

Preferences of 1st year high school students and teachers at the Araucanía region regarding written corrective feedback

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Abstract

Written corrective feedback is an important practice for the students' learning process, it provides them with the opportunity to develop their writing skills and improve at each step. This paper investigates the types of written corrective feedback preferred by students and teachers from la Araucanía region. The types of written corrective feedback can be direct or indirect, focused or unfocused. For this mixed methodology study, 234 1st year high-school students, from public and subsidized high schools, participated. The students had to respond to a 10-statement preferences questionnaire. On the other hand, 6 English teachers who work at those high schools were interviewed. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, as well as through comparing the average values in a T-test, while the qualitative data were interpreted through a content semantic analysis. The results showed that students preferred direct corrective feedback, likewise, English teachers tend to use direct feedback when correcting written assignments. This means that students preferred teachers to give them the right answer when a mistake was found and teachers preferred to let students know what was the correct answer immediately. Teachers state different reasons about why they apply direct corrective feedback, some of them are: time, number of students per class and to be aware of their students' self-esteem. It is important to know which type of corrective feedback students prefer as it will allow teachers to know how to correct and to enhance their students writing skills.

Introduction

Giving feedback in the writing process is important to improve the quality of writing in students (Brown, 2001). Feedback consists of information that is given to the learner with the aim of improving their performance (Ur, 1996). This feedback, which confirms the rule used or highlights the application of a different one, is what enables the learner to develop their interlanguage (Galindo, 2016).

Ferris (2006), states that feedback helps students' writing. Additionally, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) found that students who received corrective written feedback performed better in writing than those who did not receive any written corrective feedback. Likewise, in agreement with Lee (2008), as teachers give their feedback on students' writing, it is crucial that students' responses to comments are made to teachers as heuristics to help them develop effective feedback practices.

The main challenge of this research is to identify which are the types of corrective written feedback the 1st year high school students preferred and, at the same time, to identify which are the types of corrective written feedback that teachers apply in their classes. According to what is stated by Cohen (1987), there is a dissonance between what students would like to receive as feedback and what the teachers actually give them. As Aridah et al. (2017) point out, and according to the evidence found, it is shown that students have their own preference for what type of feedback they like to receive, independently from the comments given by the teacher about their work. On the contrary, teachers sometimes decide on their own about what type of feedback students would like to have. Hendrickson (1978) says that teachers have to take the role in the correction of students' tasks because they decide when it is needed to make a correction or not. Also, they are responsible for the process of whether students should get to the answer through inductive work and metacognition or give them the answers.

The main objective of this research is to analyze students' preferences regarding written corrective feedback and the one that is used by teachers, since there are different types of feedback which are not compatible with all students because they all learn differently. Authors such as Aridah (2004) y Ferris (1995), found that some learners pay more attention to comments related to grammar even though teachers emphasized organization and content in their written works. Therefore, how should feedback be delivered? Brookhart (2008), suggests that good feedback should include information that can be heard, understood and used at the same time by students themselves to carry out an improvement.

The second objective is to analyze the differences in relation to the preferences regarding written corrective feedback that male and female students have.

The third objective is to analyze the level of association between the types of corrective feedback preferred by the students.

The purpose of feedback in second language acquisition (L2) refers to the practice whereby the students adjust their speech once their interlocutors (teachers or their peers) provide them with corrections (Sánchez, 2014). Therefore, the use of feedback tools will help the learners as a positive evaluation of their learning process and, as a consequence, the creation of sentences in the second language will generate positive results (Sánchez, 2014). That is why we consider it very important to know what the most effective feedback for the development of written expression skills in the acquisition of English is.

Research questions

Based on the problem above, the following questions were formulated:

What types of direct and indirect written corrective feedback strategies does the teacher apply to their students?

What types of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback strategies does the teacher apply to their students?

What type of approach and strategy does the teacher use when giving written corrective feedback?

What is the perception of teachers regarding the types of corrective feedback and its degree of importance?

Methodology

Design

In order to develop this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. Regarding the quantitative aspect, a non-experimental research method was used. This method was focused on analyzing the preferences of high school students regarding written corrective feedback given by their English teachers on their written assignments. On the other hand, concerning the qualitative part, an approach called basic qualitative study was used. In this case, the strategy to gather information was through an interview with different teachers.

Participants

The participants of this study were 234 students (104 male, 130 female) and 6 English teachers. Concerning the quantitative side of the study, the participants were students from five different schools in the La Araucanía region.

It was decided to work with these students because they were in their 1st year of high school, and had at least three hours of English classes in which they had to work on written tasks.

On the other hand, in the qualitative part of the study, the participants were 6 English teachers who carried out written production assignments to their students from 1st year high school.

