

**THE EFFICACY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT WRITTEN  
CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ESL LEARNERS'  
WRITING**

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WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ESL  
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# THE EFFICACY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT WRITTEN CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN ESL LEARNERS' WRITING

## ABSTRACT

The efficacy of WCF in ESL writing has become a debate due to the notion made by Truscott (1996) that WCF is ineffective in grammatical accuracy, and it also can give harmful effects to the learners. Subsequently, many researchers have been raising the issue of whether or not teachers should provide WCF in English classes in their studies (Pham, 2015; Shirazi & Shekarabi, 2014; Sheen, 2010; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Ferris, 2006). However, findings from various studies were inconclusive due to the different ways of measuring the effectiveness. Hence, the purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness of WCF in improving the accuracy of past tenses in ESL learners' written work. In this study, the controversial issue of written corrective feedback (WCF) was examined through an eight-week longitudinal study approach. A pretest-posttest design was employed. 30 participants were divided into two groups, and they went through two treatment sessions and two posttests. The participants received WCF on three essays under two treatment conditions: Group (1) received direct WCF; and group (2) received indirect WCF on specific grammar errors. Descriptive writing, which involved picture compositions was the instrument employed for this study. *ANOVA* was used as the statistical means of analysis. The quantitative result showed that students who received direct WCF outperformed students who received indirect WCF in terms of writing accuracy. Face-to-face interview sessions were conducted with 12 students and the qualitative result revealed three main factors: 1) facilitative impact of WCF, 2) cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors, and 3) facilitative effect of scaffolding. The findings of this study will give insights to ESL teachers on which WCF

to be used in students' writing. However, the results of this study cannot be generalized in all schools in Malaysia because the data was collected in a school in Selangor only.

**Keywords:** written corrective feedback, direct feedback, indirect feedback, past tense

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# KEBERKESANAN MAKLUM BALAS PEMBETULAN SECARA LANGSUNG DAN TIDAK LANGSUNG DALAM PENULISAN PELAJAR *ESL*

## ABSTRAK

Keberkesanan maklum balas pembedulan bertulis dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua telah menjadi perdebatan disebabkan oleh tanggapan yang dibuat oleh Truscott (1996) bahawa maklum balas pembedulan bertulis tidak berkesan dalam ketepatan tatabahasa, dan juga dapat memberikan kesan yang berbahaya kepada pelajar. Seterusnya, banyak penyelidik telah membangkitkan isu sama ada guru perlu menyediakan maklum balas pembedulan bertulis dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris dalam kajian mereka (Pham, 2015; Shirazi & Shekarabi, 2014; Sheen, 2010; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Ferris, 2006). Walau bagaimanapun, penemuan daripada pelbagai kajian tidak dapat disimpulkan kerana cara yang berbeza untuk mengukur keberkesanannya. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui keberkesanan maklum balas pembedulan bertulis dalam meningkatkan ketepatan penggunaan *past tenses* dalam kerja bertulis pelajar-pelajar Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua. Dalam kajian ini, isu kontroversi mengenai maklum balas pembedulan bertulis telah diperiksa menerusi pendekatan pengajian membujur lapan minggu. Reka bentuk pra ujian-pasca ujian telah digunakan. 30 peserta dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan, dan mereka menjalani dua sesi rawatan dan dua pasca ujian. Peserta menerima maklum balas pembedulan bertulis pada tiga esei di bawah dua syarat rawatan: Kumpulan (1) menerima maklum balas pembedulan bertulis langsung; dan kumpulan (2) menerima maklum balas pembedulan bertulis tidak langsung mengenai kesilapan tatabahasa tertentu. Penulisan deskriptif, yang melibatkan komposisi gambar adalah instrumen yang digunakan untuk kajian ini. *ANOVA* digunakan sebagai kaedah analisis statistik. Hasil kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa pelajar yang menerima maklum balas pembedulan

bertulis langsung mengatasi pelajar yang menerima maklum balas pembedulan bertulis secara tidak langsung dari segi ketepatan penulisan. Sesi wawancara tatap muka dilakukan dengan 12 orang pelajar dan hasil kualitatif menunjukkan tiga faktor utama: 1) kesan pemanfaatan maklum balas pembedulan bertulis, 2) usaha kognitif yang terlibat dalam memahami kesilapan, dan 3) kesan pembedulan perancah. Penemuan kajian ini akan memberikan pandangan kepada guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua di mana maklum balas pembedulan bertulis akan digunakan dalam penulisan pelajar. Walau bagaimanapun, keputusan kajian ini tidak boleh diselaraskan di semua sekolah di Malaysia kerana data itu dikumpulkan di sebuah sekolah di Selangor sahaja.

**Kata kunci:** maklum balas pembedulan bertulis, maklum balas pembedulan langsung, maklum balas pembedulan tidak langsung, *past tense*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

ESL : English as a Second Language

L2 : second language

NS : native speaker

NNS : non-native speaker

SLA : second language acquisition

SPM : Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia

UPSR : Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah

USA : United States of America

WCF : written corrective feedback

ZPD : zone of proximal development

Sig. : significant

e.g. : *exempli gratia* (for example)

i.e. : *id est* (that is)

vs. : versus

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

English is a language used by many people around the world in both speaking and writing. It is considered as an important language because it is widely used around the globe including the Internet. In Malaysia, English is deemed as an important second language to learn, as stated in Article 152 and given due attention (Nor Hashimah, Norsimah, & Kesumawati, 2008). Although English is no longer the national and official language of this country, the importance should be given to the language (Ungku Aziz, 2012). Therefore, the education system in Malaysia focuses on the importance of mastering English language by making the subject compulsory at every level of education.

### **1.1 Background of the Study and Statement of the Problem**

The emergence of globalization and information technology has made the proficiency in English language becomes essential in most countries in the world, particularly developing countries (Nair et. al, 2012). Being one of the developing countries, Malaysia also uses English language widely in many aspects such as in business transactions, products labelling, as well as in television advertisements (Murusegaran, 2003). The extensive use of English language in this country indicates the necessity to have the literacy in the language for every Malaysian. Moreover, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, proposed to make English language a compulsory subject to pass in the Malaysian Certificate of Education or the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM); a national secondary school examination, which according to Stephanie (2012), it could be implemented as early as 2016. This decision is perceived as a challenge by many ESL instructors and teachers due to the declining proficiency levels of English among Malaysian students (Murusegaran, 2003). According to Murusegaran, the

washback effect from a change implemented in 1960s and 1970s might be the main reason for the decline. In national schools, English language has been replaced with Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instructions. In addition, English language is no longer used in official matters. Thus, the washback effect has caused the deterioration of English language usage in Malaysia.

Washback was defined by Pan (2009) as an intentional or accidental direction and the change of curriculum function on the aspects of teaching and learning. This curriculum change happens by a means of the change of public examinations. Due to the washback, subjects such as Science, Mathematics and History, which were initially taught in English language are taught in Bahasa Melayu. Thus, the use of English among students is low, and this situation leads to the decline of English proficiency among Malaysian students, in both primary and secondary schools.

There are three categories of primary and secondary schools under the national education system – government schools, government-aided schools, and private schools. These schools are administered by the Education Act 1996 (Latha, 2015). All of the schools are to use the prescribed national curriculum which specifies the knowledge, skills and values that are expected to be acquired by learners at the end of their respective periods of schooling. It is obligatory for all schools to teach both core and elective subjects as stipulated under the Act. The language used as a medium of instruction in the three types of schools are different. For government schools, the medium of instruction used is Bahasa Melayu. On the other hand, the medium of instruction in government-aided schools is either Mandarin or Tamil. In the case of private schools, approval to conduct classes in Bahasa Melayu was given under the Education Act 1996. However, in the private primary school where this research study will be conducted, English language is

widely used especially in daily conversations. Despite that English is preferred to be used in spoken context, the students still face some problems in grammatical accuracy in producing a good piece of writing. This is because, grammatical accuracy, which is important in writing, is not focused in spoken context. Moreover, the organization of ideas and proficiency in various writing aspects such as grammar, spelling, and word choice cause writing to be a complex and challenging activity.

According to Dar and Khan (2015), writing is a complex skill in ESL learning which requires learners to use language appropriately with structural accuracy and communicative potential. Hence, writing in a second language might be a demanding task for ESL student writers as they have to apply correct grammatical rules which they learned separately during grammar lessons. In addition, engaging communicative potential in ESL writing is another challenge for students because they have to think and write accurately in other than their native language. As stated by Van Beuningen (2011), learners' engagement in a continual process of planning, formulating, reading, and revising their text is essential to produce a good piece of writing. Due to the complexity of the process, making errors in written work is seemingly common among every learner. However, according to Selinker (1972), making errors is deemed as a salient component of language learning process, and correcting the errors on the other hand, is another salient component in order to facilitate learners to write in the target language more accurately. Another important component is feedback on language form. The provision of the feedback is crucial in order to stimulate L2 acquisition in producing the output (Swain, 1991; Havranek, 2002; Van Beuningen, 2011). Therefore, the objective of teacher's feedback in students' written work is to help them organize the errors made. Through the feedback provided, students are able to be aware of the errors before producing the correct language form.

### **1.1.1 Written Corrective Feedback**

Different types of teacher corrective feedback have been used to correct students' writing accuracy. Ferris (2012) stated four main types of WCF; focused, unfocused, direct and indirect which are mainly used by teachers in students' written work. In focused feedback, only certain errors are highlighted in the students' writing which is in contrast to unfocused feedback. Through unfocused feedback, the teacher will correct all the errors in the students' writing without having a linguistic aspect to be focused on. Indirect feedback on the other hand, refers to corrections together with the correct forms that the students receive from the teacher. In contrast to that, through indirect feedback, students are notified on the errors made without the provision of the correct forms from the teacher. Elaboration about the types of WCF will be discussed further in Section 2.5 in Chapter 2.

Providing corrective feedback in learners' writing is an effective way of interaction between teacher and students to improve their writing accuracy. Considering its facilitative impact, feedback is perceived as an essence in L2 teaching to foster and strengthen learning (Krashen, 1982; Kepner, 1991; Truscott, 1996). Thus, it is adapted in the L2 writing area for its important roles in improving grammatical accuracy in ESL learners' writing. Error correction, which is a type of feedback that is provided by ESL teachers, is an important part of ESL writing instruction because providing this type of feedback will enable students to receive responses from teachers. Aside from that, error correction may be the most important component for students, as it contributes to success in writing proficiency (Ferris, 2003). Moreover, corrective feedback is also a pedagogical technique teachers use to draw attention to students' erroneous utterances, and which may result in learners' modified output (Swain & Suzuki, 2005). Corrective feedback is connected to further ESL improvement because it can offer students opportunities to perceive the differences between output by a means of negotiation of meaning. It is also

seen as an essential part in a language class. Through the feedback, teachers are able to provide students with grammatical and structural information in their written production. The positive effect of corrective feedback has been proven in previous studies (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sheen, 2010; Farokhi & Sattarpour, 2012; Hosseiny, 2014; Asiah & Ng, 2014) as it helps students in noticing the errors made in their written work, subsequently improving its accuracy. Furthermore, providing WCF to learners will help them to notice, understand and correct the errors committed. Therefore, teachers must prepare to execute corrective feedback competently, carefully, and consistently in order to fully utilize its potential in improving students' writing accuracy (Ferris, 2004). According to Ferris, Pezone, Trade, & Tinti (1997), the role of WCF has a vital part in L2 teachers' instructions as it enables an individualized communication between teachers and students, which is impossible to achieve in an L2 writing class. In this situation, L2 teachers believe that responding through WCF is an effective way to improve their students' writing accuracy (Brown, 2007). Without corrective feedback, it would be difficult for students to find out that the learning task is done correctly (Chastain, 1988). Therefore, it can be deduced that identifying the effective type of corrective feedback is important for teachers in helping the students in their writing accuracy.

In a writing class, a teacher gives WCF to respond to the students' compositions because of the many purposes that it serves. First and foremost, teachers use WCF to notify students on the errors they made in their written work. The teacher's feedback will help students to be alert of the linguistic errors they committed. Apart from that, the provision of WCF in students' written work also notifies the correct linguistic forms used by the students in their writing. Hence, WCF is used by the teacher to notify and correct the errors made by students' in their writing in order to achieve writing accuracy. As stated by Hosseiny (2014), WCF helps ESL learners to improve in their writing accuracy.

Corrective feedback provided by teachers serve as a tool that they can use as means of effective interaction in students' writing.

The present study is about the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF in the use of past tenses in ESL learners' writing. It examines the differential effects of providing two types of WCF in giving responses to students' L2 essays. By using Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis as the ground of this study, the researcher investigated the effectiveness of direct and indirect WCF among students in a primary school. The reason being is that, it is very important for the students to improve in the writing accuracy in order to sit for Primary School Assessment or UPSR (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah), which is a national primary school examination.

### **1.1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The present study is grounded in Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis. Based on this theory, learners have to take part in the L2 learning process in order to produce the language as Swain (2005) indicates that 'output' is a part of the learning process – not simply the product. Learners' active engagement in the learning process is important in order to gain the output. Swain (2005) includes three functions of output hypothesis, which are noticing, hypothesis testing, and metalinguistic. Acquisition of L2 happens when the learners notice what they do not know or only partially know. According to Lynch (2001), noticing is a crucial element in language learning, and the first stage of language acquisition is noticing (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis is chosen for this study because it highlights the important elements of L2 learning, which includes noticing the errors committed, as well as getting involved in the learning process.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study

Due to the importance of writing skill in L2 learning, teachers and researchers continuously finding ways to help learners master the skill. Much research in L2 acquisition that has been conducted proves that writing is an important skill for L2 learners. ESL teachers play an important role to help their students improve their writing proficiency according to the students' needs. For many ESL teachers and researchers, the main concern is how to achieve this (Polio, 2003). Aside from the effectiveness of writing in improving students' grammatical accuracy, the debate on the most effective way to teach writing has also been made. According to Ellis (2009), various arguments suggesting the effective ways of teaching writing have been made, and providing WCF to learners might be one of the ways as a number of researchers (Chandler, 2003; Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008) concluded that WCF had a major contribution in helping learners to improve in their writing accuracy.

Though numerous studies on the efficacy of WCF in the Malaysian ESL context have been conducted (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Asiah & Ng, 2014; Mansourizadeh & Abdullah, 2014; Ng & Siti Nor Aisyah, 2018), the number of studies investigating the effect of WCF on young ESL learners in a private school is still inadequate. In a private school that uses English language as the opted medium of communication, the language is widely used by the students in spoken context. However, they still face difficulties in grammatical accuracy in written context. Therefore, the purpose of conducting the present study is to investigate the efficacy of WCF on grammatical accuracy in ESL writing among Malaysian primary school students in the context whereby English language is used widely.

Besides, a number of studies on WCF have been conducted in regard to ESL learners' improvement in their writing. Different studies have different emphasis on different aspects of corrective feedback. One apparent focus of the previous studies is the distinction and comparison of the effects of different strategies of direct and indirect corrective feedback in improving students' writing accuracy (e.g., Hosseiny, 2014; Salimi & Ahmadpour, 2015; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2016; Seiffedin & El-Sakka, 2017; Ng & Siti Nor Aisyah, 2018). Other previous studies on WCF investigated the differential effects of focused versus unfocused corrective feedback in students' writing (e.g., Sheen, 2007; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008). However, narrowing it down to the Malaysian context, very few studies investigating the efficacy of different strategies of both direct and indirect corrective feedback on focused corrective feedback have been carried out. Investigation on different strategies of providing WCF is crucial as using the right strategies will help the students in reducing grammatical errors they made in their writing.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The study is an attempt to provide an empirical evidence on the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF in learners' accuracy in the use of past tenses in their writing. Specifically, the research aimed to investigate the extent students' grammatical accuracy improved as a result of the two types of WCF. This study also attempted to identify any possible factors that influence the students' writing performance.



#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study was conducted to answer two research questions:

1. To what extent do primary school students' accuracy in writing performance in the use of past tenses improve as a result of direct and indirect WCF?
2. What are the factors that influence the primary school students' writing performance with regard to direct and indirect WCF?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Providing WCF seems to be a reliable way to be employed as it will provide learners with guidance on grammar corrections. For students, the provision of suitable WCF from L2 teachers is important as learning process would be less effective when the feedback students received do not enhance their writing accuracy. For teachers, knowing suitable types of WCF provides them insights on effective strategies which can be employed in writing classes to help the students' writing accuracy. However, the debate on whether or not teachers should provide corrective feedback to students still rages between proponents of both options, because there is no conclusive finding on the effectiveness of corrective feedback (Hosseiny, 2014). Therefore, the results of this study may provide contribution to the findings from previous studies (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009), especially in the Malaysian context.

