The Effects of Unfocused Direct and Indirect Reading Corrective Feedback on Reading Skill of Iranian Pre-intermediate EFL Students

Maryam Seyed Moradi*
Department of English, Farhangian University, Mashhad, Iran

Abstract: The purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of unfocused direct versus indirect reading corrective feedbacks on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. To perform this study, 81 Iranian eleventh grade high school students from Din & Danesh high school in Neyshabur, Iran, were non-randomly selected. They took Oxford Placement Test and 48pre-intermediate-levelstudents were assigned into two equal groups of *direct* and *indirect*. Then, both groups were given a reading pretest before the treatment sessions to determine the participants' reading skill at the beginning of the research period. During an18-sessions course, both groups were taught 9reading sections of *New Interchange for Pre-Intermediate Learners* as the main teaching material. Having finished the experiment, the learners in the both groups were given the reading posttest to evaluate their reading skill. Data were analyzed through a series of t-tests to compare the means of the pretest and posttest of both groups. The findings revealed that reading comprehension performance of both groups improved. However, the results showed that the *direct* group outperformed the *indirect* group at the significant level. Implications of the study suggest that unfocused direct reading corrective feedback can enhance reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners.

Introduction

Among the main ELT skills, reading comprehension is essential to L2 learning. However, there is a lack of familiarity with L2 reading due to several reasons, including the influence of comprehension-based approaches to L2 learning, the role of applied linguists, and the development of computer-based L2 corpora (Nunan, 2003). Reading comprehension is a complex skill to be taught to L2 learners since it requires coordinating several interrelated sources of information, determining the main idea of a text, identifying reference, inferencing, and recognizing vocabulary. Thus, many L2 learners have difficulties to gain mastery over it (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Having adequate reading proficiency entails the accurate and efficient understanding of written statements or texts (Mahfoodh, 2007).

Reading as one the main skills of English language is so important in a situation which English is taught as a foreign language. Practically, its importance is increasing when language learners who study English as foreign language further their academic education. The EFL learners need acceptable reading skill for acquiring knowledge and learning new information. In spite of the importance of reading skill in the Iranian educational system, some EFL learners' reading abilities are not good enough to achieve a good general proficiency in the language (Iranmehr, Erfani & Davari, 2011).

The L2 reading comprehension may be significant in the EFL context of Iran because the Iranian L2 learners need to gain a good command over it for academic education. There are different strategies for improving this skill in L2 classrooms. For that reason, the present study strived to reveal the effectiveness of unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedbacks on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners.

Feedback is defined as any data that provides information on the result of behavior. In teaching, feedback refers to comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other persons (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Indirect feedback is a strategy of providing feedback commonly used by teachers to help students correct their errors by indicating an error without providing the correct form (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Indirect feedback takes place when teachers only provide indications which in some way make students aware that an error exists but they do not provide the students with the correction. On the other hand, direct feedback is a strategy commonly used by teachers is direct feedback. Direct feedback is a strategy of providing feedback to students to help them correct their errors by providing the correct linguistic form (Ellis, 2008) or linguistic structure of the target language. Direct feedback is usually given by teachers, upon noticing a grammatical mistake, by providing the correct answer or the expected response above or near the linguistic or grammatical error (Ferris, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Although the L2 reading comprehension develops through using different reading corrective feedbacks, it is not clear that to what extent the feedbacks enhance the L2 learners' reading comprehension ability. Thus, the present study attempted at revealing the degree of the effectiveness of unfocused reading corrective feedbacks of direct and indirect on improving the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Several studies have examined the impacts of different strategies on developing reading comprehension of L2 learners (Aksan & Kisac, 2009; Fahim & Hoominian, 2014; Fahim & Sa'eepour, 2011; Hosseini, Bakhshipour Khodaei, Sarfallah, & Dolatabadi, 2012; Marzban & Davaji, 2015; Shanhan, 1988). However, to the best of researcher's knowledge, no research study has investigated the effectiveness of unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedbacks on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. Thus, in order to fill this gap in the literature on this matter, this study explored the possible effects of these feedbacks on the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

Literature Review

Almasi and Nemat Tabriz (2016) explored the effects of direct versus indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy. To do so, 80 Iranian learners of English were assigned into three groups direct corrective feedback (DF), indirect corrective feedback (IF), and no feedback (NF). During the treatment, the students in the experimental groups received comprehensive direct or indirect corrective feedbacks while the control group did not receive any feedback. After 10 sessions of treatment, the post-test of writing was administered to check the learners' writing development. Results revealed that DF group significantly outperformed the other two groups.

