



Effect of Direct and Indirect Feedback Strategies on Expression and Mechanical Accuracy in Writing among Students in Colleges of Education in Zamfara State

¹Shafaatu Muhammad ANKA

Email: shafa660@gmail.com

Tel: +2348060375440

²Ramlatu JIBIR-DAURA, Ph. D.

Tel: +2348032847891

¹Department of English, Federal College of Education (Technical), Gusau, Zamfara State.

²Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Abstract

This study investigated the effects of direct and indirect feedback strategies on English students essay writing performance at two colleges of education in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The aim of this study was to investigate students writing performance taught by direct and indirect feedback strategies at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State. The objectives were to examine the difference in the mean of expression and mechanical accuracy performance scores of students taught writing skill by direct feedback and indirect feedback strategies at the Colleges. The research was hinged on Schimdt noticing hypothesis and Krashen's monitor model. The Research design adopted for this study was quasi experimental design. The population of the study is 431 and this consisted of NCE II English students of two Colleges of Education. A total of 60 students were selected 30 from each college through multi stage sampling technique. The students were divided into Experimental Group One and Two. Group One was given treatment by direct feedback strategy while Group Two was given based on indirect feedback strategy for six weeks. Instrument for data collection was a narrative writing topic. The WAEC and NECO scoring procedure was adopted on students' essays. Whereas, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, t-test was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significance. Some of the findings of this study were that a significant difference was found in expression and mechanical accuracy of students taught writing by direct feedback than those taught by indirect feedback at the Colleges. The study concluded that students given direct feedback performed better than those given indirect feedback on the two components of writing. Therefore the study recommended that direct feedback strategy should be given to students on expression and mechanical accuracy components of writing.

Keywords: writing, direct feedback, indirect feedback, expression, mechanical accuracy.



Introduction

English language teaching covers the four language skills. These are listening, speaking, reading and writing. This requires a relevant approach, techniques and strategies. Writing performance in the context of this study means the ability of the students to compose a piece of writing on a given topic with accuracy of expression and mechanics. Aliyu (2009) defines essay writing as a written composition containing an expression of one's personal opinions or ideas on a subject matter (topic). Ogbuehi (2017) explained that essay in its modern form can be defined as an organised piece of prose writing on a given topic presented as an entity from the writer's point of view. The writer uses imagination and intellect to generate relevant points on a given topic. Essay writing is in the form of narrative, descriptive, argumentative and expository, it needs to be carefully organised into paragraphs for a clear communication.

There are four important components in essay writing, thus: content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy. Akano (2005) also stresses that the performance of a given writing task should be assessed based on the four components mentioned. In this study, the focus is on expression and mechanical accuracy. Expression in this study refers to how the writer strings his words together to form good sentences, sentence structures and control over the vocabulary. Mechanical accuracy means the writer's ability to use the mechanics of the English language such as the proper use of punctuation marks, correct spellings and tenses (Eko, 2015). Considering these two components of effective writing, teachers of English need to guide students to write better and develop useful revision strategies to think more systematically.

Feedback can be defined from various perspectives. Gezezin (2015) defines feedback as information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of learning task usually with the objective of improving this performance. Hattie & Timperly (2007) define feedback as information provided by an agent with respect to one's performance or understanding. Feedback in this study refers to the corrective information given by a teacher to students or given by the students themselves relating to a particular writing task. The purpose of feedback in any teaching/learning situation is to assist the learners to perform better in the next writing activity. Feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. However, feedback could be useful when learners understand what it means and how to respond to it. Feedback could be provided directly or indirectly. Direct feedback is a situation whereby the teacher writes the correct linguistic form above a student's writing errors. Indirect feedback on the other hand is when the teacher indicates the location of an error by underlining or encircling without providing the correct linguistic form. There are various proposals on which error should be corrected. Burt (1975) suggests that teachers should focus on global errors rather than local errors. Global errors are errors that affect overall sentence constructions. Local errors are errors that affect single elements in a sentence. This paper focuses on local errors that is providing direct and indirect feedback strategies on expression and mechanical accuracy.

