To Correct or Not to Correct: The Impact of Written Corrective Feedback on Improving Students' Writing about Literature

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of direct and indirect written corrective feedback (WCF) on Omani English literature students' use of tenses. The study took place over a period of two months at a university in the Sultanate of Oman. Data was collected from pre- and post-tests of 45 students who represented three groups: control group (N=15), direct group (n=15), and indirect group (n=15). The control group received no feedback, the direct group received feedback on their pre-test, intervention 1, and intervention 2. Their feedback was given directly; i.e., errors were underlined and corrections were given immediately. Indirect group also received feedback on their pre-test, intervention 1, and intervention 2, but their feedback was given indirectly; i.e., errors were underlined but corrections were not given. Students were encouraged to explore why these words were mistakes and were encouraged to correct them. The study's findings were consistent with previous research that has found mixed results regarding the effectiveness of WCF on second language learners' language accuracy. However, the study provides new insights by suggesting that direct feedback is more effective than indirect feedback since only direct group posttests were found to be significantly (p=0.02) better than their pretests. The findings are not claimed to be generalizable to other populations or contexts. They lead to recommendations for further research to determine the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on other groups of second language learners in different contexts and for different student populations, especially in the Middle East.

Keywords: Written corrective feedback, Tenses, Oman, Literary writing, ESL

1. Introduction

Giving written corrective feedback (WCF) by language teachers is a natural process that teachers practice in different stages of their teaching to varying degrees (Truscott, 1996, 1999; 2007; Ferris, 1999; Ellis, 2009a). It has been widely studied in both L1 (Sommers, 1982) and L2 where debates on its effectiveness have initiated paradigms of research (Truscott 1996, 1999; Ferris, 1999; Chandler, 2004; Sheen, 2007; Ellis, 2009a, 2009b; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashim, 2008; Lee, 2009; F. Hyland, 2000). It, thus, has received "rapid development after the accumulation of basic knowledge in the early stage" (Mia, Chang, & Ma, 2023, p. 1). Despite the fact that it takes much time and energy (Truscott, 1996, 1999; Ferris, 1999) and could sometimes have harmful effects (Truscott 1996, 1999), research in L2 has emphasized that it contributes to the development of L2 students in different ways. In its most simplistic form, Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009) emphasize that WCF helps to "indicate to the learner that there is an error in their linguistic output" (p. 556). Even though it has been surveyed early before Truscott (1996), it was his article entitled "the case against corrective feedback" that paved the way into more foundational areas in WCF. It has done more merit to WCF than it did to demerit it.

Different pro-correction researchers have started to research different types of WCF, in-class practices, and the research methods used to survey it in different contexts and from different perspectives. In fact, WCF is handled in different ways and follows different approaches. However, searching the databases, we found that WCF needs more attention in the Middle East. We, therefore, decided to embark on this study which has two main purposes: 1) to measure the impact that WCF can have on ESL students'—who study English literature—use of tenses in an Omani university, and 2) to investigate which type of WCF (i.e., direct vs. indirect) has stronger effect on students' accuracy of tense use.

2. Literature Review

In the following section, literature will be reviewed by shedding light on the different approaches to WCF (direct, indirect, focused, unfocused, metalinguistic, electronic, reformulation) and the empirical support for WCF. It will end with teacher's perspectives towards WCF.

2.1 Direct-indirect Corrective Feedback

Direct Feedback. This kind of feedback is initiated when the teacher specifies the error, locates it, and gives the correct form (Ellis, 2009b; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007). The teacher "can take a number of different forms—crossing out an unnecessary word, phrase, or morpheme, inserting a missing word or morpheme, and writing the correct form above or near to the erroneous form" (Ellis, 2009b, p. 99).It can be more helpful to students of low language proficiency level because of their lack of ability to figure out the sort of error and its correct form. It is also more used with errors that do not follow a patterned way (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) as students might have a difficulty dealing with them. Yet, this kind of feedback might leave the students unreflective about their errors.

