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# Effectiveness Of Direct Feedback Versus Indirect Feedback In The Learning Of English As A Second Language

Mohd Rashid Bin Mohd Saad<sup>\*</sup>, Sedigheh Abbasnasab Sardareh,

Rosalam Che Me, Abdul Jalil Bin Othman

*Department of Language and Literacy Department, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

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## Abstract

This is a report of a study which evaluated the direct feedback intervention to improve Grade 1 ESL pupils in a Malaysian primary school context. Although direct feedback is well-known in the North American continent, in the Malaysian context this instructional approach is largely unknown. Further some research works in this area suggest that that reading comprehension strategy instruction is not carried out in the majority of reading classrooms. We used a quasi-experimental approach with nonequivalent control group design to collect the causal connections between intervention and outcomes. For the purpose of this study, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare reading performance of Grade 1 Malaysian ESL students with direct feedback and no direct feedback. Unpaired ttest was carried out for direct feedback (N=40, Mean=67.65 and SD=5.45) and control group (N=35, Mean=50.37, SD=2.98) conditions with  $t = 16.69$  ( $df=73$ , and standard error of difference=1.035) and the two-tailed P-value was less than 0.0001 and by conventional criteria suggested a very high practical significance. The effect size for the post-test intervention revealed that really large (Ellis, 2009) Cohen's  $d$  effect size of (3.93) and Hedges'  $g$  of (3.82) for contravening variables were found. In an ESL Malaysian context, the direct feedback to improve Grade 1 ESL pupils may have some advantages in improving the English reading performance. However, the benefits to the students of this study is still to be determined, and further exploration is needed with well-designed research and a universal method of outcome measurements.

**Keywords:** Direct Feedback, Grade 1, Malaysian ESL setting, Reading performance

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author: Mohd Rashid Bin Mohd Saad  
E-mail address: msaadmr@um.edu.my

## 1. Introduction

Under the Malaysian's national education system, children begin their formal education at age seven. They undergo six years of primary education (Years 1 to 6). The six years of primary education aim at bringing about the overall development of students through skills that cover reading, writing and arithmetic as well as inculcating thinking skills and values. In 2008, the MOE began the trial implementation of the new modular and thematic primary school curriculum. The reason for this curriculum and assessment transformation was to ascertain that the schooling system fulfills students' current and future needs by improving learners' acquisition of communication and thinking skills, creativity and innovation.

To achieve this goal, communication skills; students' physical; spiritual; attitudes and values; humanities; and literacy in science and technology have been highlighted in the new curriculum (Abbasnasab Sardareh & Mohd Rashid, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, Abbasnasab Sardareh et.al., 2014). In keeping with the National Philosophy of Education that aims to develop intellectual, spiritual and emotional potentials of the learners, the new KSSR English language curriculum stresses 'critical literacy'. Pupils are expected to question and evaluate texts to develop individual growth and also function as a productive and effective member of society. Thus, the new ESL curriculum is an attempt to provide students with basic language skills appropriate to their level of development so that they can communicate effectively in different contexts, read and comprehend English texts, write with an appropriate language and style, and use appropriate and correct grammatical rules in both writing and speech (KPM, 2010).

KSSR is a standards-based modular curriculum. The Year One English language syllabus emphasizes acquiring basic language skills and these include competency in reading, writing, listening and speaking, and language arts modules. The fifth module which is grammar is only added in Years 3- 6. Themes and topics are used to present the language to make it more meaningful. Three important themes in the new syllabus are "world of stories, world of self, family and friends; and world of knowledge" (KPM, 2010, p. 7). To implement the new English syllabus successfully, the MOE has provided teachers with document standards. The aim is to provide teachers with some practical suggestions of teaching methods. However, teachers themselves are in a better position to make appropriate decisions in planning their lessons (KPM, 2010).

Teachers select a theme and then decide on appropriate speaking and listening, reading and writing activities. A coherent organization should be sustained between speaking and listening, reading and writing skills. Assessment is regarded as an integrated component of the teaching-learning process. To implement formative assessment successfully, teachers should act as facilitators in the classroom, observe students' performance, obtain information and give students feedback to improve their learning. Teachers use continuous formative assessment to gain feedback and monitor students' progress. Awareness of students' strengths and weaknesses helps teachers to plan the next steps in teaching and learning.

