
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN EFL WRITING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

A long debate among scholars about the effect of feedback on students writing has never come to the end. Since Truscott (1996) claimed that error correction is not useful and even harmful, some researchers then come up with their findings in reaction to this claim (Hyland, 1998; Ferris, 2006; Ellis, et.al.. 2008; Sheen, 2010). They proved that feedback provision on students' writing is still required because it is able to improve students' writing. However, it is still a question, what type of feedback is most effective to improve students' writing? This study aims to find out the effectiveness of direct and indirect feedback in EFL writing performance. Sixty-three students participated in this study, divided into three groups: 2 experimental groups and one control group. They were required to write five essays with different topics. Then, their papers were provided with different feedback: direct and indirect feedback for the experimental groups and peer feedback for the control group. When their papers were returned, the students were required to rewrite and revise their papers based on the corrections given by the teacher. The final versions of the papers were assessed in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics to find out how effective one particular type of feedback improve the students' writing performance. The findings revealed that the three types of feedback were able to improve the students' writing performance.

Keywords: *direct feedback, indirect feedback, writing performance*

1. INTRODUCTION

A long debate among scholars about the effect of feedback on students writing has never come to the end. Since Truscott (1996) claimed that error correction is not useful and even harmful, some researchers then come up with their findings in reaction to this claim (Hyland, 1998; Ferris, 2006; Ellis, et.al.. 2008; Sheen, 2010). They proved that feedback provision on students' writing is still required because it is able to improve students' writing. However, there were still some disagreement of what type of feedback is most effective among other types of written feedback available in educational settings. Some studies have attempted to investigate the efficacy of different types of feedback on students' ability in writing. Fathman and Whalley (1990) for example found that feedback provision which focused on meaning or content promote students' writing development, both the quality of content and linguistic accuracy.

The discussion on the efficacy of teacher written feedback tended to be abandoned since the emergence of other sources of feedback such as peer or self feedback and electronic feedback. Hyland (2009) stated that electronic technology has affected writing in which people are able to change creating, editing, proofreading and formatting processes. Even, the current writing instruction is able to make students find themselves reading feedback on their electronically submitted essays which have been given by an invisible commentator or given by the computer itself. However, some of the limitations that the electronic feedback has are that it may not be as sensitive as teacher written feedback in terms of correcting errors the writer makes and it does not provide an interactive communication face to face. Despite that the electronic feedback plays a crucial role in helping writers correcting their mistakes, teacher written feedback is still favored by students. Ryan, (2013) found that the most helpful feedback is written feedback. Chang at.al. (2012) discovered that the students still preferred written

feedback to electronic feedback and found that written feedback is still more useful than e-feedback. In addition, Hyland and Hyland (2006) in their study focusing on students' feedback preferences revealed that students generally prefer teacher written feedback to other forms of feedback such as oral and peer feedback.

In light of the findings of research above, the value of written feedback is not questionable. It still has a considerable contribution to the promotion of students' writing performance. However, there is a certain occasion when a teacher feels frustrated to see that students still have problems in writing even though they have been provided with feedback. The problems may lie on whether the teacher has given appropriate feedback on their writing, whether the teacher has given feedback based on the preference of the students and whether the teacher has provided feedback on the aspects of writing which really need serious attention. This study then aims to find out the effectiveness of different types of feedback in improving students' writing performance.

Responding to the research findings which led to uncertainty about what feedback to use, the present study was then conducted in order to yield more convinced conclusion that can be held by EFL teachers for them to treat problems the students encounter in their writing performance. This study then attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the students' writing performance improve from the first essay to each successive essay during the writing process after a particular type of feedback is provided?
2. Which type of teacher written corrective feedback (direct and indirect feedback) is effective in improving students' writing performance?

2. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DIRECT AND INDIRECT FEEDBACK

In relation to the objective of this study, the distinction between direct feedback and indirect feedback is made. Ellis (2009) created a typology of feedback strategies that consists of five types and two of them are direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback is the feedback provided by the teacher by showing the correct form of language while indirect feedback is the feedback given by the teacher by indicating the errors students make but not correcting them (Ellis, 2009). Direct feedback according to Ferris (2006: 83) may take the form of crossing out the mistakes and then providing the correct form around the error, while indirect feedback may take the form of "underline, circle, code, or other mark – but does not provide the correct form, leaving the students to solve the problem that has been called to his or her performance."

Furthermore, Ferris and Robert (2001) stated that direct feedback is the provision of the correct form by the teacher to the student's writing so that the student just needs to transcribe the correction into the final version of their writing. Indirect feedback, on the other hand, is the feedback given by the teacher by just indicating that an error exists without providing the correct form, but letting the student identify the error and correct it. Lalande (1982) argue that most student writers prefer indirect feedback because it engages them in guided learning and problem solving.

