



The Effects of Direct and Indirect Written Corrective Feedbacks on the Business Communication Texts of Technical University Students in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Grading of texts is a major issue in the field of teaching and learning of Business Communication. One emerging technique used in grading students' texts is corrective feedback. This research was an effort to investigate the effects that direct and indirect written corrective feedbacks had on the business letters of students of Ho Technical University, Ghana. Forty HND 1 (first year) students in the Department of Marketing from the 2016/2017 Academic Year batch of Ho Technical University were the selected participants for this qualitative study. A total of 80 raw data were solicited from the participants. These comprise 40 pre-test and 40 post-test materials (80 texts). Each participant composed two letters – one at the pre-test level and the other at the post-test level. After the pre-test, the texts of the students were divided into two groups. The texts of the first group (DF) were graded using direct feedback method and those of the other group (IF) were graded using indirect feedback method. After the pre-test, the participants were asked to rewrite the business letter. The results from the post-test showed that students performed better at the post-test level when direct feedback technique was applied on their pre-test texts.

Keywords: Direct feedback; Indirect feedback; Written corrective feedback; Business Communication.

1. Introduction

Language is the very core of humanity. Without language, communication becomes challenging. It is therefore very imperative to our lives. If one wants to socialize and function effectively and efficiently in life, it depends on one's command of the language skills. Every language has four main skills – reading, listening, speaking and writing. Out of these four skills, speaking and writing are considered as productive skills (active skills) while listening and reading are receptive skills. One way of helping students to receive feedback on their written productive skills is when their texts are graded. Corrective Feedback (CF) as a grading method, is the teacher's response to students' written or verbal structures that seeks to critique the structures by either commending or modifying them (Owusu, 2017). This suggests that CF can be in a written, oral or non-verbal (gestures) form. Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) is an instantaneous CF which focuses on the speech of the learner. Lyster and Ranta (1997) has identified six types of OCF. For example, a teacher can respond to

the erroneous structure: *Kofi has cat*, in these six (6) ways:

- using reformulation (recast): 'A cat';
- using direct oral feedback: 'No, you have to say "a cat"';
- seeking for clarification: 'Can you say the structure again?';
- providing metalinguistic feedback: 'You have to insert an indefinite article';
- using elicitation: 'Kofi has...';
- using repetition: 'Kofi has cat?'

OCF is normally provided on the verbal communication of students. Non-verbal Corrective Feedback (NCF) uses non-verbal signals (gestures) on students' verbal communication. Written Corrective Feedback (WCF), which is also called error correction or grammar correction, refers to the correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately (Truscott, 1996, p.329). This is mostly provided on the texts of the students. Also, WCF can be in an electronic form, where the teacher indicates an error in the learner's soft copy work, and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples to correct usage (Ellis, 2008, p.98). Electronic feedback seems modern and current but it has several drawbacks. One, it can only work in an environment where both the teacher and the learner are computer literates and have access to computers. Two, for this CF to work effectively and efficiently, there should be constant and effective access to the Internet. This is so because the teacher may have to provide a hyperlink to an Internet source which provides information about the error. Three, in an environment like Ghana, where there is frequently power outage, this type of CF might not be successful in terms of providing speedy CFs. Four, providing electronic feedback on the soft copies of scripts of large numbers of students could be a Herculean task. Again, WCF can be in direct or indirect form. Direct feedback (DF), which is, also, known as explicit CF refers to the direct provision of the correct form. With this type of CF, the teacher indicates that a learner has made a mistake; and in addition to that the teacher provides the correct form of the structure on the hard copy of the learner's work. With indirect feedback (IF), the teacher indicates that an error or mistake has been made but does not provide the correction (Ellis, 2008, p.98). This can take the form of underlining the mistake and using cursors to indicate omissions in the student's text. It can also take the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors have been made in a line of text (Ellis, 2008, p. 98). The issue of whether or not to give corrective feedback on students' grammar has been a debatable one since Truscott (1996) called for an abandonment of grammar correction in his paper. The main reason for the abandonment are: (1) extensive research works show it to be unsuccessful; (2) for both theoretical and practical reasons, it is expected to be ineffectual; and (3) it has some detrimental consequences. Ferris (1999, p. 8) opposed Truscott's (1996) view and made a claim about the efficacy of teacher error/grammar correction in second language writing classes in this way:

[t]he issue of helping students to develop their written language skills and improve their accuracy in writing is too important to be ruled on hastily. As teachers, we can only hope that we will continue to find answers and discover ways to respond more thoughtfully and effectively to our student writers' needs.' (p. 8)

From 1999, when Ferris published her rebuttal on Truscott (1996), the debate about whether or not to correct students' errors, which method to use in correcting the errors, and which errors to correct has heightened.

