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# Research on Teachers' Focused Corrective Feedback in Learners' Composition

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## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the role and impact of teachers' focused corrective feedback in learners' writing. Focused corrective feedback, as an essential teaching strategy, plays a crucial role in language learning. By analyzing teachers' feedback methods in writing instruction, particularly when it comes to pinpointing and rectifying language errors, this paper comprehensively discusses how such feedback can effectively assist students in improving their writing skills. It also elaborates on how it helps enhance language proficiency and identifies the best practices for implementing it across different educational contexts. Through an in-depth literature review, this paper further examines the distinct advantages, potential challenges, and specific conditions under which focused corrective feedback is most applicable, providing valuable insights for educators.

## Keywords

Focused Corrective Feedback; Writing; Language Learning; Education

## 1. Introduction

Writing is a core skill in language learning that not only reflects a learner's language ability but also their cognitive and creative skills. Second language writing is often considered one of the most challenging tasks in language learning, as it requires not only linguistic accuracy but also logical structure and fluency (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009). However, learners face a variety of language errors in writing, particularly with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. These errors can affect the quality of the writing and even impact learners' confidence.

To help students improve their writing abilities, teacher feedback plays a vital role. Research shows that timely and effective teacher feedback can significantly enhance students' motivation, help them better understand language rules, and improve their writing skills (Ellis, 2009). There are many types of feedback strategies, and each has a different impact on students. Focused corrective feedback (FCF), as a more targeted form of feedback, has gained increasing attention from educators.

Unlike traditional comprehensive feedback, focused corrective feedback aims to help students concentrate on solving specific language errors rather than correcting all errors at once (Liu & Brown, 2015).

Focused corrective feedback not only improves students' linguistic accuracy in writing but also enhances their ability to self-correct and boosts their motivation to learn. However, how to flexibly apply this feedback in different teaching contexts remains an important issue in current education. This paper aims to explore the role of focused corrective feedback in writing instruction, analyze its potential in promoting the improvement of students' writing abilities, and discuss effective implementation strategies (Shintani, 2015).

## 2. Literature Review

Focused Corrective Feedback (FCF), as a refined branch of corrective feedback, advocates for systematic correction of specific language features. Its theoretical value and practical effects have become a research hotspot in recent years. Ellis (2009) was the first to clearly distinguish FCF from Unfocused Corrective Feedback (Unfocused CF), pointing out that the former can effectively improve the acquisition efficiency of target structures through concentrated intervention, especially in the field of morphosyntax.

DeKeyser (2020) proposed that FCF promotes automated processing through the "cognitive narrowing" mechanism. His experiment showed that an 8 - week FCF intervention on the Spanish past tense improved learners' accuracy. Sheen's (2010) quasi - experimental study indicated that in English article teaching, the focused metalinguistic feedback group had a faster reduction in error rates compared to the comprehensive feedback group. Regarding the comparison between FCF and comprehensive feedback, Shintani (2015) found that in Japanese classifier teaching, the FCF group had a better immediate effect, but the comprehensive feedback group had stronger transfer ability six months later. In the digital context, Ene and Link (2022) confirmed that AI - driven FCF can increase the correction rate of writing errors, but it may inhibit creative expression. In classroom practice, Bitchener and Knoch (2010) established a "three - dimensional focus model".

Current research focuses on dynamic adjustments. For example, Nassaji (2021) proposed an adaptive FCF framework that adjusts the feedback focus through real - time diagnosis. In the future, it is necessary to strengthen the exploration of the long - term impact of FCF on the development of tacit knowledge and establish a multimodal feedback system.

## 3. Types and Theoretical Foundations of Teacher Feedback

In foreign language teaching, teacher feedback is one of the key means for facilitating language acquisition. Feedback not only helps students identify and correct errors but also provides guidance for improvement. There are various types

of teacher feedback, each with its own role and effect in teaching (Truscott, 1996). To understand the role of teacher feedback and maximize its effectiveness, it is necessary to first classify the different types of teacher feedback and understand the relevant theoretical support (Lee, 2004).

### 3.1. Types of Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback can be classified based on the form, content, and implementation method. Common types of teacher feedback include direct feedback, indirect feedback, positive feedback, and negative feedback.

Direct Feedback: Direct feedback is when the teacher directly provides the correct answer or solution after identifying an error in the student's writing. For example, if a student misspells a word, the teacher will directly correct it. The advantage of direct feedback is its immediacy and clarity, which allows students to quickly correct errors. However, it may reduce the opportunity for students to think critically and can lead to dependency on the teacher's corrections (Sheen, 2007).

