

## The Impact of Explicit Corrective Feedback on Learning English Conditional Sentences

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the impact of corrective feedback on enhancing the student's ability to correctly use English conditional sentences. The study used a quasi-experimental design for data analysis. The data was collected from a sample of hundred students selected through a convenient sampling technique studying English in 9th class in English medium schools in Upper Dir. The homogeneous results of the control and experimental group in the pre-test before intervention and better performance in the post-test by the experimental group confirmed through *t*-tests showed a positive impact of explicit corrective feedback on learning English conditional sentences. A significant effect was seen on the experimental group suggesting that explicit corrective feedback is required for students at secondary to learn the complex structure of English. In light of the findings, it is suggested that explicit corrective feedback focuses on students' deficiencies and might increase their drive to learn more about their mistakes and correct themselves in time.

**Key Words:** Complex Structures, Corrective Feedback, English Conditionals, Explicit, Implicit

### Introduction

Corrective feedback is the review by a teacher, peer or mentor of about how well the learner has performed by communicating the feedback to the learner about his learning or work. The learners feel motivated and encouraged after receiving positive feedback whereas, they are advised to take negative feedback more constructively so that they can improve in the future. The main aim

behind giving corrective feedback is to expect a change in performance and improvement in the future. The teachers give feedback to students about how well they have performed while learning a language, what needs to be changed, improved and how well it can be presented by correcting the errors related to grammar and wrong sentence structures. Feedback as a kind of information that is given to the student about her/his

result of an assigned learning work often with an intention to improve this performance. Making errors is part of the learning process and for language teachers specifically, this has been of great interest to identify errors and give constructive feedback on it. Student's errors must be corrected timely for their learning and growth. There are many methods of corrective feedback that are used globally by teachers. Still, it entirely depends on the teachers how want to convey their feedback (Sadat, Zarifi, Sadat, & Malekzadeh, 2015). Corrective feedback plays a very significant part in improving both written and spoken linguistic proficiency. Feedback helps the learners to improve long-term competence which is beyond the immediate composition effect. Being central and crucial to all kinds of learner-centered teaching, feedback is a very important phenomenon in the language teaching processes as it helps the learner not only to consolidate what they have already learnt but also spurs them to learn more. The three types of options for feedback are conferencing, peer feedback, and written comments. Feedback is the central and crucial to all kinds of learner-centered teaching. Feedback is a very important phenomenon in the language teaching processes as it helps the learner not only to consolidate what they have already learned but also spurs them to learn more. There are three types of direct corrective feedback that can be used by teachers: a blend of direct feedback and written/oral explanation, written metalinguistic explanation and direct feedback and finally, direct feedback only (Marzban & Arabahmadi, 2013). Explicit feedback speaks of the explicit delivery of the accurate structure (Lyster & Ranta, 2019). It consists of specific grammatical information that students can refer to when an answer is incorrect. For instance, if a student commits a mistake by saying "She go to the school", the students are taught to use 's' or 'es' with English third-person singular verbs ending

(Farrell, 2011). It is denoted that explicit correction are more informed and reactive approach where the instructor immediately steps in the learning process, by providing the learner with more insight on form and metalinguistic explanation (Dabaghi, 2008). Majority of learners face the problem with meaning and form in English conditional sentences. There is always the possibility of a problem with form because the conditional sentence consists of two clauses i.e., 'IF' and 'Main or Result clause' which can be used interchangeably. The 'if clause' contains a condition while the 'result clause' contains the result or consequence (Traugott, 1986). Moreover, conditional sentences can be classified into real and unreal conditions. Based on the 'real and unreal', conditional can further be classified into those showing the factual relationship and those showing present a predictive relationship. The conditionals (unreal) are used to state completely hypothetical situations and situations that are assumed to be completely opposite to known facts (Zhang, 2005). The dependent clause begins with different words such as *if, unless, even if, as long as, whether or not* etc. Conditional sentences directly reflect the language users' ability to reason either about uncertainties or alternatives. Conditionals are common syntactic configurations that express possibilities, potentialities, and causal relationships. In English, a conditional sentence is often expressed in the form of 'If B, then C.' (Li, 2010). In the 'IF clause' the speaker states the condition while in the main or result clause the speaker states the consequence. In English, we have mainly four types of conditionals and there are differences with respect to their time reference (present, past and future) and in relation to the actual world (possible, factual, and counterfactual). One of the big obstacles in English as a foreign or second language learning is conditional sentences. Al Rdaat (2017) argues that conditional sentences have cognitively

and linguistically complicated structures that give a number of different meanings, are understood via a number of different structures and are also used for a different number of discourse purposes.