2. Literature Review

The review of literature is centered on the teaching and learning of business communication at the tertiary level of education and business letters.

2.1 The Teaching and Learning of Business Communication at the Tertiary Level of Education

Du-Babcock (2006), drawing on the works of Krapels and Arnold (1998), Locker (1998), and

Roger (1996), stated that the teaching of Business Communication as an official and distinctive field originated in the United States. Agarwal and Chakraborty (2010, p.381) have also stated that Business Communication, as a course of study, emanated from its parent branch, Human Resource Management (HRM). Since then, the teaching and learning of Business Communication has become a milestone in management education, though the challenges faced in the 21st century in terms of doing it right have become enormous (Agarwal & Chakraborty, 2010). Business Communication has established itself as a vital course in most of the business schools or departments of universities across the world. For example, in America, the teaching objective of Business Communication in the early years was to educate American students on how to communicate effectively and efficiently in American business and commercial environments (Du-Babcock, 2006).

Therefore, the developmental era remained rooted in the study of rhetoric in the writing of letters and memos, with emphasis on the proper forms and correct use of English (Hagge, 1989, p.33); and teaching students how to communicate in the professional genres of specialized domains was not the focus of business communication. Textbooks and other teaching materials were mostly written by American authors. Because the application and examples used in the teaching focused on teaching effective and efficient communication in the United States, teachers of business communication were not necessarily required to have specialized professional knowledge of business communication (Du-Babcock, 2006). The early period in the American context, thus, provided limited scope on the teaching of business communication in terms of the target group, the course content, the teacher and the teaching/learning materials.

Presently, the teaching and learning of Business Communication has gone through tremendous changes 'to better suit the realities of an ever evolving and more complex, globalized, and multidisciplinary communication and teaching environment'¹ (Du-Babcock, 2006, p. 255). Thus, with the world becoming a global village, most communities are now multicultural, and communicators, especially in the world of business, are faced with the challenges of encrypting and decrypting complex and differentiated messages. Increasingly, individuals and corporate entities, use more multifarious and distinguishing professional genres in communicating in their write-ups. Consequently, the course contents of most Business Communication materials and curricula are increasingly becoming complex and wide in scope as topics on Business Management, English language, Information Communication Technology, Secretarial Management, Office Practice, Marketing Communications, Financial Reporting, and Cross-cultural Communication have been incorporated². Thus, it has gradually digressed from the traditional study of rhetoric in the writing of letters, memos, and correct use of English to include various contemporary topics³ and roles played by other functional areas⁴ of business in terms of organizational communication.

Again, Business Communication is no longer the preserve of students and corporate entities in America, but every entity who desires to operate in the world of business in an effective and efficient manner. At the moment, more business and non-business departments of tertiary institutions and research centers in Ghana, for example, have included Business Communication related course(s)

1 In this environment, people continually share ideas directly and indirectly in interrelated global communication networks and create interconnected global value-added chains (Porter 1985) in their capacity as stakeholders of businesses. The sharing of field knowledge that is normally coded in specialised professional genres (such as budgets, financial reports, marketing research reports, and business plans), additionally complicates this process (Du-Babcock 2006:255).

2 For example, Locker and Kienzler (2010:xxv-xxxi) have the following contents in their book, *Business and Administrative Communication: Succeeding in Business Communication, Adapting your message to your audience, building goodwill, navigating the Business Communication environment, communication across cultures, working and writing in teams*. The rest are: planning composing and revising, designing documents, creating visuals and data displays, making oral presentations, building résumés, writing job application letters, interviewing for a job, sharing information and positive messages, delivering negative messages and crafting persuasive messages(Locker and Kienzler 2010:xxv:xxxi).