Instruments

The quantitative measurement was performed throughout the questionnaire named “Teacher Practices and Students’ Preferences for Written Corrective Feedback and Their Implications on Writing Instruction” Aridah et al., (2017). The questionnaire was made up of 10 items with 4 statements each. Every statement represents possible preferences (direct, indirect, focused and unfocused feedback samples) of which the students had to arrange them from 1 to 4 in line with their own preferences, 1 being their favorite and 4 being their least favorite.

Regarding the qualitative instrument, an interview guideline was used based on the following topics: the importance of written feedback in the classroom, direct and indirect feedback strategies, focused and unfocused feedback strategies, teacher’s focus and strategies when it came to giving corrective feedback.

Procedure

The quantitative data collection was carried out in the context of a class. Before delivering the questionnaire, the students were informed that the participation in this study was optional, so they might decline the participation. Also, it was informed the participation in the study was anonymous. Regarding the interviews, the first step was to arrange a date according to the availability of each English teacher. Later in the interview, they were told that they were going to be recorded on voice in order to get clearer data, if they agreed with this procedure, they had to sign an informed consent.

Data analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed with the software SPSS and took into account demographic data, reliability tests and variable values. Qualitative data was analyzed throughout the software Atlas.ti 7 in order to identify narrative extracts from the interviews and elaborate categories meant to help the formulated questions of the study.

Results

Quantitative Data

Reliability

The quantitative instrument that was used with the students was taken from the study “Teacher Practices and Students’ Preferences for Written Corrective Feedback and Their Implications on Writing Instruction” Aridah et al., (2017). However, this research did not specify its level of reliability.

When the results from the questionnaires were already collected and analyzed to take the reliability test with the SPSS software, it resulted in a low level of reliability ($p < 0.5$). This may have happened because only one instrument was used, which did not ensure a high level of reliability.

Types of educational establishment

This study was carried out in public and subsidized schools. Regarding public schools there was a frequency of 67 students which equals 28.6 percent. On the other hand, subsidized schools had a frequency of 167 students which equals 71.4 percent of the total as shown in the chart.

Table 1

Types of educational center

	Frequency	Percentage
Public High School	67	28.6
Subsidized High School	167	71.4
Total	234	100.0

Participants' Gender

There were 234 students who participated in this survey. There was a frequency of 104 male students with a percentage of 44.4. On the other hand, there was a frequency of 130 female students with a percentage of 55.6 as shown in the chart below.

Table 2
Participants' Gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male Students	104	44.4
Female Students	130	55.6
Total	234	100.0

Descriptive Analysis Data

According to the first objective meant to find students' preference about corrective feedback, the results shown in the chart disclose that the most prominent feedback strategy was direct, followed by indirect; the least preferred feedback strategies were focused and unfocused.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the types of written corrective feedback

	Average	Standard Deviation
Direct	29.73	4.53
Indirect	24.91	3.66
Focused	22.32	4.12
Unfocused	23.02	3.83

Gender Differences

The result of the analysis shows that direct corrective feedback was slightly preferred by female students rather than male students. Respecting indirect corrective feedback choices were quite similar between female and male students. In the case of focused corrective feedback, it was mostly chosen by male students and unfocused corrective feedback was prominently liked by female students.

Table 4
Group statistics according to gender

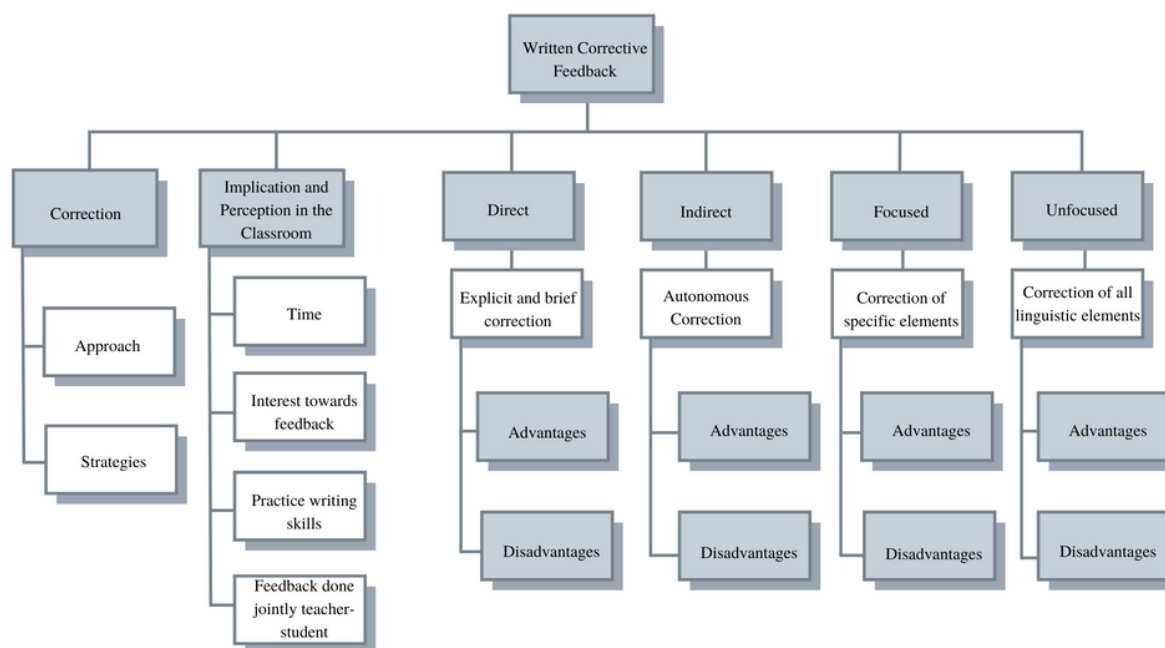
	Gender	n	Average	Standard Deviation
Direct	Female	130	30.32	4.17
	Male	104	29.00	4.87
Indirect	Female	130	24.57	3.63
	Male	104	23.08	3.69
Focused	Female	130	21.71	4.12
	Male	104	22.59	4.01
Unfocused	Female	130	23.37	3.78
	Male	104	22.59	3.86

