

## THE EFFECT OF DIRECT CORRECTIVE-FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS' WRITING PROFICIENCY

Fataneh Samadi Sayyad<sup>1</sup>, Mitra Mousazadeh Sayyadmahaleh<sup>2</sup>

Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Guilan,  
IRAN.

<sup>1</sup>fatanehsamadi@yahoo.com, <sup>2</sup>mitra.mousazadeh@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the current study was to investigate the probable effects of direct corrective feedback on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing proficiency. First, a total number of 60 female EFL learners who were learning English in "Zaban-Gostar English institute" in Bandar Anzali were selected as the main sample from among those whose score on OPT test was within the range of  $\pm 1$  SD from the mean. Then they were randomly divided into two groups. One class was assigned to serve as an experimental group (direct corrective feedback) and the other class as a control group (traditional group). This study followed a quasi-experimental design. The mean scores of the control and experimental groups were compared in pre- and post- writing tests by running independent samples t-test to investigate the possible differences between the two groups in terms of their writing proficiency. The results of independent samples T- test indicated that while the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their writing proficiency at the beginning of the study, the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post writing test. The results confirmed the positive effects of providing direct corrective feedback on EFL learners' writing proficiency. Conducting studies like the present one may help effectively on the better teaching and testing writing skill to the foreign language learners.*

**Keywords:** Direct corrective-feedback, EFL writing, EFL learners

### INTRODUCTION

Providing corrective feedback on students' writing is one of the writing teachers' most difficult tasks (Enginarlar, 1993). An important issue that has attracted much attention recently is how students and teachers become aware of the usefulness of written corrective feedback (Diab, 2005; Leiki, 1991). How teachers correct L2 student's writing is a topic that has attracted very large interest from researchers and teachers alike. Several studies have investigated the effect of various types of teacher feedback on students writing skills. One of the basic strategies for providing written corrective feedback is "direct" corrective feedback which refers to supplying learners with the correct target language form when they make an error and the teacher provides the student with the correct form. The point is that for a lot of teachers their most immediate concern in the classroom is not so much to correct or not to correct, but what to correct and how to correct. The current available evidence over the issue of corrective feedback (Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2006; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Lalande, 1982) conclude that feedback is effective in helping EFL students improve the accuracy of their writing. Some attention has been given to investigating whether certain types of corrective feedback may be more effective than others, but the findings are not convincing.

In the case of direct corrective feedback the teacher provides the student with the correct form. As Ferris (1995.) notes, this can take a number of different forms - crossing out an unnecessary word, phrase, or morpheme, inserting a missing word or morpheme, and writing

the correct form above or near to the erroneous form. Direct corrective feedback is beneficent since it provides learners with clear guidance about how to correct their errors. This is clearly useful if learners do not know what the correct form is (i.e. are not capable of self-correcting the error). Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggest direct corrective feedback is probably better than indirect corrective feedback with student writers of low or intermediate levels of proficiency. However, a disadvantage is that it requires minimal processing on the part of the learner and thus, although it might help them to produce the correct form when they revise their writing, it may not contribute to long-term learning. However, a recent study by Sheen (2007) suggests that direct corrective feedback can be effective in promoting acquisition of specific grammatical features.

Indirect corrective feedback involves indicating that the student has made an error without actually correcting it. This can be done by underlining the errors or using cursors to show omissions in the student's text or by placing a cross in the margin next to the line containing the error. In practice, this involves deciding whether or not to show the exact position of the error.

Ferris (1999) suggested that attention be given to investigating which methods, techniques, or approaches to error correction lead to short-term or long-term improvement and whether students make better development in observing certain types of errors than others.

As aforementioned sections indicated, a number of issues related to the value of error correction feedback on EFL students' writing have been investigated, but it seems that further research needs to examine the effects of direct corrective feedback on Iranian EFL writing.

