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Effects of Teachers' Use of Direct and Indirect Feedback on Learners' Writing English Argumentative Essays

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Abstract:

The present study attempts to investigate the effects of teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback on learners' writing English argumentative essays in a context of the Mekong Delta. To achieve the aim of the study, 60 English high school teachers who participated in a 12-week- training course on English improvement. Direct/ Indirect feedbacks were used so as to affect the quality of writing argumentative essays. Feedback delivery centered on content, organization, grammar and spelling. The result showed that the learners benefited more from feedback on content and organization than feedback on grammar and spelling. The questionnaires result also showed that the learners had better attitudes on teacher's feedback which focus on organization and content rather than feedback on grammar and spelling. Furthermore, the learners from the interviews presented their positive attitudes towards teacher's feedback, either direct feedback or indirect feedback. The interviewees agreed that their writing argumentative essays' abilities had significantly improved in the content and the organization after joining in the training course.

Keywords: Direct and indirect feedback, argumentative essays

1. Introduction

English is an international language and its significance has been showed through increasing number of English learners in Vietnam. As acquiring English, one of the most difficult skills for learner is writing, especially writing an essay. Therefore, in this study, the researchers looked into the effects of the teacher's direct and indirect feedback on the learners' argumentative essay writing and learners' attitude towards the feedback in argumentative essay writing. The study hopes to be able to improve insights into enhancing the quality of teaching argumentative essays in a Vietnamese context.

1.1. Research Questions

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

- Does teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback enhance learners' ability in writing English argumentative essays?
- What are the learners' attitudes towards teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback on learners' writing English argumentative essays?

1.2. Significance of the Study

By conducting this study, the current study hopes that the teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback could bring about positive effects on learners' ability in writing argumentative essays. Learners hold positive attitudes towards teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Attitude

In this study, 'attitude' is defined as one's inclinations and feelings, prejudice or bias, pre-conceived notions, ideas, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic. Eagly and Chaiken (1971) state that the cognitive response is a cognitive evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's belief about the object. An effective response expresses an individual's degree of preference of an entity. Joy, love and happiness are three main factors that can be affected directly to one's attitude. Cacioppo (1994) considers attitude as the way to evaluate the perception of some person, object, or issue in general. It is endured in a particular period of time or after any activity. Aiken (1997) treats attitude as a response whether positively or negatively to a specific object, situation, institution, or person.

In this study, attitude is viewed as reaction that learners have towards teacher's direct and indirect feedbacks on writing English argumentative essays.

2.2. The Argumentative Essay

The argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the learners to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner. Teaching learners how to write argumentative essays successfully is a challenging task for the teachers. Writing teacher should provide learners with essential knowledge and skills such as knowledge of the mechanics of writing, command of the language system, knowledge of appropriate writing processes and understanding of the context and content of the genres of writing (Tribble, 1996). Embong (2011) states that 'Argumentative writing is undeniably important to language users' because language's use influences people's opinion, enlists people's support, changes people's behavior and asks for a direct action when it is presented effectively. However, many argumentative writing writers and learners still lack the ability to write an effective argument. Hinkel (2002) claims that in many Asian cultures, people are affected by Confucian philosophy in which people tend to reach consensus, just address public opinions and attempt to develop agreement among community members. These thoughts and behaviors are against Western argumentation which requires writers to formulate a person claim, arguing ability and rebuttals. However, the argumentative essay differs from the expository essay in the amount of pre-writing (invention) and research involved. The argumentative assignment is commonly as a capstone or final project in first year writing or advanced composition courses and involves lengthy, detailed research. It is not only call for extensive research of literature or previously published materials but also require empirical research where student collects data through interviews, surveys, observations, or experiments. Argumentative capacity is one of the most valued educational aims by the educators for the middle school and further learners. At the same time, educators often complain about the learners' weakness for constructing written arguments. Seyler (2008) suggests five basic characteristics of an argument: purpose, arguable issues, evidence, audience, and recognition of topic's complexity.