Salam and Raouf Moini (2013) investigated whether two types of written corrective feedback, indirect focused corrective feedback and indirect unfocused corrective feedback, produced differential effects on the accurate use of grammatical forms by high intermediate EFL learners. In this study, 54 female EFL learners formed two experimental groups and one control group. One experimental group received indirect focused written CF, and the other experimental group received indirect unfocused written CF for six weeks. The control group, nevertheless, received no particular feedback within this period. Results of performing ANOVA with post-hoc tests revealed the accuracy development of both experimental groups. However, unfocused group achieved the highest accuracy gain scores for simple past tense forms (copula past tense, regular past tense and irregular past tense) subject-verb agreement, articles, and prepositions. It was further found that unfocused feedback can contribute to grammatical accuracy but its long-term effectiveness is not quite as significant as its short-term effectiveness. The study also suggested that unfocused written CF reflects better teacher's objective as it views writing correction as a whole rather than as a way of practicing grammar.

Shooshtari, Vahdat and Negahi (2019) investigated the effect of direct and indirect unfocused written corrective feedback on the implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge as well as the writing grammatical accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in their new pieces of writing. To that end, 90 participants selected from a statistical pool of 380 EFL learners in seven private English language institutes were assigned into two treatment groups of unfocused direct and indirect WCF and one control group via random matching technique to receive the intended treatment. Five instruments, namely, Timed Grammaticality Judgment Test, Metalinguistic Knowledge Test, Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Test, Oral Imitation Test, and Writing Test were used to measure the probable learning gains in implicit/explicit grammatical knowledge and the writing accuracy of the participants due to the treatment. In turn, the statistical analyses of MANCOVA, MANOVA, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Although no significant difference was identified between the two types of WCF in learning gains, the results showed that these two types of instructional treatment helped improve the explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge as well as the writing accuracy of the participants.

Wen Kao (2013) attempted to assess different types of focused direct correction effects on learners' acquisition of the English article system. Based on Truscott's (2007) inclusion and exclusion criteria, six and five effect sizes are extracted for direct correction type and metalinguistic explanation type separately from seven focused feedback studies. Both direct correction and metalinguistic explanation have large positive effects on learners' ability to accurately use English articles in their writings in terms of long-term learning. This suggests that direct correction may be sufficient for students' acquisition of English articles.

Alavi and Kaivanpanah (2007) conducted a research study on exploring the relationship between feedback expectancy of Iranian learners of English and their level of education, achievement in English, and attitude toward peer and teacher feedback. The results showed that (1) feedback expectancy in higher levels of education is stronger; (2) a positive and moderate correlation exists between feedback expectancy and learners' English achievements; high achievers of English expect more feedback; (3) feedback received from teachers is more expected than from peers; (4) female learners sought more feedback from their peers and teachers than male learners. As providing language learners with clear feedback plays a crucial role in developing learners'

language abilities and helping them directly their learning, this study suggests language program developers and teachers to motivate learners to seek feedback from several sources.

Shea Lee (2014) investigated the effectiveness of different strategies of written corrective feedback in improving students' written accuracy. 20 students were recruited and divided into two groups, direct and indirect group. This study was conducted in 3 stages; pre-test, treatment, and post-test. Feedback was provided in treatment stage where group one students received direct corrective feedback while group two students received indirect corrective feedback. The results showed that students who received direct corrective feedback outperformed students who received indirect corrective feedback in the post-test. In addition, the results also showed that although the mean number of errors made by indirect feedback group did not decrease in post-test, the mean number of errors made decrease in their revised texts. Thus, it can be concluded that indirect corrective feedback was an effective tool in helping students retaining their language learning over a period of time.