### Research Questions

The specific research question addressed in this study was:

**RQ:** Does direct corrective feedback affect Iranian EFL learners' writing proficiency?

## METHOD

### The Design of the Study

This study primarily used quasi experimental design to gain larger views on Iranian EFL learners' writing proficiency.

**Table 1. Schematic representation of study Experimental Design**

G1 (random) T1 (placebo) T2	Control group(working on traditional methods of teaching writing skill)	30 EFL Learners
G2 (random) T1 X T2	Experimental group (working on direct corrective feedback)	30 EFL Learners

T1=Pre-test, T2=Post-test

### Participants

The participant of the current study contained 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners who were selected through administrating an OPT from among a group of 200 EFL learners studying in Zaban - Gostar English Language Institute in Anzali. They were randomly assigned to two groups (one experimental and one control group). The English class was held twice a week that was about 3 hours per week during a semester.

### Instruments and Materials

In this study a number of instruments were used.

**Table 2. Instruments and Materials**

<i>Type of Instrument</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Oxford placement test	To examine the homogeneity of the two groups at the beginning of the study
IELTS writing test	To examine the participants' writing ability both at the beginning and at the end of the study.
Wang and Liao's analytical scoring rubric	To evaluate the participants' writing

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected over a period of 10 sessions in winter 2013. At the end of the treatment, all the participants in both experimental and control group participated in the post-test writing proficiency test to examine the effectiveness of direct corrective feedback on their writing proficiency. The scores of the students in the control and experimental groups were compared in pre and post tests within and between groups.

### RESULTS

In the analysis phase of this study, the results obtained from the two tests were summed up and the procedures of descriptive statistics (including frequencies, means, standard deviations, etc) were conducted on them. Independent samples t-test was then run in order to find out if there was any significant difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of their writing achievement. The results of the study are presented in the following sections.

#### Examining the Normality of the Distributions

Before interpreting the findings of the analyses, the main assumption of independent samples T- tests namely, normality was examined. Skewness analysis was used to examine the normality of the distributions in the two groups. The results of the Skewness analysis, as it is indicated in table 4, obtained by dividing the statistic of Skewness by the standard error disclosed that the assumption of normality was fulfilled in the distribution of the scores (-.956 and -.776 for the pretest and post test scores of the experimental group respectively, and -.199 and .533 for the pretest and posttest scores of the control group respectively). The results indicated that the distribution was symmetric.

**Table 3. Group Statistics for the results of OPT test**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Valid</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>0</i>	
Mean	39.2750	Std. Deviation	21.06056	Minimum	9.00
Median	34.0000	Variance	443.547	Maximum	94.00
Mode	22.00	Range	85.00	Sum	7855.00

To select the main sample, Oxford placement test (OPT) was administered to 200 EFL learners studying in Zaban- Gostar English language institute in Anzali. Sixty students whose score fell + 1SD from the mean score were selected as the main sample for the present study. Then they were randomly assigned into two groups (control and experimental). The results of the OPT test for 200 students are presented in table 3.

**Table 4. The results of the Skewness analysis**

		<i>Statistics</i>			
		<i>Pre-test(control)</i>	<i>Post-test(control)</i>	<i>Pre-test (experimental)</i>	<i>Post-test (experimental)</i>
N	Valid	30	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	14.3000	14.5000	15.1333	17.3333
	Median	15.0000	14.5000	16.0000	18.0000
	Mode	10.00 <sup>a</sup>	13.00 <sup>a</sup>	16.00	18.00
	Skewness	-.305	-.168	-.764	-.872
	Std. Error of Skewness	.427	.427	.427	.427
	Sum	429.00	435.00	454.00	520.00

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

### Inter- Rater Reliability

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to measure inter- rater reliability for the two raters the results of which are presented in Tables 5 to 8. The Pearson correlation indicated the overall agreement of the two raters. The inter- rater reliability calculated by the Pearson correlation for pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups were 0.872 and 0.848 respectively; those for post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were 0.943 and 0.911 respectively, which were all considered to be acceptable.

