



Indirect Corrective Feedback on Writing Accuracy of Students Across Different Level of Grammatical Sensitivity

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Abstract. *People tend to communicate their ideas, opinion, and views through writing. However, in English language learning context in Indonesia, writing is usually thought as the most challenging skill to be mastered. As language facilitator, teacher has to be able to provide the students with teaching strategy that can assist them to master writing skill. A quasi-factorial design was aimed at investigating the effect of indirect corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy viewed from the different level of students' grammatical sensitivity. There were control and experimental group. The experimental group was exposed to the use of indirect corrective feedback, while control group was exposed to the use of direct corrective feedback. Independent T-Test and Two-way ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses. The study revealed that there was significance difference on writing accuracy between the experimental and control group. Students with high level of grammatical sensitivity got higher mean score than the lower students. There was no interaction between indirect corrective feedback on writing accuracy and students' level of grammatical sensitivity. It is recommended to the English teacher to use indirect corrective feedback to assist the students' learning on writing.*

Keywords: *corrective feedback; writing accuracy*

1. INTRODUCTION

People usually have tendency to communicate with others to air their feelings, ideas, opinions and views. In addition to speaking, writing is often becoming the way to dispense this tendency. According to Syamsir (2016), 'writing is a kind of activity where the writer expresses all ideas in his mind in the paper from words to sentence, sentence to paragraph, and paragraph to essay'. In sum, writing is the activity of conveying one's feeling, idea, opinion and view in a written form in order to communicate with others.

However, in academic context, especially in L2 learning, writing is usually thought to be the most challenging skill to be mastered. It can only be taught after introductory acquaintance with elements of language (Aghajanloo, 2016). Despite that writing comes late on the process of language acquisition, the need to acquire writing skill is still considered as important. Harmer (2006) stressed out that 'writing is recognized as the important skill to be taught to English foreign language students. Writing is also commonly seen as the most challenging language skill for L2 learners to master compared to either listening, speaking, or reading for the complex skill and competence involved in writing.

In Indonesian context, the national policy has acknowledged English as the first foreign language taught at schools. The teaching of English as foreign language for junior and high school students has the aim to create the Indonesian citizens who are able to communicate, both orally and written, using English as an effort to improve the national competitiveness amid global competition (Permendiknas, 2006). In that, writing becomes part of the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language and it must be taught in various levels of education, starting from elementary school to higher education.

In instructional pedagogy, the English teacher should view teaching writing as a process of learning even though it is usually seen as a product of learning that combines writer's grammatical and lexical knowledge (Hyland, 2003). According to Hayes and Kellog (1996), writing is rated as complex process that requires the skillful coordination of large number of cognitive and linguistic processes and resources. Therefore, it is approved that writing is also considered as the most challenging skill to be mastered by the English language learners.

Moreover, writing competences that should be formed in the classroom covers macro competences; such as using the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse, conveying links and connections between events, as well as micro competences; such as producing an appropriate word order, and using acceptable grammatical system (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, Brown (1994) states that teaching writing in the classroom should 'let the students to write and re-write as well as give them feedback throughout the composing process'. For sum, writing is a very essential skill in English language development as it covers many competences to master and it is part of learning the language being acquired.

The purpose of the teaching of writing in the above-mentioned level in Indonesia is to enable English Foreign Language (EFL) students to master functional and monologue texts in various form of genres such as descriptive, narrative, recount, procedure, and report (Depdiknas, 2006). The students are also expected to be well-organized as well as accurate on their writing especially when it is seen from the use of language structure, word choice, and mechanics.

In mostly instructional practices, however, problems related to writing accuracy are still frequently found in students' writing. A study by Husin (2017) revealed that the teaching of writing in Indonesian context has not been able to respond to the students' needs for different literacy ability and that students have very low score on their writing viewed from their accuracy on the use of appropriate and acceptable structure in English. It, in fact, shows that the students' writing accuracy competence is still being categorized not maximal and it may lead the teacher to confusion and frustration despite all of their efforts done to achieve the

national goal. With the high demand of writing accuracy, the EFL teachers should help the students to solve this problem.

In response to the issue aforementioned above, the researcher has assumed that Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is very helpful in improving students' writing accuracy as it helps students to acquire and demonstrate of sensitivity on the use of targeted linguistic forms and structures (Bitcher & Knoch, 2008). The concept of corrective feedback was first proposed by Schmidt (1990) and emphasized by Long (1996) and Swain (1985, 1995), but rejected by Truscott (1996). Schmidt (1990) with his noticing hypothesis and Swain (1985, 1995) with her output hypothesis emphasize the importance of corrective feedback during learning the second or foreign language. However, after the study of Truscott (1996), which denied the importance of corrective writing, long debates on it emerged, and a study of Ferris (1999) claimed that students' writing accuracy demands correction and that study on the effectiveness of WCF should be addressed.

