The Impact of Teacher Corrective Feedback Practices on EFL Learners' Writing Performance Improvement

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***Abstract*:** The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of various teacher corrective feedback practices (explicit, implicit, explicit with implicit and no feedback) on EFL learners' writing performance amelioration. An experiment was conducted with fourty first-year Master EFL students at Souk Ahras universty. The quantitative analysis of the obtained results proved that the different studied corrective feedback practices significantly ameliorate learners' writing in comparison with no feedback. Explicit feedback group acheived the most sutisfying results in the short-run, while the combination of explicit with implicit feedback is the most effective type of feedback for long-run utility of corrections.

Key words: Explicit feedback, Implicit feedback, Error Correction, Writing performance, English as foreign langauge Teahing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the teaching philosophy of EFL writing knew a major shift from product-focused approach to process-focused approach which considered writing as a process that necessitates repeated revisions of students' writing drafts through the process of pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing, (Tribble, 1996). Accordingly, students are guided through the process of their writing and their errors are accepted and considered as inevitable, productive and developmental rather than substandard and deviant (Ronald & David, 2001). This necessitates more responsiblity from EFL teachers on their learners' erroneous foreign language writing, and their corrective feedback is urgently needed to treat their learner' errors through these multiple revised drafts, as recomended by (Pica, 2000, p7) "learners…must produce the L2 and given feedback in order to modify their production toward greater comprehensibility, appropriateness and accuracy".

As a result of paying centered attention to the improvement of EFL writing as a productive skill, the subject of providing students with corrective feedback in writing has become of very heated debates. Despite the large number of researches that have attempted to determine the effectiveness and usefulness of teacher corrective feedback (TCF) for students' writing progress, yet, they have not succeeded to reach firm agreement about this contentious issue and questions about it are still unanswered, necessitating further investigation.

Thus, the present study is an attempt to investigate the effect of TCF on writing performace of first year Master EFL students at the department of foreign languages in Mohamed Cherif Messadia University of Souk Ahras, focusing on the different teacher corrective feedback practices (explicit feedback, implicit feedback, explicit with

implicit feedback) versus no feedback. Further more, the study attempts to find out which type of TCF is more effective on learners' writing performance improvement in the long-run. This is a critical issue that has received insufficient attention in the field of error feedback studies.

Alegrian First year Master EFL students have attended a compulsory writing module at the unversity for three years in a row. Yet, despite the many years studying Eglish, their writing performance is considered, according to (Ahmed, 20018) to be low intermedite level. When required to write essays in English in class, in view to many factors, they commit different types of errors. These errors negatively affect the effectiveness of their written assignments and lead to written ambiguity and miscomunication. This research aims first at recognizing their most frequent writing errors and investigates the effectiveness of their teacher's different corrective feedback practices on the elimination of these errors and on the improvement of their writing performance. The following research questions were raised and answered in this study:

1. Do the different EFL TCF practices affect EFL learners' writing performance improvement?
2. Which type of TCF practices is most beneficial for learners' writing performance improvement in short and long runs?

The answers to these two questions were reached through an experimental design. Fourty students were asked to write (essay1), then, the researcher analyzed the errors. Based on the number of errors, only the two highly frequent errors were chosen to work on, namely; subject shift and the use of unnecessary words. Participants were then randomly divided to four different feedback experimental groups (control group, explict feedback group, implicit feedback group, and explict with implicit feedback group).The researcher investigated the effect of the different corrective feedback practices on the different groups and

compare their effect in short and long runs through three writing phases using descriptive quantitative analysis of the obtained results.

2. Literature Review

The issue of wether TCF is beneficial to the improvement of students' writing performance has gone through a controversial history for over the past couple of decades. Studies resulted in different opinions about the role of TCF in L2 writing development and did not come with a precise answer to this debate (Truscott, 1999). (Kanyakorn et al., 2017) depthly reviewed the previous studies about the impact of TCF on students' writing performance improvement, from which the researcher adopted the main studies as follows.

