Effects of Written Feedback on
College Students' Academic Writing Performance

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Abstract

In English as a Foreign Learning context, writing is an important skill, and it requires the learners' mental capacity. Two major strategies make the learning process of writing easy. Writers need linguistics strategies and writing process strategies. Giving and receiving constructive feedback helps students implementing the writing process and identifying grammatical errors. Feedback is an integral element of teaching and learning in Higher Education. The major purposes of this scientific study is to identify appropriate strategies for giving written feedback to students. Moreover, it aims to realize written feedback effects on EFL students' academic writing performance. This study was conducted through a systematic review of the literatures. Reliable and valid articles were reviewed, analyzed, evaluated and synthesized thematically. The scientific study found that Effective written feedback educates autonomous writers. There are many models of providing written; the sandwich model is a common model which starts and ends with positive points and it deals with mistakes in the middle of model. Direct and indirect written feedback effect on nonnative English speakers' academic writing performance. Students do not appreciate vague and late feedback. Direct feedback and indirect feedback are applicable in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Direct feedback is used in intermediate level classrooms and indirect feedback is utilized in advanced level classrooms. Feedback is a tool of assessment which is useful in the student-centered learning approach. It is the easy way of assessing learners' needs and develop supplementary materials that fulfil their needs.

Keywords: Academic Writing, College Students, EFL, ESP, Written Feedback.

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Introduction

Demonstrating insights and skills requires knowledge and strategies of academic writing. Academic writing is a type of writing which is used within a specific context by experts. There are many strategies that pave the way to become a good academic writer during and after college studies. Academic writing is the fundamental need of various disciplines such as Medicine, Engineering, Economics and Literature. The advancement of academic writing skills and strategies pave the way for students to communicate ideas fluently, and it accelerates the process of generating knowledge.

Bagheri and Andi (2015) stated that English is accepted as an academic language in many education institutes of world. Giving written feedback, on the other hand, is a strategy which may help students to develop their writing skills within their discipline. However, giving written feedback is rather less common among writing course instructors at universities across Afghanistan. Constructive feedback is neglected by teachers in the 'English for Specific Purposes' course due to some integral factors. Multilevel large classes, time limitations and multitasking are the major factors that prevent teachers from giving clear written feedback. Many students are keen to write academic papers and overcome the challenges of their projects by writing. However, they are unable to write accurate academic essays and papers. The lack of receiving constructive feedback tempts them to resort to plagiarism which is unethical and illegal. Not getting constructive written feedbacks discourages novice writers from 'deep reading'. 'English as a Foreign Language' learners commit subject verb agreement, sentence structure, punctuation and capitalization mistakes in their paragraphs and essays. According to Hamid and Mahmood (2010), constructive feedback assists teachers and students to develop practical knowledge and experience of writing through such activities. Having academic writing skill is essential for college students, and students develop academic writing skill through receiving constructive feedback. The teacher's constructive feedback can make an accurate and fluent writer.

Objectives

This research report informs about and discusses the benefits of providing constructive written feedback to English for Specific Purposes course students who are nonnative speakers of English. It helps the instructor to find out the proper ways of giving understandable written feedback to EFL students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated:
1. What are the effects of written feedback on academic writing?
2. How can written constructive feedback be provided to academic writers?
3. Does written feedback help students to write fluent and accurate paragraphs?

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Literature Review

Writing is a complicated language skill, and it is a need of many learners and educators. Writing skills require deep thinking skill. Assessment is one essential element of English for Specific Purposes learning and teaching. There are two types of assessment: formative and summative assessments. Feedback is integral part of the assessment procedure, because providing constructive feedback informs writing course learners about the problems they have and progresses they make. Teachers who are applying a student-centered learning approach prefer constructive feedback. They give oral and written feedback to students (Hardavella, Gaagnat, Saad, Rousalova, & Sreter, 2014). In addition, teachers who teach writing course use direct and indirect feedback for assisting students. A good number of reviewed articles investigated the benefits of written feedback and its integration in a student-centered learning approach, in formative and summative assessments as well as academic writing process.

Introduction to Written Feedback

Written feedback assists students to realize their mistakes and it is important for overcoming the writing challenges. Jamalinesari, Rahimi, Gowhary, and Azizifar (2014) defined feedback as an integral part of learning and teaching the writing course. Theses authors stated that feedback assists many students to achieve success in the class. Furthermore, in the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2012), feedback is defined as a "Comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other person" (p.199). Besides, the above authors mentioned that the major objective of giving and receiving feedback is to train lifelong writers. Sharing various types of feedback enhances students writing proficiency and it is the teacher's responsibility to provide feedback on grammatical errors at a time. Specifying many grammatical errors at a time confuse students and the teacher must consider the students' preferences concerning constructive feedback.

