Effect of Implicit Written Corrective Feedback on the Writing Skills of ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Background. Providing learners with written corrective feedback (WCF) on their writing is crucial to the ESL learning process.

Purpose. This research is aimed at examining the effects of indicating errors as implicit WCF on the writing skills of ESL learners, as well as identifying learners' perceptions towards its use in their essay writing.

Methods. This is a mixed methods research involving the gathering of data both quantitatively and qualitatively. By means of a purpose sampling method, 50 ESL learners from a private university in Selangor, Malaysia were selected for this study. They underwent a two-week training period during which they were taught to self-correct their essays based on errors indicated as implicit WCF by their lecturer. This also included a pre-test and a post-test administered in between. Finally, 10 respondents were interviewed to gain their perceptions on the use of this technique as implicit WCF in their writing.

Results. The results showed that the students achieved a slightly significant improvement in their essay writing skills. They also had a positive perception of the use of the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF in their essay writing.

Conclusion and Implications: In conclusion, error indication as implicit WCF is effective for enhancing writing skills, and the ESL learners perceived it positively. This present study contributes fundamental pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research. ESL instructors are encouraged to adopt and apply this technique in their composition writing lessons.

KEYWORDS

error indication, self-correction, implicit, corrective feedback, autonomous learners

INTRODUCTION

Giving and receiving corrective feedback is one essential aspect of teaching and learning process in the ESL classroom. It is one of the strategies used by educators to improve their students' learning and academic performance. Corrective feedback administered can either be in the form of oral or written feedback. Previous researchers have classified the types of corrective feedback (CF) into different categories. Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified feedback into three main categories i.e., direct feedback (explicit correction), prompt (metalinguistic clue, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request) and implicit feedback (recast). On the other hand, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) categorised feedback into two main types: direct or explicit, and indirect or implicit feedback. The main difference between this feedback rests on learners' awareness of their understanding of something (Godfroid et al., 2015). In indirect or implicit feedback, teachers do not inform the students about their errors explicitly but use specific codes to indicate the type of errors, in order to prompt students to brainstorm, search, and fix the errors (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Teachers may offer feedback by underlining or circling the error, showing where the error has occurred using a code and what type of error it is, or stating in the margin the number of errors (Baleghizadeh

& Dadashi, 2011; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). In direct or explicit feedback, actual corrections are given overtly by the teacher by crossing out unnecessary sentences, words, phrases, or morphemes or inserting a missing one (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Conversely, using a prompt, the teacher can encourage learners to think about the error, while not providing the correct form (Ito, 2015). In short, prompts involve using a variety of signals which encourage learners to self-correct (Lyster, 2002).

Providing appropriate corrective feedback to students in a timely and constructive manner is crucial for enriching their abilities towards self-direction. This can involved application of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) and scaffolding to students' learning. Lyster and Saito (2010) contend that corrective feedback (CF) functions as important scaffolding which teachers need to provide to learners for continuous second language growth. The usual approach is for teachers to provide successive levels of temporary support, in order to boost students' comprehension and skills acquisition. These supportive strategies are incrementally removed when they are no longer needed. Then the teacher gradually transfers more responsibilities over the learning process to the students. This sociocultural theory of cognitive development by Lev Vygotsky (1934) requires teachers to adjust the level of his or her help in response to the learners' level of performance. Gradually, students are given the responsibilities to take charge of their own learning, since success in the 21st Century learning requires knowing how to learn. Similarly, it is especially beneficial for ESL learners to acquire the productive language skills of speaking and writing.

In any educational context, ESL learners are expected to gradually acquire good writing skills and achieve commendable linguistic competence. This skill is especially important in tertiary education where learners are required to engage in a wide range of academic writing. Good writing skills are judged on linguistic accuracy. ESL learners are expected to use correct grammar and syntax, and suitable vocabulary in their academic writing. However, this is easier said that done for many learners. Hence, CF is important for students to appreciate mistakes made in writing. It helps give them clear guidance on how to improve their flaws. Furthermore, feedback can also boost students' confidence (Martin & Alvarez Valdivia, 2017), self-awareness (Miller et. al.,2017), and motivation (Taskiran & Yazici, 2021) in learning a second language. In short, the importance of CF to ESL learners are numerous.

Written corrective feedback (WCF) can be categorised as: focused vs. unfocused WCF; direct vs. indirect WCF; and explicit vs. implicit WCF (Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013). Past studies have examined various types of WCF, including overt correction (direct WCF), underlining (indirect WCF), error code, metalinguistic explanation (metalinguistic WCF), etc. This study employs indirect or implicit WCF by Bitchener and

Ferris (2012) to examine the significance of its implementation on the targeted group of ESL learners' writing skills. This strategy integrates indirect or implicit feedback with self-correction as an implicit WCF. It is a correction method used to indicate errors, such as by underlining or circling the errors or using symbols or codes which will guide students to self-correct their errors (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Mohebbi, 2013; Hoesseini, 2014). This is a suitable technique for self-correction, since this type of feedback prompts learners to identify the errors they make and correct them on their own. Self-correction is a form of indirect feedback where the teacher provides alternatives to learners but the learners themselves have to work out the correct form (Bitcher et al., 2005). There is no description provided in the feedback, since students are meant to discover their own errors. This type of corrective feedback will encourage learners to repair their own errors, causing them to think, and apply their existing schematic knowledge in the learning process. This will then promote self-directed learners in the ESL classroom. This is a form of discovery learning, implying that learning is more internally driven than externally driven (Maftoon, Shirazi, & Daftarifard, 2010). Learning through self-discovery paves the way for learners to produce language meaningfully and develop their linguistic competence.

