



# Effects of direct and indirect feedback on ESL/EFL writing

a literature review focusing on form



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## Abstract

Feedback is a very broad term involving many different ways of providing information to our students. The effectiveness of feedback has been largely debated throughout history. The major debate had its starting point in Truscott's (1996) claim that error correction is ineffective and perhaps even harmful. Many researchers objected to this thesis and started extensive research, measuring effects of different feedback types against control groups that did not receive any feedback. This literature review will report the findings from studies measuring whether direct or indirect feedback on form is effective at all and which is most effective for ESL/EFL students' writing accuracy. Motivation seems to be a factor influencing the effects of feedback as well and therefore studies on this will be reviewed as well. In general the results seem to indicate that feedback- both direct and indirect- is effective, with a growing amount of research favoring focused feedback.

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Feedback as a specific term is rather new in research. Early studies from Behaviorist researchers around the 1950s and 1960s were more focused on error prevention than error treatment. Errors should not be tolerated and at all times be prevented. The claim was that errors could be habit-forming and if they were allowed to exist, they would interfere with more preferable habits. If the students responded incorrectly they were given corrective feedback. Only when the student practised responding correctly, learning would occur (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

This literature review will start from some of the earliest researchers such as Lalande (1982) and Robb, Ross and Shortreed (1986). Then it will follow the research about direct and indirect feedback on form, from the big explosion – which occurred as a response to Truscott’s (1996) claim that error correction should at all times be avoided and might perhaps even be harmful – to more recent research. Many teachers and researchers – Ferris (1999) was one of the first – felt that Truscott’s claim was premature and totally false. Despite this consensus in the teacher profession, extensive research was needed to be able to falsify this claim and to find out how feedback should be given in order to have the greatest effect on students writing skills.

The review will include a section about how motivational factors might affect how students make use of the feedback given to them. Studies reviewed have shown that this factor needs to be taken into consideration when talking about effects of feedback. Finally a discussion section with concluding points of the research will be carried out. Validity of existing research and suggestions for further research in the field will be discussed as well.

*Feedback* in general refers to that specific information teachers provide to their students related to the task or learning process. The purpose is to fill in the gap between what the student understands at the moment and what is aimed to be finally understood (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore a distinction has to be made between *direct* and *indirect* feedback, as the different effects of these two types of feedback is what is aimed to be investigated. One easily understood definition of these two is: “While indirect corrective feedback only consists of an indication of an error (i.e. by underlining the error or providing an error code), direct error correction identifies both the error and the target form” (Van Beuningen, 2008, p. 282). Therefore indirect correction of errors is left to the student to find and correct (Zaman & Azad, 2012), while the teacher provides the correct form in direct error

correction (Ellis, 2009A). Furthermore Ellis gives a brief explanation of all different corrective feedback (CF) types that are being used in research. The types of feedback in the table cover all types used in the studies reviewed in this paper. It is therefore important to have a grasp of these types of feedback when reading the body of this paper.

**Table 1.1 Types of Feedback** (Ellis, 2009a, p.98)

Type of CF	Description
<b>1.</b> Direct CF	The teacher provides the student with the correct form.
<b>2.</b> Indirect CF	The teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction.
<b>A:</b> Indicating + Locating the error	This takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text.
<b>B:</b> Indication only	This takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have taken place in a line of text.
<b>3.</b> Metalinguistic CF	The teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clue to the nature of the error
<b>A:</b> Use of error code	Teacher writes codes in the margin (e.g. ww = wrong word; art = article).
<b>B:</b> Brief grammatical Description	Teacher numbers errors in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.
<b>4.</b> The focus of the feedback	This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the students' errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options.
<b>A:</b> Unfocused CF	Unfocused CF is extensive.
<b>B:</b> Focused CF	Focused CF is intensive
<b>5.</b> Electronic feedback	The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.
<b>6.</b> Reformulation	This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.

This literature review focuses on students in classes of both English as a foreign language (EFL) - and English as a Second language (ESL). Therefore, these terms have to be defined, but also distinguished from each other in order for the reader to understand how research might differ depending on which category is used for the study. EFL refers to students that do not have English as their native language and are studying in a country where English is not an official language. ESL on the other hand, is studied by someone who does not have English as their native language, but who is learning it in a country where English is an official language in order to be able to fully participate in the society. The main reason why these terms have to be separated is because it might affect the motivational factor of why English is studied. This argument will be developed later on in the review.

