



# An Investigation of the Effects of Three Post-writing Methods: Focused Feedback, Learner-oriented Focused Feedback, and No Feedback

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## Abstract

There have been inconclusive results regarding the issue of feedback and no feedback to student compositions. The present study investigated potential differences in the effect, on writing accuracy, of focused meta-linguistic feedback, learner-oriented focused meta-linguistic feedback, and mere writing practice on overall accuracy in Iranian EFL writings. Because of dramatic student attrition and two failures in the data collection phase which was due to lack of student commitment to performing the tasks, the study involved three groups: a) experimental A (33→9) who wrote on topics, received feedback, and kept edit logs and error tally sheets; b) experimental B (33→7) who only received feedback; and c) control (33→6) who merely wrote on topics. The results indicated that all the three methods are almost equally ineffective to accuracy improvement of student writings in the targeted areas, thus refuting claims for the effectiveness of both feedback and no feedback methods.

**Keywords:** focused CF; meta-linguistic feedback; writing accuracy

## 1. Introduction

It is Saturday midnight, academia Fantasia has ended, and throughout the block the last lights flick off, all but one that is. A single orange light blooms in the darkness. It is the English teacher, weary-eyed, cramped of leg, hand and brain, sifting listlessly, but doggedly through piles of essays, circling, correcting, marking, grading, commenting, and worrying about what he has just written. Will my learners understand and be able to effectively use my feedback? Will they learn from my feedback for future writing? What if they have difficulty? How will I know? Has my feedback helped them to become better writers? What if my feedback has alienated them from writing? What can I do? How can I finish marking before my learners bug me for their essays? The fifth cup of coffee grows cold and bitter. Just one more essay. And then one more. And then...

(Adapted from Goldstein, 2004, p: 63)

One of the many challenges language researchers and teachers have long dealt with is if and how to remind EFL/ESL student writers of the errors they frequently make so as to prevent those errors from recurring in students' future writings. Feedback is known as the response to the efforts made by the learner to communicate. It plays a major role in helping learners to test hypotheses they have formed about the system of the target language (Keshavarz, 2008). Both the emphasis Long (1969) puts on the role of feedback in language acquisition (cited in Ellis, 2004), and the fact that majority of language learners desire teacher feedback (Walsh, 2006; Ferris, 1999), as well as weak writing skills of students at language institutes further highlight the significance of studying corrective feedback (CF), hence the incentive of the present researcher in conducting this study.

In addition, although the study of written feedback goes back to the 1960s to the early works of researchers such as Truscott (1996) and many studies have been conducted in this area, the research evidences so far have been inconclusive regarding the appropriateness of feedback. There have been a lot of debates regarding this issue the hottest of which is the debate between Truscott and Ferris [Truscott, J., 1996. The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning* 46, 327 to 369; Truscott, J., 1999. The case for "the case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes": a response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 8, 111-122; Ferris, D. R., 1999. The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing* 8, 1-10]. Myriad of studies have been performed in an effort to disclose the secret, to name just a few, Truscott (1996), (2004) and (2007); Hyland (1998); Ferris and Roberts (2001); Ferris (1999) and (2004); Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005); Guenette (2007); Truscott and Hsu (2008); Ellis, Sheen and Takashima (2009), and Alghazo, Bani

Abdelrahman, and Abu Qbeith (2009). However, no conclusive comments have been possible so far. One possible reason as Hyland and Hyland (2006) commented is that "It is difficult to draw conclusions and generalizations from the literature as a result of varied populations, treatments, and research designs of the researches conducted. Sheen (2007) also noted that L2 writing research investigating CF has suffered from a number of methodological limitations (e.g. lack of a control group as in Lalande, 1982; and Rob, Ross & Shortreed, 1986, as cited in Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009), the mother tongue of the participants; focus of instruction; the demands put on the learner in the course of the study; duration of the treatment; the level of comprehensiveness of error corrections; and the measure of assessment. Another reason may be variation in learner performance in different occasions. As Bitchener (2008) commented, regardless of the type of feedback provided, learners perform differently across different writing occasions, more accurate in one but less in the other.