The most opposing studies is that led by (Truscott, 1996) who explored "*the case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes*" He believes it is damaging and, hence, has a negative impact on students' writing. He claims that giving corrective feedback wastes teachers' time and energy and makes students feel dominated and controlled, which causes them to abandon their writing attempts. In this sense, feedback can become a destructive thing for them and he suggested to stop it for many reasons.

In addition to his findings, (Truscott, 2007), in a review of the studies that confirm his opinion (Polio, Fleck, and Leder, 1998 ; Chandler, 2003 ; Lalande ,1982 ; Fazio ,2001 ; and Sheppard, 1992, Brown, 2001, Brookhart, 2008) they argue that the noticed progress in the students' writing performance can be credited to their writing practices, rather than the corrections they have received. In his review, however, he eliminates the studies that have investigated feedback in revisions because the progress seen in revisions does not necessarily represent long-term improvement, which is the main aim of giving feedback to students.

These claims, however, were discarded and considered as premature and incomplete by Ferris (1999) who stated that TCF can equip the learners with an input and boost the acquisition process especially in the EFL context where students do not receive much exposure outside the classroom. Many studies supported Ferris' (1999) from a different perspective, and proved the usefulness of teacher corrective feedback, (Chandler, 2003; Robb et al., 1986; Sheppard, 1992, Hyland, 2003, Hashemnezhad and Mohammadnejad, 2012, Sritrakarn, 2018, Harmer, 2012, Lyster and Ranta, 1997, Park, 2012, Octaviana, 2011), they all support the provision of TCF for the amelioration of students' writing performance, and advocate for more teacher intervention in the correction process.

Corrective feedback can be either implicit or explicit. (Ellis et al., 2006) suggest that when providing implicit feedback, teachers correct learner's erroneous writing without overtly indicating that there has been an error and maintaining the focus on meaning. Explicit types of feedback either point out an error has been committed or push learners to self-correct, or both. Many researches have widely studied the impact of the two types of TCF.

Among the studies which talked about explicit feedback are those conducted by (Hamidun et al. 2012; Hosseiny, 2014; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2015; Tootkaboni & Khatib, 2014) who all agree that students' writing performance can be improved as a result of exposing them to explicit feedback.

As far as implicit feedback is concerned, many other researchers lend support to its effectivness, among of which those conducted by (Ferris and Robert, 2001, Noroozizadeh, 2009; Erlam et al., 2013, Eslami, 2014), they indicate that implicit feedback encourages students to self-

correct their errors and enhances their acquisition of accurate linguistic forms in the long run.

A significant number of studies have discussed the issue of which type of TCF practices is most beneficial for improving students' writing performance via comparing the effect of explicit and implicit feedback. In favor to explicit feedback, each of (Hosseiny, 2014; Almasi and Tabrizi, 2016,Chandler, 2000, 2003; Fazio, 2001; Ferris, 2006; Frantzen, 1995; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) concluded that students who were exposed to explicit feedback outstanded the other groups who were exposed to implicit feedback and no feedback.They suggest that teachers should ensure that students understand the remedial feedback they provide for maximum benefit from it.

Others report advantages of implicit feedback rather than explicit feedback, (Jamalinesari et al., 2015; Westmacott, 2017; Lalande, 1982), their studies revealed that implicit feedback has stronger beneficial influence on students' learning autonomy in comparison to explicit feedback and creates a favorable atmosphere for promoting writing performance.

In sum, research on the effect of TCF has revealed its beneficial significance in assisting learners to improve their writing performance. However, the findings of these researches are inconclusive since, as Ferris (2004) points out, due to the maladjustment between the designs of the studies, the results are not comparable, consequently, the findings of one study cannot corroborate and validate those of another, and debates remain ongoing.

