

EFL STUDENTS' PREFERENCE IN RECEIVING WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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Abstract: One solution to help EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in writing skill is providing a written corrective feedback by a teacher. Somehow, it is also necessary for a teacher to know the appropriate feedback given to their students. This study had two purposes: 1) To describe the students' thought toward feedback strategies with different proficiency levels in general and in specific writing aspects content; and 2) To explore the most students' preference with different proficiency levels in general and in specific writing aspects content and form. A qualitative data analysis approach was integrated using an interview, eight students in total were chosen to be interviewed; two from each group and level (two-high, two low direct feedback with an end note and two-high, two-low indirect feedback with an end note). N vivo was used to analyze the content analysis of the data. The study found that no matter low or high proficient writers, they had a positive attitude toward the teacher's feedback and most of them preferred to receive direct corrective feedback to improve their writing performance both in content and form. In brief, providing a feedback is needed for students however it must be advisable with students' proficiency level in order to make them easier in understanding the feedback.

Keywords: *direct corrective feedback; EFL (English as a Foreign Language); indirect corrective feedback; students' preference; students' proficiency; written corrective feedback.*

INTRODUCTION

Although writing is known an essential skill for language production, writing is still commonly debated as the hardest skill (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehrdard, 2012) learnt by ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, students have many problems and challenges, namely untrained teachers, ineffective teaching methods, lack of reading and writing practices, low motivation and lack of ideas (Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). Another scholar reports that students' problems in writing are usage errors, mechanical mistakes such as spelling, punctual, adequate knowledge of writing skill, cognitive problems and graphomotor problems (Alfaki, 2015). Therefore, to alleviate those problems the teachers need to find good strategies to help their students to improve their writing.

One of the solutions is providing feedback to students' writing task. There are many types of feedback and the most favorite one received by students is teachers' written corrective feedback (WCF). Many studies reveal that teachers' WCF give positive effects of feedback on language acquisition (Farrokhi & Sattapour, 2011), help to improve the students' written accuracy over time (Van, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012). It is also divided into two categories; indirect corrective feedback and direct corrective feedback. Indirect corrective feedback is occurred when a teacher only identifies the students' errors without giving any correction meanwhile direct corrective feedback is occurred when a teacher identifies the students' errors and provides the correction directly.

Nevertheless, there is some debate as to whether corrective feedback or indirect corrective feedback is more appropriate and prefer to be received by students. As a study conducted by Horbacauskiene and Kasperaviciene (2015) at Kaunas University Technology, it reveals that the teacher feedback gives a little influence towards the students writing performances. Also, the students show preference for feedback on

different error type, and they prefer indirect corrective feedback with a clue to direct corrective feedback. In addition, Westmacott (2017) describes that the students prefer to receive indirect feedback to direct feedback to stimulate their ability to become independent learners.

On the contrary, Aridah, Atmowardoyo and Salija (2017) find that the students prefer to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback given by the teachers. In addition, Tursina and Chuang (2017) and Irwin (2017) reveal that most of the students prefer to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback especially on content and form. Van, et al. (2012) mention that direct corrective feedback is better used to correct students' grammatical errors meanwhile indirect corrective feedback is better used to correct non-grammatical errors. Moreover, Gu nette and Lyster (2013) state that providing direct corrective feedback to students might motivate, give more practices, and satisfy the students' needs, for example they know their mistakes and they know how to revise them.

The next issue is the effectiveness of indirect corrective feedback and direct corrective feedback towards content and form. As mentioned by Daneshvar & Rahimi (2014), students who receive direct corrective have improvement in their grammar ability. While, if the teacher only focuses on form such as grammar, it will be less effective in helping students' writing skill, it will be better if the teacher focuses on content then form because it may be meaningful for students (Biber, Nekrasova, & Horn, 2011).