Hardavella, Gaagnat, Saad, Rousalova, and Sreter, (2014) said that a student-centered approach includes giving and receiving stages of constructive feedback. For students' development, it is important to welcome the teacher's and their peer ideas regarding their assignment. Similarly, feedback is an indispensable part of the student-centered approach. The teacher should select a type of feedback which fits students' perception. Kaur, Kaur, Arora, and Singh (2014) said that students want constructive feedback during the formative assessment stage to get preparation for the summative assessment. Giving and receiving feedback enhances the quality of teaching and learning. Specific, accurate and timely feedback assists learners to increase their grades in the final examination. In a similar manner, Al-Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016) found in the summary of national surveys conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia emphasized providing feedback,

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because it analyzes, evaluates, and monitors students learning process. In addition, constructive feedback facilitates the learning process, and it educates independent learners.

Likewise, Septina, Sulistyo, and Kadarisman (2016) mentioned that the teacher's constructive feedback encourages students to review and edit their writing, and they perform better than those students who do not receive feedback. In a similar manner, Al-Bashir, Kabir, and Rahman (2016) found that many students across the world do not prefer teacher feedback due to the following reasons. Firstly, teachers are unable to provide feedback on time and they do not provide adequate feedback which attains the students' satisfactions. Both students and teachers can benefit from a constructive feedback process; it motivates students to become autonomous learners.

Furthermore, Mandhane, Ansari, Shaikh, and Deolekar (2015) declared that feedback is the fundamental needs of Medical students because it promotes students' insights and skills. Feedback should be given on time within a specific setting. Appropriate feedback helps students to realize their strengths and weaknesses and the teacher must give neutral, clear, and concise feedback which accelerates the process of learning and teaching. Also, teachers must use understandable language throughout their feedback. Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) said that written feedback is the integral element of English as a foreign language classroom. Written feedback is time consuming although teachers and students prefer it because it is helpful for students and teachers. Students dislike feedback that are general. Constructive and specific written feedback helps students in current and future writing projects. Likewise, Razali, and Jupri (2014) said that teachers and students accepted the importance of teachers' written feedback in the English classroom. Written feedback is more important than oral feedback after small conference and peer review. According to Iris (2009), feedback brings many changes which are utilized by students in the revision stage of the writing process. Text-specific feedback is tangible, and students can apply it easily.

Mustafa, Norazaiah, and Abdul Majid, (n.d) said that feedback is useful if it delivers suggestions for improvement. Constructive feedback informs students about their strengths and weaknesses. Vague and untimely feedback demotivates students. Constructive feedback must explain positive and negative dimensions of the text. Otherwise, it remains boring for the participants. Hattie and Timperley (2007) mentioned that "Feedback has no effect in a vacuum; to be powerful in its effect, there must be a learning context to which feedback is addressed" (p.82). Constructive written feedback leads students toward the course goals, and it is the aim of each assessment too. When feedback is used only in the form of praise, it is rarely effective. Feedback giving starts after instructing some insights and skills about the lesson.

In the same way, Ismail, Maulan, and Hasan (2008) said that nonnative English speakers face two challenges during writing: content and form. Practicing and producing written texts requires mental capacity. When feedback providers write comments on content and form problems, students

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like to review and edit the form. According to Ismail, Maulan, and Hasan (2008), there are many strategies for providing feedback: coding, circling, underlying mistakes, utilizing symbols, writing margin notes as a comment, and general suggestions at the end of the text. These ways of giving feedback help students to write effective texts after revision. Students who are keen to become independent writer always inspire teachers to share their comments with them because they believe constructive feedback pave the ground for them.

Harmer (as cited in Septina, Sulistyo, and Kadarisman 2016) stated the four steps of the writing process which contains planning, drafting, editing, and writing the final draft and he trusts that feedback is essential during the editing step of the writing process. Similarly, Jamalinesari, Rahimi, Gowhary, and Azizifar (2014) said that error correction or providing feedback is one of the writing elements, and teachers attempt to teach the rules of accurate writing text. Text revision is more important than compiling new text every time for writers and readers (Jamalinesari, Rahimi, Gowhary, & Azizifar. 2014).

