

The Effects of Teachers' Written Comment Types and Iranian EFL Learners' Attitudes

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This study was designed to investigate the impact of teacher's written feedback and the learners' attitudes about it in the context of Iran. To this end, 60 intermediate-level learners of an institute participated in three 20 members groups, each group receiving one type of teacher's written comments (i.e., imperatives, statements, and questions). The participants were asked to write four drafts on each of the two IELTS topics during a semester, and then a one-way ANOVA was conducted on the average gain scores from the first to the last drafts. The results showed that different feedback types can affect writing improvement differently, and statement feedback is the most effective comment for the context of this research. Moreover, the participants' attitudes was investigated through using a questionnaire (adapted from Hamouda, 2011 & Beaumont et al., 2008), and statement feedback was reported as the most preferred comment type. Finally, correlations were conducted between the types of comments and the participants' attitudes, the result of which indicated a match between the two results.

Keywords: comment, learners' attitudes, written comment type

Introduction

Writing in academic contexts is the skill through which we can discern the development of other skills, like the ability to “critically analyze the content” or to “apply one’s knowledge to a new task” (McGrath, Taylor, & Pychyl, 2011, p. 10). It is difficult to improve this skill naturally and without receiving any formal or informal instruction. Feedback is one of the most effective ways among the various options available to improve writing ability while trying to revise a written assignment and produce the next drafts. It can be received from different sources, the most frequently use of them is the instructor given feedback (Williams & Jasmine, 2003). Giving an effective comment on learners’ writing is one of the most important steps of the process writing approach that can help the learners to revise their written draft in order to increase its quality and accuracy.

At the same time, there are many important factors that should be taken into account by writing teachers before any effort to give feedback, one of which is the learners’ attitudes about comment. Teachers should know the attitudes of their learners for the kinds of the comments they give, because learners’ likes and preferences can affect the usefulness of the provided comments (Amrehin & Nassaji, 2010) and may increase their engagement and motivation (Hamouda, 2011). Teachers should not only know the most helpful types of comments and the most preferred comments by learners but also try to match two factors in order to improve learners’ motivation, learning, and behavior in class (Ferris, 2003).

Literature Review

Introducing the process approach to writing, with multiple-drafting as one of its main features, has triggered doing more and more investigations on teacher feedback (Desrosiers, 2008). Zhang (2008) emphasized that feedback can have its actual definition only when the instruction follows a process approach. He

also stated that “in the process approach, the focus of attention has shifted from the finished products to the whole process of writing: experience and question, prewriting preparation, draft writing, editing and rewriting, publication or sharing, and response and feedback” (p. 108).

According to Ishii (2011), the peak of publishing theses about teacher feedback goes back to a period around 2000 to 2004 which rose as a result of debates between Truscott and Ferris: Truscott (2007) assumed that not only is error correction not a good choice, but also it is harmful and can have many side effects like distorting the class-time away from more productive and communicative activities; whereas, Ferris (1997) believed in effectiveness of providing comments and advocates using corrective feedback. After the publication of these debates, many researchers have started to look at the issue of teacher feedback from different perspectives. Nevertheless, as Zhang (2008) stated, identifying helpfulness of comments and the comment type which is the most appropriate one, still remains as a key research question for researchers working in this field.

Williams and Jasmine (2003) noted that there are two main common categories of providing comments – feedback on form and feedback on content – each of which has its own methods. In Williams and Jasmine’s (2003) opinion, there are three methods to provide form related comments. That is, the teachers may correct the surface errors themselves (i.e., direct feedback); they can provide markings that indicate the place and type of the errors without any overt error correction (i.e., indirect coded feedback); or they can simply underline the error to indicate that something wrong is presented in that place (i.e., indirect uncoded feedback). On the other hand, Williams and Jasmine (2003) stated that content feedback are mainly in the form of teachers’ written comments and opinions which offer suggestions for the improvement of that specific part of the writing for subsequent rewrites. The same classification of comment types is made by some other researchers such as Bitchener and Knoch (2009), Bitchener, Young, and Cameron (2005), Delgado (2007), Ferris (2003), Lalande (1982), Lee (1997), and Vengadasamy (2002). Furthermore, in Vengadasamy’s (2002) article, two main subcategories of responding to

content are introduced, namely directive feedback (which direct the students' attention to what is wrong or right in teacher's opinion) and facilitative feedback (which is written on learners' drafts just as a suggestion by the teacher as a concerned reader and may or may not be the best idea necessarily).