Indirect Feedback. In this kind of feedback, the type of error is specified without correcting it and without marking its type. This can be either done by locating the error without correcting it or by highlighting the existence of the error without locating its place (Ellis, 2009b; Ellis et al., 2008). It can result in "deeper processing" (Ellis, 2009b), "cognitive problem-solving" (Ferris, 2004), and internal "hypothesis testing" about language (Sheen, 2007). Another point to be highlighted here is that this kind of feedback can better respond to patterned errors and thus students can absorb them more easily (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) or when the proficiency level is high.

2.2 Focused-Unfocused Corrective Feedback

Focused Feedback. It refers to selecting specific grammatical aspects to focus on in the correction process (Ellis, 2009a, 2009b; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009). It is "potentially more effective than unfocused CF" (Ellis, 2009b, p. 14) as students can attend to a reasonable number of errors. For example, the teacher can focus on the use of tenses, definite/indefinite articles, punctuation, etc. In comparing different feedback strategies (focused, unfocused), Sheen et al. (2009) have found that focused corrective feedback can lead to higher grammatical accuracy. They emphasized that it better facilitates the learning process. Taking a cognitive theoretical stance, this kind of feedback is more effective in language acquisition as it enhances understanding and extensive attention to the pre-selected errors (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009) and thus gives learners an opportunity to deal with these errors and absorb them into their interlanguages they are developing.

Unfocused Feedback. This type of feedback refers to a more comprehensive error correction where a wide range of errors are treated without a specific pre-selection (Ellis, 2009b; Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009). It is more traditional in writing classroom as teachers highlight as many errors as there are in the student's text (Sheen et al., 2009). This could distract students as they encounter different errors and might not be able to internalize rules governing the corrected forms. That is, "this approach runs the risk of overloading students' attentional capacity" (Sheen et al., 2009, p. 559). Studying the effect of corrective feedback on a sample of EFL Japanese students' grammatical accuracy gain, Ellis et al. (2008) showed that both focused and unfocused students' groups better performed in comparison to the control group. Yet, there was no significant difference between the focused and unfocused groups. In another study comparing the difference between focused and unfocused corrective feedback, Sheen et al. (2009) emphasized that their focused group gained higher grammatical accuracy in comparison to both the unfocused and the control groups. Their "results suggested that unfocused CF is of a limited pedagogical value whereas focused CF can contribute to grammatical accuracy in L2 writing" (Sheen et al., 2009, p. 556).

2.3 Metalinguistic Feedback

This kind of feedback "involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of the errors they have made" (Ellis, 2009b, p. 100). It requires using codes or labels that highlight the error. These codes can be conducted by either placing the codes over the error or in the margins of the page. In the case of placing the code or label over the error, it makes the comment more explicit and better guides the student to think over the error and correct it. Yet, when placing the label by the margins, the student needs to think of that error more deeply. Here, this kind of feedback is best absorbed when there is a training as "many writing weaknesses … can be traced back to a lack of thorough, systematic training during the early stages of foreign language learning" (Lalande, 1982, p. 140). In using error codes in comparison to direct correction, Lalande (1982) found that error codes method revealed significant improvements in the students' later writing. In this respect, it is evident that using these codes counts as providing metalinguistic level that can help to guide the students to figure out the type of error and to better handle it in subsequent writing.

2.4 Electronic Feedback

It is associated with the use of software programs that help to provide feedback to be used by teachers to guide their students to make corrections on their texts. Ellis (2009b) states that when using a program of this kind, it:

> Enables the teacher to use the electronic store to insert brief metalinguistic comments into a student's text. [...] This assists the student to self-correct. The same program also generates an error log for each piece of writing, thus drawing students' attention to recurrent linguistic problems" (p. 103).

This electronic feedback could serve as a time-saver for teachers when providing feedback.

