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The Influence of Direct and Indirect Feedback on Accuracy in the Production of Selected Grammar Structures in Written Compositions¹

Abstract: Error correction is a burning issue in every classroom, since students tend to create numerous faulty structures. Those erroneous utterances should be corrected in such a way that would be supportive and useful for the pupil. Identifying the most effective feedback type is a considerable challenge for every researcher and English teacher. For many years, there has been an ongoing debate about correcting students' grammatical errors. Nevertheless, this article can contribute to the development of research in its specific field of study mainly, because it deals with the influence of direct and indirect feedback on accuracy in the production of selected grammar structures in written texts. Most of the studies in this topic concern oral feedback; however, this paper gives some insight into written correction and its significant impact on grammar accuracy in written compositions. With the purpose of fully understanding this issue, the article includes not only the comparison of different forms of grammar instruction but also various types of feedback. The aim of this paper is to investigate whether direct or indirect feedback is more efficient in second language written compositions. In order to solve this problem, an experiment and an interview with the students had been conducted in Zespół Szkół Ekonomiczno-Turystycznych in Jelenia Góra. The results of this study may have some crucial implications for English teachers and methodologists.

Keywords: accuracy, corrective feedback, error, error correction, formal instruction, learners' preference of feedback

1. Introduction

Formal teaching is inseparably connected with error correction. In a formal environment, the teacher is obligated to provide his students with some form of feedback concerning their utterance. Despite the variety of studies focused on this

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particular subject, there is still ambiguity concerning the most effective form of feedback. This paper contrasts direct and indirect feedback and studies their influence on accuracy in the production of selected grammar structures in written compositions. The research has been conducted in order to investigate, which form of feedback is more favourable while mastering writing skills.

2. Formal instruction and its types

Second language acquisition process can occur in three contexts: naturalistic, instructed and mixed (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 309). This paper concerns the second context which takes place in the classroom. Form-focused instruction refers to any type of teaching which engages the learners in formal aspects of language, such as the use of explicit techniques and presentation of rules. Obviously, error correction may be utilized in formal instruction (Pawlak 2006: 18).

Form-focused instruction and meaning-focused instruction are different types of formal instruction. Meaning-focused instruction includes communicative language teaching, task-based teaching and content-based instruction (Pawlak 2012: 38). Its main principle is to lead a student to incidental acquisition of a foreign language and communicative effectiveness. According to Long and Robinson (1998: 19), this kind of instruction is most popular in particular classroom environments such as "Prabhu's procedural syllabus, Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach, and some (but not all) content-based ESL instruction and immersion education." On the other hand, there is form-focused instruction, which covers various types of teaching and draws students' attention to formal features of the language. Moreover, it includes explicit instructions and corrective feedback. Deductive and inductive grammar instructions are techniques used in form-focused instruction. Furthermore, The Grammar Translation Method and Audiolingual Method make use of this type of instruction (Pawlak 2006: 18).

Form-focused instruction splits into focus on form and focus on forms. Ellis (2006: 100) states that focus on form "entails a focus on meaning with attention to form arising out of the communicative activity." It joins the communicative lessons with teaching grammar. Grammar structures are not the dominant goal of the lesson but they are presented in a meaningful context (Ellis 2006: 101). This type of instruction combines focus on form and focus on meaning. Another option of form-focused instruction is focus on forms, which concentrates intensively on particular grammatical structures. This type of form-focused instruction includes a large number of isolated lessons concerning teaching grammar (Ellis 2006: 100). The familiarization with the linguistic forms, which are taught in detachment from context and meaning, should result in language acquisition and communicative abilities (Doughty and Williams 1998: 3). Presentation-Practice-Production lesson structure is the most popular example of focus on forms (Pawlak 2006: 22).

Doughty and Williams (1998: 4) made a brief and logical distinction between different forms of instruction. They stress that "focus on form entails a focus on formal elements of language, whereas focus on forms is limited to such a focus, and focus on meaning excludes it" (Doughty and Williams 1998: 4).

3. Grammar accuracy in written compositions

This study focuses on the influence of different types of feedback on accuracy. According to Richards et al. (1992: 142), the term *accuracy* can be defined as "the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but may not include the ability to speak or write fluently." The term *grammar accuracy* refers to paying attention to grammatical forms and structures. This article highlights the importance of accuracy in writing compositions. In writing, lexical knowledge and grammatical accuracy are indispensable to avoid communicative confusion (Larsen-Freeman 2003: 14). There have been plenty of studies concerning the influence of form-focused instruction on accuracy. Pawlak (2006: 193–195) lists the studies which examined this topic; twelve out of sixteen studies reveal that form-focused instruction has a significantly positive impact on language accuracy.