Recent research has demonstrated that feedback on the grammatical errors that the L2 learners make in their writing can lead to improve accuracy in new pieces of writing (Bithener & Ferris, 2012). Hyland (2003:17) pointed out that 'providing feedback is one of the most important tasks of the teacher of writing'. Shortly, corrective feedback is believed to be the effective strategy to assist the students' to improve students' literacy or writing skill.

Corrective feedback, as defined by Keh (2016: 1), is the 'input given containing information for the revisions'. Corrective feedback, both oral and written, is an integral part of teaching (Ellis, 2009). Written corrective feedback is an important part of second language writing because it allows of providing teacher-to-student interaction in L2 writing class (Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997). Many L2 writing teachers feel that written corrective feedback is influential in the improvement of their students' L2 writing accuracy (Brown, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

In addition, L2 writing students want and expect their teachers to correct written errors (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lee, 2004) and prefer to receive written corrective feedback such as peer and oral feedback (Leki, 1991; Ferris, 1995). Students believe that a learning task is not complete without corrective feedback. Although there are various views on the impact of providing written corrective feedback on the improvement of L2 writing accuracy, both teachers and students feel the need for its use (Van Beuningen, 2010; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2012).

Many studies on WCF have been conducted. From the last ten years, there are many studies revealed that the students prefer to get correction from the teacher (Santos, 2010;

Hyland, 2010; Jolita & Ramune, 2015; Rosdiana, 2016), rather than correction from their mates which is so called peer-feedback correction (Sanu, 2016). Moreover, studies by Salimi (2016), Nowbakht (2016), Khadijeh et.,al (2016), Kisananto (2016), Syamsir (2016), Dilara & Ismail (2016), and Bobrova (2018) also have reported that WCF is effective in helping students to improve their writing. The students with WCF were able to outperform the students without WCF.

However, those studies are still lack on investigating the effectiveness of indirect CF on EFL students of senior high pesantren-based school setting as well as considering a psychological factor which may affect students' improvement, such as the different level of grammatical sensitivity that each individual may has. Thus, the present study aims to make larger contribution in CF research, especially by investigating the effect of the indirect corrective feedback on the accuracy improvement of senior high pesantren-based school students' writing. Moreover, the present study also has interest in finding the relationship between indirect corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity since the effect of grammatical sensitivity on students' writing is worth to investigate.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is a productive language skill involving the generation, organization, and communication of ideas through meaningful written text. Writing is a complex activity. It has to pass several processes before it ends into the final product. Before ones go writing, they have to plan, think what they would write, make draft of the important points will be shared, edit errors as such inappropriate language and grammar used.

According to Byrne (1988), writing is more than the production of symbols, just as speech which is more than the production of sounds. Writing requires the activity of arranging these symbols according to certain convention to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences. We do not just write for one sentence or even a number of unrelated sentences, but we produce a sequence of sentences arranged in a particular order and are linked together in certain ways. Brown (2001) defines writing as a process of thinking, drafting, revising, and rewriting to communicate ideas effectively in written form. It is not merely about vocabulary and grammar but involves how to organize thoughts logically.

In the context of Indonesia where English language is a foreign language to be taught officially at school from a very beginning level of education to higher education, writing remains one of the most challenging productive skills due to its reliance on grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organizational structure (Hossain, 2021). Learners often struggle

with syntactic accuracy and idea development, particularly in contexts where exposure to English is limited (Alfaki, 2020).

Some may be questioning why it is needed to teach writing for the language learners. Is it that importance to either teach or learn to write using foreign language? Schools play a critical role in developing students' writing skills. If student writing is not addressed adequately at school level, the higher education sector will always be inundated with students who are academically under-prepared.

According to Harmer (2001), teaching writing has some important reasons. *First*, teaching writing for reinforcement. Sometime students tend to study better when they directly write what they got in order to have better understanding. *Second*, teaching writing for language development. Writing demands the writers to maximize their mental activity which then is able to provide them with the activity of learning the language. *Third*, teaching writing for learning style. It is the activity which let the students to be able to study better through writing.