Qualitative data

The following section provides and answers the questions of the qualitative approach of this study. These results were obtained by the application of semi-structured interviews with first year highschool teachers to know the perception they had about written corrective feedback: direct, indirect, focused, and unfocused.

Figure 1

Written Corrective Feedback Category Tree.



Dimension 1: correction

From the point of view of the English teachers, one of the issues in the correction of writing refers to the approach that teachers have. On this subject, four teachers pointed out that their focus when correcting was grammar. In the same way, we found that this approach would change for each student according to any errors they may have presented in their work.

Another point that was taken into consideration was the strategies that teachers used at the moment of correction. Positive feedback was mentioned by three teachers, in which they subtly indicated the mistakes that each student made, so that they could take it as positive reinforcement and not as punishment that could generate certain level of frustration.

Dimension 2: Implication and perception in the classroom

As a second dimension, we find four main topics about the implications and perceptions teachers have regarding written corrective feedback in the classroom.

To begin with the first topic, five teachers pointed out time as a negative factor when it came to giving feedback. According to them, the time was quite limited and what they highlighted the most was that, in some cases, it was not even possible to give any feedback at all, or if they did, it would be detrimental to advancement of new content.

Another topic within this dimension was the interest students had towards feedback according to the teachers' perception. Four teachers indicated that students were not interested in this area. This was reflected because students did not take their feedback into account. Additionally, during evaluations or written assignments they constantly made the same mistakes.

Regarding how the feedback helped the students to improve the development of written expression according to the teachers' perceptions, three teachers stated that feedback didn't help improving this aspect, indicating that the students had to use the translator or another tool to complete the activities.

Finally, in relation to student-teacher feedback, we found that five teachers considered this method suitable and, in addition, the good reception by the students. This way, teachers would be able to ensure that students received this feedback and could take heed of it.

Dimension 3: Direct Written Corrective Feedback

Concerning the dimension of direct written corrective feedback, which consists of an explicit and concise correction, the six interviewed teachers indicated they used this type of feedback when they correct students' writing. Teachers highlighted or marked the mistakes students made and the right answer would immediately be delivered to them.

According to the teachers, the advantage of direct corrective feedback is that students are able to understand why it was wrong because of their teacher's explanation. They also indicated that due to the time factor, it was helpful to use this method. In addition, they took into account students' self-esteem.

On the contrary, the disadvantages observed by the English teachers were that the students could not independently recognize their mistake, neither identifying them in any other context.

Dimension 4: Indirect Written Corrective Feedback

The indirect written corrective feedback dimension consists of an autonomous correction by the student where the teacher only indicates where the mistakes are made.

At this point, three teachers indicated they would use this type of feedback when they had to support students in the classroom with questions that could help them to identify the mistakes. However, one teacher also said that if a student failed to realize the mistakes, she would give the student the correct answers.

As for the advantages of indirect feedback, five teachers agreed that this feedback could help students to think critically and analyze strategies to correct the mistake.

In contrast, the disadvantage of direct feedback, according to four teachers, if the student couldn't find a way to correct their mistakes autonomously, it might affect their self-esteem and become frustrated as a result.

Dimension 5: Focused Written Corrective Feedback

Focused written corrective feedback is a writing strategy in which only specific elements are corrected within a written production or evaluation. At that point, two teachers acknowledged using this type of correction because they said if a student had a low level of English, the teacher should focus on certain specific aspects.

In relation to the advantages of focused feedback, three teachers emphasized that the only advantage present in the use of this type of feedback is that for the students it is clear what is going to be evaluated due to the fact that it would contain some known contents or structures. Contrarily, three teachers pointed out as disadvantages that come with this feedback is that, students would tend to develop more writing skills in specific content rather than a complete understanding or correction of the written production.