3. Methods
3.1 Instruments

The present experimental research aims to investigate and compare the influence of different TCF practices on 40 EFL first-year

Master students' writing performance. Those students were given writing propmts and they were asked to write argumentative essays under different conditions corresponding with the types of TCF, and at different times. Through the three experimental phases, each student submitted four essays, resulting in a total of 160 essays gathered and corrected.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The study was constructed following three main phases. The pre- experimental phase in which all of the students were assigned to write (essay1). 40 essays were collected and correted so as to count the total number of the different types of errors and deterimne the most common and frequent ones on which the researcher focused his work, namely, subject shift and the use of unnecessary words without taking into consideration other types of errors. Followed by post-experimental phase in which the students were divided into four groups of 10 students corresponding with the type of TCF (CG, IF, EF, IFEF). Each group is asked to write (essay 2) on which the treatment groups received written corrective feedback in two times (the first feedback on draft 1of essay 2 during writing in the classroom and the second one on draft 2 of essay 2 via e-mail), while the control group received no feedback. Then, the delayed-experimental phase in which the participants were asked to write (essay 3). At this phase the teacher just counted the number of errors and gave no corrections to any of the groups.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The 160 collected essays were corrected, the study's focused erros were counted and arranged in Excel Microsoft files according to the experimantal phases for easier calculations and comparisons of the mean number of each group in each phase then descriptive quantitative analysis were performed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Essay 1 Errors: Types and Number

In order to decide which type of errors to work on in this study, the number of errors of all the participants on essay 1 were counted and classified into 20 types of language errors. Only the most common and frequent ones were taken into consideration, namely Subjet Shift (SS) and Unnecessary Words (Ø) on which the teacher provided feedback, as shown in Figure 1 bellow

Fig.1. Types and Number of Errors in Essay 1
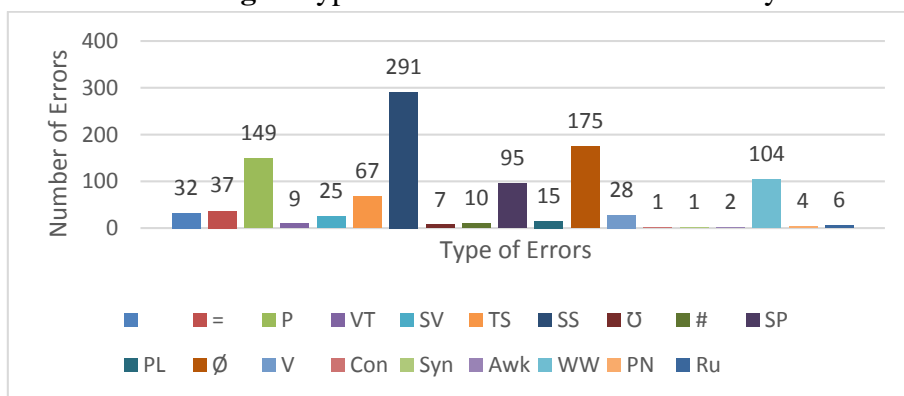
4.2. Effect of TCF on Students' Writing Performance

To answer the research questions, the mean number of errors of all the participants in all the essays through the three treatment phases were counted and recorded on table 1 bellow. Between-groups and within-groups comparisons were done in order to compare beween the number of errors of the different groups in each phase and to examine the variability of the number of errors within each group across the experimental treatment phases.

Research question one: Do the different EFL teacher corrective feedback practices affect EFL learners' writing performance improvement?

As it is evident, the mean number of errors of all the groups (IF, EF, EFIF, CG) in Essay 1 prior to any corrective feedback are (22.25, 23.75, 21.50, 22.20) respectively.The mean number of errors of all experimental groups are very close in the pre-experiment phase

**Table 1.** Mean and SD of no. of Errors per group and stage

Group	N	Essay 1		Essay 2 Draft 1		Draft 2		Essay 3	
		Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev	Mean	Std dev
IF	10	22.25	20.224	21.25	16.741	16.00	20.116	19.75	11.927
DF	10	23.75	21.436	12.00	7.071	4.50	5.686	11.50	6.807
IFDF	10	21.50	19.416	14.00	3.162	5.50	2.517	6.5	2.646
CG	10	23.20	18.385	21.80	6.760	22.40	7.987	21.20	10.402
Total	40	22.675	19.865	17.24	9.628	12.71	12.687	18.82	10.346

This means that there is homogeneity between the four groups at the pre-experimental phase indicating that the four groups were of symmetric writing abilityy at the beginning of the study. This result may due to the fact that the four groups were selected from a population of the same caracteristics and envirement. Accordingly, any change in the number of errors will be caused by the intervention of one of the influencing factors, in our study, TCF with its three types.