One of the crucial aspects of teaching writing is the provision of feedback. Brown (1994) emphasizes the necessity of offering feedback on students' written work. Sheen (2010:175) also explains that rather than solely aiming to enhance writing skills, writing practice can serve as a form of language output that, when combined with corrective feedback (CF), supports the development of learners' interlanguage. In essence, written CF acts as a method to direct second language learners' attention to the linguistic features within their writing, thereby promoting language acquisition.

Indirect written feedback is believed to encourage learners to actively solve problems and test linguistic hypotheses, which can support second language (L2) development and improve writing accuracy (Suh, 2014). According to Lalande (1982), this type of feedback is particularly effective because it promotes guided learning, allowing learners to identify and correct their own errors. Bitchener (2012) also notes that indirect feedback encourages deeper cognitive engagement with language structures that learners have already begun to internalize. Therefore, this approach tends to be beneficial primarily for students who possess some prior understanding of the language features being addressed, rather than those encountering them for the first time.

Grammatical sensitivity has been defined in various ways, but all interpretations center around the ability to identify grammatical roles within a sentence. Robinson (2001:324) describes it as the capacity to recognize the grammatical functions of words or other linguistic elements in sentence structures. This view aligns with similar definitions from other scholars. For instance, Skehan (1998:200) defines it as the ability to comprehend the role that each word

plays within a sentence, while Gillece (2006:35) refers to it as the skill to manage grammatical structures, including the forms and their organization in natural language use.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research used quasi-factorial research design. The population of this study was the eleventh-grade students of SMA Mamba'us Sholihin Blitar. Due to the large number of the population, the sample was chosen from the existing intact classes by cluster random sampling using lottery to select two classes assigned as experimental group and control group. Experimental group was treated using indirect corrective feedback, while control group received direct corrective feedback.

There were three variables. The dependent variable of the study was students' writing accuracy, and the independent variable was indirect corrective feedback as the method for giving correction. Meanwhile, the moderator variable was the level of the students' grammatical sensitivity. According to the number of variables involved in the study, this research employed simple factorial design 2x2, which was further read as factorial design 2 by 2.

Referring to the variables of the study, the technique for collecting the data in this current study was by administering test. The data were collected through administering both writing and grammatical test. The instruments used in the study were in the form of writing pre-test and post-test, and the second instrument was the grammatical sensitivity test. Pre-test was conducted for both groups before experiencing treatment in order to measure their initial ability in writing accuracy. Meanwhile, post-test was given after treatment in order to reveal whether or not the treatment was effective to improve the students' writing accuracy. The grammatical sensitivity test was employed to group the students based on their level of grammatical sensitivity. According to Piraud (2006), the students with high level grammatical sensitivity were those who correctly answer 65% of 20 questions given. While those who weren't able to correctly answer the minimum criteria, were categorized as students with low level of grammatical sensitivity.

Before both tests were administered to both groups, firstly the researcher tried out the tests to ensure that the instruction of the test is clear enough for students by distributing questionnaire adapted from Hughes (1996). A scoring rubric related to students' accuracy on grammar, vocabulary and mechanics was also provided to score the students' writing accuracy. Inter-rater reliability was used to assure the reliability of the data by involving two different raters to score the students' writing.

Techniques of analyzing the data for current study were descriptive and inferential

statistic. Descriptive statistic was used to know mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of the writing test score of each group. Meanwhile, inferential statistic was used to test the hypothesis, whether or not it can be used to make generalization for the population.

However, before testing the hypotheses, the researcher conducted prerequisite tests covering; normality testing and homogeneity testing. Normality testing was conducted in order to make sure that the data was normally distributed, while homogeneity testing was conducted to ensure whether the data are homogenous or not. The data in this study was called normally distributed and homogenous because the significance values of both groups were greater than the level of significance $\alpha = .05$. These two prerequisite tests were computed using SPSS version 23.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of pretests were in the form of scores of the writing accuracy obtained from administering writing test to both experimental and control group before the treatment was began. The mean score of the pretest of the experimental group was 67.93, while the mean score of the control group was 66.97. There was a slightly difference between the mean score of the experimental and control group. The difference was only 0.96 points. The slight difference means that both groups were having equal characteristics. In this case was the students' ability was equal so that they were feasible to follow the study.

Meanwhile, the post-test results were obtained from administering writing test to both experimental group and control group after being given a treatment. The results of post-test of both groups were respectively 70.80 and 68.41. The experimental group achieved 2.39 points higher than the control group. Table 1 below shows the descriptive analysis of pre-test and post-test of both experimental and control group.

