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## The Effect of Direct Versus Indirect Focused Written Corrective Feedback on Developing EFL Learners' Written and Oral Skills

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### Abstract

There has been an increasing attention to written corrective feedback (WCF) and its potential effectiveness in recent years. This paper examines the roles of direct versus indirect WCF in fostering learners' written and oral accuracy across language proficiency. A quasi-experimental design was adopted to conduct the study. Seventy-six pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners were randomly assigned into six groups (four experimental and two control groups). In the experimental group, a series of pictures were used as prompts for writing tasks in the treatment sessions, and pre-, immediate, and delayed posttests were used to measure written and oral accuracy. According to the results, WCF, regardless of the type, was facilitative in developing learners' both written and oral accuracy, which was a manifestation of implicit knowledge. The results also revealed that the proficiency level played a key role in determining which type of CF was more beneficial. While the pre-intermediate learners benefited more from direct CF, the upper-intermediate group improved more as a result of indirect CF treatment. This study calls for more informed decisions by L2 teachers in the correction of written errors considering that it improved L2 learners' oral accuracy.

**Keywords:** accuracy, corrective feedback, EFL learners, writing skills, oral production

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## 1. Introduction

As one of the most essential language skills, writing has a determining role in second language acquisition. Bello (1997) rightly believes that writing involves language users categorizing different ideas, conveying messages, and promoting their grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Writing practice is much related to the activity of long-term memory, which leads to a more efficient acquisition of structures and words. Accordingly, one of the biggest ambitions for language teachers and researchers is how to enhance learners' writing ability. Substantial effort has been conducted to find the most advantageous procedures and techniques for instructing Second Language (L2) writing. Moreover, the skill of writing successfully is becoming more imperative in the universal community, accordingly, effective teaching of writing is really important in both second and foreign language learning (Weigle, 2009). Accuracy in writing, particularly in using tenses and articles, has attracted many English teachers' and researchers' attention throughout the world (Baker et al., 2003), and in the Iranian context as well (Sharafi Nejad et al., 2016). Language learners need to acquire proper use of writing rules in different writing courses, and this objective requires sufficient time devotion. Skehan (1996) describes accuracy as "how well the target language is developed in relation to its standards" (p. 23). In fact, Foster and Skehan (1996) define accuracy as removing mistakes from written works, which implies accurate use of grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation in written texts. Accurate forms demonstrate learner's progressive proficiency in learning a language (Ellis, 2008, 2010).

On the other hand, in line with Richards (1990), who introduces speaking as one of the primary skills that must be mastered by any learner of the second or foreign language, Luoma (2004) asserts that speaking is one of the most challenging and difficult forms of a language. Spoken language has been frequently a big challenge for English learners. In speaking, students need to take into account different aspects, including accuracy, fluency, reduced forms, slang or idioms, fixed phrases, collocations, and most importantly, speech pace, among which accuracy, i.e., using the rules and language items appropriately, is of utmost importance. According to Gower et al. (1995), accuracy includes the correctness of expressions, syntax, and pronunciation. Teachers who concentrate on accuracy help their students generate spoken English, which is grammatically sound. In other words, accuracy is associated with the extent to which learner language performance meets target quality requirements.

One major way to ensure accuracy in writing and speaking is with the help of corrective feedback. Indeed, according to Ellis (2005, 2009), teacher-initiated corrective feedback (CF), which refers to a response in a way or another to learners' errors by the teacher, and, to a lesser extent, student-initiated CF, which refers to CF provided by peers, have recently grabbed researchers' attention. In the instructional setting, CF plays an important role. Reigeluth (1990) affirms that CF is a method of instruction that can foster cognitive learning. Furthermore, hypothetical support for CF can be found in Schmidt's (1994) assertion about the significance of noticing the gap in L2 acquisition. As Schmidt (1994) puts, CF raises a linguistic awareness in students and reveals the differences between students' productions and target language norms.

The current study was accordingly designed.

1. Does the type of corrective feedback (in/direct focused written corrective feedback) have any effects on pre-intermediate learners' long term and short term

oral accuracy?

written accuracy?

2. Does the type of corrective feedback (in/direct focused written corrective feedback) have any effects on upper-intermediate learners' long term and short term

oral accuracy?

written accuracy?

3. Is there a significant difference between pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of direct focused written CF on their long term and short term

oral accuracy?

written accuracy?

4. Is there a significant difference between pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their long term and short term

oral accuracy?

written accuracy?

## 2. Literature Review

Writing, which can be outlined as a recognized graphical version of thoughts, is not merely a direct or clear-cut technique of adding phrases and concepts immediately on paper at any moment. On the other hand, writing activity is an undertaking which necessitates a good deal of endeavor, attention, and discipline (Smith, 2011). Some believe that writing is an intricate process and a demanding language macro-skill for both native and non-native learners (Kroll, 2003), through which learners need to learn how to act and write in formal teaching situations and practice via experience (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In more specific terms, it is a complex set of planned processes, including planning, brainstorming, writing, revising, and editing.