3 Some of the topics include: formality, employment letters, communication across cultures, and interviewing for jobs.

4 Some of these areas include: Human Resource Management, Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Procurement, Auditing, Production, Research and Development, and Information Technology departments.

in their programs of study. Because of this, different but related labels (of the course, Business Communication) have been used in these diverse departments to suit their house style. Among some of them are: Language in Business, Business English, Business Correspondence, Organizational Communication, Management Communications, Strategic Business Communication Systems and Technical and Professional Communications.

Teachers of Business Communication are now found in almost all parts of the world. These teachers are constantly researching on innovative pedagogic styles in teaching and learning Business Communication at different levels of education. For example, Du-Babcock (2006) used two styles in teaching Business Communication in Hong Kong. One, she adapted American simulation in a large-scale to fit the learning environment in Hong Kong. This skill-building exercise, gave the target group, Hong Kong students, experience and exposure in business administration professional genres in finance and accounting, strategic and general management, marketing, and human resource management. Two, she used teleconferencing as a means to teach intercultural communication and professionalism in business genres (Du-Babcock, 2006).

Many of the experimentations in business communication assessments have, to a large extent, involved peer assessment⁵ (Agarwal and Chakraborty, 2006, p.383). Peer assessment is a tool that could be used in providing feedback to peers to help them improve on their performance (Agarwal and Chakraborty, 2006, p.383). Peer assessment, on its own, is not an all-inclusive pedagogic method, as Du-Babcock (2006, p.261) has stated:

... we need to introduce new theory and build new teaching approaches into our pedagogy while continuing to stress the fundamentals of effective business communication. This means continually taking into account advances in communication technologies, even more complex knowledge in the professional genres, and the need to adjust messages to the varying competency levels of interactants as messages are translated across national languages and professional genres.

Corrective Feedback (CF) techniques and the role(s) they play on business communication texts could be an innovative pedagogic method in the teaching and learning of form, structure, and process of Business Communication.

2.2 Business Letters

'When people think of business communications, many think of e-mails, letters, and paper memos'. Letters have over the years, played an important role in business communication. In the traditional setting, getting the message across without using a printed matter, is a nonstarter. Business letters are brief written messages normally sent to people outside the organisation (Locker & Kienzler, 2010; Thill & Bovée, 2013). A business letter is ordinarily used to transmit information on the company's vision, mission, core values, goals, objectives, products, and services to the company's external stakeholders who include but not limited to customers, suppliers, competitors, regulatory agencies, governments, communities, opinion leaders, financial institutions, and agents. Although business letters are used for external business correspondence, 'there are many special once-off cases that arise in business... , where a letter will be the most effective response'. Examples are: appointment letters, acceptance letters, resignation letters, dismissal letters, transfer letters, request for sponsorship (McClave, 2008, p.128) and promotional letters.

The business letter is said to act as an ambassador for the institution or person who sends it. It is therefore imperative for business letters to be carefully composed and well-presented so that the sender/company's reputation will be enhanced. For example, if a business letter contains mistakes or looks untidy or has wrong format, it will have the opposite effect. Business executives normally scrutinize the first letters sent by a customer or a supplier. In analyzing business letters, some of the questions executives ask are: is the letterhead well designed? Is there a fax number or e-mail address? Is the stationery of good quality? Accordingly, letter writers need to be circumspect of the

⁵ Peer assessment is an interactive and dynamic process that involves learners in assessing, critiquing and making value judgment on the quality and standard of work of other learners (Juwah, 2003)

letter's content and appearance if they want to build a good image (McClave, 2008, p.128).

2.2.1 Elements of Business Letter

The business letter has a format. It is a correspondence that is not done in a disorganized manner. Certain conventions are observed. The elements of most business letters include: letterhead, references, date, sender's address (for non-printed letterhead letters) recipient's address, salutation, subject, message, complimentary close, signature block, sender's full name and position, reference initials (this is mostly optional), enclosure notation and copy notation (Guffey, 2007; Guffey & Loewy, 2010; Locker & Kienzler, 2010; McClave, 2008). The various items in the elements are discussed below:

Letterhead: The letterhead is a printed stationery with the company's name, logo, address, e-mail address, fax number, postal address, telephone number(s), website address, registration number, bank name(s) and account number(s) (Bové & Thill, 2008; Locker & Kienzler; McClave, 2008; Owusu, 2015, p.65; Thill & Bové, 2013). In addition to giving useful information, the letterhead could be a marketing piece. A well-designed and attractive letterhead helps to carry a positive image of the organization to its stakeholders (McClave, 2008).