Table 1. Summary of the Descriptive Statistic Analysis of the Pretest and Posttest of the Experimental and the Control Group

Stages	Descriptive Statistic	Groups	
		Experimental	Control
Pretest	Mean	67.93	66.97
	SD	3.769	3.053
	N	30	29
Posttest	Mean	70.80	68.41
	SD	3.242	2.693
	N	30	29

In addition, the grammatical sensitivity test was conducted to both experimental and

control group in the beginning of the treatment. It resulted that in experimental group there were 18 students had high grammatical sensitivity level; and there were 12 students were categorized into low level of grammatical sensitivity. While, in control group, there were 18 students had high level of grammatical sensitivity, and 11 students were low level of grammatical sensitivity. Table 2 below shows the summary of the result of grammatical sensitivity level of the students of both experimental and control group.

Table 2. The Result of Grammatical Test

Group	N	Level of Grammatical Sensitivity	
		High	Low
Experimental	30	18	12
Posttest	29	18	11

Moreover, statistical assumptions analyses were examined in order to decide the appropriate statistical analysis to test the hypothesis. These statistical assumptions were also called as prerequisite tests before conducting hypothesis testing using Independent T test by SPSS v23.

The first prerequisite test was normality test. It was found that the significant value of the data of the experimental ($Sig = .156$) and the control group ($Sig = .102$) were greater than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. It means that the data were normally distributed.

The second statistical assumption or prerequisite test was homogeneity test. Homogeneity testing using SPSS v23 was performed and it was found that the significant value of the computation of Levene's test was .252. It was greater than the value of the level of significant ($\alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, it means that the data were homogenous and came out from homogenous groups.

Based on the examination of those two prerequisite tests, it can be concluded that those two statistical assumptions were fulfilled. Therefore, a parametric test using Independent T test and Two-Way ANOVA could be performed to test the hypotheses. The results show that the p value was lesser than the value of level of significant $\alpha = 0.05$ ($Sig .003 > sig .05$). It means that the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students who were treated with indirect corrective feedback did have significantly better writing accuracy than those who were treated with direct corrective feedback.

Next, the second hypothesis testing was conducted using Two-Way Anova. The students of both experimental and control group were categorized into two; those who had high level of grammatical sensitivity and those who had low level of grammatical sensitivity. Based on the statistical computation, it was found that p-value was .000. It means that p-value was

lesser than the level significance $\alpha = 0.05$. It means that there was significance different score on students' writing accuracy based on the different level of grammatical sensitivity. Thus, it could be concluded that the second null hypothesis (H_{02}) was rejected.

Furthermore, the statistical analysis was employed to test the third hypothesis. The statistical analysis used was Two-way ANOVA with interaction to test whether or not there was interaction between corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity. Based on the computation of the interaction between corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity, it was found that p-value was .064. It means that p-value was greater than the level significance $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, it means that there was no interaction between indirect corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity. Thus, it could be concluded that the third null hypothesis (H_{03}) was not rejected.

Based on the result of hypothesis testing, the result of the study matches with the findings of a study conducted by Dilara & Mirici (2007) which revealed that indirect corrective feedback did have positive impact on students' writing. The findings were also in line to the result of the number of previous studies (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006) that all have reported the positive effect of indirect corrective feedback as had been put by Ferris (2010).

However, the result of the study was in contrast with the result found by Ferris and Roberts (2001) which found that there was no significant different between the groups which received indirect corrective feedback than the group which received direct corrective feedback. A study by Septiana *et.al* (2014) also found that indirect feedback didn't have any significant effect on students of university level writing accuracy. Students who received indirect corrective feedback had no significant different mean score than the students who experiencing direct corrective feedback.

With a view to supports by theories and empirical evidence, there are several factors that are assumed to cause the effectiveness of indirect corrective feedback in improving students' writing accuracy. First, according to Beuningen & Kuiken (2008), indirect corrective feedback is beneficial and has strong significant short-term effect for the students' writing accuracy improvement. It is showed by the empirical data found in the study that after six meetings of the treatment, the students could achieve better on their writing accuracy score.

It probably caused also by the indirect corrective feedback which enables the students to do self-repair on their grammatical error. It is in agreement with the study found by Erlam (2013) which revealed that students could do self-repair better when they experiencing indirect corrective feedback. The ability of the students in doing self-repair is due to the information

given by the teachers. The information is also becoming the language input given to the students so that the students can learn new vocabularies and proper structures in the text context (Latifah, *et.al.*, 2014).