2.5 Reformulation

This type of feedback requires a reconstruction of the students' text (Cohen, 1989; Ellis, 2009b; Ellis, 2010; Sachs & Polio, 2007). It "consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact" (Ellis, 2009b, p. 98). The student's text is thus restructured to meet the native language with the intention of preserving its main ideas. Cohen (1989) emphasized that this technique is better directed towards intermediate and advanced

level students who like their writing to look like a native one in terms of structures, vocabulary, and overall expression. Cohen (1989) argued that this technique is more of a "refinement" than a correction. That is, "it is no longer a matter of correct or incorrect, but rather one of style" (p. 8). Here, it complements other types of feedback. Yet, it could be problematic in that it somehow over-privileges the native language user's approach which might demerit the student's efforts in composing the text.

The discussion above shows the different strategies and techniques of feedback. Yet, there are other factors that impact the student's response to feedback. The following section will discuss these factors.

2.6 Empirical Support for WCF

Empirical research shows support for WCF (Benson & DeKeyser, 2018; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Lalande, 1982; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009; Zhang, 2021). In an early study, Lalande (1982) compared two correction methods: traditional direct method where the teacher gives direct feedback and the students are required to revise based on it versus coded feedback as a guide for revision. The experiment group performed more significantly than the control group on the targeted areas (grammar and orthography). Importantly, the control group errors increased in the posttest. Lalande attributed this increase to the faultiness of feedback. In a similar approach, Vornosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009) compared the effect of explicit and implicit feedback on Iranian students. Their explicit feedback (direct correction along with metalinguistic explanation) resembles, to some extent, Lalande's use of codes (as codes are considered metalinguistic form of feedback, Ellis, 2009b). The implicit feedback consisted of only providing the correct form without any further hints about its category. They found that students provided with explicit feedback made better performance than those with implicit feedback. They emphasized that providing "explicit correction of learners' errors may have triggered the learners' noticing of gaps between the target form and their existing interlanguage forms and this led them to restructure their interlanguages" (Vornosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2009, p. 92). In a somewhat similar approach, Shintani and Ellis (2013) focused on the effect of the use of direct correction only versus metalinguistic feedback on 49 low-intermediate ESL students' explicit and implicit knowledge of indefinite articles. They found that neither type had an effect on the students' implicit knowledge. Even though metalinguistic feedback was more effective in students' later revision, it did not work in texts finished later on in the following week. Yet, they emphasize that it could be "possible that reminding learners of the rule prior to subsequent writing tasks will help them to proceduralize it" (Shintani & Ellis, 2013, p. 301). Taking a different path, Zhang (2021) examined the effect of highly focused feedback versus mid-focused feedback on 58 EFL students. He found that "the highly focused and mid-focused groups significantly outperformed the control group on all outcome measures for regular but not for irregular past tense forms" (p.1). Zhang's findings resonate with Sheen et al. (2009) who also compared focused and unfocused feedback in an ESL context. Both focused and unfocused groups showed higher grammatical gains in comparison to the control group. Yet, the focused group had the highest gains in grammatical accuracy for the targeted grammatical structures (articles, copular be, the use of prepositions, and regular/irregular past forms).

Unlike the previous studies, Sachs and Polio (2007) focused on reformulation in parallel with error correction. They used three different methods in their research: "error correction, reformulation, and reformulation + think-aloud" (p. 67). The students provided with error correction performed more significantly than those provided with reformulation. Moreover, the students using reformulation only showed more significant results when doing revisions than those with think-aloud. Yet, there are two blurry points about this study. First, they added a control group later to the design of the study to reduce the possible effect of memorization once used by students. Second, they did not clarify what kind of error correction they gave (direct/ indirect or focused/unfocused). It could be fair to consider the SLA strand and students' attentional capacities they focused on that might affect their design

Focusing on the role of individual differences like language aptitude and motivation (Kormos, 2012; Robinson, 2001), some researchers explored the effect of these differences on students' uptake of different types of feedback (Benson & DeKeyser, 2018; Sheen, 2007; Shintani & Ellis, 2015). For example, Sheen (2007) examined the effect of direct only versus direct metalinguistic feedback on students' acquisition of English articles in connection to language-analytic ability (ALL). This study shows that "[s]tudents' score gains were positively correlated with their aptitude" (p. 247). Moreover, Sheen found that students with high LAA benefited more from metalinguistic feedback. Like Sheen, Benson and DeKeyser (2018) investigated the effect of different types of feedback (direct versus metalinguistic) on students' grammatical accuracy of acquiring past tense and present perfect tense as well as the effect of language aptitude LAA on mediating these two types of feedback. Both treatment groups performed better than the control group on these two grammatical structures. Their findings "lend some backing for the position that LAA is beneficial when learners have to work out the grammar rules for themselves" (p. 18). Yet, in contrast to Sheen, they found that direct feedback was more beneficial to higher LAA students than was metalinguistic one.