4. The concept of error

The provision of feedback is directly linked with errors. Chunhong and Griffiths (2012: 306) remind us that various approaches describe an error differently. Behaviourists treat an error as a bad habit which has to be corrected immediately, whereas Corder (1981: 10) calls it a sign of language development. The definition of an error ought to be more connected with the classroom environment. Consequently, Chaudron (1986 in Pawlak 2012: 15) claims that errors are linguistic forms that are different from the native-speaker's standards and any other utterances which are considered faulty. A clear distinction between an error and a mistake has to be made. Mistakes are errors of performance; they are unsystematic and they emerge because the speaker, for some reason, cannot properly utilize his abilities at a given moment. On the other hand, errors indicate lack of competence; they occur because of certain misunderstandings inherent within the students' knowledge (Corder 1981: 10).

Although errors are called unwanted forms, their careful analysis may also be significant for second language acquisition. Corder (1981: 5) reminds us that there are two approaches concerning errors. The first of them claims that errors are the results of imperfect teaching methods. On the contrary, the second one states that errors will always occur despite the teacher's best effort. Consequently, the teacher should concentrate on how to deal with those erroneous forms. Most of the methodologists state that classified and analysed errors can be beneficial for second language acquisition.

Edge (1989 in Pawlak 2012: 176) illuminates that making language errors is not only natural, but also necessary to language learning.

Corrective feedback

The correction of errors is an intrinsic aspect of feedback provision. McMillan defines the term feedback as "the transfer of information from the teacher to the student following an assessment" (2007: 138). George (1972: 7) names feedback as information concerning output. This sort of recognition regarding an utterance leads to self-correction. Moreover, Chaudron (1988: 133) illuminates that feedback is a component of classroom interaction, since students discover the quality of their language performance by the teacher's reaction. According to Pawlak (2012: 16), feedback is much broader in scope and it encompasses error correction. Consequently, all error correction is feedback.

There are many distinctions of feedback. The most general is the division into oral and written feedback. Oral corrective feedback is usually public and straightforward. It can be both immediate and delayed. What is more, it can be explicit as well as implicit. The correction can be made by the teacher, a peer or the learner himself. It makes it possible for the teacher to give some metalinguistic information; in addition, it has a direct impact on implicit, procedural knowledge. The teacher chooses if the oral feedback is conversational or didactic (Pawlak 2012: 131). In spoken language, there are feedback strategies intended for meaningful communication. They are also labelled as negotiation strategies and they constitute explicit correction, recast, clarification request, elicitations, repetitions and metalinguistic feedback.

Written feedback, in many cases, is opposite to oral feedback. It is not public; it is shown only to the learner who made the errors. It cannot be immediate; it is always delayed. It concerns various aspects of writing, such as grammar accuracy, lexical complexity, content, coherence, mechanics, cohesion and others. Contrary to oral feedback, written feedback can only be explicit and didactic. In addition, written feedback only regards explicit, declarative knowledge. However, it has some similarities to oral feedback. It also can be made by the teacher, a peer or the student himself. Moreover, both oral and written feedback may contain metalinguistic information (Pawlak 2012: 132). Last but not least, written feedback can be either direct or indirect. This article contains research which focuses on these two forms of written feedback. Hyland and Hyland (2006: 83) define direct feedback as the identification and provision of the appropriate form by the teacher. It may follow different patterns, such as crossing out erroneous words or morphemes, inserting omitted phrases or providing correct forms. The supporters of direct feedback believe that providing the correct version in conjunction with metalinguistic information reduces the possibility of confusion or misunderstanding on the learner's side (Pawlak 2012: 190). As far as indirect correction is concerned, the error is indicated but the student is not supplied with the correct form. The teacher simply underlines, circles or marks the errors; he may also indicate the errors in the margin by ticks or some type of code. This kind of information is an output-pushing option and it should encourage the learner to self-correct. The adherents of indirect approach claim that it engages learners in problem-solving which leads to deep language processing and eventually causes long term acquisition of the second language.