Next, the students could gain better score on their writing accuracy because they had better autonomy in learning. It is as what have been found by Westmacott (2017) which yielded great finding that students given indirect corrective feedback were having strong autonomy in learning when they were being given a chance to repair or correct the errors they made. It was eventually built their awareness to the errors and they could do better when they produced the next writing. Lalande (1982) also reported that the indirect corrective feedback was able to foster the deeper processing of internalized knowledge. Which is why, the students taught by using indirect corrective feedback can work better on understanding the language features.

Last, indirect corrective feedback could give strong motivation to students (Latifah, *et.al.*, 2014). Students are giving the indications on the location of the error on their writing by underlining, highlighting, or circling without providing the correct one. The students given indication are having chance to check their own product. The indication given will push the students to find out the correct ones (Eslami, 2014). It gives the students an experience and enables them to call for sufficient linguistic knowledge so that in a long term run, they can produce better writing.

In the meantime, it was aimed to find out whether there is a relationship between grammatical sensitivity; high and low, and the learners' writing accuracy. Current study included the level of grammatical sensitivity of the students. It is believed that the level of the students' grammatical sensitivity affects the students' accuracy on their writing performance.

From the result of hypothesis testing, it revealed that there was significant different on the students' writing accuracy score viewed from their different level of grammatical sensitivity. The students with high level of grammatical sensitivity got higher mean score than those with low level of grammatical sensitivity. There was 3.95 points difference.

Moreover, the result of the study was also in harmony with the result found by Jimmi (2017) which revealed strong correlation between students' grammatical sensitivity with the students' writing skill. Students with highest score in grammar test could show better writing than those who has lowest score in grammar sensitivity. Further, study by Septiana *et.al.*, (2014) supported the finding of current study. It revealed that the university students with high level of grammatical sensitivity could gain better writing accuracy performance.

To sum, grammatical sensitivity level had significant effect on the writing accuracy of the students. It was proved by the empirical fact that the students with high level of grammatical

sensitivity got higher mean score than those with low level of grammatical sensitivity. Therefore, in a word it can be declared that grammatical sensitivity was able to give a significant effect in the writing accuracy of the students.

The effectiveness of the grammatical sensitivity on students' writing accuracy might be caused by a reason. Grammatical sensitivity as part of the language aptitude is one of the factors influencing the success of teaching learning process (Caroll, 1964). Moreover, grammatical sensitivity is one of the internal factors in determining the success of learning.

Grammatical sensitivity is considered as the main factor to cause the students' performance (Caroll, 1964). The students' grammatical sensitivity will affect the students' critical thinking on the use of the structures in forming the sentences (Wen, 2011). Likewise, the students with high level of grammatical sensitivity could learn the foreign language with better ease, more quickly, and with apparently better results than the lower ones. The error indications given by the teacher on their piece of writing could be easily understood by the students who have better grammatical sensitivity. They could do better in making the correction and they could revise their error in their new piece of writing product.

Current study also tried to see whether or not there is an interaction between the technique of indirect corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity. The interaction in question represents the combined effect of factors on the dependent measure, in this case was the score on writing accuracy. When an interaction effect is present, the impact of one factor depends on the level of the other factor. An interaction effect is a change in the simple main effect of one variable over levels of the second.

However, the result of the hypothesis testing showed that there was no interaction between indirect corrective feedback and the level of grammatical sensitivity. It is at the same agreement with the result showed in the study by Septiana *et.,al.* (2014) which investigated the effectiveness of indirect corrective feedback on the students across different level of grammatical sensitivity. The study had no enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis stating that there is no interaction between corrective feedback and the students' level of grammatical sensitivity. In other words, there was no interaction between the indirect corrective feedback strategy and the different level of grammatical sensitivity.

5. CONCLUSION

In accordance with the research problem and the result of the data analysis, it can be stated that that indirect corrective feedback is an effective teaching strategy for teaching writing accuracy to the eleventh-grade students of SMA Mamba'us Sholihin Blitar. By using indirect

corrective feedback, students are getting more encouraged to study and improve their writing accuracy. As a result, the students' writing accuracy performance improved better. Further, the level of grammatical sensitivity level is also giving significant effect on the students' writing accuracy. Yet, there is no enough empirical fact showing there is an interaction between indirect corrective feedback strategy and the level of grammatical sensitivity on students' writing accuracy performance.

It is a fact that no research is complete in its own right. The more answers are obtained; the more questions will naturally be raised. The domain of corrective feedback is too vast to be explored, and therefore the researcher had limitation in doing this current study. Since this current study is still limited on the length of the treatment, future and further research with the same matter or content is expected to be conducted in order to give clearer and thorough description related to the effectiveness of direct and indirect written corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy.

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