The present study is, thus, another effort to shed further light on this issue through comparing the effectiveness of three postwriting conditions on overall accuracy, in the areas of capitals, mechanics, words, and number agreement in noun and prepositional phrases, of EFL learner writings. In order to accomplish this, the researcher formed five research hypotheses:

1. Experiment A, the learner-oriented approach to feedback (focused feedback and keeping edit logs and error tally sheets), is more helpful to the overall accuracy of student writings than experiment B, that is focused feedback.
2. Experiment B raises accuracy more than no feedback method.
3. Experiment A is more helpful to accuracy improvement of student writings than no feedback method.
4. Experiment A is significantly helpful in inducing greater overall accuracy.
5. Experiment B is conducive to accuracy.
6. No feedback method leads to accuracy only non-significantly.

To test the above-mentioned hypotheses, the researcher needed to form three groups of student writers: one group working through a learner-oriented approach to focused feedback, another group working through focused feedback, and a final group merely writing on the assigned topics, that is receiving no feedback. Therefore, there was supposed to be two different types of interventions, a learner-oriented feedback one and a mere feedback one. This required a quasi-experimental design. It is hoped that the findings of the present study can help shed light on the road of feedback in language teaching, and help teachers solve the riddle of feedback or no feedback and that of which feedback method is more helpful to accuracy improvement of student writings.

## 2. Literature Review

According to the most extreme views, such as those of Truscott (1996), CF which indicates to learners the existence of error in their linguistic output is seen as not only ineffective but also potentially harmful. Truscott in his 1996 article reviewed the previous studies on the effect of written CF and concluded that the literature is against its effectiveness. He maintained that existing CF studies revealed that CF is ineffective, and none proves it to be helpful in any interesting sense. Additionally, he argues that for both theoretical and practical reasons one can expect CF to be ineffective, concluding that error correction should be abandoned since it is not only ineffective to student learning, but also harmful. He made four insightful observations to help substantiate his position (see Truscott, 1996).

However, responding to Truscott (1996), Ferris (1999) reviewed the original sources Truscott had reviewed and strongly argued that Truscott's thesis regarding the ineffectiveness of CF has been hasty and premature. Ferris argued that Truscott has acted anecdotally in gathering evidence to support his claim, and has over-generalized the findings of previous studies most of which are not comparable since they differ in many ways including the mother tongue of the participants; focus of instruction; demands put on the learner in the course of the study; duration of the treatment; the level of comprehensiveness of error corrections; and the measure of assessment. Ferris concluded that CF may help improve accuracy and insisted on teacher persistence in discovering more helpful feedback methods.

In Truscott (2007), once more, Truscott argued for the ineffectiveness of CF on language leaning. He reviewed existing literature on the effect of error correction and once again found that error correction had a small negative effect on learners' ability to write accurately. He claimed that one can be 95% confident that if error correction has any benefits, they are too small. In his article he further discussed the factors that have probably biased the findings in favor of error correction (see Truscott, 2007).

An important point which partially leads to the inconclusiveness of CF literature is the difference that should be, but seldom is, made between student ability to correct his errors and thus be more accurate on versions of the same piece of writing rather than that on new pieces of writing. This issue is less addressed. Previous research has shown that CF helps learners reduce their errors on revisions of the same writing, not on a new piece of writing. But, does this finding constitute evidence that learning resulted from the feedback? This question was addressed by Truscott and Hsu (2008) through examining the differential effects of error correction on revision and learning. It was revealed that error correction only leads to significant linguistic gains in the revised version but not in new pieces of writing. In fact, they found that such improvement is not extended to learners' future writings, thus, the linguistic form corrected is not actually learned. Finally they concluded that success in the revision process is by no means a predictor of learning.