Prior to 2011, in Malaysia, students have been assessed mainly through standardized summative tests developed by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate (MES). However, with the popularity of Assessment for Learning (AFL) that was popularized by the Assessment Reform Group (1999), in 2008, School-Based Oral Assessment (SBOA) was experimented on some selected schools by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and it was considered as the first step in the use of formative

assessment in ESL classrooms (Abbasnasab Sardareh & Mohd Rashid, 2013a, 2013b) AFL and its effectiveness in students' learning seem to be of interest to the current educational setting. Researchers and educators acknowledge the favorable role of AfL in students' learning, yet, more consistent research needs to be conducted on the practical development of AfL in schools (Black, 2000) as well as teachers' knowledge and understanding of its implementation (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998ab; Wiliam, 2011). As such, drawing upon Wiliam and Thompson's (2008) framework of aspects of formative assessment this study concerns Year One primary school ESL classes in Malaysia.

## 2. Literature review

Assessment for learning (AfL) is the main assessment methods and in use currently not only in Malaysia but also around the world (Abbasnasab Sardareh & Mohd Rashid, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, Abbasnasab Sardareh et.al., 2014) AFL which is the focus of this study is often described as formative assessment and is aimed at enhancing students' learning as they interact with their teachers and peers (Crooks, 2002). Gipps (1994) uses this term to explain a shift from traditional summative assessment practices that include "checking whether the information had been received" (p. 26) during the teaching and learning processes. As Stiggins (2002) explains, the basic tenet of AfL is that assessment can improve students' learning.

Perhaps, among the first generation definitions of formative assessment refer to "all activities teachers and their students undertake in assessing themselves, to get information that can be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which [both students and teachers ] are engaged "in Black and Wiliam (1998a, p. 2). This definition has been widely used and cited, yet according to Klenowski (2009) "the ways in which the words are interpreted and made manifest in educational policy and practice often reveal misunderstanding of the principles, and distortion of the practices, that the original ideals sought to promote" (p. 263). However, the above mentioned definitions show the most important components of AfL, such as teacher and students' collaboration in classroom discussion and questioning; defining and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success; formative feedback; as well as peer-and-self-assessment technique. These strategies reduce the distance between students' current level and the desired goals and also help students monitor their own learning process (Sadler, 1989). In this study, the aspirations of formative feedback such as direct feedback technique was used but self and peer assessment was not included because of the age-inappropriate samples of the study.

AfL significantly improves learning and instruction. However, the potential of AfL is not fulfilled yet because teachers are not completely familiar with formative assessment and they might only implement some elements of it non-systematically (Bennett, 2011). As Marshall and Drummond (2006) describe, the name of formative assessment might be prevalent but teachers do not conform to the spirit of the AfL. Moreover, many teachers and policy makers regard formative assessment as a tool and describe it as frequently testing students to monitor their progress. Popham (2008) considers formative assessment as a process not simply frequently testing students at the end of each instruction but consistently and periodically.. In this study, one of the spirits was taken to be implemented to the Grade 1 Malaysian ESL pupils.

Teachers should be able to implement effective classroom discussions and questionings (Abbasnasab Sardareh, & Mohd Saad, 2013a,2013b). When students want to express their own

ideas during classroom discussions or answer teachers' questions during the implementation of a lesson, "it is expected that [teachers] will follow-up and provide guidance through probing, allowing students to create their own responses with minimal assistance" (Berk, 2009, p. 265). As Shute (2008) mentions, formative feedback provides students with information to modify and improve their learning and is hypothesized to be the major aim of this study.

According to Stiggins (2008), in an AfL context teachers provide students with continuous formative feedback "which is a necessity in promoting progressive learning" for the pupils (p. 18) and "feedback should serve to clarify, synthesize, expand, modify, raise the level of, or evaluate students' responses" (Cruikshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2009, p. 375). They elaborate that: "The importance of providing feedback is to encourage student-originated responses while correcting or elaborating on their effort. In the case of an incorrect response, it is appropriate to ask the student to provide support for their answer in an effort to guide them towards the correct solution" (p. 377). However, in the Malaysian context few studies (with the exception of Abbasnasab Sardareh & Mohd Rashid, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, Abbasnasab Sardareh et.al., 2014) investigate the effectiveness of providing direct feedback. Especially so, in the reading classes for Grade 1 none has explored or even do an experimental study to find out the effectiveness of providing direct feedback to pupils. This study was carried out to fill that gap and compared the traditional way of teaching reading and the approach that utilized direct feedback as a benchmark to explore reading performance of Grade 1 pupils in Malaysian ESL setting.