One of the causes of the complexity of "English conditional sentences" is the dependency of one situation on the happening another one (Eskandari & Soleimani, 2016). Conditioning involves a process in which a person's behaviour changes as a result of experiences he has. It is about behaviour that comes about under certain conditions and which gradually becomes a habit - an ingrained behavioural pattern (Schulz, 2014). Once the students understand this basic structural similarity, it is easy to proceed with the zero conditional, as well as other conditional forms (Savage, Bitterlin & Price, 2010).

The variety of possible meanings includes the areas of psychological desirability and intent, cognitive reasoning, semantic nuances, and logical argument related to counterfactual, real, or assumed incidents, concluded from one or more of these happenings. Conditionals occur in many languages, such as English, Classic Greek, Chinese, German, Latin, and others and every language has its own methods of forming conditional sentences (Tyler, 2012).

### Purpose of the Study

Explicit corrective feedback plays an important role in teaching and learning processes. It is the correction of the mistakes made by the students more explicitly. Similarly, English conditional sentences too have their own importance in the process. Learners of English have trouble in learning "English conditional sentences" because of the semantic and syntactic complexities embedded in conditional constructions (Farooq, Wahid & Hassan, 2020). It is believed that comprehending and constructing of English conditional

sentences "provides basic insights into the cognitive processes, linguistic competence, and inferential strategies of human beings (Yufrizal, 2017). The increasing number of English lessons (Kirkpatrick, 2012) demands more feedback in English (Briggs, Dearden & Macaro, 2018) which should be explicitly given in case of complex structures like English conditional sentences. Therefore, the present study has focused on analyzing the impact of explicit corrective feedback on learners' English conditional at the secondary level.

### Literature Review

Second language learners always have difficulties in learning English conditional sentences. These difficulties have been investigated in many previous studies. For example, Al Rdaat (2019) carried out a study on the order of acquisition of conditionals to investigate learners' difficulties. Two experiments were conducted to compare the production and comprehension of real (type 1), unreal (type 2), and past unreal (type 3) conditional sentences for fifty-five advanced and low-advanced adult ESL learners. The findings of the study showed that despite the complexity of structure in type three, the learners had less difficulty in comprehension than in production. Therefore, these methodological and theoretical problems show that learners and instructors are faced with a problem in how to learn and teach conditionals properly, efficiently and practically. The students make mistakes, but it is of course not necessary to correct every mistake that has a very discouraging effect (Li, 2010). Nevertheless, it remains important to provide regular feedback to the students for the betterment of their academic performance. Obviously, corrective feedback is much more than just correcting mistakes (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013).

According to the study conducted by Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018), explicit feedback classically includes a learner who

either receives formal or informal feedback on the basis of his level of understanding or output on different tasks through a mediator that can be a teacher or friend. It has been claimed by many of the researchers such as Zhao and Ellis (2020), that explicit feedback is a highly effective type of corrective feedback. In a study (Zohrabi & Behboudnia, 2017), the effectiveness of corrective feedback in gaining various grammatical features has been witnessed that support language learning and teaching. The impact of corrective feedback has been found in the treatment of errors during communicative activities that impact significantly linguistic features. It is necessary to involve such pedagogic interventions that not only focus on explicit knowledge but also involve implicit learning. The corrective feedback is considered to be elicited if it involves the correct version of utterance from the learners. Through classroom studies, the long-term effects of corrective feedback can be analysed. Likewise, through the findings of the study, it was demonstrated that using corrective feedback as a technique of teaching shows superiority over prior exemplification of grammatical exceptions and structures. The explicit feedback supports the knowledge with which learners are consciously aware. Another study conducted by Ataman and Mirici, (2017) shows that explicit corrective feedback is more effective than implicit corrective feedback as the researcher assumed that provided implicit feedback demoralizes most of the students but when students received their corrective feedback explicitly, they were more encouraged and motivated to take part in tasks of writing conditional sentences. The analysis showed the corrective feedback helps the student to develop their learning and writing skills with the use of different processes.