From a pedagogical perspective, writing is a multi-dimensional activity and presents numerous challenges to L2 learners (Bowles & Montrul, 2008). Furthermore, writing skill is an inevitable part of communication. "Writing is the expression of feelings, thoughts, likes and dislikes and plans in black and white" (Akkaya & Kirmiz, cited in Gholaminejad et al. 2013, p. 1138). However, as Lee (2003) asserts, writing is considered to be one of the most complicated skills to be mastered by second or foreign language learners. On the other hand, since most of the daily communication occurs using oral language, speaking gains a significant role in teaching and learning a language. In this vein, Alderson and Bachman (2001) assert that mastering speaking in a foreign language is one of the problematic skills that takes a long time and entails using a number of abilities and different types of reactions on the part of teachers and learners. Speaking has been demonstrated to be so crucial that students cannot succeed in their educational work without the ability to speak sufficiently and understandably. For example, Agwu (2005) argues that countless students with difficulties in job market and inability to establish empathy and problem-solving skills admit their inadequate performance in communication. This weak performance of students in public speech contexts is also attributable to insignificant daily language communication (Namaziandost &

Ahmadi, 2019; Namaziandost et al., 2018; Oyetunde, 2003). Like writing, spoken language has been likely a significant challenge to English learners, especially in terms of accuracy. Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) define oral accuracy as “the ability to be free from errors while using language to communicate in speech” (p. 33).

Hence, without doubt, planning and teaching a language course is a demanding task; therefore, many researchers have put effort into developing effective strategies that teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) can use to improve ESL/EFL students’ writing and speaking (Ashwell, 2011; Chandler, 2003). One of the major issues in dealing with written and oral competence is the errors made by learners throughout the learning process. Accordingly, many researchers have conducted studies to address this issue, specifically in terms of what and how to correct (Velayutham, 2013). The use of corrective feedback in writing and speaking has become controversial in recent years. Some researchers such as Truscott (2004), believe that error correction in writing is ineffective and is not necessary to be used. Others, like Chandler (2012), argue that it can be helpful, and teachers should provide CF to their learners. This signifies the need for more research in this area.

Scholars such as Ellis (1997), Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998) view errors beneficial due to the light they shed on the actual state of learning of the learners and the position they play in the acquisition of the target language. Accordingly, they believe that correcting errors by providing corrective feedback can facilitate learning and teaching while other theorists and scholars (e.g., Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1985; Truscott, 1996) believe that errors hinder the development of second or foreign language; hence, they consider fully ruling them out and see no role for corrective feedback. In this vein, Truscott (1996), in his article ‘The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes’ argues that error correction appears not only to be useless and ineffective but also destructive to students’ fluency. However, there is a common opinion among several scholars that error correction plays a major role in developing student writing skills (Bitchener, 2008; Chandler, 2003; Ellis et al., 2014).

A huge body of research has focused on different types of corrective feedback and their differences in terms of student writing improvement. Generally, two taxonomies have been proposed in the literature on written CF: ‘direct’ versus ‘indirect’ and ‘focused’ versus ‘unfocused’. Direct CF occurs when instructors offer the exact or similar structures to the error (Ellis, 2009). In other words, direct input happens when

a mistake is detected by the instructor, and the proper type of feedback is given. That is to say, it applies a direct error correction, so the instructor is liable for both error checking and error correction. According to Ferris (1999), direct feedback refers to an error feedback strategy where the teacher corrects students' errors in writing and sometimes explains those errors using metalinguistic terminology (i.e., oral and written metalinguistic explanations). Indirect CF, on the other hand, refers to CF which merely indicates, in some way, that an error has been made without providing the correct form (Ellis, 2009). In indirect feedback, students are encouraged to predict and correct the errors themselves, and the teachers merely note the error without further comments (Bitchener et al., 2005). According to Ferris (1999), teachers can signal the error through underlines, codes, and margin notifications. Indirect guidance is a very effective technique to help students identify and fix their own mistakes, rather than take a passive part in fixing errors. Nonetheless, indirect input allows students to participate in greater information analysis than direct feedback as it enables students to discover their opportunities (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb et al., 1986). However, there are few studies reporting on the superiority of indirect CF in improving L2 writing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Robb et al., 1986).

According to Ellis (2009), in the case of unfocused CF, the error categorization is of no importance, and teachers provide feedback on all types of student errors. In contrast, using focused CF, teachers center on one particular linguistic category and keep other errors untouched (Ellis, 2009). In other words, in focused feedback, one particular pre-determined linguistic feature is targeted, while unfocused feedback can be provided on a wide range of structures (Ellis et al., 2008). As Sheen (2007) noted, in focused feedback the probability of accuracy is much higher due to limited amount of attentional pressure. Thus, the focus of written CF can concern both the focused target structures and how errors are treated.

The study conducted by Tayebipour (2019) mainly focuses on finding the effect of written vs. oral corrective feedback on Omani part-time vs. full-time college students' accurate use and retention of the passive voice. The researcher selects six intact classes who has registered in Academic Reading and Writing for Business module in the first semester of the academic year 2017-2018 using the convenience sampling method. To conduct the study, first the participants take part in an Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) as a general proficiency test. Following the test rubrics, those who score low are selected as the sample of the study. After the proficiency test, the participants take a test as the pretest on the passive voice. For

the treatment phase of the study, the participants are given relevant written or oral feedback using different types of feedback. At the end of the study, it is found that there is a significant difference between the pretest performance of the experimental groups and their performance in the posttest and the delayed posttest. Furthermore, it is revealed that there is a significant difference between the performance of the experimental groups and that of the control group.