Despite issues such as the time it takes to implement formative assessment and undeveloped assessment practices, research evidence from studies conducted in New Zealand, England and the United States have shown that implementing formative assessment is essential for student learning development. Black and Wiliam (1998b) mentioned this aptly, "It is clear that instruction and formative assessment are indivisible" and that "opportunities for pupils to communicate their evolving understanding are built into the planning" of its implementation (p. 143). This statement relates to how teachers should give students feedback to help them monitor their progress towards the learning intentions, and help them achieve those intentions (Wiliam, 2011). Pellegrino (2002) also stated that formative assessment is an integrated part of instruction and helps students get information about the quality of their work, how to improve their work and how to achieve learning goals. In addition, it relates to the notion that instructional strategies are not to be taken lightly for instance when we talk about how to refine instructional strategies. Teaching and assessment are embedded within the instruction and formative assessment occurs during teaching and learning processes (Wiliam, 2011). Black and Wiliam (1998a), in their extensive review on formative assessment, drew together a number of studies on formative assessment but their review was not based on a pre-defined theoretical basis.

Drawing upon Ramaprasad (1983) and Sadler (1989), Wiliam and Thompson (2008) underlined three important strategies that helped Black and William (2006) to develop a more appropriate theoretical framework for formative assessment. These key strategies are as follows:

1. Establishing where the learners are in their learning
2. Establishing where they are going
3. Establishing what needs to be done to get them there (Black & Wiliam, 2012, p. 208).

While teachers are responsible for implementing these three strategies in the classroom, students' role should not be neglected. Both teacher and learners are responsible for learning. It is necessary for teachers to provide a safe learning environment so that students can learn within it (Black & Wiliam, 2012). The first strategy means eliciting evidence of students' learning to see where the learners are in relation to the learning intentions. The second strategy means defining learning intentions to the students and the last strategy intends to provide students with feedback to find the gap and help learners to achieve success.

Wiliam and Thompson (2008) developed their framework of aspects of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009, 2012; Bennett, 2011). Wiliam and Thompson's (2008) framework of aspects of formative assessment clearly defines AfL, identifies its key elements and explain how these elements work together to achieve desired outcomes (Bennett, 2011). According to Bennett (2011), these key strategies direct teaching and learning processes more effectively. For instance, questioning technique helps teachers identify where students are relative to the learning intentions; by establishing learning goals and success criteria students can identify where they are going, and through feedback they can find out how they can achieve success. In their framework, Wiliam and Thompson (2008) explained that formative assessment consists of five main strategies that define its own territory:

1. Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions
3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward
4. Activating students as instructional resources for one another, and
5. Activating students as the owners of their own learning

The first step of the AfL process is establishing learning intentions and success criteria "that is worthy and requiring understanding" (DeMeester & Jones, 2009, p. 5) or the goal of students' learning. A lesson presented to students should have clearly stated learning intentions with specific conditions for performance and criteria for evaluating that performance (Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, & Brown, 2007). Teachers can clarify and share learning intentions and success criteria in different ways. Some teachers clearly describe the learning intentions at the beginning of the lesson, but they might fail to establish activities that will lead to the achievement of the learning intention and cannot discriminate between the learning intentions and those activities. Instruction is more likely to be effective when teachers start from what students already know and design their instruction based on the learning goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2000). Therefore, more time is spent on reading, discussing and writing lesson plans learning goals and defining what teachers expect of students. Wiggins and McTighe (2000) note that, first of all, teachers should clarify the learning intentions and establish success criteria. Only then should they explore activities that will lead to achievement of the learning intentions.

