**Impact of combined feedback on female university students’ writing achievement**

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**Abstract:**

 This study examines the impact of combined feedbackon female university students’ essay writing achievement and investigates the attitudes of the students toward the use of combined feedbackin writing. Twenty-one female students from one class were used as the sample group. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. The research instruments included the combined feedback instructions, writing achievement test and semi-structured interview. The participants wrote four essays of five parapraphs. At the end of the intervention, they attended the interview. The findings revealed that the participants developed their writing significantly after both types of feedback were combined in the intervention. Based on the interview, they had positive perceptions toward the use of both types of feedback to develop their writing skill.

**Keywords**: indirect corrective feedback, writing, female university students

**Introduction**

Writing is recognized as one of the most difficult skills for the learner as it needs appropriate practice and training to be able to produce effective written work. Errors is considered as one of factors for writing development. This is because it is an essential component for learners’ language learning process development (Li & He, 2017).

Many studies revealed that providing feedback is very crucial to help learners develop their writing ability and many studies have been conducted on corrective feedback in the recent years (Brown, 2007; Zanjan & Eslami, 2013). Feedback is recognized as one of the main components of the foreign language writing instruction because when learners receive constructive error correction, they understand their strong and weak points of their written work, nurturing their learning process (Zaman and Azad, 2012).

Content-based feedback means any comment emphasizing on whole-text issues of language learning: concepts or content, vocabulary, genre and register, argument, clarity of purpose and coherence in productive skills (Olson & Ratteld, 1987 as cited in Shobeiry, 2021). Studies showed the positive impact of content-based feedbacks over form-based feedbacks on motivation and essay writing skill of students (Rojab, 2017; Farrah, Zahida, & Zaru, 2014).

Corrective feedback is referred to as methods of teachers’ responses to students by describing the writing issues that do not appropriate or accurate in the target language (Li & Vuono, 2019). Based on the literature review, there are two kinds of written corrective feedback that are direct and indirect written correcive feedback. Direct written correcive feedback refers to when the teachers see the errors produced by learners, they directly explains the learners with correct form of these errors (Bostanci & Sengul, 2018). Direct corrective feedback is useful for devloping writing and learning competence (Sheen, 2007; Alroe, 2011; Guo & Barrot, 2019). According to Al-Jarrah (2016), some drawbacks of direct corrective feedback is that it may not good for long-term learning for students. When students know where the errors are and how to correct them, their cognitive effort may not be encouraged to process the correct answer. That is to say, it doesn’t motivate students to learn some grammatical aspects in the target language.

For indirect corrective feedback, no explicit correcions are provided to the students, they give only clues or codes such as underlining, circling the errors (Eslami, 2014). According to Elashri (2013), there are two kinds of indirect corrective feedback. First, coded indirect feedback is provided to learners by underlining the error and marks the symbol on that error. The second one is uncoded indirect feedback. It is provided to learners only with underlining or circling the error (no symbols identifying the kinds of error). This will help stimulate the learners to fix errors on their own.

Studies revealed positive impact and student’s perceptions of indirect corrective feedback to help improve students’ language and writing abilities. Based on these studies, students who received indirect corrective feedback performed significantly better in essay writing than students who received direct corrective feedback (Lizotte, 2001; Moser & Jasmine, 2010; Alhumidi & Uba 2016). However, some researchers revealed that poor writers may not possibly point out and fix errors eventhough they were provided with error location (Srichanyachon, 2012).

The problem of the present study was the low level of English writing proficiency of students at Thaksin University. Based on the data of non-English majored students, the data revealed that most of them are struggling writers with poor grades in English writing, tend to exhibit negative views toward writing tests and writing instruction and low effort and English writing motivation in classroom. Thus, this research aim to combine feedback instructions to improve university students’ English writing ability. With this regard, this study was designed to address the research objectives as detailed below.

**Objectives of the Study**

The two purposes of this study are:

1. To study the impact of combined feedbackon female students’ academic writing achievement
2. To explore female students’ attitudes toward the use of combined feedback on writing

**Research Methodology**

***Research design***

A one-group design was conducted in this study to investigate the impact of the use of combined feedback on students’ English writing ability. This study proposes an independent variable that is the combined feedback. The dependent variables were students’ essay writing achievement and their attitudes toward the use of combined feedback on writing.

***Population and Sample***

The population in this study was 60 first-year students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Education at Thaksin University in Thailand during the second semester of academic year 2020, as the course of “Read and Write in Basic English” (EN 0000122) is offered only during the second semester of every academic year. The Convenience sampling was employed in this study. Twenty-one female students from the same class were used as a sample group.

***Research Instrument***

The three instruments of this study were combined feedback instructions, essay writing achievement tests and semi-structure interview.

**4.3.1 Combined feedback instructions**

 The combined feedback instructions were adapted El-Sakka (2017). The contructed model was checked by three experts and revised based on their suggestions. The pilot study was administered with first-year students majoring in English at Thaksin University.