Moreover, according to Ferris (2003), the past tense is viewed as a treatable error. Ferris (1999) suggested verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, article usage, plural and possessive noun endings, and sentence fragments as treatable errors. Thus, the use of past tenses can be considered as rule-governed errors. Measuring the effectiveness of corrective feedback in writing among ESL learners will be possible by looking into

treatable errors, as the rules can be learnt by the learners (elaboration about treatable and untreatable errors will be discussed further in Section 2.3.1 in Chapter 2). Thus, this study hopes to provide new sights on the effectiveness of WCF in improving treatable errors in students' writing.

In addition, previous studies which focus on students' problems while doing corrections based on WCF provided by the teacher are very limited. Investigating the factors that influence students' performance in their writing provides more insights on the effects of different strategies of WCF. Hence, the findings gained from the present study will contribute to the findings from past research and help to identify other factors that need to be taken into consideration when giving WCF to ESL learners.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the problem statement, followed by the purpose of conducting the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and conclusion. Chapter 2 comprises literature which is related to this study. In Chapter 3, the methodological steps taken for collecting and analyzing data. Chapter 4 describes the results and findings in regard to the research questions. Lastly, Chapter 5 outlines the summary of the findings of the research, pedagogical implications, methodological implications, as well as recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter will describe several theories in second language acquisition, the theoretical framework used in this study, and errors in language learning. Next, the chapter discusses feedback and error correction, as well as the approaches and methods of providing WCF. The chapter then further discusses the issues on WCF in language learning raised by Truscott (1996) before analyzing a number of past studies in WCF.

### **2.1 Theoretical Perspectives of Language Learning**

Theories originated from behaviourism, cognitivism, and sociocultural perspectives play a vital part in the SLA because they act as a guidance for teachers to provide corrective feedback to students effectively when they commit errors in their writing. Making errors is seen common among every learner during a language learning process. Thus, appropriate approaches based on theories of language learning should be applied while providing corrective feedback. This may help students receive optimum help from teacher when they make errors. The subsection below discusses the first approach, which is behaviourism.

#### **2.1.1 Behaviourism**

Behaviourism is a school of thought in language acquisition that generates the importance of providing WCF in learning a language. Based on behaviourism, language learning is a result of habit formation which happens when learners give responses to stimuli in their environment. After the responses are reinforced, the learners gradually remember the habit. Therefore, habit is considered as a connection between stimulus and response (Ellis, 1998).

In the process of language learning, habit is formed through the repetition of responses that learners give when they are exposed to several stimuli. These continuous responses are later reinforced by the learners. Ellis (1998) stated that learners imitate the correct language models, which act as the stimuli. The learners receive positive reinforcement when they are correct, while negative reinforcement is received when they are incorrect. The learners automatically respond towards certain stimuli when they are given exposure to the stimuli they receive. Hence, the process of learning a language happens through drilling and imitation of the same structures over time. Furthermore, according to Corpuz (2011), while teaching, teachers should focus on the difficult structures. In relation to this, providing WCF is deemed as an effective way to help the learners in dealing with the difficult structures in their writing. They will produce active responses towards the corrective feedback, imitate, and repeat the correct structure. Through these processes, the learners will eventually become capable of producing the correct structures over time.

Nonetheless, learners sometimes actively produce their own rules. The reason being is that they are not able to reproduce all the input they gain in language classes all the time. The exposure of the target structures is a factor that affects the learners in producing the rules. Thus, learning does not solely involve a stimulus-response connection. That is to say, language acquisition cannot be sufficiently accounted by behaviourist theory.

Another theory related to language acquisition is discussed in the next subsection.

### **2.1.2 Cognitivism**

Cognitivism is another theory involved in language acquisition. Language rules are the focus of cognitive perspective in language acquisition, and based on this theory, learning occurs through mental process that is active and dynamic. Through the environment, learners select and organize the information before relating it to their prior knowledge.

Then, they save the information which they think is important, and use it appropriately. This reflects on the success of learning efforts of the learners (Chamot & O'Malley, 1996). According to Chamot and O'Malley (1996), declarative and procedural knowledge are involved in an acquisition or a learning process. Declarative knowledge refers to 'what' learners know, whereas procedural knowledge is considered as 'what' the learners know on how to do. In a context of learning new things, declarative knowledge is first learnt by the learners, followed by procedural knowledge. When they gain procedural knowledge, the learners learn the ways on how to do something. Therefore, through a few steps of practices, knowledge is gained or learnt by learners. For language learners, making errors or mistakes during these practices is common. Besides, making mistakes is an important process in cognitivism because learners gain the new knowledge through errors and mistakes they made previously. The feedback they received for the errors and mistakes made help the learners to construct the correct forms of the targeted structure.

Cognitive approach can provide theoretical explanation on the application of WCF in language learning. The feedback provided by teacher when learners make mistakes is vital in improving their writing accuracy. However, this approach cannot provide the measures of the efficacy of WCF. There are other possibilities under the socio-cultural perspectives which include motivation and scaffolding that affect the effectiveness of WCF. The subsection below discusses the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978).

### **2.1.3 Sociocultural Theory**

In contrast to cognitive theory that focuses on mental processing learning, sociocultural theory, according to Vygotsky (1978), focuses on how different people learn differently. The core of sociocultural theory is the social interactions with other speakers, and the interactions result in children's cognitive development and learning. In a language classroom, learners come from various backgrounds, and they may have different preferences to learn a language. The learners' different ways of learning are important for teachers to focus on in order to conduct an effective teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, there are a number of other factors which also affect individual's learning. These factors include motivation and scaffolding in language learning. Since these two factors are important in language learning, they will be discussed in the next subsection.

#### **2.1.3.1 Motivation**

Motivation is a factor that affects the learning performance of a language learner. This factor becomes important in learning because it is a source that stimulates and retains learners' interest. For instance, when a learner is aware of the benefits of corrective feedback given by the teacher, he becomes motivated to improve in writing performance. Thus, in this case, the corrective feedback given by the teacher acts as a motivator that prompts the learner to continue improving his writing accuracy. Nevertheless, learners' motivation level to learn varies from each other. Successful past learning experience that learners have may cause them to have a higher motivation level to learn than those that have less or no experience. However, motivation level in learners is not the only factor that affects their achievement in language learning. There are other factors which may contribute to learners' success in learning, such as scaffolding. The subsection below discusses the factor of scaffolding in language learning.

### **2.1.3.2 Scaffolding**

Scaffolding, according to Wood, Bruner, & Ross (1976, in McLeod, 2010), is specified as the elements of the task which are initially beyond the capacity of a learner. It allows the learner to focus on and complete only those elements that are within his range of proficiency. In L2 learning process, scaffolding is a way to assist learners to learn a language with their teachers' and peers' help. Besides, according to Stuyf (2002), scaffolding is an important factor in language learning because it motivates learners to learn, and minimizes learners' frustration level, especially those with learning disabilities and low self-esteem. Learners will develop "can" do attitude when they receive positive feedback from the teacher, and this attitude will help them to improve their writing accuracy.

Through scaffolding, learners receive supports based on their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Being the main concept of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Raymond (2000) describes ZPD as the gap between what children are able to do by themselves and the next learning process which they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance. So, when learners are completing their tasks, they are able to internalize new knowledge by using their prior knowledge. The corrective feedback provided by the teacher will reduce the ZPD of the learners, hence, leads them to an improved writing accuracy. So, teacher's awareness on the learners' proficiency level in providing WCF is critical in order to ensure the effectiveness of the learning process. Therefore, learners will have the ability to correct the errors in their writing based on the corrective feedback provided. Besides, through the assistance given, learners are eventually able to self-correct the errors. According to Swain's Output Hypothesis, corrective feedback is deemed as a necessary element in language learning process. Thus, the two types of WCF (direct and indirect) received by learners in their writing is the

negative evidence in the present study. The treatment, which involves WCF and the written task that need to be completed by the participants was guided by the Output Hypothesis, which is the theoretical framework of this study. The framework is further explained in the next section below.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Present Study**

Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis is the framework adapted in the current study. According to Swain, comprehensible input (i.e. second language production) is the most efficient incentive for the development of the learners' interlanguage, and it ensures mental grammatical processing. Thus, in L2 acquisition, comprehensible input plays a vital role. Additionally, according to Swain, one important aspect of this hypothesis is for learners to actively engage and in order for them to be given opportunities to use language, they should be "forced" to produce it.

According to Ellis (1998), Swain lists out three functions in the Output Hypothesis – the *noticing* function, the *hypothesis-testing* function, and the *reflective* function (i.e. metalinguistic). The first function indicates learners' awareness towards certain linguistic forms which takes place in a language production. This function helps learners to realize the linguistic "gap" in their interlanguage system. Noticing the "gap" pushes the learners to seek for adequate knowledge to fill this "gap". In pushing learners' awareness of this "gap", providing direct WCF and indirect WCF in their written work is deemed to be an essential way.

The second function denotes learners to use a trial-and-error form in order to test their understanding of certain linguistic forms. In this context, learners notice what they do not know or what they partly know when they encounter linguistic gaps between what they



want to write and what they are able to write. With the process of testing, learners get the opportunities to reprocess or adjust their output when WCF is used.

The third function involves learners' metalinguistic knowledge. Learners will discover new formula in their interlanguage system when they reflect their linguistic knowledge. Due to the reflection on the language learnt, the learners are able to control and internalize the linguistic knowledge. Thus, the current study aims to find out any differences between the two feedback options on learners' error reduction in their written work during the correction stage. The errors in SLA are discussed in the following section.

### **2.3 Errors in Language Learning**

In second language acquisition, making errors is normal for every learner. Similarly, native speakers of a language also commit errors. However, the difference between the two situations is the type of errors made by the learners. Errors made by native speakers are considered as performance errors such as false starts, repetition, and slip of tongue. Whereas, in L2 acquisition, the errors include form, utterance, or structure which are not acceptable by a language teacher. These errors are committed by ESL learners because of their absence in real life discourse or the inappropriate use (Hendrickson, 1978, in Purnawaman, 2011). According to Zhu (2010), when learning a language, making errors is seen as an important factor because learners may develop and apply the language rules during learning process. Based on the errors made, teachers may know what learners have learnt. So, by providing corrective feedback, teachers are able to be aware of measures which they can take to help students improve the language accuracy.

However, it is worth noting that teacher's awareness on providing corrective feedback to students must be parallel with the types of errors made. This is because, not all grammatical errors in writing can be treated effectively with WCF. Moreover, grammatical knowledge is learnt in specific order and time. It is not possible to acquire or learn the knowledge instantly. According to Lee (2008a), the first step in providing WCF should be learners' specific needs. However, the effects of the WCF may depend on the nature and complexity of the errors. Thus, Ferris (2006) coined the term 'treatable' and 'untreatable' errors.

### **2.3.1 Treatable vs. Untreatable Errors**

Ferris (2006) described treatable errors as the linguistic structures that are rule-governed. The structures are acquired by students in a short-term period based on grammatical rules that they have learnt. Comma splices, missing articles, missing verbs, run-ons, subject-verb agreement, and verb form errors are the types of errors that can be treated. On the contrary, untreatable errors refer to linguistic errors that are item-based. Resolving this type of errors requires students to have a deeper linguistic knowledge (Ferris, 2006), thus, having prior knowledge is very important. Students have to apply the acquired grammatical knowledge that they have learnt previously to correct the errors they made. This type of errors includes errors of lexis such as missing words, unnecessary words, and word order problem. Fixing untreatable errors through WCF might not be effective for students with limited prior knowledge as they do not have the ability to self-correct the errors they made. The students might still face difficulties to construct correct structures in new writing tasks even if they are given direct corrective feedback because the errors made in their writing are idiosyncratic and non-idiomatic. Therefore, teachers should use diverse strategies in providing corrective feedback by taking into

consideration the types of errors made by students in their writing. Feedback and error correction are further discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4 Feedback and Error Correction**

Written corrective feedback is a type of error correction used to notify the errors made by students in their written work. It is defined differently by different scholars. Loewen (2012) perceived it as information on a linguistic error made by the learners, while Yeh and Lo (2009) defined it as the responses to the texts containing errors. It is also defined as the means of giving responses to a second language writer by pointing out certain incorrect usage of the targeted language (Sun, 2013). On the other hand, Ducken (2014) defined written corrective feedback as the teacher feedback given to the students in their writing in order to help them improve the grammatical accuracy. Other scholars such as Lightbrown and Spada (2006, p. 197) perceived written corrective feedback as any types of indication given to a learner to point out the incorrect use of his or her target language. In the context of the present study, the definition provided by Al Shahrani (2013, p. 4) will be used. According to Al Shahrani, written corrective feedback indicates correct forms in learners' writing. It is also a type of feedback which specifically acknowledges linguistic errors such as vocabulary, grammar and mechanics made by learners. This refers to the feedback given to learners when they use incorrect linguistic forms in the target language. The feedback given by the teacher is very important to help learners improve the grammatical accuracy in their written work. In addition, Al Shahrani (2013) mentioned the purpose of providing feedback to language learners, which is to help them identify any problem they face in their writing. As a result, learners will be able to apply the correct linguistic forms in their written work. In doing so, teachers can provide corrective feedback in oral or written forms.

### **2.4.1 Oral vs. Written Corrective Feedback**

Oral corrective feedback is normally used to correct students' errors made in oral production in a communication-oriented classroom. This type of feedback includes metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, clarification request, explicit correction, repetition, and recast. Out of the six strategies listed, recast is the type of strategy which is frequently used by the teacher in a language class. In a study on communicative classroom settings conducted by Sheen (2007), it was revealed that recast was the feedback strategy which was frequently used in the four contexts (French Immersion, Canada ESL, New Zealand ESL, and Korean EFL), especially in New Zealand ESL and Korean EFL. According to Othman (2012), recast becomes the major preference because teachers feel that it does not interrupt the communicative flow or cause classroom interaction during lessons to immediately stop. Another study on the effects of recast was carried out by Philip (2003). In the context of dyadic interaction, he examined the extent to which learners were able to be aware of the reformulations of the interlanguage grammar of the native speakers. The study involved 33 adult ESL learners, who were required to carry out several tasks on oral communication in NS-NNS pairs. The results revealed that the students were still able to notice over 60-70% of recasts regardless of the constraint of the accurate recall due to their level of proficiency, as well as the number of changes in the recast.

Although oral corrective feedback is proven to be effective in language learning, language teachers still opt for using another type of corrective feedback to assist learners in correcting different types of errors made in their writing. Written corrective feedback is the corrective feedback that is frequently used by the teachers. Hence, much research on the effects of WCF on grammatical errors was conducted by different researchers. On the other hand, an error classification system was established by researchers like Ferris (2002) and O'Sullivan and Chambers (2006). According to O'Sullivan and Chambers, the errors

are divided into four types, which are 1) grammatical errors (adjectives, articles, prepositions, singular/plural, tenses), 2) lexical errors (idioms, informal usage, word choice), 3) syntactic errors (sentence structure, word order), and 4) substance/mechanical errors (capitalization, misspelling, punctuation). In order to investigate the effects of different types of WCF on different categories or error types, a number of studies were carried out by different researchers. Sheen, Wright, & Moldawa (2009), for example, examined the efficacy of focused and unfocused WCF among adult immediate ESL learners on the English article system along with four other grammatical structures (copula 'be', regular past tense, irregular past tense and preposition). The findings of the study indicated a significant improvement in grammatical accuracy among students in all three treatment groups over a period of time. Apart from examining the grammatical errors, researchers also carried out studies to investigate the efficacy of WCF on grammatical complexity, lexical complexity, as well as overall accuracy in learners' written work. In a study on the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF conducted by Mubarak (2013), it was found that the students' writing accuracy was insignificant although they improved in the course of the experiment. Due to the inconclusive findings in the previous studies, the present study is carried out to examine the efficacy of WCF on one grammatical feature, which is the use of past tenses among young learners of ESL. The following section describes the approaches and methods of providing WCF to ESL learners.

## **2.5 Approaches and Methods of Providing WCF**

Providing students with corrective feedback in their L2 writing is not restricted to only one form. There are different forms which teachers can imply and these forms are based on their explicitness, the feedback medium, their focus, or the person who provides the feedback. To cope with various students with different learning abilities, using various

types of WCF is always effective and successful compared to implementing a single technique. The current study engages feedback types as focused direct and focused indirect corrections in order to increase linguistic accuracy. In regard to this, the typology of corrective feedback by Ellis (2009) and Bitchener and Ferris (2012) is mainly used as the ground to define the types of WCF. The subsection below describes the focused WCF.

### **2.5.1 Focused WCF**

Focused WCF, which concentrates correction on only one error type can be classified as an intensive type of correction. On the other hand, unfocused corrective feedback focuses on all of error categories. This type of feedback is categorized as extensive and comprehensive, as it covers all students' errors, regardless of the error category. There are different notions from various researchers concerning the efficacy of focused and unfocused WCF. The focused approach in WCF may give greater impact on students' writing accuracy as it promotes more noticing among the students. When students receive focused corrective feedback, they tend to notice and understand corrections when a set of error type is highlighted. Moreover, some researchers (e.g. Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008) in their studies pointed out that focused approach is an effective correction method to be applied compared to unfocused approach. This is because L2 students have a processing capacity that is very limited and they may experience cognitive overload if they are provided with correction that covers multiple linguistic aspects. As stated by Ellis (2009), learners may be able to process the feedback provided reflectively as focused WCF is thorough. Therefore, it may help learners especially those in primary schools to comprehend the errors better. The reason is that; the students have the ability to learn new L2 features effectively. Upon focusing on a single linguistic error in students' writing, teacher can either provide direct or indirect feedback in their written work. The next subsection discusses the direct WCF.