References: Most business letters have reference number (*Ref.*) or reference numbers (*Our Ref.* and *Your Ref.*). The reference number is a special number organizations generate manually or electronically (Owusu, 2015, p. 65). It helps in the filing of letters and other business correspondence such as memoranda and reports.

Date: For most business letters, the date is usually written in full. Examples of different formats for full dates are: 20th January, 2016; January 20, 2016 or 20 January, 2016. Short dates such as: 20/01/16; 20-01-16 and 20:01:16 are normally used in informal correspondence (McClave, 2008; Thill & Bové, 2013).

Sender's address: Since business letters usually use letterheads which already contain the address of the company, the sender's address as a separate component, is not usually needed in business letters. However, where a business letter is typed or written on a non-printed letterhead, the sender's address becomes imperative. When this happens, it is placed on the top right-hand corner of the page.

Recipient's address: In business letters, the name and the address of the intended recipient should always be stated (McClave, 2008). It is important to observe the person's title as well; which is normally placed before the person's name or in brackets after the person's name.

Attention line: Most business letters do not use attention lines. However, when used, an attention line allows the sender to send the message officially to an organization but direct it to a specific individual, officer, or department (Guffey, 2007).

Salutation: This is also known as *Greetings* in business letters. It varies according to some circumstances. One, *Dear Sir*, is used for male recipients whose names are not known; and *Dear Madam* for female recipients. In some highly formal letters, sometimes this salutation is still used though the name of the recipient might be known to the sender. In cases where the gender of the recipient is not known to the sender, *Dear Sir/Madam* is commonly used. *Dear Sirs* is used when one is writing to a company (McClave, 2008). Sometimes, the recipient's title and surname or full names are used. This situation normally happens when the sender already knows the recipient either through prior business contact or personal relationship. Examples are: *Dear Mr. Owusu*, *Dear Mrs. Abban*, *Dear Prof. Clark*, and *Dear Dr. Brain Authur*.

The Subject: The *subject* line is also known as the *title/heading*. Some business entities do not use the *subject* line in their business correspondence. Entities that use it normally place it between the salutation and the first paragraph (McClave, 2008). (For further information on subject style, see elements of memoranda).

The message: The message (also known as the body) is the content of the letter. The body of the letter is divided into three parts – the introduction, the main body and the conclusion. The introduction identifies the topic, gives background or contextual information, indicates the writer's

purpose for writing, and states the thesis statement⁶ (Kirzner & Mandell, 2007). It is therefore important for a writer to write the introduction with the sole purpose of capturing and sustaining the interest of the reader. The body develops the main ideas of the letter. It is important for the body to be divided into paragraphs so that each paragraph will handle one main idea. The topic sentence (the most important sentence of a paragraph), is the sentence that captures the main idea of each paragraph. Each topic sentence is expected to be developed by supporting sentences. The supporting sentences are sentences that corroborate or confirm the topic sentence. Most paragraphs have concluding sentences. A concluding sentence is the sentence that summarizes the entire paragraph. The conclusion of a letter reviews the main points by way of recapitulation, and discusses the significance of those points. Most writers normally use the concluding part of informal letters for issues on pleasantries.

The complimentary close: In the Ghanaian context, this is also known as subscription. According to McClave (2008, p.132) only two complimentary closes are found in business letters. *Yours faithfully* (which is more formal) and *Yours sincerely* (which is less formal). If one uses *Dear Sir(s)* or *Dear Madam* as the salutation of one's business letter, the complimentary close should be *Yours faithfully*. But, if one addresses the recipient by name in the salutation section, one has to use *Yours sincerely* as the complimentary close (McClave, 2008). Locker and Kienzler (2010), however, believe that *Sincerely* and *Yours truly* are standard complimentary closes. When one is writing to people in special groups or to a friend or even to a business acquaintance, a less formal close such as *Cordially*, *Thank you*, or even *Ciao* can be used. 'In mixed punctuation, writers ensure that a colon follows the salutation and a comma follows the close' (Locker & Kienzler, 2010). Guffey (2007, p.A-5) states that the complimentary close is typed after leaving one blank line below the last line of the letter. The complimentary close, to Guffey (2007) may be *Very truly yours* (for formal letters) and *Sincerely* or *Cordially* (for informal letters). The simplified letter however, omits complimentary close (Guffey 2007).