Molavi, Ghaedrahmat and Entezari (2014) designed a research to see if there were any significant differences among the effect of explicit versus implicit recast as corrective feedback on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL learners. The participants under study were 45 Iranian seminary intermediate level EFL students studying English at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan, Iran chosen non-randomly among over 100 seminary EFL learners. the results of the study revealed that the formulated hypotheses for the study in hand could be safely rejected. In other words, the findings of the study revealed that explicit and implicit feedback both affect positively the vocabulary learning of intermediate seminary EFL learners.

Durham (2011) investigated external focus feedback for motor skill acquisition after stroke in his doctoral thesis. He believed that feedback an external focus of attention, about movement effects, has been found to promote motor performance in healthy subjects. This thesis adopted a mixed methods paradigm to explore the attention focus of feedback used by therapists. Where feedback was used it predominantly induced an internal focus of attention, about body movements. The next study compared feedback inducing an internal or external focus of attention during the motor performance of reach to grasp after stroke. Support was found for adopting an external focus of attention compared with an internal focus of attention, although an interaction between feedback type and order was also found. Finally, the influence of the level of arm and memory impairment on feedback type was explored. Neither the level of arm or memory impairment was found to influence feedback type. This study highlighted the complexities of providing feedback after stroke and suggests that adopting an external focus of attention may be beneficial to improving motor performance after stroke.

Wulf1, Chiviacowsky, Schiller, and Gentilini Ávila (2010) examined the hypothesis that feedback inducing an external focus of attention enhances motor learning if it is provided frequently (i.e., 100%) rather than less frequently. The results demonstrated that learning of the movement form was enhanced by external-focus feedback after every trial (100%) relative to external-focus feedback after every third trial (33%) or internal-focus feedback (100%, 33%), as demonstrated by immediate and delayed transfer tests without feedback. There was no difference between the two internal-focus feedback groups. These findings indicate that the attentional focus induced by feedback is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of different feedback frequencies.

Miçooğulları, Kirazcı, and Altunsöz (2012) conducted a research study by the title of the effect of internal, external and preference of attentional focus feedback instruction on learning soccer "head kick". In other words, the aim of this study was to investigate the effects of different types of feedback on learning soccer "head kick" of female adolescent. This study result's indicated that external focus feedback was more effective than internal focus feedback in terms of acquisition and retention of learning soccer head kick for students with limited amount of knowledge about this skill. This study also indicated that not only the source of attention but also control over to source of attention of preference was an important factor in the amount of retention.

Research Questions

   a) Does unfocused direct reading corrective feedback have any statistically significant effects on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?
   b) Does unfocused indirect reading corrective feedback have any statistically significant effects on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners?
   c) Is there any significant difference between the effects of unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedback in terms of reading skill of Iranianpre-intermediate EFL learners?

Methodology

Participants

81 Iranian eleventh grade high school students were selected from Din & Danesh high school in Neyshabur- a city in Iran, were selected. The pupils were non-randomly selected from of the high school. Then,

the students were given a version of OPT and 48 EFL learners who got the band score (15-30) of the test were considered as the pre-intermediate level students. The learners varied in age from 16 to 18 years old with the mean age of 17. Some of the EFL students studied English for an average period of 1.5 to 2.5 years, mainly through private language institutes in Neyshabur. Next, the participants were equally divided into two experimental groups. The participants, who were exposed to unfocused direct reading corrective feedback during teaching reading skill, were named the *direct* group. On the other hand, those who were taught reading skill through unfocused indirect reading corrective feedback were referred to as *indirect* group. Each group consisted of 24 students.

Instruments
OPT
The OPT (version II) was utilized in this research to verify the homogeneity of the participants' L2 competence. This test consists of three parts. Part 1 includes 40 multiple-choice questions that assess the L2 respondents' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. Part 2 contains other 20 questions on the same L2 components. Part 3 has a writing section, which requires the test takers to write a well-organized paragraph of 150-200 words to describe what their reasons are for choosing their specific university. The L2 respondents were given 80 minutes to complete the test.