There are various classifications with regards to the strategies of corrective feedback that have been proposed by many

researchers. Nevertheless, such classifications vary in essence. The classification which includes six various categories named as, clarification request, explicit feedback, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, as well as repetition is majorly used for the production evaluation of oral learners. Though while having a slight alteration, it could even be used for the writing activities of the learners. However, in terms of explicit corrective feedback, it can be averred that this classification is really helpful in focusing on the quality of the words (Banaruee, Khoshsima & Askari, 2017). According to the study conducted by Granena, Yilmaz and Leow (2019), explicit corrective feedback is an evaluative as well as advisory kind of feedback that tends to emphasize on the writing abilities of a learner and advise them that how they can improve the quality of vocabulary. Explicit corrective feedback is quite useful as compared to implicit corrective feedback. The reason is that it tends to lead towards more perfection when it comes to accuracy and awareness of grammar. The learners remember the rules or guidance that they get through their mentors in the form of explicit corrective feedback.

## **Methodology**

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The population of the present study consisted of all secondary level students of 9<sup>th</sup> class studying in English medium schools in Upper Dir. A representative sample of 100 students was selected through a convenient sampling technique consisting of fifty male and fifty female students. These students were divided into two groups having equal numbers of male and female students in separate classes. Each class comprised of 25 students. Experimental group was taught through corrective feedback whereas control group was taught through the conventional method. Two tests were conducted, i.e., one before the treatment (pre-test) and one after the treatment

(post-test). The pre-test helped in assessing the proficiency level of the students before the treatment and the post-test helped in assessing the learning outcome after the treatment as a result of corrective feedback. The prescribed text for the class having lessons about English conditionals were taught for one month. After the treatment, a post-test was conducted. Because the focus of the study was on developing the students' conditional sentences, the feedback was explicitly corrective, offering insight into the formation and then instructing on verbs for occurrences of 'if' and would in different sentences to help the students in understanding the basic and complicated phrases. The study measured a specific outcome relating to the phenomenon of interest (Vogt, 2012), so, a quasi-experimental research design was used involving pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The experimental and control groups were not just in the context of the experimental treatment's reception but also in other uncertain and unknown ways (Walser, 2014), which were controlled to the maximum level. The design specifically investigated the influence of the independent variable (explicit corrective feedback) on the

dependant variable, i.e., learning English conditional sentences (Goldfarb, 2014). The primary focus was on giving constructive comments on sentence fragmentation, parallel construction, and subject-verb agreement. The explicit feedback centred around providing feedback on run-on phrases, which were most common in agreements with two or more separate provisions. Corrective feedback taught the students how to connect sentences closely related to the topic to make their writing more fluid. Corrective feedback also provided light on basic phrases, including a comma and a word such as: *and*, *but*, *so*, *still*, which are commonly used to create conditional sentences. Based on secondary sources (Paradis, 2016) relevant to the study, the primary data was collected from the two groups of the selected sample.

### Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers examined the impact of corrective feedback on students of the experimental group in comparison with students of control group taught through the conventional lecture method. The following table shows the pre-test results.

**Table 1.** Pre- test results

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test Score	Experimental Group	42.82	4.516	0.639
	Control Group	42.64	5.454	0.771

Table 1 represents the pre-test results for both groups. The purpose of the pre-test was to determine the scores of both groups before the treatment in the form of corrective feedback. As per the results, it is determined that the mean score of the experiment group was 42.82 whereas the mean score of the control group was 42.64. Hence, there was no

significant difference found in the scores of the groups which indicated that both groups were homogenous in nature. The pre-test scores of both groups were further confirmed from the values of an independent sample t-test to look for any significant difference of the test scores of the two groups.