Eslami and Derakhshan (2020) introduce advantageous ways for teachers and learners to deal with corrective feedback. Based on the discussions proposed by the researchers, corrective feedback must be viewed as highly complex – especially as it concerns learners' autonomy in second language development and in effectively strategic use of it. The researchers offer some recommendations on ways of promoting CF practice in second language classrooms.

Mobarak and Razzaq (2020) examine various types of feedback such as recast, clarification request, elicitation, and repetition that are used by the teachers. Furthermore, the relationship between the feedback types and learner uptake and immediate repair of errors is investigated. In addition, the study examines whether the errors should be corrected and when and where they should be corrected. Based on the results, it is found that teachers need to be sensitive when correcting students' errors in the classroom. Hence, it is concluded that there is a need to attract learners' attention to their errors which can cause awareness in learners. In addition, it is found that drawing learners' attention to errors assists teachers to become aware of themselves both as a teacher and as an individual.

However, the debate continues on the issue of the type and effectiveness of corrective feedback on the development and improvement of different skills. Furthermore, we hypothesize that written CF can lead to improvements in learners' oral accuracy since it facilitates noticing. Due to its nature, oral CF, particularly implicit CF, may go unnoticed for several reasons such as learners' engagement in communication and meaning transfer/negotiation. However, in the case of written CF, such possibility is minimized as it is provided in an off-line mode, and the learners do not focus on communication while noticing the CF. Consequently, this study not only tries to contribute to the existing literature on the importance of writing accuracy in foreign language learning but also is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of direct versus indirect focused Written Corrective Feedback on developing Iranian EFL learners' accuracy in oral Skills.



### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

Six intact classes were selected to participate in the study; so, the study enjoyed an intact groups design. The participants ( $N=76$ ) were 36 male and 40 female students, 37 of whom were in the pre-intermediate group and 39 in the upper-intermediate group, studying English as a foreign language in a private language school in Zanjan, Iran. They were within the age range of 16 to 25 and spoke Turkish/Azeri as their first language and were all proficient users of Persian as their second language. The classes were held three days each week in the afternoon. World English 2 and 3 were used for pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate groups, respectively (it should be noted that the intermediate level is not included as a proficiency level in that institute). The learners had paid tuition for attending the course and were all interested in learning English as a foreign language, and none of them had been to an English-speaking country. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants in pre and upper intermediate groups, the researchers administered an in-house placement test to all learners at the outset of the study. Subsequently, participants were placed into upper and pre-intermediate groups.

The participants at each level were then assigned into either a control or two experimental groups on a random basis. Thus, there were two separate experimental groups for upper-intermediate and two for pre-intermediate learners, in addition to one control group for each category. The learners in each experimental group received either direct or indirect written CF. The participants gave their informed consent to voluntarily participate in the study. The characteristics of the participants are shown in the following table.



**Table 1**  
*Characteristics of Participants*

	Pre-intermediate group	Upper-intermediate group
Gender	Male (N=16) and Female(N=21)	Male(N=20) and Female(N=19)
Proficiency level	Pre-intermediate	Upper-intermediate
Total number	37	39
Course book	World English 2	World English 3
First language	Turkish and Farsi	Turkish and Farsi
Focus of the syllabus	Structural: Present continuous tense	Structural: Present perfect tense
Language skills and components	Grammar Speaking accuracy Writing accuracy	Grammar Speaking accuracy Writing accuracy

### 3.2. Instruments

In order to examine the potential effectiveness of direct versus indirect written CF on written and oral accuracy of EFL learners at two proficiency levels, several instruments were utilized. A series of pictures and writing tasks were employed to elicit samples of written and oral performance. Five series of pictures were used as prompts for writing tasks in five treatment sessions, while three different sets of pictures were used as prompts for pre-, immediate, and delayed posttesting purposes. The pre- and posttests included written and oral modes, with the oral mode preceding the written format. The following section provides further detail on each instrument.

#### 3.2.1. In-house placement test

To ensure the comparability and homogeneity of the learners in experimental and control groups at each proficiency level, we used the in-house placement test scores administered by the institute at the beginning of the courses. The test had been designed by expert instructors, has and had been used successfully for more than seven years in the institute. The in-house placement test included items for testing listening, vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and writing together with a supplementary interview for evaluating speaking skill. The results

indicated that the three groups at each level were homogeneous in terms of overall language proficiency.

