Direct-Unfocused-Corrective Feedback: A Model for Improving Writing Skills

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The effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback on the writing accuracy of the EFL/ESL students had been rebutted. The traditionalists believed that direct feedback performed much better than indirect one, while others concluded the other way around. Other points of views confirmed that receiving feedback either direct or indirect was not effective or it could not help the learners improve the accuracy of their narrative writings. This study aims to find out the effectiveness of integrated direct and unfocused corrective feedback on the EFL students’ writing accuracy. A pre-post control group was applied. The data was taken from students’ narrative writing and evaluated by using Brown and Yule rubrics. The results show that integrated direct and unfocused corrective feedback outperformed the indirect and focus feedback group. Among the five components of a standard essay, syntax receives more improvement of the students’ writing. The conclusion can be drawn that direct and unfocused corrective feedback significantly improves students’ writing accuracy.

Key words: Writing skill, ESL Learners, Direct-Unfocused Corrective Feedback.

Introduction

The effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback on the writing accuracy of the EFL/ESL students has been actively discussed since 1977 (Chaudron, 1977; Truscott, 1996; Ferris, 1999; Van Beuningen, 2012; Zaman & Azad, 2012, and Gandhi & Maghsoudi, 2014; Wiliyanti, et al., 2015). Numerous researchers also had investigated teacher & peer feedback within CALL and Blog environment or computer-mediated communication (Matsumura & Hann, 2004; Black, 2005; Jones, Garralda, Lie & Lock, 2006; Pan, 2010; Marboyeh, 2011, Lin & Yang, 2011; Cifci & Kocoglu, 2012; Srichnyachon, 2012; Abu Sileek, 2012; Abu Seileek &
Rabab’ah, 2013; Abuseileek,2014; Redmon & Berger, 2014; Salter & Conney, 2015; Aljeraisy.etal, 2015). In the Indonesian context, the studies were conducted by Purnawarman (2011), Paris(2017), and Akmal (2018). Nevertheless, no references were found in the integration of direct and unfocused corrective feedback.

Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta is the first Muhammadiyah High School in Indonesia established by K.H.Ahmad Dahlan 110 years ago in 1918. Mu'allimin is not just an ordinary Muhammadiyah boarding school. It has the title as Muhammadiyah Cadre School because many alumni are devoted to the struggle of this organization, both from the level of the local government to the Central Executive in Jakarta. The national figures graduated from this school include Mas Mansoer (former head of Muhammadiyah), Abdul Rozak Fachruddin, Djarnawi Hadikusumo, As'ad Humam, Ahmad Syafi’i Ma'arif (National figure), and Nasrullah (National politician). In 2015, two Mualimin students, Nasrina Kamilah and Safira Qurota A’yun were awarded second place in the International Essay Competition sponsored by ENO International. Since many International Essay Competitions can be followed by the students such as Indonesian Science Project Olympiad (ISPO), International Essay Contest for Young People, International Open Memory Championships of the Philippines, etc, the students should be prepared well. Thus, integrated direct and unfocused corrective feedback is taken as the model for improving writing skill of Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Students.

Methodology

A pre-post test design was used in this research. It was conducted during the academic year of 2018/2019. The sample was comprised of 52 students class from XII A and XII B, Madrasah Mu’alimin Muhammadiyah Schools. These classes were purposely chosen as their pre-test scores distributions are almost equal; p of pre-test experimental group= 0.645 and p of control group =0.800. They are homogenous as seen from the Levene’s F=0.45 (p=0.5 (0.5>0.05).From the ANOVA testing, it can be seen that F=1.76 < 3.99 which means both groups have no differences, or share similar writing skill. The data was gathered from students’ essay writing and evaluated in term of its content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics (Brown, 2004:246).

There are three research questions to be answered:1) Does integrated direct and unfocused corrective feedback improve the students’ writing accuracy? 2) What narrative writing aspects receive more improvement in the students’ writing, and 3). What is the students’ perception of the use of the model?

Pre-test writing was administered to the students to determine the homogeneity of their writing skills and to make sure that there were no significant differences in writing skill
between the experimental and control groups. The lesson materials on a good essay were
given in four classroom sessions. Students were required to write an essay maximum 300
words including introductory, detailed, and concluding paragraphs within 60 minutes. The
students are free to choose the topic such as Green School Policy, living in the world without
plastic, mobile shopping, etc. Each students’ writing was evaluated and its grammatical
errors were corrected by the teacher. The students received individual consultation with the
teacher at night as both students and teachers are living in the school boarding complex and
their grammatical errors were corrected during the night. After giving the treatment for four
sessions, the post-test of writing essay was conducted. In summary, there were 6 pieces of
students’ essay (one pre-test essay, four classroom essays/immediate essays, and one post-
test essay).