What makes the issue of the appropriateness of written CF even more controversial is the variety of strategies available for carrying out CF (e.g., direct, indirect, and meta-linguistic CF, see Ellis, 2006). It is not only a question of whether CF is helpful and whether it helps learning, but also which type is effective. The written CF literature indicates that

many teachers and L2 writing researchers have favored the use of indirect feedback where errors are indicated and learners are required to self-correct. Such studies have placed emphasis on the revision process.

Many studies have investigated the effects of different feedback types on the accuracy of student writings. Ferris and Roberts (2001), for example, investigated the differential effects of indirect and meta-linguistic CF on the accuracy of ESL writings. It was revealed that both feedback groups outperformed the non-feedback group, but that the difference between the feedback groups was indistinguishable. Therefore, they concluded that indirect (underline) CF is just as helpful as meta-linguistic (underline-coded) CF.

Alghazo et al. (2009) also addressed the differential effects of meta-linguistic and indirect feedback on writing accuracy of EFL learners. The strategies they implemented for providing meta-linguistic and indirect feedback were the same as strategies used in Ferris and Roberts' 2001 study. However, the results were different. Similarly, it was revealed that both feedback groups significantly outperformed the non-feedback group. However, meta-linguistic feedback was proved to be more conducive to accuracy of the targeted features than indirect feedback. Though this finding was contrary to that of Ferris and Roberts, both these studies suggested that feedback leads to more accuracy gains than no feedback method, refuting Truscott's case against the effectiveness of written CF.

Sheen (2007) examined the differential effects of direct and meta-linguistic feedback on accuracy with which ESL student writers used English definite and indefinite articles. Again, it was revealed that both feedback groups outperformed the control group. Where on immediate posttest direct-only group outperformed both meta-linguistic group and control group, on delayed posttest it was the meta-linguistic group which outperformed both groups. Therefore, the study showed that focused written CF improved learners' accuracy in the long run, especially when meta-linguistic feedback was provided.

A few studies have examined the effect of focused written CF where the teacher selects a few selected aspects for correction. Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima (2008), for example, addressed the differential effects of focused and unfocused feedback on accuracy of EFL student writings. Both feedback methods helped long-term accuracy of EFL writings more than no feedback method. This indicates that CF is effective in itself, at least where English articles are concerned. Again, difference in the performance of feedback groups was non-significant.

Likewise, Bitchener and Knoch (2008) examined the effect of focused feedback on the accuracy with which ESL writers used English definite and indefinite articles. Their study, as well, disclosed that feedback group outperformed the control group.

Sheen, Wright & Moldawa (2009) also investigated the differential effects of focused and unfocused feedback on accuracy. Their study included four groups of ESL writers: 1) focused CF (receiving correction on article errors only), 2) unfocused CF (receiving correction on a few different types of errors including ones involving articles), 3) writing practice (receiving writing tasks with no correction), and 4) control (receiving neither the tasks nor correction). The results indicated that focused CF made the highest gains in accuracy of both articles and the other targeted areas; unfocused feedback was of limited pedagogical value; and there were non-significant differences between the performance of focused CF group and writing practice group. In fact, the pattern of improvement across groups was  $F > W > U > C$ . Once more, it was revealed that feedback induces better accuracy than no feedback method.

To date, few number of studies have examined the effect of learner-oriented approaches to feedback, esp. to focused feedback, on written accuracy. Greene (2003), for example, addressed the impact of unfocused feedback complemented with error logs and teacher-student conferences. The study revealed that unfocused feedback along with student-teacher between-draft conferences and student maintenance of error logs have short-term benefits for the accuracy of student writings. Lack of consensus on the effectiveness of CF partially induced by methodological problems in such studies, and scarcity of studies on learner-oriented CF were other motives for the present researcher to conduct this study.

