



## Providing Indirect Corrective Feedback: A Technique to Reduce Errors in Students' Writing

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### Abstract

This experimental study aims at investigating the application of Indirect Corrective Feedback (ICF) in teaching writing recount text. The subjects of the study were tenth graders of SMAN 1 Meulaboh who are chosen randomly. The instrument used is writing tests. This study focuses on giving ICF on students' recount writing in terms of grammatical features of the text. Accordingly, there are eight error aspects included in the analysis; these are verb, noun ending, spelling, word form, word order, pronoun, missing and unnecessary word. The findings indicate that Indirect Corrective Feedback helps students to reduce errors in eight aspects. It is shown from the decreased mean score of errors in the post-test ( $\bar{x} = 12.17$ ) which was lower than the mean score of errors in the pre-test ( $\bar{x} = 27.07$ ). Verb was the aspect reduced mostly in students' recount texts (56) followed by word order (18), word form (16), spelling (14), pronoun (12), noun ending (11), unnecessary word (8), and missing word (3). From t-test analysis in the post-tests of both groups, this study found that t-counted was higher than t-table ( $1.823 > 1.68$ ). Thus,  $H_0$  was rejected. The result confirmed that Indirect Corrective Feedback can significantly improve the students' writing achievement by the reduction of errors.

**Keywords:** indirect corrective feedback, error, writing

### A. Introduction

English in Indonesia is considered as a foreign language. It is taught in formal education. Therefore, it is common for Indonesian students to face some difficulties in learning English due to some factors, for example, lack of vocabulary and learning strategies. One aspect of teaching and learning process is writing. Hence, writing is the skill needs to be learnt by the students. In the context of teaching English at senior high schools in Indonesia, particularly for first grade students, the students are expected to be able to write a simple recount text and understand the

social function, text structures and grammatical features of the text. Teaching writing for senior high school students aims to develop the students' competence in writing various types of texts from functional text to different text genres (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013).

Widiati & Cahyono (2016) agree that writing is considered a difficult skill in teaching and learning. The difficulty can come up from lack of understanding about grammar. Besides, the students are not interested in learning writing because they made the same errors. Oftentimes, teachers do not give error correction to the students' writing task. Teachers just put cross mark on the error part without providing the correct form. Most of them give writing assignment without any marks of correction to the students' work and there is no discussion of error in the classroom between the teacher and students before or after giving the writings back to the students (Hartono, 2010). In this situation, this present study assumes that teachers need to consider applying as corrective feedback that can utilize students' mistake by using correction codes on students' writing, so that they are informed of their mistakes and at the same time can improve their writing by correcting the errors based on the feedback.

Using corrective feedback helps the learners to improve students' grammatical accuracy of their text (Ferris, 2003). Students who wish to compose well in writing need a help in understanding and avoiding mistake in their writing since they need ways to know whether they are on the right track or not. The error correction can be done by providing correction symbols or by marking the error on students' writings. This way is called Indirect Corrective Feedback (Ferris, 2003). Riddel (2001) states that teacher can use correction symbols, underline the errors and write the symbols on students' writings to signify the mistakes. The students can do the correction by themselves. Many teachers believe that feedback should be provided through the use of error correction codes because this gives students the opportunity to look up their errors (Corpuz, 2011).

Some previous studies have investigated the use of ICF on students' writing and how ICF can help students to write better. Ferris & Robert (2001) explored the effect of indirect feedback on students' writings by dividing 72 English as Second Language (ESL) students into three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. The first experimental group students received coded feedback, and the second one received uncoded feedback. The control group students received no feedback. They found that students in the two experimental groups perform better than the control group students. The use of corrective feedback, both coded and uncoded, helps students to write better and do self-editing in five error categories: verb, noun, article, word choice and sentence structure.

Chandler (2003) examined two ESL undergraduate groups receiving direct corrective feedback in the control class and indirect corrective feedback in the experimental class. The feedback focused on grammatical and lexical errors. The result indicated that the application of indirect corrective feedback contributes more on students' self-editing for writing accuracy compared to the use of direct corrective feedback. Moreover, Pramana (2014) conducted an experimental study involving the employment of indirect corrective feedback on the descriptive writings of first grade students. The finding indicated an improvement of students' writing in five aspects: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanic. Mechanical aspect, which relates to spelling and punctuation, is the most correctable for the students among other aspects.

Although the investigation on corrective feedback has been conducted by previous studies, this study expanded the exploration to the grammatical error which focuses on the language features of a text genre; in this case is the features of language in a recount text. To find out the effect of Indirect Corrective Feedback on students' recount writing, this study posed this question: "Is there any significant decrease of students' grammatical errors by the implementation of Indirect Corrective Feedback?"