Types of Written Feedback

Daneshvar and Rahimi (2013) mentioned that integration of various types of feedback are useful. These authors categorized feedback into explicit and implicit. Direct or explicit feedback helps students in long term learning processes, and it involves students in the correction process. Regarding the indirect feedback the instructor points out the errors and students correct themselves. The direct feedback is used in the intensive classroom where instructors correct the grammatical mistakes of the writer. Septina, Sulistyo and Kadarisman (2016) described that indirect feedback helps those students who have a high level of pragmatic grammar skills and it helps them to provide accurate text. Also, Ansari, Shaikh, and Deolekar (2015) classified feedback into two types: positive constructive feedback and negative feedback. On the other hand, they classified feedback into three types: brief, formal and major.

According to Hardavella, Gaagnat, Saad, Rousalova and Sreter, (2014), there are four major types of feedback: informal feedback, formal feedback, formative feedback and summative feedback. According to Razali, and Jupri (2014), there are three types of written feedback: form-focused feedback, content-based feedback, and integrated feedback. Firstly, form-focused feedback or feedback on students' grammar is conducive for writers. The second type of feedback is called content or meaning based feedback which deals with the theme of the text. Written feedback is a continuous process, and it progresses until the end of written product. It means that there should be many phases of written feedback. Additionally, written feedback highlights the students' strengths and weaknesses. It is teacher's job to improve the students' weak points through tasks which are utilized inside and beyond the classroom. Semsock, Liaminmir, and Pochakorn (2017) said that direct and indirect feedback helps students to identify grammatical errors. Hyland and Hyland (as

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cited in Semsock, Liaminmir, & Pochakorn 2017) mentioned three forms of written feedback: praise, criticism and suggestions and integration of these forms develop effective written feedback.

Beside written feedback oral feedback also improves student writing. Face to face feedback acquaints students with grammatical structures and their errors. Both direct and indirect feedback help students to realize grammatical mistakes. In short, both direct and indirect feedback are utilized in EFL/ESP settings. Direct feedback is used for students who have a low level of command on target language and indirect feedback is given to intensive level students who have advance English grammar skills.

Strategies for Giving Written Feedback

There are many ways of providing feedback to learners and one of the common strategies of giving feedback is sandwich which has three major layers. The first layer introduces positive points of the text, the second layer figures out the improvement areas and the third layer points out another positive point (Mandhane, Ansari, Shaikh, & Deolekar2015). PEARL acronym is a technique of building rapport between teacher and students and it is utilized to promote the learning stages. Mandhane, Ansari, Shaikh, and Deolekar,(2015) said that PEARL acronym explains some essential skills " Problem solving, empathic understanding, apologies for barriers to the learner's success, respected for learner's values and choices, legitimation of feelings and intentions and support for effort of correction" (p.1870). The authors of the article mentioned that lack of enough feedback remains a barrier for advancement of the learning process. To illustrate, Al-Bashir, Kabir and Rahman (2016) explained that teachers should provide a limited amount of feedback to students and they suggest learning and assessment processes require motivation. Giving and receiving feedback is important for learners and educators who work in the Higher Education context.

Sandwich is a model of feedback which includes three parts. Certainty, it starts and ends with positive points. When teachers are providing feedback, they must think about some principles of giving feedback. For example, teachers must consider the objective of a lesson, what the students achieved and what barriers are for students. Kamberi (2012) revealed some strategies for giving feedback "direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focused/unfocused, electronic, peer feedback and mini-conferencing" (p.1668). Teachers use various types of feedback for improving students' writing skill. As a matter of fact, there is not only one best strategy of providing feedback. Feedback is an important component of EFL learning and teaching. Students like teachers' feedback better than peer feedback because of feedback providers' insights and skills (Kamberi, 2012).

In the same way, Asadi and Rahimi (2014) stated that direct feedback, indirect feedback, and other methods of feedback affect students writing accuracy. These methods are used to correct content, form and organization mistakes of the text that feedback provider review. Whenever a teacher evaluates students writing quality, he/she can use rubric which includes content criteria,

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organization criteria, vocabulary criteria, language criteria and mechanics criteria. Razali and Jupri (2014) exposed that suggestion, criticism and praise is the other model of giving feedback. Too much criticism and general feedback demotivate students and they will not bring improvement in their revision or final draft.

Iris (2009) classified feedback into two general categories based on the level of changes: global (concentrates on whole text) and local (concentrates on specific aspects of text). Global feedback deals with the general organization of the text and general rules of mechanics and referencing. Local feedback deals with major elements of an essay: introduction, body and conclusion and direct editing of mechanics and expressions. Only emphasizing on surface level feedback (spelling, grammar, and punctuation) does not improve students writing. It is important to provide feedback regarding content, text organization and mechanics of text.