Indirect Feedback: Unlike direct feedback, indirect feedback requires students to identify and correct the errors themselves under the teacher's guidance. The teacher typically does not provide the correct answer directly but marks or signals the error (e.g., by using a "?" or circling the incorrect word) (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Indirect feedback promotes self-monitoring and reflection skills in students and aids long-term memory formation, as students must understand the underlying language rules when correcting their errors (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Positive Feedback: Positive feedback refers to teachers affirming and encouraging the correct parts of students' writing. For example, a teacher might praise a student for using appropriate vocabulary or fluent sentence structures, which enhances the student's confidence. Positive feedback not only increases students' motivation but also stimulates further interest in learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Negative Feedback: Negative feedback typically involves correcting errors in students' writing, pointing out language problems, and suggesting improvements. Negative feedback encourages students to make changes by drawing attention to their mistakes. However, unlike positive feedback, negative feedback can cause stress, so teachers need to regulate the intensity and frequency of negative feedback to avoid negative emotions in students.

### 3.2. Theoretical Foundations of Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback is not just a practical tool in the classroom; it is underpinned by several key educational theories. These theories provide the theoretical foundation for the implementation of feedback.

Input Hypothesis: Proposed by linguist Krashen, the Input Hypothesis emphasizes that learners need to be exposed to language input slightly above their current level of proficiency to facilitate language acquisition. Teacher feedback, as a form of input,

plays an important role in learners' language development. Through feedback, teachers provide learners with corrective input that helps them understand the correct language forms by contrasting them with their errors.

Interaction Hypothesis: This theory suggests that language learning occurs through interaction with others, and feedback is a crucial part of this interaction. In the writing process, feedback from teachers enhances learners' understanding and application of language rules, helping them to better comprehend and use the target language in communication (Krashen, 1982).

Sociocultural Theory: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that learning occurs in a social context, and teacher feedback is an important tool in the learning process. Through feedback, students receive support in a sociocultural context, which gradually improves their writing abilities. Teacher feedback guides students in understanding the social and cultural context of language use.

Metacognition Theory: This theory focuses on learners' monitoring and regulation of their own learning process. In writing, teacher feedback helps students recognize their errors and encourages them to reflect on their writing process. Feedback not only helps correct mistakes but also teaches students how to better control their writing process, enhancing their metacognitive skills in language learning.

### 3.3. The Role and Challenges of Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback plays a crucial role in language learning, both in the early and advanced stages. However, the challenge lies in how teachers can flexibly choose feedback methods based on students' needs, writing content, and error types. Research shows that focused corrective feedback is particularly effective when correcting specific language errors (e.g., grammar, vocabulary) compared to comprehensive feedback.

Moreover, the effectiveness of teacher feedback is influenced by various factors, such as the timeliness of feedback, its level of personalization, and students' receptiveness to feedback. Therefore, in practice, teachers need to carefully choose the timing and form of feedback based on students' specific situations to ensure that feedback maximizes the improvement of students' writing abilities.

## 4. The Role of Focused Corrective Feedback in Writing

Focused Corrective Feedback (FCF) is a teaching strategy that focuses on correcting specific types of errors in writing, especially in second language acquisition and writing instruction. Compared to traditional comprehensive feedback, focused corrective feedback emphasizes selective and targeted correction of specific language errors (such as grammar, spelling, vocabulary, syntax) in students' writing. It helps students focus on particular errors, promoting in-depth learning in these areas. The following sections explore the role of focused corrective feedback in writing.

### 4.1. Improving Writing Quality and Language Accuracy

The most direct role of focused corrective feedback is helping students correct language errors in their writing, thus improving writing quality. Through targeted feedback, students can identify specific areas where they make mistakes (e.g., improper use of tenses, inaccurate grammar structures, spelling errors) and focus on improving them. Unlike comprehensive corrections, focused feedback avoids information overload and provides students with specific and clear corrections, leading to better linguistic accuracy. Over time, as students continually correct similar errors with the teacher's guidance, they can automate language rules in writing, improving both accuracy and fluency.

### 4.2. Enhancing Students' Language Awareness and Self-Correction Abilities

Focused corrective feedback not only serves as a tool for correcting errors but also helps students enhance their language awareness. By focusing on specific types of errors, students gradually recognize their weaknesses and learn how to avoid recurring mistakes. In the feedback process, teachers not only point out errors but often guide students to reflect on why the error occurred, helping them improve based on an understanding of language rules. This development of self-monitoring and correction abilities helps students reduce errors in future writing and self-correct more independently.

Simultaneously, focused feedback promotes students' deeper understanding of the target language. By repeatedly correcting a specific type of error, students develop a profound memory of that language rule. This memory is not just about memorizing the correct form but also understanding the deeper structure behind the language rule. For example, in correcting a grammatical mistake, teachers might explain why the past tense is necessary in a particular context, helping students grasp the essence of grammar rules (Swain, 1985).

