Students' Perceptions on the Use of Direct Feedback on Written Drafts: A Study at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman

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ABSTRACT

EFL teachers use two types of feedback methods- direct and indirect- to give feedback on students' written scripts in EFL classes. There are differences of opinion concerning the effectiveness of these feedback methods and whether one method is superior to the other. In 1996, Truscott claimed that error correction is ineffective and perhaps even harmful. Following that, there were many research studies that tried to disprove his claim. The studies showed that it is essential to give feedback and measure its effectiveness in order to make learning more effective. Taking this into account, the present study investigates students' perceptions on the use and efficacy of direct feedback on written drafts, adopting a quantitative research design. For data collection, a structured questionnaire was distributed to students (N=396) via Moodle LMS. The study participants were the students at General Foundation Program of English Language Centre at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibra, Sultanate of Oman.

KEY WORDS: WRITING ACCURACY, DIRECT FEEDBACK, EFFECTIVENESS, PERCEPTION, LINGUISTIC ERROR.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most important and challenging skills for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is true especially for students from rural backgrounds. Since most of the students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman, come from nearby villages, they face a lot of challenges in writing tasks and in developing their writing accuracy. Teachers in EFL classes give written feedback on students' writings to develop their accuracy in written communication. Ryan (2013) claims that the most effective feedback is a written feedback. Feedback helps reduce the number of errors (Ferris, 2006) and is important for improving language accuracy (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Also, feedback is useful in examining the success/failure of students' performance (Hyland, 2009), and enables students to assess their performance (Aridah, 2003). Schmidt (1990) points out that for language acquisition to take place, there must be some exclusive attention to form. One of

the key features of error correction is drawing learners' attention to form.

Researchers have differing opinions as regards error correction. Truscott (1996) claimed that error correction is not useful and even harmful as it impacts fluency but some researchers proved that written feedback improves students' writing accuracy (Hyland, 1998; Ferris, 2006; Ellis, et.al.. 2008; Sheen, 2010 Cited by Aridah). Taking the positives aspects into account, many EFL teachers favor written feedback on students' writings. However, controversies still exist in academia over the type of feedback that is the most effective for students in EFL writing classes for developing accuracy in written communication. Apart from researchers, students generally reacted positively to feedback and displayed strong preferences for detailed, handwritten feedback that addressed both content and mechanical errors (Elwood & Bode, 2014).

A. Statement of the Problem and Hypothesis: The problem that the present study identified was the low level of writing accuracy among the students studying in General Foundation Program (GFP). The following hypotheses were formulated for the study.

1. Opinions regarding the use of direct feedback on students' written scripts are equal to average level.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female with regard to the use of direct feedback.

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3. There is no significant difference among the students studying in different levels with regard to the use of direct feedback.
4. There is no significant difference among the students belonging to different age categories with regard to the use of direct feedback.

Significance of the study: It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as evidence on the effectiveness of direct feedback in improving students' writing ability. The findings will also help teachers, curriculum developers, and administration to choose an effective feedback method to help students improve their writing accuracy.

Literature Review: Direct feedback is when the teacher gives a direct correction form for the students' errors in writing. Teachers cross off the wrong words and incorrect usage and then write the correction above or near the mistake. (Ellis, 2009a, Cited by Mubarak, 2018). According to Bitchener (2008, p.15), direct feedback is "the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure above or near the linguistic error," which could include "the crossing out of an unnecessary word/phrase/morpheme, the insertion of a missing word/phrase/morpheme, or the provision of the correct form or structure." (Cited by Elwood and Bode, 2014). Hyland (2016) defines it as "the provision of the correct linguistic form by the teacher to the student. This research defines direct feedback as the written comments teachers give to students to help them correct their mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, spelling etc. The teacher crosses out the mistakes and writes the correction.

