Effect of Different Types of Written Corrective Feedback on Accuracy and Overall Quality of L2 Learners' Writing

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Abstract: The present study aims to trace the long term effects of different types of feedback--direct, indirect, and content--on EFL learners' writing accuracy (the major concern of SLA researchers) and overall writing quality (the primary aim of L2 writing researchers). Data was gathered from three groups of Iranian EFL learners (N=44) randomly assigned to an indirect feedback, a direct feedback, and a content feedback group. The first two groups received both content and form feedback, while the last group received content feedback only. Results obtained from the analysis of three essays written at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study, over the course of nine months, indicated a significant but small difference between formal feedback groups (direct and indirect) and only content feedback group regarding the long-term improvement of their writing accuracy. Nonetheless, no significant difference was found among the three groups with respect to the improvement observed in their overall writing quality in the long run. The study concludes that content feedback seems to be the most efficient feedback method, when we are concerned with the long-term improvement in either accuracy or overall quality of writing.

Keywords: Content feedback, Error correction, Form feedback, Revision, Writing accuracy, Writing quality

1. Introduction

For any writing teacher, finding an effective way of helping students develop their writing ability is a primary concern. To this end, many scholars in second language acquisition (SLA) in general, and second or foreign language teachers or researchers in particular, have proposed different approaches and methods of teaching writing as a second or foreign language. One of the methods, sometimes also referred to as an approach, having profoundly attracted the attention of SLA researchers, is form-focused instruction (FFI). FFI was first suggested by [2] and [3]. [2] distinguished between two types of FFIs: focus on FormS and focus on Form.

[4] define focus on FormS as the act of incorporating synthetic accumulation of language elements such as verb endings, or agreement inflections, or even functions to the extent meaning is excluded. This is distinguished from focus on form emphasizing meaning before attention to linguistic features. Later, [5] redefine FFI as an "occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher or peers" (p. 23). [6] proposed a more comprehensive definition of FFI. He refers to FFI as "any planned or incidental instruction activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (p. 1). This broad definition covers both Long's "focus on form" and "focus on formS," as well as corrective feedback/error correction, which is the focus of the present study.

The efficacy of CF has been questioned by [7] calling for its total abandonment. [7], [8], [9], [10] argue that error correction does not necessarily lead to the improvement of writing accuracy in the subsequent essays, though it might help learners write better revisions. [7] believes in a "free correction approach" and suggests that "teachers should be presented with both sides of the question [feedback or no feedback] and be allowed the chance to make informed judgments of their own since teachers, and neither [7] nor [1], are the ultimate decision makers in the classroom" [8]. This is what [11] calls "teachers' sense of plausibility."

Another group of researchers, namely, second language writing researchers, however, consider CF crucial to learner's encouragement and empowerment (e.g. [12], [13], [14], [15], [16]). [17] argue:

> The importance of feedback is acknowledged in process-based classrooms, where it forms a key element of the students' growing control over composing skills. Presumably, changes in writing pedagogy and research have led to different types of written feedback with teacher feedback along with peer feedback, writing conferences and finally computer-mediated feedback. (p. 83)

[1] argues that the lack of agreement between these two groups of researchers arises from that fact that they look for answers to different questions, though they both talk about

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CF. In other words, in their feedback studies they have two different goals. That is, the second language writing teachers and researchers aim to help L2 learners improve their writing accuracy in one written piece. [12] argues that second language writing researchers are "probably influenced by process approaches to teaching writing" and "corrective feedback has a short–term rather than a long–term goal for these teachers; [they are] not specifically concerned with the improvements in the accuracy of subsequent wirings, though such improvements would obviously be welcome". (p. 228).

[1] further asserts:

They do not necessarily ask the same questions. SLA-focused researchers investigate whether written corrective feedback facilitates the acquisition of particular linguistic features. In contrast, L2 writing researchers generally emphasize the question of whether written corrective feedback helps student writers improve the overall effectiveness of their texts (p. 181).

[1], hence, proposes a blended model which takes into account the concerns of both groups of researchers. In her model, both short-term (effect of CF on revisions) and long-term (effect of CF on subsequent essays) have been taken into consideration.