Most of the methodologists agree that corrective feedback is an inevitable part of second language teaching. As Pawlak (2012: 315) says, "corrective feedback constitutes an important option in form-focused instruction." In both form-focused lessons and meaning focused lessons, corrective feedback is provided. In form-focused context, it is aimed at the particular structure taught during the lesson, whereas in meaning-focused context corrective feedback is intended for whatever errors that emerge (Ellis 2006: 94). Corrective feedback is also appreciated in the concept of focus on form. Long (1991 in Pawlak 2012: 39) states that it is a great method of drawing students' attention to formal structures of the language during communication. The focus should be put on both form and meaning. What is more, corrective feedback is undeniably the distinctive feature of the concept of focus on forms. Focus on forms is firmly linked with PPP procedure, where error correction plays an important role.

This paper is intended to present the comparison of direct and indirect feedback and their influence on language accuracy in written compositions. Corder (1981: 11) claims that indirect feedback is more beneficial for learners because it forces them to discover the language on their own. Nassaji (2011: 317) believes that if feedback is enriched with negotiation and interaction it is more profitable for the learner, since it is matched with his interlanguage level. Similarly, Bitchener et al. (2005: 202) claim that direct oral feedback is highly profitable if it is connected with direct written feedback.

6. Research

This paper tries to answer the question of which form of feedback is more beneficial for learners as far as grammar accuracy is concerned. There is a considerable demand for this kind of research. Chaudron (1988: 152) claims that there is a need for some studies which would focus on different types of feedback and their influence on second language learning. The research question searches for an answer to the problem of which form of feedback has a more significant impact on accuracy in the production of selected grammar structures.

6.1. Hypotheses

The above mentioned question will be investigated with reference to the following hypotheses.

H0 = there is no systematic relationship between the type of corrective feedback and grammar accuracy in written compositions of intermediate ESL learners.

H1 = direct feedback has a more decisive effect on intermediate ESL learners' acquisition of selected grammar structures.

6.2. Description of the sample

Dependent variable is the accuracy in selected grammar structures in written compositions. Independent variable is direct and indirect feedback. Control variable is the group of students who have private lessons outside of school; they were excluded from the research. Forty teenage participants took part in the experiment. They were divided into two groups. Each group included twenty people; seventeen women and three men in the first group. Seven men and thirteen women constituted the second group. They were eighteen years old each. The groups were at an intermediate level. The learners had not been abroad for a longer time so their only contact with the language was in the classroom. The experiment took place during regular English lessons in Zespół Szkół Ekonomiczno-Turystycznych in Jelenia Góra.

6.3. Linguistic targets

The researcher focused on the regular and irregular verbs in past simple tense because of two reasons. First of all, this particular linguistic problem is a burning issue in English classrooms since learners still have some troubles with the proper application of those forms. The -ed marker may be often confused by the learners. Richards (1974: 175) claims that "the -ed marker, in narrative or in other past contexts, often appears to carry no meaning, since pastness is usually indicated lexically in stories, and the essential notion of sequence in narrative can be expressed equally well in the present." Consequently, learners have some problems with the usage of this structure. Moreover, George (1972: 108) confirms that for the English language learner a stem+-ed must usually seem redundant. Typically, the stem+-ed is introduced while presenting past time, so it concerns narration and the order of past events. In addition, the learners have serious problems with remembering the irregular verbs in past simple. Because of these difficulties, this paper concentrates on past tense forms. Secondly, this study will be compared with Bitchener et al. (2005), who conducted a study concerning the influence of different types of corrective feedback on writing. They focused on past tense forms, definite articles and prepositions.

6.4. Instruments

The instruments used in the experiment were two students' diaries about their previous day and their last birthday; moreover, there were two informal letters concerning the last summer and the preceding weekend. The learners, in each group,

wrote four pieces of writing. This kind of writing is named by McKay (2006: 262) open response writing. All of these works had been conducted as guided writing. After that, the last written composition was controlled by the researcher; she was dictating the letter in Polish while the students were simultaneously translating the text into English. It was an informal letter to a friend about the previous weekend.

6.5. Research procedures

The research consists of an experiment and an interview with the students.