Limited studies have been conducted on indirect or implicit WCF. Hyland (2010) contends in his review that there has been very little research conducted on "how students actually engage with feedback and how feedback shapes their writing processes, revising practices and their self-evaluation capacities" (p. 179). This is supported by Linh (2018) who asserts that there is very limited body of research focusing on indirect written corrective feedback. Furthermore, Rouhi et al. (2018) claims that there is still inadequate evidence on which specific feedback strategies are effective in enhancing the accuracy of second language (L2) learners' writing. Thus, in response to this gap in literature, this present study aims to examine the effects of a lecturer's indirect or implicit WCF (indication of errors by underlining or circling the errors) on ESL learner's writing skills. It also aims to test the research hypothesis that there is a significant difference in students' essay writing scores after treatment using the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF. This present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

a. Does error indication as implicit WCF effectuate a significant improvement in the writing skills of learners?

b. What are learners' perceptions towards the use of error indication as implicit WCF in their essay writing tasks?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of research studies have been conducted on the effects of direct and implicit written corrective feedback (WCF) on students' speaking (Shamirim & Farvardin, 2016;

Rama-dhani, 2019; Lasmi, 2020) and writing skills (Alavi & Amini, 2016; Westmacott, 2017; Karim & Nassaji, 2018; Nemati et al., 2019; Sultana & Yoko, 2021). The findings of these previous studies are varied and inconclusive. In addition, findings relating to comparison of corrective feedback type on enhancing learners' writing skills is also inconclusive. A number of researchers claim that written corrective feedback is effective in improving students' L2 writing (Fer-ris 1999, 2006; Bruton 2009, 2010; Chandler, 2009), as opposed to arguments by Truscott (1996) that it is ineffective and harmful. Other studies found that there is no significant difference in terms of effectiveness between direct and indirect WCF. Evidently, "a lot of researchers and practitioners have extensively investigated WCF role within the framework of second language acquisition and L2 writing" (Ene & Kosobucki, 2016). However, no conclusive results have been obtained (Yi, 2019).

Evidently, a review of 35 primary studies reveals that written corrective feedback can bring about improvement in L2 written accuracy (Lim & Renandya, 2020). Many recent research findings also approve the effectiveness of WCF on writing skills (e.g., Westmacott, 2017; Karim & Nassaji, 2018; Nemati et al., 2019; Sultana & Yoko, 2021). Alavi and Amini (2016) who investigated the effects of two different corrective feedback techniques, namely recasts and elicitation, found that elicitation was more effective than recasts. Many researchers confirm that it is beneficial for long term learning improvements, because it boosts student engagement and attention to forms, allowing them to problem solve (Ferris, 2003; Lalande, 1982). This is supported by Kisnanto's (2016) finding that direct WCF is effective for improving the writing accurance of university students She examined the effect of direct and indirect WCF on students' L2 writing accuracy. The results of the writing tests revealed that participants who received direct WCF experienced a statistically significant improvement in their writing accuracy, when compared to students who were given indirect WCF. Similarly, the findings of Hamid et al (2018) also ascertain that corrective feedback is a useful editing tool. They explored the effect of colour as a form of corrective feedback on EFL learners' writing and relationship of such feedback with learners' performance in EFL acquisition. This study revealed that colour used in corrective feedback was found to be effective in increasing the awareness of learner, thus improving the writing performance of learners.

Pakbaz (2014) found an equally positive effect of giving both types of written corrective feedback on the written work of learners. There was no statistically significant difference between the implicit and explicit groups on their correct use of the specified structures. This is supported by Babanoğlu, Ağçam and Badem (2018) who also found that there was no statistical superiority of explicit and implicit WCF over each other. Similarly, Wahyuni (2017) discovered that there was no significant difference in the writing quality of students who received direct corrective feedback and those who received indirect corrective feedback. The findings also showed that the cognitive styles of students did not have any influence on the effect of different feedback on writing quality. This is an important finding, but it requires further examination, since the results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all ESL learners.

In contrast, Ariyandi (2018) compared academic performance in writing skills between students who were taught using indirect written correction and those were not. He found that indirect correction technique was more effective for teaching writing skills. On the other hand, Poorebrahim (2017) compared the effects of two types of indirect corrective feedback - indication and indication plus location. This involved two groups of learners and revealed significant difference between the two groups in error reduction from the original draft to the revision stage. However, there was no significant difference in terms of accuracy of the new pieces of writing. It was found that error reduction at the revision stage should not be considered as learning. The study implicated that "more explicit feedback is better for revising purposes while more implicit feedback is good for learning purposes" (p. 184). Certain studies found that indirect corrective feedback seemed to be effective in helping the learners to improve their linguistic accuracy of grammatical errors (Jamalinesari et al., 2015). The findings of the above studies substantiate the inconclusive findings in past literature concerning the effectiveness of direct and implicit WCF.