This between-groups convergence in the mean number of errors in essay 1 did not remain stable in the other writing phases in which the participants receive different types of TCF. In Draft 1 essay 2 (the first feedback provision time), the mean number of errors of (IF, EF, IFEF, CG) are (21.25, 12, 14, 21.8) respectively. We can notice a large between-groups disparity in the mean number of errors in this phase. Also, the number of errors of the different groups has undergone other changes on each of the other writing phases (Draft 2 Essay 2 and Essay 3), as it is shown on figure 2 below.

Fig.2. Mean Number of Errors of each Group in Each Writing phase
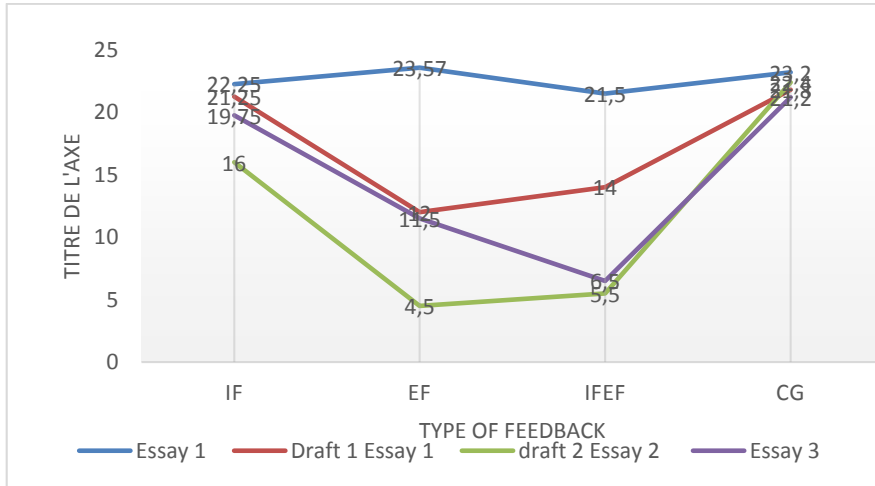
Comparisons between-groups revealed that there were significant differences between groups on each writing phase corresponding to the different TCF practices. This means that there is an effective interaction between TCF and number of errors.

After investigating between-groups differences in the mean number of errors on each writing phase, another set of within-group comparisons were done in order to further examine if there were significant differences within each group through the three experimental phases, i.e, to study the effect of interaction between the TCF and the writing phase.

These comparisons revealed that the CG who did not receive any form of TCF in the three stages recorded slight diminution in its number of erros from 23.20 in Essay 1 to 21.80 on Draft 1 of Essay 2, then it raises slightly to 22.40 on Draft 2 of Essay 2. On Essay 3 the mean number of errors of the CG diminites again to 20.20 which is similar to

the mean number of errors in Draft 1of Essay 2 but still lower than the mean number of students on essay 1. These slight reductions in the mean number of errors of the CG may due to other influencing factors such as students' self-correction and repeated writing practices.

While the other three treated groups (IF,EF,IFEF) remarkably reduced their mean number of errors through the three phases in comparison with the CG. The mean number of errors of the (EF) group, for example, reduced from 23.75 in essay 1 before any feedback to 12.00 on draft 1of essay 2 during the first feedback in class, and more reduced to 4.5 on draft 2 of essay 2 after the second feedback via e-mail. Although the mean number of errors augmented again to 11.5 on essay 3 writen by the students two weeks after the last feedback, but it remained less than the number of errors on essay 1 before any given TCF. The same thing for the other groups, as it shown on figure 3 below

Within-group comparisons demonstrated significant differences within-groups in the mean number of errors through the writing phases. Accordingly, there is a significant effect of interaction between TCF and writing phase. These findings denoted that the mean number of errors varies significally between the treated groups and the CG and also within each group through the three experimental phases.