The signature block: Business letters are supposed to be signed. The signature is used to indicate the authenticity of the sender of the letter. Three blank spaces are expected to be created for a written signature below the complimentary close. It is standard practice to type the signer's name and position in the company beneath the signature (McClave, 2008; Thill & Bovée, 2013).

Reference initials: This is mostly optional in business letters. However, if it is used, the initials of the typist and writer are typed one blank line below the writer's name and title. Normally, the writer's initials are capitalized and the typist's are written in lower case (Guffey, 2007). Reference initials are optional in business letters and vary in terms of the format.

Enclosure notation: If an enclosure or attachment accompanies a document, a notification to that effect is done. The full word: *Enclosure(s)* or *Attachment(s)* is typed (one blank line below the reference initials) to indicate such attachment (Guffey, 2007; McClave, 2008). This may also be abbreviated as *Encl.(s)*, or *Enc.*, or *Att.* The enclosure notation has some uses. One, it reminds the typist to include the attached document(s) to the parcel/envelope that contains the business letter. Two, it also reminds the recipients to look for such attachment(s) (Guffey, 2007). The enclosure notation may be specific by indicating the number of attachments done or by stating clearly the type of document(s) that has/have been attached (Guffey, 2007).

Copy notation: This notation is used to indicate the name(s) of individual(s) who has/have received copies of the business letter. This is usually done by typing the name of such a person after *cc:* (for *carbon copy*), (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010; McClave, 2008, p.132) or *cc:* (for *courtesy copy*) (Thill & Bovée, 2013), or *cc:* (for *computer copy*) (Locker & Kienzler, 2010) or *pc:* (for *photocopy*) (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010), or just a *c:* (for any kind of *copy*) (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010). According to Guffey (2007), the colon after the initial (*c/cc/pc*) is optional. In an event where the recipients of the *cc/c/pc* are many, the typing of names is done in alphabetical order (McClave, 2008). In some business environments, the typing of names is done in order of seniority.

⁶ This is a single declarative sentence that states what you want your readers to know, believe, or understand after having read your essay' (Tagg 2004).

2.2.2 Layouts (formats) and Types of Business Letters

Generally, business letters are prepared in three layouts (formats) – fully blocked (block layout), modified block, and simplified formats (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010). In the block layout, all lines in the business letter begin at the left-hand margin and paragraph divisions are marked by line spaces instead of indentations (McClave, 2008). This format has become popular in business correspondence to the extent that most typists and business people see it as a convention (McClave, 2008). According to Guffey (2007), the block layout ‘...is easy to format.’ It is mostly combined with open punctuation, where punctuation marks are omitted in all sections of the letter, except in the body or the message of the letter (McClave, 2008). The block format could also be combined with mixed punctuation, where there is a colon after the salutation and a comma after the complimentary close (Guffey, 2007).

The modified format has almost the same characteristics as the block format. However, one difference between these formats is that the date, the complimentary close, the signature block, and the full name and position (if any) of the sender in the modified format appear in the centre of the paper (Guffey, 2007; Locker and Kienzler, 2010). Again, the first lines of paragraphs of the modified format are usually indented five or ten spaces (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010).

Guffey (2007) has stated that the simplified format was introduced by the Administrative Management Society⁷. Like the block format, all lines of the paragraphs in the simplified format begin at the left margin. Conversely, the simplified format omits the salutation and complimentary close; and the sender’s signature, name, and identification appear in all capital letters four black lines below the last paragraph (Guffey, 2007; Locker & Kienzler, 2010). One advantage of the simplified format is that it avoids the problems of appropriate salutations, complimentary close, and courtesy titles (Guffey, 2007).

Whether fully blocked format, modified block format, or simplified format, business letters come in different types. McClave (2008) has identified the following as types of business letters: letters of introduction, referrals, letters of enquiry, letters of reply, query letters, letters of estimates, letters of orders, letters of complaint, letters of adjustment, collection letters, and goodwill letters. We also have rejection follow-up letter, application or résumé follow-up letter, job acceptance and rejection letters, and resignation letters (Guffey, 2007). Other notable business communication letters are: promotional letters, transfer letters, leave letters, appointment letters, termination of appointment letters, and reinstatement letters. At Ho Technical University, the student-teacher ratio of language teachers who teach various language related courses is disproportional. Because there are always many scripts to be graded by relatively fewer language teachers, the issue of grading of scripts has always been problematic, as teachers use their own style. In Owusu (2019), it was found out that DF and IF have positive effect on students’ scripts, and that no feedback (NF) doesn’t have a place in grading of texts. This paper is therefore an attempt to find out the effects that DF and IF have on the business communication texts of selected students of Ho Technical University. The research questions for the paper are to:

- What effects have WCF techniques have on students’ texts in general?
- Which WCF type (DF or IF) has the greatest effects on students’ performance?
- Do students’ performance appreciate after they have been given opportunity to take a post-test?