### 3.2.2. Picture description task

Picture description tasks were used as the main instrument for data collection. To ensure the reliability of the tasks, they were piloted prior to the main administration phase and were found to be appropriate for the purpose of the study. As a result, the contents of the pictures were verified, and some of the wording in the instruction were modified. The pictures were simple and were composed of sequences of connected actions, which required the participants to tell the story or the incident based on the sequencing pictures (see Appendix A for pre-intermediate task and B for the upper-intermediate task). The tasks were separately implemented both in oral and written forms. The participants were supposed to prepare their five sentences using the correct form of the verb and narrate the story. To add variety and ensure that the concept of the target structures, namely present-continuous and present perfect tense, were understood by the learners, the tasks were completed based on a different picture each session. After tasks were completed by each learner, written corrective feedback, either direct or indirect, was given to each participant individually at the very beginning of each session based on the requirements of each experimental group. The answers were attributed as correct, partially correct, and incorrect, and they were assigned the scores of two, one and zero, respectively. The following extract is an example of how they were supposed to describe the pictures:

1. She has already made breakfast.
2. She has already made her bed.
3. She has already talked on the phone.
4. She has already done the laundry.
5. She has already washed the dishes.

### 3.3. Procedure

This study was an attempt to investigate whether providing learners with different types of written CF would contribute to improving their oral and written accuracy. Moreover, we examined whether learners' level of proficiency would possibly play a mediating role in written CF efficacy. The scores of the participants in both experimental and control groups were examined and checked in order to make sure

they were homogeneous in terms of their English language proficiency. This study was carried out in three pre-intermediate and three upper-intermediate level EFL classes in a private language school. The study was conducted during the autumn semester, and students attended the class three times a week. The treatment was implemented during five sessions. Approximately 30 minutes of each session was devoted to the treatment.

In order to obtain the learners' consent to participate in the study, the aims and the procedure of the study were elaborated to them in the first session. The learners were divided into four experimental and two control groups (N=25), with approximately 10-13 learners in each group in the following order:

Group 1: pre-intermediate/direct WCF

Group 2: pre-intermediate/indirect WCF

Group 3: pre-intermediate/control

Group 4: upper-intermediate/direct WCF

Group 5: upper-intermediate/indirect WCF

Group 6: upper-intermediate/control

The target structure for the pre-intermediate learners was the "English present continuous tense". For the upper-intermediate learners, the target structure was the "English present perfect tense" as the groups did not have full mastery of relevant structures, based on their pretest and placement test results, it was assumed that they could benefit from written CF. Five series of pictures were used as prompts for writing tasks in five treatment sessions, while three different sets of pictures were used as prompts for pre-, immediate, and delayed posttesting purposes. The pre- and posttests were in written and oral modes, with the oral mode preceding the written format. For treatment purposes, the learners were engaged in picture description tasks. Each learner was individually provided with a set of pictures which showed a story. They were asked to look at the pictures and describe the story taking place in the pictures in a written mode with no time limitations; however, it approximately took 30 minutes of the entire class time. Their texts were then collected, and either direct or indirect focused written CF was provided to them based on the requirements of each experimental group. As for the indirect written CF, some error codes were used and inserted into their text (e.g. symbols such as: T to signal a

tense error, WO to signal a word order error, [ ] to signal a redundant word error, Y to signal that a word is missing, etc.). Then, they were asked to revise their own sentences according to the given feedback and the instructor checked their revisions. On the other hand, the correct form along with the brief grammatical explanation were provided to the participants with regard to direct written CF. However, the control group did not receive any CF feedback. They merely received comments on the content of their stories. The same format and procedure were followed in all five treatment sessions.

To explore participants' achievements in terms of written and oral accuracy, two posttests were administered after 5 treatment sessions. The first posttest (immediate posttest) was run in the session following the last treatment, and the second one (delayed posttest) was administered two weeks after the immediate posttest. The learners were provided with a different set of pictures which showed the occurrence of a series of connected actions. Then, they were asked to look at the pictures and describe the story occurring in the pictures orally. In the next stage of testing, the learners were provided with the same set of pictures and were asked to describe the story in a written form. The same was repeated for delayed posttesting using new tasks and pictures. To assess the learner's performance, strict scoring criteria was used. If the learners wrote the sentence correctly, they received the score of 2. However, they received the score of 1 when their sentences were partially correct, for instance, if they did not use the correct verb tense or the sentences did not contain a specific word. Finally, the students obtained the score of zero, 0, whether their answers were grammatically wrong or they did not write the sentences at all.

### 3.4. Data analysis

The collected data, including the scores of the pretests and posttests of both experimental and control groups were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21, to be analyzed considering an alpha value of  $p < .05$ .

Shapiro-Wilk, one-way ANOVA, independent samples *t*-tests, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Tukey post hoc test (HSD) were used as the main statistical tests in this study. To do the analysis, first, the underlying assumptions of the aforementioned tests were addressed. The first and foremost assumption of one-way ANOVA is a normality test. The Shapiro-Wilk test was exploited in order to check whether the data enjoyed a normal bell-shape distribution. To find out which type of written CF

was more effective in each group (i.e., research questions 1 and 2), a series of one-way between groups ANOVAs were employed as its underlying assumptions were met. In order to determine the exact location of the differences, a Tukey HSD post hoc test was employed for research questions 1 and 2. Furthermore, to check whether a significant difference existed among the learners of different proficiency levels in terms of the effectiveness of direct and indirect written CF (i.e., research questions 3 and 4), a series of independent samples *t*-tests were run.