Fig.3. Mean differences of errors Within-groups through the writing phases

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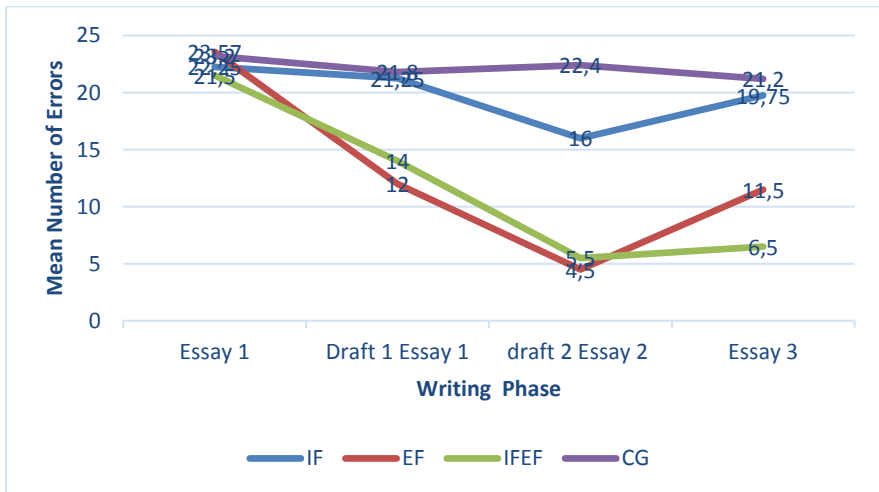
The statistical analysis of the obtained results from between-groups and within-groups comparisons confirmed the existance of significant differences in the mean number of errors between the CG which remained almost stable through the treatment phases, and those of the other experimental groups (IF, EF, IFEF) which recorded considerable reduction in the number of errors after the intervention of the different types of TCF, therefore they realized important acheivements in their writing performance. These findings support those of (Chandler, 2003; Robbet al., 1986; Sheppard, 1992) who claimed that regardless of the type of the provided TCF, students will benefit from it and improve their writing performance, however they oppose (Truscott, 2004) claim that providing learners with corrective feedback has no effect or can be of some negative harmful effects on students' language acquisition.

The mean number of errors within the three treated groups decreased mainly between the two revised drafts of essay 2, while they raised again in the third essay which was written two weeks later of the provision of feedback but they still lower than they were in the first essay. Therefore, we can conclude that there was a main effect of the

interaction between TCF and the time of its provision (the writing phase), and that immediate TCF more improved learners' writing accuracy, and it may not have long-run effect. The remaining section of the study delves deeper into the effect of each type of feedback in the long and short run.

Question 2: Which type of TCF practices is most beneficial for learners' writing performance improvement in short and long run?

In order to decide which type of the provided TCF is more beneficial for learners' writing performance improvement, comparisons between the mean number of errors of the three treated groups (IF, EF, IFEF) on both immediate corretive feedback phases were done.

On draft 1of essay 2, the mean number of errors of the three treated groups (IF, EF, IFEF) were (21.25, 12,14), respectively. This means that the participants in the (EF) group most reduced their number of errors and outperformed those in (IF, IFEF) groups with fewer errors, followed by those of (IFEF) group with no significant differences between them, while the (IF) group participants, although they lowered their number of errors, there were significant differences between their number of errors and those of the other groups.

Comparing the mean number of errors of the three groups on the second draft of essay 2 yeilded almost the same indicators of impact that the (EF) highly influenced learners' improvement with more convergence between (EF, IFEF) groups since this later at this phase acheived considerable developments compared to its results in the previous phases and to the other groups (IF, CG), as illustrated in figure 4 below