Research results on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of these comment types are not conclusive. For example, in Lalande's (1982), Ferris' (2003), and Saito's (1994) studies, an advantage for indirect feedback has been reported, while Ellis (2008) and Conrad and Goldstein (1999) found that direct feedback is more beneficial. Semke's (1984) research found no difference between these two comment types. On the other hand, Bitchener et al. (2005), Chandler (2003), Lee (1997), and Van Beuningen, de Jong and Kuiken (2008) highlighted some positive evidence for both direct and indirect approaches.

Regarding the comparison between form and content feedback, Ashwell (2000), Ferris (1997), Maria and Asis (2009), and Park (2006) reported both to be useful, while Ferris (1995) and Hyland (2003) observed that while the participants of their study acknowledged the importance of comments, they could not use them in practice and therefore they did not benefit from any types of the given feedback. Even regarding the use of different feedback types separately or in combination, there are some controversies. Some researchers, like Fathman and Whalley (1990), believed in using a mixture of both form and content related comments, which was named by Park (2006) as integrated feedback; whereas, Zamel (1985), Ashwell (2000), and McGarrell and Verbeem (2007) suggested that teachers should use them separately to be more useful for learners' writing abilities. Likewise, in case of commenting selectively (i.e., deciding in advance on the amount of written feedback that would be provided) or comprehensively (crossing out all of the observed errors) there are also controversies; that is, some researchers (Lee, 1997; Makino, 1993; McGrath et al., 2011) believed that not all of the errors should be evaluated and corrected at once, while Jodaie and Farrokhi (2012) believed in usefulness of comprehensive strategy.

Nevertheless, the results of some studies showed that provided comments were not helpful for their participants. As an example, Polio, Fleck, and Leder

(2002), found that there was no significant difference in the performances of between those who received feedback and those who did not, but both of them improved their writing accuracy during the semester, from each written draft to the next one. Additionally, the benefits of teacher's feedback were limited. In some studies for instance, Ferris (1995) and Hyland (2003) showed that most students acknowledge the importance of receiving comment from their teacher but not all of them made use of it in their written drafts.

Some scholars have categorized the comments in the same way that was used in the present research (i.e., questions, statements, and imperatives), and came up with different result. Sugita's (2006) investigation on pre-intermediate to intermediate Japanese learners found that imperative comment type which were more "direct and easy to follow the instruction" (p. 39) was the best feedback type. Desrosiers' (2008) research results on advanced Japanese learners showed a positive impact of all comments on the students' rewritings, but the teachers used more question form of comments because in their opinion it was better for their students. Also, Conrad and Goldstein (1999) during revealed that the most successful and frequently used comment was the statement comment type through a case study on Iranian, Filipino, and Vietnamese students.

In Amrhein and Nassaj's (2010) opinion, current controversies about the effectiveness of different comment types can be related to different factors, one of which is that whether there is a match/mismatch between what the students prefer and what the teacher thinks is correct and useful for them. Similarly, as Guenette (2007) has noted, if we do not consider the crucial variables like the learners' preferences and commitment in making use of received comments, no matter what comment type is provided for the learners, there will be no improvement in their composition writing skill. Hamouda (2011) also emphasized the importance of learners' attitudes as a supporting or inhibiting factor for their motivation and engagement in the improvement process. He said that most teachers expect their students to be highly motivated in doing things that they prefer. Sharbaf Shoar, Zainol-Abidin, and Pour-Mohammadi (2011) are among the Iranian scholars who strictly emphasized the importance

of the learners' role as one of the influential factors in making reflections and improvement in their writing potentiality.

Results of the research on learners' attitudes are varied. For instance, Hamouda (2011) reported that most of the Arab students of his study preferred statement comment type since it prevented any confusion; whereas, Sugita's (2006) Japanese participants preferred imperative comment type. Also, Saito (1994) and Amrhein and Nassaji (2010) found that the participants of their studies (EFL and ESL students, respectively) valued form-focused feedback; but Kordi, Hashemnejad, and Biria's (2012) research on EFL learners resulted in the most of the students in their study preferred to receive content-based feedback. Moreover, Ferguson (2011) conducted a research on graduate and undergraduate learners to examine their perception about helpful feedback and concluded that most learners liked to receive comments only on the key points of their compositions. It was also found that EFL learners in a certain EFL context wanted to receive more corrective comments than what their instructors provided for them (Park, 2006).