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research was the design employed for this paper. Specifically, single case study was used. Single case designs are idiographic by nature (Thomae, 1999). This is to say that they allow an exhaustive investigation of the effects of interventions on entities in the case. Therefore, Ho Technical University (HTU) was selected for the study. This provided an opportunity to study ⁷ This is an organisation that is based in Washington, D. C, USA, which promotes efficiency in management and participates in research for the purpose of lowering costs, increasing the quality of products, and improving relations between their employers and employees (www.businessdictionary.com).

subjects in a single department in a comprehensive and experimental way by using the selected interventions of direct feedback (DF) and indirect feedback (IF).

3.2 Population, Participants, Sample Size, and Sampling Techniques

The Faculty of Business and Management Studies was purposively selected for this study. Specifically, selective HND 1 Marketing students in the Department of Marketing constituted the participants. The total population of the HND 1 students in the Department, as of the second semester of 2016/2017 Academic Year stood at about 75 students. Out of this, a sample size of 40 students was simple randomly selected. The 40 participants generated 80 texts in all (40 texts at the pre-test stage, and 40 texts at the post-test stage).

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Texts were the instruments used in soliciting data from the participants. The participants were asked to compose a business letter of about 400 words on the topic: *You are the manager of ABC Company Limited. Write a letter to the Director of Foods and Drugs Authority explaining how foods are processed in your company.*

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Because this qualitative study was also an experimental one, first, I used 2 credit hours to discuss with the participants elements, layout, and types of business letters. After this, I asked students to compose the business letter. A total of 1 hour was given to them to respond to the business letter task at the pre-test stage. After the pre-test scripts were submitted, I sorted them into two groups – DF and IF Groups. After the sorting, each text was given a code (*please see section 3.6*). The scripts were then graded using the two selected interventions of DF and IF. The grading section took a total of 3 working days. After the pre-test scripts were graded, a day was used to distribute photocopies of the pre-test scripts to the participants; that same day marked the onset of the post-test exercise. At the post-test stage, the participants were given 45 minutes to reproduce a new text by responding to the various comments in the pre-test scripts. The grading and the comments from the grading were not the same as different interventions (DF and IF) were used. With the DF intervention, the mistakes and errors⁸ (ME's) in the scripts of the participants were pointed out using error correction symbols, and consequently, the correct versions of the ME's were provided on top of the erroneous items. With the IF intervention, ME's were pointed out with error correction symbols only. Thus, the participants in the IF Group were not given the correct versions of the ME's.

3.6 Coding

For the purpose of easy identification and reference, all the texts were coded. The manual coding was done, taking into consideration the name of the university, the group (intervention used), the type of test (whether pre- or post-test), and the serial number generated for the participant. For example, the symbols of texts with code numbers HDA1 and HIB2 mean Ho Technical University (H), Direct Feedback (D), Pre-test (A), Serial Number (1); and Ho Technical University (H), Indirect Feedback (I), Post-test (B), Serial Number (2) respectively.

4. Results

The results are based on the research questions of the study. The texts of the participants were not analysed and graded in a chaotic way. A framework (marking scheme) was used:

⁸ A mistake is a performance phenomenon that reflects processing failures that come about as a result of competing plans, memory limitation, and lack of automaticity. An error on the other hand represents a gap in competence (Corder, 1967 as cited in Ellis, 2009, p. 6).

Table 1. Marking Scheme

Variables in the Framework	Initial	Grade
1. Content	C	04
2. Organization	O	03
3. Expression	E	08
4. Mechanical Accuracy	M/A	05
Total		20

The scheme (framework) has 4 variables of content, organisation, expression, and mechanical accuracy. The content looks at whether the topic in question has been well-developed. The expression assesses adequacy of ideas developed in the various paragraphs. The organisation aspect focuses on consistency of styles used; and mechanical accuracy focuses on grammar, and punctuation errors.