Reading Pretest and Posttest
In order to evaluate the reading instruction for the EFL students and to measure the effectiveness of the treatments of the study, the pretest and posttest consisted of two reading parallel tests extracts from Nelson English language tests (pre-intermediate) were administered. This test consists of 50 items and two parts: part one with the first 14 questions in part two which included the next 36 items. The participants had 40 minutes to answer the questions. This test was regarded as reliable and valid test. Although the pretest and posttest were regarded as reliable instruments, to improve reliability of the tests, the researcher piloted the tests before the main administration.

Reliability of the Tests
The reliability of the pretest and posttest was estimated based on the scores from 15 participants similar in characteristics to target participants. The instruments used in this study demonstrated reasonable degrees of reliability.

Table 1: Piloting of the Tests

Instruments	Students Number	Items Number	'r'
Pretest	48	50	0.832
Posttest	48	50	0.709

Teaching Material
In the present study, 9 reading sections extracted from *New Interchange for the Pre-intermediate Learners* were selected. The materials were selected based on the language proficiency level of the learners.

Design
The design of this research study was non-equivalent group pretest- posttest quasi-experimental as random sampling is not viable. It was based on quantitative data collected from a sample OPT, a pretest and a posttest. The independent variables were the unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedback. The dependent variable was reading comprehension.

Procedure
Having selected the students, the second step in this study was to administer the pretest. The participants were pretested on the pre-intermediate level reading exam. The purpose was to verify that there was not any significance difference in the participants' knowledge of L2 reading prior to conducting the experiment. Thus, the researcher were enabled to assess and compare the impacts, if any, of using unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedback on the participants' reading skill. The third step was to administer the treatments. The participants in direct group were exposed to unfocused direct reading corrective feedback. On the other hand, the learners in indirect group were taught to unfocused indirect reading corrective feedback. The last step in this study was to measure the students' reading learning after the treatment sessions. In other words, the posttest was administered to the direct groups to compare the test's scores with the indirect group's scores.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the raw data and answer the research questions, a series of independent and paired samples t-tests were used as inferential statistics.

Results
Outcomes of the OPT Scores
Table 2: Results from the OPT

Range	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Elementary	24	7.241	2	18	0.557
Pre-intermediate	*48*	*18.241*	*8*	*28*	*0.675*
Intermediate	6	39.898	33	45	0.508
Upper-Inter	3	55.700	47	60	0.591

Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest

Statistical data provides the descriptive statistics of the two groups before using the treatment. Descriptive statistics of the reading pretest including number of students, mean score, standard deviation and standard error of measurement is presented in the following Table.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Direct	24	9.9333	2.96512	0.54135
Indirect	24	10.0000	1.83829	0.33562

The statistical results from Table 3showed that the number of participants in direct group was 24 and indirect group was 24 too. Results indicated that the groups were homogenous in terms of the pretest mean score.

Independent Samples t-test for the Pretest

In order to find out whether the difference among the performances of the two groups in the pretest was statistically significant, Independent Samples *t*-test was run.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test for the Pretest

Direct *vs.* Indirect	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5.731	0.020	0.754	46	0.324	0.544	0.655	-0.648	1.908
Equal variances not assumed			0.754	36.4	0.325	0.544	0.655	-0.648	1.913

Table 4provides the means of the two experimental groups' pretest analyzed through Independent Samples *t*-test before the treatment in terms of number of participants, means, standard deviations, standard error, lower and upper bounds. As shown in Table 3, since observed *t* (0.754) with df= 46 is less than the critical *t* (1.871), the difference between the groups is not significant at (p<0.05). This showed that the groups were homogenous before the research period at the pretest stage.

Descriptive Statistics for the Posttest

The reading scores are analyzed in Table 4 to find any significant difference between the two groups after the treatment.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for the Posttest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Direct	24	17.9943	2.18577	0.39508
Indirect	24	12.0618	2.11289	0.38661

Table 5 shows that the mean of direct group in the posttest wasgreater than the mean of indirect one. It revealed that direct group performed better in posttest in comparison with the pretest stage. On the other hand, indirect group did not perform better in posttest in comparison with the pretest stage. In other words, the experimental groups were not homogenous after the treatment sessions at the posttest stage.