Schulz (2001) realized that students of different cultures may have different perceptions of and attitudes toward comments. As a result of his study, he explicitly argued that the culture of the society would affect their attitudes and beliefs. Likewise, the results of Amrhein and Nassaji's (2010) study showed that students' attitude is not a unified concept and could vary across different situations. There are still other researchers (e.g., Conrad & Goldstein, 1990; Poverjuc, 2011) who believed that learners' attitude is a culture-bound factor. Finally, Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourdiani (2012) believed that teachers should match their comments with learners' needs and instructional objectives, and they should also take into account the learners' preferences and give them some autonomy and freedom to express their opinions about the comment types that they prefer to receive. Therefore, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in the effects of three different types of teachers' written comments such as questions, statements,

- and imperatives in helping learners improve their written drafts?
2. Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of the learners about three different types of teachers' written comments such as questions, statements, and imperatives?
 3. Is there any relationship between learners' attitudes and actual effects of three different feedback types such as questions, statements, and imperatives in learners' writing?

Methodology

Participants

This study was conducted in an English institute in a city of Hamadan province, Iran. Sixty adult Iranian EFL learners from both genders (22 male and 38 female students) were participants of this study. They were from different majors of the same university and took part in a course in this institute as an extra-curriculum course to develop their academic English proficiency. These participants were selected after administering the writing section of a TOEFL test (Eduka, Kusuma, Al Huda, Nur, & Jatmiko, 2014) at the outset of the research to 82 Payaam-e-Noor University students who were placed at intermediate classes of this institute. The norm of this institute for such classes is that after registration, the learners take part in a placement test, which consists of a written test with sections on vocabulary, grammar, reading, as well as an individualized interview on their speaking proficiency, after which they are divided into different classes according to their proficiency level. They met once a week for one session and each session lasted about one hour and a half. The curriculum of such classes is not a preselected program; that is, the learners themselves with the help of their teacher decide on what to be covered during the term and as their teachers said, improving writing ability is almost always among those preferred activities. Though the participants were at the intermediate level in this institute, they were tested on their writing English

proficiency through administering the writing section of TOEFL (Eduka et al., 2014) as a pretest to ascertain the homogeneity of their writing proficiency levels. To this end, the selection criterion was scores between one standard deviation above and below the mean score. On the basis of their responses to the writing part of TOEFL (Eduka et al., 2014), and according to the selecting criterion, only 60 of the students whose scores fell in this range were selected. Then they were randomly divided into three 20 member groups and each group received only one kind of the selected comment types.

In this study the intermediate participants were selected because such learners already have some knowledge of English and writing is not as difficult for them as for the elementary learners on the one hand, and they are trying to increase their English language proficiency by learning new points on the other hand; so, they might benefit from these written comment types (i.e., questions, statements, and imperatives).

Instrumentation

The following instruments were used in this study:

1. The writing part of a TOEFL test (Eduka et al., 2014): This test which consisted of 40 multiple choice questions related to written expressions, was administered at the beginning of the study to ascertain the homogeneity of the participants' writing proficiency. The validity of these types of tests is well-established and can be scored analytically without interfering subjective judgment of the rater. Also, the reliability of the test was calculated to be 0.62 for this group of participants.
2. Paulus's (1999)¹ writing rating rubric was used which had 10 scales (i.e., 10 sections from one point to 10 points in six different categories of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, organization,

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development, and coherence/cohesion) and took into account both form and content in scoring. All drafts received feedback but only the first and the fourth drafts written by the participants were rated according to this rubric; in other words, second and third drafts of the learners were not rated, but only commented on.

3. A questionnaire was adapted and modified from the existing questionnaires (developed and used by Beaumont, O'Doherty, & Shannon, 2008; Hamouda, 2011)² to fit the context of this research. They devised these questionnaires for investigating the perception and attitudes of the teachers, staff and students about feedback. Twenty-four selected questions were all in Likert scale types with five scales from strongly disagree (one point) to strongly agree (five points). Then, this questionnaire was revised and piloted through using 21 learners with the same writing proficiency level as the main group. The reliability of the final version of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.79.