### **2.5.2 Direct WCF**

Direct feedback is described by Bitchener and Knoch (2008) as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher for the students. The correct forms are normally written above or near the linguistic errors. In order to provide the correct form or structure to learners, teacher may insert a missing words/phrase/morpheme, or cross out unnecessary word/phrase/morpheme. Besides, as proposed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), teacher may as well include written meta-linguistic explanation and oral form-focused through direct feedback.

In a study conducted by Almasi and Tabrizi (2016), the findings revealed the efficacy of direct feedback compared to indirect feedback. The type of feedback resulted in the grammatical accuracy in both revised and new writings. The findings clearly proved that the teacher's feedback helped students to learn effectively, whereby they were able to identify different types of errors. The students were also able to incorporate teacher feedback in subsequent revised writings and apply grammatical rules they learned from teacher feedback, which included explicit corrective comments. The reduction of errors in students' writings is in response to the feedback provided by the teacher that they received and applied in their written work. Additionally, according to Lee (2003), direct WCF might be suitable for beginners, or in a context where teachers want students to focus on the types of error that require them to do correction. The next subsection discusses the indirect WCF.

### **2.5.3 Indirect WCF**

According to Bitchener and Ferris (2012), indirect feedback is categorized as corrections that only indicate the occurrence of error without explicitly providing the correct forms of the errors. This indication can be in the form of writing error codes on top of the errors

or underlining the errors. Without being provided with the correct forms, students are required to rectify and correct the errors which have been indicated.

Lalande (1982) asserted that indirect feedback provides learners with opportunities to be engaged in “guided learning and problem solving”. In addition to this, Ferris (1995) claimed that indirect feedback is useful because students are able to get involved in a language process that is more profound as they are revising their output. This is because the use of error codes in indirect feedback pushes students to involve in hypothesis testing. During the correction process, students need to think of the correct forms for the errors they made based on the error codes given by the teacher. The next subsection discusses the codes of error correction.

#### **2.5.4 Error Correction Codes in Indirect WCF**

The use of error correction codes is a type of indirect WCF which was used in the present study. The error correction codes may include abbreviations such as ‘vt’ to indicate the wrong use of verb tense and ‘sp’ to indicate a spelling error (See **Appendix E** for more details on the examples of the codes). These codes are helpful because they allow teachers to provide indirect feedback, and reduce negative effects of error indication (Hyland, 1990). Besides, according to Hammerly (1991), using error correction codes is relevant to language teachers who are very careful and precise with accuracy. Hence, students’ written work is often covered with red ink. Despite its relevance in ESL learners’ writing, the effectiveness of WCF still remains an issue. The issue of the use of WCF in language learning as pointed out by researchers like Truscott (1996) is discussed in the next section below.



## **2.6 Issues on WCF in Language Learning as Stated by Truscott (1996)**

The efficacy of WCF in ESL writing has become a debate due to the notion made by Truscott (1996) that WCF is ineffective in grammatical accuracy, and it also can give harmful effects to the learners. According to Truscott (1996), grammar correction should be abandoned as it does not help in improving the linguistic accuracy in learners' writing. He provides three reasons to support his argument: 1) grammar correction may have harmful effects on learners' language learning development, 2) findings gathered from corrective feedback literature may have been misleading in implying the efficacy of feedback, and 3) theoretical and practical of grammar correction may be not effective.

To support his reasons, Truscott (1996) claimed that grammar correction may bring harm to learners' language learning development. In supporting his argument, Truscott took into consideration previous studies carried out by a number of researchers (Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992) which involved control groups and they were presented with both corrective feedback and revision. Findings of the studies disclosed that not only corrective feedback is detrimental, but it has also proven absolute gains even without the presence of correction. In other words, students that received corrective feedback had the tendency to make their writing short and simple just to avoid contexts which they might possibly make mistakes.

Secondly, Truscott (1996) argued that due to methodological issues, there was no comprehensive evidence in the previous studies to prove the development of learners' language. One of the methodological issues is highlighted in studies by researchers like Ashwell (2000), and Ferris and Roberts (2001) (as cited in Truscott, 2007). These studies investigated learners' success during revision process after they received different types of feedback and according to Truscott (2007), they failed to offer means of changes in

their learning, where the learners were unable to improve in writing accuracy. Truscott (2007) further claimed that studies of language learning concentrate on the difference between a measure of accuracy at a one-time period and a comparable measure at a later time. Thus, students' revised text (with teacher's assistance) should not be compared with their original text (without teacher's assistance). To be more specific, Truscott (2007) stated that a study which implements this kind of design is short-term and does not produce any measure of learning. Hence, the revision studies do not address the question.

Finally, Truscott (1996) asserted that theoretical and practical aspects of grammar correction may not be effective. Theoretically, the interlanguage system is built upon a complex process. This means that by simply providing grammar correction on learners' errors, learning and acquisition cannot be attained through an utter transfer of knowledge. Moreover, Truscott stated that the existing practice of corrective feedback provision in classrooms does not solve the issue related to the sequence of grammar acquisition. This is because different learners have different individual performance, and linguistic development ability develops at different paces. Providing feedback is seen as ineffective because it does not assist individual language development. Furthermore, Truscott (1996) continued his argument by stating that learners who are supplied with grammar correction tend to demonstrate pseudo-learning which is described as a superficial form of knowledge. Truscott presented a valid point that teaching produces nothing more than pseudo-learning when the acquired knowledge disappears over months. Learning would not be practical for acquisition if corrective feedback resulted in slightly more than pseudo-learning.

In terms of the practical perspectives, Truscott (1996) conceded that it may be difficult for teachers to recognize all errors committed by students in their writing. The reason is that it may be due to the fact that language develops and so does the grammar system or it may be due to the limitations in grammar knowledge. In addition, corrective feedback is not always consistent because it is time-consuming when teachers have to deal with too many errors. Besides, not all error types are in fixed structures at most time. As a result of these inconsistencies, the feedback given is affected. Truscott (1996) stated that students may find it difficult to comprehend all corrections given. Even if they understand the corrections, they might not be able to recall the information, let alone to use it in future written tasks or utilize it in different contexts.

Due to the continual controversy of implementing WCF in ESL writing, many researchers in their studies have been raising the issue on the necessity of providing teacher's feedback in English classes (e.g. Ferris, 2006; Sachs & Polio, 2007; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sheen, 2010; Shirazi & Shekarabi, 2014; Pham, 2015). Some studies (Semke, 1984; Fazio, 2001; Truscott & Hsu, 2008) revealed results which showed the inefficacy of error correction. Apart from its ineffectiveness, the results also showed that corrective feedback was harmful in the development of L2 writing accuracy. Nonetheless, there are studies (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Sheen, 2010) that revealed results which showed the efficacy of error correction. The results denoted the importance of error correction because it facilitated learners in improving their writing accuracy. The arguments against and for WCF which are supported with evidence from past studies are discussed in the next subsection.

### **2.6.1 Argument Against WCF**

For L2 teachers, corrective feedback is very important to help students improve their writing accuracy in the target language. Researchers like Truscott (1996) however, made an argument regarding the effectiveness of WCF in language learning. According to Truscott, grammar correction in L2 learning should be avoided as it is not effective and may bring harm to learners. He added that using corrective feedback in learners' written work is not promising as it is a teaching practice that solely relies on knowledge transfer, without focusing on the development of the language system. Therefore, due to the complexity of language development system, teachers cannot expect students to have the ability to produce the correct form or structure after being corrected through corrective feedback. Furthermore, Truscott (1996) stated that the acquisition of grammatical rules and structures happens in a specific order. So, when learners are not ready, corrective feedback becomes ineffective as the process of acquisition does not happen naturally. In other words, when teacher feedback is not in line with students' learning sequences, corrective feedback loses its effectiveness.

In addition, Truscott (1996) asserted that knowledge that learners gained from corrective feedback was superficial and possibly impermanent due to the complexity of the interlanguage development processes. Thus, the knowledge that learners gained from corrective feedback will not last long. Interlanguage, as stated by Selinker (1972), is a student's production of language during L2 learning process. This means that the acquisition of knowledge in the target language will not happen when students do not have the readiness to receive corrective feedback from their teacher.

The argument made by Truscott (1996) is supported by researchers like Truscott and Hsu (2008). In their study, Truscott and Hsu recruited 47 adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to investigate the efficacy of WCF. The findings revealed that there was error reduction in written work for learners that received corrective feedback. However, the effect of WCF was not applicable on the learners' new writing tasks. Truscott and Hsu proved that the effect of WCF was not applicable on new writing pieces despite the fact that students produced lesser errors in their writing. The issue of WCF continuously arises when students keep making the same mistakes in their writing even after being corrected. Thus, the doubt whether or not corrective feedback should be provided, emerges. The next subsection discusses the argument for WCF.

### **2.6.2 Argument for WCF**

As opposed to Truscott's (1996) claim, several studies support the benefits of WCF in improving the accuracy of ESL learners' writing. To respond to Truscott, Ferris (1999) mentioned a number of effective ways in responding to error correction in L2 learning. Besides that, Ferris suits her own generalizations or arguments by under- or over- stating the results of the original study. The argument made by Ferris (1999) has led to several studies on the effectiveness of WCF (e.g. Chandler, 2003; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Farrokhi & Sattarpour, 2012).

Chandler (2003) conducted a study investigating the efficacy of corrective feedback in written work among 31 students. The students were divided into a treatment group and a control group. The students received the same type of feedback but they were given different types of treatment. Students who received treatment had to correct the underlined errors they made before they handed in the second writing task. Meanwhile,

students in the control group had to do corrections after submitting their second writing task. The findings of the study showed that the writing performance of students who received corrective feedback before doing corrections was better than the students in the control group. This proves that corrective feedback received by students help them improve their writing performance.

Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken (2008) further researched the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF on ESL learners' writing accuracy. Participants from two Dutch secondary schools took part in the study. The participants were grouped into two experimental groups and two control groups. Direct WCF and indirect WCF were given to students in the two experimental groups respectively, whereas, students in the control groups were given practicing writing and revision respectively without being provided with feedback. A pretest-posttest design was used in the study to find out the students' writing accuracy. The results suggested that both types of corrective feedback had positive effects on students' written work. However, in a long-term period, only direct WCF worked effectively on students' written work.

In addition, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) investigated the effectiveness of corrective feedback by looking into differential effect of direct WCF. 52 ESL learners with low-intermediate proficiency level in New Zealand were involved in the study. They were assigned into three experimental groups (direct corrective feedback, written, and oral meta-linguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback and metalinguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback only), and one control group. All participants were required to write five pieces of writing for the pretest, an immediate posttest, and three delayed posttests. It was revealed in the findings of the 10-month study that students in all three

experimental groups outperformed those students in the control group. However, the difference found in the three groups was not significant.

Another study was carried out by Bitchener and Knoch (2010) to investigate the efficacy of WCF in students' use of articles. The study involved 62 advanced L2 learners, and it was carried out in the USA. In order to investigate the long term effect of WCF, the students were divided into four groups; three experimental groups and one control group. Students in the three experimental groups were given written metalinguistic explanation, written metalinguistic feedback, and oral form-focused instruction. Descriptive writing was employed in the study, whereby the students were given a picture of different social setting to write about. The results revealed that during the immediate posttest, students in the experimental groups outperformed those in the control group. Nevertheless, in the period of 10 weeks, the improvement in writing accuracy was only shown by students who received direct feedback.

In another study, Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) further investigated the effect of direct feedback on the use of English article system on EFL learners with high proficiency level. 60 participants in the study were divided equally into two experimental groups and a control group. Participants in the experimental groups were given either direct focused or direct unfocused WCF, and no feedback was given to participants in the control group. All of the participants had to write picture compositions during the pretest and posttest. Farrokhi and Sattarpour (2012) found that focused WCF had more significant effects on learners' grammatical accuracy than unfocused WCF. The study provides an evidence on the effectiveness of focused feedback on ESL learners' grammatical accuracy in their writing.

The inconclusive results from different studies mentioned above is an evidence that further investigation on WCF in language learning is undeniably required. The different types of corrective feedback and the linguistic features to be focused on are important factors that should be taken into account. Therefore, a number of researchers in the past few years continue to prove the efficacy of WCF in their studies. The next section discusses several recent studies on corrective feedback in L2 writing.

## **2.7 Past Studies on WCF**

Over the years, researchers have been continuously made the arguments on the use of direct and indirect WCF. These arguments are mainly about which type of feedback benefits more in terms of the accuracy gains. Apart from comparing the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF, the efficacy of different types of direct WCF was also being the focus of studies investigating the differential effects of different types of feedback (e.g., Sheen, 2007; Sheen et al., 2009; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Studies investigating the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF on students' writing are discussed in the following subsection.

### **2.7.1 Direct vs. Indirect**

In this literature review, recent studies on direct vs. indirect WCF which have been explored since 2014 are taken into consideration. To begin with, a five-week study carried out by Hosseiny (2014) which investigated the role of two types of corrective feedback – direct and indirect WCF in improving EFL students' writing skill will be reviewed. 60 pre-intermediate Iranian students which were divided equally into three groups participated in the study. Direct WCF and indirect WCF were given to students in the first and second treatment groups respectively, and no feedback was given to students in the control group. For students in the control group, their papers were not returned to them



although the errors in their writing were corrected. The study focused on one target structure, which was article system of English. The results revealed that in general, students who received WCF showed significant improvement than those who did not receive any feedback. Hosseiny (2014) concluded that the type of corrective feedback affected the accuracy in EFL writing, and indirect WCF was more effective than direct WCF in improving students' writing accuracy. In line with this result, a study carried out by Seiffedin and El-Sakka (2017) also disclosed the same finding. By providing direct and indirect WCF to 48 junior EFL students at kindergarten level through email, the results of the study revealed a significant difference between students who were provided with corrective feedback and students in the control group. The results confirmed the statement made by Hyland and Hyland (2006), where according to the researchers, feedback helped students gain control over the writing skills. Students have no opportunity to practise the structure when they do not receive any feedback from teachers. On the contrary, when students receive feedback on the errors they made, they have sufficient opportunity to practise the structure, hence improving their skill in the targeted language structure.

Additionally, Salimi and Ahmadpour (2015) carried out another recent study investigating the effectiveness of direct WCF and indirect WCF on the use of article system of English among EFL learners. The study involved 30 intermediate university students in Iran. All of the participants were assigned into group one (direct WCF), group two (indirect WCF) and the control group. It was revealed that the difference in performance between the two treatment groups was not significant. Nevertheless, the means of accuracy for direct group was higher than the means of accuracy for indirect group. Direct and indirect WCF demonstrated to have an equal short-term effect in

learners' writing accuracy development. However, with regard to a long-term effect, direct WCF was reported to be more significant than indirect WCF.

Moreover, there was a study carried out by Sarvestani and Pishkar (2016) which explored the effects using direct and indirect WCF on the use English article system in L2 learners' writing. The study involved 60 Iranian intermediate EFL students who were divided equally into three groups. Group one students received direct WCF, group two students received indirect WCF, and students in the control group received no feedback. Findings of the study disclosed positive evidence supporting corrective feedback. It was revealed that students who received direct WCF improved significantly in their writing accuracy than students who received indirect WCF in the posttest. Sarvestani and Pishkar (2016) reported that during teaching of writing, the use of direct WCF had an important effect on the intermediate student's performance. Furthermore, the use of direct WCF was more effective than indirect WCF for students with intermediate proficiency level. This was because, in regard with their proficiency level, direct WCF was simpler and easier to understand by the students compared to indirect WCF.

Another recent study carried out by Siti Nor Aisyah (2017) investigated the effectiveness of two types of WCF (direct and indirect) on ESL learners' use of past tenses in a secondary school in Malaysia. The 12-week study involved 60 students who were divided into two groups – group one (direct WCF) and group two (indirect WCF). The results of the study yielded positive evidence to support the effectiveness of WCF. The findings disclosed that the writing performance of students who received direct WCF was slightly better than students who received indirect WCF in the posttest. Siti Nor Aisyah (2017) further claimed that direct WCF was immediate, and it benefited more as it helped

students lessen the confusion they had when doing correction. Thus, students are able to do corrections efficiently based on the corrective feedback they received from the teacher.