2.3. Direct Feedback and Indirect Feedback

This section highlights the importance of direct and indirect feedback. The term feedback means to describe the information that comes back from readers to the writer. The significance of feedback has been shown obviously in the writing procedure. There are many experts who has been identified these benefits. The first advantage is that learners will recognize whether they are performing well or not (Mi, 2009; Littleton, 2011). The second one is, thank to feedback, learners can correct and improve their writing performance (Getchell, 2011). Finally, Asiri (1996) presents that feedback is not only intended to help the learners manage their progress, but also stimulated them to take another's view and adapt a message to it. Nematzadeh and Siahpoosh (2017) state that two types of feedback have their important role in improving the learners' writing product. Moreover, according to Hino (2006), the appreciated feature of feedback is that it serves as a good indication of how EFL learners are progressing in learning the written language. As a result, the teachers can identify their learners' problem in writing performance. For more than a decade, second language (L2) writing teachers and researchers have dynamically discussed the value of written corrective feedback in L2 writing instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Participants

The participants were 60 female learners who have been teaching English in high school over 4 years in the Mekong Delta province. All participants were randomly chosen from four training- classes of the training course, held by the National Foreign Language 2020 Project. They were expected to be at the same level of English writing proficiency. They all got level B2 following Common European Framework.

3.2. Research Instruments

The two writing tests, pre-test and post-test and a questionnaire are used to find out the answers for the two research questions. A semi-structured interview at the end of the course to find out learners' attitudes toward the teacher's use of direct and indirect feedback.

4. Findings

4.1. Participants' Writing Performance Before and After the Study

In this study, sixty participants got involved in the study. Participants got direct and indirect feedback from the teacher during the writing course. The two writing tests were used to evaluate the participants' writing performance. The mean scores of those tests was calculated and compared.

Writing Test	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Pre-test	60	7.00	8.0	8.01	.37
Post-test	60	7.50	10.00	8.74	.46

Note. M=mean, SD= standard deviation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Pre-Test and Post- Test (SPSS Statistic)

As indicated in Table 1, the mean score of the pre-test is ($M=8.01$, $SD=.37$) is rather high in the ten-degree scale. The mean score of the post- test is ($M=8.74$, $SD=.46$) is high in the ten-degree scale.

The Paired Sample T-Test was run to compare the mean scores of the participants' writing performance before and after the study. The result is presented in the following Table.

Writing Test	MD	SD	t	df	p
Pretest& Post-test	-.73	.45	-12.34	59	.000
Organization (pre)& Organization(post)	-.11	.34	-2.43	59	.018
Content (pre)&Content (post)	-.55	.48	-8.79	59	.000
Spelling (pre)&Spelling(post)	-.04	.17	-1.93	59	.058
Grammar(pre) & Grammar (post)	-.03	.38	-.50	59	.616

Note. MD=mean difference, SD= standard deviation

Table 2: Participants' Writing Performance before and after the Study (SPSS Statistic)

As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2, the mean score of the participants' writing performance after the study ($M = 8.74$) was higher than that before the study ($M = 8.01$). The mean difference ($MD = -.73$) is statistically significant ($t = -12.34$, $df=59$, $p= .000$). The results support the conclusion that the participants' writing performance after the study was better than that before the study. The mean difference of the organization element of the essay ($MD = -.11$) is statistically significant ($t = -2.43$, $df=59$, $p= .018$). This can be concluded that the participants' writing performance on organization after the study was better than before the study. The mean difference of the content element of the essay ($MD = -.55$) is statistically significant ($t = -8.79$, $df=59$, $p= .000$). This can be concluded that the participants' writing performance on content after the study was better than before the study. The mean difference of the spelling element of the essay ($MD = -.04$) is not statistically significant ($t = -1.93$, $df=59$, $p= .058$). The results support the conclusion that the participants' writing performance on spelling after the study was not better than before the study. The mean difference of the grammar element of the essay ($MD = -.03$) is not statistically significant ($t = -.50$, $df=59$, $p= .616$). This can be concluded that the participants' writing performance on grammar after the study was not better than before the study.

In summary, in general, participants' writing performance after the study was better than before the study. Participants' writing performance on organization and content after the study was better than before the study. Participants' writing performance on spelling and grammar was not improved after the study.