Design

Three comparison groups were presented in this study. Levy and Ellis (2011) defined quasi-experimental research as one type of experimental design in which, although we had treatment, group comparison, and measurement of outcomes, the degree of the researcher's control over selection of participants was limited and the homogeneity of the groups was not as desirable as possible, even if the researcher tried to assign the participants randomly into each group. They also stated that many effective irrelevant variables could not be fully controlled. On the basis of these arguments, it could be said that there were two features going on at the same time that did not match each other. One was the important factors (like gender, major of the learners in university, age, etc.) and the other was the treatment (investigating the effect of different comment

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types) that was used in this study. Although the design was quasi-experimental, in grouping procedure many of these factors were considered in order to decrease the effects of irrelevant factors.

Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, the writing section of a TOEFL test (Eduka et al., 2014) was administered to 82 intermediate level students of the institute to ascertain their homogeneity regarding writing proficiency. The acceptability criterion for this research was scores between one standard deviation above and below the mean score. Sixty of the students (38 female and 22 male students) whose scores met the acceptability criteria were accepted as participants of this study. Then, the learners were randomly divided into three 20-member groups, and then, two topics were given to them in order to write essays of at least 250 words. These topics were selected from among sample IELTS writing topics (i.e., the students' agreement and disagreement about development of technology and their personal opinions about doctors' income). Moreover, it should be mentioned that two topics rather than one was used to prevent boredom and encourage the learners to do more writing activities. Hence, the average scores recorded for each learner on two writing tasks was considered.

In other words, the first drafts on both topics were written in one session, and then each group received only one type of three comments (i.e., questions, statements, and imperatives) on both local (form) and global (content) writing features according to the selected rating scale (Paulus, 1999). Also, in the present research the model of separation of form and content feedback, (put forth by Bitchener et al., 2005; McGarrell & Verbeem 2007; Zamel, 1985) was not followed and both types of form and content feedback were provided simultaneously (as suggested by Fathman & Whaley, 1990; Park, 2006; Song, 1998). Moreover, regarding the number of comments on each paper, it was decided in advance to provide only twelve comments (two comments on each point: grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, organization, development, coherence/cohesion) with reference to the recommendation made by Stallard (1974, cited in

Hillocks, 1986) who reported that good writers in his study were considered to be those who could make an average of twelve revisions or more per each written drafts.

Then, the teacher (not the researchers) returned the papers to the learners to revise and rewrite them accordingly. In order to decrease the chance of having incomplete data sets, the learners had enough time (at least two weeks) to receive previous drafts and revise them in time. Next, the researchers and one experienced advanced writing teacher graded the first and final (fourth) drafts carefully according to the selected rubric (Paulus, 1999), and then the gain scores of each learner on both writing topics were recorded in order to be used in analyses and to find the most useful comment type in practice. However, none of the scores were announced to the learners themselves because rating the written papers and assigning a number to each one was not common or even needed for these learners in these specific classes of this institute, and it could affect the results of this study.

In terms of learners' attitudes about these three comment types (questions, statements, and imperatives) and to know which one was liked more by the learners, at the end of the semester, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (designed and used by Beaumont et al., (2008) and Hamouda, (2011)) which was piloted before, was administered. The questionnaire was devised in three similar versions according to the received comment types (i.e., statements, questions, or imperatives); that is, the items of all three versions of the questionnaire were the same for the three groups with the only difference in the comment type (imperative, question, or statement type) they received (see Appendix A). The reliability of the questionnaire in this study was calculated to be 0.662. Finally, the questionnaire was administered to the main participants of this study (i.e., sixty intermediate learners in three groups) and an average score was computed according to the scores of the learners' attitudes of each group. In other words, first the scores of each learner on the responded questionnaire was computed and then an average score was computed and recorded for each group. After that, these three average scores of the questionnaire were compared with each other to find out the most preferred

comment type. Also, with the kind of feedback each group received on the one hand, and with the total effect on the other hand, the researchers tried to find out whether these attitudes matched or mismatched with the effects of different comments in practice.