 The four participants were later interviewed for their feedback for improving the instructions prior to the intervention of the study.

 In this study, the participants were required to write three drafts in order to receive feedback from the lecturer, and the fourth draft was to submit to the lecturer. In the first draft, the content feedback for content, organization, and development of essay writing was provided to them through writing comments. The use of lecturer written feedback helped the participants to recheck on global writing issues in the first draft. For the second draft, the students received encoded feedback for local changes. The lecturer only circled the mistakes without explanation for grammatical errors. In the third draft, the participants received the coded feedback: circled words with error correction using symbols. Then, the final draft was submitted for overall writing evaluation.

**4.3.2 The pre-test and post-test of essay writing achievement and scoring rubric**

An essay writing test was designed and were chekced by three experts in the fields. The IOC result was higher than 0.6. The participants were given two hours to finish the pre-test and post-test. For inter-rater reliability, the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient was conducted after two raters rated students’ writing tests. The inter-rater reliability for the pre-test was .933. For the post-test, the value of relaibility was .912. The analytic scoring rubric for writing evaluation was adapted from the Michigan Writing Assessment Scoring Guide (2020).

**4.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

The interview questions were conducted with four female participants after the use of combined feedback regarding participants’ perceptions toward the feedback intervention and preferences for feedback types. The interview was conducted in Thai and took half an hour for each participant. The responses were audio-recorded and analyzed using content analysis. The questions were checked by three experts and some revisions were suggested by them. For example, “What do you think about the combined feedback?” or “Which types of feedback do you prefer to receive in the future?”.

**4.4 Data Collection**

The female students were required to take a pre-test by writing an essay of 200 words. Four types of essay writing were classification, problem and solution, descriptive, cause and effect essays. Each participant was assigned four writing tasks for the whole semester. Then they received the combined feedback. For each writing task, the participants were required to write four drafts. In the first draft, the content feedback for content, organization and development of the essay writing was provided to them through writing comments. For the second draft, the students received encoded feedback focusing on local changes. The lecturer only circled the mistakes without explanation for grammatical errors. In the third draft, the participants received the coded feedback for form-based changes: circled words with error correction using symbols. The code sheet was explained and distributed to the participants prior to returning the third draft to them. Then, participants can ask questions while checking codes and looking at the feedback. The final draft was submitted to the lecturer for overall writing evaluation. At the end of the semester, the students took the post-test on essay writing. Finally, four female students voluntarily took part in the individual interviews to check their views toward the use of the combined feedback to develop their writing skill.

**Data Analysis**

The writing rubric was used to score the students’ writing. The students’ English writing ability was examined using four essay writing tasks. Each writing task was scored by two raters. The average score from both raters was analyzed in each writing task. Students’ score from four writing tasks were analyzed by using Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The content analysis were used to transcribe and analyze the quantitative data from the semi-structured interviews of four students.

**Research Results**

***Background information of the participants***

Most of the students were 18 years of age and were first-year undergraduate students, comprising 17 participants (80.95%). However, four of them (19.04%) were aged 19-21 years. Eighteen participants studied English for 12-13 years. Three students had studied English for 14-15 years. In terms of English writing competency, fifthteen students viewed themselves as low level, six of them reported that they had the moderate level, and only one of them had high level of English writing competency.

***Findings and discussion of research questions***

***Writing Achievement******Results***

The participants were required to write an essay of around 200 words based on the topic “Causes and effects of climate change.” Each students must write an essay before and after the implementation of the intervention. They were allowed for one and a half hours to complete the essay. All essays were evaluated using the evaluation form adapted from the Michigan Writing Assessment Scoring Guide (2020). There were five parts: cohesion and organization, task completion, mechanics, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary to evaluate the written essay. 10 marks were full scores for each section, and the total score was 50 marks.

Based on the result, the mean score of the pretest was 24.70 and the standard deviation (S.D.) was at 1.98; the mean score increased to 33.96 and standard deviation (S.D.) reached 3.21 for the post-test.

Table 1 The comparision result of pre-test and post-test

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **N** | **Mean** | **Sums** |
| **Post-test and pre-test** | Negative | 0a | .00 | .00 |
| Positive | 24b | 10.00 | 240.00 |
| Ties | 1c |  |  |
| Total | 25 |  |  |

a. post-test < pre-test, b. post-test > pre-test, c. post-test = pre-test

Table 2 Result of Statistics

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Post-Test and Pre-Test |
| Z | -3.941 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |

\*\*p < .01

Table 1 and 2 present the writing achievement between the pretest and posttest through the intervention. The result was lower than .01. It can be inferred that after the intervention, the writing achievement was different with a statistical significance at the .01 level. The result revealed that after the intervention of combined corective feedback, participants’ writing ability improved when compared between the pre-test and post-test.