Furthermore, the study carried out by Farjadnasab and Khodashenas (2017) is another example of direct vs. indirect WCF study. It measured the differential effects between direct WCF and indirect WCF on L2 learners' writings over time. 79 Iranian EFL learners were involved in the study. In contrast with aforementioned studies (Hosseiny, 2014; Salimi & Ahmadpour, 2015; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2016) which focused on one linguistic error, this study focused on three targeted linguistic errors (capitalization errors, the correct use of definite and indefinite articles, and simple present tense verb). The findings of the study revealed that direct WCF had a greater effect on students' writing accuracy. Whereas, different types of feedback had a long-term improvement and learning over time. The utilization of each type of feedback in the treatment groups resulted in improving students' writings at different levels.

Lastly, Ng and Siti Nor Aisyah (2018) carried out a study investigating the impact of instructor's direct and indirect feedback on learners' use of past tenses in their written work. The qualitative study involved 12 Malaysian high school students which were divided equally into two groups. Students in the first group received direct WCF, whereas students in the second group received indirect WCF. Based on the data collected through semi-structured interview sessions, three main factors regarding direct and indirect WCF were revealed. The three factors included 1) learner attitude towards the two types of WCF, 2) learners' beliefs about what correction entailed, and 3) three types of scaffolding. To put it simply, students' beliefs and attitudes towards what WCF entailed affected how they perceived and responded to the feedback. Furthermore, scaffolding by instructors and peers, as well as self-initiative influenced the students who received

indirect feedback on how they acted on the feedback. Ng and Siti Nor Aisyah (2018) added that longer period should be given to these students in order to understand the error codes, as they still faced difficulties in grasping the meaning. The adequate time given by teachers is important in ensuring the WCF used is fully utilized.

Due to conflicting results from various studies, the effects of direct and indirect WCF remain ambiguous. While some studies suggest that direct WCF may benefit learners more in particular contexts (e.g., Siti Nor Aisyah, 2017; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2016; Farjadnasab & Khodashenas 2017), other studies (e.g., Ghandi & Maghsoudi, 2014; Eslami, 2014; Hosseiny 2014) proved that indirect WCF may be more beneficial for learners. There are also studies (e.g., Frantzen, 1995; Van Beuningen, 2008) which provided no difference across different types of direct and indirect WCF. Thus, in order to generate more specific results on the effects of direct and indirect WCF in different contexts, additional studies are needed.

## **2.8 The Present Study**

One of the aims of this study is to make a contribution to the literature investigating the effectiveness of WCF on writing accuracy among ESL learners in Malaysian context. There are several studies which are somewhat similar to the one presented. They are the studies of Eslami (2014) and Farjadnasab and Khodashenas (2017). Eslami (2014) investigated the effect of two types of feedback (direct and indirect) on L2 writing on the use of simple past tense, while Farjadnasab and Khodashenas (2017) investigated the effect of direct and indirect WCF on three targeted linguistic errors, which were capitalization errors, the correct use of definite and indefinite articles, and simple present tense verb. The number of targeted linguistic errors is the major difference between the study carried out by Farjadnasab & Khodashenas (2017) and the present study. Similar to

Eslami's (2014) study, this study focuses on only one targeted linguistic feature, which is the use of past tense. Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima (2008) stated that learners might be able to notice and acquire the received corrective feedback better when they receive corrective feedback on only one targeted feature, since they have limited processing capacity according to many SLA models. Hence, in the context of this study, the grammatical aspect is focused on only one feature, which is the use of past tenses.

The present study hopes to contribute to the literature of the efficacy of WCF. Firstly, it studies the effect of WCF on the writing accuracy of young learners. There are not much studies on WCF focusing on young learners such as primary school students. Secondly, it provides a combination of different research instruments, including interviews, in addition to experimenting.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter outlines reviews of literature which are related to the focus of this present study; the efficacy of WCF. By referring to a number of previous studies, the different types of corrective feedback, as well as its effects on ESL learners' writing were discussed comprehensively. In the next chapter, the methodology used by the researcher to carry out the present study is presented.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of the research. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF in ESL young learners' writing. The targeted linguistic error is the use of past tense. To assess and evaluate the effects of the two types of WCF on the students' writing, a primary school situated in the Klang Valley with 41 Year 6 students' population was chosen. Data of the research were collected through essay writings and interview sessions. Thus, in this chapter, the participants will be first discussed, followed by the research design, instruments used to collect the data, as well as the target structure. Lastly, the procedures of the data collection and the data analysis will be explained in details.

In order to investigate whether the students improved in their writing, they were asked to write five essays, which comprised four different topics. During the pretest, the students wrote the first essay. Next, during the treatment sessions, the students wrote the second and third essays in week 2 and week 4 respectively. Then, students wrote the fourth essay which of the same topic as the pretest for posttest 1 in week 7. Lastly, students did the fifth writing task for posttest 2 in week 8. The number of errors that the students made from the pretest to posttest 2 were calculated in order to examine the effects of the WCF given in their writing.

### **3.1 Participants**

Participants consisted of 41 students who are studying in Year 6 in two classes, which are 6 Orchid and 6 Lily. All of them have completed their lower primary years, from Year 1 to Year 3, as well as upper primary years, Year 4 and Year 5. In class 6 Orchid, there is a total of 22 students, consisting of seven boys and 15 girls. In class 6 Lily, there is a total of 19 students, consisting of 10 boys and nine girls. In total, there are 17 boys and 24 girls. The reason for selecting students from the two classes out of three Year 6 classes in the school is because of the small gap of proficiency level among the students. To support this, the participants' marks for English subject in the most recent exam, which was Final Exam 2017 when they were in Year 5 was taken into account to ascertain their proficiency level. In class 6 Orchid, the highest mark scored in English was 92 for paper 1, and 80 for paper 2. The lowest mark in English was 74 for paper 1 and 60 for paper 2. In class 6 Lily, the highest mark was 92 and 82 for paper 1 and paper 2 respectively. Whereas, the lowest mark was 46 for paper 1 and 60 for paper 2.

A convenience sampling size of students aged 12 years old was used. Convenience sampling was chosen for this study for its accessibility factor. Marshall (1996) stated that convenience sampling is the least rigorous technique due to the involvement of the most accessible subjects. In addition, in terms of effort, time, and money it is the least costly to the research. Therefore, convenience sampling was used in the present study. All the 41 participants from the two classes are taught by the same English subject teacher. Although the selection of the students was based on convenience sampling, the students can represent the Year 6 private school students in Malaysia to some extent. This is because, the curricular and non-curricular programs stipulated in the education system received by the participants were similar to those in other Malaysian private schools.

Nevertheless, due to several factors such as the students' attendance from the pretest to posttest 2, only 30 students (15 students from each class) were selected for the study. The students were divided into two groups, with 15 students in each group. Group 1 members were represented by the students in 6 Lily, whereas Group 2 members were represented by the students in 6 Orchids. Participants in Group 1 received direct WCF while participants in Group 2 were received indirect WCF. The next section discusses the design of the study.

### **3.2 Research Design**

A mixed methods research design was employed in this study to collect the data both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to Creswell (2014), a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative methods in one study or a series of study in order to understand the research problem. This type of research design is used in a study when researcher has both quantitative and qualitative data. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data has an advantage where it can offer better understanding to the readers regarding the research problem. Quantitative data such as scores on instruments allow the generalisation of a population to be made by the researcher. On the other hand, qualitative data such as semi-structured interviews allow a complex picture of the situation, where various different perspectives on the study can be gained. Consequently, a mixed methods research design was employed in this study because it provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both types of data.



In the present study, the quantitative data were collected from the scores gained by students in their writing tasks during a pretest and two posttests. The qualitative data on the other hand, were collected from responses given by the students when they were interviewed. The two data collection methods were used to find out the differential effects of direct and indirect WCF on grammatical accuracy produced by students in their writing. The instruments used in the study are explained in the next section.

### **3.3 Instruments**

Descriptive writing, which involved picture compositions was the instrument employed for this study. Students produced five pieces of descriptive writing of four different topics during the pretest, treatment and posttests. The reason of using picture description writing is because it allowed the students to use past tense in their writing, which is the target linguistic structure in this study. The other reason of using picture description is that it is stipulated as a test component in the Primary School Assessment or the UPSR (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah). The target structure of the study is discussed in the next section.

### **3.4 Target Structure**

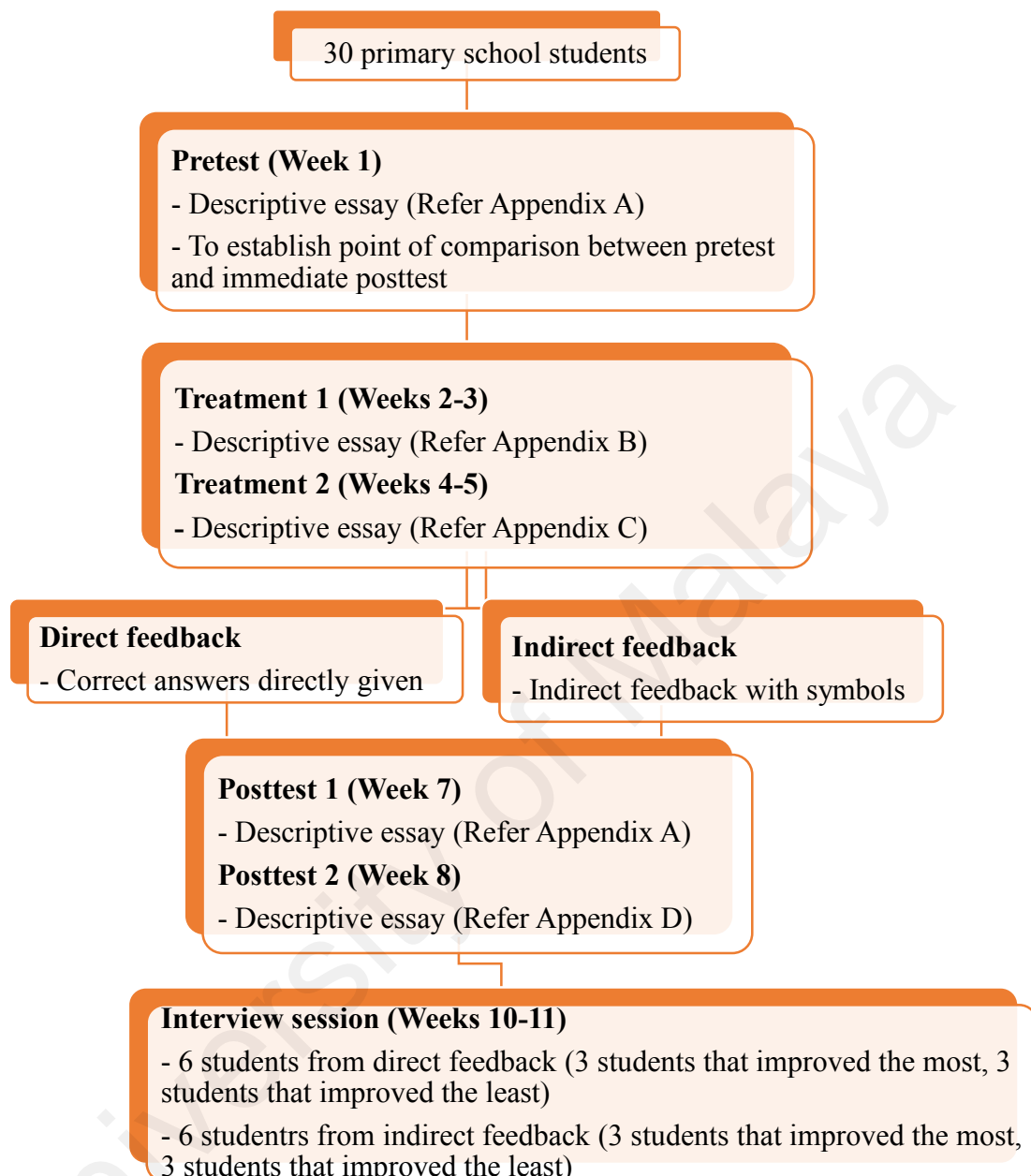
The current study focuses on one “treatable” (Ferris, 2002) error. The target structure of the study is limited to only one linguistic error. The reason being is that the positive results when examining specific treatable errors had been shown in a number of past studies on corrective feedback (e.g., Hosseiny, 2014; Salimi & Ahmadpour, 2015; Sarvestani & Pishkar, 2016). As suggested by Al-Jarrah (2016) on how future studies should be designed, focusing on one targeted linguistic error at a time is one of the basic premises of corrective feedback provision model. Therefore, in order to investigate the efficacy of

WCF, this study focused on only one targeted treatable error, which is the past tenses structure.

The past tenses structure is used to describe the past. There are four subcategories of past tenses, which include simple past, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous. Simple past and past continuous tenses are the focus of this study. The two subcategories of the past tenses structure were selected on the basis of feedback from a teacher currently teaching the subject in the school where the study was conducted. The teacher acknowledged that the acquisition of this form varied with some who have mastered it, and others who have not. Many students still encounter difficulties in applying correct tenses in their writing despite their experience in learning the target structure. Bitchener, Young, & Cameron (2005) reported that simple past tense was one of the frequently committed errors in students' writing. In addition, it was suggested for future research to focus on other linguistic forms (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; 2009; Ellis et al., 2008), as English article has always been the focused linguistic structure in the previous studies. The next section describes the data collection procedure of the study.

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure**

The current study utilized an experimental approach based on Swain's Output Hypothesis in order to investigate the effectiveness of two types of corrective feedback on students' use of the past tenses structure. The measurement of the students' writing accuracy was made based on the number of errors they made in the writing tasks (Pretest, Posttest 1, and Posttest 2) in an eight-week period. **Figure 3.1** below shows the data collection procedure of this study.



**Figure 3.1:** Data collection procedure of the study

The current study comprised three stages – pretest, treatment process, and posttest. In the three stages, participants were required to write descriptive essays of 80-100 words each within 30 minutes. The writing task started with the pretest which was conducted in week 1. During the pretest, all participants were given picture compositions of the same topic to write about (Refer to **Appendix A**). The significance of having a pretest is to set a point of comparison between the two experimental groups in the beginning of the study.

Treatment sessions were carried out in four weeks; from week 2 to week 5. The reason of allocating two weeks for each treatment session is to provide sufficient time for students to revise their texts and practice writing two essays during the treatment process. The students were provided with direct and indirect WCF during this stage. Students in Group 1 (direct WCF) were given the correct forms on top of the errors they made, whereas students in Group 2 (indirect WCF) were given symbols. Correction in the form of symbols was used each time an error was made by the students (Refer to **Appendix E** for the symbols used). For instance, VT was used for verb tense errors. A participant wrote “She take a broom and started sweeping” instead of “She took a broom and started sweeping”. Hence, to indicate the error, the teacher wrote VT above the word “take”. The students were given the explanation about the symbols used prior to the data collection process.

In this stage, two different topics were given to all the participants to write about (Refer to **Appendix B** and **Appendix C**). Students in both Group 1 and Group 2 had to write the two essays twice (draft 1 and draft 2). For the first draft, students in Group 1 and Group 2 wrote the essay independently, where there was no help and guidance from the teacher. The number of errors made by students in their first draft was counted. The first draft then was returned to the students with WCF provided by the teacher. Group 1 students (direct WCF) were required to correct the errors they made and rewrite the essays with the correct forms provided to produce draft 2. Group 2 students (indirect WCF) had to do correction based on the symbols and produce another draft (draft 2). During the correction process, the students were allowed to find help and assistance from teacher and friends to encounter any problems that they had. The number of errors found in the second draft, or the revised text, were counted again to find out whether there was error reduction made by the students.

The next writing tasks were posttest 1 and posttest 2 which were carried out in week 7 and week 8 respectively. For posttest 1, students wrote the essay of the same topic as the pretest (Refer to **Appendix A**). This allowed a comparison to be made in terms of the errors made by students before and after the treatment process. On the other hand, during posttest 2, a new topic which was related to the topic used in posttest 1 was given to the students (Refer to **Appendix D**). Again, the errors made by students in both posttests were counted in order to see the students' writing accuracy. The students wrote all the essays from the pretest to posttest 2 in the school, and they were not allowed to do the writings at home. This was done to make sure that the writings produced by the students were authentic.

The final part of the data collection procedure involved interview sessions which was conducted in week 10 and week 11 after all the data was collected and analyzed. Semi-structured interviews were used in the present study in order to gain the students' insights on any problems that they encountered during the correction process based on the WCF they received, as well as to find out the efficacy of WCF. 12 students; six from each group were involved in the interviews. From these six students, three of the students are the ones that improved the most and three students that improved the least. The reason of selecting six students from each group was because the variation of perspectives from the students can be identified, and they were able to represent their respective groups. To collect the data, the interview sessions were recorded. The students responded to the researcher by providing their opinions on WCF and sharing their problems in understanding the WCF. Interviews were used in this study because it is an effective tool which can provide useful information when participants cannot be observed directly, and it allows detailed personal information to be made by the participants (Creswell, 2012). Thus, interview was a

suitable method to be employed in this study in order to identify any other factors that influenced students' writing performance, as well their writing accuracy.

