total	105.250	59			

As Table 6 shows, there is no significant difference (F=.191, P =.827 > 0.05) among three groups with respect to writing ability in pretest. The results show P-Value equals .827 which is more than α = 0.05.

Results of Posttest

Prior to check the results of posttest it is worth restating the null-hypotheses proposed by the researcher in chapter one.

H01: Direct corrective feedback (CF) doesn't significantly influence intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing ability.

H02: Indirect corrective feedback (CF) doesn't significantly influence intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing ability.

H03: Direct corrective feedback (CF) and Indirect corrective feedback don't result in meaningful different performances regarding intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing ability.

To check the effects of direct corrective feedback (CF) on the participants' narrative writing ability independent samples t-test was employed as follows:

Table 7. Results of Control and Direct CF Groups' Post-test

Groups	N	M	SD	t	Df	P
Cont.	20	16	1.55	.318	38	.75
Direct.	20	16.15	1.42			

As the results of Table 7 reveal, there is no statistically significant difference (t=.318, P=.75>.05) between the means of control (M= 16, SD=1.55) and direct CF group. Therefore, the null-hypothesis indicating that direct CF doesn't significantly influence EFL narrative writing ability is accepted.

To check the effects of indirect CF on participants' narrative writing ability independent samples t-test was employed as following:

Table 8. Results of Control and Indirect CF Groups' Post-test

Groups	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Cont.	20	16	1.55	2.22	38	.032
Indirect.	20	17.05	1.43			

Based on data in table 8, participants in indirect CF (M=17.05, SD= 1.43) significantly outperformed (t=2.22, DF=38, p= .032<.05) those in control group (M= 16, SD= 1.55). Thus the null hypothesis indicating that indirect CF doesn't significantly influence participants' narrative writing ability is rejected.

To compare direct CF vs. indirect CF again independent samples t-test was employed and data are illustrated in table 8.

Table 9. Results of Direct and Indirect CF Groups' Post-test

Groups	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Direct	20	16.15	1.42	1.99	38	.053
Indirect.	20	17.05	1.43			

As table 9 shows there is no statistically significant difference (t=1.99, df= 38, p= .053>.05) between means of direct (M=16.15, SD= 1.42) and indirect (M=17.05, SD= 1.43) groups in posttest. Therefore, it can be concluded that these two types of corrective feedback can be employed by EFL teachers. It is true that participants in indirect group performed better than those in direct group but this difference isn't significant on a statistical basis. Therefore, the third null-hypothesis indicating that direct corrective feedback (CF) and indicate corrective feedback don't result in meaningful different performances regarding intermediate EFL learners' narrative writing ability, is accepted.

Discussion
Based on the results obtained from data analysis direct corrective feedback doesn't put meaningful effects on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing. In

contrast, this is the indirect CF which put significant effects on development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing. Finally, the third null-hypothesis formulated for this study compared the effectiveness of direct vs. indirect CF regarding the development of Iranian EFL intermediate learners' narrative writing and the results clarified that; although, participants in indirect CF group performed better in posttest, this difference was not statistically significant.

The findings of this research are in line with Sivaji (2011, 2012) who states that, it would be effective to propose error correction, regardless of types as a desired feedback mechanism, to be used to respond to students' writings. Also, in another similar study, Dadashi (2011) claims that the indirect corrective feedback compared to the direct corrective feedback on spelling errors is more useful for learners at least in the region where the second researcher has been teaching due to the fact that most teachers here apply dictation to evaluate the spelling and coping abilities of EFL learners. This finding is in disagreement with the current findings which did not indicate any statistically significant difference between performances of these two groups of participants.

However, Erel and Bulut (2007) who compared direct and indirect coded feedback in Turkish EFL context suggested that error correction was not helpful in improving learners' accuracy in writing regardless of the type of correction.

Conclusion and implications

The present study comes to this conclusion that using corrective feedback is useful in EFL writing classes and language teachers should correct their students' errors in a way which makes sense. Providing CF will motivate the learners to try and modify their developing interlanguage system in line with the feedbacks they receive (Maleki & Eslami, 2013). As the findings of this study showed indirect CF resulted in better outcomes, therefore, during the process of error corrections, EFL teachers should provide their students with some opportunities of revising and editing their written products to recognize their errors and self-correct them. It appears that providing the students with correct forms hinders their achievement and leads to negative outcomes. Although, meaningful difference was not found between students' performances in both indirect and direct groups, those students who received indirect CF outperformed those in control group.

The findings of this study support this fact that EFL learners can develop their narrative writing if they self-correct their errors (through receiving indirect CF). EFL teachers should employ this type of error correction in their writing classrooms to motivate their students to write. During the time of writing EFL students should ponder on their products and edit them in several short blocks of times. Editing again and again increases students' attention and if simultaneously they are indirectly warned over their errors they may self-correct them; this kind of error correction may put positive effects on EFL learners' long-term memory.

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