The issue whether feedback should be given directly or explicitly and indirectly or implicitly has also attracted the attention of researchers in the field. The research findings on the issue of direct and indirect feedback showed that students get benefits from the two types of feedback. Ferris (2006) found that students who were provided with either direct feedback or indirect feedback were successfully revise and correct their mistakes. However, there are also some findings which showed conflicting results. Lalande (1982), for example found that indirect feedback was able to decrease the errors the students made while direct feedback was not (Lalande, 1982). Other findings revealed that direct feedback was the least effective method of feedback provision on students' writing (Semke, 1984, Robb, Ross, and Shortereed (1986). Those findings were confirmed by a more recent study conducted by Baleghizadeh & Dadashi (2011) who found that indirect feedback provision was more effective than direct feedback provision in improving students' written work. All of these findings have disapproved the argument given by Ferris and Roberts (2001) and that direct written feedback is probably more

effective than indirect feedback. This argument is strengthened by Ferris (2011) who claimed that direct correction of error by the teacher led to more correct revisions (88%) than indirect feedback (77%).

Is indirect feedback really more effective than direct feedback? Another statement given by Ferris (2011) said that direct feedback was helpful in short term revision but indirect feedback for a long term revision. She stated: "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" (p.33). But again, Ferris still insisted that direct feedback would show positive effects than indirect. This is because direct feedback is easier for students to act on and requires less knowledge and effort on their part. However, the proponents of indirect feedback options such as Lalande (1982) and Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue that indirect feedback enables students to benefit from guided learning and problem-solving, which can encourage student to reflect on existing knowledge and to retain much deeper levels of processing, which, in turn, lead to more successful self-editing and foster long-term acquisition of the target forms.

From a number of studies presented above, it is clear that there is no conclusive consensus that leads the teachers and educational practitioners to use a certain type of feedback which is believed to be most effective than others. Therefore, it is still necessary to conduct a study which uses a different context.

3. WRITTEN FEEDBACK AND WRITING PERFORMANCE

In instructional setting, performance is defined by Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) as what the learner will be able to do. Assessing writing can be categorized as performance assessment because it requires students to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. Weigle (2009) stated that performance assessments require the students to reflect the actual tasks that are relevant to the knowledge, skill, or ability being measured, and successful and unsuccessful performance are judged by human raters. Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) furthermore stated that when we measure or score students' writing performance or proficiency, the outcome must be based on a student-generated text. This text should consist of 100 words or more and be based on a prompt that gives the writer considerable space to generate extended discourse. The writing aspects that may be indirectly related with writing performance include verbal reasoning, error recognition, or grammatical accuracy. Moreover, writing performance is the ability for the writer to perform the skills which are being assessed. Knapp and Watkins (2005) added that the aspects of students' writing performance include syntax, punctuation and spelling.

In relation to feedback provision, Aridah (2003) believed that feedback is useful to examine the success or failure of students' performance, including writing performance. This is supported by Hyland (2009) who stated that feedback is vital to the process of learning. Research evidence revealed that feedback enables students to assess their performances, modify, their behavior and transfer their understandings. He mentioned that the language features that comprise writing performance are the features of organization, grammatical accuracy, referencing and plagiarism, tone and style. However, Clark (2003) considered that grammar has not had any positive effect on writing performance.

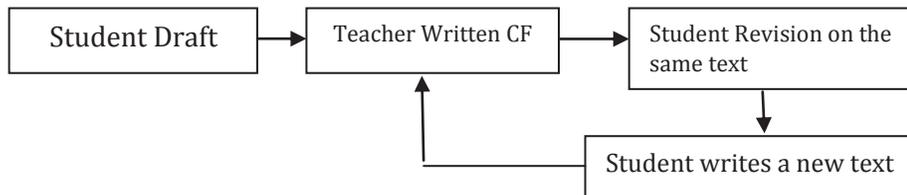
Talking about writing performance, there have been a lot of studies which investigated how one particular types of feedback affect writing performance. Sheen (2010) stated that second language writing researchers have been primarily concerned with how corrective feedback improves writing performance. The results of the studies were quite controversial. Some studies revealed that certain feedback affect writing performance positively and some others affect writing performance negatively. Truscott (1996) and Kepner (1991) found that feedback on grammatical errors on the students' writing does not work well. On the other contrary, Other researchers (Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Lalande, 1982) found that feedback on grammatical errors on the students' composition increased their writing performance especially in its accuracy.