#### 4. Results

The present study examined the effects of the type of corrective feedback, namely direct versus indirect focused feedback, on EFL learners' written and oral accuracy. A secondary objective of the present study was to compare the roles of the two feedback types across two proficiency levels. Below, we present the results of the data analysis per research question

**RQ1. Does the type of corrective feedback (in/direct focused written corrective feedback) have any effects on pre-intermediate learners'**

***written accuracy?***

***oral accuracy?***

According to descriptive statistics on written posttest, the pre-intermediate Direct CF Group had the highest ( $M=7.8$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ) and pre-intermediate Control Group the lowest mean scores ( $M=1.2$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ). Also, based on the descriptive statistics on the delayed posttest, the pre-Intermediate Direct group had the largest mean score ( $M=7.5$ ,  $SD=1$ ), which was followed by the pre-intermediate indirect ( $M=4.4$ ,  $SD=.8$ ) and control ( $M=1.1$ ,  $SD=1.1$ ) groups. It can be understood that the results of the delayed posttest are still in line with the posttest results, and the direct CF group had the highest mean score. The results of ANOVA for both written posttests and delayed posttests are depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2***ANOVA Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Writing Performance*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Posttest Writing	Between Groups	260.087	2	130.044	98.269	.000
	Within Groups	44.994	34	1.323		
	Total	305.081	36			
Delayed Posttest Writing	Between Groups	240.805	2	120.403	120.767	.000
	Within Groups	33.897	34	.997		
	Total	274.703	36			

According to Table 2, the written accuracy of the learners in both posttest and delayed posttest differs significantly across three groups ( $p < .05$ ). However, in order to check the exact differences across the groups, a Tukey post-hoc test was used. The results of Tukey tests are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3***Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Posttest Written Performance*

Dependent Variable: Posttest Writing

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	3.21795*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	6.58333*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-3.21795*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	3.36538*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Control Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-6.58333*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-3.36538*	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 4**

*Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Delayed Posttest Written Performance*

Dependent Variable: Delayed Posttest Writing

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	3.03846*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	6.33333*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-3.03846*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	3.29487*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Control Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-6.33333*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-3.29487*	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

It was found that the group which received direct feedback performed better in terms of written accuracy compared to those in the indirect group in both posttest and delayed posttest. Besides, both direct and indirect groups were found to be superior with regard to their written accuracy in both tests as compared to the control group.

The study also explored the effects of feedback type on pre-intermediate learners' oral accuracy. Based on the descriptive statistics posttest stage, the pre-intermediate Direct CF Group had the highest mean ( $M=6.5$ ,  $SD=1$ ), and pre-intermediate control group received the lowest ( $M=.9$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). The pre-intermediate indirect group fell between the two other groups in terms of mean score ( $M=1.6$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). As for delayed posttest, the direct CF group ranked the first ( $M=6.1$ ,  $SD=1$ ), followed by the indirect group ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=.5$ ). The control group received the lowest mean score in the delayed posttest ( $M=.8$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). Table 5 illustrates the results of ANOVA for oral accuracy.



**Table 5**  
ANOVA Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Oral Performance

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Posttest Oral	Between Groups	187.044	2	93.522	128.808	.000
	Within Groups	24.686	34	.726		
	Total	211.730	36			
Delayed Posttest	Between Groups	170.679	2	85.340	141.098	.000
	Within Groups	20.564	34	.605		
	Total	191.243	//			

As Table 3 reveals, similar to results of written accuracy, there are also significant differences among the three groups in terms of their oral accuracy in both immediate and delayed posttests. Consequently, a post hoc test was used in order to determine the location of the differences, and the results are depicted in Tables 6 and 7.

**Table 6**  
Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Oral Posttest Performance

Dependent Variable: Posttest Oral

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	2.80769*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	5.58333*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-2.80769*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	2.77564*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Control Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-5.58333*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-2.77564*	.000

\*, The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 7**

*Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Oral Delayed Posttest Performance*

Dependent Variable: Delayed Posttest Oral

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Pre-Intermediate Indirect CF Group	2.62821*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	5.33333*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-2.62821*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Control Group	2.70513*	.000
Pre- Intermediate Control Group	Pre- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-5.33333*	.000
	Pre- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-2.70513*	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

According to Tukey HSD tests, there was a significant difference between the performance of direct and indirect pre-intermediate groups in terms of oral accuracy. In simpler terms, the group which received direct corrective feedback outperformed the one which received indirect corrective feedback. Furthermore, both direct and indirect CF groups significantly outpaced the control group in terms of oral accuracy. This indicates that direct corrective feedback had better effects on both immediate and delayed performance of the pre-intermediate students' oral accuracy. It also indicates that direct CF had positive effects on oral accuracy of learners in both short and long terms.