### 3. Research Questions

In the current study the researcher intended to find out answers to the following questions:

1. Does experiment A (keeping edit logs and error tally sheets along with receiving focused feedback) produce greater accuracy in new pieces of writing (rather than in revisions) compared to that of no feedback method in the short term? If yes, to what extent?
2. Does experiment B (mere focused feedback) induce better accuracy of the targeted features than mere writing practice?
3. Does experiment A lead to greater accuracy improvement of the targeted areas than mere writing practice?
4. Does treatment A help improve the accuracy of the targeted features in learners' writing in the short term?
5. Does treatment B induce accuracy in student writings?
6. Is mere writing practice conducive to accuracy improvement of new pieces of writing?

Among these six questions, the first three are the most pertinent to the purposes of the study.

### 4. Method

#### 4.1 Participants

The data were collected from three intact language classrooms at a language institute in Ardebil, Iran. As Mackey and Gass (2005) mention, the use of intact groups enhances the face validity of certain types of classes. Since in

experimental situations most of the intervening variables are controlled, the results cannot be based on realities. But in intact classes we deal with real classes in which no variables are controlled and in reality there are classes, not randomly selected samples. The sampling technique employed was convenience sampling in which participants were selected on the basis of their availability to the researcher. Therefore, participants were selected from the language institute at which the researcher was teaching.

The learners, 14-20 years of age, had enrolled in the classes to master English conversation. A consent form was attained from the manager of the institute. The major researcher was the teacher of the classes which met three days a week for 1.5 hours per day. Although the learners were males and females from identical classes at the same institute, to further make sure the groups were equivalent prior to the study, Test Of English as a Foreign Language was administered to enable the researchers to select learners who showed approximately equivalent overall English proficiency levels. To further delve into students' writing proficiency levels and to diagnose their most problematic areas to be targeted through feedback, two writing pieces of 100-250 words were elicited from each student. Out of 99 students selected after the analysis of writings, three cluster groups were formed through random assignment of learners into target groups, that is, two treatment groups and a control group. Initially the study included 99 participants, but due to participant attrition near the end of study, finally data from only 22 students were analyzed and are reported in the paper. This stems from the fact that language teachers thus far have put little attempt into improving students' writing skills and creating interest and positive attitudes in learners toward such tasks. It is natural that learners would tend not to like what they lack skill in. Additionally, research ethics prevented the researchers from forcing students into performing the writing tasks by means of considering it as part of their class mark or by any other means since this would have probably affected the quality of writings and, subsequently, the results..

#### 4.2 Procedures, Design and Instruments

A quasi-experimental design with a pretest-treatment-posttest design was adopted. On the basis of the two writings elicited from each student prior to the beginning of the course of study, students' most problematic language areas were diagnosed based on their seriousness. The other source for the selection of these target areas (i.e., capitals, mechanics, words, and number agreement within noun and prepositional phrases) were that based on the interviews conducted with several experienced teachers at the language institute, these errors were among the most common in intermediate level students' written production. Then, based on these areas, the researchers prepared the error sheets to which learners referred in order to open up the correction codes.

Over a four-week period all groups performed four writing tasks, each of which was followed by a CF session for the treatment groups and no feedback for the control group. The topics were assigned randomly. Focused written CF in the present study was performed as (1) the provision of the correct form in the learners' written texts by underlining the erroneous form and indicating the type of error through codes above it (i.e., meta-linguistic feedback) and (2) directing the written corrections at errors in a specific group of target areas. Thus, the treatment for experimental group A consisted of two types of tasks: (1) receiving focused feedback, (2) and keeping edit logs and error tally sheets, and for experimental group B only receiving focused feedback. Writing practice group merely completed the writing tasks without receiving any feedback.