Previous studies have shown that students have different per-ceptions on the usefulness of the different types of correc-tive feedback and which feedback they prefer for their learn-ing. However, the findings are also inconclusive and there are limited studies conducted in this field of research espe-cially in Malaysia. Some past studies (e.g., Lee, 2009; Black & Nanni, 2016; Khalil Jahbel, et al., 2020) show that students prefer direct error correction. For instance, Moham-mad and Rahman's (2016) findings showed that majority of students wanted lecturers to provide correction or feedback for the mistakes on their writing and they preferred lecturers to mark their mistakes and give comments on their work. This finding is supported by Khalil Jahbel, et al. (2020) who found that students had high preferences towards written correc-tive feedback. Bozkurt and Acar (2017) support Mohammad and Rahman's (2016) and Jahbel, et al.'s (2020) findings that students preferred getting explicit feedback to their written work, however, they were aware that implicit feedback led to more awareness, exploration, autonomy, and self-improve-ment. Chandler (2003) claims that students accept that they learn more from implicit feedback and benefit more from self-correction. This confirms the findings of Ferris and Roberts' (2001) that students preferred implicit feedback for error rectification, and they valued the feedback specifically implicit correction from their teachers (Saito,1994). In the contrary, Umer, Ahmad and Soomro (2018) found that students believed direct written feedback provided by teachers and saw it as effective for improving writing

skill. They perceived direct face-to-face interaction as more productive than indirect feedback, due to a failure to understand the comments or the symbols used by their teachers.

The contradictory findings from past studies may be due to several factors which influence the preferences of students for corrective feedback. This includes important demographic factors such as age, educational background and linguistic proficiency. These are all factors which can influence how students like their errors to be corrected (Lee, 2009). In addition, the field of interest of students may also affect their preference for feedback. For example, certain students prefer feedback on grammar while others need feedback on content and ideas (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Nevertheless, further examination is needed on issues such as "the problems inherent in the provision of corrective feedback, the differential effects of various types of feedback, the conditions under which the effect of feedback can be maximised, and the issue of uptake" (El-Tatawy, 2002, p. 12). Storch (2010) indicates that research findings are still inconclusive, although many of the inadequacies of earlier research have been largely addressed. She suggests that "future research on WCF needs to be conducted in authentic classrooms, so that the feedback is given within the context of an instructional program" (p. 43). In providing WCF, she recommends that future research take into consideration the writing goals or learners and their attitude to grammatical accuracy. Taking Storch's (2010) suggestions into consideration, the present study is expected to offer new insights and knowledge on these issues, especially relating to the effect of the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF on learners' writing skills in an ESL classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This present study employed a mixed methods research design wherein two research methods were used for data collection and analysis. For the quantitative data, a single group pre-test and post-test design was used. The pre-test and post-test results were compared to measure the improvement in the writing skills after treatment. "This design attempts to use the subjects as their own controls and to eliminate the need for a control group design. This design is sometimes referred to as a 'repeated measures' design because subjects are observed or measured twice on the dependent variable" (Seliger & Shohamy, 2008). The main advantage of using this design is that it controls several extraneous variables which can affect the homogeneity of subjects when more than one group is employed (Seliger & Shohamy, 2008). Next, a qualitative research method using a structured interview was employed to determine the perceptions of participants regarding the treatment, based on error indication as implicit corrective feedback in writing. The combination of both methods complements the flaws

of each research method and thus, generates richer data, more reliable and specific results. Also, this study was conducted in an authentic classroom environment, wherein the participants remained in their lecture room during the experiment.

Participants

This study applied a purposive sampling method. Participants were a class of 50 final year Bachelor of Education in TESL (BTESL) students at a private university in Selangor, Malaysia. The age range was between 23 to 26. Academically, the majority of them had obtained a good cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.5 and above. Generally, their English proficiency level was upper intermediate. All fifty students participated in the treatment, pre-test and post-test, while only ten were selected for the interview session with the researcher.

Instruments

Essay Writing Tests (Pre-Test and Post-Test)

Essay writing tests were the first instruments used in the data collection. They were employed to gather data which answered the first research question: Does lecturer error indication as implicit WCF effectuate a significant improvement in the writing skills of learners? A pre-test and a post-test were conducted, in order to examine the differences in their total writing scores before and after the treatment using implicit WCF (lecturer error indication and learner self-correction of essay writing). During the Pre-Test, the students were asked to write a short essay of about 200 words in 30 minutes entitled "The advantages of using Twitter for its users". Together with the essay question, four main points (access information, social interaction, share moments, create awareness) were given as guidelines for the students to use in their essay writing. They were also encouraged to use their own ideas to elaborate the essay. For the post-test, the students were also asked to write a short essay of about 200 words in 30 minutes entitled "The advantages of using Facebook for its users". Four main points (access information, social interaction, share moments, create awareness) were also given as in the pre-test. Students were required to use them in their essay with the addition of their own ideas to expand the essay. Both written scripts obtained from the pre-test and the post-test were evaluated by two independent raters based on the scoring rubric for writing test adopted from Jacob et al. (1981). This rubric was employed in this study because it is one of the most frequently used and reliable profiles for ESL composition rating (Lee et al, 2008). Furthermore, it is a suitable scoring rubric that offers a clear undertaking of what and how to score the composition consistently based on each writing element graded by the lecturer (Turgut & Kayaoğlu, 2015). The improvement

was examined by comparing the essay writing scores that the students obtained in the pre-test and post-test.