Table 3 Result between the pretest and posttest based on each component of evalution

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Components of Evaluation** | **Tests** | **n** | X | **S.D.** | **Z** | **P-Value Sig. (2-tailed)** |
| **Cohesion and Organization** | Pretest | 25 | 5.70 | 0.50 |  | .000 |
| Posttest | 25 | 7.18 | 0.84 |
| **Task completion** | Pretest | 25 | 4.60 | 0.41 |  | .000 |
| Posttest | 25 | 6.72 | 0.57 |
| **Mechanics** | Pretest | 25 | 4.95 | 0.39 |  | .000 |
| Posttest | 25 | 7.07 | 0.68 |
| **Grammatical accuracy** | Pretest | 25 | 4.65 | 0.36 |  | .000 |
| Posttest | 25 | 6.78 | 0.52 |
| **Vocabulary** | Pretest | 25 | 4.85 | 0.54 |  | .040 |
| Posttest | 25 | 6.21 | 0.60 |
| **Total** | Pretest | 25 | 24.70 | 1.98 | -3.841 | .000 |
| Posttest | 25 | 33.96 | 3.21 |

Based on Table 3, it shows that there are the significance difference levels between the pre-test and post-test are significantly different. This can be inferred that the students’ overall writing score including each aspect of the writing evaluation improved. After the intervention, the highest mean score was in cohesion and organization part with mean score of 7.18, and a standard deviation (S.D.) was 0.84 for this part of the evaluation. The lowest means score was 6.21 in the vocabulary component.

***The results of the students’ attitudes toward the use of the combined***

***feedback******to develop their writing skill***

Regarding the interview data, the combined feedback was useful. They gained more understanding on the writing process: this experience differs from what they had been taught about writing before.

They were all agreed that they liked this method, especially for the combined feedback was the lecturer and participants meeting as this encouraged them to gain more understanding of the their writing content. For some of low competent participants, they viewed themselves as weak in grammar, so they felt pressured and worried to receive the low marks from each writing assignment.

**Discussions and Conclusion of the Findings**

***Research Question 1***

For the first question, the results revealed that the writing achievement was at a statistical significance of .01 level. The results of this study are consistent with the studies conducted by Yamalee (2019) and Van Beunigen, De Jong & Kuiken (2012). It can be explained that the participants must plan and revise their written work for their errors according to the lecturer’s written feedback, so that they have to carefully reread their own writing, leading to improving their written work.

Another explanation might be that there were two types of feedback that the participants received. Then, they had to detect and analyze errors, revise and edit their drafts and re-submit their revised essays, helping to improve their writing quality. For the students, they are more active in revising and improving their writing tasks after they received both feedback in the three drafts.

***Research Question 2***

Based on the result of the semi-structured interviews on the their attitudes toward the intervention, the students had the positive view of their lecturer’s feedback, as they consider her as a person who can explain and provide feedback on their writing. The result also revealed that the students just perceived that grammar is not the whole thing that they must pay attention to, but the process of writing is very helpful when the feedbacks were received.

Students were willing to receive the lecturer’s comments, even though some of them said that they were worried after seeing the lecturer’s written feedback on the first draft. In terms of correcting grammatical errors, all of them viewed that it was useful when they received written corrective feedback with codes, as they had opportunities to revise their errors.

In addition, the student interviewees recognized the way that the lecturer implemented indirect corrective feedback with codes as a challenge due to the problem of solving nature eventhough at the begining they seemed to be frustrated as they were not sure whether the correction of an error was really the right one. For example, S1 mentioned that:

*“In the first time, I don’t really like this type of feedback. It is difficult for me to know whether this tense is correct or not.*

Eventhough the indirect corrective feedback is not preferred by most students at the beginning, later their attitudes have changed as they see the positive sides of the indirect corrective feedback. They are encouraged to be more active and put more effort to find out the correct answers. For instance, S4 explained that:

*“I know what is incorrect because I have to put more effort to find out what is incorrect.”*

Regarding the types of feedback they would like to receive in the future, two of the students (50%) agreed on the direct feedback. This might be because of their learning preferences. But another two students (50%) preferred to receive coded indirect feedback, as they would like to understand more of which types of grammatical aspects they need to improve. As S3 stated that:

*“ When I understand which grammatical errors I have, I can improve them.”*

To conclude, it can be inferred from the findings that the participants improved their essay writing with the help of the lecturer’s written feedbacks and indirect corrective feedback. Both types of feedback perceived by students finally show positive views and feedback, as the feedback could strengthen students’ motivation.

**Limitations and Recommendations for further studies**

No control group was included in this study for result comparison and the sample size of the study was only twenty-one which is small. Thus, the use of control group and large numbers of students are more reliable for the quantitative data collection. In addition, future research can use data triangulation through including a questionnaire to gain information of learners’ perspectives regarding each types of corrective feedback. The limitations should be taken into consideration if the findings from this study are to be used in other contexts.

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