**Table 5. Inter rater Correlation for the pre-test scores of the experimental group**

<i>Correlations</i>		<i>Rater B Pre-test Experimental</i>
	Pearson Correlation	.872**
Rater A pre-test Experimental Group	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**Table 6. Inter rater Correlation for the pre- test scores of the control group**

<i>Correlations</i>		<i>Rater B Pre-test Control</i>
	Pearson Correlation	.848**
Rater A Pre-test Control Group	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**Table 7. Inter rater correlation for the post- test scores of the experimental group**

<i>Correlations</i>		<i>Rater B Post-test Experimental</i>
Rater A Post-test Experimental Group	Pearson Correlation	.943**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

**Table 8. Inter rater Correlation for the post- test scores of the control group**

<i>Correlations</i>		<i>Rater B Post-test Control</i>
Rater A Post- test Control Group	Pearson Correlation	.911**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	30

According to Tables 5- 8 there was acceptable correlation between the two raters' scores both for the pre and post-test of writing tests of the two groups ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). After examining the correlation between the two raters, the average of the two raters' scores was used as the subjects' final writing score. Tables 9 and 10 show the results of an independent samples t-test used to analyze students' scores in the pre-writing test.

**Table 9. Group Statistics for the pre-test scores of the control and experimental groups**

<i>Group Statistics</i>					
	<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
<i>Pre-test Scores</i>	Control	30	14.3000	2.96124	.54065
	Experimental	30	15.1333	2.27025	.41449

**Table 10. Independent Samples T- Test for the pre- test scores of the two groups**

		<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>		<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>						
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
								<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	
<i>Pre-test scores</i>	Equal variances assumed	3.81	.055	-1.2	58	.22	-.833	.681	-2.197	.530
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.2	54.3	.22	-.833	.681	-2.198	.532

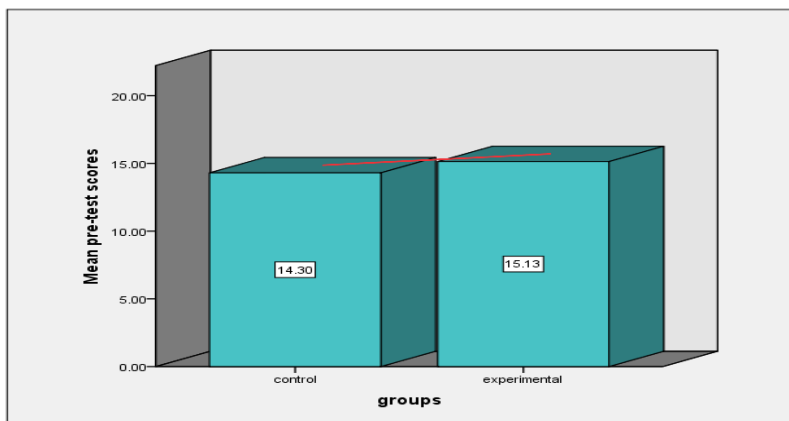


Figure 1. The comparison between the two groups on writing pre- test at the beginning of the study

**Examining the Research Question:** Does direct corrective feedback affect Iranian EFL learners' writing proficiency?

Based on the findings, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in pretest of writing achievement ( $p > 0.05$ ), that is: the control and experimental groups were almost at the same level of proficiency in terms of writing ability in the administered writing test at the beginning of the study before introducing the specific treatment. As far as the research question is concerned, i.e., whether providing direct corrective feedback for the experimental group affects the two groups' writing achievement in post -test, an independent t-test was run to the results of the writing post- test to compare the experimental and control groups. This time the results revealed that providing direct corrective feedback affected the writing achievement of the two groups differently ( $t = -4.8, 0.00 < .05$ ). In fact, learners' performance in the experimental group (Mean =17.33) far outweighed that of the control group (Mean =14.50) in post test. The results of independent samples t-test for the post-test scores in tables 11 and 12 indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups in their post- test ( $p < 0.05$ ). According to the data in tables 11 and 12 the experimental group considerably outperformed the control group in the post-test. The results indicated that providing direct corrective feedback had been effective in improving students' writing achievement in the experimental group and thus the research null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 11. Group Statistics for the post- test writing scores of the two groups**