The present study, partly taking this model as its theoretical framework, aims to investigate the effects of different methods of teacher feedback (direct, indirect, and content feedback) on the students' revisions as well as their subsequent writings. To this end, the present study not only examines writing accuracy (basically, formal accuracy) but also its overall quality i.e. form, content, and organization. In fact, it is hoped that the present study would fill the existing gap between theory, research, and practice. To put it another way, the results of this study may help L2 writing practitioners and SLA researchers find a middle-ground rather than just moving towards the extreme poles of a spectrum.

2. Literature Review

A plethora of research has investigated the effects of different types of feedback including direct, indirect, and content feedback on student writing. Nonetheless, as [1] states, the findings of these studies have addressed the extreme ends of the continuum. That is, the SLA researchers have mainly focused on the effect of error feedback on the accuracy of the essays in the long run, whereas the second/foreign language writing scholars have primarily aimed to investigate the impact of different types of feedback on the quality of essays, only a part of which is accuracy of from, in the short run.

Major research findings on the impact of feedback on second and foreign language learners' writing can be summarized along the following lines:

1. Generally speaking, students in the experimental group(s) receiving feedback significantly outperformed those in the control group with no-feedback on their writing, though [7], [8], [9], [10], and [18] claimed that these improvements could be attributed to student revisions and not new writing tasks.

2. Regarding different types of feedback, almost all studies (except for [19] and [14]) concur that indirect feedback proved more effective than direct feedback.

3. Though the focus of feedback in most studies was on the form, content feedback turned out as effective as form feedback though such studies include only one type of form feedback hence the effect of other types of feedback has not been taken into account. ([15], [12], [20], [21], and [22], to name a few).

4. [7] claimed that error reduction during revisions does not guarantee better performance on new essay tasks and the students' accuracy will improve over time as a result of practice with or without form feedback. In a study, [18] found error feedback to have a significant effect on the students' rewrites while this improvement did not extend to the subsequent essays.

Research on error feedback reported above has focused on one or the other end of the continuum. In other words, while one group i.e. SLA researchers solely investigate the accuracy of the writing, the other, second or foreign language teachers, focuses exclusively on the overall writing's quality, i.e., form, content and organization. On the other hand, some studies have focused on the impact of error feedback on multiple revisions of the same text, while others have investigated the effects of different types of feedback on subsequent essays. What is more, no study has examined the impact of different types of feedback (form or content) on student writing accuracy and quality over a relatively long period of time, long enough to consider the observed change as learning. Hence, the present study, adapting [1] blended design mainly aims to establish whether providing form feedback (direct vs. indirect) as well as content feedback, as opposed to content feedback only, will help Iranian EFL students improve their writing's accuracy as well as its overall quality in their revisions and subsequent writings in both the short run and the long run. More specifically, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do form (direct and indirect) and content feedback contribute to the accuracy of the revisions as well as subsequent essays? If so, which feedback method is more effective?

2. Do form and content feedback result in promoting the overall quality of the subsequent essays? If so, which feedback method is more effective?

Based on [1] suggestions for further research, the present study can be considered unique in two respects. For one, it adapts a blended design incorporating the concerns of both SLA researchers and second or foreign writing practitioners. That is, the present study considers the effects of feedback on both the revisions applied to the same text as well as the subsequent writings in the long run. In other words, the present study is longitudinal in nature, similar to pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test designs of SLA research in letting us know if the improvement observed in the accuracy of the revisions extends over the following essays. Moreover, it compares the impact of three different feedback methods (i.e. code feedback, direct feedback and content feedback) on the students' writing accuracy as well as quality. [7] believes that form feedback does not necessarily contribute to writing quality. In fact, he contends that content feedback alone can help to promote writing quality in the long run, when subsequent essays are concerned.

