

A review of studies on teachers' written corrective feedback

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of available research findings of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) studies conducted in various contexts including Vietnam. It is recognized that researchers have paid attention to two key areas which are the effects of WCF and students' perceptions on WCF. Although students have different perceptions on different types of feedback (direct or indirect feedback), they all show positive attitudes toward WCF because it assists them to improve their writing. Finally, research gaps and suggestions are discussed and presented at the end of the paper.

Keywords: *Written Corrective Feedback, direct feedback, indirect feedback*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is not only a physical act but also a mental work as according to [1], "writing is both a process and product" [1. p.33]. In order to generate good paragraphs or essays, writers are required to take several steps including brainstorming, outlining, writing first draft, revising, proofreading, and writing the final draft [2]. In the process of revising, it is important to check errors at surface level such as grammar, spelling, word choice and deep level like structure of the writing product. Students or teachers; therefore, play an important role in enhancing their writings through feedback.

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) is an effective method used by most instructors to provide guidance in correcting students writing [3]. Facilitators could adapt different kinds of feedback (direct feedback and indirect feedback) to support learners. In terms of direct feedback, teachers point out the errors and correct them at the same time [4] while indirect feedback is indicated by underlining or circling the errors without giving the correction [5] and students have to work out the cor-

rection by themselves.

In order to explore which written corrective feedback is more effective and acknowledge the role of WCF in students' language learning, this paper presents an overview of previous studies' results on WCF in different research scopes and contexts. Thus, it is hoped that the current overview paper will provide future researchers with some ideas, especially for those who want to do WCF research in Vietnamese context. The following section is literature review of previous WCF studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) plays an important role in the development of students' writing [6 - 8]; WCF, thus, has been conducted in different contexts such as New Zealand, America, Iran, China, Malaysia, and Indonesia. While several studies focused on the effects of WCF [3 - 11], others concentrated on students' perceptions on WCF [12 - 13]. The following sections review these studies with the above two main issues of WCF.

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2.1. The effects of Written Corrective Feedback

The effects of Written Corrective Feedback has been investigated in different research areas such as the effects of direct and indirect feedback [3 - 5, 8, 10 - 11] and the effects of direct feedback with oral metalinguistic [7, 9]. Below table presents the titles of those studies, followed by the reviewing these studies with the above two categories in detail.

2.1.1. The Effects of Direct and Indirect Feedback

Ferris, et al., [4] investigated the effects of WCF on 10 L2 first-year undergraduates at a public university in California, USA. These students are Ukrainian, Tagalog, Hmong, Spanish,

Mienh, and Vietnamese. After the first three timed writings with indirect feedback, the researchers selected the error patterns, then interviewed and discussed about students' errors. Pupils were next asked to revise and write new texts as researchers wanted to examine self-monitoring processes of students' writing. The results show that the WCF techniques applied in this study and one to one discussion about learners' errors are helpful. It could be explained that students had the opportunities to ask questions and receive explanations from teachers through in-person meetings. Thus, this study suggests that individual learning and interview cycles are valuable in the writing course.

Table 1. *Direct and Indirect Feedback*

No	Title of the Study	Country	Author(s)	Year
1	A Case for Direct and Indirect Feedback: The Other Side of Coin	Iran	Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad	2012
2	Written Corrective Feedback for Individual L2 Writer	USA	Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna	2013
3	The Effects of Direct and Indirect Corrective Feedback Techniques on EFL Students' Writing	Iran	Eslami	2014
4	The Role of Direct and Indirect Written Corrective Feedback in Improving Iranian EFL Students' Writing Skill	Iran	Hosseiny	2014
5	The Effects of Corrective Feedback on Chinese Learners' Writing Accuracy: A Quantitative Analysis in an EFL Context	China	Wang	2017
6	The Effects of Direct and Indirect Written Corrective Feedback on ESL Students' Use of Past Tenses	Malaysia	Siti Nor Aisyah	2018
7	The Effect of Teachers' Direct and Indirect Feedback on Students' Writing Ability	Indonesia	Latifah, Suwarno, & Diani	2018