Again, with respect to writing performance, researchers also did not have any agreement on what feedback is most effective in improving writing performance, including the aspect of writing such as content and form.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This research was quantitative research which employed a true experimental design. There were two experimental groups and one control group. The first experimental group was given direct feedback and the second group was given indirect feedback while the control group used peer feedback. All of the students in each group followed the treatment which applied process writing approach. The approach incorporated the procedure as follows:



This design was adapted from the design proposed by Ferris (2010) with the following steps:

1. Students wrote an essay draft on a given topic with one type of essay development.
2. Students handed in their drafts and the teacher (researcher) corrected the draft by providing one type of written corrective feedback according to the designated type of feedback in each of the experimental group. The students in the experimental group 1 were provided with direct feedback, experimental group 2 with indirect feedback, and the control group with non-teacher feedback (peer feedback).
3. The teacher returned the students' papers with feedback on them for the students to revise and they handed in them again to the teacher for grading.
4. Students wrote a new essay draft with different topic and different method of development and the teacher gave the same type of feedback used for each group. This process was repeated five times with five different topics of essay until the end of the semester.

Participants

The participants of this study were the students of English Department, Mulawarman University who took Writing III course. There were 63 students who were randomly selected by using systematic random sampling. Each group consisted of 21 students. During the course of the experiment which lasted for one semester, they were required to write five essays with different method of development so that there were 315 essays collected.

Instruments and Scoring

The instrument used to collect the data was writing tasks, each of which was given at the end of every cycle of writing process. Each writing task contained different topics and different methods of development. The first writing task was an essay which was developed by using examples, then followed by comparison and contrast, classification, process and argumentation given consecutively. The students were required to write approximately 300 words for each essay, except for the argumentation, they were required to write about 400 words.

All of the essays were graded by two competent raters to maintain the reliability of the scores. The scoring rubric was ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacob, et.al (1981) which includes the aspects of Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language Use, and Mechanics.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively by using statistical analysis of one-way ANOVA and one-way ANOVA repeated measures. The Program of SPSS version 21 was used to help analyze the data.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The first research question asked if the students' writing performance improve from the first essay to each successive essay during the writing process after a particular type of feedback is provided. In order to answer this question, a series of repeated measures ANOVA were performed to see the improvement of students' writing in each group. The first type of feedback examined was direct feedback. The results of descriptive statistical analysis showed that the mean scores of students' essay in the direct feedback group increased from one essay to subsequent essays. The highest mean score was achieved in the last essay with the gain of 5.9524 points (Table 1).

Table 1

The Mean Score of Students' Essays in the Direct Feedback Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EXAMPLE	72.0952	7.21218	21
CONTRAST-COMPARISON	74.5238	5.78895	21
CLASSIFICATION	74.8810	5.96428	21
PROCESS	76.9762	4.16676	21
ARGUMENTATIVE	78.0476	4.35576	21

Table 2 presents the result of one-way repeated measures ANOVA and it shows that there was a significant difference between the first essay and each successive essay of the students provided with direct feedback, $F(4, 80) = 17.532$, $p = 0.000$. This means that direct feedback was effective in improving students' writing performance.

Table 2

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects of Repeated Measure ANOVA for Direct Feedback

Measure: Direct Feedback

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Essays	Sphericity Assumed	449.557	4	112.389	17.532	.000	.467
	Greenhouse-Geisser	449.557	3.172	141.713	17.532	.000	.467
	Huynh-Feldt	449.557	3.840	117.072	17.532	.000	.467
	Lower-bound	449.557	1.000	449.557	17.532	.000	.467
Error(Essays)	Sphericity Assumed	512.843	80	6.411			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	512.843	63.446	8.083			
	Huynh-Feldt	512.843	76.800	6.678			
	Lower-bound	512.843	20.000	25.642			

The next type of feedback analyzed in this study was indirect feedback. Like direct feedback, indirect feedback group also demonstrated an increasing trend from one essay to subsequent essays, where the last essay also obtained the highest mean score ($M=75.2143$) with the gains of 5.8095, slightly lower than the gain obtained in the direct feedback group.

Table 3
The Average Scores of Each Essay in Indirect Feedback Group

Essays	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EXAMPLE	69.4048	7.54423	21
CONTRAST-COMPARISON	72.8810	5.89259	21
CLASSIFICATION	72.9048	5.81296	21
PROCESS	74.5000	4.20119	21
ARGUMENTATIVE	75.2143	4.48211	21

The result of the analysis reveals that there was a significant difference among the types of essay, $F(4, 80) = 9.494, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$, with the main effect $\eta^2 = 0.322$. This indicates that indirect feedback was also effective in increasing students' writing performance.