3. Method
3.1. Setting and participants

The sample consisted of 44 Iranian intermediate EFL learners of both sexes (14 males and 30 females) with an average age of 25, participating at a language institute in Shiraz, Iran. Their purpose was to prepare themselves for the writing section of the IELTS exam. The participants of the study had enrolled in three intact IELTS exam preparation classes; the classes were randomly assigned to three groups, namely, code feedback (N= 15), direct feedback (N=15) and content feedback only, which serves as our control group, (N=14), referred to as Code group, Direct group, and Content group, respectively, hereafter. The students in the first two groups received content feedback as well. They all had passed 12 levels in the institutes and were supposed to be at an intermediate level of proficiency. However, in order to determine their proficiency level more precisely and see if the three groups were all at the same level, an Oxford Placement Test was administered. The results of the test indicated that all the three groups were at an intermediate level of proficiency; the mean score for the 3 groups were 33, 32.64 and 32.13, for code, direct, and content feedback, respectively. The scores, however, were subjected to a one-way ANOVA test; the results showed no significant difference among the three groups (F= 1.13, P >0.05), confirming that they were at the same proficiency level.

3.2. Treatment and procedure

The objective of the essay writing course was to familiarize the learners with task two of the writing section of both general and academic IELTS tests, in which learners are supposed to write an organized argumentative or expository essay with a minimum number of 250 words. In addition to content and organization, grammatical and lexical accuracy were also emphasized.

The classes were held once a week for a nine-month period with each session lasting about two hours, with the three groups being taught by the second researcher. The first five sessions were spent on pre-writing and outlining activities. Sessions 6 to 20 were devoted to expository writing. During these sessions, the teacher explained the process of writing an expository essay, provided the students with model essays, and had the students practice writing essays of their own. During these sessions students altogether wrote six essays of at least 250 words, in-class and at-home. Each essay was collected by the teacher, commented on, and returned to the students in the following session. The students were required to revise their papers and return them to the teacher for a second round of feedback. These drafts, too, were returned to the students after being provided with feedback so that they could see how well they had revised their papers. The same procedure was followed for the argumentative essay, through sessions 21 to 35.

By the end of the experiment, after approximately nine months, the students had written 12 essays and received teacher feedback on each. However, the three essays written at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study along with their revisions were considered as the material of the present study.

3.3. Error feedback methods

The essays were commented on using three different methods. In the first group, i.e., Code group, the teacher provided feedback in the form of underlining and coding the grammar errors; the students in this group also received content feedback. The error categories marked in the essays were adapted from Ferris & Roberts (2001) including verb errors, noun ending errors, article errors, wrong word, and sentence structure errors. A detailed description of the error categories used in [16] comes below:

1. Verb errors (VE): including those errors occurring in the tense and form of the verb as well as the errors related to subject-verb agreement.
2. Noun ending errors (NEE): including the incorrect or unnecessary use of plural or possessive ending and/or omitting them.
3. Article errors (AE): containing the incorrect and/or unnecessary use of articles or other determiners (some, any, etc.) and/or omitting them.
4. Wrong word (WW): including all types of lexical errors in word choice or form .i.e. errors arising from the inappropriate use of prepositions and pronouns. This category, in addition, includes spelling errors if they result in a new word with a meaning different from the intended one.
5. Sentence structure errors (SEE): referring to all errors related to sentence/clause boundaries (for example, run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitting words or phrases from a sentence, and inserting any unnecessary words or phrases in a sentence.

For the second group, direct group, the correct forms of errors were provided in the body of the paper (in the spaces between lines or in the margin of the paper). The students of this group also received feedback on the content of their essays. The last group, the content group, however, received feedback only on the content and organization of their essays and no form feedback was provided for them. This group served as the control group of the study.

3.4. Quality

To evaluate students' writing quality [23]'s scoring rubric was used. This rubric contains five sub-sections, namely, content criteria, organization criteria, vocabulary criteria, language criteria, and mechanics criteria. Based on this 100-point scheme, 30 points were allotted to the content of writing, 20 points to writing organization, 20 points to vocabulary use, 25 points to language use (mainly syntax), and 5 points to mechanics. On the whole, 50% of the score assigned to the writing quality is related to its global aspects (content and organization) and the rest to the formal aspects (vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics).

3.5. Data analysis

In order to ensure the consistency of scoring, 10% of the writings were graded and corrected by the first researcher as well as the second, who was the teacher of the classes. The inter-rater reliability index was 0.87 (p< 0.01). The remaining 90% were corrected only by the second researcher.