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question (i.e., investigation of significant difference in the effects of three different types of teachers' written comments in helping learners to improve their writings) and the second one (i.e., investigation of significant differences in attitudes of the learners about three different comment types) two one-way ANOVAs were conducted among average gain scores reported for the first and the last drafts of two writing assignments and also among the average scores of the questionnaire. To answer the third research question (i.e., investigation of the relationship between learners' attitudes and actual effects of comment types on learners' writing) correlations were conducted between the learners' average gain scores from the first to the fourth drafts on both topics and the scores reported for attitudes of the learners.

Results

At first, to check the normality of distribution, a number of statistical analyses were conducted. As a result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic, a non-significant result for writing 1 ($Z = 0.99, p = .28$) and writing 2 ($Z = 1.02, p = .25$) indicated the normality of distribution of scores in both writings. Also, the result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test carried out on the questionnaire data, showed that the scores were normally distributed ($Z = .97, p = .30$). Moreover, the histograms and boxplots were carried out (see Appendices B and C) and showed that there were no outlier and extremes in the scores and the normality of distributions was ascertained.

To answer the first research question, the first and the last (fourth) drafts of each student on two IELTS topics were rated by two raters (an English teacher and the researchers) using the preselected scale (Paulus, 1999). Using Cohen's Kappa Test, the inter-rater reliability of the raters' evaluation of the participants' writing was checked and it was found to be 0.85, indicating that both raters have provided similar computation about learners' writing performance (Landis & Koch, 1977). Despite being similar in rating, the scores reported by two raters were added up and their mean was used in statistical analyses.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of gain scores of the different feedback types for the two writing assignments.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics of Average Gain Scores of Different Feedback Types for both Writing Tasks

comments	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
questions	20	4.56	1.35	.30	3.93	5.19	2.25	7.00
imperatives	20	4.76	2.23	.50	3.72	5.81	1.75	11.75
statements	20	6.41	1.12	.25	5.89	6.93	4.00	8.25
Total	60	5.25	1.81	.23	4.8	5.71	1.75	11.75

The results show that statement feedback type ($M = 6.41$) was more effective than the imperative ($M = 4.76$) and question ($M = 4.56$) types. Then, because the homogeneity of variances for both topics were confirmed ($p = .18$), a one-way analysis of variances was conducted to examine the significance of differences between comments, the results of which are presented below.

TABLE 2
ANOVA Results of Average Gain Scores of Different Feedback Types on both Writing Tasks

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	41.23	2	20.62	7.68	.00
Within Groups	153.08	57	2.69		
Total	194.31	59			

The results show statistically significant differences among the learners' writing performance with regard to the type of provided feedback ($F(2, 57) = 7.68, p = .00$). Then, in order to identify the exact points of differences among the comment types, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted.

TABLE 3
Tukey Test Results of Average Gain Scores of Different Feedback Types on both Writing Tasks

(I) feedback1	(J) feedback1	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
questions	imperatives	-.20	.52	.92	-1.45	1.05
	statements	-1.85*	.52	.00	-3.10	-.60
imperatives	questions	.20	.52	.92	-1.05	1.45
	statements	-1.65*	.52	.01	-2.90	-.40
statements	questions	1.85*	.52	.00	.60	3.10
	imperatives	1.65*	.52	.01	.40	2.90

Note. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The Tukey test conducted on the collected data shows that there were significant differences not only between question and statement categories ($p = .00$), but also between statement and imperative categories ($p = .01$), and statement feedback was better in both pairs. This finding indicates that

participants' writing performance differed with respect to the question and statement, and also, imperative and statement feedback types. So, it seems reasonable to disconfirm the first null hypothesis.

Considering the second research question, the results of the administered questionnaire ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) was calculated. Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics.

TABLE 4
Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Feedback Attitudes

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
questions	20	61.20	15.23	3.41	54.07	68.33	30.00	80.00
imperatives	20	65.75	10.41	2.33	60.88	70.62	44.00	81.00
statements	20	72.30	8.79	1.97	68.19	76.41	59.00	88.00
Total	60	66.42	12.47	1.61	63.19	69.64	30.00	88.00

As the results of the table show, the participants who received statement comments ($M = 72.30$), preferred this comment type more than those who received imperative ($M = 65.75$) and question ($M = 61.20$) categories. Moreover, because the homogeneity of variances was confirmed ($p = .71$), a one-way ANOVA was conducted to see if this difference was significant or not.