Independent Raters

Two lecturers with a Master of Education in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) were selected as independent raters. Both raters have more than five years experience in teaching TESL subjects. They were briefed about their roles as raters by the researcher and the rubric was explained to them. Importantly, a pilot study was conducted, in order to test interrater reliability of the two raters' scores. The intraclass correlation coefficient analysis showed that the raters' pre-test scores had moderate inter-rater reliability of .67 while the post-test scores had good reliability of .84.

Interview

For the qualitative data collection method, a structured interview was used to enable the selected participants to share their thoughts and opinions about the focused topic. There were eight structured interview questions (Appendix 1) in total, related to their perceptions on the use of error indication as implicit WCF. This interview was mainly to answer Research Question 2 - What are the learners' perceptions towards using the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF feedback in their essay writing tasks? The findings would support the data and findings obtained from the students' essay writing tests. Using purposive sampling method, ten respondents were selected randomly for the

interview session. All interview sessions involving the ten interviewees were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the data analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

The systematic data collection procedures used in this present study are illustrated in Figure 1.

A pilot study was conducted involving 30 actual participants in the study a week before the treatment. After the pilot study, the pre-test was administered to a class of 50 final year BTESL students. They were given 30 minutes to complete the test. They were required to write a short essay of about 200 words, entitled "Advantages of using Twitter for its users". The pre-test scripts were collected and photocopied in two sets to be given to each of the independent raters to evaluate. The original copies of the pre-test scripts were used for the first treatment. Figure 2 shows the framework of the treatment process.

The first session of the treatment process began immediately after the pre-test. The remaining 20 students who were not involved in the pilot study were asked to write their essays based on the same essay topic, "Advantages of using Twitter for its users." Therefore, all the 50 participants participated in this first treatment. Next, the lecturer administered the implicit WCF (Lecturer's indication of errors by underlining or circling the errors) to all the 50 pre-test scripts during his free time after the lesson.

Figure 1
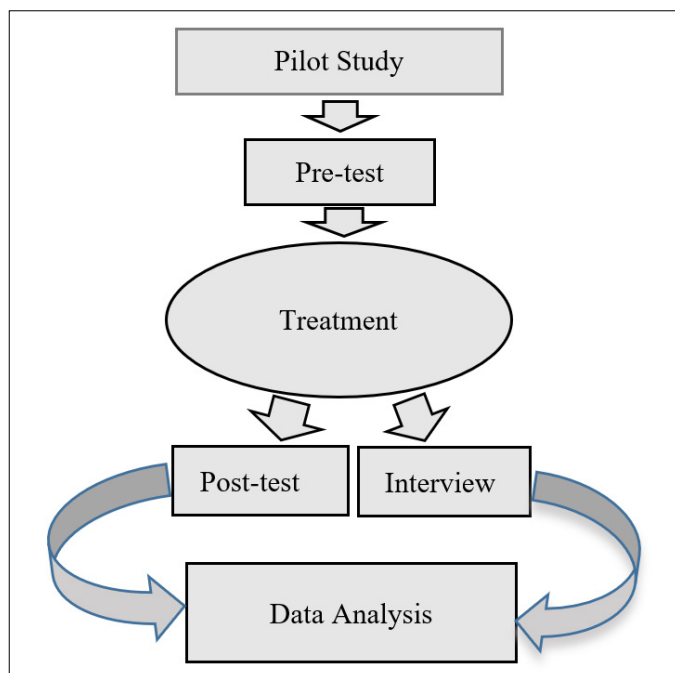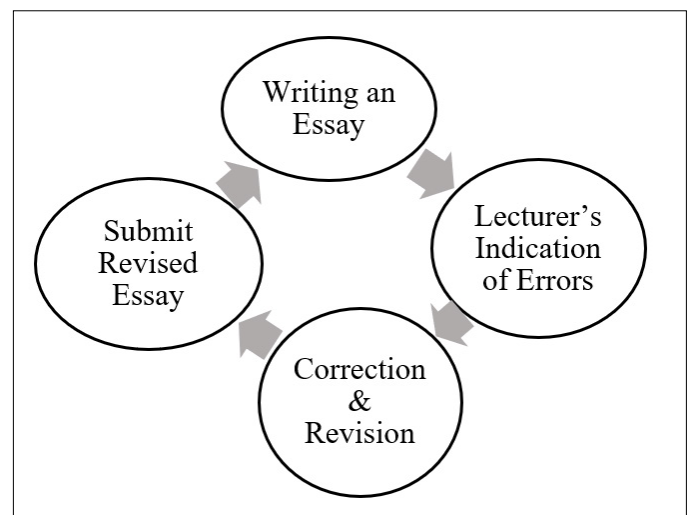*The Data Collection Procedures*