**RQ2. Does the type of corrective feedback (in/direct focused written corrective feedback) have any effects on upper-intermediate learners'**

**written accuracy?**

**oral accuracy?**

This study further examined the effects of different feedback types on the written and oral accuracy of learners at an upper-intermediate level. In the immediate written posttest, the descriptive statistics showed that the upper-intermediate Indirect CF ( $M=9.2$ ,  $SD=.8$ ) and control ( $M=1.3$ ,  $SD=.7$ ) groups had the highest and the lowest mean scores, respectively. The descriptive results for the delayed written

posttest revealed that the group which received the indirect CF had the highest mean score ( $M=9$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ). The direct ( $M=7.2$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ) and control ( $M=1.1$ ,  $SD=6$ ) groups received lower mean scores compared to that of the indirect group. The results of ANOVA test across three groups of learners in both immediate and delayed posttests are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**  
*ANOVA Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Writing Performance*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Posttest Writing	Between Groups	443.282	2	221.641	206.629
	Within Groups	38.615	36	1.073	
	Total	481.897	38		
Delayed Posttest Writing	Between Groups	440.359	2	220.179	198.162
	Within Groups	40.000	36	1.111	
	Total	480.359	38		

According to Table 8, in both immediate and delayed posttests, significant differences were found among the three groups. We further ran a Tukey test to discover the exact point of the differences. Tables 9 and 10 summarize the results of the Tukey test.

**Table 9**

*Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Upper-Intermediate Groups' Posttest Written Performance*

Dependent Variable: Posttest Writing

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Upper-Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-1.69231*	.001
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	6.15385*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Upper- Intermediate mediate Direct CF Group	1.69231*	.001
	Upper-intermediate Control Group	7.84615*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Control Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-6.15385*	//
	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-7.84615*	//

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 10**

*Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Upper-Intermediate Groups' Delayed Posttest Written Performance*

Dependent Variable: Delayed Posttest Writing

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Upper-int Intermediate Direct CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-1.76923*	.000
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	6.07692*	//
Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	1.76923*	//
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	7.84615*	//
Upper- Intermediate Control Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-6.07692*	//
	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-7.84615*	//

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As the tables clearly show, in contrast to the case of pre-intermediate group, indirect feedback appears to be more effective in enhancing upper-intermediate students' written accuracy. Besides, both indirect and direct groups performed

better in terms of written accuracy compared to the control group. Most importantly, we found that indirect CF had more significant effects on written accuracy of upper-intermediate learners in comparison to direct CF.

In case of oral accuracy, the descriptive statistics associated with the immediate posttest showed that the Upper-intermediate indirect CF Group had the highest mean ( $M=8.3$ ,  $SD=.7$ ), and Upper-intermediate direct WCF ( $M=6.8$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ) and control ( $M=1.07$ ,  $SD=.7$ ) group received lower mean scores. The delayed posttest descriptive results revealed that the indirect CF group had the highest mean score ( $M=7.9$ ,  $SD=.8$ ). Besides, the direct group ( $M=6.6$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ) had a higher mean score than the control group ( $M=.7$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). Table 11 demonstrates the ANOVA results of the immediate and delayed posttest across the three groups.

**Table 11**  
*ANOVA Test for Pre-Intermediate Groups' Oral Performance*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Posttest Oral	Between Groups	380.051	2	190.026	249.809	.000
	Within Groups	27.385	36	.761		
	Total	407.436	38			
Delayed Oral Posttest	Between Groups	377.282	2	188.641	187.042	.000
	Within Groups	36.308	36	1.009		
	Total	191.243	36			

According to Table 10, there is a significant difference in learners' scores in the oral immediate and delayed posttests. Consequently, a post hoc test was used in order to determine the location of the differences. The results of the Tukey test are shown in Tables 12 and 13.

**Table 12***Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Groups' Oral Posttest Performance*

Dependent Variable: Posttest Oral

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-1.46154*	.000
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	5.76923*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	1.46154*	.000
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	7.23077*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Control Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-5.76923*	.000
	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-7.23077*	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table 13***Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test for Groups' Oral Delayed Posttest Performance*

Dependent Variable: Delayed Posttest Oral

(I) Participants	(J) Participants	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-1.30769*	.006
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	5.84615*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	1.30769*	.006
	Upper- Intermediate Control Group	7.15385*	.000
Upper- Intermediate Control Group	Upper- Intermediate Direct CF Group	-5.84615*	.000
	Upper- Intermediate Indirect CF Group	-7.15385*	.000

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to the Tukey HSD test, there is a significant difference between the performance of direct and indirect upper-intermediate groups. The group which received indirect corrective feedback outperformed the one which received direct corrective feedback in terms of their oral accuracy. On the other hand, both direct and indirect CF groups significantly outpaced the control group. This indicated that

indirect corrective feedback had better effects on both immediate and delayed performance of the upper-intermediate students' oral accuracy. It also indicates that indirect CF had both short-term and long-term effects on oral accuracy of upper-intermediate learners.

**RQ3. Is there a significant difference between pre- vs. upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of direct focused written CF on their**

**written accuracy?**

**oral accuracy?**

According to the descriptive statistics on immediate written posttest, both pre- ( $M=7.4$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ) and upper-intermediate ( $M=7.3$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ) groups received somewhat similar mean scores. However, the upper-intermediate group ( $M=6.8$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ) had a larger mean score compared to that of the pre-intermediate group ( $M=6.5$ ,  $SD=1$ ) in oral immediate posttest. As for written delayed posttest, pre-intermediate group had a higher mean score ( $M=7.5$ ,  $SD=1$ ) compared to the upper-intermediate group ( $M=7.2$ ,  $SD=1.2$ ), while the descriptive results of oral delayed posttest showed that upper-intermediate group ( $M=6.6$ ,  $SD=1.3$ ) received a higher mean score in comparison with the pre-intermediate group ( $M=6.1$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ).