In Iran, three studies compared the effects between direct and indirect feedback on students' writing [3, 5, 10]. First, Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad [10] focused on English grammatical types and divided 80 intermediate students into two treatment groups: one received direct feedback and the other obtained indirect feedback. They participated in the project in 16

weeks in which each of them wrote a short essay (no more than 250 words) then received feedback from teacher. By using t-test statistical method, the researcher found that both indirect and direct feedbacks had a good influence on students' writing texts. The result suggests that direct feedback is more effective than indirect feedback for proficient students. In terms of grammatical errors, direct feedback

enabled Iranian students to apply the past simple tense, relative pronoun, and preposition better in the new writing texts. The researcher suggested that teachers might know the target pupils and their proficiency level before making decisions on which feedback is suitable.

In 2014, Hosseiny [3] investigated the role of direct and indirect WCF for the purpose of improving Iranian EFL students' writing skill. The researcher chose 60 Iranian students at pre-intermediate level to join the research. These students were divided into three groups in which 20 students received direct feedback, 20 other students received indirect feedback, and no feedback for the rest. The researcher gave students a five-section test based on TOEFL format about definite and indefinite nouns. By using ANOVA tests, the researcher found that indirect feedback seemed to encourage students to edit their papers more effectively, which is different from the finding of Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad's study [10]. Different English level of students might lead to different results since the English proficiency level of the participants in this study is lower than those in Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad's study [10]. Based on this study, direct feedback was not beneficial to students because they did not have chances to work again on their paper. Besides, some students did not pay attention to given feedback so it is suggested that teachers should teach them how to use instructors' feedback to improve their writing.

Eslami also [5] conducted a study in Iran which investigated the impact of teacher written direct and indirect feedback on writing texts of 60 pre-intermediate EFL Iranian students. These students' English proficiency level is the same as those in Hosseiny's study [3]. The researcher allocated them into two groups (30 students each group): one received the direct red pen technique and another group received an indirect technique. The participants took part in three tests: pre-test, immediate post-test, and delayed post-test. The researchers focused on simple past tense errors, similar to

one of the grammatical errors concentrated by Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad [10]. The study found that students receiving indirect feedback outperformed those who received direct feedback on both immediate post-test and delayed post-test. According to the findings of this research, whose participants' level is as same as those of the two studies [5, 3], indirect feedback is more effective than direct feedback for their writing quality.

In China, Wang [6] explored the effects of corrective feedback on 105 undergraduate Chinese students. The researcher divided these students into three groups: one received comments on content only, one received direct feedback, and the last group received indirect feedback. By applying quantitative research method and qualitative interview, the researcher found that there was no difference between corrective group and control group. It means that direct and indirect feedback seem to have the same effect. According to the researcher, the participants are at advanced level so their performance in their writing seems unchanged. Nevertheless, students agreed that corrective feedback played an important part in developing and improving students' writing and they showed positive attitudes toward corrective feedback in language learning. Besides, students might not understand indirect teacher feedback because they are not able to fix their errors. Then the researcher supported that teachers should develop self-correction strategy, for example, group work in class where students could discuss their errors and work together to fix them.

In Malaysia, Siti Nor Aisyah [8] examined whether or not direct and indirect WCF improved students' accuracy in the use of past tenses over 12-week period. By applying the same method as the above researchers [3, 5-6, 10], the researcher grouped 60 intermediate ESL Malaysian students into two categories: direct and indirect. Besides, the researcher interviewed participants to figure out the factors that influence the performance of students' writing. The findings show that both

groups did better after receiving teachers' feedback. To be specific, direct group performed slightly better than indirect group. This result supports the finding of Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad's study [10] since both studies checked the effects of corrective feedback on grammatical errors. Thus, it could be said that direct feedback might be helpful for grammatical errors. Two main factors affecting students' writing performance are learner attitudes toward teacher feedback and learner beliefs toward corrected errors. First, students reported that direct feedback was clear and helpful. Meanwhile, participants reported that indirect feedback was useful as it required them to correct errors even the feedback was not straightforward. Second, students in both groups were eager to receive their errors figured out by teachers.