Another ongoing issue is students' proficiency, only a few research investigated on how those two types of feedback can be meaningful not only focusing in terms of content and form but also considering students' proficiency level. Hashemnezhad and Mohammadnejad (2012) explore that providing direct corrective feedback and focusing on the form is more benefit than indirect corrective feedback for proficient

students. Also, Chen, Nassaji, and Liu (2016) explain that the high proficient students do not want their teacher to focus on grammar, the more advanced the students, the less they require explicit feedback on their grammatical errors. However, they still prefer if the teacher corrects their errors and provides an explanation for the correction rather than simply marks the errors without providing any clues and correcting their errors.

To fill in the gap about students' preference in receiving the teacher's feedback with different proficiency levels in terms of content and form, the study reported both high and low proficient students in two different treatments, two groups receiving direct and the others indirect corrective feedback to improve content and form. This study has two purposes, first; to explore the students' preference toward teacher's feedback with different proficiency levels and second, to describe the most preference teacher's feedback in terms of content and form receiving by students.

This study set out to find the gap in the EFL research through the following research questions: 1) How are the students' perception at different proficiency levels toward teacher's feedback? and 2) What is the most students' preference at different proficiency levels in receiving feedback in terms of content and form?

METHOD

A qualitative design was used to address the research questions in this study. As stated by Creswell (2012, p. 181), "qualitative research has multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic. The methods of data collection are growing, and they increasingly involve active participation by participants and sensitivity to the participants in the study. The researchers applied two different types of feedback; direct corrective feedback in an endnote and indirect corrective feedback in an endnote.

There were four groups formed as participants in this study, namely: low direct corrective feedback group (LD), high direct

corrective feedback group (HD), low indirect corrective feedback group (LI) and high indirect corrective feedback group (HI). A total of eight students was from three different universities. They were from National Chiayi University, Chiayi, Taiwan, Open Learning University/Universitas Terbuka Taiwan and another one was from Open Learning University/Universitas Terbuka Hongkong. Four Indonesian students and four Taiwanese students. The Indonesian students ranged in age from the late 19-22 years old, while Taiwanese students ranged in age from the late 19-20 years old

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To answer the research questions, the researchers used a semi-structured interview. Before doing the interview, the students were required to complete their tasks in writing five narrative essays on three different topics: My First Day at School, My Most Memorable Journey and The Moment of Success. After that a semi-structured interview was conducted to learn more

details about students' perception towards receiving the teacher's feedback, and what types of feedback strategies that students preferred to receive from the teacher's responses in correcting both content and form. Eight students in total were chosen to be interviewed; two from each group and level (two-high, two low direct feedback with an end note and two-high, two-low indirect feedback with an end note). There were seven questions including three main points being discussed by the semi-interview questions. First, the teacher's feedback. Second, direct corrective feedback in total and specifically in terms of content and form and finally, indirect corrective feedback in general, focused on content and form. It took ten to fifteen minutes per participant.

To analyze the data, N-vivo was operated to analyze the content of the data got from students' answers. Then, the researchers coded the data refer to answers 'needed. Finally, wrote conclusions to answer the problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' perception at different proficiency levels toward teacher's feedback

The first question presented to the students was whether they prefer to receive teacher feedback or not. Table 1 presented the results of the interviews of students' preferences towards teacher feedback and showed that all of the students with different language proficiency value and like the teacher's feedback and want to receive feedback (Irwin, 2017).

In addition, they claimed that by receiving the teacher's feedback, they made changes to their writing for the better such as give a chance to students to know their mistakes, learn how to revise them and help them to improve their skill (Aridah, Atmowardoyo, & Salija, 2017). For instance: when LD1 was asked whether she preferred to have the teacher's feedback, she replied:

"Yes, it will help me a lot to make my writing better than before". Moreover, HD1 said that "Yes, I do prefer it because it lets me know my mistakes and teaches me how to fix or correct it. Indeed, as learners we need someone who can give feedback to make the next writing better than before." "Yes, as a learner I still need my teacher's help to improve my writing skills. I will understand my mistakes and remember them". (HI2)

To summarize these findings, it could be assumed that the students' overall preferences for feedback, as expressed in their interview. All of the students indicated that they would prefer to receive feedback. The main reason given was that teacher's feedback gave a positive effect on students to identify errors and improve in the future (Bitchener, 2012; Farrokhi & Sattapour, 2011; Van, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012).