We used an independent samples *t*-test to check for the significant differences between the two groups in both oral and written immediate and delayed posttests. Table 14 shows the results of the *t*-Test for the two groups that received direct CF.



**Table 14**

*Independent Samples T-Test Results of Pre- and Upper-Intermediate Groups Receiving Direct CF*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Written Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.021	.885	.527	23	.603	.29487
	Equal variances not assumed			.527	22.806	//	//
Written Delayed Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.154	.698	.596	23	.557	.26923
	Equal variances not assumed			.601	22.640	.554	//
Spoken Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.157	//	-.835	23	.413	-.34615
	Equal variances not assumed			-.837	22.993	.411	//
Spoken Delayed Posttest	Equal variances assumed	1.341	.259	-.939	23	.357	-.44872
	Equal variances not assumed			-.949	22.385	.353	//

Independent samples *t*-test,  $p < .05$ , indicated that there was not a significant difference between the pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of direct focused written CF on their written or oral accuracy in the immediate posttest. According to Table 14, independent samples *t*-test indicated that there was not a significant difference between the pre- vs. upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of direct focused written CF either on their written and oral accuracy in the delayed posttest. The results were in line with those of the immediate posttest, indicating that there is no difference between the pre- vs upper-intermediate groups with regard to the effects of direct focused written CF on their written or oral accuracy both in short and long-term effects.

**RQ4. Is there a significant difference between pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their**

**written accuracy?**

**oral accuracy?**

As the final step, we examined the differences between pre- and upper-intermediate groups in terms of their oral and written accuracy levels as a consequence of indirect WCF. Based on the descriptive analyses related to the written performance, the upper-intermediate indirect CF group ( $M=9.2$ ,  $SD=.8$ ) had a higher mean than the pre-intermediate indirect CF group ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.9$ ) did in the immediate posttest. On the other hand, the descriptive statistics associated with the oral posttest performance of pre vs. upper students revealed that the latter was prominent in terms of the mean score ( $M=8.3$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). However, the pre-intermediate group had a lower mean score ( $M=3$ ,  $SD=.7$ ). In the delayed posttest, based on the descriptive statistics for written accuracy, the results are still in line with the posttest results, and upper-intermediate group had a higher mean score ( $M=9$ ,  $SD=.8$ ). The pre-intermediate groups had a lower mean value ( $M=4$ ,  $SD=.9$ ). In the delayed oral posttest, the descriptive statistics confirmed the posttest results and showed a higher mean score for the upper-intermediate group ( $M=7.9$ ,  $SD=.8$ ). In addition to descriptive statistics, an independent samples  $t$ -test was run to explore the significance of the differences between the groups. The results of the  $t$ -Test for both immediate and delayed posttests are shown in Table 15.

**Table 15**

*Independent Samples T-Test Results of Pre- and Upper-Intermediate Groups Receiving Indirect CF*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Written Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.161	.692	-13.093	24	.000	-4.61538
	Equal variances not assumed			//	23.520	//	//
Written Delayed Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.782	.385	-11.285	24	//	-4.53846
	Equal variances not assumed			//	22.388	//	//
Spoken Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	-15.667	24	//	-4.61538
	Equal variances not assumed			//	24.000	//	//
Spoken Delayed Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.234	.633	-15.709	24	//	-4.38462
	Equal variances not assumed			//	19.683	.000	//

Independent samples *t*-test indicates a significant difference between the pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their written and oral accuracy. In other words, the upper-intermediate learners who received indirect CF outperformed the pre-intermediate learners. In the delayed posttest, there is a significant difference between the pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their written and oral accuracy. The results were in line with immediate posttest, indicating that there is significant difference between the pre- vs upper-intermediate learners with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their written accuracy. In other words, the upper-intermediate group outperformed the pre-intermediate with regard to the effects of indirect focused written CF on their written and oral accuracy. This indicates that upper-intermediate group which received indirect corrective feedback outperformed the pre-intermediate group both in short and long terms.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that written CF had positive roles in developing learners' written and oral accuracy. In our study, learners did not receive any type of instruction on the target structures other than the specified type of written CF. The participants in all groups (at each level) were within the same level of proficiency and received the same amount of treatment. Thus, any gains in mastering the target structures could be possibly attributed to written CF practices. Studies on both oral and written CF have shown that CF is more effective when it addresses a single structure (e.g., Doughty & Varela, 1998; Muranoi, 2000; Nicholas et al., 2001; Sheen, 2007). These theorists and scholars reported the effective roles of written CF in language education. Sheen (2007) discovered that corrective feedback based on a specific linguistic function was successful and that metalinguistic remarks were often useful when students had a good analytical language capacity. Doughty and Varela (1998) found that corrective recast had a significant effect on improving learners' developmental progress and grammatical accuracy. Learning is fostered in case learners devote their attentional span to a single language feature. They further contend that extending attention to different aspects of language learning hinders learners' focus on particular language forms (Nicholas et al., 2001). In the same vein, the present study addressed a specific

linguistic form in two levels (English present continuous tense in the pre-intermediate level and English present perfect tense in the upper-intermediate group) and intensively treated errors on that form in a written mode. According to Ellis (2009b), CF can be effective only if learners consciously attend to it. It goes without saying that CF provision in a written mode intensifies the probability of noticing the target linguistic form. Chances of noticing are further increased when correction is sustained and occurs intensively over a period of time. Thus, as error correction in this study occurred in a written mode, was provided intensively over five sessions, and addressed only a single structure, it might lead to improved accuracy levels in the learners' productions.

