

The Efficacy of WCF on Learners Grammatical Accuracy in their Diary Writing

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Abstract – This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of implicit vs. explicit written corrective feedback (WCF) on the grammatical accuracy of students' diary writing. In addition, it aimed to uncover what type of WCF can improve their grammatical accuracy. In order to fulfill this goal, 45 participants at Shamim English language institute were randomly divided into three groups, explicit corrective feedback (ECF), implicit corrective feedback (ICF) and no feedback group (NFG). In NFG, the researcher presented some examples of past tense accompanied by the corresponding usage which is the common method of teaching grammar in the language institutes. Then, the students in NFG were asked to write their diaries. They did not receive any kind of feedback. The same scenario was conducted for the ECF and ICF. The only difference was the type of feedback the students received. The former received explicit WCF while the latter received implicit WCF. The findings reveal that WCF foster EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. In addition, the results confirmed that those students who received explicit WCF were outperformed those received ICF. The findings can help EFL teachers, material developers and syllabus designers to integrate explicit corrective in the EFL class.

Keywords: Grammatical Accuracy, Written Corrective Feedback, Explicit Feedback, Implicit Feedback, Diary Writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing has been considered as a complex skill, as Richards and Renandya (2002) states, “there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master”. And to convey ideas, enough knowledge of vocabulary, punctuation and grammar is needed. Simultaneously Harmer (2004) states, compared to speech, good writing has been considered as a sophisticated process, so the writer needs to improve all the writing's connected features, including mechanics of writing, vocabulary and knowledge of grammar in order to master writing (Bitchener, 2008). So teachers and learners can be engaged in written communication and conversation by using writing.

The focus has shifted to process-oriented tasks such as diary writing which also can be considered as “emotive writing” (Olshtain, cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001). Olshtain defines emotive writing as personal writing through personal experiences by using the past tense forms to help the personal needs of the learners (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Along with “process-approach” (Ghahremani-Ghajar and Mirhosseini, 2005; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Kroll, 2006; Marefat, 2001; Raimes, 1991; Shih, 1986; Zamel, 1983) the

idea of diary writing was focused by many researchers (Bailey, 1990; Barjesteh, Vaseghi & Gholami, 2011; Curtis & Bailey, 2009; Haghnavaaz, 2016; Hiemstra, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Marefat, 2002; Taqi, Akbar, Al-Nouh & Dashti, 2015; Vaseghi, Mukundan & Barjesteh, 2014). According to Ferris (cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002) “although process skills are important, we have to be aware of the fact that grammatical inaccuracies can have negative effects on the overall quality of students’ writing”. Furthermore, grammatical accuracy in writing is necessary to avoid communicative misunderstanding and to ensure the writer’s intended meaning. (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Diary writing has been used by many researchers as a research tool in Iran. Barjesteh et al. (2011) by focusing on a process approach conducted a research on 44 BA students who were majoring in Mechanical engineering to clarify the effectiveness of diary writing. It was emphasized that diary writing can be a productive and creative activity that helps students to gain self-confidence and encourage them to write more, but it doesn’t help them to improve their grammatical accuracy despite their efforts in writing their diaries.

Teachers and some researchers debate on how the EFL learners’ errors should be treated so it needs to be investigated systematically because it’s an important matter and there isn’t enough research which deals with WCF in the process approach.

Although, teacher-written feedback has been considered as a necessary part by both teachers and students in the writing process (Goldstein, 2004; Ferris, 2002). Some authors believe that written corrective feedback (WCF) has a detrimental effect on students’ writing (Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). For example, Truscott and Hsu (2008) argues that WCF may have a negative effect on students’ writing fluency which might affect their overall writing. Hence, teachers need to provide implicit feedback.

One of the concerns of the researchers in this area is how to present feedback, i.e. explicitly or implicitly. Some researchers have attempted to discover it quantitatively, but because of the deep world of teaching, the importance of providing learners with written corrective feedback necessitates more studies. Therefore, in order to address the gap in literature, the present study seeks to determine how to improve writing accuracy of learner’s diary writing, while the focus is on the targeted structure.