In order to find whether the students of each group improved their writing accuracy in revisions and subsequent essays over time, the average error numbers of the three essays as well as their revisions written by each group were compared through repeated measures ANOVA. In order to answer the question regarding the efficacy of different types of feedback (i.e. direct feedback, indirect feedback and content feedback) on the students' writing accuracy, three one-way ANOVA tests were run on three writing tasks of the three groups. In other words, the first drafts of each group's three essays were compared.

In order to investigate the effects of the teacher's feedback on the students' writing quality, the same statistical procedures were run this time to compare the average quality of the essays within and between groups.

4. Results

4.1. Research question one: Do form (direct and indirect) and content feedback contribute to the accuracy of the revisions as well as subsequent essays? If so, which feedback method is more effective?

Table 1 indicates the error means for the three essays and their revisions written by the three groups. The table also illustrates the result of paired t-tests run to compare the error means of each essay and its revision.

Table 1: T-test results for the comparison between each essay and its revision

Group	Essay	First draft error mean	Revision error mean	t	Sig
Content	1	14.35	11.64	4.12	0.001
	2	13.00	10.28	4.29	0.001
	3	8.85	6.07	4.24	0.001
Code	1	14.40	7.80	14.48	0.000
	2	11.40	6.46	10.03	0.000
	3	6.40	2.60	10.33	0.000
Direct	1	14.00	6.33	14.67	0.000
	2	12.26	4.04	10.87	0.000
	3	7.2000	2.40	9.26	0.000

As the results illustrated in Table 1 demonstrate, for all the cases, one can see that the error means have significantly decreased in the second draft as compared to the first one. The results show that the decrease in the error means of both form feedback groups is much larger than the Content group. The error means of the revision of the third essay written by the Content group is 6.07, whereas those of Code and Direct groups are 2.60 and 2.40, respectively. The revisions of each essay were compared in all three groups through three one-way ANOVA tests. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of ANOVA for the differences among the error means of the revisions of the three essays of all groups

Essay	SSQ	DF	MSQ	F	Sig.
1	216.03	2	108.01	18.38	0.000
2	189.35	2	94.67	16.57	0.000
3	122.05	2	61.02	20.48	0.000

*significant level at $p < 0.05$

The table reveals that the differences among the error means in all the three group's revision on the three essays are significant (F= 18.38, $p< 0.001$ for essay 1, F=16.575, $p< 0.001$ for essay 2, and F = 20.487, $p< 0.001$, for essay 3). In order to see which differences are significant, Scheffe's *post hoc test* was run. The results indicated that the error means of the revisions of all the three essays in the form feedback groups, namely Code and Direct groups were significantly lower than those of the Content group ($p < 0.05$). However, no significant difference was observed between the error means of Code and Direct groups on the middle and the last essay. This indicates that form feedback has led to better revisions, while the type of feedback (direct or indirect) does

not have any significant effect on the accuracy of the revisions.

As suggested in the first part of Ferris' (2010) blended design, teacher's corrective form feedback contributes to the accuracy of the revisions; however, it is required that the effects of form feedback on the accuracy of students' subsequent writing must be investigated further.

Table 3 illustrates the results of three repeated measures ANOVA tests comparing the error means of the three essays (written at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the experiment) written by each group.

Table 3: Results of Repeated Measures comparing the error means of the three essays written by each group

Group	Essay	Mean	F	Sig
Content	1	14.35	27.46	0.00
	2	13.00		
	3	8.85		
Code	1	14.40	122.50	0.00
	2	11.40		
	3	6.40		
Direct	1	14.00	58.21	0.00
	2	12.26		
	3	7.2000		

As evident in the table, the error means of Content, Code, and Direct groups in their first essays are 14.35, 14.40, and 14, respectively. The means of the second essays are 13 for the Content group, 11.40 for the Code group, and 12.26 for the Direct group. Finally, the error means of Content, Code, and Direct groups in their third essays are 8.85, 6.40, and 7.20, respectively.