The role of language-analytic ability was also used by Shintani and Ellis (2015) to explore its effect on mediating written feedback. They examined how this ability can affect 118 Japanese college students' response to two grammatical structures, namely "past hypothetical conditional and indefinite article" (p.110). They used only direct feedback and only metalinguistic feedback. They compared the effect of providing direct feedback with direct revision, direct feedback without revision, metalinguistic feedback with direct revision, and metalinguistic feedback without revision. Their design was meant to measure the possible correlation and grammatical gains. Their results showed significant correlation for accuracy for indefinite articles for direct feedback without revision and for metalinguistic feedback with revision while that correlation for conditionals was found for direct group with revision and metalinguistic without revision. Even though there were correlations (weak and moderate), these correlations did not appear in the students' writing two weeks later. They

argue that in order for LAA to work, an interaction between three factors is essential (the targeted structure, the opportunity for revision or lack of revision, and the type of feedback).

Unlike other studies mentioned earlier, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) used a longitudinal design to examine the effect of direct error correction accompanied by oral and/or written metalinguistic comments on the use of definite and indefinite articles of 52 low-intermediate ESL students at a New Zealand university. Three different groups received feedback (error correction only, error correction with oral metalinguistic comments, and error correction with written metalinguistic comments) and a control group which received no feedback. The first post-test feedback was one week after the writing, the first delayed post-test was two months later, and the final post-test was six months later. The results of this ten-month span showed significant gains for all treatment groups. Yet, there was no significant differences among the treatment groups. Even though Truscott (2007) emphasizes that sometimes instruction is key in making differences in accuracy gains, the findings in this study show the opposite in that students receive similar teaching. In different studies, Bitchener and Knoch (2009), and Suzuki, Nassaji, and Sato (2019) examined direct feedback with and/or without metalinguistic explanations. They examined four groups: direct feedback with/ and without metalinguistic explanations and indirect feedback with/ and without metalinguistic explanations. The target structures of those low level 88 Japanese students (A2) were indefinite articles and past perfect. Their results show significant gains for direct feedback groups with and without metalinguistic explanations over the indirect feedback with metalinguistic explanations. Yet, these gains were only for the past perfect but not for the indefinite articles. In the following section, light will be shed on teachers' perspectives towards corrective feedback. It will show some theoretical and empirical standing as teachers are the providing actors of feedback.

2.7 Teachers' Perspectives on Feedback

One of the points that Truscott (1996, 1999) highlighted is teachers' inconsistency in providing feedback. This possible inconsistency can be attributed to teachers' perspectives and beliefs when providing feedback. This emphasis has attracted attention to explore feedback from the teacher-as-provider angle (K. Hyland & Anan, 2006; Lee, 2011). In her study of teachers' perspectives on the possibilities of adopting different feedback strategies in Hong Kong schools, Lee (2011) found that there are different institutional obstacles that teachers encounter when providing feedback. These obstacles can affect their perceptions and beliefs of how to balance the duty towards students and the institutional possibilities. She emphasized that:

> Feedback strategies cannot work without teachers' beliefs that the strategies can work or their readiness to innovate in their own classroom […], the implementation of change also depends on the support and autonomy teachers are given in their own work contexts" (Lee, 2011, p. 10).