4.2. The Participants' Attitudes on Direct and Indirect Feedback

In order to find out the participants' attitude on direct and indirect feedbacks, the questionnaires were delivered to 60 participants. First of all, the reliability of the questionnaire was checked. The result shows that the questionnaire is reliable to collect data ($\alpha = 0.811$)

After checking the reliability of the questionnaire, the Descriptive Statistic Test was run to calculate the mean score of the participants' attitude to teachers' use of direct and indirect feedbacks which were used by the trainers. The result is shown in the following table.

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
CONTENT	60	3.17	4.83	4.16	.34
ORGANIZATION	60	3.33	5.00	4.11	.39
SPELLING	60	2.67	4.67	3.53	.45
GRAMMAR	60	2.67	4.67	3.59	.51
TOTAL	60	3.43	4.64	3.93	.28

Note. M=mean, SD= standard deviation

Table 3: The Participants' Attitude on Direct and Indirect Feedbacks (SPSS Statistic)

As shown in Table 3, the overall mean score of the participants' attitude on direct and indirect feedbacks ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .28$) is so high, nearly reaching the scale 4- Agree in the five- point scale of questionnaire. This means that, in generally, most of the participants had a positive attitude on direct and indirect feedbacks. To be more detailed, a large number of participants thought that direct and indirect feedbacks helped them to improve their writing skill on content element ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .34$). On organization element, the participants also agreed that their way to organize an argumentative essay was enhanced by trainers' direct and indirect feedbacks ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .39$). Moreover, almost participants thought that their writing performance on spelling was not improved so much thanks to the teachers' feedbacks ($M = 3.53$, $SD = .45$). Furthermore, the mean score of the participants' attitudes on grammar element is not high ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .51$). This demonstrated that they did not agree that the direct and indirect feedbacks helped them to enhance grammar in their essay.

In summary, the participants agreed that, thanks to teachers' use of direct and indirect feedbacks, their writing performance was enhanced. It had an effect on all elements of an essay such as content, organization, spelling and grammar.

In order to gain deeper insight into participants' attitudes to direct and indirect feedbacks, the interview was conducted with six participants. They were in different levels (e.g. two people with high test score, two with average test

score and two with low test score). Six questions around attitude toward using direct and indirect feedback were asked the interviewees. The interviewer asked the interviewee some questions like how the teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback help you have the idea for your writing; how the teachers' use of direct and indirect feedback help you arrange and link your ideas for your writing. The results are presented as the following.

Most of learners with the high and average score stated that they really liked the way which the trainers gave direct and indirect feedbacks. Those kinds of feedbacks helped them to enhance the level of essay writing. All names are pseudo names. Cam Nhung stressed,

'I have more ideas about what I will write in my essay. When the trainer gives feedback, I can discuss my thoughts to my trainers. It makes my mind be brighter.'

Ngoc Han also said,

'Thank to the trainer' feedbacks, I know how to organize my idea in my essay as well as how to convince the audiences.'

My Thoa added,

'I really like the way the trainer gives feedbacks. It helps me to remember my error in spelling and grammar so that I never make those errors again.'

However, the low- test- score participants did not agree that the trainer's direct and indirect feedbacks helped them improve much on their writing performance. Bao Tran stated,

'The trainer's feedbacks are not very important to me. Sometimes, I can correct my errors myself or get the idea from my friends.'

Phi Yen also said,

'My idea of writing an essay about something usually comes from the internet, not from the trainer's feedback.'

In summary, this chapter reported the research findings through the data tools such as pre-test, post- test, questionnaires and interviews. All of the findings are to answer two research questions clearly. In the next chapter, discussion and conclusion will be presented to explain more clearly about those findings and give some implementations of the research.

5. Conclusions

The current research was designed to examine the effects of the feedback on the learners' argumentative essays. The findings of the study revealed that with the intervention in conducting the treatment, the learners significantly improved their writing performance on content and organization. They slightly improved their writing performance on grammar and spelling. In other words, the positive effects of the implementation of the direct and indirect feedback in different points of time on improving the quality of the learners' argumentative essay writing were observed. The results of the present study also confirmed the significantly positive improvement in writing argumentative essays in terms of content, organization, spelling and grammar. After the experimental course, English teachers felt more confident in their writing ability in comparison with the confusion and uncertainty in their writing before the course. The participants' preference of the feedback corresponded to the increasing needs of further exploring the approach in the future.

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