Figure 2
The Treatment Process

In the second session, the lecturer returned the pre-test scripts to the students with indicated errors. They were given 30 minutes to do the correction and rewrite the entire essay. After completing the self-corrected essay, the students submitted it to the lecturer. Then, the second essay topic and its main points - "Ways of reducing stress" (have a hobby, watch television, exercise regularly, talk to a friend) were distributed to all the students. The same process was conducted whereby students were required to write an essay of about 200 words in 30 minutes and submit the completed copy to the lecturer. Similarly, the implicit WCF was administered to the students' writing scripts during the lecturer's free time.

In the third session, the lecturer handed the second essay scripts with the errors indicated back to the students for correction, rewriting and submission of the corrected essays to the lecturer. After that, the lecturer gave a new essay topic and its main points - "Benefits of using social media" (make friends, social interaction, relieve stress, share posts) to the students. The same process was being conducted as in session 2 above for session 3 and session 4. In the fourth session, the students were asked to write the final essay about "The importance of the internet" (obtain information, do research, watch videos, gain knowledge). The steps of the treatment are summarized in Table 1 as follows:

All 50 participants participated and completed their essays in all the four sessions of the treatment. After the treatments had been conducted four times in two weeks, the post-test was administered to examine the improvement in the writing skills of the learners. This time, the students also wrote a short essay of about 200 words in 30 minutes, but a new topic was given, entitled "Advantages of using Facebook for its users". All 50 students participated and completed their essays in this post-test. The same procedures were applied as in the pre-test whereby the essay scripts were collected, photocopied in two sets, and given to each of the independent raters to evaluate. The final scores in the pre-test and post-test were compared to ascertain if there was any significant difference in their essay writing scores after the implicit WCF had been administered.

After the post-test, a structured interview was conducted. Ten students were chosen at random for the interview session with the researcher. The structured interview instru-ment was also used as a pilot test with two participants from among the actual participants chosen. This pilot testing will enable the researcher to recognise vagueness and unclear interrogations concerning answers for required corrections (Kerlinger (1986). The reliability of the instrument was justified by the results of the pilot testing whereby the two participants did not face any difficulties in responding to all the interview questions. The questions merely focused on student perceptions towards the lecturer's indication of errors as im-plicit WCF in their essay writing tasks. One example of the interview questions (Appendix 1) includes "From your own experience, state two improvements that you have achieved after receiving the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF in your writing task." The interview sessions were re-corded and then transcribed to be analyzed for the research findings.

Data Analysis Procedures

Both the pre-test and post-test were rated by two independent raters based on the analytic scoring rubric for writing test, as adopted from Jacob et al. (1981). This rubric contains certain constructs to guide the independent raters when giving marks for the pre-test and post-test scripts written by students. The descriptions for every level of achievements were stated so that the raters could mark the students' scripts efficiently. An average score was calculated, in order to ascertain the final scores of both the pre-test and post-test. Finally, the final scores which students obtained in the pre-test and post-test were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 Paired samples t-tests were run to examine the significant difference. Therefore, the results would finally reveal whether the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF is significantly effective for enhancing the essay writing skills of student.

Lastly, the interview sessions involving the ten students were recorded and later transcribed. The interview transcription was analyzed using thematic analysis as employed by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). In the analysis process,

Table 1

The Steps of the Treatment Process

Step 1:	All 50 participants write the essay based on the topic given
Step 2:	The lecturer administers the implicit WCF (The lecturer only circles or underlines the errors made by the students. He neither corrects nor provides them with short comments in the scripts).
Step 3:	Students do self-correction. (The students are requested to do self-correction based on the elicited errors and then, revise their essay scripts)
Step 4:	Students submit their self-corrected essay to the lecturer.

the views given by the interviewees were categorized into themes and codes. In addition, an operationalisation table was constructed to identify the frequency of the same responses being repeated by the participants. This method was followed closely to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the interview.

RESULTS

Does the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF lead to a significant improvement in the writing skills of students?

The essay writing test scores obtained by all 50 students in the pre-test and post-test were computed for data analysis. Then, paired sample t-tests were run to examine whether there was any significant difference between the essay writing final scores in the pre-test and post-test. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2 below.

No outliers were detected. The difference in scores for the pre-test and post-test were normally distributed, as assessed by the visual inspection of a Normal Q-Q Plot. Table 1 shows that students were able to increase their essay writing scores slightly in the post-test after the treatment, by using the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF (M = 15.58, SD = 1.617) when compared with before the treatment in the pre-test (M =13.30, SD = 2.082), a statistically significant mean increase of 2.28, 95% CI [1.828, 2.732], t (49) = 10.13, p = .001, d = 1.43. The mean difference was statistically and significantly different from zero and, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The research hypothesis was accepted as there was a statistically significant difference between the students' essay writing scores before and after the treatment. Besides, based on Plonsky & Oswald (2014),

d = 1.43 shows a large effect value denoting a high practical significance of the difference. Hence, the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF had lead to rather significant effects on the writing skills of students.