Various methods of clarifying and sharing intentions exist, but it is important to know that each objective should clearly state what knowledge, skills, and accountability measures students should have to achieve the learning intentions. Shavelson, Ruiz-Primo, and Wiley (2005) in their research concluded that "if we could make all our goals explicit to our students and ourselves, we might expect much more of their learning and our teaching" (p. 413). Therefore, it is important to define learning intentions and success criteria so that students better understand what is expected of them. Some researchers believe that to reveal learning goals and to enhance students

understanding of the stated goals, students should be able to engage in some form of self- and peer-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998ab; Bell, 2000; Cassidy, 2007; Dawson, 2005; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Munns & Woodward, 2006; Sadler, 1989). To do so, students should understand learning targets and the focus for their learning.

If the criteria of success is established and students know what is expected of them, then in order to implement formative assessment effectively, teachers should design tasks to elicit evidence of students' learning and their progress towards learning intentions. Heritage (2007, 2010) mentions that there are different ways of collecting evidence of students' learning, yet, decision should fit the purpose and should also be consistent with the learning intentions. Heritage (2007, 2010) categorizes different strategies for collecting evidence into three types: systematic or curriculum embedded, planned and spontaneous or on-the-fly. Systematic or curriculum embedded strategies include ongoing classroom interactions and tasks such as journals and end-of-section questions. In this study, the curriculum-embedded strategy was used to elicit reading performance hence both pre-test and post-test results based on the standardized nationally-developed tests instead of the common commercially-developed tests by other researchers.

During planned assessment teachers plan questions or students' discussions in advance, to elicit evidence of their learning. Spontaneous assessment is unplanned; for example, during classroom discussion, students might ask a question or say something that makes teachers ask more questions. But, what is more important is to establish a trusting environment. Establishing a trusting environment for instructional conversations between teacher and student is fundamental to effective formative assessment. Bell (2000) termed the phrase "interactive formative assessment" as the occasion when a teacher gives feedbacks to students in the form of a class discussion or a question-answer between teacher and student and when the teacher finds out the need to alter instruction.

Mortimer and Scott (2000) investigated the 'flow of discourse' and 'patterns of classroom talk' between teacher and student from a sociocultural perspective. Their analysis of classroom talk showed how discourse assisted students in developing meaningful understanding of complex science concepts when the teacher provided a balance between presenting concepts and exploring ideas. The teacher's role was to guide and direct the conversation and to initiate, respond and provide feedback (Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Encouraging students to formulate questions about conversation topics, Van Zee, Iwasyk, Krose, Simpson, and Wild (2001) found that when a teacher was attentive to student questions, the feedback information could be altered "by creating comfortable discourse environments" (p. 159). Wilen (2004) noted how a social studies classroom discussions consisting of higher-order questions by the teacher and students gave opportunities for using their knowledge and critical thinking to improve their understanding about the task or problem. They termed this pattern of discourse as instructional responsiveness.

### **3. Methodology**

The overall purpose of this study was to examine the effect of implementing direct feedback on struggling ESL readers in Grade 1 reading performance (Hattie, 2009). Further, to understand how direct feedback help struggling ESL readers in Grade 1 to achieve better reading performance a quasi-experimental research design was carried on these multi-ethnic, multi-ability ESL pupils (N=75) . For the purpose of the current study, the main research question was

formulated as: Given that direct feedback was developed, designed, implemented, and monitored by two ESL teachers, can read performance of ESL Grade 1 students improved? In other words, we hypothesized that the intervention chosen has a positive effect on the Grade 1 Malaysian ESL pupils' reading performance.

The formulated research questions were:

1. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of pupils in the experimental group during the direct feedback intervention periods?
2. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group at the end of the study?
3. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group at the end of the study on two measures: reading comprehension questions and short answer questions?

For the purpose of this study, the unit of analysis was the pupils' reading performance based on the implementation of direct feedback of a teacher using simplified English for ESL Malaysian context. Purposive sampling was used in this study based on the expert judgment to select participants that were representative of the population based on the needs of the school, accessibility of teachers and the willingness and eagerness of teachers to participate without force in this study. Because purposive sampling was chosen for this quasi-experimental study, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the other ESL population in Malaysia but adequate for the purpose of acting as a baseline study to describe the effectiveness of the intervention.