TABLE 5
ANOVA Results for Learners' Feedback Attitudes

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	1245.43	2	622.72	4.47	.02
Within Groups	7933.15	57	139.18		
Total	9178.58	59			

The results showed statistically significant differences among students'

feedback attitudes with regard to the type of feedback provided ($F(2, 57) = 4.47$, $p = .02$). A Tukey post hoc test was conducted to identify the exact points of differences among the comment types with regard to the participants' attitudes.

TABLE 6
Tukey Test Results for Learners' Attitudes

(I) feedback1	(J) feedback1	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
questions	imperatives	-4.55	3.73	.45	-13.53	4.43
	statements	-11.10*	3.73	.01	-20.08	-2.12
imperatives	questions	4.55	3.73	.45	-4.43	13.53
	statements	-6.55	3.73	.19	-15.53	2.43
statements	questions	11.10*	3.73	.01	2.12	20.08
	imperatives	6.55	3.73	.19	-2.43	15.53

Note. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Results of Tukey test signify the differences between question and statement feedback types ($p = .01$), with the statement type having the highest mean ($M = 72.30$) and the question type having the lowest mean ($M = 61.20$) (see Table 4.). As a result, the second null hypothesis, which predicted no significant difference among the three provided comment types (questions, statements, and imperatives) regarding the participants' attitudes, was disconfirmed.

Finally, to answer the third research question, correlations were conducted between average gain scores (before comments and after comments) obtained for each of the three groups (i.e., questions, statements, imperatives) on two writing assignments (i.e., Technology Impact and Doctors' Income) and their scores on the administered questionnaires. Hence, in order to find out whether there was any relationship between the participants' attitudes for the comment types and the actual effects of these feedback types on their writing performance, a Pearson correlation coefficient was performed between each group's average gain scores and their attitudes toward the received comments.

Table 7 shows the results of the correlations of both writing assignments regarding the three comment types.

TABLE 7
Relationship Between Participants' Attitudes and Actual Effects of Different Feedback

Feedback Type	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Statement group	.88**	.00
Imperative group	.50*	.03
Question group	.55*	.03

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to Cohen (1998), the result of table 7 indicates that reported correlation for the participants of statement comment type for the writing assignments was a strong, positive, and significant correlation ($r = .88$). Also, the Pearson correlation coefficient that was employed to examine the relationship between the question type of comment and the average gain scores of writing tasks showed that there was a moderate (Cohen, 1998), direct, and positive relationships ($r = .55$) between the participants' writing performance and the question type of comment. Finally, the relationship between the imperative comment type and the average gain scores of writing assignments, too, using the Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was a moderate (Cohen, 1998), direct, and positive relationship ($r = .50$). Therefore, it seems logical to disconfirm the third null hypothesis of this study because it was predicted that no relationship can be found between the learners' attitudes and actual effects of three different feedback types (i.e., questions, statements, and imperatives) in their writing.

Discussion

To answer the first research question, the differences in the impact of three teacher comment types was investigated, and as the results show, statement comment was significantly the most helpful one. There can be different explanations for these findings. The reason can be related to the impact of culture on the usefulness of feedback. In other words, sometimes question comments are not clear enough for the learners and they do not know what to do with the received comment (Ferris, 2003; Sugita, 2006). In addition, because the educational system in Iran is mainly product oriented and score-based, receiving imperative comment, which implies more strongly that something wrong has been done, might discourage and threaten the learners. Therefore, the only option among these three comments which was neither discouraging nor unclear seems to be statement comment type. These results confirm the idea that effectiveness of feedback is very likely to be affected by culture (Hamouda, 2011; Hyland, 1990; Leki, 1991; Myles, 2002; Poverjuc, 2011).