The data was analyzed by using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)
version 20. First, the errors of pre-test from both experiment and control group were
recorded, coded, graded, and input into the software package SPSS. An independent samples
t-tests and paired samples tests were conducted to examine the differences between those
two groups. The areas of grammatical errors were analyzed. Brown writing rubrics
(2004:246) were applied for scaling (0-100) of the students’ writing components including:
1. Content: knowledge of the subject, development of a thesis, coverage of a topic, relevance
   of details, substance, the number of details. 2. Organization: fluency of expression, clarity in
   the statement of ideas, support, organization of ideas, sequencing and development of ideas.
3. Syntax: use of sentence structures and constructions, accuracy and correctness in the use
   of the agreement, number, tense, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, negation.
4. Vocabulary: range, the accuracy of word/idiom choice, mastery of word forms,
   appropriateness of register, effectiveness in the transmission of meaning. 5. Mechanics of
   writing: conventions of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc. The scoring system is
given in the table below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>27-30 Excellent to very good</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22-26 Good to average</td>
<td>Subject adequate range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-21 Fair to poor</td>
<td>Limited knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-17 Very poor</td>
<td>Does not show knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>18-20 Excellent to very good</td>
<td>Fluent expression of the ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14-17 Good to average</td>
<td>Somewhat choppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-13 Fair to poor</td>
<td>Non-fluent-ideas/confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07-09 Very poor</td>
<td>Does not communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>18-20 Excellent to very good</td>
<td>Sophisticate range-effective word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14-17 Good to average</td>
<td>Adequate range occasional errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-13 Fair to poor</td>
<td>Limited range of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07-09 Very poor</td>
<td>Essential translation of english vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>22-25 Excellent to very good</td>
<td>Effective complex construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19-21 Good to average</td>
<td>Effective but simple construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-18 Fair to poor</td>
<td>Major problems in construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05-10 Very poor</td>
<td>Virtually no mastery construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>5 Excellent to very good</td>
<td>Demonstrates mastery of conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Good to average</td>
<td>Occasional errors of spelling,etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Fair to poor</td>
<td>Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Very poor</td>
<td>No mastery of conventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The pre-test of students’ writing was evaluated and scored by two raters for assessing inter-rater reliability. To estimate the inter-rater reliability of the test, we calculated the correlation coefficient between the two raters. Table 2 depicts the resulting inter-rater reliability indices.

**Table 2**: Inter-rater reliability indices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CM test</th>
<th>CM test R2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CM test R1</td>
<td>.937**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R1= first rater; R2= second rater. ** p < 0.1.

The test is shown to have very high reliability, 0.937, which is statistically significant at p < 0.1 level of significance. The content validity of the instruments was also assured by a panel of experts.

**Theoretical framework and previous research**

Direct corrective feedback is given when the teacher writes the correct form on the student's paper. Indirect error feedback is provided when the teacher only indicates the location of the error on the paper by underlining, highlighting, or circling it without providing the correct form. For example, the indication of the error is marked with a symbol representing a specific kind of error such as T=verb tense, Sp=spelling (Lee, 2004).

According to Chandler (2003), direct corrective feedback is indeed more effective in improving the students writing errors while Ferris & Helt (2000) suggest that indirect feedback is more effective in enabling students to correct their errors. These effectiveness issues were rejected by Robb et al.,(1986) and Frantzen (1995) as they found no difference between direct and indirect corrective feedback.

Other researchers like Ferris (1999), Chandler,(2003), Ellis.et al,(2008), Van Beuningen et al.,(2012), and Bitchener & Knoch (2010) claimed that direct feedback performed much better than an indirect one. The same results were also reported by Bitcher and Ferris,(2012); Zaman and Azad,(2012); and Wiliyanti, et al,(2015). On the other hand, indirect feedback outperformed direct feedback (Lalande,1982; Beuningen,2010; Ghandi&Maghsoudi, 2014). Ironically, some studies conducted by Frantzen (1995) and Robb et al. (1986) showed no significant difference between those two feedbacks. It is supported by Truscott & Hsu (2008) that receiving feedback either direct or indirect was not effective or it cannot improve the students’ accuracy. Truscott (1996) says providing feedback regarding the students’ writing errors is not good and should be abandoned as the grammatical structure is a gradual process not a sudden discovery as the intuitive of correction would imply.
This statement has brought controversies among the ESL/EFL teachers and researchers. Ferris said that Tuscott’s claim was premature and false as she had a methodological problem both in design and analysis. Ferris believes that when error correction is done effectively, it will be helpful to the students’ writing. She argues that ineffective correction must be distinguished from the more sensible version. Ineffectiveness of teacher feedback may be caused by unspecific text. It can be incorrect or may not address the issues that it intends to (Ferris, 2006; Qoqiauri & Qoqiauri 2017).