Teachers in this study were selected because their willingness to participate and to extend their professional knowledge on what works best at least in the Malaysian ESL primary school context. Teacher A was female, graduated with a basic and Master degrees in ESL from a North America's university, worked both as a primary school teacher and a national ESL expert consultant for government training programs with an ESL teaching experience of 15 years and now continuing her doctoral degree specializing in reading instruction. Teacher B in the control group was female, graduated from a United Kingdom's university and had 20 years ESL teaching experience both in the UK teaching immigrant children and Malaysia and also continuing her doctoral degree specializing in ESL assessment. Both taught at a different school but within the urban district of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The schools basically were populated with low-income and struggling pupils both academically and in other subject matters. The English language national-norm for these schools was below average. There were no disabled students in both experimental and control groups but all students were identified as struggling readers and lacked academic achievements with 35 male pupils and the rest were female and their mean average age was at 7.3 years.

Instruments used for the pre-test results before students were grouped into experimental and control group were based on the nationally-designed quarter term tests as measured based on the two reading measurements: reading short answers and reading comprehension tests, ( 6 months

after these Grade 1 pupils were exposed to the business-as-usual instructional approach) while for the post-test instrument, a nationally-designed 3rd Quarter term test was used scored by 2 independent raters chosen for their national-based examination expertise with percentage exact agreement (PEA) of two testers across all scoring criteria of 93% (range 80%–100%) when scoring these 75 Grade 1 participants.

Materials prepared for the reading intervention purposes were taken from Ogden's Basic English website (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/>) both for the word lists such as words through pictures (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/wordpic.html>) and reading texts. For reading aloud purposes, 'A Basic Phonetic Reader' by A Llyod James was used (<http://ogden.basic-english.org/abpr.html>). Four short Basic English were selected and taught sequentially (Crusoe gives help to Friday [Coleman Liau Index of 4.88 and Flesch Reading Ease of 78.3%], Jerry's New Year [Coleman Liau Index of 4.9 and Flesch Reading Ease of 78.3%], Tom Thumb [Coleman Liau Index of 5.43 and Flesch Reading Ease of 84.11%], and Florizel and Perdita [Coleman Liau Index of 7.14 and Flesch Reading Ease of 61.81%], by both teachers after the stories were run to check grade-level appropriateness and reading ease using online utility reading text analyzer (<http://www.online-utility.org>).

For teachers professional training it was necessary to give full understanding of the protocol for the research data. For Teacher A in the experimental group 6-week training or 3-hour session per week was given in the techniques and the philosophy of AfL behind the direct feedback technique and how best to implement, monitor and evaluate her instructional time. On the other hand, for Teacher B, the same 6-week training were given with the outline based on the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2012) so as to ensure that the traditional approach can be classified according to this framework.

Since research suggests that reading comprehension strategy instruction is not carried out in the majority of reading classrooms (McNamara, 2011, Moje, 2008 and Pressley, 2008), in the intervention group, the experienced teacher was explicitly taught guided strategy instruction for 6 weeks before the intervention was carried out, and this technique has demonstrated to help struggling students to overcome problems they encounter when reading to understand (e.g., Block and Duffy, 2008, Duke et al., 2011 and Fisher and Frey, 2008). Some useful strategies to help struggling readers were used in this study. For instance, Weinstein and Meyer (1986) captured the main strategies of memorization, organization, elaboration, and monitoring. Memorization indicates surface-level processing, while the other three contribute to deeper-level processing (Bråten and Samuelstuen, 2004, Bråten and Strømsø, 2011 and Weinstein et al., 1988). Both surface-level and deep-level processing techniques were used in the study.

During the implementation period (July to September, 2013), both teachers were monitored by the researchers in order to check whether the fidelity of their implementations were correctly carried out. During this 12-week intervention period, Both Teacher A and Teacher B wrote their reflections on the selection of materials, pre-reading preparation, during-reading and post-reading activities for 12 weeks to enable them to reflect on their instructional beliefs and practices (the qualitative data is not discussed in this article). On the 14th week of the experiment, their students (N=75) sat for a standardized test (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2012). Scores were carried out by two experienced ESL researchers. The data of the study were collected and analyzed for



both descriptive statistics and ttest for comparative groups. The discussion on the results and its interpretation with limitations is presented next.