Writing is a productive skill that is supposed to be taught through learner centred approach. This is the reason why Olaofe (2013) supported the process approach to the teaching of writing. He viewed learners as active participants in the creative process of writing. Olaofe states that errors are necessary bi-product of writing. Similarly, Eko (2015) posits that there is no writing beyond error. Therefore, every piece of writing demands proofreading and revisions where necessary. In the Nigerian educational system learners of ESL are introduced to writing skills right from primary education level. As students progress into secondary education, they are also exposed to different



forms of writing. In Nigerian tertiary educational institutions writing is regarded as product-oriented whereby teachers assigned topics for students to make choices and write their first draft. The teachers will mark the draft and return the scripts to the students (Kamal cited in Yahaya, 2018). At this stage the forms of feedback given to the students could be helpful in the next writing tasks. However, Ellis (2009) generally advised teachers of L2 to focus on fewer errors rather than address all the errors learners make. This view is in line with the recommendation of Fabian & Chinyere (2015) who recommend that teachers should be encouraged to use point marking over global or holistic method. Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to understand corrective feedback provided to them, correct their errors, and produce the correct form. Lastly, teachers should monitor how corrective feedback creates tension to students and plan how it could enhance learning positively rather than negatively.

Grammatical error is an area that is more often given more attention by teachers of English. For instance, Hong (2004) investigated the effect of teachers' error feedback on international students' self-correction ability. Some 119 international students enrolled in ESL composition classes at Brigham Young University's English Language Center participated in the research. The participants were assigned into three groups. Three instruments were used. In-class writing assignment and correction exercise. Participants compositions were scored based on the number of grammatical errors they made. The results revealed that teacher feedback was the most significant factor influencing students' self-correction. The former study is similar to the present study because they investigate effect of feedback strategies on students essay writing. While this study provides feedback on grammatical errors, the present one provides feedback on expression and mechanical accuracy.

Sadat, Zarifi, Sadat & Malekzadeh (2015) investigated the extent to which direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' grammatical errors would affect the level of their grammatical accuracy. The sample was divided into two experimental groups and a control group. The experimental groups were provided with indirect uncoded and indirect coded correction feedback and the control group was provided with direct error correction feedback. The result indicated that the students who were exposed to indirect coded correction feedback outperformed the students who were provided with direct correction feedback or indirect uncoded feedback. The present study is related to the former because both studies focus on the use of corrective feedback on expression aspect of writing.

Although effective writing skills are significant to the success of second language learners, Sivaji (2011) reported that students face challenges in developing writing skills. Sivaji conducted a research at University of Jaffna, Srilanka and investigated a suitable feedback technique to improve students' essay writing. The sample was drawn from undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The groups were treated with both direct and indirect error correction feedback in two-three day sequences of composition writing and comparison of original texts with feedback and revision. The result revealed that both feedback types had a positive impact on students' writings. The short coming of this research is that it was only conducted in one institution and one aspect of the language. There is need for comparisons with other institutions of learning for better generalizations.

Some researchers investigated on aspects of mechanical accuracy component of writing. Sani (2014) for instance, examined the effects of explicit and implicit feedback strategies on the use of punctuation marks among senior secondary students in Zaria metropolis. The study was



guided by five research questions and hypothesis. A quasi- experimental design was adopted for the study. Out of a population of 300 class 2 of 3 selected senior secondary schools students in Zaria metropolis, 60 (20%) were used as the sample of the study. Out of the 60 subjects of the study, 30 were used as control group selected from one secondary school while 15 each were selected as experimental groups. After pre-test, the researcher conducted lessons to the experimental groups for six weeks using explicit and implicit feedback strategies for teaching capitalization, use of full stop, comma and semi-colon. A post-test was administered to all the groups. The findings of the study revealed that both explicit and implicit feedback strategies are effective in the use of punctuation mark but explicit feedback group performed better than the implicit group. This implied that the students that were exposed to punctuation using different feedback strategies could perform better on writing performance. Hence, the present study intended to investigate how direct and indirect feedback strategies could be used to enhance writing performance of college students on expression and mechanical accuracy.