All three groups completed the pretest and posttest. In administering each test learners were assigned a topic to develop into a paragraph of 100-250 words for the following session. Prior to the beginning of the course of study, the topics were piloted two times: 1) through interviews with six university instructors in English department at Mazandaran university of Babolsar and four experienced language teachers at the language institute, in which the study was conducted, to ensure validity, 2) through questionnaires administered to 20 students of an approximate level and age at the same language institute. Finally, based on the results of the interviews and questionnaires, topics most appealing to students and deemed most suitable for eliciting the targeted areas by the university instructors and on which the researchers consented were chosen. This was done not only to ensure validity, but also to tailor writing topics to student interests, thus to control affective barriers to some extent, and elicit enough production from student writers. The procedure for the tests and writing tasks (displayed in table 1) was the same. In all groups only errors in capitals, mechanics, words, and number agreement were targeted.

Table 1. Design of the Study

| Session | Experimental Groups             |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| 1       | <b>Pretest:</b> Written task 1  |
| 2       | Written CF on task 1            |
| 3       | No assignments                  |
| 4       | Written task 2                  |
| 5       | Written CF on task2             |
| 6       | No assignments                  |
| 7       | Written task3                   |
| 8       | Written CF on task3             |
| 9       | No assignments                  |
| 10      | <b>Posttest:</b> Written task 4 |

The research instrument implemented in the present study was written tests as pretest and immediate posttest.

The specific procedures for the treatments were as follows:

1. First, the teacher (the major researcher) announced the topic and asked learners to hand her a writing of 100 to 250 words the following session.
2. After having collected written texts the following session, the teacher provided them with coded focused feedback at home.
3. Next, the corrections were reviewed and commented by a second rater, the second researcher, who was a PhD university instructor in TEFL.
4. To prevent loss of data, the teacher made copies of all corrected writings and returned the corrected writings to the experimental groups the following session. The control group was not given their writings back. The teacher asked learners in the treatment groups to revise their corrected writings based on the error sheets provided for this purpose. Except that students in experimental group A were also asked to write the number of times they committed each error type as well as the number of times they revised each piece of writing to reach an error-free one.

Here, it would be appropriate to briefly depict the innovative approach that was employed in one of the experimental groups. As mentioned earlier, and as research has clearly indicated, we need to rethink the way we provide feedback to our learners. Learners may need a method which helps them learn to edit their own writings and thus reduce errors. In such an approach, learners are able to keep track of their errors using a running log of each error they make in terms of targeted type and frequency of the error. Over time, they become familiar with their most frequent error types and the learner, in an effort to master those areas, may be less likely to make a particular error again in the future.

Along with the error tally sheets, learners maintained another record to track their progress. This included an edit log, which was implemented so as to record the number of times learners edited each piece of writing to reach an acceptable level of accuracy. Error sheets, edit logs and error tally sheets were handed to experimental group A the first CF session. Learners in the experimental group B only received the error sheets, and those in the control group received none of the above since no revisions were required.

The final raw data in the present study were 44 student texts (two writing pieces from each student). First, the total number of T-units was counted for each given piece of student writing. To establish the reliability of the measures employed in this study, scoring and rating the essays and essay components was done by both researchers.

In attempt to carefully measure the effect of the treatments on the accuracy of only the targeted errors, a measure of accuracy, adapted from Wolfe-quintero, Inagaki, and Kim, (1998), was implemented, that is  $1(E/T)100$ . An important feature of this measure is that it is implemented for the purpose of examining various performance levels among several different types of errors within error families, not just overall count of errors. It is utilized to express the accuracy of the presence or absence of error for each error type. Since error correction in the present study covered four error families (capitals, mechanics, words, and number agreement), E in the above-mentioned formula stood for the sum of errors in these four areas, and T stood for total number of T-units per given piece of writing.

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) datasets were also used for descriptive and inferential statistics. In order to answer the six research questions posted in this study, one-way ANOVAs, two-way repeated-measures ANOVAs as well as Tukey's post hoc pair-wise comparison tests were performed.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Answers to Research Questions

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for mean scores across writing tests which measured student writing accuracy on mechanics, capitals, words, and number agreement, from pretest to posttest for the three groups of (1) experimental group A, (2) experimental group B, and (3) writing practice group which for better intelligibility is referred to as control group through the text.