Some of the samples during the study used by Teacher A in the intervention group were below-mentioned:

Before reading: Planning for the reading task

1. Set a purpose or decide the materials to read aloud to students
2. Decide how background knowledge of students helps in the understanding of the text presented
3. Focus on both word-level and whole-understanding of the text

During and after reading: Monitoring comprehension

1. Check for inaccurate guesses by students and attend to correct mistakes
2. Decide what is important to understand
3. Reread and check comprehension
4. Help weaker students while not ignoring proficient readers

After reading: Evaluate comprehension and strategy use

1. Evaluate comprehension by giving homework and discuss the homework in the next class
2. Evaluate overall progress in reading for each student
3. Decide if the strategies used were appropriate and change to suit the needs of the pupils
4. Modify strategies if necessary

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The aim of the study was to find out the comparative differences between the interventional direct feedback for Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils and the no direct feedback group for the effectiveness of their (N=75) reading performance after 3 months intervention period. Specifically, the questions to be answered were:

1. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of pupils in the experimental group during the direct feedback intervention periods?
2. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group at the end of the study?
3. Given the conditions of the reading material chosen, designed, and implemented by teachers to Grade 1 ESL Malaysian pupils, what is the reading performance of the experimental group as compared to the control group at the end of the study on two measures: reading comprehension questions and short answer questions?

The contribution of this study is that the selected reading materials, procedure and the outcomes of the intervention can at least help many Malaysian ESL primary school teachers to focus and direct their energy into developing and focusing more on direct feedback for their Assessment for Learning intervention in the future. The result point to the effectiveness of direct feedback intervention but comes with its limitations as well.

First, it points to the effectiveness of direct feedback as compared to the control group. Before the study took place, the two groups had been into the business-as-usual teaching approach classes taught by 2 experienced ESL female teachers at 2 different schools in the same district with a combination of 35 years of teaching experience. The teaching credibility of these two teachers' need to be mentioned for it shows their competency and well-trained backgrounds both for pre-service and in-service ESL trainings that they went through. In the intervention group, the struggling readers started their reading performance based on the descriptive statistics computed ( $N=40$ ,  $Mean=39.6$  and  $SD=5.01$ ) quite at the same level with the struggling readers from the control group from another school ( $N=35$ ,  $Mean=39.57$ ,  $SD=4.75$ ). Both groups were at the same level of language competency based on their results on nationally-designed quarter term tests as measured based on the two reading measurements: reading short answers and reading comprehension tests. The effect size for both groups using the traditionally unsystematic feedback techniques stood at Cohen's  $d$  effect size ( $d=0.006$ ) which was trivial and showed the ineffectiveness of the technique used by both teachers (<http://www.polyu.edu.hk/mm/effectsizefaqs/calculator/calculator.html>).

After the study took place, the two groups were once again compared on their reading performance. For the purpose of this study, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare reading performance of Grade 1 Malaysian ESL students with direct feedback and no direct feedback. Unpaired ttest was carried out using Graphpad (<http://www.graphpad.com/quickcalcs/ttest2/>) for direct feedback ( $N=40$ ,  $Mean=67.65$  and  $SD=5.45$ ) and control group ( $N=35$ ,  $Mean=50.37$ ,  $SD=2.98$ ) conditions with  $t=16.69$  ( $df=73$ , and standard error of difference= $1.035$ ) and the two-tailed  $P$  value was less than  $0.0001$  and by conventional criteria demonstrating the effectiveness of the reading performance intervention using direct feedback. Also, the mean of the Intervention Group minus Control group equals  $17.28$  and the 95% confidence interval of this difference: From  $15.216818$  to  $19.343182$ . This difference is considered to be extremely statistically significant and has the potential of its application in the teaching approaches to Grade 1 Malaysian ESL pupils. The effect size for the post-test intervention revealed that really large (Ellis, 2009) Cohen's  $d$  effect size of ( $3.93$ ).