## **B. Literature review**

### *1. Writing*

According to Nunan (2003), writing is the process of thinking to construct ideas, thinking about how to express ideas into a good writing, and arranging ideas into statements and paragraphs clearly. It means that when learners want to write a good composition, they have to grammatically and structurally organize their ideas. In the context of teaching English at senior high schools in Indonesia, particularly for first grade students, they are expected to be able to compose descriptive, recount and narrative text. Hence, recount text is taken into account in this study. According to Derewianka (1990), recount text tells about sequential events occurred in the past. The general purpose of the text is to entertain readers. The text is developed in three

stages: orientation, sequent events, and re-orientation (optional). In this study, the experimental group students were introduced to the aspects of a recount text including the purpose, structures and language features. The ICF was given to indicate students' errors in writing based on the features of a recount text.

## 2. Error

Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) define errors as the deficiency of learners' oral or written language. The errors are deviating from the grammatical structures or rules of a language. In other words, error occurs because the learners do not know what is correct; hence, they find it difficult to do self-correction for the errors. Grammatical errors have been divided by Ferris & Robert (2001) into five categories; these are verb, noun ending, article, wrong word and sentence structure errors. In this study, the aspect of errors that is marked on students' writing follows the categories mentioned by Ferris & Robert (2001) plus the language features of a recount text based on Derewianka (1990) and Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop (2003). Therefore, there are eight aspects of errors involved: verb, noun ending, spelling, word from, word order, pronoun, missing and unnecessary word.

## 3. Feedback

In addressing grammatical errors on students' writing, teacher can use two types of strategies, Direct Corrective Feedback (DCF) and Indirect Corrective Feedback (ICF) (Ferris & Hegdcock, 2005; Hendrickson, 1984; Lalande, 1982). Direct Corrective Feedback is done by providing the correct forms right on the errors (Ellis, 2009). In other words, DCF is the provision of correct answer in responding to students' errors (Lee, 2008). Indirect Corrective Feedback, according to Lee (2004), refers to the situations when the teacher marks the errors that have been made but the teacher does not write the correct forms so that the learners diagnose and correct the error by themselves. Furthermore, Lee (2004) also distinguishes ICF with code and without code. This study used coded ICF by marking the errors and the types of errors

## C. Methodology

### 1. Research design

This true experimental study employed pre-test post-test only design involving one experimental group and one control group. The students in both groups were chosen randomly from the total population of 163 first graders of senior high school number 1 in Meulaboh, West Aceh. In choosing the samples, this study wrote each name of the first graders on a piece of paper. 163 names were written on 163 pieces of paper. The pieces were then rolled and put into a can. Afterwards, the can was shaken and the researchers took 60 rolled papers (about 36% of the population) randomly from the can. The sixty rolled papers were then divided into two groups; the first 30 names in the rolled paper were then listed as the experimental group participants, and the second 30 names as the control group participants. Students in the experimental group were given ICF, while those in the other group were not given ICF. Both groups were introduced to the aspects of recount genre.

To see if the use of ICF can significantly improve students' writing performance (significant decrease on the errors), this study formulated the hypotheses as follows:

- Ho : There is no difference in writing achievement between the students who are taught by using indirect feedback and those by using conventional way in terms of grammatical errors.
- Ha : There is a difference in writing achievement between the students who are taught by using indirect feedback and those by using conventional way in terms of grammatical errors.

### 2. Data Collection Technique

Test is the technique of data collection employed in this study. As an experimental study, this study conducted two types of test; these are pre-test and post-test. In the pre-test, the students were given a topic about "Idul Adha Holiday" with the length of words counted 100. Three-meeting treatment were given for the experimental students after the pre-test where the students were given error correction codes on their writings after they completed writing a simple recount text about "My Best Holiday". The tasks were then revised by the students and recollected by the researchers to be given the second error correction feedback. In the last

meeting of the treatment, the writing task with second feedback was returned and the students did the second revision. Post-test was then conducted by assigning students to write a recount text about "Unforgettable Experience".

### 3. Research instruments

Printed written instruction was created for the instrument used in pre-test and post-test. The instrument provides some instructions for students in both groups involving the topic and the length of recount text that they have to write, as well as the duration (in minutes) to complete writing the text. The instructions given in both pre-test and post-test were the same even though the assigned topic was different. The instructions used in the instrument are readable for the students, related to the topic of investigation of this study, and based on the curriculum of English subject for high school students. Hence, the instrument used in the tests is valid.