The interview questions focused on three major areas. Under the three questions, there were a number of minor questions that were asked to draw out the answers from the participants (Refer to **Appendix F** for the interview questions of this study). The following are the interview questions:-

1. What are the problems you face when doing correction based on the symbols or direct corrective feedback given, without help from teacher and friends?
2. Do you find the teacher or friends' assistance useful when doing correction?
3. Overall, does corrective feedback help you in your writing?

Explanations or reasons that may explain factors that influence students' use of past tenses which is related to the provision of direct and indirect feedback are made based on the feedback obtained from the participants. The next section discusses the data analysis of this study.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data analysis for the current study is divided into two parts – quantitative and qualitative analysis. The following subsection describes the quantitative part of the data analysis.

### **3.6.1 Quantitative analysis**

In order to measure and compare the differential effects of the two types of WCF (direct and indirect WCF) on the use of past tenses, quantitative analysis was carried out. In doing so, split-plot ANOVA was used. It is an analysis of variance design which combines both between-subjects and within-subjects analysis of variance designs. Between-subjects analysis of variance design is used to compare two or more groups in the same analysis. Meanwhile, within-subjects analysis of variance design, which is also known as repeated measure design, is used when one group of participants is exposed to two or more conditions. Hence, split-plot ANOVA is used to test for mean differences between two or more independent groups while subjecting participants to repeated measures.

In this study, between-subjects analysis of variance was used to compare the effects of direct WCF and indirect WCF on students' use of past tenses based on results from posttest 1 and posttest 2. Whereas, within-subjects analysis of variance was used to find out the improvement in students' accuracy based on the results of posttest 1 and posttest 2 in the two groups. The qualitative part of data analysis is discussed in the next subsection.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative analysis**

Twelve students from two treatment groups participated in the semi-structured interview. The interview sessions were recorded using an audio recorder and later transcribed by the researcher. The transcription of the interview data was insert to Microsoft Excel 2016 software. The open-ended components from the interview questions were analyzed qualitatively. A grid was then prepared in Excel for all the responses for each interview question by the researcher. The participants' answers to the open-ended questions were

read repeatedly to generate common themes for analysis. A colour-coding technique was used to draw out emerging themes from the grid.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the methods that the researcher used in the study which was focused to investigate the differential effects of direct WCF and indirect WCF on the use of past tenses. Additionally, the research design, the participants, data collection procedure, and data analysis are also explained. The rationale of using the methods and choosing the target structures were also explained. The findings and the discussion of this study will be presented in the next chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The aim of the present study is to investigate the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF on ESL learners' use of past tenses. The results of the data analysis which is going to be presented in accordance with the research questions is presented in this chapter. This chapter comprises two parts. The analysis of the quantitative data which relates to the first research question is discussed in the first part, whereas the analysis of the qualitative data which relates to the second research question is discussed in the second part.

### **4.1 Analysis of Quantitative Data**

In this study, the quantitative data involve students' written work test scores. A total of three sets of scores of the test were gathered to provide the answer for the first research question. A pretest (prior to the treatment), posttest 1 (after the second treatment session) and posttest 2 (a week after posttest 1) were carried out. The descriptive and inferential statistics, which will be used to interpret the written work test scores, were administered to answer the first research question. Subsequently, the researcher used SPSS version 23 to carry out the analysis of the data. The next subsection discusses the analysis of the data beginning with normality test.

#### 4.1.1 Normality Test

In inferential statistics, normality of data is very important. It is important because it determines which type of statistical test that needs to be carried out in a study. As stated by Pallant (2007), normality test must be administered because most of the statistical tests depend on the assumption of normality. The following **Table 4.1** presents the normality test results of the current study.

**Table 4.1:** Results of skewness and kurtosis in normality test

	Group (n=32)		Statistic	Std. Error
Pretest	G1	Skewness	.046	.564
		Kurtosis	-.762	1.091
	G2	Skewness	1.131	.564
		Kurtosis	.246	1.091
Posttest 1	G1	Skewness	.484	.564
		Kurtosis	-1.010	1.091
	G2	Skewness	1.116	.564
		Kurtosis	1.908	1.091
Posttest 2	G1	Skewness	.018	.564
	G2	Kurtosis	-1.234	1.091
	G1	Skewness	1.006	.564
	G2	Kurtosis	.493	1.091

Skewness and kurtosis is one of the ways to identify the normality of data. The skewness value for Group 1 (direct WCF group) in the pretest was 0.046, posttest 1 was 0.484 and posttest 2 was 0.018. Meanwhile, the kurtosis value in the pretest was -0.762, posttest 1 was 0.484 and posttest 2 was 0.018. On the other hand, for Group 2 (indirect WCF group), the skewness value in the pretest was 1.131, posttest 1 was 1.116 and posttest 2 was 1.006, while the kurtosis value of Group 2 in the pretest was 0.246, posttest 1 was 1.908 and posttest 2 was 0.493. Chua (2012) stated that in order for a datum to be normally distributed, the skewness and kurtosis values should be in the range of -1.96 to +1.96. Based on the data presented in **Table 4.1**, the skewness and kurtosis values were in

between  $\pm 1.96$ . Thus, the distribution of data was normal. When data are normally distributed, parametric tests can be used to analyze the quantitative data. Parametric tests, according to Pallant (2007), make assumptions about the population from which the sample has been drawn.

In this case, one of the parametric tests, which was the paired-samples t-test was administered. According to Chua (2013), a paired-samples t-test is used when two sets of data are obtained from the same subject group (one sample) at two different levels. The paired-samples t-test was administered because it can determine if there is a difference between the means of both sets of data obtained from the pretest and the two posttests. The mean scores of the direct and indirect WCF groups are shown in the **Table 4.2** below.

**Table 4.2:** The mean scores of the direct and indirect WCF groups

<b>G1 (direct WCF group)</b>					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	43.0138*	16	19.39723	4.84931
	Posttest 1	33.2813*	16	30.91347	7.72837
Pair 2	Posttest 1	33.2813	16	30.91347	7.72837
	Posttest 2	20.0681*	16	15.56989	3.89247
Pair 3	Pretest	43.0138	16	19.39723	4.84931
	Posttest 2	20.0681	16	15.56989	3.89247
<b>G2 (indirect WCF group)</b>					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	36.2288*	16	24.81304	6.20326
	Posttest 1	26.6813*	16	23.43528	5.85882
Pair 2	Posttest 1	26.6813	16	23.43528	5.85882
	Posttest 2	14.8394*	16	13.40231	3.35058
Pair 3	Pretest	36.2288	16	24.81304	6.20326
	Posttest 2	14.8394	16	13.40231	3.35058

In this study, the students' accuracy on the use of past tenses was measured by the errors committed in their written work. Thus, the mean scores as presented in **Table 4.2** indicated the error reduction in the written work produced by learners in the pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2. As shown, the direct WCF group had a greater degree of error reduction in general than the indirect WCF group.

The mean values in Group 1 (direct WCF) indicated that direct WCF improved significantly in the use of past tense from the pretest (M=43.01) to posttest 1 (M=33.28) to posttest 2 (M=20.07). Similarly, the mean values in Group 2 (indirect WCF) also showed significant changes, which means indirect WCF also improved the accuracy of the past tense from the pretest (M=36.23) to the posttest 1 (M=26.68) to the posttest 2 (M=14.84). The p value from the results of paired-samples t-test was observed after observing the difference between the mean scores of both sets of data. The research result can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the two scores if the p value is less than 0.05 (e.g., 0.04, 0.02, 0.002) (Pallant, 2007). For this study, the p value for both sets of data are shown below.

**Table 4.3:** The results of the paired-samples t-test for direct WCF group

		<b>G1 (direct WCF group)</b>							
		Paired differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest 1	9.73250	30.16096*	7.54024	-6.33914	25.80414	1.291*	15*	.216*
Pair 2	Posttest 1- Posttest 2	13.21312	26.55394*	6.63848	-.93647	27.36272	1.990*	15*	.065*
Pair 3	Pretest - Posttest 2	22.94563	17.65454*	4.41364	13.53818	32.35307	5.199*	15*	.000*

As **Table 4.3** illustrates, the paired-samples t-test indicated that the research result in Group 1 (direct WCF) was not significant from the pretest to posttest 1 ( $t = 1.291$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .216$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and from the posttest 1 to posttest 2 ( $t = 1.990$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = 0.065$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). However, the result from the analysis revealed a significant decrease in the direct WCF group from the pretest to posttest 2 ( $t = 5.199$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results showed that the score means for Group 1 (direct WCF) continued to descend achieving significance in the posttest 2. Next, the following **Table 4.4** shows the results of the paired-samples t-test for indirect WCF group.

**Table 4.4:** The results of the paired-samples t-test for indirect WCF group

		<b>G2 (indirect WCF group)</b>							
		Paired differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest 1	9.54750	36.02135	9.00543	-9.64692	28.74192	1.060*	15*	.306*
Pair 2	Posttest 1- Posttest 2	11.84188	22.80408	5.70102	-.30956	23.99331	2.077*	15*	.055*
Pair 3	Pretest - Posttest 2	24.27996	24.27996	6.06999	8.45150	34.32725	3.524*	15*	.003*

As shown in **Table 4.4**, similar to the direct WCF group, a decrease in the indirect WCF group turned out to be significant from the pretest to posttest 2 ( $t = 3.524$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Conversely, the research result showed no significant difference from the pretest to posttest 1 ( $t = 1.060$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = 0.306$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and from the posttest 1 to posttest 2 ( $t = 2.077$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = 0.055$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) because of the inefficacy of the treatment session during 6-week interval (from the pretest to posttest 1). Similarly, this means that the participants in Group 2 (indirect WCF) managed to do equally well in the posttest 2.

There are a number of previous studies that have corresponding results which proved the facilitative effects of WCF concerning the accuracy gain in a linguistic form. A study by Bitchener and Knoch (2010) was one of the studies. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) compared the effects of two different types of direct WCF (i.e. written meta; written meta and form focused) and indirect WCF (i.e. circle). Having the English article system as the targeted linguistic structure, a pretest-immediate posttest-delayed posttest design was used in the study. The results of the study denoted a consistent improvement in the accurate use of articles in all of the written tasks. However, there was a slight decrease in accuracy showed by the group that received indirect WCF. Apparently, the direct WCF

group benefited more compared to the indirect WCF group as the former received metalinguistic explanation as a part of the feedback provided.

The same finding in terms of the facilitative effects of WCF can also be seen in the current study. Although no observable differences were found between students in direct WCF group and students in indirect WCF group, students preferred to receive direct WCF from the teacher to do correction. This might be due to certain advantages of direct WCF: the information is clearer, more suitable for more demanding language structures, and more immediate (Nagode et al., 2014). As revealed in **Table 4.3**, the standard error mean for Group 1 decreased between the pretest and posttest 1 (7.540), between the posttest 1 and posttest 2 (6.638) and between the pretest and posttest 2 (4.413). This clearly showed the consistency of error reduction of students in Group 1 (direct WCF). In line with this, two students from direct WCF group stated that direct WCF provided to them was easy to understand as it was very straightforward. As mentioned by another student during the interview sessions, the feedback helped them to improve their writing skills due to its clarity. The excerpt from the three students are outlined in **Figure 4.1** below.

Student A : Yes, I need the correct forms. I need this to know my mistake. When teacher write the correct forms, it's easy for me to learn. I have no problem at all to understand this. It's very straightforward.

Student B : I like it because teacher write the correct forms, it's like, it's very straightforward. Not only past tense, I can also see my spelling mistakes.

Student C : Yes, I think it's helpful for me to write better. When I know the correct one, I can learn from it.

**Figure 4.1:** Students' responses towards direct WCF

This is also in line with findings in Westmacott's (2017) study. During the interview sessions, it was revealed that two out of six participants in the study favoured direct WCF as direct feedback was not time-consuming and not frustrating. Hence, they preferred direct WCF to find out their mistakes in the written work. The next subsection discusses the analysis of the first research question.

#### **4.2 Analysis of Research Question 1**

*To what extent do primary school students' accuracy in the use of past tenses improve as a result of direct and indirect feedback?*

Split-plot ANOVA was administered to answer research question 1. Split-plot ANOVA was used to find out whether the two independent variables (i.e. direct and indirect WCF) had main effects. It was also used to identify whether the interaction between the two variables was significant. In the context of this study, the analysis would tell whether there was a change in the accuracy in the use of past tense over time (main effect for time). It would also compare the two interventions (direct WCF and indirect WCF) in terms of their effectiveness in improving the accuracy on the use of past tense (main effect for group). Lastly, it would tell whether the direct WCF and indirect WCF groups undergo the same changes in scores over time (interaction effect).

There is a need to check on the assumptions before assessing the interaction effect and the main effect. To analyze these assumptions, two types of test will be carried out. Pallant (2007) explained that checking for assumptions is necessary in order to see if the homogeneity assumption of variances is violated. First, Levene's Test of Equality of error variances was observed in order to check for these assumptions. If the Sig. value is bigger



than 0.05, the value for the variable can be considered as non-significant. The results of Levene's Test are presented in **Table 4.5** below.

**Table 4.5:** Levene's Test of equality of error variances

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Pretest	.793	1	30	.380*
Posttest 1	2.329	1	30	.137*
Posttest 2	.460	1	30	.503*

Based on **Table 4.5**, the Sig. values for pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2 were 0.380, 0.137 and 0.503 respectively. Since the significant values for all three variables were bigger than 0.05, they were considered as non-significant. Next, Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was checked. According to Pallant (2007), if the Sig. value in Box's Test is bigger than 0.001, the assumption is not violated. The results are shown in **Table 4.6** below.

**Table 4.6:** Box's Test of equality of covariance matrices

Box's M	4.278
F	.635
df1	6
df2	6520.755
Sig.	.827*

Referring to **Table 4.6**, the Sig. value is 0.827. According to Pallant (2007), the interaction effect and the main effects can be discussed if the Sig. value for the variable in Levene's Test is greater than 0.05 and Sig. value in Box's Test is bigger than 0.001. In this study, the Sig. value for the variable in Levene's Test is greater than 0.05 (0.380,

0.137, 0.503) and the value for the variable in Levene's Test is bigger than 0.001 (0.827). Therefore, the discussion on the interaction effect and the main effects can be proceeded. The interaction effect is discussed in the next subsection.

#### 4.2.1 Interaction Effect

According to Pallant (2007), the results from the interaction effect influence the way a researcher interpret the main effects. Thus, it is necessary to assess the interaction effect before the main effects (within-subjects effect and between-subjects effect). To determine whether the direct WCF and indirect WCF groups undergo the same changes in scores over time, the interaction effect for the two groups was observed. Wilks' Lambda, according to Pallant (2007), is the most commonly reported statistic for the interaction effect. The reported statistic (labelled 'Sig.')

for the interaction effect is shown below in **Table 4.7**.

**Table 4.7:** Interaction effect

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Nocent. Parameter	Observed Power	
Time * Group	Pillai's Trace	.008	.110 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	29.000	.896	.008	.220	.065
	Wilks' Lambda	.992	.110 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	29.000	.896	.008	.220	.065
	Hotelling's Trace	.008	.110 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	29.000	.896	.008	.220	.065
	Roy's Largest Root	.008	.110 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	29.000	.896	.008	.220	.065

Computed using alpha = .05

The Sig. level for Wilks' Lambda in **Table 4.7** was 0.896, which was greater than the alpha level (i.e. significance level) of 0.05. It showed that the interaction effect was not statistically significant. Since the interaction effect between time and group was not

statistically different, this means that students in both direct and indirect groups showed the same reaction to the WCF they received. As stated by Pallant (2007), the main effects for each independent level can be assessed if the interaction effect is not significant. The main effects (within-subjects effect and between-subjects effect) are discussed in the next subsection.

#### 4.2.2 Within-Subjects Effect

The results of within-subjects effect determined whether there was a statistic change in error reduction in the same group over the three different time periods. To report within-subjects effect, the Wilks' Lambda statistic is observed, as proposed by Pallant (2007).

**Table 4.8** below shows the result of within-subjects effect.

**Table 4.8:** Within-subjects effect

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Time	Pillai's Trace	.626	24.242 <sub>b</sub>	2.000	29.000	.000	.626	48.484	1.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.374*	24.242 <sub>b</sub>	2.000	29.000	.000*	.626	48.484	1.000
	Hotelling's Trace	1.672	24.242 <sub>b</sub>	2.000	29.000	.000	.626	48.484	1.000
	Roy's Largest Root	1.672	24.242 <sub>b</sub>	2.000	29.000	.000	.626	48.484	1.000

Computed using alpha = .0005

Referring to the results in **Table 4.8**, the value for Wilks' Lambda for time was 0.374. The Sig. value was 0.000. This clearly means  $p < 0.0005$ . Since the p value was less than 0.05, it can be inferred that the effect for time was statistically significant. Although the

time was revealed to be statistically significant (i.e. not likely to have occurred by chance), this does not mean the difference has any practical or theoretical significance. Pallant (2007) stated that depending on the probability value, researchers might not be able to identify the extent of the association between the two variables. Pallant further claimed that large samples can cause very small differences to be statistically significant. In addition to that, Cortina and Nouri (2000) stated that a strong effect can fail to be statistically significant if a sample size is too small, and a weak effect can attain statistical significance if a sample size is very large.