In the section about the influence of motivation, the terms integrative and instrumental motivation are used. Cook (2008) defines *instrumental motivation* as learning the language

for practical reasons such as passing an examination or getting a job. *Integrative motivation* is learning the language to be able to integrate in the target culture and society e.g. to go abroad and live in a country where it is an official language; additionally, Littlewood (1984) claims that a learner with integrative motivation has a bigger interest in the community of the second language than a learner with instrumental motivation.

My ambition with this literature review is to give teachers of EFL and ESL a better picture of what research says about what type of feedback that is most effective to provide to our students.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Effect of direct vs indirect feedback**

In one of the earliest studies of direct and indirect feedback, Lalande (1982) found that his experimental group outperformed the control group in the occurrence of errors at the end of their writing course. The participants were 60 Foreign Language (FL) students of German in Pennsylvania. The students in the experimental group were given indirect feedback to their errors and were only allowed direct feedback from peers or the teacher when they could not find out the answer for themselves after trying this. The control group had all their errors corrected directly by the teacher. The students took the post-test after two weeks only, so the effect of this study can only be measured for short term-learning, nevertheless, in this context indirect feedback helped them improve their writing skills. The validity can be questioned because, according to Lalande, the students were allowed direct feedback when they did not understand the indirect feedback. Even if there was no significantly big difference, the effects of indirect feedback still outperformed other methods to some extent. The group that received direct feedback actually showed negative effects on four grammatical areas. The study involved German students and not English students, but it might still contribute helpful information to this research field.

Robb et al. (1986) carried out a study on 134 Japanese EFL students. They used four different types of feedback, one type for each of four groups. The first group received direct feedback and had all their errors corrected. The second group received coded feedback to all their errors. The third group received uncoded feedback to all their errors and the fourth and last group received marginal feedback. To start the study they let all students take a pre-test which showed no significant differences between the four feedback groups. This was done to make sure that the students did not start the course with too big differences in previous

knowledge. The students revised their texts once a week through the whole course. The findings of this study were that none of the groups showed significantly increasing writing skills. They did not include a group receiving no feedback at all, so it is difficult to fully evaluate their results.

Truscott (1996) in his opposition to grammar correction used the results from Robb et al. (1986) as an argument for his case. Even if a fifth non-feedback group had been involved, he claimed that it would not show any significant difference from the other groups as they did not show any significant improvement themselves. As feedback on form would show no significant difference, he suggested that teachers should spend their time on more important things in language teaching.

Truscott's (1996) following quote is the basis of his work, but also the reason why such extensive research has been done in this area for almost two decades now: "My thesis is that grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned" (Truscott, 1996, p. 328). Truscott gave some reasons for his conclusion by firstly, claiming that grammar correction is ineffective as research evidence referenced to in his article has shown. In the nature and process of language learning, this lack of effectiveness is something that should be expected. For this he used Krashen's (1987) order of acquisition as reference to support his claim, "The acquisition of a grammatical structure is a gradual process, not a sudden discovery as the intuitive view of correction would imply" (Truscott, 1996, p. 342). Furthermore, he claimed that grammar correction has harmful effects and that research supporting the continuing of grammar correction lacks support for its claim. He wrote that Lalande's (1982) results were not completely valid as they did not compare one group that received error correction with another group that did not get any correction at all, but rather a group that received another sort of correction. One does not know for certain if these groups would have outperformed a non-correction group or not.

One of the first researchers to react and criticize Truscott's claim was Ferris (1999). She objected to the way Truscott generalized the term error correction when he said that error correction can come in different forms but that such distinctions do not have much purpose in his research. Ferris claims that this is the specific point where she and many teachers would disagree with Truscott. The different ways to deal with error correction are either more or less effective and the whole teacher profession would agree that error correction done poorly will not be of any help to students, however she claims that plenty of research shows that when error correction is done effectively, it will be helpful to students' writing. In other words, Ferris (1999) is very much in favor of feedback, even if extensive research is still needed.