Moreover, participants' responses showed several similarities and differences between the results of this research with studies conducted in other contexts. For instance, Sugita (2006) worked on Japanese intermediate learners and suggested that imperative comment was the best feedback type; but, this statement was supported neither by this study nor by Desrosiers' (2008) study conducted on Japanese advanced level learners. Generally speaking, as the results show, almost all of the participants were able to improve their writings to some extent through receiving selective integrative feedback together with having enough time interval to do their revisions (about two weeks time interval was allocated to submit their next drafts); this is consistent with those of previous studies, which found similar results (Polio et al., 2002; Rahimi, 2009). Another point needed to be mentioned is that although in this study both form and content of each paper were rated separately and then their scores were added up, the effectiveness of form and content feedback was not explored separately because the purpose of this research was to investigate the general improvement in the quality of writing. This was contrary to some other

research in which a comparison of the effectiveness of form versus content feedback has been applied (e.g., Bitchener et al., 2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Delgado, 2007; Ferris, 1995; Lalande, 1982; Lee 1997; Vengadasamy, 2002; Williams & Jasmine, 2003).

Also, regarding the controversy of using selective or comprehensive strategy of feedback giving which was not among the concerns of this research, it should be said that the study worked only on selective feedback in three different forms (i.e., statements, imperatives, questions) and as wider effect, the raters realized that providing the participants with twelve selective feedback suggested by Stallard (1974, cited in Hillocks, 1986) either in question, imperative, or statement form, and leaving other errors to be self-corrected, can be effective, because many of the errors that were not pointed out through feedback were corrected by the students themselves in the next drafts (as said by the two raters). This finding correspond somewhat to the findings of previous studies (Lee, 1997; McGrath et al., 2011; Shi, 2001) which worked on selective strategy for feedback provision and reported that it can be helpful for learners' writing improvement. On the other hand, it was not in line with the statement of those in the literature (Jodaie & Farrokhi, 2012) who believe that uncorrected errors might remain unnoticed by the students.

Considering the second research question that was investigation of any differences in the attitudes of the participants about different comment types (questions, statements, and imperatives), the results partially confirm those of Conrad and Goldstein (1999) conducted on Filipino, Iranian, and Vietnamese university level learners, and Hamouda (2011) conducted in Saudi Arabia. The majority of participants reported that statement feedback can help their writing improvement more than question and imperative feedback. Moreover, question comment type which was expressed as the least preferred one, had also the highest dispersed data among the three, and the statement feedback that was the most preferred one, received the lowest amount of standard deviation. It shows that the scores reported for statement group had higher reliability than those of question and imperative groups, and the participants of statement comment group had a greater consensus on their responses than the participants of the

other two groups. However, the studies of Sugita (2006) conducted on pre-intermediate to intermediate Japanese learners and Desrosiers (2008) conducted on advanced Japanese learners led to other conclusions; in the first research, imperative feedback, and in the second one, question feedback were reported as the most preferred comment types.

The third research question was about investigation of any fitness between the responses obtained from the first and the second research questions, as a result of which a strong and positive correlation was observed between the best and the most preferred comment types, and the correlations obtained for the second and the third comment types were moderate and positive. These results were not particularly surprising because as it is stated in many studies in the literature (e.g., Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ellis, 2009; Guenette, 2007; Hamouda, 2011; Poverjuc, 2011), when the learners prefer a comment type, their engagement in revision process and, as a result, the effectiveness of that comment type and their correlation will increase.

Radecki and Swales (1988) stated that most of the times a mismatch is observed between what the learners receive and what they like to receive. As an outcome of the present research, this statement was rejected because there was a match between what the students preferred to receive and what was most useful for them in reality (both of which were reported to be statement feedback). Also, since, learners' attitudes and comments effectiveness are two interrelated factors (Myles, 2002), creating a match between them, as was observed obviously in the present research, can increase the effectiveness of comment.

Therefore, it seems that learners' attitude is a crucial factor for the effectiveness of comments, and therefore, in order to have advantage for the learners, teachers should not ignore their learners' attitudes. Also, because a strong and positive correlation was found between the best comment type and the most preferred one (both were statement comment type), statement feedback can be considered pedagogically as an ideal outcome which can be provided on writings of Iranian EFL learners.

Conclusion

All in all, these results provided good evidences to conclude that the most useful and preferred comment type for the context of this research was considered to be statement feedback. Furthermore, because there was fitness between the learners' attitudes and the most effective comment type (both of which were found to be statement comment type), the findings of the present research confirmed what Ferris (2003) and Hamouda (2011) claimed, i.e., in order to involve the learners' maximum attention to the feedback, it is essential to know their attitude and to match our comment type with that. Overall, these findings add to a growing body of studies that have investigated the impact of teacher feedback and most of them (e.g., Amrhein & Nassaji, 2010; Ashwell, 2000; Guenette, 2007; Hillocks, 1986; Park, 2006; Pashazadeh & Marefat, 2010; Zhang, 2008) have already found that, on the basis of the outcome of conducted studies, a unified response cannot be proposed for the best comment type and that it is a strongly culture-based issue (e.g., Hamouda, 2011; Leki, 1991). As a conclusion, the teachers are suggested to match themselves and their comment giving practices with their own instructional setting and the learners' needs and attitudes.