Calculating the strength of association (i.e. the effect size) between the two variables is a way of assessing the significance of a finding. According to Coe (2002), effect size is an important tool in reporting and interpreting effectiveness. The most commonly observed value in comparing the effect size between the two variables is partial eta squared. Partial eta squared effect size statistics indicate the proportion of variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable (Pallant, 2007). As shown in **Table 4.8**, the time was revealed to be statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), showing that the improvement in accuracy for the treatment was significant over the three different time periods. The within-subjects effect of the current study in terms of effect for time was statistically significant because both direct and indirect groups performed statistically significantly weaker on the pretest. Meanwhile, the effect size, as shown in **Table 4.8** ( $\eta^2 = 0.626$ ) suggests that the treatment had a very large effect size; the effect size proposed by Cohen (1988, as cited in Pallant, 2007) indicates that 0.01, 0.06, and 0.14 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes respectively. This suggests that the treatment had practical significance, as according to Ellis and Steyn (2003), practical significance is measured by the effect size, and that a large effect is important in practice. Hence, the

result of this study indicates the efficacy of providing WCF to students in improving their writing skills.

Similarly, findings from the Bitchener and Knoch's (2009) study disclosed the same result. Bitchener and Knoch (2009) looked into the efficacy of four types of corrective feedback: direct WCF, written and oral meta-linguistic explanation; direct WCF and written meta-linguistic explanation; and direct WCF only. In contrast with this present study that used split-plot ANOVA to measure the within-subjects effect, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) in their study used two-way ANOVA to measure the effect. The effect for time was revealed to be statistically significant because all the three treatment groups performed statistically significant weaker during the pretest too. The next subsection discusses the between-subjects effect.

#### 4.2.3 Between-Subjects Effect

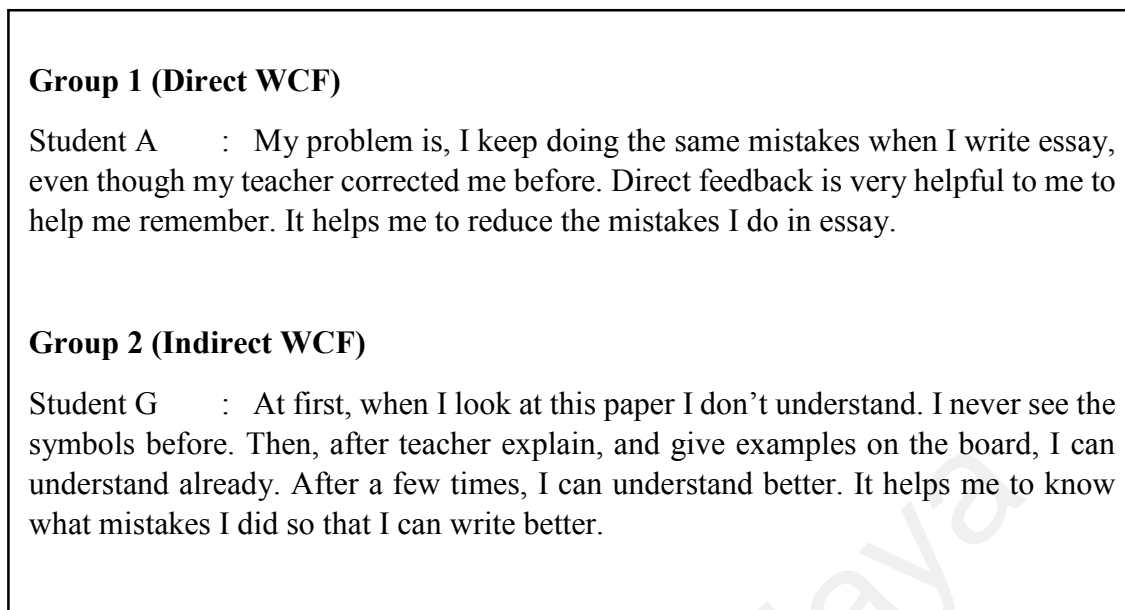
The between-subjects effect indicates the efficacy of direct and indirect written WCF in improving the past tense accuracy in students' writing. **Table 4.9** below presents the between-subjects effect.

**Table 4.9:** Between-subjects effect

<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>	<i>Noncent. Parameter</i>	<i>Observed Power</i>
Intercept	79821.047	1	79821.047	107.523	.000	.782	107.523	1.000
Group	817.834	1	817.834	1.102	.302*	.035	1.102	.174
Error	22270.928	30	22270.928					

Computed using alpha = .05

Referring to the results in **Table 4.9**, the Sig. value (labelled 'Group) was 0.302, which was more than the alpha level, 0.05. Hence, the main effect of group was insignificant. The value of the partial eta square was 0.035. This showed that the effect size for group was small and did not reach statistical significance. Hence, it can be deduced that the difference in the learners' use of the past tense between direct WCF group and indirect WCF group was insignificant ( $p = 0.302$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). That is to say, direct WCF was just as effective as indirect WCF. Bitchener and Knoch (2009) also reported similar findings in their study. There were no observable differences in the effect for the three groups (direct WCF, written and oral meta-linguistic explanation; direct WCF and written meta-linguistic explanation; and direct WCF only) in the three posttests. This might be due to the perception of students towards the WCF provided to them. Regardless of the types of WCF given, students perceived the WCF as a corrective tool with the same main objective; that was to help them improve their writing skills. That is to say, every type of WCF has its own role in helping students to reduce grammatical mistakes in their writing. This can be supported by the data from the interview in this current study. Two students (one student from direct WCF group and one student from indirect WCF group) had the same perception towards the WCF provided to them; whereby according to the students, WCF helped them to produce good essays. The excerpts are shown in **Figure 4.2** below.

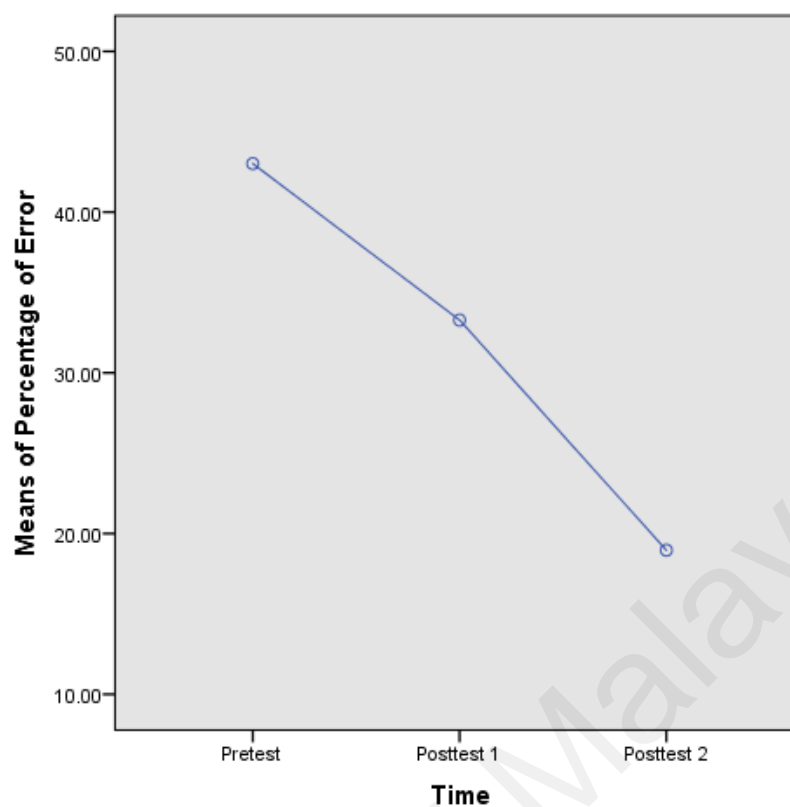


**Figure 4.2:** Students' responses towards two types of WCF

The next subsection discusses the phenomenon with the profile plots. The reason of using profile plots is because they provide a useful graphical summary of the data.

#### 4.2.4 Profile Plots

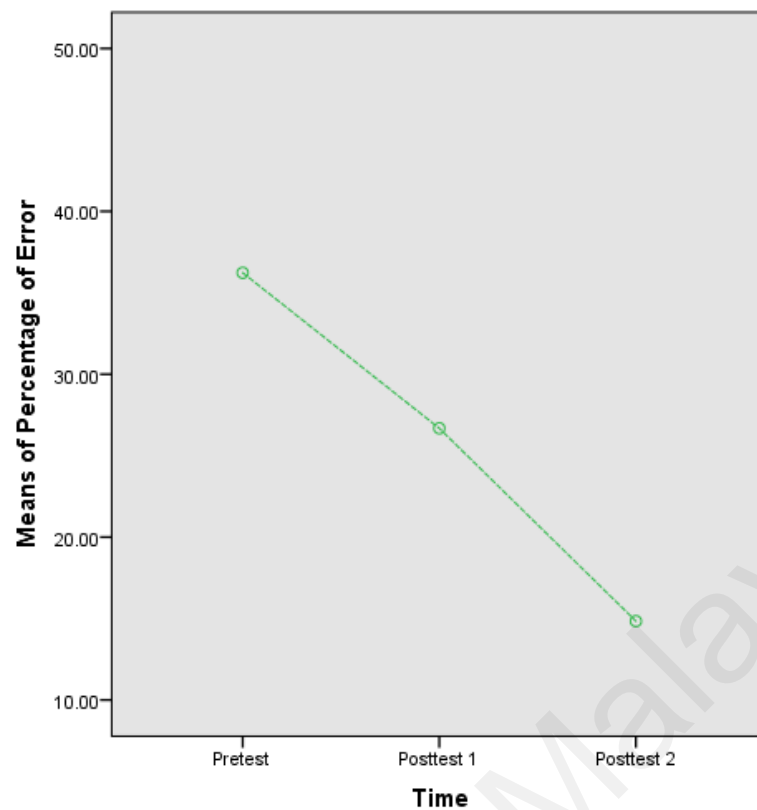
Generally, no significant difference in the between-subjects effect was identified. The discussion on the profile plots of the error reduction in writing offered a comparison of the error reduction of Group 1 (direct WCF group) and Group 2 (indirect WCF group) in three periods of time. In this section, three graphs of the profile plots will be presented for Group 1 (direct WCF), Group 2 (indirect WCF), and both of the groups. The profile plot of means of percentage of errors made in writing by Group 1 (direct WCF group) is shown in **Figure 4.3** below.



**Figure 4.3:** Profile plot of Group 1

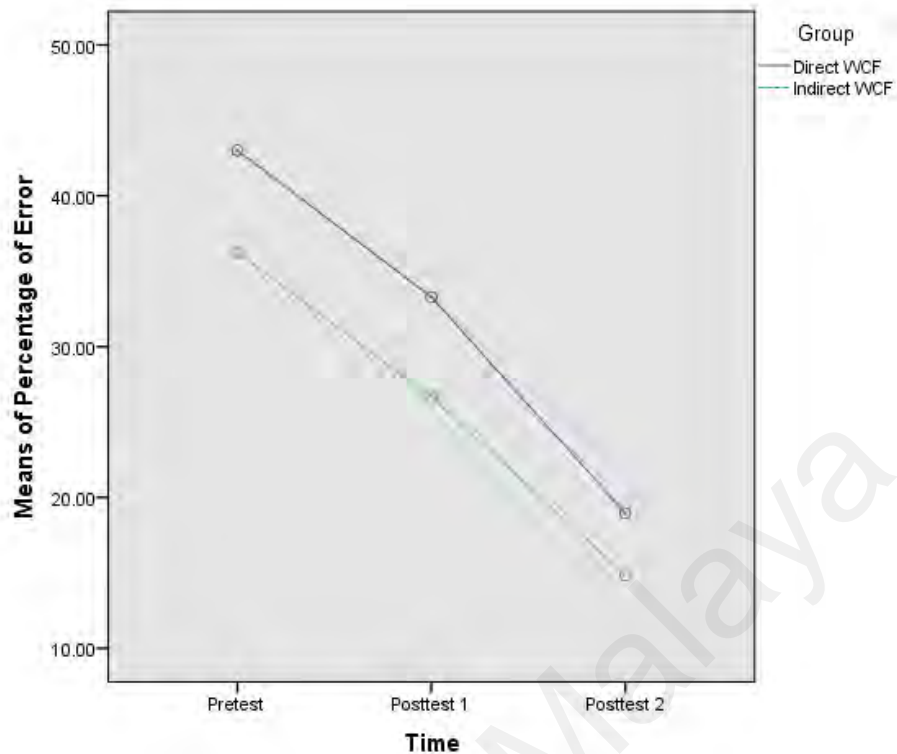
The profile plot explicated the trend of accuracy in writing (which was indicated by the error made in writing) of the participants in the current study. The means of percentage of errors made in writing in the posttest 1 for Group 1 decreased sharply after the pretest. This indicated that the effect on participants' use of past tenses was high after the intervention in Group 1 (direct WCF group). Next, the trend of accuracy of Group 2 (indirect WCF group) is discussed. **Figure 4.4** below shows the means of errors made in writing by Group 2 (indirect WCF group).





**Figure 4.4:** Profile plot of Group 2

As shown in **Figure 4.4**, similar with Group 1 (direct WCF group), the percentage of error made in the posttest 1 for Group 2 (indirect WCF group) also declined sharply after the pretest. Thus, this also indicated that the effect of participants' use of past tenses was high after the intervention. In other words, both direct WCF and indirect WCF group worked effectively on the two groups of students. In order to provide a clear comparison between the two groups, the profile plots of both groups will be presented. **Figure 4.5** below shows the profile plots of error reduction of Group 1 (direct WCF) and Group 2 (indirect WCF) against three time periods.



**Figure 4.5:** Profile plots of Group 1 and Group 2

Referring to **Figure 4.5**, in the beginning of the graph, the patterns of Group 1 (direct WCF) and Group 2 (indirect WCF) in the means of percentage of errors made in writing were the same. The means of percentage of errors for the two groups then decreased after the pretest. The trend of error reduction continued to decline from the posttest 1 to posttest 2. This means that the errors made by students in the writing task had reduced. However, the means of percentage of errors for Group 1 (direct WCF) showed an abrupt descending trend between posttest 1 and posttest 2, whereas the means of percentage of errors for Group 2 (indirect WCF) on the other hand, showed a gradual descending. This can be deduced that the patterns of writing improvement in Group 1 (direct WCF) over eight weeks were slightly better than the patterns of writing improvement in Group 2 (indirect WCF). Group 1 (direct WCF) had a slightly higher level of error reduction because direct feedback “provides unambiguous, immediate information about the correct version, in

that enabling learners to notice the gap more efficiently between their current performance and their target feature” (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). This means that learners are supplied with more immediate feedback which they can use efficiently to figure out the errors they have made in their written work. The immediate feedback in direct WCF helps the students lessen the confusion they face when they do not understand or remember the implication of the WCF. On the contrary, indirect feedback consumes more cognitive effort, as it involves learners’ engagement in guided learning and problem solving (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Greater cognitive effort is needed when learners do their own corrections, as they try to find out whether their own hypothesized correction is correct.

A past research investigating direct WCF and indirect WCF revealed findings that corroborate the results of the present study. Salami and Ahmadpour (2015) in their study examined the efficacy of direct vs. indirect WCF on L2 learners’ accuracy in their writings and the findings refuted Truscott’s (1996) claim, where according to him, written error correction on students’ work should be abandoned as it poses more harm on students’ language learning development. Disproving Truscott’s (1996) claim, Salimi and Ahmadpour (2015) yielded results that support the facilitative influence of WCF. It was found that the mean score for direct WCF group was higher than the mean score for indirect WCF group, even though the performance of the two groups was not statistically significant. It was also revealed that direct WCF and indirect WCF had an equal short-term effect on students’ written accuracy. However, in terms of long term-effects, direct WCF had a more significant effect than the indirect WCF. This was indicated by the written accuracy during the posttest. According to Ferris (2002), a long-term effect can be seen through the effect from an initial task to a new writing task. In the context of Salimi and Ahmadpour’s (2015) study, participants in direct feedback group showed

more significant improvement in terms of writing accuracy during the posttest; which is a new writing task. Hence, students who received direct WCF benefited from the feedback more than the students who received indirect WCF.