What are the learners' perceptions towards using the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF in their essay writing tasks?

The interview sessions involving the 10 selected respondents were transcribed manually. After that, the transcriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis as employed by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). Table 3 shows student responses during the interview sessions. These were classified into themes and codes, in order to obtain a clear understanding on their perceptions and to ease the qualitative analysis. Based on these themes and codes, the frequency was determined to ease the analysis of the research findings.

Table 3 shows that the students perceived positively the use of lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF in their essay writing tasks. All 10 participants believed that lecturers are the most qualified individuals to give feedback. In addition, they concurred that errors should be corrected immediately after receiving the indication of errors from their lecturer. According to 7 participants, this would enable them to identify the nature of the errors. For example, participant 1 expressed this by saying, *"Yes, the errors made should be corrected. From there, we are able to notice the mistakes that are commonly made by us and at the same time, we could improve our writing skills."* All 10 students also indicated that they could improve their writing skills after receiving the treatment in their writing tasks. The Majority (9) also believed that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF helped them to reduce and avoid common errors. This was

Table 2

The Comparison of Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test Essay Writing Scores

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Post-test	15.58	50	1.617	.229
	Pre-test	13.30	50	2.082	.295

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Post-test-Pre-test	2.28	1.591	.225	1.828	2.732	10.13	49	.001

Table 3

Thematic Analysis of the Interview Transcriptions

Themes	Codes	Frequency
Qualified feedback provider	Lecturers	////////// (10)
	Peers	/ (1)
Need for immediate correction	To identify the error type	/////// (7)
	Avoid repeating errors	/// (3)
Improvements in writing	Improve writing skills	////////// (10)
	Identify and correct errors	/// (3)
	Reduce/avoid common errors	///////// (9)
	Use wider vocabulary	// (2)
Good understanding of language components	Classification of errors	/////// (7)
	Discovery learning	/// (3)
Able to assess own progress	More aware of errors	////////// (10)
	Monitor writing development	////////// (10)
It enhances learning	Meaningful learning	////////// (10)
	Increase knowledge	/////// (7)
Need for feedback discussion	Get clarification	////// (6)
	better understanding of error type	/// (3)
Frequency of elicitation	Often	//////// (8)
	Not too often	// (2)

perceived positively by participant 5, *"Firstly, I would say I am improving a lot with my grammar. Secondly, I believe, it would be the sentence structure as I can now construct longer sentences."* It also enables a good understanding of a language component learned as majority (7) of the interviewees perceived they were able to understand the classification of errors.

Notably, the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF helps students assess their own progress in writing. All 10 interviewees explained that it enabled them to become more aware of their own errors and monitor their writing development. In the words of participant 8, *"Yes, I become more careful of the possible errors that I may make in writing specifically on grammatical items."* All of them also claimed that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF enhanced learning, since it could lead to meaningful learning. 7 of them believed that it could increase their knowledge. This was perceived confidently by participant 3, *"It helps me to enhance my learning because basically the concept of this feedback actually drives students to learn and explore learning by their own. This kind of learning definitely helps me to discover more and learn better..."* As suggestions, 6 interviewees commented on the need to discuss feedback orally during the correction phase, in order to obtain clarification from their lecturer. The majority (7) of interviewees suggested the implementation of this technique in their writing tasks

to be conducted more often, as expressed by participant 5, *"Yes. From my point of view, lecturers should start implementing this technique more often so that the learners would appreciate the need of self-learning."*

DISCUSSION

The present study achieved its objective. The findings ascertained that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF had a significant effect on the writing skills of ESL learners. There was a slight improvement in the essay writing skills of ESL learners after the treatment. The students were able to obtain a slight mean increase in their post-test essay writing scores. Therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted, since there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test essay writing scores of learners, and the difference had a high practical significance. This finding is supported by Ariyandi (2018) who found that the indirect correction technique was more effective for teaching writing skills. This is because it boosts students' engagement and attention to forms and enables them to solve problems, which is essential for long-term learning improvements (Ferris, 2003; Lalande, 1982). Baghzou (2014) as cited in Farrokhi and Sat-tarpour (2012) states that some researchers think that error feedback is useful for improvement in the writing skills of students. However, contradic-

tory findings were also found by several past studies (e.g., Poorebrahim, 2017; Wahyuni, 2017) on the effects of indirect WCF in improving writing quality. Lim and Renandya (2020) found that WCF can boost L2 writing accuracy, while both direct and indirect feedback can benefit learners. This is supported by Kim et al. (2020) who also found that both feedback types were effective for promoting learning of new linguistic features through collaborative writing. With the limited available studies on the effects of implicit WCF on writing skills, this present study has contributed new finding to the body of knowledge. The lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF is proven quite effective in improving ESL learner's writing skills.