The results of ANOVA show a significant difference among the error means of the three essays in all groups (F = 27.462, $p< 0.001$ for Content group; F = 122.50, $p< 0.001$ for Code group; F = 58.210, $p< 0.05$ for Direct group). This was followed by a *Bonferroni test*, used as the *post hoc* test to correct the significance level and to eliminate the effect of repeated analyses for the same group of students. The results of the test showed significant differences among the error means of all the three essays written by Code and Direct groups, whereas, in the Content group, significant difference was observed only between the error means of essays two and three as well as between essays one and three.

Thus, it can be concluded that both form feedback (direct and indirect) and content feedback have helped students improve their writing accuracy over time. In other words, whether or not the students receive grammar feedback, they can gradually improve their writing accuracy, as a result of writing practice and concentration on the content of their writing. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, no significant difference was observed between the error means of the first and the second essays written in the Content group, suggesting that in the absence of grammar feedback, it takes more time for the students to improve their writing accuracy and acquire the correct forms they have problem with. As SLA is concerned, these findings are indicative of the idea that, in the long run, the students can acquire linguistic forms even though they do not receive any form-focused instruction if they are given the chance to practice writing and are required to rewrite their essays with a primary focus on meaning and content to make communication more effective.

The results resemble those of [24] and [18] in that they showed that the group who did not receive form feedback, improved their writing accuracy as well, and this was a result of practicing writing and gaining experience in self-editing over time.

Nonetheless, a look at the error means of the three groups at the end of the experiment (See Table 4, above) reveals that although they have all reduced the number of their errors from the beginning to the end of the experiment, the error means are not equal. Three one-way ANOVA tests were run to compare the error means of the three groups at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the experiment. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of ANOVA for the differences among the error means of the three groups on the three tests

Essay	SSQ	DF	MSQ	F	Sig.
1	1.43	2	0.71	0.09	0.90
2	18.62	2	9.31	1.65	0.20
3	45.19	2	22.59	4.98	0.01*

*significant level at $p < 0.05$

As Table 4 shows, there is no significant difference among the error means of the three groups in the first and the second essays (F = .097, $p > 0.05$ for essay one; F = 1.656, $p > 0.05$ for the second essay). Regarding the first essays, the results further verified the hypothesis that the participants in the three groups were homogeneous with regard to their writing ability at the beginning of the study. As for the second essays, the findings indicated that in the short run (after approximately four months of receiving feedback) none of the feedback methods turned out to be more effective than the others. On the other hand, the results of the third one-way ANOVA test indicated significant differences among the error means of the third essays in all three groups (F= 4.989, $p < 0.05$). However, the results of the Scheffe's *post hoc test* showed that there is only one significant difference between the error means of Code group and Content group, with the former being lower than the latter. That is, indirect feedback was more effective in helping the students improve their writing accuracy as compared to content feedback.

Nonetheless, the results showed that the degree to which the feedback was provided explicitly has had no effect on writing accuracy and it does not make any difference whether or not to give direct or indirect feedback. In fact, it seems that, giving direct feedback is a waste of time since no significant difference can be observed between the writing accuracy of the students who received no form feedback and those who received direct feedback, on the one hand, and between those who received indirect feedback and those who received direct feedback, on the other hand.

Effect size for the difference between Content group and Code group was calculated in order to analyze the magnitude of the difference. The calculated effect size was 0.19, which is very small, implying that the magnitude of difference between the error means of third essays in Code and Content group is rather negligible. In other words, in spite of the statistical advantage of indirect form feedback over no form feedback, or content feedback, the difference is not large enough to support the efficacy of form feedback. This is in line with what Truscott (personal communication) claims regarding the inefficacy of form feedback in the long run.