From this point in time and forward, most researchers are challenging Truscott's (1996) claim. Most studies are trying to investigate what sort of feedback is the most effective and comparing this to whether it is effective at all. Even if the studies are measuring if feedback is effective at all, the general assumption is that it is and the question is more which sort is most effective. As Zaman and Azad (2012) put it, "while the debate is still going on over the focus of feedback, there is general agreement that attention should be given on both form and content" (Zaman & Azad, 2012, p. 141). However, Truscott did claim that feedback on other areas of students writing is probably a very good teaching method, but form related errors – which are the focus in this review – should not be corrected.

Ferris and Roberts (2001), in their study of 72 ESL students ability to self-edit their written work, found that there were no significant differences between students who received direct and indirect feedback. The direct feedback group had all their errors underlined and coded, while the indirect feedback group had their errors underlined but without codes. These results were similar to the results of Robb et al. (1986) that Truscott (1996) used to support his claim, however, in Ferris and Roberts' (2001) research a control group was included. This control group received no feedback at all and they showed to have a significantly higher error rate than the other groups at the end of the study. Bitchener (2008) points out that the post-test in Ferris and Roberts study only involved a revision of the first text. Bitchener therefore claims that this study cannot be measured for learning, only revision skills and that the validity of the study is therefore limited to this.

Two studies which also measured the effects of feedback for revision of texts were carried out by Chandler (2003). These studies involved 31 ESL students in the first and 36 students in the second. These studies showed that direct feedback was the more effective feedback form; nevertheless, both direct teacher correction and simply underlining with student self-correction outperformed other feedback types. These results seem to be in direct contradiction to Lalande's (1982) results mentioned earlier which showed an advantage for the indirect correction, but a negative effect for direct correction. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions from either of these studies.

A more recent study from Truscott and Hsu (2008) investigated the difference between revision accuracy and writing skill accuracy. The study was carried out on 47 EFL students in a public university in Taiwan. One group had their errors underlined as help in their revisions, while the other group did not receive any feedback at all. The results showed significant differences in favor of the group that received feedback. The conclusion of the first part of the study then, was that receiving feedback was beneficial for students' revision



accuracy. One week later they conducted a new writing task. On this task both groups had almost an identical error rate. Their overall conclusion of this study then was that feedback is effective in helping students rewrite their work, but that it does not show any improvement for writing accuracy for longer (one week) learning. This study supports the findings that feedback helps students' revision accuracy in Chandler's (2003) study mentioned above. Also Ferris (2012) supports the same results as the findings in the first part of the study about effectiveness of feedback on revision, "Written CF clearly helps students to revise and edit their texts more successfully, and these are important skills and strategies for student writers to develop" (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012, p. 96).

Van Beuningen (2008) carried out an experimental study investigating the long-term effects of direct and indirect feedback on second language learners (SL) of Dutch. Three classes with a total of 62 students were divided into four groups. The first group received direct feedback and the second group received indirect feedback. The first control group received no feedback and practiced only new writing tasks instead of revisions of their first texts. The last group was asked to revise their texts but they did not get any feedback at all.

The results of this study showed that student's accuracy in writing can be effectively improved by corrective feedback. The study showed short-term effects for both the direct and indirect feedback groups. Significant long-term effects on the other hand, were only found for the direct feedback group measured on a completely new writing task. All three groups with an opportunity to revise their texts produced fewer errors in their revised texts than in the original production. As they all showed improvement in their revisions but only the direct and indirect feedback group showed significant accuracy effects on the new writing, Van Beuningen concludes that the revision process in itself was not the reason for the accuracy improvement of these groups, rather what sort of feedback that was given. Besides, all four groups had to take an initial test which showed no significant differences between the groups, so previous knowledge had no significant effect on the results in this study.

It would be interesting to see a similar study carried out in an EFL class, but this study still shows tendencies useful for language writing classes in general. Ferris (2012) supports Van Beuningen's findings as well when saying that "longitudinal studies of the influence of written CF on student improvement over time have shown that in most cases, students receiving written CF do improve in written accuracy, though there is variation across individual students and error types" (Bitchener & Ferris, p. 96, 2012). Studies of variation in different error types will be brought up further on in the review.

Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) conducted a longitudinal study on 53 adult ESL students in New Zealand, aiming to find the most effective way to provide focused direct feedback on three different grammatical features. The features were prepositions, definite articles and the past simple tense. These features were chosen because most errors occurred for these features on a pre-test taken by the students. After the pre-test all students were divided into three different groups. The first group received direct written corrective feedback followed by a five minute session with the teacher where they talked about the errors the student made. The second group received direct corrective feedback only and the third and last group received no feedback at all. The study lasted for 12 weeks and the students completed new writing tasks week 2, 4, 8 and 12 in the form of informal letters. The results showed that there were no significantly big differences between the groups if all three features were measured together, however, they found that the first group significantly increased their accuracy from week 8 to 12 in the use of articles and past simple tense, but not for prepositions. The conclusion they drew from this was that some features were more treatable by direct error correction than others. They used Ferris' (1999) claim about treatable and untreatable errors to support their findings.

The following year, Ferris (2006) carried out a longitudinal study on 92 ESL students at California State University. Three drafts from two student essays were used- the first and the last essays of the course- to collect the results. The method used for this study was unfocused coded feedback on 15 error categories. Students were able to successfully edit 80% of the feedback they received. The longitudinal study (comparison from essay one to four) showed significantly increasing results for 5 of the 15 error categories. Most significant improvement was found for verb errors.

Ferris' (2006) study shows that teachers are successful in their error correction. Out of 5,101 corrections, 89.4 % were accurate, however, it is worth noticing that the teachers only corrected according to the 15 codes in 41.1% of the times, most common was that they used direct correction instead (45%). Ferris concluded that teachers tend to correct treatable errors, such as errors in verb tense more indirectly and untreatable errors, such as word choice and sentence structure, more directly. Best long-term effects were shown for indirect corrected treatable errors.

Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima (2008) picked up on this focused direct feedback research. They carried out a longitudinal study on 49 EFL university-level students in Japan. Their goal was to provide evidence that corrective feedback is effective for EFL students' writing. They investigated how the students improved their use of articles by using

narrative writing. All students took a pre-test and the students scoring over 90% in accuracy of article use were not involved in the study. The remaining students were then divided into three groups, 11 students in the focused feedback group, 13 in the unfocused group and 11 in the control group (no feedback). They were given three different subjects to write a narrative story about, in separate lessons, without any time pressure. The focused feedback group had all their article errors corrected, the unfocused group had some article errors and some other grammatical errors corrected and the control group received no error feedback at all, but instead they received content feedback. The results showed that all groups improved their results from the pre-test to the first narrative story test, however, for the longitudinal study only the feedback groups improved their results significantly, while the control group did not. The focused group improved more than the unfocused group on the last test, but not significantly. All in all, the study lasted for 10 weeks, so when the researchers say long-term learning, 10 weeks is what they count for.

The study by Ellis et al. (2008) reflects the results of a similar study by Sheen (2007), also focusing the feedback on articles. Sheen's study was carried out in an ESL setting. After a pretest 91 students out of 111 were divided into three groups. One group received direct feedback, one group received direct feedback with a meta-linguistic comment, and the control group did not receive any feedback at all. Except from the focused feedback, the treatment groups received some feedback on other grammatical features in order to not exclusively focus the students on articles. After receiving feedback on the pre-test, an immediate post-test was taken and a delayed post-test was taken 3-4 weeks after the pre-test. The result of this study showed that both treatment groups outperformed the control group and that the direct feedback with a metalinguistic comment group showed the significantly biggest long-term effects.

Bitchener (2008) further developed the study from Bitchener et al. (2005) to investigate the direct focused feedback. In this study the purpose was to measure the effects of focused direct feedback on students' use of articles only, similar to Ellis et al. (2008) and Sheen (2007). This study involved 75 ESL students in Auckland, New Zealand. They were randomly assigned to four groups, three of the groups received direct feedback. The first group received direct feedback with written and oral meta-linguistic explanation. The second group received direct feedback with written meta-linguistic explanation but no oral explanation. The third group received direct feedback only and a fourth group functioned as control group, receiving no feedback at all except from some comments on the content of the text. The structure of the study was one pre-test, one immediate post-test and a delayed post-

test two months later. All tests were conducted in the same way. The students received a picture and were assigned to describe what was happening in it. The results showed a significant benefit of all direct feedback groups compared to the control group from the pre-test to the immediate post-test. The improvements of the feedback groups were retained from the immediate post-test to the delayed post-test. Bitchener claims that this indicates that the effects can be measured as gains in writing skills due to the feedback, as no additional feedback had been given on these grammatical features between the immediate post-test and the delayed post-test.