The findings of this study are in line with those of several previous studies (e.g., Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Karim & Nassaji, 2018; Sheen, 2007, 2010) which confirmed the effects of WCF and its types (direct and indirect) on different language learning aspects, such as grammatical structures, language production, writing skills and accuracy in revising. These studies collectively provide further counter-evidence to what Truscott (1996, 1999, 2001, 2007) noted with regard to the inefficacy of written CF. This study, however, in addition to taking the learners' proficiency level into account, tried to find out whether CF provided in written form would have any effects on learners' oral accuracy. This point makes our study different in focus from earlier research. The respective findings indicated that written CF, regardless of its type, was also facilitative in developing learners' oral accuracy. Interestingly, according to Ellis (2009a), learners' oral production in narrative tasks provides some hints regarding their implicit knowledge. Thus, the findings of this study could support the positive role of written CF in fostering learners' implicit knowledge. However, since this study is the first attempt to look into the role of written CF in developing learners' implicit knowledge, further research is warranted before any generalization of the results.

### ***5.1. Corrective Feedback Types and Proficiency Level***

The first research question focused on whether the type of corrective feedback would have any effects on pre-intermediate learners' accuracy. The results revealed that although both direct and indirect CF types were effective in developing learners' oral and written accuracy in both short- and long-terms, the direct CF had the highest

effects in improving pre-intermediate learners' accuracy. This finding could be expected considering the learners' level of proficiency. As Ellis (2009b) states, learners with lower levels of proficiency may lack the essential L2 knowledge to self-correct, making direct CF more desirable for this group of learners.

The second research question targeted the effects of direct and indirect written CF on upper-intermediate learners' accuracy. The findings revealed that both types of CF had significant effects on learners' oral and written accuracy, and the upper-intermediate learners benefited most from the indirect type of written CF. According to Ellis (2009b), compared to direct written CF, indirect CF can foster higher levels of processing, as it encourages learners to reflect on the forms of language. This condition is favored as it caters to guided learning and problem solving (Lalande, 1982). However, as stated before, the prerequisite of this advantage is learners' ability to self-correct. Thus, it seems that provision of indirect CF has stimulated the upper-intermediate learners to process the target structure more deeply thanks to their higher level of proficiency.

The third and fourth research questions compared pre- and upper-intermediate groups regarding the effectiveness of direct and indirect written CF on their accuracy levels. Based on the findings, there was no significant difference between the groups regarding the effectiveness of direct written CF, and indirect written CF was more beneficial for the upper-intermediate learners. As mentioned before, learners' proficiency level is a determining factor in self-correction. Given the role of high proficiency level in self-correction, the upper-intermediate learners benefited from indirect written CF to a greater extent compared to pre-intermediate students.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of the study indicated that although both direct and indirect written CF were effective in improving both pre- and upper-intermediate learners' accuracy, proficiency level played a role in determining which type of CF was more beneficial. While the pre-intermediate learners benefited more from direct CF, the upper-intermediate learners performed better as a result of indirect CF. This finding can carry important implications for language teachers who may make more informed decisions in treating their learners' written errors. Teachers should take

the proficiency level of their learners into account while providing written CF if they aim for an effective error correction process.

This study also revealed that written CF not only facilitates the development of written accuracy but also leads to increased oral accuracy, which is a manifestation of implicit knowledge. This finding also offers insightful implications for teachers and researchers. On pedagogical grounds, teachers are recommended to pay more attention to writing tasks and written CF and possibly devote more time to writing skill and errors in their classes. On theoretical grounds, researchers are encouraged to look more closely into the role of written CF in developing L2 development in general and written accuracy in particular. Finally, textbook writers and curriculum developers need to better notice the role of writing skill in L2 development and create more room for written practices in instructional materials.

This study calls for more informed decisions by L2 teachers in the correction of written errors as it improves L2 learners' oral accuracy. Instructional coordinators and educational professionals may implement written CF from a rather different viewpoint and should be more punctilious in designing curricula by means of focusing on written errors.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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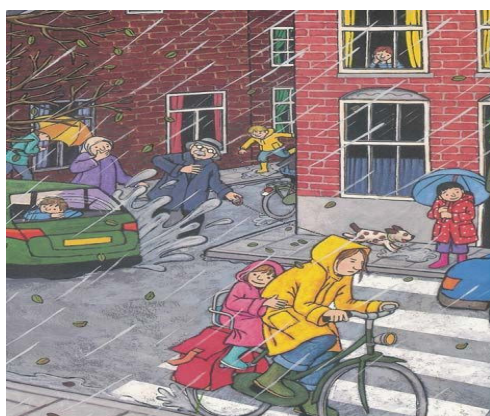
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## Appendix A

### Picture description task: present continues



## Appendix B

### Picture description task: present perfect