K. Hyland and Anan (2006) examined how three groups' (native English-speaking teachers, native English non-teachers, and native Japanese teachers) "corrected an authentic text written by a Japanese university student" (p. 509). They found that "the Japanese teachers were far more likely to regard stylistic variations as errors, although the native English-speaking teachers were sensitive to features of formality and academic appropriacy" (p. 509). These results show that teachers' approaches to feedback are affected by their beliefs and priorities. Teachers' beliefs are stated to differ from their practices when providing feedback. In this respect, Roothooft (2014) revealed that there are notable discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and their corresponding practices. Despite focusing on oral feedback in an EFL context, Roothooft emphasized that one possible interpretation could be "teachers' concerns for their students' emotional well-being" (p. 74). These findings speak to the impact of possible inconsistencies in providing feedback and discrepancies between beliefs and practices. In light of this argument, Ellis (2009b) emphasizes that there should be guidelines for providing feedback that teachers can consult to better time and formulate their feedback and make it more productive. Surveying the literature, it is noted that more research needs to be done as different factors intervene whether being individual (language aptitude, learning style, beliefs of learners) or contextual ones (Ellis, 2010). Taking the Omani context and focusing on writing about literature, this study provides a contribution to the existing literature as this context has not received enough attention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quasi-experimental research design was applied to investigate whether written corrective feedback contributes to improving students' use of tenses. Two interventions were applied to improve the outcomes of the study, since interventions improve the dependent variables, as stated by Shadish, Cook, and Capbell (2002, p. 425). The purpose of this study is to find out the effect of two types of written corrective feedback on improving students' tense use in writing.

It is noteworthy to mention that in such studies, it is crucial to manipulate any expected threats to interventional internal validity to ensure that the casual effect was a result of the applied intervention. Hence, factors such as treatment implementation, homogeneity of the sample, sample selection, samples' history, and maturation were considered when setting the experimental plan, as will be discussed in the next sections. To ensure that this research is well-designed and prepared for application, the researchers conducted three online preparation meetings to discuss all the study elements. The study's proposal and the overall work were discussed in the first meeting. During the second meeting, the researchers distributed the work, discussed intervention issues such as the procedure of applying the intervention, including the materials that will be used in the study's intervention, the pre-test and pos-test, and the selection of the sample. The third meeting was for the final discussions and checking the readiness to embark on the study. Another meeting was conducted to review the findings and discuss the entire work before the final writing of the study.

3.2 Selection of Participants

Among the three sections taught by one of the researchers, the students from the three sections who participated in the study were selected using self-selection sampling. This method of recruiting a sample that is used in quasi-experimental research has two main advantages. First, it saves researchers time to recruit participants, especially if they meet the inclusion criteria. Second, the participants show commitment and willingness to continue their studies (Sharma, 2017). The researcher/teacher in this study followed this procedure to recruit the sample: a) he selected the three target classes to include in his sampling selection; b) ensured that the students in the three classes met the inclusion criteria; c) announced to the students the need to have samples for a research study; d) explained the role of the students and researcher in the study; and e) distributed consent forms to students who showed interest in participating in the study. The participants in this study were 45 ESL students in the BA English Language & Translation major who are currently studying at a higher education institute in Oman. The participants were assigned into three groups: the direct WCF group in one class (15 students), the indirect WCF group in another class (15 students), and the control group in a third class (15 students). The decision to apply two types of feedback was to enable the researchers to: a) measure the effectiveness of the intervention on the improvement of the students' language competence, b) compare the effectiveness of the intervention among the three groups, and c) suggest further research on the same area based on the results.

To ensure sample homogeneity and maintain internal validity, the 59 sample students was selected based on the following inclusion criteria: a) Students should be at the bachelor's level; b) Their ages should be between 17 and 22; c) Students should be enrolled in a literature course; d) And they had no language improvement courses in private institutions. In the consent form, students were asked if they had attended any language improvement courses to be excluded to avoid maturation as an external threat to intervention and internal validity that may affect the results of the study (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Further, additional ethical approval was needed from the institution itself to conduct the study.

