

Teacher Constructed Corrective Feedback Enhancing Students Writing Skills in EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The present study states in the field of teaching EFL students in the process of writing correct feedback in the classroom, the study was conducted to explore the influence of feedback on the students' writing skill and language abilities in grammar. 30 student participants enrolled in "Advanced Writing" classes were administered to write a short paragraph of their interested topics for 15 weeks they were given separate note books to write essay, letter and a short paragraph of any instant situation and were also asked to write eight essays throughout the semester. At the beginning semester, students were taken pre-test open-ended questionnaire and at end of the semester were taken post-test, both test involves the students' method of writing and its benefits of feedback. The obtained data showed that the students' language abilities significantly improved especially in the grammar and vocabulary. The students also reported their satisfaction in the free-writing method which allowed them to learn more on self-expression and organization of ideas.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered as a complex skill that requires the learners' to learn the syntactic and lexical knowledge of the target language. While writing in second language, learners find it difficult to deliver the accurate form of language and they are not knowing of their errors. The understanding of the distinction between error and mistake is essential in error analysis. Mistakes are the slips of the tongue/pen and the learners who make mistake can identify the mistake and rectify it at any situation. On the other hand errors are systematic; it will occur repeatedly until the learner recognizes the errors and correct them.

The learners use a definite system of language at every stage of his/her development. Written corrective feedback provided by the facilitator enables the learner to notice the gap in their developing L2 systems. Errors committed by the students help the facilitators understand the current proficiency level of the students. When Ellis (1981) mentions about the pedagogical justification of learners' errors, he says, "understanding the nature of errors is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them..." The facilitator should make a distinction between the errors which are the circumstance errors and which reveal his underlying knowledge of the language. Researchers in the field of L2 writing deal with the question of how the written corrective feedback facilitates the learners to become an independent writer.

The objective of the current study focuses on

- To observe the role of errors in the development of second language writing.
- To assess the role of attention in exploring the editing skill of the learner
- To examine whether the unfocused and direct written feedback enhances the learner to write coherently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a controversy among L2 researchers for several years whether written corrective feedback is effective in developing accuracy in students writing. Truscott states that the corrective feedback on second language learners written output in unnecessary, ineffective and counterproductive (Truscott 1996; 2007). Ferris (2002) on the other hand, emphasizes the effective use of error correction in writing instruction. She also mention that the written corrective feedback leads the learners to be conscious of their errors so that they do not commit same type of errors in the next writing tasks. She argues that well-formed research is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of error correction in improving students writing. Hulstijn and Schmidt (1994) explains that in raising the learners awareness of certain linguistic

features, corrective Feedback enables learners to notice the gaps between their own interlanguage output and the target language input (corrective feedback provided by the facilitator). Swain (1995) argues that it is necessary to the facilitators to observe the second language learners productive skills. He further states that learners' output combined with facilitators' feedback promotes the learners notice the linguistic features of the target language and it creates awareness towards the gaps and problems in their inter language

Another significant issue regarding error correction among recent researchers is which type of error correction is effective in developing fluency in writing. Written Corrective feedback on L2 learners writing can take different forms. The recent researchers have focused on the direct and indirect corrective feedback method. The predominant factor which distinguishes these two methods is learners' involvement in the correction process. Direct or clear feedback arises when the facilitator points an error and offers the correct form, while indirect strategies state to situations when the facilitator indicates that an error is made but does not give a correction, thereby leaving the student to diagnose and correct it (Bitchener et al. 2005). In Direct written corrective feedback, facilitator provides correct form, i.e. overpass out a pointless word, phrase or morpheme, put in a missing word or morpheme, and writing the correct form above or near to the erroneous form (Ferris 2006). In indirect corrective feedback the facilitator just marks the errors and asks the learners to edit their errors. Ferris and Roberts (2001) advocate direct written corrective feedback is possibly better than indirect written corrective feedback with writers of low level language proficiency. Moreover indirect written corrective feedback is not helpful to low proficient second language learners, since they lack the linguistic competence to self correct their errors (Ferris, 2004; Hyland, K and Hyland, F 2006).

There has been a debate in error correction methodology whether it should be focused or unfocused. Most of the recent research explores the effects of focused written corrective feedback (Bitchener 2008; Sheen 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). In Focused corrective approach the facilitator targets only specific types of errors in the learners output, for example they focus only the errors in the use of article and leaving the other types of errors uncorrected. The unfocused corrective feedback approach involves correction of all types of errors in the learners writing and does not concentrate on error category. It could be argued that focused error correction is a form of teaching grammar explicitly rather than focus on form. Focused error correction approach makes the learner to be inefficient in writing new situation tasks and the learners failed to transfer their feedback according to the context.