Scholars in the field of effectiveness of feedback such as Ferris (2004) and Jalaluddin (2015) argued that indirect feedback is more beneficial for most students, because it involves them in guided learning and problem solving. Moreover, they debate that the mistakes that are corrected through indirect feedback have long term effectiveness. The study by these researchers on the effect of direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' spelling errors shows positive results. Their study was conducted at the gifted girls' high school in Saveh, Iran. A sample of 56 high school sophomores was randomly assigned to two equal groups of 28 students. Groups 1 for the direct feedback group and Group 2 for the indirect feedback group were treated differently regarding their spelling errors for five weeks. These two researches revealed that indirect written feedback was more effective than direct written feedback in rectifying students' spelling errors.

Theoretically, this study adopted Input Hypothesis also known as Monitor Model founded by Krashen (1986) and Noticing Hypothesis founded by Schmidt (1990). This theory is concerned with the notion that learners cannot learn the grammatical features of a language unless they notice them. Noticing alone cannot be sufficient rather a starting point for acquisition. Therefore the findings of the present study have further validated previous studies that were hinged on Input Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis.

Researcher's experience and observations have shown that the writing performance of NCE students of English is below expectations. This low performance could be due to lack of acquiring the necessary writing skills in terms of expression and mechanical accuracy. The lack of acquisition of necessary writing skills by these students of English could result into continuous low writing performance even after their graduation at NCE level. Consequently, this situation could have negative effect on their job performance as teachers at basic education level. Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate and find a way of assisting the students to perform better in expression and mechanical accuracy in writing.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effect of direct and indirect feedback strategy on expression performance in writing skills among students in COEs in Zamfara state.
2. To determine the effect of direct and indirect feedback strategy on mechanical accuracy performance in writing skills among students in COEs in Zamfara state.



Research Questions

1. What is the effect of direct and indirect feedback strategy on expression performance in writing skills among students in COEs in Zamfara state?
2. What is the effect of direct and indirect feedback strategy on mechanical accuracy performance in writing skills among students in COEs in Zamfara state?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing by direct feedback strategy and those given indirect feedback strategy at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing by direct feedback strategy and those given indirect feedback strategy at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State.

Methodology

This study adopted Static group non-control pretest-posttest design. The design is an aspect of quasi experimental design. In this design, each individual's pretest score was subtracted from his posttest score in analyzing the data to find the gain after treatment. Quasi- experimental design was adopted in this study because it allows the use of existing classroom structure, where random sampling could not be possible (Frankel & Wallen 2000, Nworgu 2015). The population of this study comprised all NCE two students of English of Federal College of Education Technical Gusau (178) and College of Education Maru (253).

The study was based on multi stage sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select NCE two English students of the two Colleges of Education. The whole classes (178 and 253 for group 1 and 2 respectively) were given pre-test. The scripts were arranged serially and systematic sampling procedure was employed and 30 participants from each group were selected. The researcher conducted a lesson with the groups for six weeks. The lesson was based on the narrative descriptive, argumentative and expository forms of writing. Direct feedback was provided for Group One and indirect feedback was given for Group Two. After the treatment they were given post-test. This was based on the recommendation by Frankel & Wallen (2000) that 30 participants per group are ideal for experimental research.

The research instrument used for this study was a narrative essay writing for both pre and posttests. The essay topic is: "During your visit to the city last holidays you witnessed an interesting event. In not less than 250 words, narrate the incident to your friends'. The scoring procedure for this study adopted the Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations Marking Schemes. (WAEC & NECO) obtained from Chief Examiner's office, Gusau, Zamfara State), expression carries 20 marks and mechanical accuracy carries 10 marks. The writing is marked by continuously reducing the marks assigned by either expression or mechanical accuracy up to the end whenever an error is sighted, then whatever marks remained will be the final score of the write up. Whereas, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, t-test was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significance.