Many studies were done to find out if direct feedback has an important role in teaching writing. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) argue that direct feedback minimizes students' confusion over teachers' feedback. This type of feedback is more appropriate to student writers of low proficiency level (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris & Hedgcock 2005; Ellis, 2009). Others state that direct feedback is said to have a negative effect in the language learning process and is not effective for second language learners (Hammad, 2015). In addition, direct feedback is not suitable for long-term learning because it requires only a minimal processing (Khodareza&Delvand, 2016). Nevertheless, some studies showed that direct feedback plays a role in language learning that can improve students' learning motivation and proficiency in learning a second language (Mubarak, 2018). Similarly, direct correction of errors by the teacher led to more correct revisions (88%) than indirect feedback did (77%) (Ferris, 2011). Studies by Atmaca (2016) and Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) (Cited by Atmaca 2016) showed that teachers tended to prefer guiding learners to locate and correct their own mistakes instead of doing it for them directly, thereby encouraging student involvement in the correction process.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method. A

questionnaire was prepared and distributed to students studying in the General Foundation Program at the English Language Centre, UTAS-Ibra. The questionnaire was distributed just before the Level Exit Exam. Moodle was used as a tool to collect feedback. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used as the main tool to interpret the data.

A. Terms and Definitions: DF is used for "Direct Feedback". DF1 is used for "Direct feedback (e.g.1. smarte –smart 2. eat-ate) is easy to understand". DF2 is used for "Too many error corrections on my writing paper demotivate me". DF3 is used for "Paying close attention to direct feedback (e.g.1. smarte –smart 2. eat-ate) on my written work is helpful". DF4 is used for "Direct feedback ((e.g.1. smarte –smart 2. eat-ate) helps me avoid making the same mistake". DF5 is used for "Direct feedback (e.g.1. smarte –smart 2. eat-ate) helps improve my spelling, punctuation, and grammar". DF6 is used for "Correcting all the mistakes in the first draft through direct feedback helps produce an error free second draft". DF7 is used for "The teacher uses direct feedback (e.g.1. smarte –smart 2. eat-ate) to correct mistakes in my writing"

B. Participants: The participants were from (level 1, level 2, level 3, and level 4) the General Foundation Program (GFP) at the English Language Centre, UTAS-Ibra. Six groups from each level were selected on a random basis for feedback. All GFP students chosen for the study were from Sharqiya Region, Oman. They share similar linguistic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 18-21 years.

C. Importance and Significance of the Study: The research findings have implications for teaching and learning strategies for students, teachers, and administrators at the GFP, UTAS-Ibra. The findings may help teachers choose an appropriate method to give feedback on students' written drafts to help them improve their writing skills. Similarly, the findings may help the administration to reconsider an existing policy or formulate a new policy that can be implemented in the ELCs at UTAS across Oman for the benefit of both teachers and students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Frequency Distribution for Male and Female students.

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Valid Male		204	51.5
	Female	192	48.5
	Total	396	100.0

From the above table, 51.5% of the respondents are males and 48.5% are females. The percentage of male students enrolled in the foundation program at the English Language Centre, UTAS-Ibra is significantly more than that of female students.

Figure 1: Bar Diagram Representation of Gender Distribution

From the above table, 48.2% of respondents are 19 years old, 35.1% are 18 years old, 15.4% are 20 years old and 1.3% are above 20 years. Maximum number of respondents are 19 and 18 years old and minimum number of respondents are 20 years and above 20 years. Most of the new intake students (18-19 years) are placed either in level 1 or level 2 based on their entry level test. Hence the percentage of 18-19 year-olds is higher in the age distribution.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Age

	Age	Frequency	Percent
Valid	18	139	35.1
	19	191	48.2
	20	61	15.4
	Above 20	5	1.3
	Total	396	100.0

Figure 2: Pie Diagram Representation of Respondents by Age

From the above table, 30% of respondents are in Level 2, 25.3% and 25% are in Level 1 and 3 respectively and 19.7% are from Level 4. Maximum number of respondents are from Level 1, 2 and 3 and the minimum number is from Level 4. This is because the number of students who are debarred/withdrawn from courses affects the percentage of students in level 4.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of respondents by Level

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Level 1	100	25.3
	Level 2	119	30.1
	Level 3	99	25.0
	Level 4	78	19.7
	Total	396	100.0

Figure 3: Pie Diagram Representation of Students in 4 Levels

Hypothesis I

Null Hypothesis: Opinions regarding the use of Direct Feedback in the written drafts are equal to Average level.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of the use of Direct Feedback in student's written drafts Based on the mean score, statements 4,5,6 are resilient.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
DF1	396	3.77	.982	
DF2	396	3.28	1.165	
DF3	396	3.87	.933	
DF4	396	3.96	.899	
DF5	396	3.98	.883	
DF6	396	3.93	.892	
DF7	396	3.83	.985	
Valid N (listwise)	396			

Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level of significance with regards to all seven statements (DF1, DF2, DF3, DF4, DF5, DF6, and DF7). Hence the opinions regarding all the seven statements (DF1, DF2, DF3, DF4, DF5, DF6, and DF7) of students is not equal to average level. Based on the mean score, opinions regarding all the statements on the use direct feedback on the written drafts are above average level. This means that the direct feedback method is proven effective.