In Indonesia, direct focused feedback outperformed the direct unfocused group. Providing direct focused feedback enhanced the students to master the linguistic features particularly in the accurate use of English articles in a piece of writing (Mardijoni, 2003; Basri, 2015; Wihadi, 2015). In the Indonesian setting, most of the teacher implements either direct or indirect corrective feedback. However, combining two types of written corrective feedback seems to have more advantages (i.e. direct focused corrective feedback, direct metalinguistic corrective feedback, or focused metalinguistic corrective feedback). Lack of references on the combination of corrective feedback such as direct and unfocused corrective feedback were found.

Focused corrective feedback is providing feedback to the students regarding writing errors selectively, focusing on the use of the passive, conditional clause, tenses, or structure of the target language. It can be said that focused corrective feedback helps the students to acquire grammatical rules of particular linguistic features based on the topic of the lesson given by the teacher (Zamel, 1983; Muncie, 2002; William, 2004; Hyland, 2006). The unfocused, on the other hand, is the way of giving feedback comprehensively on the students’ writing without any specific structure. It includes the choice of word, style, paragraph structure, tenses, passive voice, etc. It depends on the students’ errors. Both focused and unfocused feedbacks, however, have no conclusive evidence for their effectiveness (Ellis, 2009).

Since the general goal of giving feedback to the students’ composition is to improve their accuracy in general, not only on specific linguistics or structural features so unfocused direct feedback is much better (Ferris, 2010). Giving feedback on the student’s error in a focused way would encounter sequence language instruction. This is because the attention of the students are drowned to language features that the teachers explained in the classroom.

Findings and discussions

It is found that the Mualimun Muhammediyah Teachers use general three phases of teaching writing; pre-writing, while writing, and post-writing.
**Pre-Writing Phase**

During this phase, teachers prepare the students with the context, situation, and background of the topic being discussed in an essay. Some teachers take the students outside the classroom for eliciting vocabulary about nature or give icebreaker through direct contact with nature, generate ideas through mind mapping and diagram. During this step, the teachers also prepare textbooks, articles from newspapers and magazines. Because the school is quite reclusive and has no Internet, no TV, no mobile phone, the students lack hyper-link references. Additionally, the textbook in the library is almost out of date, therefore the teachers have the initiative to provide the supplement teaching materials from outside.

The teacher used a mind map to explore the student’s topic. In the mind map, the student has a central node to be developed and the teacher allows him/her freely to expand and develop the ideas. The teacher uses the mind map technique for brainstorming ideas before the student does the writing.

**While writing**

After having ideas during brainstorming or pre-writing phase, the teachers explain the lesson on how to write an effective essay including the paragraph organisation (introductory, details, and concluding paragraphs), language structure, content, and cohesive items. The teacher then asks the student to write a narrative essay based on the mind map. They are free to choose the topic as freedom of writing is more likely to have a good effect on the students. The followings are teachers’ reasons:

“I always direct students to make an introduction with a simple sketch, starting from explaining the essence of the variable, then being specified as a phenomenon/problem”.

“I suggest students to do writing by using a title that filled with questions and try not to use a title that directly people to guess the point of discussion”.

To keep the student on the right track during the writing process, the teachers do error correction on an individual basis. One English teacher was responsible for guiding 26 students and he/she should give individual unfocus directive feedback upon students’ narrative writing. The corrections were done by the teacher at night after since the teachers and students are living in the same school dormitory.

After giving detail remedy on the students’ error, the teacher asks them to revise their essay by using Grammarly software. So unfocused corrective feedback and self-correction were applied by the Mualimin Muhammadiyah teachers to save their time in correcting the
students’ essay.

After correcting 4 essays and giving unfocused feedback, the teachers finally concluded that there were 13 major areas of the students’ errors. Among the errors are: 1). Past and present participles 14.51 per cent 2). Adjectives and adverbs 10.66 per cent 3). Passive and active at 10.57 per cent 4). Subject and verb agreement 10.00 per cent 5). Coordinate conjunction 8.79 per cent 6). Paired conjunction 8.70 per cent 7). Verb form 8.90 per cent, 8). Conditional clause 7.86 per cent, 9). Modal 5.66 per cent, 10). Expressions of quantity 3.55 per cent, 11). Nouns 4.30 per cent, 12). Possessives 4.00 per cent, 13). Pronoun reference 2.50 per cent.