As far as the experiment is concerned, the students were assigned into two groups. There were forty learners who were at an intermediate level. The learners who had some extra lessons were excluded from the study. They were divided into two groups, twenty people in each group. As it was mentioned before, four writing tasks were conducted. The researcher assessed the completed tasks and used different types of feedback in those groups. In the first group, the students got direct feedback with commentary and the correct form of a selected grammar structure. The students from the first group had an opportunity to talk with the researcher about the faulty structures in the text. In the second group, the learners got indirect feedback without any correct version of the structure. They were provided only with a sign which indicated that a grammar error had been made. After each assessment, the learners had an opportunity to look at their works and check their errors. The researcher concentrated on past tense forms; consequently, she used primary trait scoring. After a period of time, a written test was conducted in order to investigate the influence of feedback on selected grammar structures. The draft of this piece of writing is placed in Appendix A. It includes twenty verbs; therefore, the grading scale ranged from 1 to 20 points. This gave an opportunity to count the points and discover which group performed this task better; whether it was the first group which got direct feedback, or the second group which was provided only with indirect feedback. The written assignment answered the question of which form of feedback is more beneficial for students. The research procedure is remarkably similar to the draft made by Ferris (1995 in Pawlak 2012: 300). He presents a possible combination of research concerning corrective feedback on written compositions. He mentions that it should start with a student draft, followed by a written correction made by the teacher. The next step is a student revision of the text and writing a new text.

Not only the experiment, but also the interviews with the students were conducted to study the effectiveness of feedback. After the final writing, the researcher talked with the students about their feelings toward these two types of correction. The same questions were later given on paper. The learners could anonymously express their opinions on direct and indirect feedback. The examples of these written interviews are available in Appendix B. The first question asked the learners whether the type of treatment that they had been receiving was satisfactory for them. The second question presented two types of feedback and investigated which one is more

beneficial for the students. The last question concerned indirect feedback; it asked whether this form of correction would force students to define the error.

7. The results

7.1. Results of the experiment

The written test gave clear scores of points from both groups, which could be compared by the teacher. The raw scores from both groups are shown in Appendix C and D.

After the detailed correction of the informal letters, the researcher collected all the scores. In the test, the students could get twenty points. Then the means of the two groups were calculated. The first group, which received direct feedback, was signed with the symbol X. The second group, which was supplied with indirect feedback, was named as group Y. The mean of the group X was considerably higher. The students got a mean score of 16.7 points, whereas the Y group got a mean score of only 12.75 points. Consequently, it can be said that the scores in the group with direct feedback were much higher; their performance was much better. Afterwards, the Standard Deviation was calculated. The researcher calculated the SD for the two groups and got some interesting results. SD for the X group was 4.7, whereas for the Y group was 4.78. The difference between them is not so significant but some conclusions can be made. Group X was more homogeneous than the Y group. The group with the indirect feedback was more heterogeneous. This can be supported with the range between the scores. The range is higher between the scores in the Y group. In addition, the lowest score, which is three, was found in the group with the indirect feedback.

In order to count the *t test* for these tests, the researcher needed SD and the mean of those groups. The value of the t obs for these two groups is 5.72. In order to classify this value, the critical values of *t* must be settled. The critical values are taken from the table presented by Brown (1988: 168). The degree of freedom for this research is 38. The α decision level is .005. Knowing the degree of freedom and α < .005 the critical value has been found for one-tailed test. The one-tailed hypothesis, which was established at the beginning of the study, says that direct feedback has a more decisive effect on intermediate ESL learners' acquisition of selected grammar structures. The critical value is 2.704. T obs is higher than t crit (t obs > t crit; 5.72 > 2.704); consequently, the difference between them is statistically significant. Therefore, the zero hypothesis is rejected and the one-tailed hypothesis is accepted.

The t test has shown that direct feedback has more influence than indirect feedback on grammar accuracy in written compositions. The group which was supplied with direct feedback performed better on the final test. The T test has supported the hypothesis that direct feedback is more beneficial in writing.

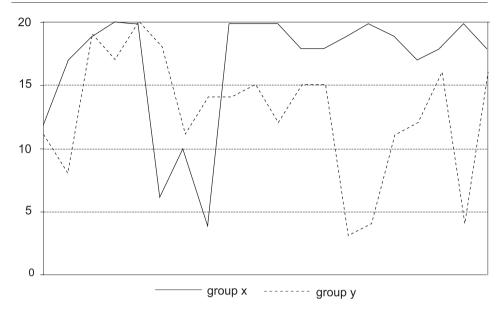


Figure 1. Students' raw scores on a final writing

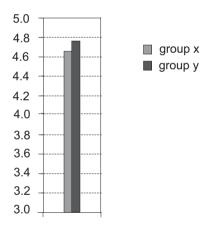


Figure 2. Standard Deviation

7.2. Results of the interviews

The interviews from the X group, which received direct feedback, were highly similar. All the students (20 people) agreed that direct feedback was suitable for them. In addition, in the second question the entire group picked this type of feedback as more beneficial. Fifteen people confessed that indirect feedback would not force them to dwell on the committed error. Two people said that they would be motivated to investigate the error. One student claimed that maybe he could dwell on the problem but certainly not always. Another learner pointed out that there is a

possibility like this, but it is not certain. The last person interviewed claimed that he would rather not be motivated to check on his errors by indirect feedback.