Fig.4. Mean Number of Errors between Draft1Essay 2- Draft 2 Essay2
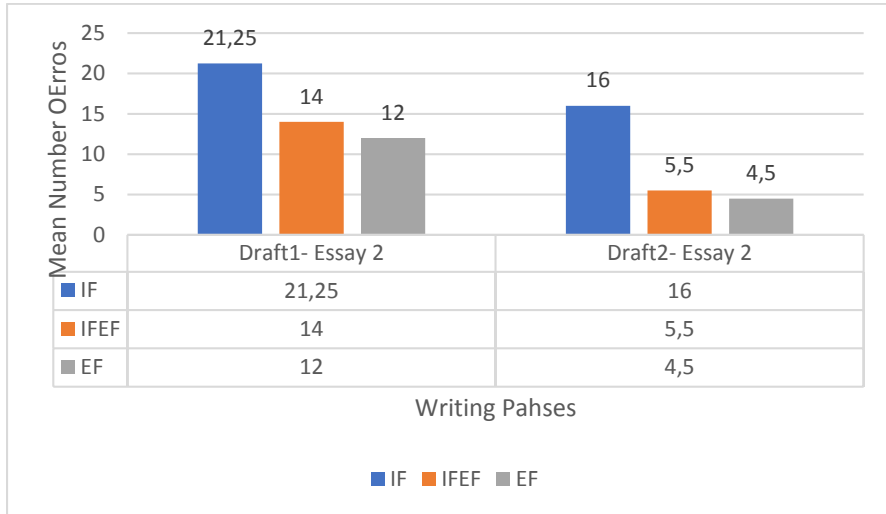
Learners' number of errors reduction reflects their writing improvement, the fewer they make errors the better they ameliorate their writing performance. During the two intervals of corrections, (EF) is the most beneficial type of TCF the teacher can provide to his students to help them develop their writing skills, in comparison with the other types (IF, and IFEF pactices). Accordingly, we can conclude that learners will more benefit from TCF immediately if this later indicate, locate and correct errors on students' peices of writing explicitly, than if they only provide them with indications or hints to chek in the margin to let them realize that their writing is flawed   and it contains errors

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Accordingly, teachers' explicit corrective feedback is the most advantageous and helpful for EFL learners to ameliorate their writing performane in the short-run because it enables the students to concentrate on a clearly corrected error at a time which allowed them to revise and rewrite their essays effectively. These findings confirmed

those of (Ferris and Roberts, 2001, Perez et al., 2013, Hosseiny, 2014) who observed amelioration in their students' writings in the revision of their essays just after the provision of explicit corrective feedback but they did not consider long-term effects. The fact that the students rewrite their writings successfully in the presence of immediate feedback does not guarantee that they will do so in subsequent new writings in the long run, which is the main purpose of providing students with corrective feedback.

The results of the previous comparisons about time effect, revealed that there is an effective interaction between TCF and writing phases since leaners' mean number of errors did not remain stable and they went down and up through the different experimental phases, but all of the feedback groups acheived improvements in their writing performance in comparison with their results from (essay 1) to (essay3).

In order to examine the long-run effectiveness of TCF on learners' writing performance, students were asked to write essay 3 two weeks after the last time of feedback provision. After that, the errors of the four groups which were recorded on essay 1 and essay 3 were compared in order to find the mean loss of errors of each group at the end of the study. The group who scored the higher mean loss is the group who benefited the most in the long-run.

The results of the comparisons of the mean loss of each group between essay 1 and essay 3 revealed that (IFEF) group outstands all the other groups with a mean loss of (-15) followed by the (EF) group with (-12.25) which registered lower but closer significant reduction in the mean number of errors in comparison with its mean loss in the short-run. This index fall down to (-2.5) for the (IF) group which registered lower non significant mean loss, while the (CG) made minor non

significant improvements with a mean of loss of (-2). The figure 5 below illustrated these results.