Ferris (2010) suggests that targeting only specific types of errors is not enough in improving accuracy, so the facilitator should correct the students writing in general. Moreover, correcting the use of specific grammatical feature and other errors uncorrected might be confusing the learners and make them to be unmindful of other lexical and syntactic errors.

With these theoretical insights the present study attentions on the role of direct and unfocused the corrective feedback in evolving the learners to write comprehensively.

The corrective feedback is a pedagogical tool and it serves as an input for the learners. According to the Noticing Hypothesis, input is not intake for language learning unless it is observed, that is, consciously registered (Schmidt, 1990; 2001). The Noticing hypothesis states that subliminal SLA is impossible and it can be happened through conscious attention that input can be converted into intake. Mackey (2006) investigates that whether it shows a relationship between noticing of L2 forms in the corrective feedback and the learners output. The results of his study reveal that learners who showed extra noticing developed more than those who showed less noticing. The idea of noticing combines the cognitive notions of attention and consciousness. While associating the idea of noticing with attention, corrective feedback allows the learners to identify the gap between what he/she writes and what actually he/she is required to write in a given context. Conscious attention is prerequisite for interlanguage development.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure and Participants

The participants of this study are 30 B A program "Advanced Writing" students of King Saud University, Riyadh. A Schedule of 45 classes with 50 minutes duration was conducted to improve the writing skill of the students. The students are expected to be regular to the course, as it is believed that the systematic monitoring strengthens their writing. A free writing task of writing a paragraph on a given topic was assigned to the students. A Separate notebook was given to the students to write their everyday task and they were monitored. In the first 10 minutes classes, students were motivated to write in English on their own. Further, Students were asked to write the paragraph in a focused and meaningful way. The remaining time was assigned to provide written corrective feedback to students on their writing and the students were engaged in interaction with the facilitator regarding the feedback. Finally the facilitator asked the students to describe their own perspective of writing for the given topic to explore the possibilities of various perspectives for the same topic. This stimulates the learner to think on different contexts and enable them to write realistic and meaningful written communication. The students were asked to go through the corrections consciously before starting to write on the next topic. Written corrective feedback provided to the learners in this study belongs to the category of unfocused, direct and explicit (Ferris 2002). The corrected version of the sentence structure was mentioned near the erroneous form.

Error Gaps Noticed in the Diagnostic Test

The performance in the diagnostic test displayed errors in sentence formation. Sentences demonstrated both grammatical and lexical errors. A number of fragments of disjointed sentences were noticed in his writings. The error types noted are listed below:

1. Organization in writing
2. Verb tense errors
3. Missing/unnecessary words and wrong choice of words
4. Wrong spellings

Student’s Draft

Raining time we (Farmer) have a lot of problems in our mind and body because of our fear and tension of flood in our agricultural field. To avoid those things we do it some meditations, yoga, exercise for our body and mind. Before raining we know about our crops and plan means we avoid our tension.

Written Corrective Feedback

During raining time, we have a lot of problems in our mind and body because of our fear and tension of flood in to our agricultural field. To avoid those things we *need to* do it some meditations, yoga, exercise for our body and mind. Before raining, *if* we know about our *low area filed and all* crops *related to it* and studied means *then* we *can* avoid our tension.

Table 1. Mean score of performance students writing skills

Writing test/task	Mean score of performance students writing skills		Mean score difference between the two
	Pre-study	Post-study (Feedback)	
Paragraph	10.33%	19.67%	9.34%
Grammar	09.6%	20.4%	10.8%