As far as the interviews from the Y group are concerned, six people stated that indirect feedback was satisfactory for them, whereas fourteen students confessed that they did not approve of this type of correction. Nevertheless, when they were asked which type of correction is more effective for them, seventeen learners claimed that it is direct correction. Only three people pointed out that indirect correction is more beneficial. Eleven people claimed that indirect feedback would not force them to correct errors highlighted by the teacher. On the contrary, four learners said that they would be motivated to identify their errors. Nevertheless, in the previous question they admitted that they prefer direct feedback than indirect. One person wrote that indirect feedback would force him to identify errors, but he would not know how to do it. Two people wrote that they would check on the error if they would have had time for it. One person claimed that he does not have time for these kinds of activities.

These interviews highlighted that direct feedback is more appreciated than indirect feedback among intermediate students. It is visible that group Y, which received indirect feedback, was more discontented with the type of correction that they had been receiving. The whole group X appreciated direct feedback in their written compositions. The t test gave a scientific insight into the effectiveness of direct correction. The interviews have shown that this type of feedback is also appreciated in ordinary classroom situations. Students are more comfortable with direct feedback, because the teacher can give them a clear explanation of their errors. Unfortunately, the majority of students will not check on the error on their own. They expect the teacher to assess their errors and provide them with the correct forms. That is why they appreciate direct feedback more than indirect one.

The interviews have confirmed the hypothesis that direct feedback is more effective in writing compositions.

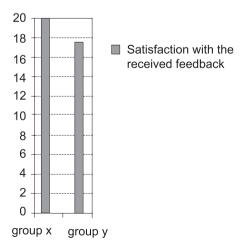


Figure 3. The visual representation of the first question which concerned the satisfaction with the received feedback

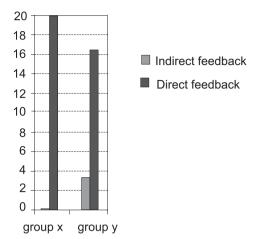


Figure 4. The visual representation of the second question which concerned the most effective type of feedback

9. Discussion of the results

This study has proven some very important aspects. It has rejected the zero hypothesis which claimed that there is no systematic relationship between the type of corrective feedback and the grammar accuracy in written compositions. In the experiment, *tobs* was higher than *tcrit* so the difference between feedback types is statistically significant. Consequently, the one-tailed hypothesis has been confirmed; direct feedback has a more decisive effect on intermediate ESL learners' acquisition of selected grammar structures. Moreover, the guided writing exposed that the group which received direct feedback got a higher mean score of points.

In addition, the written interviews with the students have revealed that direct correction is safer and more beneficial for them. They prefer to be supplied with the correct version of the faulty structure. The majority of interviewed learners agreed that indirect highlighting of the inaccurate form would not encourage them to diagnose the committed error.

The results of this research are similar to other studies conducted on this topic. Chunhong and Griffiths (2012: 305) also found out that students want to be corrected by the teacher. Their study concerned oral correction; nevertheless, the results pointed out that learners need correction in their learning process. Similarly, Bitchener et al. (2005: 191) investigated that the combination of explicit written feedback and oral face-to-face feedback enabled the students to use the past simple tense and the definite article with greater accuracy in new pieces of writing. The results were more significant than in the case of prepositions. Consequently, direct feedback is highly beneficial in training past tense accuracy. Similarly, many methodologists claim that direct feedback is more effective in second language acquisition.

Conclusions

The results of the study confirmed the one-tailed hypothesis; direct feedback has a more decisive effect on intermediate ESL learners' acquisition of selected grammar structures.