In Indonesia, Latifah et al., [11] applied quantitative method to investigate the effects of teacher direct and indirect feedback on two groups of 64 Indonesian students. The result of this study also is in line with findings in studies of Ferris, et al.' [4], Eslami' [5], and Hosseiny'

studies [3] which proves that indirect feedback is effective on learning language.

In conclusion, there are some differences in research methods based on the topic of WCF such as different participants and project time duration so the findings might be varied. However, these studies meet some common things: first, all students have positive attitudes toward teacher corrective feedback. Second, intermediate students' English level seems to perform well with direct feedback [8 - 10]. Third, lower students English (pre-intermediate level) performed well with indirect feedback [3, 4-5, 11]. Thus, it can be recognized that indirect feedback might be suitable for pre-intermediate students and direct feedback is for students of higher proficiency levels.

2.1.2. Direct Feedback with Oral Feedback

In another research scope of Written Corrective Feedback, many studies investigated the effects of direct feedback with oral feedback [7, 9]. **Table 2** below presents the titles of these studies then the reviewing in detail is shown.

Table 2. Direct Feedback with Oral Metalinguistic

No	Title of the study	Country	Author(s)	Year
1	The Effect of Different Types of Corrective Feedback on ESL Student Writing	New Zealand	Bitchener, Young & Cameron	2005
2	The Relative Effectiveness of Different Types of Direct Written Corrective Feedback	New Zealand	Bitchener & Knoch	2009

Bitchener, et al., [9] explored whether or not corrective feedback had positive effects on students' writing. Three groups with 53 post-intermediate students in total received three types of feedback: direct feedback and five minute individual conferences; direct feedback and written feedback only; and no corrective feedback. The researchers focused on three kinds of error, namely repositions, the past simple tense, and the definite article. Among these kinds of corrective feedback, the study found a significant effect of the combination between written and conference feedback on accuracy levels in the use of the

past simple tense and the definite article in students writing. This finding meets the result of Hashemnezhad & Mohammadnejad's study [10] which showed that direct feedback might be suitable to adopt for intermediate students on grammatical feedback.

Four years later, in 2009, Bitchener & Knoch [7] investigated the effectiveness of different types of written corrective feedback including direct corrective feedback, written and oral meta-linguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback and written meta-linguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback. The researchers collected thirty-nine low

intermediate ESL learners in Auckland, New Zealand to participate in this research. Students wrote four pieces of writing: pre-test, immediate post-test, and two delayed post-tests. Two functional uses of the English articles "a" and "the" were targeted in the teacher feedback. The findings show that there is no difference in the effect upon accuracy between the three treatment options (three types of feedback). Accordingly, the researchers suggest that teachers should focus on some main errors and it might be sufficient for students at low level. It means that many corrections might make students lose their concentration in the revision process.

To sum up, even the above studies explored the effects of direct feedback with oral or written

feedback on learners of various proficiency levels (post-intermediate and low intermediate), participants showed positive attitudes toward these corrective feedback methods. Particularly, the combination between written feedback and oral feedback has a significant effect on students' writing in terms of past tense and functional words. Therefore, it can be said that the aforementioned studies show that WCF is important in the development of language learning.