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post test	Control	30	14.5000	2.60966	.47646
	Experimental	30	17.3333	1.89979	.34685

**Table 12. Independent Samples Test for the post- test scores of the control and experimental groups**

	<i>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</i>	<i>t-test for Equality of Means</i>

		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
								<i>Lower</i>		<i>Upper</i>
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	3.8	.055	-4.8	58	.00	-2.83	.58	-4.01	-1.6
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.8	52.9	.00	-2.83	.58	-4.01	-1.6

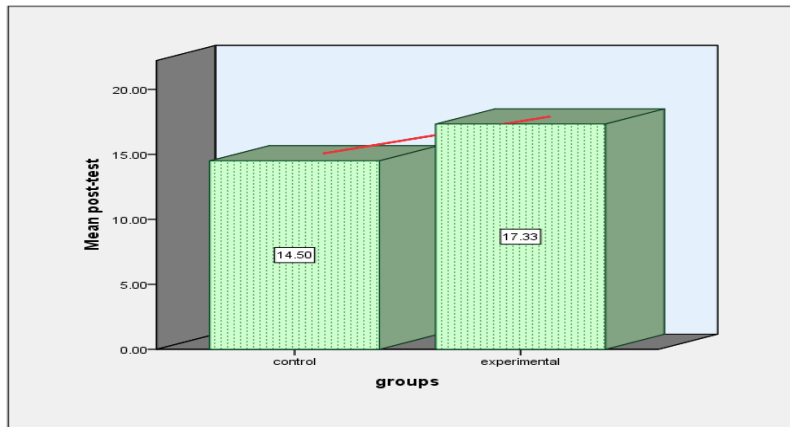


Figure 2. The comparison between the two groups on writing post- test at the end of the study

In order to investigate students’ progress within groups, two paired t-tests were also run, which showed the subjects’ progress in pre-test and post-test that are shown in Tables 13, and 14.

**Table 13. Paired Samples Statistics for the two groups in pre and post tests**

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Pair 1	Pre-test Control	14.3000	30	2.96124	.54065
	Post-test Control	14.5000	30	2.60966	.47646
Pair 2	Pre- test Experimental	15.1333	30	2.27025	.41449
	Post- test Experimental	17.3333	30	1.89979	.34685

**Table 14. Paired Samples Statistics for the two groups in pre and post tests**

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
						<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>		
Pair 1	Pre-test control & post-test control	-0.20	1.12	.20	-0.62	.22	-0.97	29	.33
Pair 2	Pre- test & Post-test experimental	-2.2	1.24	.22	-2.66	-1.7	-9.6	29	.00

The mean score of the experimental group has been improved from 15.13 in pre- test to 17.33 in post- test; that of the control group has changed from 14.30 in pre- test to 14.50 in post- test.

As depicted in the tables 13, and 14 both control and experimental groups have progressed in the post-test. Based on the results of paired t-test, this progress is statistically significant just for the experimental group but not for the control group ( $P$  experimental group  $<0.05$ ,  $P$  control group  $\geq 0.05$ ).

In other words, the experimental group made a considerably higher progress as compared to the control group in the post-writing test. The mean score of the experimental group in pre-test was 15.13, with a standard deviation of 2.27, and a mean score of 17.33, with a standard deviation of 1.89 in the post- test.