The statistical tests for writing accuracy were done under the assumption of normality. However, we used proportion data (frequency of errors) to measure the writing accuracy of the students in all the three groups, which might violate the normality assumption. Therefore, in line with [18] arguments, the non-parametric counterparts of one-way ANOVA and repeated measures ANOVA, namely Kruskal-Wallis and Freidman tests for which no normality assumption is required were run for the present study. The results were similar to those of the parametric tests. The result of Friedman test showed significant difference among the three error means of the three essays for Content group ($X^2 = 20.46$, $p < 0.001$), Code group ($X^2 = 29.55$, $p < 0.001$) and Direct group ($X^2 = 26.27$, $p < 0.001$). In a similar vein, the result of Kruskal Wallis test showed significant difference only between the third essays of the three groups ($X^2 = 9.29$, $p < 0.05$). Hence, it can be claimed that the findings are reliable with or without the assumption of normality.

4.2. Research question two: Do form feedback (direct and indirect) and content feedback result in promoting the quality of the subsequent essays? If so which feedback method is more effective?

As mentioned, we used [23] to assess the writings' quality. [7] believes that form feedback adversely affects the quality of writing. To check the effect of feedback on the quality of students' writing, all the essays written by the learners in the three groups were evaluated. The scores on the three essays, i.e. essay one at the beginning, essay two in the middle, and essay three at the end of the study, have been compared to answer the second research question.

Table 5 shows the results of three tests of repeated measures comparing the three essays written by each group.

Table 5: Results of Repeated Measures comparing the quality means of the three essays written by each group

Group	Essay	Mean	F	Sig
Content	1	66.42	55.69	0.00
	2	70.00		
	3	81.00		
Code	1	65.00	43.82	0.00
	2	68.00		
	3	78.33		
Direct	1	66.66	55.82	0.00
	2	70.66		
	3	80.00		

As the table indicates, the quality means for the essays of all the three groups have increased from the first to the third essay. In all the groups, the quality mean for the first essay is around 65 but this mean mounts to about 80 in essay three. The results of repeated measures ANOVA show that the differences among the quality means for the three essays in all the three groups are significant (F= 55.69, $p < 0.001$ for Content group; F = 43.82, $p < 0.001$ for Code group; F = 55.82, $p < 0.001$ for Direct group). Besides, the results of the *Bonferroni* post hoc test indicated that the differences among the quality means of all the three essays in all the three groups are significant ($p < 0.05$). That is, during the experiment, all the students managed to improve the quality of their writing whether they received form feedback (direct and indirect) along with content feedback or content feedback only.

Although all the three groups improved their writing quality, we were interested to know if any one of the groups outperformed the others in this regard. Three tests of one-way ANOVA were run to compare the three groups at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the experiment. Results appear in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of ANOVA for the differences among the error means of the three groups

Essay	SSQ	DF	MSQ	F	Sig.
1	24.21	2	12.10	0.380	0.686
2	57.57	2	28.78	1.336	0.274
3	76.03	2	38.01	2.27	0.11

*significant level at p < 0.05

As evident in the table, the results indicate no difference among the writing quality means of the three groups at the beginning (F= 0.380, $p>$ 0.05), in the middle (F= 1.336, $p>$ 0.05), and at the end of the experiment (F = 1.092, $p>$ 0.05). Therefore, we can conclude that whether the students receive form and content feedback together or solely content feedback, they can improve their writing quality in the long run as a result of the feedback they receive on the content of their papers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, in an attempt to apply [1] design, we compared the effects of direct and indirect formal feedback as well as content feedback on the writing accuracy and overall quality of three groups of EFL learners. The study investigated the effects of different types of feedback on the accuracy of revisions (an approach generally adopted by writing researchers) as well as the long-term effects of teachers' feedback on the accuracy and quality of the subsequent essays (an approach favored by both writing researchers and SLA researchers). The findings of the study with respect to the impact of different types of feedback- viz. indirect feedback (i.e. codes), direct feedback, and content feedback- on writing accuracy of the EFL learners' revisions of the same text indicated that the students who received form feedback (Direct and Code) wrote significantly more accurate revisions than those who received content feedback only. Nonetheless, when the long-term improvement of accuracy was concerned, the results showed that those who received indirect form feedback over time wrote more accurate essays than those who received content feedback only, while no significant difference was found between direct and indirect form feedback. Nonetheless, the results showed that the magnitude of difference between the writing accuracy of the students who received content feedback only and those who received indirect form feedback was so small that the difference could to be neglected.