Arslan (2014) emphasized that the analytic assessment rubric is developed to provide explicit feedback to students. This rubric includes content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics/conventions. Teachers can use analytic assessment criteria and a holistic assessment guide throughout their feedback giving process. Teachers' written feedback will have positive effects when they considers the student's attitude toward the feedback. Receiving well-written feedback from peers and teachers prepares students for a more professional life. Ultimately, many educators, teachers and writers claim that feedback is the crucial part of higher education. Teachers should find best strategies for providing feedback to students. They have to eliminate the traditional type of feedback providing from teaching approaches. It paves the ground for teachers to design effective activities which help students in their learning.

Method and Materials

A systematic review of relevant articles was conducted during this scientific study. The articles were purposefully reviewed and evaluated. This study concentrated on textual materials and the reliable articles are collected from Google Scholar and Academic journals.org. In addition, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Health Management Information Center (HMIC), were consulted. These search engines were searched through keywords (Academic Writing, College Students, EFL, ESP, and Written Feedback). The database included reports of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method. The quantitative and qualitative studies reports were selected based on the targeted keywords. Furthermore, the relevant books were borrowed from Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Kabul University, Kabul Education University libraries.
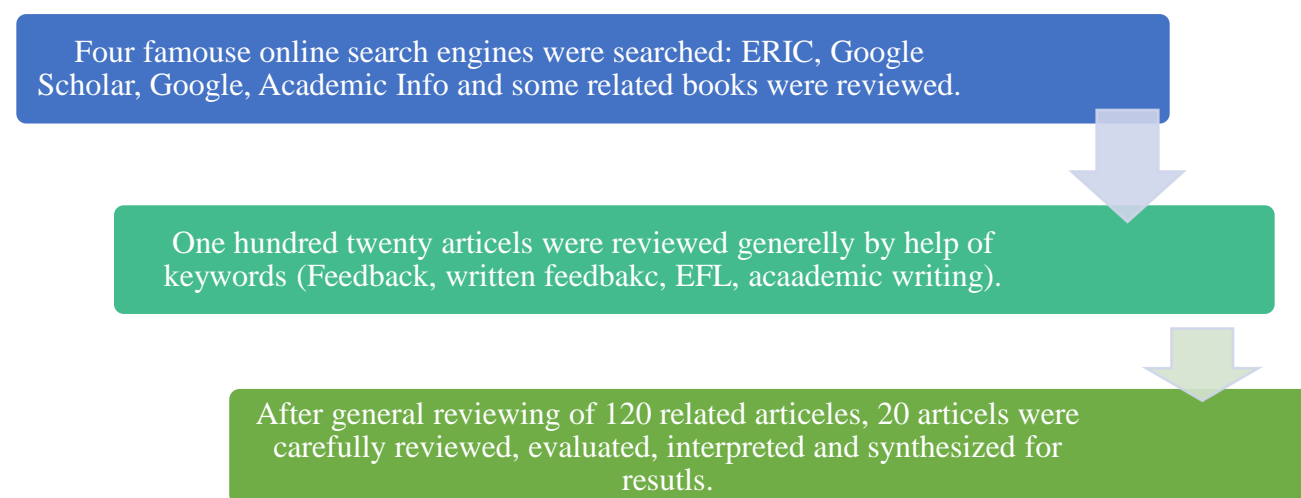
Sampling Method

The purposive sampling method was utilized in this study; the materials were assembled purposefully. Subsequently, the articles were analyzed thematically after careful note taking, evaluating, and interpreting. At first, the targeted articles were reviewed and after reviewing the

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themes of the articles emerged. Finally, the information reported thematically without errors and bias, as far as possible. This qualitative study focuses on secondary data which include research articles and English Language Teaching (ELT) related books. Throughout the study fifty articles were reviewed; they focus on the importance of giving and receiving feedback during the college. Other articles dealt with strategies of giving feedback as an instructor of English language.

Data Analysis

The related articles were reviewed according to the research questions. Margins tokens were used to collect information and it paved the ground for data evaluation and synthesizing. After careful context reviewed, the information was analyzed thematically. This scientific research was performed at Kabul University of Medical Sciences, Afghanistan, and it assists medical students, and English for Specific Purposes teachers to realize the importance of written feedback and the ways for providing written feedback to advance the students writing skills. Systematic review process implemented as below.

> Four famouse online search engines were searched: ERIC, Google Scholar, Google, Academic Info and some related books were reviewed.

> One hundred twenty articels were reviewed generelly by help of keywords (Feedback, written feedbakc, EFL, acaademic writing).