The Almasi and Tabrizi's (2016) study is another past research that reported similar findings that support the results of the present study. They investigated the effect of direct WCF and indirect WCF on L2 learners' written accuracy. 80 EFL students from an Iranian university were involved in the investigation on the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF. The findings of that study revealed that there was no significant difference between direct group and indirect group. Participants from both direct group and indirect group improved their writing performance from the pretest to posttest. However, during the posttest, direct group significantly outperformed indirect group, thus validating the effect of direct WCF on a new piece of writing. Furthermore, Almasi and Tabrizi's study has also proven the effectiveness of WCF in subsequent revised writing, as well as in the production of a new writing, thus disproving Truscott and Hsu's (2008) claim, whereby they stated that there is no correlation between error reduction and learning. The next section discusses the qualitative analysis of the data of this study.

### **4.3 Analysis of Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data in this study involves students' interview transcriptions. A total number of 12 short transcriptions were used. In the interview, six participants each from direct WCF group and indirect WCF group were involved. From the six participants, three students are those that improved the most and three students that improved the least were selected. To answer research question 2, thematic analysis was applied. The analysis of the qualitative data is described in the next section.

#### 4.4 Analysis of Research Question 2

*What are other factors that influence the primary school students' writing performance in the use of past tenses?*

In this study, face-to-face interview sessions were conducted with 12 students in order to find out the factors that influence the students' performance in the use of past tense in relation to direct and indirect WCF. Before carrying out the interview sessions, the students were informed that they could respond in the language which they felt most comfortable with. In this case, informal English is the language used by the students in their daily conversations. Thus, the students were allowed to speak in informal English to answer the interview questions. The reason being is that the students tended to express their ideas more fluently and genuinely when they corresponded in a language which they were more comfortable with. The students were also allowed to express any negative opinions without having to worry the impact of their views.

During the interview sessions, the 12 students were asked a few questions on topics related to 1) the problems they faced when WCF was utilized; 2) strategies they applied when dealing with the problems; and 3) recommendations on the strategies of WCF (Please refer to **Appendix F** for the interview questions asked). The interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, thematic analysis was carried out to identify themes that are related to the factors that influence the students' writing performance in the use of past tense. The main themes extracted from the data analysis were facilitative impact of WCF, cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors, and facilitative effect of scaffolding. The following subsection discusses the first factor.

#### 4.4.1 Facilitative Impact of WCF

Based on the results of the interview sessions, one of the factors that influence the efficacy of WCF in improving the accuracy in writing is facilitative impact of feedback provided. From the interview sessions, students from each direct and indirect WCF group agreed that the corrective feedback they received helped them in producing better pieces of writing. The excerpts for the two students from direct WCF are shown below.

<b>Group 1 (Direct WCF)</b>	
Researcher	: When you look at this essay, what come across your mind about this corrective feedback? Do you think it's helpful?
Student A	: Yes, I need the correct forms. I need to know my mistake. When teacher write the correct forms, it's easy for me to learn. I have no problem at all to understand this. It's very straightforward.
Student B	: Umm yes, I think so. I refer to it when I did my correction. It helps me to improve my English.

**Figure 4.6:** Students' responses towards the facilitative impact of direct WCF

Based on the responses given by the students, it could be presumed that Student A and Student B (direct WCF) favoured direct WCF for its facilitative impact on their written performance. They found that direct WCF was useful in improving their writing. Student A preferred direct WCF because it was easy to understand, since the correct forms were written on top of the sentences. Similarly, Student B favoured direct WCF because the correct forms provided helped him to produce a better piece of writing. Due to the clarity and simplicity of direct WCF, both students A and B favoured the direct corrective feedback.

According to Farjadnasab and Khodashenas (2017), the advantage of direct WCF is the provision of explicit guidance for learners on how to correct the errors made. It is desired by students if they do not know the correct forms (i.e. are not capable of correcting the errors themselves). As suggested by Ferris and Roberts (2001, in Farjadnasab & Khodashenas, 2017), direct WCF might be more suitable with students of low proficiency levels. In this case, direct WCF probably matches the proficiency level of students in that group. For instance, the participants of this study are young learners with low proficiency level. Both Student A and Student B agreed that direct WCF was very helpful in their written work.

Contrarily, most of students from Group 2 who received indirect WCF seemed to have problems in the beginning of receiving indirect feedback. The excerpts are outlined in **Figure 4.7** below.

<b>Group 2 (Indirect WCF)</b>	
Researcher	: What are the problems you have to face when you are just provided with these symbols?
Student G	: I don't understand at first. I never see the symbols before. I need my teacher to tell me what is that. If not, I wouldn't know what is that.
Student H	: I know that it's past tense mistakes. Um, it's like, I didn't use past tense correctly. It's because, I didn't understand the correction at first. Some of it. Some I don't get it. The symbols. I don't understand. But when teacher explain, I understand. I can do my correction then.
Student I	: At first, when I see this paper, I don't understand at all. I was confused a bit because I never see before. Then, after teacher explain, I can understand. Then, when teacher use it again, I already know. But sometimes I forget, then I have to ask teacher again.

**Figure 4.7:** Students' responses towards the disadvantage of indirect WCF

Student G from Group 2 (indirect WCF) seemed to be unfamiliar with the error codes at the beginning. However, the unfamiliarity did not stop her from doing the correction. Student G indicated that she understood the error codes after she was given an explanation and provided with examples by the teacher. This clearly means that teacher's explanation plays a vital role in proving the facilitative impact of indirect WCF. Comparably, Student H had difficulties in understanding the error codes at first. She became more comfortable with indirect WCF only after the teacher explained and gave examples. Student I also faced difficulties when she received the indirect feedback for the first time. She acknowledged that when she was first introduced to indirect feedback, she was quite confused. After receiving the explanation from the researcher, she became familiar with the symbols and managed to do her correction.

Although all the three students in Group 2 (indirect feedback) encountered difficulties initially when they were introduced to indirect WCF by the researcher, they were determined to understand the error codes and correct the errors they made. The effort that the students invested in the process of understanding the error codes led to the improvement in their written work. Thus, the students' improvement in their writing clearly showed the facilitative impact of WCF in reducing errors in students' written work. Although indirect WCF can cause confusion in understanding the error codes (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008), this did not refrain Student G, Student H and Student I from trying to do their correction. When these students successfully found out the meaning of the error codes, they probably felt satisfied and motivated to do their correction. Thus, the students were encouraged to figure out more. As stated by Skehan (1989), learners may have the motivation to do something when they have the understanding of what is happening in a classroom. Hence, by receiving WCF in their written work, students knew



that they were expected to look at the errors they made, notice the errors, and find out the correct structures for the errors made.

Students in both direct and indirect WCF groups seemed to prefer the feedback given by the researcher. They were able to cope with the feedback given; hence the feedback enabled them to do correction. The ability to cope with the feedback is crucial because it resulted in students accepting the feedback given and benefiting more from the facilitative impact of corrective feedback in learning a language.

Briefly, majority of the students from direct and indirect WCF who were interviewed agreed with the facilitative impact of WCF. Past research studies from researchers like Abadikhah and Ashoori (2012) and Kang and Han (2015) have found similar findings. Research findings in Abadikhah and Ashoori (2012) proved the usefulness of WCF when the results revealed that the feedback group students improved in grammatical accuracy on their productions. The feedback received provided the students with the opportunity to engage in ‘cognitive comparisons’ between their own responses and the correct answers. Besides, findings in Kang and Han’s (2015) study on the effectiveness of WCF in improving L2 written accuracy, revealed that WCF can lead to greater grammatical accuracy in L2 writing, yet its effectiveness is mediated by variables such as learners’ proficiency, the setting, and the genre of the writing task. The next subsection discusses the second factor.

#### **4.4.2 Cognitive Effort Involved in Understanding the Errors**

The second factor that influences the students’ performance in the use of past tenses relates to cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors. The excerpts for two students from Group 1 (direct WCF) group are outlined in **Figure 4.8** below.

<b>Group 1 (Direct WCF)</b>	
Researcher	: When you look at this essay, what do you think of the corrective feedback provided by teacher? Do you think it's helpful?
Student D	: Yes, it's very helpful. But when teacher do like this, I just write whatever correct forms that is given to me. It's very straightforward. I didn't have to think much. I just went through it, I read it for a while and I did my correction. It's easy for me to understand.
Student E	: Yes. I understand because it's very straightforward. Only at the beginning I didn't really know. I just copy whatever teacher write. But after I see this a few times, I know how it works. The answers help me to do correction. I can know my mistakes.

**Figure 4.8:** Students' responses towards direct WCF

Student D of Group 1 (direct WCF) in **Figure 4.8** noted that direct feedback was easy to understand because it was very straightforward. Student D was willing to accept the feedback as it did not pose any challenges. Whereas, Student E initially highlighted the issue of the direct WCF he received because he didn't know the purpose of the feedback, hence the student just wrote the correct forms given. This caused him to merely copy all the correct forms that were written on top of the errors without trying to think of the reasons. That is to say, there was little cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors made in his writing. Nevertheless, the direct WCF was still acceptable by Student E as he mentioned that the direct feedback was very straightforward and did help him in improving his writing. Bitchener (2008) stated that direct feedback is straightforward because there is no additional delay in knowing whether learners' own hypothesized correction is correct. In the case of the present study, automatic processes are involved when students who received direct WCF do their correction, whereby little cognitive effort is required by the students to understand the errors made. According to Ryan, Hamrick, Miller, & Was (2017), automatic processes require little cognitive effort. They

occur rapidly and presumably do not require consciousness. The process occurred unconsciously and quickly when the correct forms were written on top of the errors. Despite the little cognitive involved, students still favoured the feedback given as it was easy to understand and the students did not face any difficulties to do the correction.

Contrarily, indirect feedback involves deeper cognitive effort and when students make their own corrections. Learners' information processing mechanism is regulated by controlled processes during the early stages of SLA. A large amount of cognitive effort is required in controlled processes, they are generally conscious, and under voluntary control of the learners (Ryan et al., 2017). The controlled processes are used with any new or inconsistent information the learners receive in the input. The following excerpt supports the situation.

<b>Group 2 (Indirect WCF)</b>	
Researcher	: How do you think direct WCF helps you in writing an essay?
Student K	: I don't understand at first. Then, when teacher explain, I started to understand, and when teacher give examples, I understand better. Then, the next time I saw the symbols, I sometimes forgot. I will try to recall and guess. If cannot, I will ask teacher. Then, after seeing this many times, I get used to it already. It helps me to do correction. It also helps to improve my grammar.

**Figure 4.9:** Student's response towards indirect WCF

In **Figure 4.9**, Student K from Group 2 (indirect WCF) noted that finding his own errors and making his own corrections caused him to learn more. This involved controlled processes where more cognitive effort was required as he had to think of the correct forms. As mentioned by Ryan et al. (2017), cognitive effort beyond noticing may have been a factor in impacting students' learning outcomes. When Student K noticed the

errors he made in his writing, he started to make use of cognitive effort in doing correction. In noticing process, students' attention is very crucial to understand the errors made.

According to Leow (2015a), attention has a vital role in the early stages of the acquisitional process of input to output. In this aspect, one of the earliest theories in SLA that has postulated the role of attention in input processing is McLaughlin's (1987) cognitive theory. In cognitive theory, adult L2 learners have limited capacity in processing the information in the early stage of SLA. This means that they are limited to what they can attend to at a given point in time (selective or focal attention) and what they can process based on their prior knowledge (McLaughlin et al., 1983, in Ryan et al., 2017). Hence, immediate feedback provided by teacher is an effective tool in helping students to find out and correct the errors they made in their writing. To support this, Al-Jarrah (2016) stated that a learner's attention can be drawn with the provision of error correction immediately above the error the learner has made, and it might as well cause the learner to put the necessary cognitive effort into making use of it. The indirect WCF provided to Student K let him put enough mental processing effort into comparing his output (which is erroneous) with the feedback he received. Therefore, error feedback and error correction should work in tandem.

Mental processing continued to occur when Student K had to test out whether his hypothesis on the error codes was correct, and the mental process becomes effective because the error feedback focuses on one linguistic aspect. Thus, his main concern was the correct use of the past tenses structure. In relation to this, Cumming (1995, in Hyland & Hyland, 2006) denoted that ESL students in academic contexts put a particularly high value on form-focused feedback, which pays attention to linguistic forms. In addition,

according to Ellis (2009), when focusing on a specific grammatical rule, WCF will be effective in promoting acquisition. This is due to the limited L2 processing capacity the L2 learners have. Apart from that, correcting all the errors the students made in their writing will produce too much of a cognitive overload for learners to attend to (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009), hence eliminating the effectiveness of WCF. In this case, Student K benefited from the feedback given despite the further delay due to hypothesis testing. The feedback given is perceived by Student K as beneficial because it focused on the linguistic errors he made. The next subsection discusses the third factor.

#### **4.4.3 Facilitative Effect of Scaffolding**

The third factor that influences the students' performance in the use of past tenses in relation to direct and indirect WCF is the facilitative effect of scaffolding. Scaffolding refers to support that is given to students based on their needs (Van De Pol, Volman, Oort, & Beishuizen, 2015). Students might understand certain linguistic rules that they have learnt in class but they might not be able to correct the errors themselves, especially primary school students. Hence, teacher should scaffold learners with instructions that are slightly beyond their proficiency level (Olson & Platt, 2000), as support from teacher and peers are able to help learners to self-edit their work. During the interview sessions, students agreed with the facilitative effect of scaffolding in doing their correction. The situation is illustrated in the excerpts below.

**Group 2 (Indirect WCF)**

Researcher : What did you do when you read your work and saw these symbols?

Student G : If I don't understand, I'll ask teacher. Sometimes, I do ask my friends. But most of the time they said they don't know. That's why I ask teacher. But it's random. It's like, when I take the paper from the teacher, then I'll ask teacher, if somebody pass it to me, then I get my paper, I will ask my friend first whether they know or not. Then, if I don't think, it's like a weird the way they answer, then I will ask teacher. For example, if they say "this is wrong tenses", then I will ask why is this wrong?

Student H : I'll ask my friends when I don't understand. The symbols, teacher must tell me first, then only I understand then I do correction. If my friends don't know, then only I ask teachers.

Student I : I ask my teacher. I try to ask my friends first. I prefer friends because I feel more confident. If they are not sure, I ask teacher.

Student J : I'll ask teacher if I don't understand. Sometimes, ya, I will ask my friends. But when they give me weird answers, I'll ask my teacher.

**Figure 4.10:** Students' responses towards teacher and friends' scaffolding

From the excerpts shown in **Figure 4.10**, Student G of Group 2 (indirect feedback) explained that depending on the situation, she would first find out suitable individuals, such as teacher and friends as her source of reference. Nevertheless, she did not solely rely on the answers given by her friends. After receiving some assistance from her friends, she would still think about the answers and explanations given by them before writing down the answers. The student had the ability to self-check her own work, rather than fully relying on her friends' assistance. The importance of scaffolding is shown in assisting students acquiring the correct rules of the targeted structure in written work. Thus, scaffolding is an extra help that she needs in the learning process.

As mentioned by Tigchelaar (2016), while friend and teacher feedback can give impact on students' writing, the individual review process also plays an important role. This clearly shows the importance of teacher's and friends' role in facilitating students in writing classes. When asked about the strategies she applied when encountering problems while doing correction, Student G mentioned that she would consider the answers given by her friends. As stated by Student G during the interview session, when the answers given by her friends were somewhat confusing, she would discuss with her friends first before asking clarification from the teacher. This involves deeper cognitive effort in finding the correct answers.

Meanwhile, the assistance that Student G received from her teacher contributes to her effort and attention in the classroom. When the support is effective, the student knows which steps to take and how to proceed independently. According to Van De Pol et al. (2015), teacher's support is always responsive to the student's understanding which in turn is hypothesized to stimulate a student's task effort. In addition to this, WCF is seen to be effective under sociocultural theory, such as teacher-provided scaffolding. Students become independent when they have adequate understanding of the given task. In the case of Student G in this study, she was capable of incorporating independent problem-solving as she was self-regulated with feedback received.

Whereas, Student H, Student I and Student J of Group 2 (indirect feedback) stated that they would try to obtain assistance from teacher and friends when they encountered problems in their writing. According to Student I, asking friends was more convincing to her, and she might feel more comfortable to do discussion with her friends. Then, she would ask for teacher's help for clarification. This proves that teacher and friends'

assistance play an important role in helping students to figure out the correct answers for the errors they made in their writing.

In the case of the present study, English language is commonly used by the students in daily conversations, without stressing on the grammatical accuracy. As a result, they frequently encounter problems in applying the correct grammatical rules in their writing. Moreover, to some students, the exposure of English language is very limited. One possible reason for this is the insufficiency of reading. Without adequate reading of English materials, it may impact their proficiency level, making it difficult for them to self-edit their work whenever they found errors in their writing. Therefore, scaffolding is needed by the students.