Table 4
Tests of Within-Subjects Effects of Repeated Measure ANOVA

Measure: Indirect Feedback

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	
Essays	Sphericity Assumed	422.105	4	105.526	9.494	.000	.322
	Greenhouse-Geisser	422.105	3.068	137.584	9.494	.000	.322
	Huynh-Feldt	422.105	3.687	114.486	9.494	.000	.322
	Lower-bound	422.105	1.000	422.105	9.494	.006	.322
	Sphericity Assumed	889.195	80	11.115			
Error(Essays)	Greenhouse-Geisser	889.195	61.359	14.492			
	Huynh-Feldt	889.195	73.739	12.059			
	Lower-bound	889.195	20.000	44.460			

The last is the peer feedback used in the control group. The result of descriptive statistical analysis presented in Table 5 also revealed that this type of feedback showed an increasing trend in mean score from one essay to successive essays and the last essay still got the highest score among other essays. The gain obtained from the first essay to the last essay was 4.3357 points. However, there was one occasion when the students' essay decreased in mean score, namely from essay 2 to essay 3 with the mean difference of -0.8571.

Table 5
The Mean Scores of Students' Essays in Control Group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EXAMPLE	69.2143	5.81501	21
CONTRAST/COMPARISON	71.7381	5.41207	21
CLASSIFICATION	70.8810	6.12353	21
PROCESS	72.3333	5.68184	21
ARGUMENTATIVE	73.5000	5.68111	21

Table 6
The result of ANOVA repeated measure with Greenhouse-Geisser Correction

Measure: Control Group

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Essays	Sphericity Assumed	217.419	4	54.355	13.368	.000	.401
	Greenhouse-Geisser	217.419	2.181	99.710	13.368	.000	.401
	Huynh-Feldt	217.419	2.457	88.472	13.368	.000	.401
	Lower-bound	217.419	1.000	217.419	13.368	.002	.401
Error(Essays)	Sphericity Assumed	325.281	80	4.066			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	325.281	43.610	7.459			
	Huynh-Feldt	325.281	49.150	6.618			
	Lower-bound	325.281	20.000	16.264			

A

seen in Table 6, using sphericity assumed the result of repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference. However, for the control group, the assumption of sphericity was violated, meaning that the variance across different levels of the repeated measures was not equal. Table 7 shows that the result of Mauchly's test of sphericity is significantly different with $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. This implies that a correction or adjustment needs to be made. Laerd Statistics (2015) stated that if Mauchly's test of sphericity was performed and it was found that it violated the assumption of sphericity, it is necessary to interpret the result by using adjustment test, either the "Greenhouse-Geisser" or "Huynh-Feldt" rows of the Tests of Within-Subjects Effect table. Therefore, in this study the result was interpreted using the Greenhouse-Geisser correction and it was found that the differences in scores among the five essays in control group were also significant, $F(2.181, 43.610) = 13.368, p = 0.000$ with $\eta^2 = 0.401$.

Table 7.
The Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for Essays in the Control Group

Measure: Control Group

Within Subjects Effect	Mauchly's W	Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.	Epsilon ^b		
					Greenhouse-Geisser	Huynh-Feldt	Lower-bound
Essays	.132	37.256	9	.000	.545	.614	.250

B

analysis demonstrated significant differences among the types of essay, it can be concluded that peer feedback was also effective in improving students' writing with the same effect as the two types of teacher written corrective feedback analyzed previously.

The second question of this research asked which type of teacher written corrective feedback (direct and indirect feedback) is effective in improving students' writing performance. Table 8 presents the results of descriptive statistical analysis which shows that the highest mean score was found in the direct feedback group. However, to find out whether the difference between groups was significant, one-way ANOVA was performed. The results of ANOVA can be found in Table 9.

Table 8
Mean Scores of Students in Different Types of Feedback

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
GROUP				
DIRECT FEEDBACK	21	75.3048	5.13405	1.12034
INDIRECT FEEDBACK	21	72.9810	4.87254	1.06327
CONTROL GROUP	21	71.5333	5.45704	1.19082
Total	63	73.2730	5.31223	.66928

Table 9
The Result of ANOVA for Direct Feedback, Indirect Feedback and Control Group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	152.036	2	76.018	2.855	.065
Within Groups	1597.589	60	26.626		
Total	1749.624	62			