Different studies investigated the impact of diary writing for improving the writing skill but none of them targeted the rate of enhancement of grammatical accuracy in learners L2 learning. Moreover, corrective feedback was debated in various articles as a strong tool to enhance learners writing ability by which learners can intensify their metalinguistic knowledge of L2 grammar.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In an empirical study the effects of explicit and implicit negative feedback were investigated on the acquisition of the English dative alternation by Carrol and Swain (1993). 100 ESL learners were participated in the study. The subjects were divided into 4 treatment groups. Group A received explicit metalinguistic feedback. Group B were just told that their response was wrong. Group C subjects were given implicit feedback. Group D participants were asked if they were sure about their response, and a control group which received no

kind of feedback. The results indicated that all treatment groups outperformed rather than the control group during all three test sessions; however, it was shown that group A subjects which were given explicit CF performed better than the other groups.

The role of error correction on writing proficiency and also second language knowledge of grammar was examined by Dekeyser in 1993. In this study, thirty-five students who were all Dutch speaking high seniors learning French as a L2 were participated. They were divided in to treatment groups, and received feedback mostly on morphosyntax over a full school year. One group has received explicit error correction on their activities that relates to oral communication, and another group rarely received feedback. Three communicative tasks were used: writing an improvised story, answering teacher questions about a reading, and diary writing. One written grammar and three written tests were administered as a pre-and-posttest. The findings revealed that error correction didn't lead to a significant improvement; however, some students benefitted more from error correction than others based on the interaction of individual differences including previous achievement, extrinsic motivation, and anxiety with the treatment.

Kim and Mathes (2001) conducted a study as well to find out which form of negative feedback, either explicit or implicit is more effective in the use of dative alternation. The participants were 20 ESL students who were native speakers of Korean. The learners were high beginners or low intermediate that were evenly distributed between the two groups of an explicit group which received metalinguistic information and an implicit group receiving recasts when they erred. The target structure was taught to them in the form of one structural change. The results of the posttests indicated no significant differences between the groups. However, the findings emphasized the need for continued feedback rather than limited feedback.

The impact of implicit feedback and learners' responses on ESL questions development was investigated by McDonough in 2005. 60 EFL students as Thai native speakers, were participated in the study, they carried out communicative tasks with English native speakers in 3 treatment sessions and completed 4 oral tasks over 8 weeks. The learners were assigned to 4 treatment conditions. The first one was enhanced opportunity to modify by drawing learners' attention to the target form with stress and intonation. Opportunity to modify by using an open-ended clarification request was the second condition. Another treatment was feedback without opportunity to modify which occurred by enhancing the salience of the target forms through stress and intonation, and the last treatment condition didn't provide any form of feedback. Logistic regression revealed that modified output which involved developmentally advanced questions was predictive of ESL question development. It was also yielded that clarification requests indirectly promoted both ESL questions and modified output.

In another study, Loewn, and Erlam (2006) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of two types of CF: explicit (metalinguistic information) and implicit (recast) on the acquisition of the target structure. 31 lower intermediate students in a private language school in New Zealand participated in the study. They were divided into 3 groups namely explicit, implicit, and control groups.

Both explicit and implicit groups received the same amount of instruction, and they were audio- recorded. Two posttests in forms of oral imitation test (measuring implicit knowledge) untimed grammatically judgment test, and the metalinguistic test (measuring explicit knowledge) were taken; one a day after the last day of treatment another one 12 days later. The results revealed that explicit feedback was more effective than implicit. The study, furthermore, pointed to the fact that both types of knowledge (implicit and explicit) need to be measured in experimental studies.

In the same fashion, Zohrabi and Ehsani (2014) attempted to discover the role of implicit and explicit CF in Persian speaking EFL learners' awareness of and accuracy in English grammar. This study was carried out with the participation of 60 Iranian Persian-speaking pre-intermediate learners who were divided into implicit and explicit group after taking the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Data were collected by administering two tests containing 10 English sentences in simple past and present tense with wrong verb forms, while the learners were asked to identify and correct the errors. The findings indicated that both implicit and explicit CF were shown to be effective in improving the process of English language learning and learners' awareness of English grammar. The researchers of the study also found out that explicit correction is more useful.

This Research

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of two kinds of WCF on learners' grammar accuracy. Moreover, this study probes which type of feedback is more effective. To comply the objective, the following research questions are addressed.

RQ1. Does written feedback improve learners' acquisition of simple past tense?

RQ2. Is there any difference between learners' performance on the type of feedback they receive?

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

A convenient sampling procedure was conducted for the subject selection. To comply the objective, 45 pre-intermediate EFL learners, 20 males and 25 females comprised the subjects of study. Their ages ranged from 15-17. They have been studying English more than two years and have never been exposed to English in a native environment. They all have been learning English as a foreign language since junior high school which is a compulsory part of the educational system in the country as well. They were homogeneous in terms of their Persian native language. They all speak standard Persian.