In language learning, scaffolding can be provided in a number of ways. Based on a simple scaffolding structure provided by Ellis and Larkin (1998, in Larkin, 2002), scaffolding can be done in four ways. The first way of scaffolding is '*the teacher does it*'. This means that teacher demonstrates the way to perform a new or difficult task by using thinking aloud method. The second way is '*the class does it*'. Through this method, teacher and students work together in performing the task. Thirdly, through '*the group does it*' way, students work with a partner or a small cooperative group to complete a task. The last way is '*the individual does it*'. The fourth method involves independent stage where an individual completes the task independently after receiving necessary practice to help them perform the task automatically and quickly.

In this current study, there are three types of scaffolding that involved. The three types of scaffolding are '*the teacher does it*', '*the group does it*', and '*the individual does it*'. '*The teacher does it*' is a type of scaffolding that was incorporated when teacher and students



worked together, and when students could not get the answers after trying. Whereas, '*the group does it*' was incorporated when students asked help from their peers and they discussed the answers together. Finally, '*the individual does it*' was integrated when students independently tried to find the answers without teacher's and peers' assistance.

In this study, scaffolding that comes from both teacher and peers is preferred by the students. The students find it helpful to refer to their friends before making reference to the teacher for more convincing answers and justifications. Furthermore, students normally get help and assistance from their friends in the form of discussion. Through this way, students who needed help and students who helped usually discuss the answers for the errors made together, as well as figuring out the reasons why the errors were made. Besides, through this way, students had deeper understanding on the topic learnt, thus, learning process became more effective. In contrast, through scaffolding which comes solely from teacher, students sometimes became passive as they did not have the initiative to participate in the discussion. This is because, teacher played the roles and responsibilities to do the talking, while students only did the listening. Hence, the impression received by the students might not be as deep as when they were actively involved in the learning process.

According to Bijami, Kashef, & Nehad (2013), the cognitive and social benefits of peer feedback cause the peer feedback to become useful in writing classes. Peer feedback is known as a critical technique for improving students' writing because it requires students' active participation during the discussion. In addition, feedback from friends can support learning process. According to Liu, Lin, Chiu, & Yuan (2001), peer interaction is fundamental to the improvement of students' learning, because it allows students to construct knowledge through social sharing and interaction. The active participation of

students during the discussion helps them to understand the errors they made and do the correction.

Thus, to conclude, scaffolding in a language classroom does not have to merely come from teachers; it can be any form of help and assistance from teachers and peers. Assistance from teacher and friends may help the students to find out the correct answers for the errors they made in writing. Teacher and friends' assistance is important because the students need more support and help from others in order to improve their writing skills, because L2 learning occurs through the mediation between learners and external assistance (Yamashita & Iizuka, 2017). The assistance that students received from the teacher contributes to their effort and attention in the classroom. When the support is effective, students know which steps to take and how to proceed independently.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The findings of the current study are presented in this chapter. The findings were discussed concerning to the two research questions. In connection with the efficacy of WCF, the findings did not support Truscott's (1996) claim: WCF is harmful to students' language learning development, thus it is ineffective in language learning. Both direct WCF and indirect WCF were revealed to work effectively in eliminating the errors of the past tense uses. Generally, direct WCF is more preferable by the students due to the fact that it is very straightforward and easy to understand, thus making it easy for them to do the correction. Specifically, direct WCF produced better effect in error reduction than indirect WCF in students' written work. Direct WCF is more preferable by the students due to the fact that it is very straightforward and easy to understand, thus making it easy for them to do the correction. Moreover, in order to gain more insights on the factors that influenced the students' accuracy use, interviews were conducted. Based on the

interviews, three main factors were revealed: *facilitative impact of WCF, cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors and facilitative effect of scaffolding*. The implications, recommendations for future study and the conclusion of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

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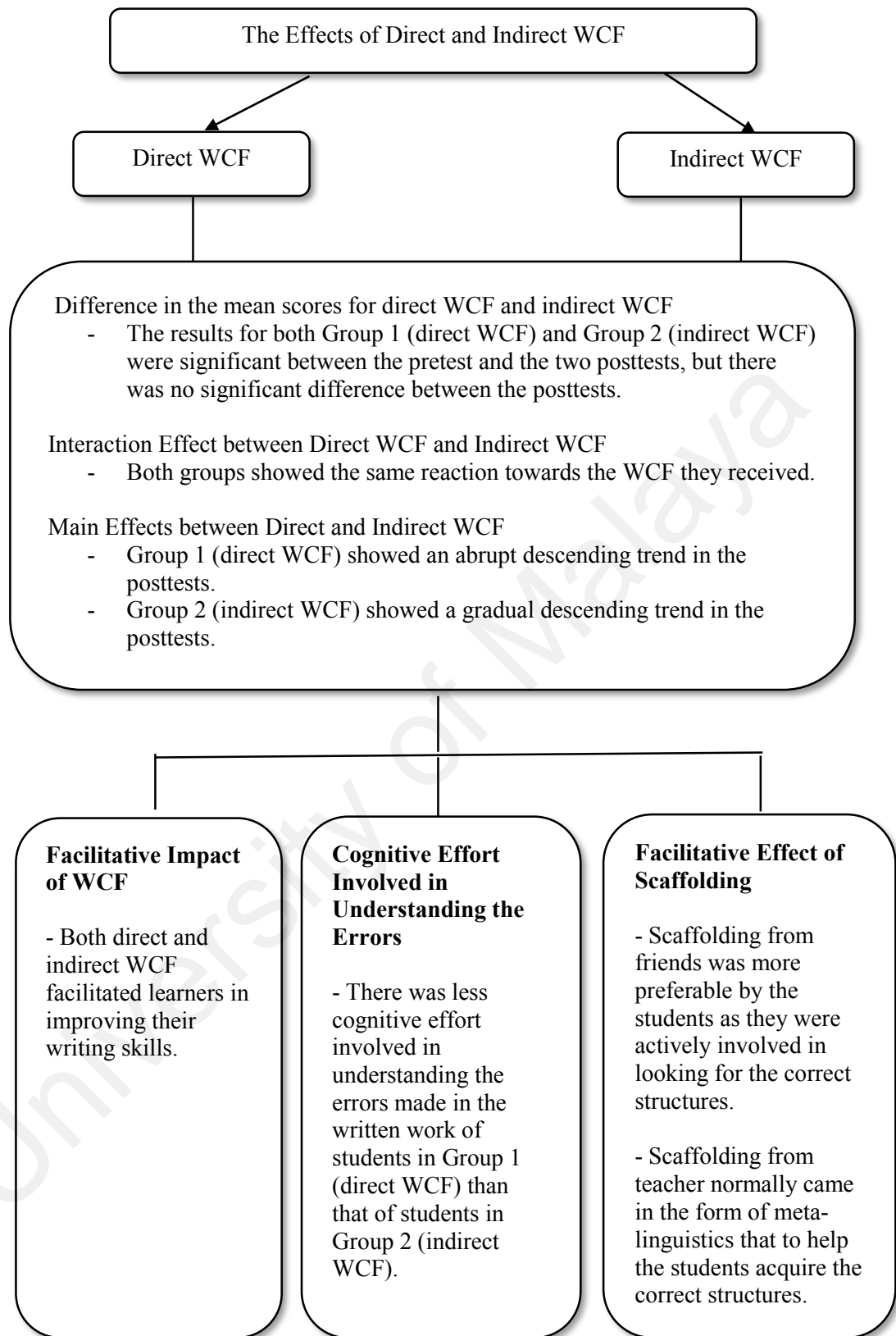
## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

The present study set out to investigate the efficacy of using two types of WCF - direct and indirect corrective feedback on ESL primary school students' use of past tenses. It was revealed in the findings of this study that both direct and indirect WCF had positive effects in improving students' accuracy in the use of past tenses, which was indicated by the number of errors the students made in their writing. Furthermore, the results disclosed that to some extent, the performance of the direct group was better than the indirect group in both posttest 1 and posttest 2. It can be seen that both groups performed statistically significant over time, but the difference in the learners' use of past tenses between groups was not significant. In this chapter, the summary of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for future research and conclusion of the study will be presented.

### 5.1 Summary of the Findings

This study aimed to examine the efficacy of two types of teacher feedback – direct and indirect WCF in the use of past tenses in the Malaysian primary school context of writing by answering its two research questions. The summary of the findings of this study is shown in **Figure 5.1** below.



**Figure 5.1:** Summary of findings

The results from the first research question revealed the efficacy of WCF concerning the error reduction in the use of past tenses in learners' written work. Generally, from the pretest to posttest 2, it was found that students in Group 1 (direct WCF) improved equally as students in Group 2 (indirect WCF) in terms of error reduction. However, from posttest 1 to posttest 2, the error reduction for students in Group 1 (direct WCF) was slightly better than the error reduction for students in Group 2 (indirect WCF). This indicates that direct WCF has a better effect than indirect WCF. The students' proficiency level might be the reason for this. As stated by Kang and Han (2015), the efficacy of WCF in grammatical accuracy depends on variables such as learners' proficiency, the setting, and the genre of the writing task. Direct WCF might be more effective and useful for primary students because it is very straightforward and clear. Hence, the direct WCF provided made it easier for the students to notice and correct their errors. From this finding, it can be deduced that direct WCF does have a positive effect in improving students' linguistic accuracy, and thus help them in the acquisition of past tenses.

The results from the second research question disclosed that facilitative impact of WCF was one of the factors that influence the performance of students in the use of past tenses. Majority of students who involved in the interview sessions expressed the efficacy of WCF in assisting them in their written work. In terms of facilitative roles of WCF, students from both Group 1 (direct feedback) and Group 2 (indirect feedback) agreed that the feedback given helped them in their written work. Students in the direct group favoured the feedback given because they found that direct feedback was straightforward and clear. At the same time, students in the indirect group also expressed the usefulness of indirect WCF although the feedback was not straightforward. The facilitative effect of indirect WCF was perceived by the students in a way that it allowed them to learn effectively as they had to figure out the correct answers independently. The confusion in

understanding the error codes in the beginning did not hinder the students from trying to do the correction.

Besides, cognitive effort involved in understanding the errors was the second factor that influenced the students' error reduction in using the past tense. From the interview sessions, it was revealed that indirect WCF required deeper cognitive effort from the students in understanding the errors they made because they had to find out the correct forms independently. In contrary, despite the fact that direct WCF was more effective on a new writing task, it involved less cognitive effort for students in understanding the errors they made. The students who received direct WCF stated that the direct feedback did not require much thinking, and consequently, the students merely copied all the correct forms that were written on top of the errors without trying to figure out the answers. Nevertheless, the students still preferred the direct WCF as it was very straightforward and it did help them in reducing the number of errors in their revised texts.

In addition, facilitative effect of scaffolding also contributed to the factors that influence students' error reduction in using the past tense. Scaffolding came from teacher and friends. In this study, scaffolding that came from friends was more preferable by the students as it created deeper impression when the students actively participated in finding out the correct forms. Scaffolding from teacher on the other hand, normally came in the form meta-linguistic explanations, where explanation of the rules of the correct structures were given to the students. The implications of the study are discussed in the next section.

## **5.2 Implications of the Study**

There are two parts of implications discussed in this section. The two parts include pedagogical implications and methodological implications. The pedagogical implications are first discussed in the next subsection based on the findings of the study.

### **5.2.1 Pedagogical Implications**

The empirical study indicated that both direct and indirect WCF worked effectively in enhancing students' use of past tenses in their written work. Additionally, in relation to the accurate use of the past tense, it demonstrated that direct WCF group retained better compared to indirect WCF group. Despite this, teachers should be aware of the differences of the two types of WCF. Yet most learners are not aware of the benefits of direct and indirect WCF because most teachers did not employ these two feedback options. Based on the interview data, learners from both direct and indirect groups preferred to have their errors pointed out (direct WCF) and to have error types identified (indirect WCF) to aid them in their accuracy of language structures.

It is also suggested that when providing WCF, teachers should take the students' levels into consideration. For primary school ESL learners, teachers can provide students with direct WCF instead of indirect WCF. Students at this level might have limited ability to self-correct their own errors, and understanding the error codes on the other hand, may be time-consuming. Moreover, when being provided with WCF, especially indirect feedback, it is important for students to receive some assistance from teacher and also friends. Although some of the students do have the ability to self-correct their work, most students do not have it. Therefore, with scaffolding from teacher and friends, students can benefit from the feedback provided.



In terms of the current study, majority of students from indirect group stated that they had some difficulties in understanding the error codes initially. Hence, students need to be trained to understand the error codes before they could practise them in their written tasks. The students can increase their awareness of their weaknesses in writing and enhance their understanding of language errors corrected via the use of error codes provided by teachers. The methodological implications are discussed in the next subsection.

### **5.2.2 Methodological Implications**

The implementation of both quantitative and qualitative analyses in this study provides a deeper explanation on the efficacy of direct WCF and indirect WCF. As stated by Schulze (2003), mixed methods research provides more depths, breadth, and richness as compared to either quantitative or qualitative methods alone. In the case of the current study, the integration of the pretest-posttest design with direct and indirect WCF contributed to the quantitative data analysis. From this analysis, it was revealed that direct WCF is more effective than indirect WCF in the use of past tenses. Meanwhile, the interview with the six students from each group was the major contribution to the qualitative data analysis. Answers in relation to the efficacy of WCF are addressed by the quantitative data, and the issues of why and how the treatment received were effective in improving learners' language process are provided by the qualitative data. With respect to the methodological implications, it seems that students in the indirect group need more time to adapt on the understanding of the error codes. When the students mentioned in the interview that they had difficulties in comprehending the error codes, it clearly shows that the students need to be trained through examples in advance. The next section discusses the recommendations for future research.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

In the context of the current study, the number of participants was only 30 students and all of them were of the same age. Therefore, the result from the findings is not applicable to represent all young ESL learners in Malaysia. It would have been better to involve more participants of different age and proficiency levels in order to examine the efficacy of WCF for different groups and background of students so that a more comprehensive result can be acquired. Furthermore, there have also been a few studies on the efficacy of WCF carried out that involved the Malaysian primary school ESL learning context. So, it is recommended for researchers to carry out more studies involving primary school students. The findings from future studies would also be beneficial for Malaysian ESL teachers who may not be aware of the various types of WCF available, or the nature and advantages of different WCF.

Secondly, there was a two-week gap between treatment 2 and posttest 1. Posttest 1 could not be carried out immediately after the second treatment cycle because the students had to sit for an examination in the school. Therefore, it is recommended that future research applies more systematic and efficient data collection process to investigate the immediate effect of WCF.

Thirdly, only interviews were employed in the current study to gain insights of the students regarding the factors that influence their performance in writing. Taking this into consideration, it might be possible for students not to tell or share their actual ideas or beliefs as they might not feel comfortable with the researcher. Besides, they might not have the confidence to voice their honest opinions to the researcher. Hence, it is suggested that questionnaire is administered together with interviews in the future research in order to extract more advanced information related to students' perceptions and preferences in

relation to WCF because “another factor that can influence uptake is the affective factor” (Lee, 2013, p. 113). By taking into consideration learner preferences in the type of WCF employed, teachers can offer their learners an opportunity to feel more motivated to learn English language and to be more independent learners.

In addition, a careful planning before carrying out an interview session is another important factor. In doing so, researchers should provide a set of effective questions to be asked during the interview session. In the current study, the interview questions were not arranged accordingly, hence the feedback received from the students were affected. Therefore, it is recommended for researchers to have a good plan before conducting an interview session.

Last but not least, there was no control group included in the current study. Future studies should include control groups in order to effectively address WCF. Even though it is unethical not to provide some students with WCF while others receive WCF, students in the control group can be provided with summarized notes on their errors. The summarized notes can be in forms of comments about the organization of the writing as well as the content of the writing.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The study revealed that to some extent, direct WCF and indirect WCF are equally effective in reducing the number of errors made by students in the use of past tenses throughout the eight weeks. Generally, in terms of students’ perceptions on the usefulness of the feedback provided, students in both experimental groups indicated that receiving direct WCF and indirect WCF made it easier for them to notice their errors. Specifically, in the context of young learners aged 12 years old, direct WCF seems to be more suitable

and effective in helping the students to reduce the number of errors made in their writing. Direct WCF is proven to be slightly more effective than indirect WCF based on the percentage of errors made by students from posttest 1 to posttest 2. In addition to this, during the interview sessions, a number of students stated their preference for direct WCF. The students preferred receiving direct WCF from their teacher as it was very straightforward and clear, making it easier for them to notice their errors when corrected that way.

The current study has revealed positive findings in relation to the efficacy of direct and indirect WCF on young ESL learners in a primary school. Since there are limited studies in regards to the usefulness of WCF on primary school students, specifically the UPSR candidates, the findings from this study could give insights to English teachers in improving the students' writing accuracy. From the result of this study, it is proven that direct WCF worked slightly better than indirect WCF in the use of past tenses. Hence, teachers should consider focusing on different linguistic errors at a time in order to find out the effectiveness of WCF on other linguistic structures. In doing so, it is important for teachers to consider the difficulty that learners experience to avoid information overload. Teachers should also consider the different contexts of the study with different group of students. Future research is needed in order to provide an explanation on how different feedback affects the students' writing accuracy.

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