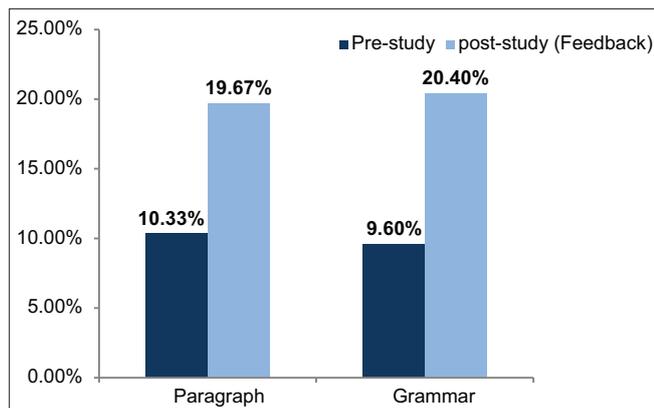


Figure 1. Pre-study and Post-Study of paragraph and grammar writing

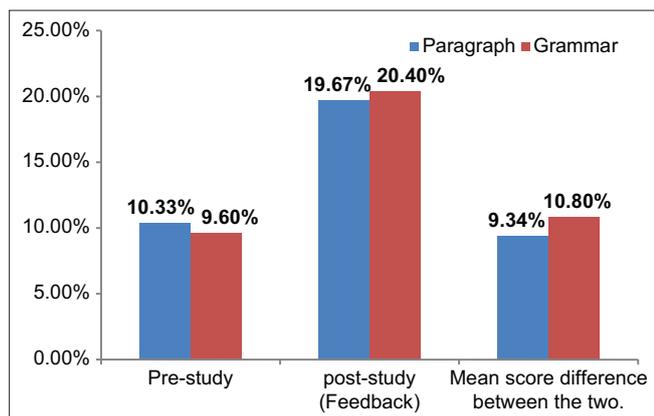


Figure 2. Mean Score difference between in the two tests

Pre-study and post-study questionnaire was administered to evaluate their improvement on writing the content comprehensively (Table 1).

The mean score of post study students is 19.67% in Paragraph writing skill, 20.4% in Grammar. The mean score of Pre- study students is 10.33 % in Paragraph writing skill, 09.6% in Grammar (Figure 1). The score difference between pre- study and post study students is 9.34% in Paragraph, 10.8% Grammar (Figure 2). The empirical evidence shows that the post study students in all the tasks of writing have got comparatively higher score than the pre- study students. So, the hypothesis proves “the feedback has direct impact on the achievement of second language skills”.

DISCUSSION

The students were monitored and written corrective feedback was given individually on their written data every day. In the first class the students are asked to write a paragraph about 250 words on the given topic. The observation of learners’ errors and the written corrective feedback on their first draft enabled the facilitator to understand the current proficiency level of the learners and it makes the learners to notice their own interlanguage system. The understandings of learners’ errors allow the facilitator to identify, what needs to be learned (focus of the instruction) and what is already stored in the learners’ system (already learned knowledge). It is observed from the errors committed by the learners on the first task that most of the students did not have focus on their writing and they found it difficult to write coherently. There is no logical connection in their sentences and they had problem in their language usage. In the subsequent classes, most of them got a focus on their writing and the errors reduced considerably. The learners had consciously gone through the corrections and they started to interact with the facilitator regarding the errors they committed. In the seventh class, they started to evaluate the writing of their peers and they were also able to identify and locate their own errors. At this stage they showed more interest in finding errors in their peers’ content and they also tried to provide correct version. In the eleventh session, they were able to write coherently and the discourse and linguistic errors started to reduce considerably. They effectively applied the feedback on their following writing tasks, even when the thematic content and context were different.

The current study suggests the facilitator to write the corrective feedback without categorizing the kind of errors. This study requires students to review their writing after they have received feedback on their text. Revision is a cognitively challenging task for L2 learners, it implicates task definition, evaluation, strategy selection and alteration of text in the writing plan, and also the ability of students to analyse and value the feedback they receive on their writing (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). This methodology demands conscious work on the part of learner to point their errors and correct them in future writing. Moreover the facilitator needs to be conscious of the individual factors that help the learners to revise the content after receiving the written corrective feedback. Conrad and Goldstein (1999) originate individual

variation in case study of participants' readiness and ability to review their writing after getting a facilitator's written commentary, noting that... in order to understand how students revise in reply to written feedback, we must look not only at the nature of the comments themselves, but also at individual factors affecting the students. (p. 147).

CONCLUSION

The finding displays that the corrective feedback can be effective in improving fluency in students writing skill. Direct corrective feedback showed to have a significant long term effect on writing and it leads to more exact revisions also more accurate presentation on a new writing task (Beuningen et al. 2008). Even though the learners committed different types of errors in their initial classes, the error patterns changed over the course of the study. They started to write on their own and to associate the outside experience in their writing. Moreover, they can edit their own content and monitor their writing according to the contexts that the students' language abilities significantly improved especially in the grammar and vocabulary. The study concludes that corrective feedback facilitates the student skill to identify the existence of errors and it enables the learner to express their thoughts in a comprehensible way.

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