The findings from the qualitative analysis revealed that most of the interviewees had a positive perception of the use of the lecturer's indication of errors in their essay writing. They were convinced that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF had contributed to the improvement of their writing skills. The lecturer's indication of errors during the treatment had provided learners with important knowledge and writing skills as they self-corrected their own work. This is consistent with Cahyono and Rosyida's (2016) claim that teacher feedback helps improve the quality of student writing. Recent studies (e.g., Babanoğlu, Ağçam & Badem, 2018; Lim & Renandya, 2020) also indicate that written corrective feedback (WCF) is effective in improving the grammar of learners. A study by Babanoğlu, Ağçam, and Badem (2018) revealed that learners who were given treat-ment of WCF made more progress in learning English prepositions than the control group. This is further supported by Lim's and Re-nandya's (2020) finding that written corrective feedback had the potential to improve L2 grammatical ac-curacy. During the interview, the students also explained that their ability to identify and correct errors improved after the lecturer's indication of errors in their essays. The majority acknowledged that they were also able to reduce and avoid common errors in their writing. This finding supports Schmidt's noticing hypothesis theory (2001) which says, "for something to be learned, it has to be noticed first" (p.13). However, Schmidt argues that noticing by itself does not lead to acquisition. Therefore, he postulates that input can become intake for L2 learning when learners pay conscious attention to or notice the input" (p. 13). This is because such corrective feedback encourages learners to notice the gaps between target norms and their own inter-language (IL), thus facilitating grammatical restructuring (Schmidt 2001, p. 13). Schmidt rationalizes that the errors made by second language learners are part of the learning process, and that drawing attention to them is a key part of their language development.

Written corrective feedback is very beneficial in the learning process. After the lecturer's indication of errors as implic-it WCF is administered, the students commented that er-ror correction must be performed instantly. They believed that error correction would help them identify the nature or types of errors which they had committed.

Furthermore, some of them claimed that the same errors would not be repeated. Through their lecturer's feedback, students will know their mistakes and they will be able to self-correct. Self-correction requires students to identify the erroneous sentences. This active engagement of students will result in a better performance in their writing task and learning in general. In the long run, this helps develop self-confidence and enhance their learning. They claimed that it led to meaningful learning and increased their knowledge. They also confirmed that it helped them monitor their own writing development. This is supported by studies which showed that language learners were able to improve the accuracy of a particular piece of writing based on the feedback provided. Then gradually they could construct long and complex sentences (e.g., Ashwell, 2000; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris, 1997; Fer-ris & Roberts, 2001). Learners learn from mistakes. Hence, without feedback, students will never get to know their own mistakes in the first place. They will be left puzzled and eventually as time passes they will no longer be concerned by errors. This can lead to the petrification of those errors. As they self-assess their own progress in the writing task, they notice important aspects in their writing. Furthermore, interviewees also believed that the lecturer's indication of errors enabled them to become more aware of the common errors in their writing. This is consistent with Kubota's (2001) finding that the number of errors of different categories in student writing diminished as a result of self-correction through self-help resources.

The lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF also functions as a self-assessed learning strategy, helping students discover their own errors in essay writing. As they successfully grasp the type or nature of errors in their writing scripts, the writing process is made easier, since error correction can be done more accurately. As mentioned by the students in the inte-view, they activated their prior knowledge most of all when they saw the errors in their writing. With the efforts that they are making to self-correct their errors, "it allows students to be the 'architects' of their own learning" (Makino, 1993) and enhances their learning autonomy (Westmacott, 2017) by allowing them to take charge of their own learning. This will mould them into autonomous learners.

The majority of participants claimed that lecturers are the most qualified persons to provide feedback on their writing tasks. A wide range of previous works support this find-ing, for example Fatemeh and Hossein (2017). Even though the use of implicit WCF in the present study does not empha-sise the provision of any specific comments on the errors students make in their writing, the mere indication of an er-ror in the writing task is sufficient as lecturers are always the reliable persons to highlight the error. Fatemeh and Hossein (2017) state that the feedback given by the teach-er is considered more 'qualified', 'experienced', 'accurate', 'valid', 'reliable' and 'trustworthy'. They argue that with the teachers' expertise mainly in the linguistic field, they know

exactly the weakness of the students. Thus feedback is given to ensure that students are aware of it and through the lecturer's indication of errors, students will gain the curiosity to learn and explore more independently. Especially when it comes to identifying their own mistakes. This will drive them to self-correct their errors without assistance from the lecturer.

Finally, the majority of the interviewees proposed that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF should be con-ducted more often in an ESL classroom. However, despite the participants' positive perception towards this form of WCF, they felt that there is a need to discuss the feedback orally with the lecturer during the correction phase. They reasoned that oral feedback is beneficial in terms of clarification from their lecturer after error indication. As stated by all interviewees, lecturers are the most qualified individuals to administer the feedback for clarification and guidance in the learning process. They also believed that if they consulted with the lecturers, they would receive better explanation and definite insight into their own weaknesses. Moreover, they asserted that if the oral feedback was given by the lecturer, they would be able to obtain a better understanding of the types of errors. The findings from previous studies support the positive idea expressed by the interviewes of providing oral feedback. For example, Agricola et al. (2020) found that students had positive perceptions towards verbal feedback from teachers. In addition, Merry and Orsmond (2008) and Van der Schaaf et al. (2011) asserted that students respond more positively to verbal feedback than written feedback. Therefore, the combination of oral feed-back and implicit WCF can be explored in future studies.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

An implication of this study is that the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF is beneficial in an ESL classroom for enhancing writing skills of ESL learners. It is applicable as a form of scaffolding particularly for composition writing. When a teache or lecturer indicates errors, students gain the confidence to identify their own errors and do self-correction. Hence, this learning method enables learners to resolve a writing task and achieve a learning goal by exploring the learning process on their own and thus, develop their own learning experiences. In other words, this process teaches learners to be autonomous in their learning. Fatemeh and Hossein (2015) state that minimizing the number of errors and self-correction are beneficial to high achievers. Therefore, it recommended that ESL teachers and lecturers adopt and apply this technique in their composition writing lessons.