Results

Research Question 1

What is the difference in the mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback strategy and those taught using indirect feedback strategy at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State?

This research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1

Table 1 Mean Expression Performance Scores of Students Taught Writing by Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback

Treatment	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Experimental 1	30	11.43	3.036	.733	-.554	2.020
Experimental 2	30	10.70	1.784			
Total	60					

Table 1 presents the mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback. The mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback (M=11.43, SD=3.036) was higher than of those taught using indirect feedback (M=10.70, SD=1.784). The mean difference between the expression scores was 0.733 in favour of students taught using direct feedback. The 95% confidence interval of the difference is -0.554 to 2.020. Therefore, students taught writing using direct feedback performed better than students taught using indirect feedback in expression component of writing.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback strategy and those taught using indirect feedback strategy at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State?

This research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Mechanical Accuracy Performance Scores of Students Taught Writing by Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback

Treatment	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Experimental 1	30	2.50	1.635	2.233	1.599	2.868
Experimental 2	30	.27	.583			
Total	60					



Table 2 presents the mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback. The mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback ($M=2.50$, $SD=1.635$) was higher than of those taught using indirect feedback ($M=0.27$, $SD=0.583$). The mean difference between the mechanical accuracy scores was 2.233 in favour of students taught using direct feedback. The 95% confidence interval of the difference is 1.599 to 2.868. Therefore, students taught writing using direct feedback performed better than students taught using indirect feedback in mechanical accuracy component of writing.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State.

This null hypothesis was tested using an inferential statistic of independent sample t-test. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Independent Samples t-Test on Expression Performance Scores of Students Taught Writing by Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback

Treatment	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	P
Experimental 1	30	11.43	3.036	1.141	58	.259
Experimental 2	30	10.70	1.784			
Total	60					

Table 1.3 presents the mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback. The mean scores of expression performance of students taught writing using direct feedback ($M=11.43$, $SD=3.036$) was higher than those taught using indirect feedback ($M=10.70$, $SD=1.784$). The mean difference between the expression scores was 0.733 in favour of students taught using direct feedback. The 95% confidence interval of the difference is -0.554 to 2.020. This is supported by $t(58)=1.141$, $p=0.259$; the null hypothesis which stated no significant difference was retained. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the mean expression performance scores of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State. In other words, students taught writing using direct feedback did not perform better than students taught using indirect feedback in expression component of writing.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State.

This null hypothesis was tested using an inferential statistic of independent sample t-test. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.



Table 4 Independent Samples t-Test on Mechanical Accuracy Performance Scores of Students Taught Writing by Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback

Treatment	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	P
Experimental 1	30	2.50	1.635	7.048	58	.000
Experimental 2	30	.27	.583			
Total	60					

Table 4 presents the mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback. The mean scores of mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback ($M=2.50$, $SD=1.635$) was higher than those taught using indirect feedback ($M=0.27$, $SD=0.583$). The mean difference between the mechanical accuracy scores was 2.233 in favour of students taught using direct feedback. The 95% confidence interval of the difference is 1.599 to 2.868. This is supported by $t(58)=7.048$, $p=0.001$; the null hypothesis which stated no significant difference was rejected. Therefore, there was a significant difference in the mean mechanical accuracy performance scores of students taught writing using direct feedback and those taught using indirect feedback at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State. Thus, students taught writing using direct feedback performed better than students taught using indirect feedback in mechanical accuracy component of writing.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigated the effects of direct and indirect feedback strategies on students' writing performance at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State. The findings from the study show that students taught writing using direct feedback strategy performed better than students taught using indirect feedback strategy in expression component of writing with 11.43 and 10.70 for experimental Groups 1 and 2 respectively. However, there was no significant difference found between the two groups. This has further validated the finding of Sivaji (2011) which states that both feedback types had a positive impact on students' writings.