**Post Writing**

After conducting four sessions of writing class together with error correction session at night, the students were given a post-test which they should write a short essay of 300 words within 60 minutes. The evaluation of their writing was still focused on its: 1) Content—such as students’ knowledge of the subject, development of a thesis, coverage of a topic, relevance of details, substance, some details, 2) Organization—fluency of expression, clarity in the statement of ideas, support, organization of ideas, sequencing and development of ideas, 3) Syntax—the use of sentence structures and constructions, accuracy and correctness in the use of the agreement, number, tense, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, negation, 4) Vocabulary—a range, accuracy of word/idiom choice, mastery of word forms, appropriateness of register, effectiveness in the transmission of meaning, 5) Mechanics of writing—conventions of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.

The results of the post-test indicate the students had 108 common syntax errors. The area of the errors are; verb tense (70.79 per cent), to be (15.74 per cent), subject and verb agreement (5.55 per cent), noun (0.92 per cent), word choice (7.00 per cent).

Referring to the mean score of the experiment group, it is implied that the accuracy of the students’ writing skill is getting better. Their pre-test means the score was 57.96 and increased into 77.65 during post-test with the difference of means 19.69 compared to that of control group 12.16. The results indicated significant differences in students’ writing accuracy between their first and the last essays (t=5.77 > 2.04; p ≤ 0.05, df=30, sig.000).

It is found that the mean scores of the experimental group on the post-test was higher than that of the control group. Therefore, there is a significant improvement of students’ writing accuracy after joining direct and unfocused corrective feedback (t= 2.94 > 2.04; p<0.05, df=49) as seen in table 5.
Table 5: Paired Samples t-test of Integrated Direct and Nonfocused Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-test control</td>
<td>-3,484</td>
<td>6,597</td>
<td>1,185</td>
<td>-5,904</td>
<td>-2,940</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-test experiment</td>
<td>-1,064</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ Perception on the use of Integrative Direct Unfocused Corrective Feedback

From the questionnaire given to the students, it is found the teachers' techniques of giving feedback were appreciated by the students so much.

Table 6: Student Perception during Teaching Essay Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Rather agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher provides an accurate reference for learning narrative writing.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sufficient mind mapping of the students’ ideas before, while, and post writing</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher explains the important points in introductory, detail, and concluding paragraph.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To make conclusion, I should do paraphrasing.</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The teacher gives</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher’s corrections are easy to read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>correction of my narrative writing</th>
<th>23%</th>
<th>38%</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>19%</th>
<th>3%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table 6, it can be seen that 62 per cent agree on the use of additional learning materials from outside the school, 28 per cent disagree, 21 per cent quite agree, 2 per cent strongly agree, and 2 per cent strongly disagree. The students felt this was sufficient with the help of the teacher during the learning process in the classroom. Additional references for teaching writing are essential because students must get a lot of resources to strengthen the results of their essay writing.

It was recorded that 54 per cent of the students like mind mapping directed by the teacher. A small percentage (35 per cent) felt this was insufficient. This is because of the time constraints as the teacher only spend 15 minutes for creating mind mapping of the topic.

Only 10 per cent of the students disagreed with direct unfocused corrective feedback because the teaching and learning process in the classroom is sometimes not conducive after the lunch hour. Though the teacher teaches students to write good paragraphs by showing the example, not all students get the teachers attention as there are 26 students in one class.

**Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication**

The effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedbacks on the writing accuracy of the EFL/ESL students has been actively discussed. Some expert say that direct feedback performed much better than indirect. Others conclude that indirect feedback outperformed the direct feedback. Another point of view says that receiving feedback either direct or indirect was not effective or cannot help the learners improve accuracy in their writing or there is no significant difference between those two feedbacks. Thus, comprehensive research must be done.

The results of this research provided the answer that giving indirect feedback in which the teachers write and explain grammatical errors the students made without focusing on a particular grammar has contributed significantly to the students’ writing quality. Six components of writing qualities such as content, organisation, syntax, vocabulary, mechanics, and syntax received the most improvement. Most of the students (90 per cent) prefer the model used by the teacher.

The findings of this study provide insight into the techniques used by English Language
teacher, especially EFL teacher in giving Indirect Unfocused corrective feedback for improving the students’ narrative writing. The disagreement on the efficacy of each corrective feedback can be minimized by paying more attention on correcting students’ writing and of course with small number of student (10-15 students) in one classroom.

Acknowledgment

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