> After general reviewing of 120 related articeles, 20 articels were carefully reviewed, evaluated, interpreted and synthesized for resutls.

The articles searching, reviewing, and synthesizing process.

Results

This scientific study found the effectiveness of formative and summative assessments, linguistics improvement of writers, and written feedback connection with writing skill advancement. Many reviewed articles proved the advantages of written feedback for college students. Teachers must utilize various types of written feedback in the EFL context. Many nonnative speakers are unable to produce effective written texts because English grammar sentence structures variation challenge them. Students prefer well-structured and timely feedback which improve their academic writing accuracy and fluency. It is the teacher's responsibility to provide feedback after teaching some lesson. The study explored that giving feedback is continuous process and it progresses at the

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end of the course. Teachers should use direct or explicit feedback in the intermediate or low level classes because students do not have enough knowledge and skill of English grammar. The findings of Asadi, and Rahimi (2014) showed that direct feedback is more important that indirect feedback for nonnative speakers of English language who study at intermediate level. On the other hand, advance level students prefer indirect or implicit feedback which provokes their thinking.

The study found some essential ways for providing constructive feedback to writes. This research investigated two models of providing written feedback: the sandwich model and suggestions, criticism, and praise model. The sandwich model has three stages. It starts and ends with positive point as well as it includes the point which requires improvement in the middle. During the implementation of this model, the teacher has to use appropriate language that helps students' revision. The second model include three forms: suggestions, criticism, and praise. These forms are used together. The form builds good relationship between teacher and students. Hardavella, Gaagnat, Saad, Rousalova and Sreter (2014) recommended before conducting a meeting with students about their project, it is important to have effective plan for providing feedback because it promotes student and teacher relationship. Criticism paves the ground for students' improvement and they understand their mistakes easily. After figuring out the mistake, in the future they avoid these mistakes in the paragraph and essay writing.

The reviewed articles reached to the three research questions. Effective and timely feedback which meets students' attitude impact on their writing performance. There are many models of constructive written feedback giving and it relates with teacher to select the one that aids students. Direct feedback and indirect feedback enhance students writing capacity and confidence. Asadi, and Rahimi (2014) stated that clear direct feedback and indirect feedback have positive effective on students writing accuracy and consistency. In sum, giving and receiving feedback is strategy of student-centered learning approach and it trains autonomous learner.

Discussion

Academic writing is one of the vital skills of academics of the 21st century and it promotes through constructive feedback and apply paragraph and essay writing process. Written feedback promotes students' academic writing performance. Students prefer teacher's written feedback to peer feedback. Nonnative speakers of English are keen to have teacher feedback on time which helps them in the future. In fact, written feedback helps students to promote the form of their text and it helps them to revise the content problems before compiling the final draft of academic text. Teacher must use various strategies of giving feedback such as praise and criticism, positive point, negative point and positive position. Students should ask for further explanation when the given feedback is not clear for them and they have to apply feedback for advancement of writing. In addition, students should avoid the grammatical and organization mistake in the near assignments.

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English for Specific Purposes is a branch of English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language (EFL/ESL). Many students who study at ESP context need academic writing insights and skills because academic writing help them inside the university and beyond the university life. Constructive feedback educates students for writing academic and technical texts. Therefore, English for Medical Purposes teachers should include providing written feedback in their teaching approaches. They must inspire students to review their assignment by help of peer assessment inside and beyond the classroom. Explicit feedback and implicit feedback enhance students writing accuracy and fluency. Feedback is the important segment of student-centered learning approach and it sounds better to use many types of written feedback in the classroom. For instance, teacher can provide direct feedback to low level students, indirect feedback to high level students, and conducting mini conferencing with writer about their text.

Conclusion

This scientific study was conducted through systematic review of literatures. It found that appropriate strategies of written feedback train clear and concise writers. Written feedback has positive effects on non-native speakers' Academic writing performance. It helps teachers and students to share their perspectives without errors. Feedback acquaints teacher with strengths and weaknesses of his/her students writing skill. Furthermore, students understand their grammatical mistakes which impact on their formative and summative assessments. Well and on time feedback attracts students' attention and they apply the teacher's comment on their final draft. While the teacher is providing feedback, it is essential to point out positive and negative matters of the written text because only specifying mistakes of the text demotivate the learners in the long term study. I suggest future researchers to conduct quantitative research which deals with perfective of English for Specific Purposes learner. They can conduct impact of feedback on improvement of oral communication of students. Furthermore, they can conduct research on students' essays writing process and grading written assignment through rubric.

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