4.1. Effects that WCF techniques have on students' texts in general

Research Question (RQ) 1 sought to find out if WCF had positive or negative effect on students' texts. The results of the post-test scripts of both the DF and IF participants in the Groups show that the participants experienced a degree of success when the DF and IF interventions were applied on their pre-test scripts. For example, the pre-test results of 17 DF participants appreciated at the post-test stage, 2 DF participants maintained the same pre- and post-test results, and the pre-test result of 1 participant rather depreciated at the post-test level. In the case of the IF participants, the pre-test results of 14 of them appreciated at the post-test stage, 5 maintained the same results for both pre- and post-test levels, and the pre-test result of 1 participant depreciated at the post-test level (*please see Tables 2 and 3 below*). For 17 DF participants (out of 20 in that category) to have had their pre-test results appreciated at the post-test level; and for 14 IF participants (out of 20) to have had their pre-test results appreciated at the post-test level, is an indication that WCF techniques have positive effect of students' texts.

4.2. WCF type that has the greatest effects on students' performance

RQ 2 sought to find out which WCF (whether DF or IF) had the greatest effects on students' performance. Table 2 portrays results of the DF Group. The results indicate that for 34 (85%) of the texts, the score of the pre- and the post-test items appreciated. For 4 (10%) of the texts, there were no changes between the scores of the pre- and the post-test items. However, the post-test score of one participant depreciated. Though the participant had a pre-test score of 10/20; at the post-test level, he or she registered 9/20⁹. His or her inability to complete the post-test contributed to this situation. That notwithstanding, the potency of the DF intervention was displayed as the scores of the majority of the participants in this group (90%) appreciated. This shows that the DF has the greatest effect on students' than the effect that the IF possesses.

⁹ Please see the pre- and post-test scores of the participant with code 15 (HDA15 and HDB15).

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Test Results of the DF Group

Code	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Comments	Code	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Comments
HDA1	11		<i>Score maintained</i>	HDA11	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB1		11		HDB11		11	
HDA2	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA12	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB2		13		HDB12		12	
HDA3	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA13	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB3		11		HDB13		10	
HDA4	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA14	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB4		12		HDB14		14	
HDA5	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA15	10		<i>Score depreciated</i>
HDB5		13		HDB15		9	
HDA6	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA16	12		<i>Score maintained</i>
HDB6		14		HDB16		12	
HDA7	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA17	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB7		12		HDB17		11	
HDA8	13		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA18	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB8		15		HDB18		12	
HDA9	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA19	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB9		11		HDB19		11	
HDA10	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HDA20	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HDB10		11		HDB20		13	

Source: Field data, 2017

Table 3 shows results of the IF Group. The results show that, for 28 of the texts (70%), the scores of the pre- and post-test items appreciated. For 10 (25%) of them, the scores of the pre- and post-test scripts did not change, and for 2 (5%) of the texts, the scores of the post-tests reduced. The implication is that the IF intervention facilitated 70% of the IF Group to produce relatively accurate texts. Another inference is that 25% of the IF Group participants could not decode some of the error symbols used, hence their pre- and post-test scores did not change.

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Test Results of the IF Group

Code	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Comments	Code	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Comments
HIA1	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA11	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB1		13		HIB11		12	
HIA2	10		<i>Score maintained</i>	HIA12	11		<i>Score maintained</i>
HIB2		10		HIB12		11	
HIA3	12		<i>Score maintained</i>	HIA13	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB3		12		HIB13		12	
HIA4	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA14	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB4		12		HIB14		13	
HIA5	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA15	12		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB5		14		HIB15		14	
HIA6	9		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA16	10		<i>Score maintained</i>
HIB6		11		HIB16		10	
HIA7	12		<i>Score depreciated</i>	HIA17	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB7		11		HIB17		13	
HIA8	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA18	11		<i>Score maintained</i>
HIB8		13		HIB18		11	
HIA9	13		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA19	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB9		14		HIB19		13	
HIA10	11		<i>Score appreciated</i>	HIA20	10		<i>Score appreciated</i>
HIB10		13		HIB20		12	

Source: Field data, 2017

4.3 Students' performance after post-test.

From Tables 2 and 3, it is obvious that students perform better when they are given the opportunity to take a post-test. This is to say that the general performance of students after the post-test was better than the performance at the pre-test stage. However, this depends on the intervention used. Table 2 showed that the post-test results of the DF Group was superior to the post-test results of the IF Group as shown in Table 3.

