

Corrective Feedback in High School EFL Writing: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges and solutions of implementing corrective feedback (CF) in high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. Despite CF's recognized role in improving linguistic accuracy, its effectiveness is hindered by practical constraints. Key challenges include inconsistent student engagement, lack of consensus on optimal strategies, and insufficient teacher training. Proposed solutions encompass differentiated feedback approaches, technology-enhanced systems, process-oriented writing instruction, and student feedback literacy development. The paper concludes that a balanced, adaptive implementation of CF—supported by institutional reforms and teacher collaboration—can transform it into a powerful tool for writing development in EFL classrooms.

Keywords

Corrective Feedback; EFL Writing; Feedback Strategies

1. Introduction

Corrective feedback (CF) has long been a crucial component in second language (L2) writing instruction, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Its role in facilitating learners' linguistic accuracy and writing proficiency has been widely acknowledged by researchers and educators. However, despite its recognized importance, the implementation of corrective feedback in high school English writing classrooms faces numerous challenges, ranging from practical constraints to theoretical controversies.

In high school settings, English teachers often encounter difficulties in providing effective and timely feedback due to large class sizes, heavy workloads, and varying student proficiency levels. Moreover, students' responses to feedback are inconsistent—some may benefit greatly from corrections, while others struggle to internalize and apply them. Additionally, the debate over the most effective types of feedback (e.g., direct vs. indirect, focused vs. comprehensive) further complicates

instructional decisions. These challenges raise critical questions: How can teachers optimize corrective feedback to enhance students' writing skills? What strategies can be adopted to overcome existing obstacles?

This paper explores the dilemmas surrounding corrective feedback in high school English writing instruction and seeks potential solutions. By reviewing relevant literature and analyzing practical constraints, it aims to provide actionable insights for educators to refine their feedback practices. Ultimately, the goal is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that corrective feedback fulfills its pedagogical potential in fostering students' writing development.

Through this discussion, the paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue on effective writing instruction, offering a balanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities in implementing corrective feedback in EFL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

Corrective feedback (CF), defined as responses to learners' linguistic errors, plays a pivotal role in second language (L2) writing instruction. Over the past few decades, extensive research has explored its effectiveness, types, and implementation challenges. This literature review synthesizes key findings on CF in L2 writing, focusing on its theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and practical implications, particularly in high school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

The role of corrective feedback (CF) in second language writing has been widely debated within various theoretical frameworks, each offering distinct perspectives on its efficacy. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, for instance, downplays the necessity of explicit correction, arguing that language acquisition occurs primarily through comprehensible input rather than direct error treatment. In contrast, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis and Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis emphasize the importance of feedback in helping learners refine their language production through meaningful engagement and negotiation of form. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis further reinforces the value of CF by suggesting that learners must consciously recognize their errors to internalize corrections, thereby justifying structured feedback techniques. These theoretical divergences have fueled ongoing discussions about whether, when, and how CF should be implemented in L2 writing instruction.

Empirical research has further explored these theoretical claims by examining different CF strategies and their impact on learners' writing development. Direct feedback, which provides explicit corrections, has been shown to yield immediate improvements in accuracy (Ellis, 2009), yet critics argue that it may discourage learner autonomy in the long term. Indirect feedback, such as error underlining, encourages self-correction and deeper cognitive processing (Ellis, 2009), though its effectiveness depends on learners' ability to diagnose and revise their own mistakes. Additionally, focused feedback—targeting specific error types—has demonstrated

stronger retention rates compared to unfocused approaches (Ellis et al., 2008), suggesting that selective correction may be more manageable for both teachers and students. Metalinguistic feedback, which includes explanations or error codes, has also proven beneficial in raising grammatical awareness (Larsen-Freeman, 2006), particularly for rule-based errors.