3.3 Intervention Administration

The study consisted of three stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test was administered to all the participants to measure their baseline writing accuracy and proficiency. First, prior to the students' pretest, students were asked to select one out of three short kids stories between 15-21 pages written by Dr. Wafa Al Shamsi, a popular child and youth literature writer in Oman. Students were given 10 to 15 minutes to read the stories. Later, students in each group were given 40 minutes to write an informative essay of 250-300 words on the story they read. While the stories are written in Arabic, the students' mother tongue, they had to write the essay in English. They were asked to include the story's plot, characters, climax (if any), exposition, and resolution. Further, the students were asked to write a brief reflection and their opinions on the story in approximately 150-250 words. Their opinions on the story comprised the story's themes and its other linguistic, stylistic, and literary features.

Second, the writing of each student was evaluated and given written feedback in a specific linguistic area, tenses. The students in the experimental group were divided into two categories: the direct WCF group, who received explicit and immediate correction of their grammatical errors on their writing tasks. The written feedback to this group consisted of underlining errors, giving alternatives for corrections for some errors, crossing out some errors, adding "s" to third-person singular present verb forms. The participants in the indirect WCF group received feedback that indicated the presence of errors without providing specific corrections. The controlled group did not receive any feedback on their writing tasks. Next, students' errors were counted and recorded. Third, supportive and direct verbal feedback was given to the direct group for 15-20 minutes at the end of some lectures. The participants in the direct WCF group received explicit and immediate correction for their grammatical errors on their writing tasks, focusing on the tenses. Both collective and individual feedback on the common errors was given to students. Further, focused feedback was offered to individual students. They were invited to share their ideas and questions if there were any vague comments or points. This support was aimed to scaffold them to avoid repeating their errors and to improve their writing and language competence by focusing on the common errors. The participants in the indirect WCF group received written feedback that indicated the presence of errors without providing specific corrections. This support was expected to highlight the main errors that students should avoid repeating. The controlled group was not given any feedback on their written work.

Fourth, over a period of five weeks, students were asked to make two writing attempts and were evaluated by the same researcher to give them other written feedback. Further, they were asked to reflect on each story they read in approximately 150-200 words. In their reflection, they were asked to include their opinions on the story, the themes of the story, and any linguistic, stylistic, or literary features.

Fifth, at the end of the intervention period, students in all three groups were given a post-test written prompt following the same procedure that was carried out in the pre-test to compare the results of both tests. Each student was given another story to write about that was different from the one he or she wrote about in the pre-test. After collecting the written work from the students, they were evaluated following the same procedure of counting errors as in the pre-test.

It is important to mention that the students in the three groups were given same story to write about in the pre-test. In the post test, they were all given another story to ensure they are evaluated in the same story titles.

3.4 Data Analysis

Selecting to evaluate students' competence in tenses was a result of the observation of general students' errors in their writing. Further, this area of linguistics is expected to be improved by students with some support and guidance from the instructor. In addition, this

research is considered a cornerstone for further studies to improve other aspects of students' language competency in Omani contexts. The number of errors made by students in the pre-test was compared to the ones in the post-test in the three groups using SPSS one sample T Test. This comparison assisted in indicating the remarkable level and type of improvement in the students' language competency due to the application of the intervention in both the experimental and control group, as will be discussed in the next sections.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study attempts to answer these two research questions:

1. Does written corrective feedback lead to significant improvements in the tense use of ESL University Omani students majoring in literature, compared to a control group?

2. How does the type of written corrective feedback (i.e., direct vs. indirect) affect the accuracy of second language learners' tense use?

The writings of our study participants included different types of grammatical inconsistencies and mistakes. Samples from students' writings indicate that most errors happened in regards to subject-verb agreement. Below are some of these examples, taken from different groups in the pretest.

- She want attention from her parents.

- She forget to sit with her girl.

- Childrens needs their parents.

- She has actually spend her time to draw.

- The scene are not real.

- It have deep meaning.

- It seem like …

However, other grammatical mistakes include double subject such as "*Jojo she like panting and drawing see*" and "*the story it have a heading meaning or message*." Other issues include a) missing a subject as in "*I think this story is very nice, because* [it] *talk about …*;" b) wrong form of the past verb such as in "*She falled* [fell] *a sleep there*," [She] *talled* [told] *them that she want to be there forever*;" c) wrong form of a dangling modifier such as "*After she wondering and playing, she feels tired*;" d) double verb such as "*The story is givs us a great example*;" and, finally, e) wrong future tense such as "*Her family will always going to love her*" and "*They will never leveing her alone*."