2.2. Students' perceptions on Written Corrective Feedback

As far as we know, it seems that few studies investigated students' perceptions toward the written corrective feedback, compared to the effects of WCF studies. **Table 3** below presents the titles of two studies concerning this issue.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions on Written Corrective Feedback

No	Title of the Study	Country	Author(s)	Year
1	Written Corrective Feedback: The Perception of Korean EFL Learners.	Korea	Chung	2015
2	Thai Students' Perceptions on the Direct Vs. Indirect Written Corrective Feedback: A Thai University Context.	Thailand	Tangkiengsirisin, & Kalra	2016

Chung [12] explored the perceptions of Korean EFL learners toward WCF. In particular, the researcher explored which feedback that Korean students think was the best and worst. Besides, the researcher compared the perceptions about WCF between Korean learners and Japanese and ESL learners studying in the US. By applying quantitative research method, the study found that 64 percent of respondents ranked direct feedback very high while a very small number of them support indirect feedback. Compared to ESL learners, Korean and Japanese students shared positive attitudes toward direct feedback more than those in ESL context who preferred indirect feedback.

In another context, Tangkiengsirisin & Kalra [13] investigated intermediate Thai students' perception towards direct and indirect written corrective feedback on

writing business letters. This quasi-experimental study with 63 senior students divided into two sections of business English classroom. Each group received one type of feedback. The findings show that students perceive WCF as a positive method in improving their writing. This result is in line with previous studies since students acknowledged the importance of WCF on their writing development [3 - 6, 8, 10 -11]. However, when comparing the effects between direct and indirect feedback, the directive group seems to outperform the indirect group. Students felt that they were confused when receiving code feedback or underlined errors from teacher. Again, this finding meets the findings of Hashemnezhad and Mohammadnejad' and Siti Nor Aisyah' studies [8, 10].

All in all, the two above studies conducted in

different contexts (Thailand and Korea) with different learners, however, they are meeting at two points: high positive attitudes to WCF and direct feedback is preferred than indirect feedback with intermediate L2 learners. The next section presents the findings of previous studies on Vietnamese students' attitudes towards WCF.

2.3. Written Corrective Feedback in Vietnamese Context

The following section reviews some Vietnamese research about Written Corrective Feedback and explore whether the findings are in line with or different from previous studies conducted in other contexts. **Table 4** presents the titles of three Vietnamese studies related to WCF.

Table 4. *Written Corrective Feedback in Vietnamese Context*

No	Title of the Study	Author(s)	Year
1	The Role of Corrective Feedback in Vietnamese High School Students' Writing	Le	2014
2	The Effectiveness of Indirect Written Corrective Feedback as Perceived By Teachers and Students of a Public University in Vietnam	Linh	2018
3	The Effects of Teachers' Use of Direct and Indirect Feedback on Learners' Writing English Argumentative Essays	Le	2018

Le [14] selected 48 Vietnamese high school students to participate in her study. The researcher explored students' attitude toward teacher feedback on their writing and the effects of teacher feedback and peer feedback. Many students agreed that the process of writing practice is important (63%) and a majority of learners reported that teacher feedback plays an important part in their writing (81%). In terms of getting feedback from peers, around half of participants revealed that peer review was significant to improve their writing. Thus, students thought that they needed to be trained peer response skills in giving feedback to their partner. Finally, 60% of respondents thought that corrective feedback was significant before writing final version. Overall, high school students had positive attitudes toward the corrective feedback on their learning in English writing essays.

Linh [15] explored the effectiveness of indirect WCF on five different errors: grammar, language use, mechanic use, content, and organization. The study delivered lists of questionnaires to 90 second-year students from English department and then she interviewed some selected participants. By applying two research methods: quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) methods, the results showed that

indirect teacher feedback was helpful for the treatment of grammatical errors and content. Besides, students thought that face to face discussion after the first draft was a need so students could be able to ask questions related to content and organization which are considered to be complicated. Similarly, Bitchener, et al., [9] agreed that oral meeting is an effective option for those who are too shy to ask teachers when they were confused by some errors circled by teachers. Thus, in order to make sure students understand the errors, face to face meetings should be carried out.