**Table 2.** Pre-Test independent samples t-test of pre-test scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre-Test Score	Equal variances assumed	0.136	0.713	0.18	98	0.85	0.18	1.001	-1.807	2.167
	Equal variances not assumed			0.18	94	0.85	0.18	1.001	-1.808	2.168

The values in the table above reflects the pre-test independent sample t-test which is applied for determining any statistical difference between the scores of these two groups. The Levene's test for equality of variance measures the assumption of homogeneity. Since under Levene's test, the significance value is higher i.e., 0.713, it can be concluded that the variances between the control and experimental group was equal. Based on Levene's tests, the equal variance assumed was investigated where the significance value (Sig, 2-tailed) was evaluated. The significance value was computed as 0.85 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test scores which demonstrates that both the

experimental and control group have homogeneity in terms of academic scores of in the test for English conditionals. Therefore, on the basis of the results of the pre-test, the explicit corrective feedback on learning English conditional sentence could be applied to any of these groups for examining its influence which was further examined in the post test. After the pre-test, the treatment of teaching English conditionals through explicit corrective feedback in the form of teacher's intervention was given to the experimental group. After the treatment, both the groups were testing again in a post-test about English conditionals. The following table shows the results of post-test.

**Table 3.** Post-test results

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-Test Score	Experimental	62.0000	4.42165	0.62532
	Control	43.7000	4.67844	0.66163

As per the findings observed in table 3, the mean values of both experimental and control groups were found to be 62 and 43.7. The mean value of the score for the experimental group shows that this group had learnt English conditionals more than the control group. The standard deviation was 4.42 and 4.68 respectively for the

experimental and control group. The standard deviation shows that variability is incurred by the data set, which in this case were the control and experimental groups (Delacre, 2017). Since the standard deviation in the test for the experimental groups was lower than its scores for the control group, it can be deduced that the experimental groups

performed better than the control group. The results in the post-test were further confirmed with an independent samples t-

test to show the significance of difference of these groups. The following table shows the result of the post-test statistically measured.

**Table 4.** Post-test independent samples t-test results

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-Test Score	Equal variances assumed	0.005	0.942	20.102	98	0.000	18.30000	0.91037	16.49340	20.10660
	Equal variances not assumed			20.102	97.689	0.000	18.30000	0.91037	16.49333	20.10667

The independent samples t-test compares two groups for the purpose of assessing the possibility of any evidence that can be obtained, associated with the population's mean (Roitman, Erera, & Weiner, 2017). Such an association was subjected to statistical evidence and in this case, the groups i.e., control and experiment groups. The significance values were calculated, while not assuming equal variances in the post-test. Levene's test, solely, concerns itself with the similarity of variance (Soave & Sun, 2017). Table 4 represents the results of the independent sample t-test where the purpose was to determine whether there was any significant difference among the students taught through corrective feedback and through traditional methods. The assumption of homogeneity was examined in Levene's test for equality of variance. Since, the significance value was higher i.e., 0.942, it was interpreted that the variances between the control and experimental group was equal. Based on Levene's tests, the equal variance assumed was investigated where the

significance value (Sig, 2-tailed) was evaluated. The significance value was computed as 0.000 which was less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected suggesting that there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group. It is validating that by providing corrective feedback to students is effectively translated to much required success such as fluency in sentence structure and a firm grasp of basic phrases.

## Discussion

Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) have highlighted that corrective feedback possesses an influence on learning through explicit knowledge increasing learners' attentiveness to grammatical structures. The beginners find it difficult to self-correct their errors (Han, 2017) demanding the need of explicit corrective feedback (Bonilla López, Van Steendam & Buyse, 2017) as an effective method (Ataman & Mirici, 2017) and kept continued for a longer time (Zheng & Yu, 2018), which is also advised for advanced