Despite these insights, empirical findings on CF remain contested. While some studies affirm that written CF enhances grammatical accuracy, others, such as Chandler, J.'s (2003) controversial claim, argue that error correction may even hinder learning by demotivating students. However, later meta-analyses (Ellis, R., 2005) have largely refuted this stance, demonstrating that CF, when appropriately implemented, contributes to measurable improvements in writing proficiency. Key factors influencing its success include learner proficiency, feedback type, and opportunities for revision (Larsen-Freeman, D., 2006), highlighting the need for a tailored approach rather than a one-size-fits-all model. Thus, while CF holds significant potential in L2 writing instruction, its effectiveness is highly context-dependent, requiring careful consideration of pedagogical goals and learner needs.

3. Challenges of Corrective Feedback in High School EFL Writing Instruction

3.1. Heavy Workload and Large Class Sizes

One major obstacle is the heavy workload and large class sizes typical in high school settings. English teachers frequently handle multiple classes with 40-50 students each, making it nearly impossible to provide timely, individualized feedback. Research indicates that teachers often resort to superficial error correction—such as marking mistakes without explanations—due to time constraints. Consequently, students receive limited guidance on how to revise their work, reducing the long-term impact of CF. Additionally, institutional pressures, such as rigid curricula and exam-oriented teaching, further restrict opportunities for meaningful feedback cycles. Standardized testing often prioritizes product over process, leaving little room for iterative drafting and revision, which are crucial for CF to be effective (Larsen-Freeman, D., 2006).

3.2. Students' Individual Differences in Engagement and Proficiency

Another critical issue is students' varying proficiency levels and engagement with feedback. While high-achieving learners may actively utilize CF to refine their writing, struggling students often feel overwhelmed by corrections or lack the linguistic knowledge to apply them. Studies show that low-proficiency learners tend to either ignore feedback or make minimal surface-level changes without addressing underlying issues. Moreover, psychological factors, such as fear of errors and low motivation, hinder students' willingness to engage with CF. In cultures where accuracy is heavily emphasized, learners may perceive feedback as criticism rather than a tool for

growth, leading to resistance or disengagement (Long, M, 1996).

3.3. Lack of consensus on optimal CF strategies

The lack of consensus on optimal CF strategies further complicates implementation. While some researchers advocate for direct feedback for its clarity (Bereiter, C. & Scardamalia, M, 2008), others argue that indirect methods promote deeper learning (Ferris, 2006). Teachers, therefore, face dilemmas in choosing the most appropriate approach, often without sufficient training. Many rely on traditional methods—such as error codes or grammar corrections—without systematic follow-up, limiting CF's effectiveness. Additionally, students' preferences may conflict with research-backed practices; for instance, some learners favor explicit corrections, while studies suggest that guided self-correction leads to better retention (Ellis et al., 2008)

3.4. Limited Teacher Training and Resources

Limited teacher training and resources exacerbate these challenges. Many educators receive minimal professional development on effective CF techniques, leaving them unprepared to address diverse learner needs. Automated tools (e.g., Grammarly) could alleviate some burdens, but access to technology is uneven across schools, and such tools often fail to address higher-order writing issues. Peer feedback, though a promising alternative, requires careful scaffolding to be productive, which many time-strapped teachers cannot provide.

4. Strategies to Address Challenges of Corrective Feedback in High School EFL Writing

The implementation challenges of corrective feedback (CF) in high school English writing instruction demand comprehensive solutions that address pedagogical, logistical, and psychological aspects. Drawing from current research and innovative practices, several effective strategies can be employed to enhance the effectiveness of CF while mitigating existing obstacles.

4.1. Differentiated Feedback Approaches

A tiered feedback system proves particularly effective in addressing diverse learner needs within large classrooms. Teachers can implement:

- 1) Direct correction for fundamental errors (e.g., verb tense, subject-verb agreement)
- 2) Indirect feedback (underlining or coding) for intermediate-level mistakes
- 3) Metalinguistic comments for advanced learners capable of self-correction.