Dimension 6: Unfocused Written Corrective Feedback

Finally, we find the unfocused written corrective feedback that corrects all the linguistic aspects present in the students' writing. In this case, four teachers acknowledged using this type of feedback, indicating that when they had to review writing, they would focus on all the mistakes they found during this process.

In relation to the advantages of unfocused feedback, one teacher indicated that when it comes to giving this feedback you are evaluating the entire language.

The disadvantage that was present in this type of feedback, according to four teachers, was that it is a more demanding type of feedback for the student and can affect the student's self-esteem. The student must have a minimum proficiency level in order to understand all the corrections delivered by the teacher.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to analyze the preferences of students regarding written corrective feedback and the feedback used by the first year high school English teachers in La Araucanía region. The results allowed us to observe that the students have a greater preference towards direct feedback along with the English teachers. Firstly, the specific objectives of the qualitative side will be discussed and answered. Then, the results of the qualitative field will be reported where the specific questions of this research are answered. Regarding the first specific objective, which consisted in determining the preference of students' corrective feedback, it could be concluded that in general, first year high school students have a markedly greater preference towards direct feedback, followed by indirect and non- focused feedback, and the type of written corrective feedback that was least preferred was the focused feedback. Chandler (2003) supports the data by mentioning that direct corrective feedback, in most cases, is preferred by students because it is faster and easier when they correct their mistakes in writing essays using this method.

On the other hand, responding to the second specific objective, which consisted of analyzing the differences concerning preferences of male and female students in written corrective feedback, it concluded that there is a small difference between them which represents a small trend rather than an actual fact.

Finally, answering the third specific objective, which consisted in analyzing the level of corrective feedback preferred by students, it has been concluded that in all categories of written corrective feedback, there is a negative correlation, for example, if more direct feedback is given then this will increase its effectiveness while the other three types of feedback will decrease in effectiveness.

In the analysis of qualitative data, the question was: Which of the four types of corrective feedback (direct - indirect, focused - unfocused) are the most applied by English teachers in the ability of writing? The results showed that teachers use more direct written corrective feedback, followed by unfocused feedback, the third option is focused feedback and finally indirect feedback.

Regarding the question: what types of direct and indirect written corrective feedback strategies does the teacher apply with the students? The data showed that teachers prefer to use direct feedback rather than indirect feedback, indicating that with the direct type of feedback their students can understand the reason behind their mistake and how to correct it soon after. This is reflected in the study made by Aridah et al. (2017) where teachers show a greater preference for this type of feedback.

On the other hand, regarding the following question: what types of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback strategies does the teacher apply to the students? The results show that teachers demonstrate a preference for unfocused feedback over the focused one, indicating that they are assessing the entire language and all the criteria are important in the correction. In agreement with Aridah et al. (2017) our results show that teachers present a preference towards unfocused feedback.

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Answering the question: what type of approach and strategies does the teacher use when giving written corrective feedback? Teachers said that their focus is primarily on grammar.

They try to use “positive feedback” which means the feedback given on the correction of mistakes that do not negatively affect the self-esteem of the students. Claiming this, Sheen (2011), mentions that the corrective feedback is considered as a teacher’s reaction that invites students to pay attention to the grammar of a word that was said or written.

In relation to the question: what is the perception of teachers regarding written corrective feedback and its degree of importance? It should be noted that the time teachers have to give feedback to their students is very little and sometimes it is not enough to do it. In addition, teachers point out the low interest that they perceive from their students towards feedback is due to the fact that students tend to make the same mistakes later on, so the students do not improve in their writing skill. However, teachers find that a good method of providing feedback when it is done jointly by both student and teacher.

At the moment of carrying out this study some limitations were presented. The first was the fact that there were few teachers able to answer the interview due to the availability they had at work. A second limitation was that there was only one quantitative instrument available to be carry out the research.

The proposal for future researchers is to have more than one quantitative instrument for the students, besides it could be better to modify the instrument to a Likert scale. Finally, the subsequent studies may focus on more than one school level.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this study gives information about the preferences that students and teachers have regarding written corrective feedback. It was demonstrated that most students and teachers preferred the delivery of direct corrective feedback.

Teachers have different reasons about why they prefer to deliver direct corrective feedback. Some of these reasons are the amount of time that they have to deliver this, the number of students per class and to keep in mind the self-esteem of students. However, the amount of time is the factor is the most reiterated, due to teachers stating that English classes have less time attributed to them than other subjects and, in these classes, they are not able to deliver feedback to every student and to carry out writing activities at the same time.

As English teachers, we have the challenge of working on a better way to instill the development of writing skill without having to put aside the other three skills present in the teaching of English.

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