Table 1. *Students' perception towards teacher's feedback*

Teachers' Feedback	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer:	Correct my errors	6	LD1, LD2, LI1, LI2, HD1, and HI1
Helpful	Improve my writing	2	HI2 and HD2

Direct corrective feedback strategy

Table 2 described that six students from LD1, LD2, LI1, LI2, HI1, and HI2 groups prefer to receive direct corrective feedback from the teacher because of two assumptions.

First, four of them think this strategy could help them learn fast, improve and make their writing better. Secondly, the rest of them thought by receiving this strategy it is easier for them to know how to correct the answers

and know what the teachers mean (Aridah, Atmowardoyo, & Salija, 2017; Black & Nanni, 2016; Guénette & Lyster, 2013; Irwin, 2017; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015). In addition, it was effective, engaged the students to do more practices, and made them felt satisfied by providing the correction (Chen, Nassaji, & Liu, 2016).

“Yes, I prefer this strategy because I gain a lot of knowledge and it helps me to make my writing better than before, such as I know how to solve the problems sooner.” (LD1)

“Yes, I do prefer this way. It helps me learn fast. I don’t need to

spend my time thinking about the corrections and I can see the correct answers soon after getting my paper.” (HI1)

On the other hand, it is surprising that those students in the HD1 and HD2 groups disliked receiving feedback in this way because they wanted to get a chance to solve the problem by themselves.

“No, I prefer the teacher teaches students how to fix errors and then let the student do it by his or herself.” (HD1)

“No, because I want to think on my own more, rather than be limited by the instructions given by the teacher.” (HD2)

Table 2. Direct corrective feedback strategy

Direct Corrective Feedback	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer: Helpful	Improve my writing	2	LD1, LI1
	Corrects my error	2	HI2, LI2
	Saving time	2	HI1, LD2
No Prefer: Guidance- Problem Solving	Let students to correct the errors	2	HD1 and HD2

Indirect corrective feedback strategy

The next question asked if they preferred to receive indirect corrective feedback instead of direct corrective feedback. The results implied that two students who did not receive indirect corrective feedback prefer to receive it. In their opinion, by receiving indirect corrective feedback they had encouragement to explore their own knowledge to fix the errors, promoted their cognitive process and strengthened their autonomous learning behavior (Westmacott, 2017). Also, it was easier to see the errors they have made by underlining or coding the errors, as can be seen in Table 3.

“Yes, it will be much easier to see where my errors are and the way to correct them. It saves

some effort on checking around. In other words, it won’t waste my time looking for the correct ones.” (HD1)

Surprisingly, six students who were received indirect corrective feedback disliked receiving indirect corrective feedback because of two reasons. First, four of them felt that it was confusing because they felt that they were not able to fix all of the errors they made and it really costs them time to think of the correct answers. In brief, only two students who categorized as high proficient students prefer to receive indirect corrective feedback to direct corrective feedback. Conversely, all students who grouped in low proficient students prefer to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect

corrective feedback. Unbelievable, two students who were in high indirect corrective feedback group did not want to receive the strategy of feedback. The finding is totally different from Chen, Nassaji, & Liu (2016)

who described that the advanced English proficiency students prefer to receive indirect corrective feedback to direct corrective feedback.