On the other hand, the mean score of the control group in pre-test was 14.30, with a standard deviation of 2.96, and a mean score of 14.50, with a standard deviation of 2.60 in the post-test. These results supported the hypothesis that providing direct corrective feedback had a positive effect on Iranian EFL learners' writing proficiency.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effect of direct corrective feedback on Iranian EFL students' writing proficiency. The results of this study supported the value of direct corrective feedback on improving the EFL students' writing. The findings showed that providing direct corrective feedback was effective in improving students' writing skill in the experimental group. In other words, providing direct corrective feedback in EFL writing classes affected Iranian EFL learners' writing achievement. The provision of direct corrective feedback resulted in significantly greater accuracy in post writing test. Direct corrective feedback enabled learners to revise their own writing and produce a better second draft. It also assisted learners to acquire correct English writing skill. This is in line with Ellis, 2006 in that providing direct corrective feedback was found to be useful. Since the participants in the control group were not given any direct feedback on their writing errors and they were not given the opportunity to discuss their corrected errors, their writing proficiency didn't improve significantly.

And finally, the participants of this study were all at intermediate level and it seemed that direct corrective feedback made these intermediate learners in the experimental group more attentive to their writing errors and helped them to develop understanding of the nature of their errors in writing this is consistent with what Ferris and Roberts (2001) suggested about the usefulness of direct corrective feedback for student writers of low or intermediate levels of proficiency.

## CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, LIMITATION

In order to contribute to the need for further research on the importance of providing direct corrective feedback to EFL writers (Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 1996), the present study investigated the extent to which direct corrective feedback helped L2 writers improve their writing skill. It found that the provision of direct corrective feedback enabled them to improve their writing proficiency. This finding adds to a growing body of research that has investigated the effect of different feedback strategies on accuracy performance. Because little research has specifically investigated the effect of different direct feedback options on improved accuracy, the findings of the present study are interesting and significant. The findings of this study imply that direct feedback facilitates improvement in EFL writing.



Consequently, it suggests that classroom L2 writing teachers should provide their learners with direct corrective feedback.

It is also suggested that teachers discuss with their learners which linguistic errors should be focused on and provide them with adequate direct corrective feedback in their EFL writing situations. Since current research indicated that direct feedback had significant effect on EFL writing, future research would do well to compare the effects of other options of corrective feedback.

Finally, the findings of this study have demonstrated that intermediate L2 writers can improve the accuracy of their writing if they are regularly exposed to direct corrective feedback. Further research would need to be undertaken to see if this finding also applies to L2 writers at other proficiency levels (elementary or advanced EFL learners) and whether it is also true for other language skills or sub skills such as pronunciation or speaking.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] Diab, R. L. (2005). Teachers' and Students' Belief about Responding to ESL Writing: A Case Study. *TESL Canada Journal*, 23, 28-43.
- [2] Ellis, R. S. & Loewen, R. Erlam. (2006). 'Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar'. *Studies in second language Acquisition* 28, 339-368.
- [3] Enginarlar, H. (1993). Student response to teacher feedback in EFL writing. *System*, 21(2), 109-204.
- [4] Ferris, D. R. (1995). Student reactions to teacher response in multiple draft composition classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 33-53.
- [5] Ferris, D. (1997). The influence of teacher commentary on student revision. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 315-339.
- [6] Ferris, D. (1999). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: a response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of second language Writing*, 8(4), 1-11. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s1060-3743\(99\)80110-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s1060-3743(99)80110-6)
- [7] Ferris, D. R. & Helt, M. (2000). Was Truscott right? New evidence on the effects of error correction in L2 writing classes. Paper presented at *Proceedings of the American Association of Applied Linguistics Conference, Vancouver, B.C.* March 11-14, 2000.
- [8] Ferris, D., & Roberts, B. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be? *Journal of Second language Writing*, 10, 161-184.
- [9] Lalande, j. F. (1982). Reducing Composition Errors: An Experiment. *Modern language journal*, 66(2), 140-149.
- [10] Sheen, Y. (2007). 'The effect of focused written corrective feedback and language aptitude on ESL learners' acquisition of articles'. *TESOL Quarterly* 41: 255-83.
- [11] Truscott, J. (1996). The Case against Grammar Correction in L2 writing Classes. *Language learning*, 46, 327-369.