Table 2. Group Means and Standard Deviations across Testing Periods

| Groups         | Pretest |     | Posttest |     |
|----------------|---------|-----|----------|-----|
|                | M       | SD  | M        | SD  |
| Experimental A | .86     | .44 | .54      | .25 |
| Experimental B | .85     | .60 | .91      | .77 |
| Control        | 1.31    | .43 | 1.72     | .43 |

The first research question asked whether there is any stronger effect on accuracy of targeted features for treatment A (the complementation of focused coded feedback with edit logs and error tally sheets) than for treatment B, that is, mere focused coded feedback. Experimental group A moved from a lower rank compared to the experimental group B on pretest to a higher rank on posttest, and one-way ANOVAs indicated no statistically significant between-group differences on the pretest  $F(2, 19), p=.183$ , ns, but they did show significant between-group differences on the posttest

$F(1, 19)$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $s$  (See tables 5, 6, &7). However, the gain within the groups themselves was still not significant (see table3). Therefore, both feedback methods are considered almost equally ineffective to accuracy improvement and the first hypothesis was rejected.

Table 5. Pretest Tukey Displaying Group Ranks

| Group          | N | Subset for alpha= .05 |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|
|                |   | 1                     |
| experimental B | 7 | .8500                 |
| experimental A | 9 | .8633                 |
| Control        | 6 | 1.3167                |
| Sig            |   | .205                  |

Table 6. Posttest Tukey Displaying Group Ranks

| Group          | N | Subset for alpha= .05 |        |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|--------|
|                |   | 1                     | 2      |
| Experimental A | 9 | .6789                 |        |
| Experimental B | 7 | .9129                 |        |
| Control        | 6 |                       | 1.7200 |
| Sig            |   | .690                  | 1.000  |

Table 7. One-way ANOVAs Exhibiting Group Differences

|          |                | df | F     | P    |
|----------|----------------|----|-------|------|
| Pretest  | Between groups | 2  | 1.863 | .183 |
|          | Within groups  | 19 |       |      |
|          | Total          | 21 |       |      |
| Posttest | Between groups | 2  | 7.148 | .005 |
|          | Within groups  | 19 |       |      |
|          | Total          | 21 |       |      |

The second research question inquired whether treatment B leads to better accuracy than mere writing practice. Due to the fact that regarding accuracy gains within each group both groups gained non-significantly across the tests ( $p= .68$  for mere focused feedback group compared to  $p=.14$  for writing practice group), it can be concluded that both mere focused feedback and writing practice are equally ineffective to the accurate use of targeted areas. Thus, the second research hypothesis is rejected too.

The third research question asked whether treatment A induced better writing accuracy than mere writing practice. The comparison of between-group differences showed that where on pretest the experimental group A outperformed the control group with a significance level of  $.71$ , on posttest, it outperformed the control group with much higher significance ( $p=.000$ ). However, the within-group accuracy improvement was not significant for this group ( $.07$ ). Neither was the improvement significant for the control group ( $.14$ ). It is suggested that the treatment A and mere writing practice were almost equally ineffective to accuracy improvement and the third hypothesis is also rejected.

The fourth research question asked whether there is any effect on accuracy for treatment A group. The results showed that the treatment A did not significantly affect the overall accuracy of student writings ( $p=.07$ ). Table 3 presents the results of one-way ANOVAs measuring accuracy gains across testing periods.