Table 3. *Indirect Corrective Feedback Strategy*

Indirect Corrective Feedback	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer: Engage	Easy to see and get a chance to think	2	HD1 and HD2
No Prefer: Confused	Don't know how to solve the errors	4	LI1, LI2, HI1 and HI2
Not efficient	Spend a lot of time,	2	LD1 and LD2

Regarding to the explanations, it could be indicated that feedback, as expected, was highly appreciated by students because they assumed that the teacher's feedback can improve their writing (Ahmadi, Maftoon, & Mehdrad, 2012). Moreover, all low proficiency students who were in two different groups prefer to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback. This finding was also the same as Mubaraq (2013) and Tursina and Chuang (2017) who showed that students preferred the teacher wrote the correction of the errors on their paper instead of underlining the errors without any corrections because they believe it is easier to understand and correct the error. Meanwhile, the high proficiency students preferred to receive both of the teacher's feedback strategies; direct corrective feedback, or indirect corrective feedback because it motivated a more active response from students and let them know how to incorporate the corrections in a new draft (which they had not done with the direct feedback), Westmacott, 2017.

The most students' preference at different proficiency level in receiving feedback in terms of content and form

Direct corrective feedback on content

Table 4 presented whether they preferred the teacher to write the correction of their content and organization on the paper directly or not. The answers indicated that the majority, six of them, prefer it when the

teacher corrected their errors on their paper and believed that they could benefit more from this strategy because it was easier for them to understand what wrong was and how to fix it. Below were two quotations from LD2 and HI2:

"Yes, I prefer the teacher corrects it because in this way I can know the correct use of the errors I had." (LD2)

"Yes, to me, these kinds of errors are mostly a result of carelessness, it's more efficient to just give us the correct answers." (HI2)

On the other hand, the result also revealed that surprisingly, HD2 who received this strategy disagree. She said that "It really wastes my time to see and reads through the correct answer." In addition, unexpectedly, HI1 who receives indirect corrective feedback felt that he disagrees because it was also a student's responsibility to figure out problems and solve them.

"No, sometimes we students need to figure out problems and solve them. All educators need to do is to give hints or underline the errors, so that we will know what the problems are and try correct them." (HD2)

Table 4. *Direct corrective feedback on content*

Indirect Corrective Feedback	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer: Efficient	Solve my problem soon,	6	LD1,LD2,LI1, LI2,HD1 and HI2,
No Prefer: Waste Time Self-Learning	Check the correct answer Figure out problems and solve them	1 1	HD2 and HI1

Direct corrective feedback on form

Further, the students were asked whether they prefer the teacher corrects their grammar and mechanical errors directly on their paper or not. Unexpectedly, no matter low or high proficiency level, they agree. They stated that this is an efficient way to solve the students' problems fast. They did not need to spend their time thinking about the right correction of their mistakes. Also, they thought that it was an easy and fast way to help them, as could be seen in Table 5.

“Yes, the teacher can correct my grammar and mechanical errors, and it will be more professional on my paper.” (LI2)
“Yes, it’s easier and it’s direct.” (HI2), and
“Yes, because this is the fastest way for us to understand our mistakes.” (HD1)

Table 5. *Direct corrective feedback on form*

Direct Corrective Feedback on Form	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer: Efficient	Saving time,	8	LD1, LD2, LI1, LI2, HD1, HD2, HI1 and HI2

As a conclusion, all of low proficient students prefer to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback in terms of content and form. While, not all of high proficient students agreed to receive direct corrective in terms of content. Surprisingly, all high proficient students liked to receive direct corrective feedback in terms of form (Bitchener, 2012; Daneshvar & Rahimi, 2014; Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad, 2012) because it lighted out the mistake and correct their errors (Irwin, 2017). However, this finding was not similar to Chen, Nassaji, & Liu (2016), revealed that most of high proficient students did not like to receive feedback in terms of form, they assumed that focus on form was not effective to improve their writing skill.

On the question of whether the students preferred the teacher to correct their content and organization errors by only underlining or not, responses indicated that seven of eight students disagree. There were two reasons why they disagree. Firstly, sometimes it was too hard to try to understand and correct their errors when the teacher only underlines them. Still, they believed that the corrections they make on the errors are not right and do not show any progress. Also, HD2 said that it's easy for a teacher, so it will be better for the teacher to write the correct answer directly rather than just underline it. Only, HD1 totally agrees on this strategy, to receive content feedback from a teacher.