3.2 Instruments

In order to fulfill the requirements and purpose of the study, the present study applied Oxford Placement Test (OPT) to homogenize and also for choosing the subjects, pre-test in the form of multiple choice test related to past tense and similarly the post-test and also diary writing was used to accomplish the task. Students were asked to write freely on any topic

about their thought, life experience or their daily activities.

3.3 Procedure

A quasi-experimental and quantitative research design was conducted to probe the effectiveness of WCF on students' diary writing. Prior to the intervention all participants were asked to write a diary on any topic they wish. They were asked to write freely. They were informed that they were free to participate to create a sense of freedom among the participants. They were divided into three groups as what follows: NFG, ECF, and ICF. In NFG, the teacher presented some examples of past tense accompanied by describing the usage of the past tense according to their course book, and then the learners were asked to write their diaries without any kind of feedback. The same procedure was conducted for the ECF groups however, they received explicit corrective feedback on their diaries and ICF group has received implicit corrective feedback on their diaries. This process has been continued for 8 sessions over a time span of one month by the researcher as a teacher.

4. RESULTS

In this section, a descriptive analysis of quantitative data is presented based on the research questions of the study. The descriptive statistics of participants' pretest scores is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest*

Group		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control Group	Pretest	15	12.00	20.00	16.80	1.47
	posttest	15	15.00	20.00	17.20	1.93
Experimental Group/Explicit Feedback	Pretest	15	15.00	19.00	16.86	1.30
	posttest	15	22.00	30.00	26.26	2.37
Experimental Group/Implicit Feedback	Pretest	15	14.00	20.00	16.93	2.05
	posttest	15	19.00	24.00	21.66	1.44

As displayed in Table 1, the scores of the subjects in the control did not change significantly (Pretest Mean= 16.80, Posttest Mean= 17.20), as compared with the subjects' mean scores in the two experimental groups. The means of ECF Group changed from 16.86 in pre-test to 26.26 in posttest and the means of ICF Group changed from 16.93 in pre-test to 21.66 in the posttest.

In order to show that all three groups are homogenized, their pretest scores were compared and results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. *One-way ANOVA for pretest scores*

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	.133	2	.067	.02	.97
Within Groups	113.06	42	2.69		
Total	113.20	44			

Table 2 summarized the homogeneity data between the three groups (NFG, ECF & ICF groups). As seen in Table 2, F value is equal to .02, Sig= .94 > α . Since the observed significance value is bigger than .05 (sig > α), null hypothesis that states, the means of three groups are not different was not rejected. That is, there was no significantly statistical difference between these three groups' pretest scores. Hence, these three groups were homogenized.

4.1 Analysis of Research Question one

In order to probe the first null hypothesis stating written feedback has no significant effect on learner's acquisition of simple past forms, One- way ANOVA was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Results of One-way ANOVA for Posttest Scores*

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	616.57	2	308.28	80.59	.00
Within Groups	160.66	42	3.82		
Total	777.24	44			

As presented in Table 3, F value is 80.59, Sig= .00 < α . Since the observed significance value is smaller than .05 (Sig < α), null hypothesis was rejected. So, there is a significant difference among the three groups at their posttest scores. Therefore, it was clear that one of the introduced forms of corrective feedbacks was more successful than others in making an increase in learners' scores on past tense.

4.2 Analysis of Research Question two

To probe the second null hypothesis suggesting that there is no difference in the performance of implicit, explicit written feedback, Post Hoc LSD was administered to compare the learners' mean scores of their pre-test at the posttest. So, the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Post Hoc LSD Test for Posttest

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Experimental/Explicit feedback	-9.06*	.71	.00	-10.50	-7.62
Control	Implicit Feedback	-4.46*	.71	.00	-5.90	-3.02
Explicit feedback	Implicit Feedback	4.60*	.71	.00	3.15	6.04

As presented in Table 4, because the values of Sig. for all three layers of comparison are .00, the null hypothesis was rejected. That is, all comparisons show a significant statistical difference among groups. In the first level, a comparison was made between NFG and ECF Group. Because the Mean Difference is -9.96, that is $\mu_1 - \mu_2 < 0$, the ECF Group outperformed than NFG, $\mu_1 < \mu_2$. In the second layer of comparison, a comparison was made between NFG and ICF Group. Since the Mean Difference is -4.46, that is $\mu_1 - \mu_3 < 0$, the ICF Group outperformed than NFG, $\mu_1 < \mu_3$. In the last layer of comparison, a comparison was made between ECF and ICF Groups. Because the Mean Difference is 4.60, that is $\mu_2 - \mu_3 > 0$, the ECF group outperformed than ICF Group, $\mu_2 > \mu_3$.