The following year, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) conducted a new study. This time 39 ESL students were involved in a six-month longitudinal study. The treatment groups received the same three sorts of direct feedback, on the same grammatical features (article use) as in the study from Bitchener alone the year before, however, this time no control group was involved due to the ethical reason of not providing feedback to some students. Four tests were taken by the students in this study. The tests were the same as in Bitchener's (2008) study the year before, describing what was happening in a picture. The first test was taken on day one of the study. The immediate post-test was completed two weeks after the initial test, the first delayed post-test two months after and the final delayed post-test was completed six months after the initial pre-test. Significant effects were found for all three treatment groups from the initial test to the final delayed post-test, however they did not differ significantly from each other. By these results, Bitchener and Knoch claim that direct feedback in itself is enough to give to students' and no more time must be spent on additional feedback activities. They see limitations in the small amount of objects but they did not mention a limitation of not involving a control group.

In a more recent study on this topic, Ghandi and Maghsoudi (2014) compared the effects of direct and indirect feedback on Iranian EFL students' written spelling accuracy. 56 students were divided into two equally big groups, one group receiving direct feedback and one receiving indirect feedback. A pre-test was taken by a larger amount of students to get two roughly homogeneous groups for the experimental study.

This study found that the indirect feedback group significantly outperformed the direct feedback group and therefore the researchers here suggest that the students should be more involved in the feedback process and not just receive direct feedback. In order to achieve this, the teacher should create material for classroom activities which promote this. Direct feedback on the other hand is not desirable and ineffective in students' spelling accuracy.

### **2.1.1 The influence of motivation on feedback**

In the research field of feedback, there has also been an ongoing debate over how student motivation might be an affective factor when it comes to receiving and using feedback.

Cook (2008) claims that Language 1 (L1) learners do not have good or bad motivation for learning their language as this is as natural as walking to them. For EFL and ESL students on the other hand, motivation is an affective factor playing a part in why some students learn language better, therefore teachers need to take this into account.

In an early research on how motivation affects how students view and make use of feedback, Radecki and Swales (1988) investigated the attitudes of 59 ESL students in four different classes at the University of Michigan. They used a questionnaire to ask questions about the students' own perception of feedback, what value they give to it and if they take it seriously. The results showed an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards feedback. 87 % of the respondents answered that they appreciated comments from their teacher on their written production. The students also showed a desire to have all their errors corrected; however, another finding was that the higher proficiency students seemed to have a more negative attitude towards teacher feedback. The conclusion they drew from this was that more research is needed to find out if the proficiency level of students affects the results of studies like this. As this was a rather small study, they could not draw the definite conclusion that this parallel exists by more than a coincidence.

Truscott (1996) used this research to support his claim against error correction as well. He referred to Radecki and Swales' (1988) saying that students were not serious with corrections given to them. Another point he referred to in this study was that they were reluctant to rewrite their texts after having been given feedback. Some students saw the revision process as punishment rather than something useful and part of the learning process. In other words, Truscott's view is that feedback – direct as well as indirect – is not effective, largely because of the motivational aspect, however, this group of students he referred to was a small part of the study and his conclusion does not correspond to Radecki and Swales' general conclusion, only the conclusion for the small group of higher proficiency students.

Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) claim that EFL and ESL students should not be treated as one single heterogeneous group in this research area. Their view is that ESL students may be more eager to make use of the feedback they get, as they are studying to be able to participate in the society to a greater extent, i.e. they have a more integrative motivation. EFL students on the other hand are studying to meet a qualification more than integration into a society which uses the target language in the daily life, i.e. they possess

more instrumental motivation. This is the reason why studies generalizing these groups might come to faulty conclusions. Even if they may indicate important factors, they have not taken this affective factor into consideration.