What is more, this paper highlights the importance of formal instruction and corrective feedback in general. As Dakowska (2005: 261) says "writing accuracy can only be learned while receiving error correction on written tasks." This paper highly appreciates corrective feedback in acquiring language accuracy. This article's thesis draws attention to the significance of formal instruction and its option of corrective feedback in second language classroom. The ample evidence on the positive effect of error correction was gathered and presented. Additionally, the opinions of students were collected and they confirmed that learners like to be corrected directly by the teacher. This paper has proven that direct feedback is more effective and more student friendly. Therefore, the teachers should provide the learners with direct feedback in their written compositions. Those comments should be enriched with the correct version of the faulty structures. This research has pointed out that students are interested in the errors that they commit; moreover, they are curious to diagnose and correct them. Undoubtedly, as they highlighted, they are not capable of correcting those faulty structures on their own. Consequently, there is a strong need for teacher correction of written compositions.

In addition, this study has provided evidence that student revision of the same text is highly valuable. They revise the text and pay more attention to those structures which are corrected by the teacher. If the test includes some additional explanations or comments, the students are more likely to remember them. Therefore, the teacher should provide the students with an opportunity to revise their works and focus on the corrective feedback that they received.

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Appendix

A) A guided writing which was dictated to the students during the test

Translate the text into English:

Cześć Łukasz, Co u Ciebie słychać?

Mój ostatni weekend <u>był</u> wspaniały. W sobotę <u>pojechałem</u> z rodziną do babci na obiad. Razem <u>byliśmy</u> na zakupach. Wieczorem <u>spotkałem się</u> ze znajomymi i razem <u>poszliśmy</u> do kina. <u>Oglądnęliśmy</u> film "Jesteś Bogiem". Po filmie <u>poszliśmy</u> na imprezę i <u>tańczyliśmy</u> całą noc. W niedzielę <u>wstałem</u> późno. <u>Zrobiłem</u> zadanie domowe i <u>przeczytałem</u> książkę. Popołudniu <u>kupiłem</u> sobie nowe buty. Po zakupach <u>zjadłem</u> obiad w domu i <u>wypiłem</u> herbatę z mamą. Wieczorem <u>porozmawiałem</u> z moją przyjaciółką i <u>wysłałem</u> wiadomość mojemu koledze. <u>Pomogłem</u> mojej mamie w kuchni i razem <u>zjedliśmy</u> kolację.

<u>Poszedłem spać</u> koło godziny jedenastej. To był cudowny weekend. <u>Spędziłem</u> cudowny czas z rodziną i znajomymi.

Napisz coś o swoim weekendzie.

Pozdrawiam,

.....

B) An interwiew on correction preferences

An interview for the group which was corrected directly

- 1. Prace pisemne, które pisałeś, były oceniane w sposób bezpośredni. Błąd był dokładnie zaznaczony oraz podana była poprawna odpowiedź. Czy taka forma oceniana Ci odpowiada?
 - 2. Oto dwa sposoby oceniania pisemnych wypowiedzi:
 - BEZPOŚREDNI
- e.g. I go home yesterday. (Forma "go" jest niepoprawna, ponieważ jest to czas przeszły, potrzebna jest forma "went")
 - POŚREDNI e.g. I go home yesterday. G! (Grammar)

Który z tych dwóch sposobów jest według Ciebie efektywniejszy?

3. Czy drugi sposób oceniania zmusiłby Cię do zastanowienia się nad rodzajem błędu, jaki został popełniony?

An interview for the group which was corrected indirectly

- 1. Prace pisemne, które pisałeś, były oceniane w sposób pośredni. Błąd był tylko podkreślony i była informacja, jakiego rodzaju to był błąd. Poprawna odpowiedź nie była podana. Czy taka forma oceniana Ci odpowiada?
 - 2. Oto dwa sposoby oceniania pisemnych wypowiedzi:

— BEZPOŚREDNI

e.g. I <u>go</u> home yesterday. (Forma "go" jest niepoprawna, ponieważ jest to czas przeszły, potrzebna jest forma "went")

— POŚREDNI

e.g. I go home yesterday. G! (Grammar)

Który z tych dwóch sposobów jest według Ciebie efektywniejszy?

3. Czy drugi sposób oceniania zmusiłby Cię do zastanowienia się nad rodzajem błędu, jaki został popełniony?

C) The table with student's raw scores on a final writing — The group X which received direct feedback

T.
12
17
19
20
20
6
10
4
20
20
20
18
18
19
20
19
17
18
20
18

D) The group Y which received indirect feedback

Ewa	11
Roksana	8
Marta	19
Edyta	17

Anastazja	20
Marzena	18
Karolina	11
Mirela	14
Marcin	14
Piotrek	15
Darek	12
Ewa	15
Joanna	15
Bartek	3
Patryk	4
Ola	11
Sebastian	12
Piotr	16
Marek	4
Ula	16