level of students (Yüksel, Soruç & McKinley, 2021) to improve their written skills (Sato & Loewen, 2018). If the students' errors are ignored, there is a possibility that the student may perhaps adopt those errors (Lee, 2019) and the efforts to correct those errors (Ha, Murray & Riazi, 2021) may not be utilised by learners but the same practice is discouraged because learners should be given chance to experiment language learning in a natural way which will sooner or later lead to the development and fluency of a language (Kim, Choi, Kang, Kim, & Yun, 2020). The students were also found out motivated (Tsao, Tseng & Wang, 2017), inspired and eager (Ai, 2017) towards the corrective learning, considering this comprehensive metalinguistic feedback working better for their learning (Zhao & Ellis, 2020) in spite of some studies showing students' inability to recognize their errors (Kim & Bowles, 2019). With the corrective feedback provided in the present study, the students could find their errors effortlessly like the findings in Karim and Nassaji, (2019) unlike the findings in Storch (2018) that corrective feedback was not that effective, as, mistakes are unavoidable. In the analysis section, the results have observed that the experimental group that received the intervention was better off than the control group. Such results were found in the study of Thompson and Renandya (2020) suggesting a positive impact of corrective feedback. The teaching skills help the students to focus on the materials or content of the intervention improving both the teaching quality and students' achievement (Kyriakides, Christoforidou, Panayiotou & Creemers 2017). Some students preferred direct corrective feedback since it included an indication of the issue as well as the proper solutions for those issues. On the other hand, some students valued indirect feedback since it encouraged them to engage in more language learning when self-revising and correcting their work. The findings of this study demonstrate that corrective feedback

can increase learners' reliability while revising the very same texts. This expands on earlier research that has demonstrated the usefulness of written corrective feedback (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener, & Knoch, 2010; Ekiet & Gennaro, 2021; Zabihi & Erfanitabar, 2021; Ekanayaka & Ellis, 2020; Sheen, 2011; Shintani & Ellis, 2013; Shintani & Aubrey, 2014). The current study's findings, on the other hand, demonstrated that corrective feedback has a considerable impact on learners' writing correctness. The current study shows there is a positive impact of corrective feedback on students' writing and students' ability to form conditional sentences (Wahyuni, 2017), if the correct grammatical forms are used as explicit feedback (Shamiri & Farvardin, 2016) because it leads to more perfection when it comes to accuracy and awareness of grammar (Yilmaz & Granena 2019). The students despite receiving formal grammar training in high school, still had trouble applying grammatical structures correctly (Guo & Barrot, 2019), considering their language instructors responsible for this (Kyriakides, Christoforidou, Panayiotou & Creemers 2017) who could not provide explicit corrective feedback about complex construction like English conditional sentences (Abrar, Mukminin, Habibi, Asyraf & Marzulina, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

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The present study was concerned with the impact of explicit corrective feedback on learning English conditional sentences by students at the secondary level. The analysis of the collected data showed that explicit corrective feedback on students' writing skills was an effective method for identifying and correcting their errors because it a secondary level, the learners find it difficult to self-correct their errors. The corrective feedback was valuable for students as it helped them to recognize their faults and made efforts to correct them. None of the



students from the selected sample faced complications with anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem. It was hypothesized that explicit corrective feedback on learning English conditional sentences was effective. The findings of the study indicated that some students preferred direct corrective feedback since it included an indication of the issues as well as the provision of the proper forms. Additionally, students were able to use their teacher's codes to correct verb, article, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors etc. For different word choices and correcting sentence structure, the errors required the teacher's explicit feedback. Furthermore, the study found out that explicit corrective feedback establishes a technique for language learners to remediate complex learning faults with appropriate and accurate structures. According to the findings, remedial comments had a significant influence on writing accuracy.

The results of this study showed that it was possible to improve dependability while rewriting the same texts. The findings showed that learners were able to properly cope with comments by the teacher's guidance throughout the revision. The feedback should have been explicit because in conditional sentences, sometimes, the specified time in the sentence is different from the non-recurring situation and we have hypothetical situation which need different forms of verbs, for example, which was easily learnt by the learner with explicit feedback of these structures. Corrective feedback for such sentences should be more visible to keep students motivated to learn. This study adds to previous researches that have shown the value of written corrective feedback in the acquisition of English. Further study should look at the role of learner variables and corrective feedback in facilitating learning.

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