Research works in this area suggest that reading comprehension strategy instruction is not carried out in the majority of reading classrooms (McNamara, 2011, Moje, 2008 and Pressley, 2008). This article addresses these issues by examining the effectiveness of business-as-usual reading instructional approaches versus direct feedback teaching approaches to enhance reading achievement of struggling readers. It is evident that the study based on the Cohen's effect size value ( $d=.62$ ) suggested a very high practical significance. The highly positively significant differences between these two groups demonstrate the useful and practical applications to the Malaysian ESL setting to enhance reading performances of Grade 1 pupils. Research also shows that formative feedback is the most important part of the assessment process and affects students' learning achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998a and b, 2006, 2009; Shute, 2008; Wiliam, 2011) and these results synch well with this study. One of the reasons for this effectiveness is that in our study, we did not ask teachers to score students' reading performance before the intervention ended following suggestions by some studies that feedback teachers provide in the form of marks or grades have no significant effect on student learning (Crooks, 1988; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Mory, 2004).

Formative feedback in the form of direct feedback considerably affects students' learning and helps them improve their learning (Hattie & Temperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Shute (2008) mentions that "formative feedback is information communicated to the learner to modify his or her own thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning" (p. 154). In their meta-analysis, Black and Wiliam (1998a) stated that, "feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils" (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p. 143). In our study, the same principles were applied and proved to be effective in the implementation of direct feedback on Grade 1 Malaysian ESL context.

In the Malaysian context, PISA literacy test is used as an international as well as a national benchmark to reading intervention initiatives in schools but so far there has been no appropriate measure as to what is considered effective instruction of reading among school-going populations (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2012) and this study was done to explain the difference between good instruction and better instructional approaches. Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2011) mentioned that, "teachers matter, especially for complex cognitive tasks like reading for understanding" (p. 51). Therefore, it is important to appropriately select and train teachers for any future reading intervention purposes such as done in the procedure of this study to train both teachers in the principles of AfL but to control one teacher to do her business-as-usual approaches but have the same level of AfL's knowledge.

The present findings should be considered in the context of its limitations although the effectiveness of direct feedback proves to be successful in this study. First, the sample of this study shows the magnitude of reading performance but this sample was small to explore the direction of effects to include other contravening variables of the study such as whole-school intervention approach, teaching experience, classroom environment and so forth. We therefore suggest that future replications should include larger sample size to understand the direction of the effect to other Malaysian ESL context and the rest of the world. Second, Grade 1 Malaysian ESL students proved to respond quite well with the direct feedback technique on their reading performance but as a pilot study more data were needed to be collected using stratified sampling method so that each state in Malaysia can be represented by both the teachers and students and wider applications with better protocol can be developed. One thing is certain in this study; the results can be taken as a baseline study for any comparative direct feedback intervention in any context that has similar conditions as in the Malaysian ESL setting.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although teachers were seen as agent of change (e.g., Hattie, 2009 and Mortimore et al., 1988 among others), effective agent for student's reading comprehension achievements (e.g., Bernhardt, 2011 and Duke et al., 2011, among others), the uncertainty remains that "very effective readers actually use a small repertoire of strategies" (p. 407) during their reading processes and this notion has been supported by many researchers as well (e.g., Grossman et al., 2010, Hattie, 2009, McNamara and Magliano, 2009 and Parris and Block, 2008, among others). Therefore, future researchers may explore to have interventional approaches to combine both direct feedback and instructions in their future study. Guided strategy instruction, such as direct instruction, has been demonstrated to have potential to overcome problems struggling readers have to comprehend

reading texts (e.g., Block and Duffy, 2008, Duke et al., 2011 and Fisher and Frey, 2008). To avoid teachers to become ‘strategy junkies’ (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 262), therefore some eclectic and effective strategies that could be more economical in terms of teaching needs to be presented to teachers (Weinstein & Meyer, 1986). Block and Duffy (2008) listed 45 reading strategies such as monitoring, organizing and elaborating with specific strategies such as asking questions, summarizing, and relating what one reads to prior knowledge. Recent research suggests that a more sensible approach would be teaching a small repertoire of strategies in combination (Dole, Nokes, & Drits, 2009, Duke et al., 2011, McNamara and Magliano, 2009, Pressley, 2008) such is the rationale for the chosen intervention of direct instruction and feedback. Further, Block and Duffy (2008) proposed nine strategies “that have been researched and validated to be highly successful since 2000” (p. 22), namely predict; monitor; question; image using; look-backs, rereads, and fix-it strategies; infer; find main ideas, summarize, and draw conclusions; evaluate; and synthesize. This can be a guideline for those teachers who are in need to help their struggling readers to improve reading performance.

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