Table 3. One-way repeated-measures ANOVAs across groups

| Groups         | df | F    | P   |
|----------------|----|------|-----|
| Experimental A | 1  | 3.51 | .07 |
| Experimental B | 1  | .028 | .86 |
| Control        | 1  | 2.57 | .14 |

Deeper analysis within the experimental group A's data revealed that at the significance level of  $.05$  this treatment helped significantly improve accuracy in capitalization errors among the four areas targeted ( $p=.02$  see table 4). Such

detailed analysis was performed only for experimental group A since, though unsuccessful, its accuracy gain was the closest to significance level among the three groups.

Table 4. One-way ANOVAs within experimental group A

|                  |                | <i>df</i> | Mean Square   | F     | Sig. |
|------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|-------|------|
| Mechanics        | Between Groups | 1         | 60.500        | .433  | .520 |
|                  | Within Groups  | 16        | 139.736       |       |      |
|                  | Total          | 17        |               |       |      |
| Capitals         | Between Groups | 1         | 4140.500      | 5.811 | .028 |
|                  | Within Groups  | 16        | 712.500       |       |      |
|                  | Total          | 17        |               |       |      |
| Words            | Between Groups | 1         | 4.500<br>.916 |       | .011 |
|                  | Within Groups  | 16        | 395.125       |       |      |
|                  | Total          | 17        |               |       |      |
| Number Agreement | Between Groups | 1         | .500          | .010  | .920 |
|                  | Within Groups  | 16        | 48.000        |       |      |
|                  | Total          | 17        |               |       |      |

The fifth research question asked whether there are any positive effects for mere focused feedback on accuracy. As table 3 showed, the experimental group B made no significant accuracy improvement across testing periods. Therefore, it is concluded that in the short run mere focused feedback is not conducive to better accuracy and the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

The last research question inquired whether there is any effect on accuracy when learners are engaged only in writing practice, without receiving feedback of any kind. As mentioned earlier, none of the groups significantly improved in accuracy across testing periods. The least unsuccessful group was the experimental group A ( $p=.07$ ); next was the control group ( $.14$ ); and the most unsuccessful was the experimental group B ( $p=.86$ ). therefore, the last hypothesis is rejected too.

## 5.2 Discussion

The first finding was that both the learner-oriented feedback and the mere focused feedback were almost equally ineffective to the improvement of accuracy in student writing tasks in capitals, mechanics, words, and number agreement within noun and prepositional phrases in the short run. However, Corder (1990) states that much of the responsibility for success at learning rests with the individual learners and with their ability to take advantage of opportunities to learn (cited in Keshavarz, 2008). Hyland (1998) and Wong and Waring (2009) maintain that feedback carries the potential to confuse the learners to the extent that it ultimately impedes making sense of the meaning of teacher feedback, thus, prevents learners from developing their own goals for effectively using teacher feedback. Hyland maintains that in order for feedback to be of help, more open dialogue between the teacher and students is required. In the present study such clarification was attempted through complementation of focused feedback with error logs and error tally sheets and students were trained on how to complete the logs and sheets. And it was hoped that such learner-oriented, awareness-raising approach to feedback would help learners set their own goals in pursuing teacher feedback which is mastering their most problematic language areas, and thereby increase the effectiveness of feedback and remove the existing ambiguity regarding its purpose. But the results were not that rosy, that is, although the treatment A included a learner-oriented approach to learning, it did not pose any significant effects on accuracy. This is somewhat in contrary with Bitchener et al.'s (2005) findings that focused feedback along with implementing student-teacher conferences, as awareness-raising instruments and as an effort to remove the confusion inherent to feedback, was more conducive to accuracy of articles and past tense than mere focused feedback. Greene (2003), also, implemented error logs as well as student-teacher conferences for removing such ambiguity. The study suggested that such approach to feedback posed positive effects on accuracy of EFL writings in the short run.

The second finding is that both mere focused feedback and writing practice are equally ineffective to the accurate use of targeted areas. This finding and the answer to research question one are in line with those of Truscott (1996, 2004, & 2007), if not in the sense that feedback is harmful to student learning, but at least in that it is not effective!