### 4.3. Boosting Students' Motivation and Writing Confidence

Focused corrective feedback contributes to increasing students' motivation and confidence in writing. When students begin to correct specific types of errors with the teacher's help, they perceive progress in their language skills. This positive feedback motivates them to keep improving and actively engage in writing practice. Moreover, focused feedback prevents students from feeling overwhelmed by a large number of errors. By focusing on one or two specific issues, students can see noticeable improvement in a short period, boosting their writing confidence. Studies have shown a strong positive correlation between students' confidence and their writing performance (Sommers, 1982). Thus, focused corrective feedback indirectly promotes the improvement of students' writing skills.

### 4.4. Effectively Enhancing Language Output in Writing

Focused corrective feedback not only helps students identify and correct errors but also enhances their language output. The feedback process helps students pinpoint their language blind spots and allows them to express their thoughts more clearly and effectively in writing. By reflecting on and applying the feedback, students gradually practice and improve their language expression, enhancing the fluency and accuracy of their writing. For instance, when providing feedback, the teacher may not only point out grammatical errors but also offer corrected examples, encouraging students to use the correct structure in practice. This type of feedback can effectively foster the development of students' language output skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

### 4.5. Promoting Active Engagement and Independent Learning

Unlike traditional comprehensive feedback, focused corrective feedback emphasizes students' active participation. Teachers guide students to think independently and solve problems using indirect feedback or hints. By locating errors and correcting them on their own, students deepen their understanding of language rules and develop self-correction and independent learning skills. Students who receive regular focused corrective feedback cultivate the habit of actively searching for errors and reflecting on their writing process, gradually becoming more independent and self-directed in their language learning.

### 4.6. Increasing the Targeted and Practical Nature of Feedback

Another advantage of focused corrective feedback is its targeted and practical nature. Compared to comprehensive feedback, focused feedback addresses only a specific type of error, making it more precise and effective. In teaching, teachers can adjust the focus of feedback according to students' writing level and common error types. For example, at the beginner level, teachers may concentrate on basic grammar and spelling mistakes, while at more advanced levels, the focus might shift to discourse structure and coherence issues. This tiered and targeted feedback ensures that students receive the most effective help at each stage of their learning process.

## 5. Implementation Methods and Strategies for Focused Corrective Feedback

To ensure the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback, teachers need to flexibly use various implementation strategies, including the following:

### 5.1. Timing and Frequency of Feedback

Timely feedback helps students correct errors before they become ingrained. Teachers can choose from immediate feedback, delayed feedback, or periodic

feedback based on the writing tasks to maximize effectiveness.

### 5.2. Forms of Feedback

Teachers can combine direct and indirect feedback to improve students' self-correction abilities. Direct feedback provides clear corrective suggestions, while indirect feedback encourages students to discover and correct errors on their own.

### 5.3. Personalized Feedback Strategies

Teachers should tailor feedback strategies to the students' writing level and common errors. For beginners, feedback should focus on basic grammar and spelling mistakes, while for advanced learners, feedback should address issues such as discourse structure and content coherence.

### 5.4. Encouraging Independent Learning through Feedback

Teachers should encourage students to actively reflect on feedback, correct mistakes on their own, and promote peer feedback interactions, which helps enhance students' independent learning skills and critical thinking abilities.

## 6. Advantages and Challenges of Focused Corrective Feedback

Focused corrective feedback has some advantages.

First, it effectively improves students' writing proficiency and language skills.

Second, it helps students clearly identify their learning goals and reduces the recurrence of errors.

Finally, it increases students' confidence and motivation in language learning.

However, focused corrective feedback also face some challenges

First, teachers may spend significant time and effort providing personalized feedback, which is particularly challenging in large classes.

Second, some students may have low receptivity to feedback and may resist it, affecting the feedback's effectiveness.

Finally, the quality of teacher feedback can vary, with a lack of standardized methods.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, focused corrective feedback, as an effective teaching tool, plays a significant role in foreign language writing instruction. By selectively correcting students' language errors in writing, teachers help improve linguistic accuracy, enhance self-correction abilities, and motivate students. Focused corrective feedback not only helps students overcome language obstacles but also fosters language awareness and independent learning skills, leading to an overall improvement in writing proficiency (Ferris, 2002).

However, to ensure the maximum effectiveness of focused corrective feedback,

teachers need to flexibly select the timing, forms, and strategies of feedback based on students' actual situations. Personalized feedback and reasonable feedback interactions can help students better understand and apply language rules, thereby improving their writing abilities. Future research could further explore the effectiveness of focused corrective feedback in different teaching contexts to provide more practical guidance for writing instruction (Lyster & Saito, 2010).

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