In correspondence with the results on the posttest, Table 4 exhibits that, learners in ECF Group (M=26.26) surpassed their counterparts in ICF Group (M=21.66) and NFG (M=17.20). It indicates that learners in ECF Group performed better than the NFG and ICF Group.

5. DISCUSSION

The extant gap in the literature is addressed in the current study. This study supports a bulk of researches on diary writing which demonstrate the positive effect of diary writing as a helpful tool in educational environments (Barjesteh, et al, 2001; Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper, 2001; Loo & Trorpe, 2002; Travers, 2011; Vaseghi, et al, 2014).

Ferris (cited in Richards and Renandya, 2002) states, however process skill is important, but lack of grammatical accuracy in writing may have negative effect, so this study conducted the use of WCF in order to improve students' grammatical accuracy.

This study was in line with the bulk of research that expressed the importance of feedback on students' accuracy and writing skill (Ashwell, 2000; Bitchener, 2008; Ferris, 2006; Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Kim & Jung, 2017; Lee & Iyster, 2017; Lee, Leong & Song, 2016; Waller & Papi, 2017). In doing so the results indicate that one of the introduced forms of corrective feedbacks was more successful than others in making an increase in learners' scores on past tense accordingly, the first research question probe that corrective feedback has improved student's grammatical accuracy.

Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012), in a study in the EFL context, also concluded that by using the direct corrective feedback learners can master those kinds of linguistic features that

can appear as errors in their writing. At the same time, Hartshorn and Evans (2015) showed the importance of WCF on the improvement of linguistic accuracy.

Previous researches on diary writing (Barjesteh, et al, 2001; Rolfe, Freshwater & Jasper, 2001; Loo & Trope, 2002; Travers, 2011; Vaseghi, et al, 2014) have been extended by investigating the importance of corrective feedback on the grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, along with a plenty of research studies carried out on debate about how to correct students' error in the field of feedback that differentiate between diverse types of feedback (Bitchener, Young & Cameron 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009a,b, 2010; Ferris 1995; Lalande 1982; Sheen, 2007), the second research question indicated that the explicit feedback improved students' grammatical accuracy and the incorrect usage of past tense rather than implicit because learners in Explicit Feedback Group performed better than the Implicit Feedback and Control Groups. This result was parallel to other studies on corrective feedback (Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Ferris, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982; Lee, 1997; Robb, Ross & Shorteed, 1986; Sheen & Ellis, 2011; Yang 2016).

Van Beuningen (2008) also concluded that regarding explicit or direct CF versus implicit or indirect CF, only direct feedback was beneficial in regard to long term effects. Concerning the effect of using corrective feedback on students' diary writing, the present study supports the profits of diary writing. The results indicated that students' writing performance differed significantly in the term of using past tense and it also indicated that the explicit feedback improved students' grammatical accuracy rather than implicit feedback especially on incorrect usage of past tense.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the role of diary writing as an emotive writing in EFL pre-intermediate Learners. Diaries were used to enhance learner's writing skill, and also due to the importance of grammatical accuracy which is neglected in process approach, the researchers used corrective feedback on students' writing in order to improve their grammatical accuracy. As suggested by the results of the study, providing feedback especially explicit feedback can enhance grammatical accuracy.

In fact, those students who received corrective feedback on their diary writings outperformed those who were in control group and received no feedback. The results also revealed that the experimental group which received explicit feedback achieved higher level of accuracy compared with the implicit feedback group.

A pedagogical implication of the findings is that in a writing classroom not only diary writing can be used as a creative and productive pre-writing activity but also it can be extended that teachers can use WCF on students' diary to improve their writing's accuracy as well as their writing skill. Of course, students' level of proficiency and also their maturity should be considered by teachers.

From the results of this study and previous similar studies, it is clear that explicit written corrective feedback is a stronger tool than the implicit version of written corrective

feedback. Moreover, it was concluded that Explicit WCF has the potential to help students' interest and it can help them to believe that it is working.

So, if teachers use more explicit WCF in second/foreign language classrooms, they will anticipate not only grammatical improvement, but they also have better L2 learning performance because learners are aware of their erroneous productions then will try to obviate them. There is a need for further research in this areas, further research is needed in order to investigate other grammatical forms or linguistics features. And also the use of other different types of feedback or the combination of two types can be used.

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