The results of the present study confirmed those of [18] in that they established the previously claimed idea that in the course of time the impact of error feedback will decrease and the students will write more accurately as a result of writing practice and gaining experience in self-editing. In fact, [7], [8], [9], and [10] contend that error feedback is not a suitable aid in helping students improve the accuracy of their essays in the long run. Hence, [7] suggests, as an alternative, that the writing teacher should follow his "free correction approach". In other words, [7] argues that "teachers can help students' accuracy at least as much by doing nothing as correcting their grammar; and by doing nothing teachers can avoid the harmful effects of error feedback."

Concerning the impact of different types of feedback, that is indirect feedback and direct feedback, the findings of the study contradict those of [19] and [14] in that they claimed that direct feedback was more effective in improving the students' writing accuracy; [14] justified her findings on the basis that direct feedback was the easiest and fastest to apply and took less cognitive effort where learners are concerned and less time where teachers are concerned; nonetheless, [14]'s focus was only on one piece of writing and its revised forms rather than on subsequent essays. On the other hand, the findings of the present study are in line with the results of [25], [26], and [27] in that they concluded that indirect feedback was the most effective method in helping the students write more accurate essays. Of course, it must be mentioned that none of the studies mentioned above have investigated feedback effect during such a long time (i.e. nine months). In fact, what can be inferred from the results of the present study is that the longer the students are involved in writing, the less they need form feedback to improve the accuracy of their writing.

In the light of [1]'s blended design, the results of the present study corroborate the idea that as the cycle of writing first drafts, revisions, and subsequent writings continues, the impact of teacher formal error feedback decreases and that learners write more accurate essays due to the feedback they receive on the content of their writing, their gaining more experience in editing their essays, and more practice with writing. In fact, the lack of difference between the students who received form feedback and those who did not can be explained in the light of SLA theories of order of acquisition, inter-language, and the role of L2 intuition versus meta-linguistic knowledge. That is, the students learned to write more accurately only when they were linguistically and cognitively mature enough to acquire the linguistic features. In line with [7], [8], [9], and [10]'s arguments, the findings of this study suggest that form feedback was not that much effective and the group who received mere content feedback also showed improvement in the accuracy of their subsequent essays.

As for the effect of different types of feedback on writing quality, the results, though indicating an improving writing quality in all the groups, showed no significant quality. The implication of these results for second language writing researchers is that content feedback seems to be sufficient when long-term improvement of writing is concerned.

To put it in a nutshell, the findings of the present study contribute to [1] hypothetical blended design in that the teacher's written feedback can help student writers acquire the target language forms (which is the concern of the SLA researcher) and writing proficiency (which is the concern of second language writing researchers). Nonetheless, what is important in this regard is that the feedback does not necessarily need to target the formal aspects of language (as SLA researchers believe); in other words, the feedback which targets the content of writing would, in the long run, help students not only improve their writing skill, but also acquire the forms of language.

The major implication of this study for both SLA researchers and ESL/EFL writing researcher and teachers is that whether the aim of feedback is helping the students acquire certain language forms or improve their writing proficiency in the long run, content feedback (feedback on the ideas expressed by the writer, the organization of the writing, and whether it has been able to communicate with the reader) would be helpful enough. In other words, writing teachers do not need to do the tedious task of correcting formal errors in addition to providing feedback on the content.

As [7] argues, "probably accuracy is improved through extensive experience with the target language-experience in reading and writing". (p. 360)
He further suggests as an alternative that:

> Correction does not help students' accuracy and may well damage it; simply abandoning correction will not have harmful effects on accuracy (or anything else) and might improve it. In other words, teachers can help students' accuracy at least as much by doing nothing as correcting their grammar; and by doing nothing teachers can avoid the harmful effects of error feedback. So, the alternative to correcting grammar is straightforward: Do not correct grammar. (pp. 360-361)

Of course, it must be mentioned that since the study was conducted over a relatively long period of time and since the subjects in the three groups simultaneously attended other courses in reading, listening and speaking, the extent to which their language proficiency and, thereby writing accuracy, was affected by other courses they had could not be controlled or measured as the present study was conducted in a natural context.

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