Independent Samples t-test for Posttest
In order to find out whether the difference between the performances of the two groups in posttest was statistically significant, another independent samples *t*-test was run in Table 5.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test for the Posttest

Direct vs. Indirect	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.620	0.493	5.957	46	0.000	2.341	0.594	1.25	3.47
Equal variances not assumed			5.957	44.141	0.000	2.341	0.594	1.25	3.47

Obtained results from Table 6 indicated that the observed *t* (5.957) with df= 46was greater than the critical *t* (1.871).Thus, the difference between the groups was significant at the posttest stage ($p<0.05$). The difference between the pretest and the posttest of direct group was significant. Generally speaking, the results showed that the posttest of direct group was significantly different from the posttest of indirectgroup. On the other hand, the pretest and posttest of indirect group indicated that there was no much difference between them.

Paired Samples t-test for Pretest vs. Posttest
In order to find out whether the difference between the performances of the two groups were statistically significant, the following paired samples *t*- test (pretest vs. posttest) was applied, and the results of the test were interpreted from the two values of observed *t*. Since the descriptive statistics cannot show the significant difference between the groups, paired samples t-test as inferential statistics was run in Table 7.

Table 7: Paired Samples t-test Pretest vs. Posttest

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Direct (Pre & Post)	-2.30	2.42	0.44	-3.208	-1.39	4.987	23	0.000
Pair 2	Indirect (Pre & Post)	-0.56	2.16	0.39	-1.37	0.24	-2.054	23	0.060

Statistical results obtained from Table 7 indicated that observed *t* (4.987) with df= 23was greater than the critical *t* (1.699). Thus, the difference between the two tests were significant (p<0.05) for direct group. Based on the obtained results of pair 2, the observed *t* (-2.054) with df= 23was less than the critical *t* (1.699) for indirect group. Thus, the difference between the pretest and posttests was not significant (p <0.05) for indirect group. In other words, the mean of indirect group in the pretest is approximately as the same as the posttest of the group.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis procedure, the results of the current study revealed that unfocused direct reading corrective feedback did have statistically significant effects on reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners. On the other hand, unfocused indirect reading corrective feedback did not have significant effects on reading skill of the learners. In sum, there is significant difference between the effects of unfocused direct and indirect reading corrective feedback in terms of reading skill of Iranian pre-intermediate EFL learners.

Discussion of the Findings

The obtained results from the present study are in lines with the following studies:

a) Almasi and Nemat Tabriz (2016) explored the effects of direct versus indirect corrective feedback on Iranian EFL learners' writing accuracy. Results revealed that direct corrective feedback group significantly outperformed the indirect corrective feedback group.

b) Salam and Raouf Moini (2013) investigated whether two types of written corrective feedback, indirect focused corrective feedback and indirect unfocused corrective feedback, produced differential effects on the accurate use of grammatical forms by high intermediate EFL learners. Results revealed that unfocused feedback can contribute to grammatical accuracy but its long-term effectiveness is not quite as significant as its short-term effectiveness.

c) Shooshtari, Vahdat and Negahi (2019) investigated the effect of direct and indirect unfocused written corrective feedback on the implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge as well as the writing grammatical accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in their new pieces of writing. Although no significant difference was identified between the two types of WCF in learning gains, the results showed that these two types of instructional treatment helped improve the explicit and implicit grammatical knowledge as well as the writing accuracy of the participants.

d) Wen Kao (2013) attempted to assess different types of focused direct correction effects on learners' acquisition of the English article system. Based on Truscott's (2007) inclusion and exclusion criteria, six and five effect sizes are extracted for direct correction type and metalinguistic explanation type separately from seven focused feedback studies. Both direct correction and metalinguistic explanation have large positive effects on learners' ability to accurately use English articles in their writings in terms of long-term learning.

e) Shea Lee (2014) investigated the effectiveness of different strategies of written corrective feedback in improving students' written accuracy. The results showed that students who received direct corrective feedback outperformed students who received indirect corrective feedback in the post-test.

Limitations

The selection of the participants of this study was limited to the availability sampling of 48 Iranian pre-intermediate EFL female students in a high school school. Thus, the findings of this investigation may lack generalizability to other age groups of L2 learners with different English proficiency levels.

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