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Appendix A

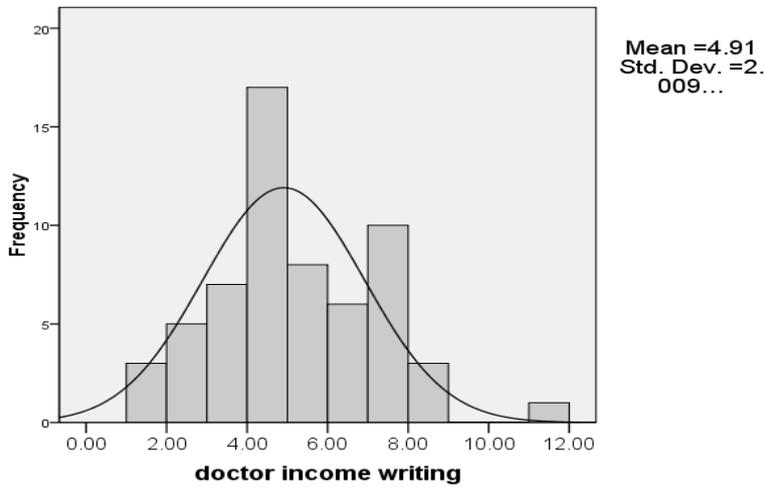
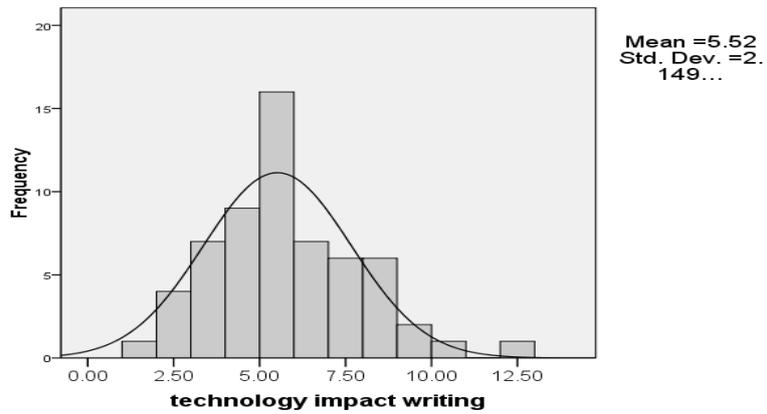
Questionnaire of Learners' Attitudes about Teacher's Comment Types

(1: strongly disagree 2: disagree 3: undecided 4: agree 5: strongly agree)

		1	2	3	4	5
1	I usually paid close attention to feedback.					
2	Feedback did not help me reach my desired level of performance.					
3	I could not understand the teacher's written feedback.					
4	I used received comments in preparing my next assignment.					
5	I found that taking notice of feedback improved my learning.					
6	In my experience, feedback was very encouraging.					
7	Feedback's detail was enough to show me what to do next time.					
8	By feedback, I could understand possible assessment criteria.					
9	It was not clear from feedback what the good performance was.					
10	I liked to read carefully every written comment on my papers.					
11	I could make correction myself on the basis of the received feedback.					
12	The teacher's comments were too negative.					
13	Generally these comments were useful for me.					
14	I think the teacher's comments were too general.					
15	Feedback helped me to know what to avoid in next drafts.					
16	Comments helped me to know how to correct my mistakes.					
17	Given feedback made me try harder to improve my writing.					
18	I could not revise the expressions suggested by the teacher.					
19	Feedback made me feel good about myself.					
20	I feel my writing improved by receiving these comments.					
21	Most of received comments were not useful for me.					
22	I had no problem in rewriting my paper on the basis of feedback.					

Appendix B

Histograms to Check the Normality



Appendix C

Boxplots to Check the Normality