Cook (2008) claims that both instrumental and integrative motivation may have positive effects and lead to success, but lacking either of them will cause problems. It depends more on how deep the motivation is, rather than what sort of motivation students possess.

Ferris (1999) claims that EFL students might be less motivated to do revision of their texts as their need for written fluency is often limited to the language classroom and the assignments they are taking part in there, furthermore she suggests that in order to increase the students' motivation to make use of indirect feedback it is the teacher's responsibility to raise the students' awareness of how important it is to develop their self-editing skills.

Zaman and Azad (2012) conducted a study aiming to investigate 120 Bangladeshi EFL learners' own perceptions on feedback. A close-ended questionnaire was used to make sure they received more honest answers from the students. Their findings were that many students were not motivated to attend to indirect feedback given to them. They preferred written direct feedback as this was easier to understand and they thought they would gain from this. The proficiency level of these students was low and Zaman and Azad claim that this is probably the reason why they prefer direct feedback. The findings that they lacked the motivation to deal with indirect feedback reflect Hedgecock and Lefkowitz's (1994) view that EFL students might be less eager to make use of the feedback given to them as they generally have a more instrumental motivation than other language learners. It supports Radecki and Swales' (1988) findings about high and low proficiency students as well. Zaman and Azad (2012) furthermore write that in this geographical area, the English language does not have as high status as in other parts of the world. This might be the main reason why many students are not eager to attend to the feedback.

Simpson (2006) carried out a study trying to change EFL students' attitudes towards feedback on writing. Her point of departure was that EFL students are not motivated to use feedback on form and therefore would not use feedback on content either. Her assumption was that her students should appreciate feedback on content more than feedback on form. Through 18 weeks she used time from the lessons to explain different ways of how feedback can be given to students' written production. She found that students changed their attitudes and that they were more motivated to write more and use the feedback if it was focused on both form and content. The students expressed that it was motivating to see feedback on their papers that was not only red marks. This conclusion is in line with the quote from Zaman &

Azad mentioned earlier, saying that it is generally agreed that focus of feedback should be on both form and content. It also supports the claim that motivation is a factor to consider in how students make use of the feedback. Another conclusion from this study was that it is possible to change students' attitudes about feedback.

Zacharias (2007) also carried out a study using questionnaires to explore EFL students' attitudes on feedback from their teachers. This study was set up in two pieces, the first involving 100 students answering to a questionnaire and in the second part, 21 of these students were interviewed to investigate deeper what they felt. The results indicated that the students preferred very specific feedback as they felt that this would help them revise their written works. 90.5% of the students answered that their view of feedback was dependent on the amount of feedback they received from their teacher. If they had too much feedback they would feel discouraged and were less likely to be motivated to use it for revision. If the teacher on the other hand gave them less feedback, this would be more motivating as it indicates fewer errors and it is easier to handle. This view is in line with the latest research showing that focused feedback seems to be more effective, as it involves less amount of correction and might therefore be more motivating. From the study of Zacharias (2007) a conclusion can be drawn that the influence of motivation is at least one of the factors why focused feedback is more effective than other methods including feedback on all errors.

### **3 Conclusion**

As can be seen from the studies reviewed in this paper, there is no clear-cut answer to what sort of feedback is the most effective. The studies reveal affective factors playing a part from one situation to the other. The research before Truscott's (1996) first article did come up with very differing results and research was very far away from a definite answer. The first years after Truscott's contribution to the field, studies used more control groups to measure that learning took place because of the feedback; however, Truscott saw another gap. These studies (e.g. Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003) generally measured the effects of revisions of texts rather than effects from one written work, to a completely new paper. The results could therefore not be counted as a measure of learning. Sheen (2007) supported this claim from Truscott and put it this way: "To claim that error correction results in learning, one must examine whether the improvement in revisions carries over to a new piece of writing or if the improvement is manifested on posttest or delayed posttest measures" (Sheen, 2007, p. 4). Due to the contribution of Truscott, the more recent studies reviewed (Bitchener, 2005; Ferris, 2006; Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, 2009), are

more longitudinal and they are measuring the effects of the feedback itself in a better way, by measuring effects from one written production to another instead of revision of the first text. Thanks to these more longitudinal studies, Truscott's (1996) claim can be seriously questioned and possibly even rejected.