We counted these mistakes and to report our findings, a one sample t test using SPSS was run to examine if any of the differences between the pre- and the post- tests were significant.

Table 1. Control Group

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Significance
Pre-Test	14.0667	15	7.14609	1.84511	
Post-Test	13.6000	15	7.52899	1.94398	.574

The results presented in table 1 above report the control group's performance on the pre-test and post-test. The mean score decreased from the pre-test (14.0667) to the post-test (13.6000), as seen in the table above. The tense use of the control group did not considerably improve with time without any feedback because this difference was not statistically significant (p =.574). These results also suggest another possibility: The control group's performance may have not been affected by any external factors, such as exposure to new material or instruction.

Table 2. Direct Group

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Significance
Pre-Test	15.2000	15	6.66762	1.72157	
Post-Test	8.1333	15	5.47549	1.41376	.002

The results reported in table 2 above indicate that written corrective feedback led to significant improvements in the participants' tense use. The significance level of .002 suggested that there was a statistically significant difference between the means. The pre-test's standard error of the mean was 1.72157, whereas the post-test's standard error of the mean was 1.41376; on the pre-test, the Direct Group's mean score was 15.2000, with a standard deviation of 6.66762, and on the post-test, the mean score was 8.1333, with a standard deviation of 5.47549. The observed difference in the means is unlikely to be the result of chance, as shown by the statistical significance of the data (p=.002), demonstrating the success of the written corrective feedback intervention. The standard error of the mean provides an estimate of the variability of sample means and suggests that the sample means are likely to be close to the true population mean.

Table 3. Indirect Group

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Significance
Pre-Test	13.9333	15	6.07650	1.56894	
Post-Test	10.8000	15	5.32112	1.37391	.025

The results presented in table 3 above indicate lower mean (10.8000) and standard deviation mean (5.32112) than these scores for the pre-test (Mean=13.9333, std. Deviation=6.07650). These differences were found to be statistically significant (p=.025). The statistical significance of the results—indicated by the significance level of .025—suggests that the written corrective feedback intervention has had a positive effect on the tense use of the student participants. The following section responds to the two research questions more specifically.

Does written corrective feedback lead to significant improvements in the tense use of ESL University Omani students majoring in literature, compared to a control group?

Our study finds that direct feedback as a type of WCF leads to the most significant improvement (p=.002) in the tense use of ESL Omani Literature students, compared to the control group. This study includes two other groups, the *control group*, which never received WCF and *indirect group*, which received marks on their errors, but no corrections were given. As for the tense use of the student participants in the control group, it did not advance with time without any feedback; the difference between the pre- and the post-test was not statistically significant (p =.574). As for the indirect group, the differences between the pre- and the post-tests were found to be statistically significant (p=.025) but less significant than the direct group (p=.002). The statistical significance of the results in both groups, the direct and the indirect, suggests that the written corrective feedback intervention successfully impacted the tense use of the student participants.

How does the type of written corrective feedback (i.e., direct vs. indirect) affect the accuracy of second language learners' tense use?

The types of WCF have been a focus for several researchers: Some studies have explored the effect of the direct versus the indirect feedback on the accuracy of student participants' tense use. Research on this topic has yielded mixed findings, with some studies suggesting that direct feedback is more effective (e.g., Sheen, 2007), while others have reported that indirect feedback is more beneficial (e.g., Lee, 2004; Russell & Spada, 2006). Our own study finds that direct feedback positively affects the accuracy of second language learners' tense use more than the indirect type. Such findings agree with several other studies that have investigated the impact of WCF on tense use among second language learners. For example, Bitchener and Knoch (2008) and Ellis and Sheen (2006) found that WCF leads to significant improvements in tense use. However, our study's findings disagree with the studies that did not find effect on students' tense use. These studies include Robb, Ross, and Shortreed (1986) who reported no significant effects of WCF on students' performance when it comes to the use of tenses in English. Such findings of our study lead to important pedagogical implications as follows.