Le [16] investigated the effects of direct and indirect feedback on 60 Vietnamese high school learners in writing English essays. These students participated in a 12-week training course. Teachers focused on students' errors in four categories: content, organization, grammar, and spelling which are quite similar to aspects in Linh's study [15]. Students agreed that they took advantages from content and organization feedback than that on grammar and spelling. In the same line with Le's study [14], participants showed good attitudes on both indirect and direct feedback from facilitators, especially when it comes to organization and content. After receiving the corrective feedback from teacher, the learners confessed that they could improve their writing

skills in terms of content and the organization.

In conclusion, Vietnamese students agreed that teacher feedback is necessary for their writing improvement, which is also found from previous studies in different contexts [3 - 6, 8, 10 - 11, 13]. Therefore, it can be concluded that WCF is a significant tool to enable students to improve their writing. Regarding the effect of indirect feedback, students think that they could perform better in terms of paper organization. Besides, indirect feedback should combine with face to face meetings in case students might be confused by teacher feedback and would like to ask questions. Nevertheless, there are still many other research areas related to WCF which have not been explored yet. Thus, the next section presents research gaps and provides some suggestions which might be beneficial to future researchers.

3. RESEARCH GAPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the previous WCF research in various parts of the world (e.g. Asian countries, New Zealand, the US, etc.) and Vietnam, some research gaps are worth noting. First, previous studies mostly applied quantitative method to explore the effects of WCF on students' writing as well as the students' perception toward WCF [3, 10 - 12, 14]. However, few studies used qualitative research method or mixed methods to examine this issue. Future researchers, therefore, might consider these kinds of methods in their studies.

Second, the majority of previous studies mostly focus on the effects of direct feedback and indirect feedback [3 - 6, 8, 10 - 11], just a few studies investigated students' perceptions toward WCF [12 - 13]. Besides, few studies explored the effects of indirect and oral feedback or written feedback. Thus, it is suggested that future researchers consider these research areas and they might have some new research directions based on WCF.

Third, previous studies [6 - 7] suggested that it is unnecessary for facilitators to focus on many errors for each feedback because students need time to absorb their errors, especially low level students. Therefore, teachers could consider

main errors in their feedback. According to this suggestion, future researcher could consider to only check important errors.

Fourth, in the educational context of Vietnam, two thirds of studies chose high school students as the participants [14, 16]. However, few studies investigated students at university for their research especially those majoring in English academic writing. Thus, this could be ideal participants that future researchers might think about. It is hoped that they might find some significant results from this promising target.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, WCF is an indispensable part in language learning, especially in writing course. However, because of different students with various English levels and numerous majors, teachers should do research on specific groups of students to investigate effects of WCF on their writings before deciding on which type of feedback is beneficial for particular groups. It is hoped that the above research gaps might be helpful suggestions for future researchers who want to do research related WCF, especially in Vietnam.

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Báo cáo tổng hợp từ các nghiên cứu về nhận xét của giáo viên cho bài viết học sinh

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TÓM TẮT

Bài báo này tập trung vào việc báo cáo những bài báo viết về đề tài nhận xét, chỉnh sửa, phản hồi của giáo viên cho bài viết học sinh trên thế giới và ở Việt Nam. Các nghiên cứu trước đây tập trung chủ yếu vào hai mảng đề tài chính: sự hiệu quả của nhận xét giáo viên đối với bài viết của học sinh, sinh viên và nhận thức của học sinh, sinh viên về nhận xét, sửa lỗi của giáo viên. Dù đối tượng học sinh khác nhau và họ có những quan điểm khác nhau về từng loại nhận xét của giáo viên (trực tiếp hay gián tiếp), tất cả đều có nhận thức tích cực về nhận xét của giáo viên cho bài viết của họ vì họ cảm thấy bài viết của họ cải thiện nhiều hơn sau khi được nhận xét bởi giáo viên. Phần cuối cùng bài viết là phần đánh giá, phân tích những điểm mới rút ra từ những nghiên cứu trước và gợi ý hướng nghiên cứu mới cho các bài nghiên cứu tiếp theo về đề tài này.

Từ khóa: nhận xét, phản hồi bài viết, nhận xét trực tiếp, nhận xét gián tiếp

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