5. Discussions

The discussions are based on themes in the research questions:

5.1. The effects that WCF techniques have on students' texts

Generally, the work revealed that WCF techniques have positive effect on the scripts of the participants. This is to say that the post-test results of both the DF and IF Groups were better than the pre-test results. This revelation confirms Ferris' (1999) claim about the efficacy of CF. According to her (Ferris, 1999) CF develops learners' written language skills, and also, improves students' accuracy in writing. The revelation, thus, defeats Truscott (1996) which called for abandonment of grammar correction in classroom interaction because it is ineffective, and has harmful effects. However, this finding is not conclusive, since not all the WCF were used in this research. Again, the experimental work focused on a sampled population of HTU. Probably, the scope (in terms of the participants and the intervention) could be expanded in future studies.

5.1.WCF type that has the greatest effects on students' performance

The study revealed that, of the two interventions (DF and IF), DF has the greatest effect on students texts. This is evident in how the post-test results of 17 DF Group members appreciated as against 14 IF Group members whose post-test results appreciated. For 5 IF Group members to have maintained the same pre-test results at the post-test stage, as against 2 DF pre-test results which did not change at the post-test level, is a further indication of the superiority of DF over IF. In Owusu (2019), it came to light that both DF and IF have significant effect on learners' written language. The results, therefore, suggest that DF should be embraced in grading the texts of second language learners.

5.3.Students' performance after post-test.

The research revealed that post-test should be given a place in second language teaching and learning. When students from the two Groups were given the opportunity to reproduce their texts at the post-test level, their post-test performance superseded the pre-test performance. This is in consonance with Owusu (2017) which recommended that language teachers should incorporate post-test in their assessments. In Chandler (2003), the post-test results of participants of the experimental group indicated an improvement of accuracy and fluency in students' scripts. This is an indication that in assessing second language learners, the language teacher should adapt post-test item in SLA classrooms, since it has the propensity of facilitating effective performance.

6. Conclusion

Ever since Truscott (1996) published his paper, CF has continued to be a debatable issue in language studies with most research works either endorsing or disapproving some CFs. Studies on the application of CF on business communication texts in Ghana have not been prominent (Owusu, 2017). The current research, therefore, investigated the effect that two (2) Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) techniques have on the business communication texts of selected students of Ho Technical University, Ghana. The two WCF used for the study were Direct Feedback (DF) and Indirect Feedback (IF). The findings revealed that both DF and IF WCF techniques, have positive effect on students texts; but the efficacy of the IF intervention cannot be compared with that of the DF which has superior strength. Therefore, DF was recommended for written assessment in second language teaching and learning. The implication is that, language teachers at the technical university level in Ghana, and other parts of the world, should endeavor to employ DF WCF in grading the texts of students. Additionally, language policy makers should also make a clear-cut policy on the use of DF WCF in teaching and assessing technical university students.

7. Suggestions for Further Researches and Limitations of the Current Study

The current research has some limitations. The work focused on only business letters of students, leaving other business communication write-ups such as minutes, memoranda, reports, and proposals out. Future research can fill this gap by using the other business communication texts mentioned. Also, in future, DF can be used to assess participants on language topics such as paragraphs, sentences, clauses, phrases, and word classes. Another limitation is the use of only participants from HTU. Future studies can juxtapose two or more technical universities to verify whether the DF intervention will still be potent. Similarly, participants from a technical university and any of the state-owned universities (in Ghana) could be studied in a comparative way, to corroborate the potency of the DF intervention. Again a study on WCF, which draws participants from different universities in two or more continents would be interesting. Of course, such participants should be on the same academic level. Thus, the potency of a particular WCF may be strong in a specific environment, but may be weak in a different environment, owing to some sociocultural factors. These sociocultural factors may be family background of the learner (Owusu, Agor & Amuzu, 2015), basic school background, educational level of the teacher, the environment the learner grew up, and the accessibility of teaching and learning materials. Another limitation of the current study is the use of only two WCF interventions of DF and IF. Future studies may explore

techniques like electronic feedback and Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF).

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