Nevertheless, this present study has its own limitation. First, the participants of this study were only the final Year BTESL students who mostly had an English proficiency level of upper-intermediate. Additionally, only a small sample size of 50 participants participated in this study. Therefore, the results might not be relevant to other contexts and population of learners. It is recommended that future research be conducted involving a bigger sample and learners with pre-intermediate or intermediate English proficiency level, in order to generate better contrasting effects of the treatment. Thirdly, the single group pre-post design employed for the quantitative data analysis has its own weaknesses. One of the primary disadvantages of using this design is that other external variables such as incidental exposure to the second language outside classroom may affect performance (Seliger & Shohamy, 2008). However, this unexpected extraneous effect is beyond the control of the researcher. Fully exper-imental research can be conducted in future by employing a control group design. This will enable performance of two homogenous groups: - the experimental and control groups, can be compared to examine their improvements and more impactful findings obtained. Finally, the treatment for the present study was only conducted for four sessions within a period of two weeks. Future longitudinal studies need to allocate longer time to allow for more sustained treatment (Storch, 2010) and this may obviate the influence of extraneous variables on the performance.

In conclusion, the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF is a quite effective method for enhancing the writing skills of ESL learners. The participants also embrace a positive perceptions towards its use in their essay writing in the classroom. With the lecturer's indication of errors, which serves as a prompt for self-correction, students can identify the type of errors that they have made in their essays, and thus improve their writing skills. It also enables students to reduce and avoid common errors and monitor their own progress in writing. Furthermore, it can promote meaningful learning by enhancing the learning process and increasing knowledge. Hence, educators should consider adopting this technique as a beneficial method for administering implicit WCF to boost writing skills in a second language classroom.

CONCLUSION

The present study has revealed a quite positive effect of lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF on the writing skills of ESL undergraduates. A slight improvement in their essay writing scores was evident in the post-test after the treatment period. The lecturer's indication of errors, which serves as a self-correction learning strategy and a scaffolding for writing tasks, is also perceived positively by the ESL learners. These findings are quite significant contributions to the body of knowledge in a second language acquisition. Thus, lecturers and teachers are encouraged to exploit this technique for administering implicit WCF to the writing

tasks of their students in the current L2 classroom. Students should be given wider opportunities to practice self-awareness, self-learning, self-correction, and self-evaluation to shape and develop them into autonomous learners. Since the current education system is gearing towards producing high quality future graduates and a generation who are creative critical thinkers, students and undergraduates should be given more opportunities and exposures to shape and develop their own learning experiences. Therefore, lecturers and teachers should slowly reduce direct WCF in the classroom, since the traditional spoon-feeding approach is no longer relevant. The lecturer's indication of errors technique and other forms of indirect WCF will enable educators to actively implement student-centric teaching and learning approach in a contemporary L2 classroom environment.

Future research may conduct similar research with a different sample of participants, especially involving the pre-intermediate or intermediate proficiency students. Better impact of the treatment using the lecturer's indication of errors technique can be obtained if students with lower English proficiency level are used as participants in the study. Since the present study focuses only on implicit WCF, future research can also be conducted to investigate the effects of incorporating both oral and written corrective feedback on the writing skills of students. To obtain more impactful results, future studies may need to conduct a fully experimental study using a control and experimental group design. This may also require more rigorous preparation and data collection procedures. The lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF is yet to be perceived wholly by learners, hence, conducting more future research in this field of study would be highly beneficial and imperative.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

F. Subon: Conceptualization, data analysis and interpretation of results, writing, reviewing & editing the final version of the manuscript.

N. A. Ali: Preliminary data analysis & interpretation of results & writing first draft.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. Who do you think is the most qualified individual to provide feedback?
2. Should errors be corrected immediately after receiving the indication of errors from your lecturer? Why?
3. From your own experience, state two improvements that you have achieved after receiving the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF in your writing task.
4. Has the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF promoted deep understanding on the language component learned? If yes / no, why?
5. Does this the lecturer's indication of errors technique help you to assess your own progress in writing? How?
6. Do you think the lecturer's indication of errors has helped to enhance your learning? If yes / no, why?
7. During the correction phase, did you feel like you need to discuss the feedback orally with the lecturer or you prefer to do it by your own? Why?
8. Would you suggest the lecturer's indication of errors as implicit WCF to be used often in any writing task as part of learning and acquiring English language? If yes / no, why?