Similarly, a significant difference was found in mechanical accuracy performance of students taught writing using direct feedback against those taught using indirect feedback at Colleges of Education in Zamfara State. This is because of the mean score of 2.50 and 0.27 for experimental Groups 1 and 2 respectively. This is in line with the findings of Sani (2014) which states that explicit feedback is more beneficial the implicit one.

Conclusion

Students of English at the two colleges of Education do not possess the techniques of writing in the aspect of expression. Students of English given direct feedback strategy performed better than those given indirect feedback on the use of mechanical accuracy such as spellings and punctuations. Both direct and indirect feedback strategies are beneficial to ESL students' writing performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Direct feedback should be given to the students especially on expression component of writing. Grammar should be given more attention.



2. Students of English that were exposed to direct feedback were better in the overall writing performance.

References

- Akano, A. (2005). *How to write acceptable essays and letters*. University press.
- Aliyu, H. (2009). *Essays and letters: Practical approach for schools and colleges*. Ol-Faith.
- Burt, M. (1975). Error analysis in the adult ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly* 9(1), 53- 63.
- Eko, E. (2015). *Effective Writing and Communication*. HEBN Publishers.
- Ellis, Rod (2009a) Corrective feedback and teacher development. *L2 Journal, An electronic referenced Journal for Foreign and Second Language Educators*. <http://scholarship.org/uc/item/2504d6w3>
- Fabian, U. & Chinyere, A. V. (2015). Scoring techniques and minimizing subjectivity in essay test for accuracy and reliability in students' assessment. *Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation*. 14, (2), 139-146.
- Ferris D. R. (2004). The "grammar correction" Debate in L2 writing. Where are we and where do we go from here? *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 13, 49-62.
- Frankel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2000). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. (4th ed) McGraw Hill, New York.
- Gezegin, B. B. (2015). Feedback in L2 writing: Voices from native and non-native English speaking teachers. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*. 199(2015), 763-769. www.sciencedirect.com
- Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). *The power of feedback*. SAGE Open. <https://journal.sagepub.com/doi/abs>
- Hong, Y. (2004). The effects of teachers' error feedback in international students' self correction. (A Master of Arts Thesis, University of Jaffna, Srilanka).
- Jalaluddeen, M. (2015) Role of Direct and indirect corrective feedback in improvement of Hindi students' writing skills. *American international Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Science*. (AIJRHASS) 11(3), 159-162. <http://www.iasir.net>
- Krashen, S. (1986). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*: Longman.
- Nworgu, B. G. (2015). *Educational research. Basic issues & methodology* (Third edition) University Trust Publishers.
- Ogbuehi, C. U. (2017). *Towards effective writing skill for higher education*. New concept publishers.
- Olaofe, I. (2013). *Teaching English in Second Language adverse situations*. Yahaya Ventures, General Printers and Publishers.
- Sadat, T., Zarifi, A., Sadat, A. & Malekzadeh, J. (2015) Effectiveness of direct and indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' accuracy and retention of conditional sentences I, II & III. *Theory and Practice in Language studies*. 5(10), 23-28. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0510.07>
- Sani, H. (2014). Effects of explicit and implicit feedback strategies on punctuation marks used among senior secondary school students in Zaria metropolis. (Masters dissertation, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria).
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 129-158.



Effect of Direct and Indirect Feedback Strategies on Expression ... (Anka & Daura, 2021)

- Sivaji, K. (2011) A study of the impact of Direct and Indirect Error correction on Undergraduate writing. (Masters Dissertation University of Jaffna).
- Yahaya, S., (2018). The application of Watson's Genre Based Approach to organization in the essay writing at Zamfara State College of Education Maru: A study of NCE III students. *Journal of English Scholars Association of Nigeria*. 20 (1&2). 228-239.