“Yes, it’s a good way to train the students to fix errors by themselves, giving students a chance

Indirect corrective feedback on content

to do it and become independent. Besides, it also provides the

students opportunity to apply the knowledge they have gained."

Table 6. *Indirect Corrective Feedback on Content*

Indirect Corrective Feedback on Content	Responses	Total Participants	Group
Prefer: Self-Learning	Solve problems by themselves	1	HD1
No Prefer: Easy for teacher Confused	It's not a big deal Have no idea	1 6	HD2 LD1, LD2, LI1, LI2, HI1 and HI2

Indirect corrective feedback on form

Contradictory to the previous question group; table 7 indicated that all of the students totally disagree on receiving feedback if the teacher just underlines their grammar and mechanical errors on their paper. They felt that this strategy was confusing and wastes their time because they did not know what the teacher's expectations were.

"No, personally, my grammar is not exactly excellent, so I would prefer the teacher let me know my mistakes directly." (LD2)

"No, if the teacher just underlines it, I won't

know how to correctly write my mistakes. In other words, I cannot make changes because I do not understand what the correct is. If the teacher just underlines the errors, it is difficult for me to understand what he means." (HD1)

"No, just underlining the errors may kind of confuse me. It's better to tell me where my mistake is." (HI2)

Table 7. *Indirect Corrective Feedback on Form*

Indirect Corrective Feedback on Form	Responses	Total Participants	Group
No Prefer: Confused	Do not know the correct ones	6	LD1,LI1,LI2, HD1,HD2 and HI2
Waste time	It's not a big deal for teacher	2	LD2 and HI1

In summary, it showed that all low proficient students did not want to receive indirect corrective feedback from their teacher/s in terms of content and form. Conversely, only one student who wanted to receive indirect corrective feedback in terms of content. Unpredictable, no one of all high proficient students agreed to receive indirect corrective feedback in terms of form.

The results of this qualitative data revealed that providing written corrective feedback gave a positive influence on the students' writing performance. All of the students agreed on receiving teacher's feedback because it was helpful to improve the students' writing performance both in content and form (Biber, Nekrasova, & Horn, 2011). Turning on what types of feedback they preferred to receive, unexpectedly, six

of the students preferred direct correction feedback in which they wanted their teacher to write the correction of the errors directly on their paper. They believed that this strategy could help them to learn fast, improve and make their writing better. Also, it was easy for them to know how to correct the errors and know what the teacher means. Generally, all low proficient students preferred to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback in terms of content and form.

Meanwhile, two of high proficient students preferred indirect corrective feedback to direct corrective feedback where the teacher just underlined the errors without correcting the errors. This way they felt that they are encouraged to explore their own knowledge to fix the errors. In addition, it was easy to see the errors they produced. The last investigation in terms of content and form, they preferred the teacher writes the correction on content to underline the errors without correcting them. While, two of them wanted the teacher to give direct corrective feedback because they felt that this is an efficient way to solve the students' problems quickly. They did not need to spend their time thinking about the appropriate correction of their mistakes. Also, they thought that it was the easiest and the fastest way to help them. As a conclusion, most of the students preferred to receive direct corrective feedback to indirect corrective feedback (Aridah, Atmowardoyo, & Salijah, 2017; Black & Nanni, 2016; Sayyar & Zamanian, 2015), especially in terms of content and form (Biber, Nekrasova, & Horn, 2011).

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, no matter whether students are low or high proficient students or whether they receive direct corrective feedback in an endnote or indirect corrective feedback in an endnote, it give a positive response towards the teacher's feedback, for instance, they feel that it helps them to improve their writing performances. Besides, it may be believed that the endnote provided by the teacher give

an aid to clarify the students' errors and what they have to do in revising their writing. Additionally, most of them prefer to receive direct corrective feedback in an endnote to indirect corrective feedback in an endnote in terms of content and form, especially for the low proficient students.

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