Many of the researchers reviewed here express a need for further research as there are so many different results and opinions presented by different researchers. A wish for more longitudinal studies and larger student groups as objects are commonly expressed. At least many researchers see small experimental groups as a lack in their own research. Another reason is because of the ethical question of involving a group of students not receiving any feedback. If the studies are longer and involve more students, they will probably be more accurate, especially if they do not compare it to a non-feedback group.

I think that more longitudinal studies, as the more recent studies mentioned above, are needed to be able to more accurately measure the effects of feedback on student writing. Longitudinal studies using focused feedback and changing the grammatical features from study to study would probably be an effective way to come closer to an answer of which sort of feedback that is the most effective. As all recent longitudinal focused feedback studies have come up with similar results, the validity is strong for further research following the same pattern. It is probably more difficult to know if it is the feedback, or if it is other factors that showed effect in shorter studies, such as if the student just had a bad day on the pre-test for example.

Only one study showed the same effects for experimental feedback groups as for a control group which did not receive any feedback, Truscott and Hsu (2008). Otherwise all studies showed positive effects for feedback. This is a summary of the studies reviewed in this paper and what feedback showed the greatest effects.

**Table 3.1 Best effects of feedback**

<b>EFL, Direct</b>	<b>ESL, Direct</b>	<b>EFL, Indirect</b>	<b>ESL, Indirect</b>	<b>No difference</b>
Ellis et al. 2008	Chandler, 2003	Lalande, 1982	Ferris, 2006	Robb et al. 1986
	Bitchener et al. 2005	Ghandi & Maghsoudi, 2014		Ferris & Roberts, 2001
	Sheen, 2007			
	Van Beuningen, 2008			
	Bitchener, 2008			
	Bitchener & Knoch 2009			

As can be seen in the table, this review shows that feedback on form –both direct and indirect- is effective and that it does have a valuable place in both ESL and EFL classrooms,



however, the review also points at the need for a distinction between ESL and EFL in research on feedback. This is much due to the motivational factor playing a part in the effects of feedback. A common assumption is that ESL students who generally possess a more integrative motivation might gain from indirect feedback, as they are in direct need of learning the language and might therefore be more eager to make use of the feedback. EFL students, especially low proficiency students, on the other hand might gain from more direct feedback as this is more concrete; however, as can be seen in the table, the results of the studies in this review are not in line with this assumption, rather it seems as focused feedback is effective for both student groups and that motivation probably affects different from person to person, more than from ESL/EFL students. The motivational factors plays a part in students' preconceptions about feedback, (Radecki & Swales, 1988) but more interesting it affects how students make use of the feedback (Hedgecock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Ferris, 1999; Simpson, 2006; Zacharias, 2007; Zaman & Azad, 2012).

When putting all of these findings out in practice there is one very important factor which needs to be kept in mind, the tailoring of feedback. Many researchers (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009b; Brookhart, 2011) talk about this as an important factor. The most common beliefs are that low proficiency students should get more direct feedback to be able to use it comprehensively. High proficiency students on the other hand should receive more indirect feedback as they are better at self-monitoring their learning. This is supported by the findings in Radecki and Swales (1988) as well. It would be interesting to see if two direct focused feedback studies, one on high proficiency students and another on low proficiency students would come up with similar results. Another interesting topic for further research would be to continue the search of how motivation influences the effect of feedback. This can be done in every country by giving questionnaires to large student groups.

The aim with this literature review was that educators of EFL and ESL should get a better picture of what sort of feedback is the most effective to provide to our students. The results clearly show that feedback can help students improve their writing skills. However, there are differences in what sort of feedback is the most effective and this may differ from country to country and probably even from student to student, depending on their proficiency level and personal motivation. The tendency seems to be that focused feedback is useful for students of all proficiency levels, but further research is needed to investigate how focused feedback is applicable in different language areas. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of that tailoring feedback is an important part of their work and what we need to do is to continue the longitudinal research on feedback to get closer to an answer.

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