Although it was found that direct feedback group obtained the highest mean score, the result of statistical analysis using one-way ANOVA showed insignificant difference, $F(2,60) = 2.855$, $p = 0.065 > \alpha = 0.05$. This finding implies that both types of feedback, direct and indirect were equally effective in promoting students' writing performance. Because the level of significance was very slightly above the value of alpha ($\alpha = 0.05$), it was suspected that there might be one type of feedback that might show significant difference from any other type of feedback investigated in the experiment. Then LSD post hoc analysis was run and the result showed that the mean score of direct feedback was significantly different from the mean score of peer feedback used in the control group ($p = 0.21$) as it can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10
The Result of LSD Post Hoc Analysis for the Three Types of Feedback

(I) GROUPS	(J) GROUPS	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
DIRECT FEEDBACK	INDIRECT FEEDBACK	2.32381	1.59244	.150
	CONTROL GROUP	3.77143*	1.59244	.021
INDIRECT FEEDBACK	DIRECT FEEDBACK	-2.32381	1.59244	.150
	CONTROL GROUP	1.44762	1.59244	.367
CONTROL GROUP	DIRECT FEEDBACK	-3.77143*	1.59244	.021
	INDIRECT FEEDBACK	-1.44762	1.59244	.367

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

The significance difference in mean score between direct feedback and peer feedback implies that direct feedback is more effective than peer feedback. This also means that teacher written feedback still outperformed non-teacher written feedback.

6. DISCUSSION

In response to the uncertainty about what type of feedback is found most effective in promoting students' writing, a number of studies have been conducted to solve and to react to this indecision. The findings of this study concerning whether teacher written feedback is effective in improving students' writing performance has yielded convinced conclusion that supports the findings of other studies conducted previously (Ferris, 2006, Bitchener and Ferris, 2012), Ellis, 2009). All of them are in agreement that written corrective feedback still play roles in improving the quality of writing.

Because the three types of feedback were found to be able to increase the students writing performance, as was found in the answer of research question number 1, it can be said that three types of feedback investigated in this study had the same effect in improving the students' writing performance. It also implies that all of the three types of feedback can be used interchangeably and dynamically to improve the students' writing performance. This finding supports the other studies whose findings were also yield the same findings that there is no any exact or common conclusion of which feedback is most effective to be used to promote writing performance. Some research findings show that direct feedback is more effective than other types of feedback and some others found that there was no significant difference between the two contrasting types of feedback. For example Ferris and Roberts (2001), investigated the efficacy of explicit and implicit feedback and found that both groups in their experiment significantly outperformed the control group but the two type of feedback which they labeled the 'codes' and the 'no codes' showed insignificant difference, a finding that is line with the finding of this study.

The fact that there was no common conclusion that can be used to decide which specific type of feedback should be given to students to promote their writing performance is supported by other conflicting research findings. Some findings revealed that direct feedback is more effective while other findings revealed that indirect feedback is more effective. The examples of study which favored direct feedback are those of Ferris (2006), Ferris (2011), Frantzen (1995) and Ferris and Roberts (2001). They all supported the findings that direct feedback is more effective than indirect feedback. Even, Ferris (2001, 2006, 2011) consistently claimed that direct feedback would result in positive effects than indirect feedback. The examples of research finding which supported the effectiveness of indirect feedback include Lalande (1982) and Hyland and Hyland (2006) (Semke, 1984, Robb, Ross, and Shortereed (1986) and the newer study by Baleghizadeh & Dadashi (2011) found that indirect feedback provision was more efficacious than direct feedback provision in improving students' writing work

Finally, considering the result of this research, it is convincing and clear that in the context of EFL writing instruction, it is recommended that teachers keep giving written feedback to their students rather than letting them write without the intervention from the teachers. The fact that there was no any single type of feedback which can be used consistently in a long run, may be right. But using divergent types of feedback in different condition and occasion will also create a variety of strategies and approach in dealing with students' errors. Although it might be contented that using different types of feedback interchangeably or alternately may lead students to confusion in revising their writing, it is suggested that teachers may negotiate with their students what particular types of feedback they want to have on their essay and what specific aspects of their writing they prefer to be commented on.

7. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that all types of feedback investigated had equal effectiveness in promoting EFL students' writing performance. Therefore, although the study was conducted in a specific EFL context in that the results need to be taken into consideration before making generalization, it is recognized that giving feedback on students' writing is really a challenging task for EFL teachers, regardless the types of training they have taken, the duration of their teaching experience, and the

context of the classroom they teach. Despite that providing appropriate and useful teacher written feedback is a challenging job for teacher, it does not mean that they have to abandon it and prefer using other types of feedback such as peer and electronic feedback. Teacher written corrective feedback is still valuable and preferred by most of the students.

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