5. Pedagogical Implications

The results of these findings have significant pedagogical implications. Firstly, it is crucial to provide feedback to enhance the writing skills of second language learners, as it directly contributes to their language development. Our study demonstrates that the control group, which did not receive feedback, did not exhibit substantial improvement in tense use over time. This highlights the indispensability of feedback in the learning process. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of considering the type of written corrective feedback (WCF) when providing guidance to second language learners. Direct feedback, which involves explicitly correcting errors, appears to be more effective in improving tense use. However, it should be noted that this approach can be time-consuming and potentially overwhelming for students. On the other hand, indirect feedback, which guides students to identify errors themselves, may prove more beneficial for developing other writing skills, such as content development.

Given these implications, curriculum designers should incorporate opportunities for students to practice using tenses and receive corrective feedback into their language learning materials. This inclusion ensures that learners have ample chances to engage with and refine their understanding of tense usage. Additionally, teachers should consider providing opportunities for students to receive feedback on various aspects of their writing, including grammar, vocabulary, and organization. These components are all vital for effective communication in a second language. By addressing these areas, educators can help students develop well-rounded writing skills and promote overall language proficiency.

5.1 Limitations

Our study has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, it is important to recognize that the study is specific to Omani literature students. Consequently, the generalizability of the results to other populations or writing skills may be limited. In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding, further research is necessary to explore the effectiveness of different types of written corrective feedback (WCF) in improving various writing skills among diverse second language learner populations.

Another limitation of our study is the relatively small sample size for each group. This smaller sample size can potentially restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results, and future studies with larger and more diverse participant groups would contribute to a broader understanding of the effectiveness of WCF. Furthermore, it is important to note that our study did not address other potential factors that could have influenced the students' use of tenses. For instance, we did not investigate the students' prior knowledge of the tense or the specific types of texts they were exposed to in their reading or writing activities. Considering these factors could provide additional insights into the development of tense usage in second language learners.

5.2 Future Directions

Future studies in the field could explore various aspects related to written corrective feedback and its impact on second language learners. Firstly, investigating the long-term effects of written corrective feedback on tense use would provide valuable insights into the sustainability of its impact over time. Understanding how learners retain and apply the feedback in their subsequent writing can contribute

to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback beyond explicit correction, such as peer feedback or teacher-student conferences, could uncover alternative approaches that facilitate tense use improvement while considering the potential benefits of collaborative learning and individualized guidance.

Researchers, moreover, could delve into examining the relationship between the use of written corrective feedback and other aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition or writing fluency. Understanding how these different components interact and influence each other can inform instructional practices that promote holistic language development. To enhance the generalizability of findings, future studies could employ larger sample sizes and incorporate additional variables that may influence the effectiveness of written corrective feedback. By considering factors like learner characteristics, language proficiency levels, or cultural backgrounds, researchers can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of feedback interventions. Finally, extending the scope of investigation beyond specific student populations and majors, as seen in our study with Omani literature students, would provide a broader perspective. Exploring how different student populations and academic disciplines respond to written corrective feedback can shed light on potential variations in its effectiveness and inform tailored pedagogical approaches for diverse learners.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of direct and indirect written corrective feedback on Omani literature students' use of tenses. The study was conducted with Omani students majoring in English literature. The study attempted to answer two research questions. The first question looked at the significant improvements in the tense use of ESL University Omani students majoring in literature, compared to a control group. The second question explored the differences between the two types of written corrective feedback (i.e., direct vs. indirect) when it comes to their impact on second language learners' tense use. The study used one sample t test using SPSS to answer these research questions. The study's findings were found to be consistent with previous research that has found mixed results regarding the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on second language learners' tense use. However, the study provides new insights by suggesting that direct feedback may be more effective than indirect feedback. We do not claim that our findings are generalizable to other populations or contexts, but we recommend further research to determine the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on tense use for other groups of second language learners in different contexts and for different student populations, especially in the Middle East.

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