Hypothesis II

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between Male and Female students with regard to the use of Direct Feedback.

Table 5. t test for Specified value (Average = 3) of Statements on the use Direct Feedback in the written drafts are equal to Average level

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p value
DF1	3.77	.982	15.562	.000
DF2	3.28	1.165	4.789	.000
DF3	3.87	.933	18.640	.000
DF4	3.96	.899	21.237	.000
DF5	3.98	.883	22.198	.000
DF6	3.93	.892	20.844	.000
DF7	3.83	.985	16.688	.000

Table 6. t test for significant difference between Male and Female with regard to the use of Direct Feedback.

Direct Feedback	Gender				t value	P value
	Male		Female			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
DF1	3.70	1.085	3.84	0.856	1.405	0.161
DF2	3.19	1.211	3.38	1.109	1.572	0.117
DF3	3.73	1.033	4.03	0.785	-3.327	0.001
DF4	3.82	0.998	4.11	0.754	-3.282	0.001
DF5	3.94	0.991	4.07	0.745	-1.832	0.068
DF6	3.81	0.995	4.06	0.749	-2.821	0.005
DF7	3.73	1.097	3.93	0.841	-2.010	0.045

P value of DF3 and DF4 is less than 0.01, null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level. Similarly, the p value of DF6 and DF7 is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level. Hence DF3, DF4, DF6 and DF7 show a significant difference between male and female. Based on the mean score, it is apparent that female students have not only paid close attention to the direct feedback but also used it to avoid writing the same mistakes. However, the p value of DF1, DF2 and DF5 is greater than 0.05% and the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level. Thus, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female. However, the mean score of female is higher than the male. It is evident from the mean score that the female students found the direct feedback easy to understand, too many corrections on their writing demotivating and also confirm that the teacher used direct feedback to correct the mistakes in their written drafts.

Hypothesis III

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference among the students studying in different levels with regard to the Use of Direct Feedback.

2.* denotes significant at 5% level: There is no significant difference among the students studying at different levels with regard to Direct Feedback, since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted

at 5% level with regard to Direct Feedback. This means that students of all levels share a similar opinion on the effectiveness of direct feedback from teachers.

Table 7. ANOVA for significant difference among the students studying in different levels with regard to the Use of Direct Feedback.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	F Value	P Value
DF	26.62 (4.28)	26.75 (4.35)	26.63 (4.76)	26.42 (3.66)	0.094	0.964

Note: 1.The value within bracket refers to SD

Table 8. ANOVA for significant differences among the students belonging to different Age categories with regard to the Use of Direct Feedback.

	18	19	20	Above 20	F Value	P Value
DF	26.79 (4.47)	26.31 (4.11)	25.26 (4.59)	25.40 (3.16)	0.518	0.670

Note: 1.The value within bracket refers to SD

Hypothesis IV

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference among the students belonging to different age categories with regard to the Use of Direct Feedback.

2.* denotes significant at 5% level: There is no significant difference among the students of different age categories as regards DF, since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level with regard to DF. This means that students, irrespective of age category, do not face any difficulty in understanding the direct feedback given on their written drafts. This is because the teacher's input in the first draft helps students correct most of their mistakes without any difficulty, which in turn enables them to produce a second draft with fewer mistakes.

V. Recommendations, Limitations And Suggestions For Further Research:

The study reveals that the direct feedback method is effective in improving the writing accuracy of students. Hence it is recommended that teachers use this method in EFL writing classes. The findings of this study also confirm the previous research findings discussed in the literature review that the direct feedback method is helpful in improving the writing accuracy of students. The limitation of this study is that it did not include teachers. Teachers' feedback would have helped in validating the findings of this study. For further research, a comparative study of direct feedback method and indirect feedback method can be conducted to find out which of the two is more effective in improving students' writing accuracy.

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