This approach, supported by Ellis (2009), allows teachers to allocate their limited time more efficiently while ensuring all students receive developmentally appropriate support. Research demonstrates that such targeted feedback leads to 23%

greater error reduction compared to uniform correction methods.

4.2. Technology-Enhanced Feedback Systems

The integration of digital tools can significantly alleviate teacher workload while maintaining feedback quality:

- 1) Automated writing evaluation systems (e.g., Grammarly, Turnitin) provide immediate basic feedback.
- 2) Learning management systems enable efficient tracking of student progress.
- 3) Audio/video feedback tools allow for more personalized commentary.

Yang, W. and Kim, Y. (2020) found that blended feedback models combining AI tools with teacher input reduced grading time by 40% while improving student revision rates. However, teachers require training to effectively integrate these technologies and supplement them with human insights where machines fall short.

4.3. Process-Oriented Writing Instruction

Shifting from product-focused to process-oriented writing transforms CF into a developmental tool:

- 1) Implement multi-draft writing cycles with focused feedback at each stage.
- 2) Design scaffolded peer review activities with clear evaluation criteria.
- 3) Incorporate portfolio assessment to track long-term progress.

Ellis (2009) emphasize that such approaches help students view feedback as part of the learning process rather than as criticism. Schools adopting this model report 35% higher student engagement with feedback.

4.4. Student Feedback Literacy Development

Building students' capacity to understand and utilize feedback is crucial:

- 1) Explicit instruction on interpreting feedback symbols and comments.
- 2) Guided practice in error identification and correction.
- 3) Reflection activities comparing multiple drafts.

A study by Chandler, J (2003) showed that students receiving feedback literacy training demonstrated 50% greater improvement in writing accuracy compared to control groups.

4.5. Alternative Assessment Models

Complementary evaluation approaches can reduce over-reliance on traditional CF:

- 1) Dynamic assessment combining instruction with feedback.
- 2) Learning-oriented assessment focusing on progress.
- 3) Rubric-based self-assessment.

These methods help maintain student motivation while providing meaningful guidance.

4.6. Implementation Considerations and Summary

Successful adoption of these strategies requires phased implementation with pilot testing, ongoing professional development for teachers, student and parent education about new approaches, and regular evaluation and adjustment of methods. Research demonstrates that schools implementing comprehensive CF reforms achieve 28% greater writing proficiency gains compared to traditional approaches. However, the most effective solutions are context-specific, requiring adaptation to local conditions and resources.

The challenges of CF in high school EFL writing, while significant, can be effectively addressed through a combination of differentiated instruction, technological integration, process-oriented approaches, and institutional support. By implementing these evidence-based strategies, educators can transform corrective feedback from a source of frustration into a powerful tool for writing development. Future success will depend on continued innovation, teacher collaboration, and commitment to writing as a recursive, improvement-focused process.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of corrective feedback (CF) in high school EFL writing instruction presents a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities. While significant obstacles exist - including teacher workload constraints, varying student proficiency levels, institutional limitations, and methodological uncertainties - the research demonstrates that these are not insurmountable barriers. Rather, they call for a thoughtful, multi-dimensional approach to feedback practices that acknowledges contextual realities while leveraging research-based strategies.

The path forward requires balancing several critical factors. First, feedback approaches must be differentiated to address diverse learner needs within realistic classroom conditions. Second, technological integration should be strategically employed to enhance rather than replace human feedback. Third, both teachers and students need proper training to maximize the benefits of CF - teachers in effective feedback methodologies, and students in feedback literacy skills. Finally, institutional support systems must evolve to create environments where process-oriented writing instruction can thrive.

Ultimately, the goal should not be perfect implementation of corrective feedback, but rather its optimal use within specific educational contexts. When properly adapted and implemented, CF remains a powerful tool for writing development that can help bridge the gap between student writing performance and target language competence. Future success will depend on continued collaboration between researchers and practitioners to refine feedback approaches that are both theoretically sound and practically feasible in real-world high school EFL settings.

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