### 4. Technique of Data Analysis

An analytical framework based on Ferris & Robert (2001), Derewianka (1990) and Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop (2003) was created for analyzing students' recount writings. The error aspects investigated in the texts are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Error Code and Meaning**

Error type	Symbol	Meaning
Verb	V	All errors in verb tense or form, including relevant subject-verb agreement.
Noun Ending	NE	All errors in plural and possessive ending
Spelling	Sp	Incorrect or misplaced use of word
Word Form	WF	Error is forming word.
Word Order	WO	It occurs when there is incorrect use of the pattern of sentence, clause or phrase.
Pronoun	Pr	There is lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent or unclear use of pronoun reference. It relates to the use of pronoun as subject, object and possessive.
Missing word	Λ	Something has been left out and incorrect pattern without the word.
Unnecessary Word	X	Words or phrases that are useless or unnecessary in a sentence

For each text produced by students, this study marked the error by giving error code as indicated in Table 1. The number of error in students' texts was counted manually. Having this done, the frequency of error for each student was presented in a table. To calculate the differences of errors between the experimental and control group students, Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used.

### D. Findings and Discussion

The result from the statistical data analysis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Pre-test results from both groups**

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.512	.477	-1.188	58	.240	-2.800	2.358	-7.519	1.919
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.188	57.472	.240	-2.800	2.358	-7.520	1.920

Table 2 indicates that t-counted from the pre-test of both groups is -1.18. T-table for  $df = 58$  at the level significance 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) is 1.68. The result shows that  $c_{\text{counted}}$  is lower than  $t_{\text{table}}$  ( $-1.188 < 1.68$ ). Therefore,  $H_0$  is accepted and  $H_a$  is rejected. This has indicated that there is no significant difference in the pre-test results between the two groups.

Meanwhile, Table 3 shows that the statistical result of post-test from both groups.

**Table 3. Post-test results from both groups**

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.824	.368	1.823	58	.01	-2.333	1.639	-5.615	.948
	Equal variances not assumed			1.823	56.557	.01	-2.333	1.639	-5.616	.950

Table 3 shows that  $c_{\text{counted}}$  from the post-test of both groups is 1.823. The result of  $t_{\text{table}}$  with  $df = 58$  and significance 0.05 is 1.68. Hence,  $c_{\text{counted}}$  is higher than  $t_{\text{table}}$  ( $1.823 > 1.68$ ). Therefore,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_a$  is accepted. This finding indicates that there is a significant difference between the result of the post-test in the experimental and control groups. Students in the experimental group increase their writing performance by reducing errors after the treatment is given.

The following table presents that the description of error aspects in pre- and post-test.

**Table 4. Total Error Aspects and Error Reduction in Experimental Group**

Error Aspect	Pre-test	Post-test	Frequency of reduction
Verb	112	56	56
Word order	48	22	18
Word form	77	61	16
Spelling	48	34	14
Pronoun	34	22	12
Noun ending	29	18	11
Unnecessary word	21	13	8
Missing word	26	23	3

Total	388	250	139
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Table 4 presents the list of total error aspects found in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. In pre-test, the highest error is found in the aspect of verb, while in post-test, the highest one is word form. Meanwhile, the lowest error in both pre-test and post-test is on the unnecessary word aspect. The verb aspect, which is the highest error in pre-test, is indicated as the highest reduced error based on the analysis. This study also found that students of the experimental group were able to make reduction for all error aspects. This finding is in line with Ferris and Robert (2001), Chandler (2003) & Pramana (2014).

The following table presents the total error and reduction from control group.

**Table 5. Total Error Aspects and Error Reduction in Control Group**

Error Aspect	Pre-test	Post-test	Frequency of Reduction
Verb	123	80	43
Word order	55	21	34
Noun ending	43	9	28
Pronoun	37	8	28
Spelling	46	32	14
Unnecessary word	19	6	13
Missing word	31	22	9
Word form	66	74	-8
<b>Total</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>204</b>

As indicated in Table 5, verb is the highest error aspect in both pre-test and post-test undertaken by control group students. Nevertheless, verb is also the highest reduced error made by the students. Moreover, the lowest error in both students' pre-test and post-test is in the aspect of unnecessary words. Except for the word form aspect, students in the control group indicate an improvement in writing performance by showing reduction of errors on the other seven aspects. For the word form aspect, these students unfortunately increase the error as can be seen in Table 5.

## E. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that both groups of students increase their recount writing performance due to the treatment given to them. In other words, both groups can reduce errors in their writings. This study assumes that the involvement of genre aspects which were introduced to students in both groups help them to write better. However, the application of Indirect Corrective Feedback in the experimental group makes the improvement significantly higher than the improvement of students' writings in the control group.

Based on the results of the analysis of the tests, this study suggests future researchers to do a similar study which focuses more on the aspect of error that is less reduced, for example the word form aspect. Moreover, future researchers can also consider applying this feedback at different levels of students using different types of text.

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