The third finding is that both focused feedback complemented with edit logs and error tally sheets, and mere writing practice are almost equally ineffective to the accurate use of the targeted areas in the short run.

The next finding is that keeping edit logs and error tally sheets along with receiving focused coded feedback were not beneficial to short term accuracy of EFL writings in targeted areas.

Another finding is that mere focused feedback is ineffective to the improvement of accuracy in student writings.

The last finding is that writing practice in absence of any feedback is ineffective to accuracy improvement in the targeted areas. This finding differs from those of Truscott (1996, 2004, & 2007) which argue for the benefits of mere writing practice. It, rather, suggests writing teachers not to frustrate their learners with assigning writing tasks which will never be corrected and to, instead, spare their valuable time and energy on seeking other useful classroom activities. This finding also differs from that of Sheen et al. (2009) and similarly suggested writing practice to be of considerable value by itself. Their study, including four groups of 1) focused CF, 2) unfocused CF, 3) writing practice, and 4) control group which did not write anything, revealed focused feedback group to be the most successful among all groups, respectively followed by, writing practice group, unfocused group and control group. It was also revealed that the difference between focused feedback group and writing practice group was non-significant on the one hand which is partially in line with our findings. On the other hand, the present study found both focused feedback and writing practice to be of little pedagogical value.

## 6. Conclusion

Literature has produced somewhat inconclusive results regarding the effectiveness of written CF on either grammatical or linguistic accuracy of EFL/ESL student writings. Recently, some researchers have provided some evidence for its effectiveness in specific target areas (e.g., Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, 2007). The present study failed to do so. It showed that neither feedback nor no feedback methods are helpful to the accuracy improvement of targeted areas in the short run. Partially following Truscott (1996), we could conclude that teachers had better look for more helpful classroom activities instead of insisting on the effectiveness of feedback practices where the results are so blurred. However, not quite in line with Truscott's later findings, we argue that mere writing practice may not be a good alternative for feedback method. More studies are needed to disclose the secret.

The main purpose of the present study was to examine the differential effects of three post-writing methods on EFL learners' errors. An important feature of this study was the innovative approach it took toward focused feedback. In this approach student writers were required to keep edit logs and error tally sheets, so that they could keep track of their progress, along with receiving focused feedback. The study addressed the differential effects of two focused feedback methods and mere writing practice on accuracy.

The results showed that although across the tests some groups changed in their ranking in relation to others in terms of accuracy (see tables 5& 6), and although the difference between posttest performance of some groups was significant, within each group there was no significant gains in accuracy.

The debate over the appropriacy of CF cannot be settled until the question of whether correcting learners' written work helps to improve accuracy more than just providing them with writing practice is established. The findings of the present study add to CF literature by the token that it investigates the impact of CF over new pieces of student writings, rather than over mere revisions which is a drawback of many previous studies on written CF. Yet, another strength is that it investigated the effect of CF over four pieces of writing which has seldom been attempted in the CF literature. Most studies have elicited up to three pieces of writing from each student writer. This, however, was a crucial reason to the attrition of the number of participants.

However, as any study, the current study is limited in some ways. Firstly, due to lack of student contribution in consistently fulfilling research tasks, there was a dramatic attrition in the number of participants in the study where at the very end of study the number of participants reduced from 99 to 22. Therefore, in order for the results to be generalizable, the study should definitely be replicated with larger number of participants. Secondly, there was lack of participant contribution which prevented the researchers from collecting more than four pieces of writing from each student, as well as from measuring the long-term effects of the treatment through implementation of a delayed posttest. Due to the same reason no error correction test either prior to or at the end of treatments could be administered. Future studies may reinvestigate the issue with larger numbers of writings from each student and in the long run and based on the results of more objective measures such as error correction tests. Another potential limitation of the study was in the way the notion of accuracy was dealt with. The use of T-unit and error-free T-unit ratio, though well established, may raise possible arguments against its use.

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