Fig.5. Error Mean Loss between Essay1- Essay 3
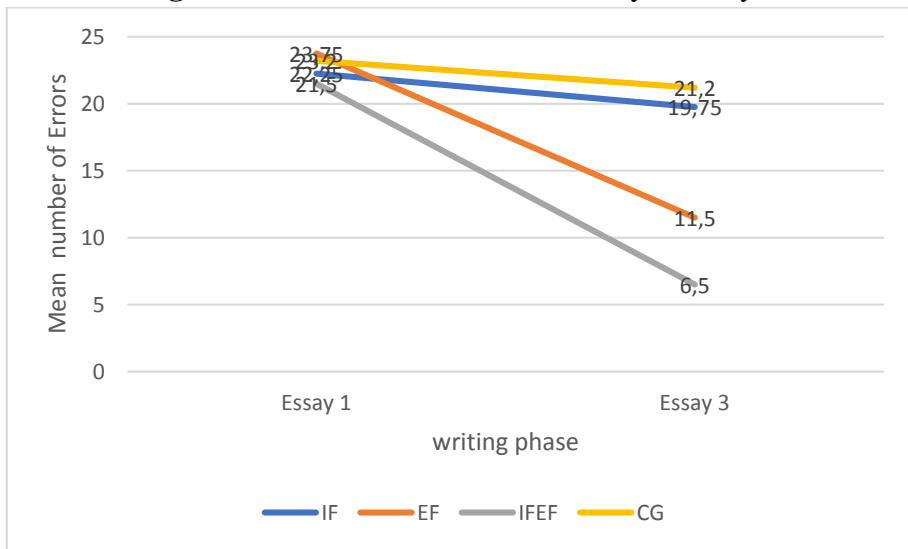
The obtained results indicated that providing students with implicit feedback accompanied with explicit feedback can yield the most effective results in the long-run. This means that relying solely on implicit feedback might lead to misunderstanding and loss of motivation in language learning. Therefore, explicit feedback is recommended to be included for obvious and accurate corrections. The results are in line with those of (Bitchener et al., 2005; Bitchener, 2008; Sobhani and Tayebipous, 2015), and opposed to (Lalande, 1982) who favored implicit corretive feedback for long run retention because it challenges the learners cognitively and motivates them to engage in discovering the correct forms and involve themselves to problem-solve which is more advantageous for long term improvements (cited in Purnawarman, 2011)

5.CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to the study, as far as the two writing items under study (subject shift and the use of unnecessary words) are concerned, the students who have been investigated succeeded to reduce them and ameliorate their writing performance overtime whether they were provided with teacher corrected feedback or not and this is due to many other influencing factors such as self-correction and repeated writing practices. However, the amount of amelioration was higher and significantly observable in the treated feedback groups in comparison with the control group. Besides, a progressive and linear pattern of improvement was achieved through the three experimental phases. The results of the present study, in line with other studies, emphasized the importance of teacher feedback regardless its type, especially in EFL teaching and learning context where the teacher's instructions and guidance are the most helpful practices for leaners to ameliorate their language skills in general and their writing performance in paticular. Therefore, the answer to the first research question is yes.

As for the impact of interaction between the writing phase and corrective feedback on the effectiveness of this later, the comparisons of the number of errors of each group with respect to the post exprimental two drafts indicated that all the groups reduced their errors over time. The participants in the explicit feedback (EF) group outperformed the other groups in the post-experimental phase, i.e, during the immediate feedback time. These results suggested that teacher explicit error corrections are the most beneficial for EFL learners writing performance improvement in the short-run.

While the findings of comparisons between the number of errors of each group in the pre-experimental phases and those in the delayed phase denoted that all the groups realized reduction in their errors overtime, but the participants of the (IFEF) group more diminited their

number of errors from essay 1 to essay 3. These findings reported that exposing students to implicit feedback combined with explicit feedback is the best way for EFL learners to ameliorate their writing performance in the long run..

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has some limitations mainly related to the circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic. As universities were obliged to minimize the social mixing, participants attended only four face-to-face sessions during the 1st semester of the academic year 2021, the researcher was obliged to conduct the whole experiment during these sessions. Also, these sessions were only one hour, which was not sufficient for the teacher to provide the students with the needed amount of corrective feedback. Another challenge is the limited number of participants because the majority of them refused to attend the in-class sessions as the government allowed them to be absent. Those out of control real-life conditions make it impossible for the researcher to draw a specific framework for the study. Thus, the study is designed to be an action research. Consequently, the study's findings cannot be generalized to the whole Algerian EFL context or even to the whole EFL context; the findings can only be applicable in the context in which the study was done.

In order to cover these limitations, more studies of the same kind must be conducted in other conditions. Olso, other related topics are suggested for future research, among which:

1. Investigating the relationship between the nature and category of errors and the type of feedback
2. Exploring the effectiveness of automated corrective feedback in errors detection and correction, as an alternative to teacher corrective feedback.
3. The effect of teacher corrective feedback on EFL learners' autonomy and motivation.

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