

The Effect of Written Corrective Feedback on Writing Accuracy in Senior High School

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Abstract

The effectiveness of Corrective Feedback on the development of second language proficiency has been of great interest to second language researchers. This study reviews the nearly two decades in which scholars at home and abroad have explored the effects of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) on English writing accuracy. The results of a large number of studies show that (1) Written Corrective Feedback has a positive effect on writing accuracy, and this effect has a certain degree of durability; (2) the effect of feedback is affected by factors such as the types of feedback, the sources of feedback, individual differences of learners, and language forms. A few studies hold the opposite view. Based on this, this paper will continue to explore how to ensure that Written Corrective Feedback has a lasting positive effect.

Keywords

Written Corrective Feedback; writing accuracy; English writing; types of feedback

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

Feedback is a crucial aspect of Process Approach for writing. Corrective feedback, on the other hand, is an important tool in second language teaching, which can assist teachers in monitoring the process of learners' writing processing and thus promote the improvement of learners' writing ability. Therefore, in the past two decades, Corrective Feedback has received extensive attention from second language researchers and educators, and both its theoretical and empirical studies have achieved fruitful results. Written Corrective Feedback provides written feedback for the errors produced in the learners' writing texts, aiming at helping learners to find and correct the errors, to acquire declarative and procedural knowledge of writing. Thus, they can gradually develop from the teacher's corrective feedback to the self-correcting feedback so as to realize the continuous development of second language acquisition (Miao and Yao, 2023).

However, there is still disagreement in the current research on the effect of Written

Corrective Feedback. The findings of the vast majority of scholars suggest that Written Corrective Feedback has a positive effect on learners' writing accuracy, but the durability of the effect may also be affected by factors such as the types of feedback, feedback strategies, sources of feedback, individual differences of learners, and language form. Based on this, this paper will explore how to ensure that Written Corrective Feedback has a lasting positive effect on learners' writing accuracy by reviewing and organizing the results of previous theoretical and experimental studies on Written Corrective Feedback at a relatively theoretical and abstract level.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the effects of Written Corrective Feedback on second language acquisition, especially writing accuracy, by reviewing previous studies. It further explores the effects of individual differences of learners, types of feedback, language forms and other factors on the effectiveness of written feedback. At the same time, this study will put forward some feasible suggestions from a theoretical perspective, taking into account the results of previous studies, in order to ensure as much as possible that Written Corrective Feedback has a lasting positive effect on learners' writing accuracy.

The significance of this study will mainly be elaborated from the theoretical perspectives to enrich the research on the effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback. Furthermore, more insights will be provided in terms of methodology that is different from former conventional quasi-experimental research, which expands the boundary of research and throws light on further related studies and teachers' teaching of writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Key Concepts Defined

2.1.1 Definition of Written Corrective Feedback

Different researchers have defined Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) in different ways. Generally speaking, there are two main categories of definitions. First, from the perspective of second language acquisition, WCF promotes information processing skills in second language acquisition. For example, Hyland and Hyland (2019) defined feedback as the teachers' aim to facilitate learners' better output. Lee (2020), on the other hand, argued that feedback can provide information on how to correct errors in students' writing, thus improving students' writing ability. Xu Jinfen and Wang Yajie (2021) held the view that WCF refers to giving responses and evaluations to learners' written output in second language. In addition, other researchers define WCF as a type of feedback that helps students improve their accuracy. For example, Keh (1990) argued that WCF refers to the information provided to the writer for revising the text to make it easier for readers to understand. Chen and Liu

(2021) focused on the role of WCF in making students aware of the gap between the target language and their output.

With the advancement of related research and the continued development of pedagogical theories, researchers have also defined Written Corrective Feedback in terms of socio-cultural interactions. This refers to the fact that WCF is learner-centered and promotes learners' writing performance and writing accuracy in an interactive process that takes into account individual differences.

2.1.2 Types of Written Corrective Feedback

Generally speaking, Written Corrective Feedback can be categorized as two types due to the different criteria. Firstly, direct WCF, indirect WCF and metalinguistic WCF are the types of WCF differ in feedback strategies (Ellis, 2009). Besides, in terms of the scope of feedback, WCF can be classified into focused WCF and unfocused WCF.

Specifically speaking, direct WCF means that teachers should locate and correct errors for learners directly, while indirect WCF refers to locate errors for learners to help them elicit their correction (Lee, 2013). Moreover, metalinguistic WCF can provide explicit and elaborate explanations to grammatical errors (Ellis, 2009).

In terms of the feedback scope, focused WCF means correcting on one specific or a limited number of errors that are preselected. Besides, unfocused WCF refers to correct as many errors as possible in written draft. Thus, WCF may provide more assistance for students in classroom.

2.2 The Causes of Different Findings in WCF

A general overview of the literature related to WCF reveals that researchers dispute the research question of whether WCF has a facilitating effect on second language learning and second language writing accuracy. Most of the research findings proved the positive effects of WCF, while a few of them concluded that the positive effects were not significant or lasting. Therefore, the reason for this result can be broadly inferred that there are differences in the experimental variables selected by different researchers when conducting experimental interventions. These differences have some degree of influence on the final results of the study, which mainly include the type of feedback, the source of feedback, the scope of feedback, the individual differences of learners, the form of language, and the research environment. In addition, the final research results are also affected by the experimental period and the duration of the experiment.

2.3 Related Studies at Home and Abroad

The overall effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback has yielded substantial results both theoretically and empirically.

2.3.1 Theoretical Studies

At the theoretical level, the use of WCF in writing instruction is supported by four main theoretical aspects, including interaction hypothesis, sociocultural theory, an ecological perspective of learning, and process writing theory.

In terms of interaction hypothesis, it highlights the role of teacher-student interaction in second language acquisition. It pays attention to stress the significance of two-way communication, which is more effective than one-way transmission (Long, 1985). Bitchener and Storch (2016) argued that Written Corrective Feedback can activate the basic processes of second language acquisition and increase learners' level of attention to and perception of grammatical differences between their native language and the target language. Thus, it can enable learners to adapt to the target language context and store new information for further retrieval. In the sociocultural theory perspective, Zarifi (2017) confirmed the positive effect on feedback, but it should align with learners' existing level of proficiency. Besides, Dobao (2012) held the view that WCF should be seen as a form of scaffolding assistance that learners' collaborative processing of teachers' written feedback can facilitate the development of the level of second language acquisition and ensure the improvement of writing accuracy. In the ecological perspective of learning, it emphasizes the impact of the environment or context on WCF. That is to say, the effect of feedback is the result of combined factors in the context (Pinner & Sampson, 2020), so increasing number of researchers advocate that research can adopt an ecological perspective (e.g., Bruton, 2009).

In China, Hou Lijuan et al. (2022) sorted out the paths and core themes of corrective feedback research and found that the hot topics in the field of corrective feedback research included WCF, recasting, second language writing, computer as a mediator feedback, and teacher feedback. Xu Qian (2021) argued that teachers should place communicative logic at the center of the grading process of writing, and introduce dialogic critique writing evaluation in the feedback process. Han Ye and Xu Yueting (2020) explored the emotional experience and emotional regulation mechanism of second language writing learning under the influence of written corrective feedback from the perspective of positive psychology, enriching the depth and breadth of WCF research.

2.3.2 Empirical Studies

At the empirical level, this paper mainly focuses on the relationship between WCF and writing accuracy. The results of this study include two aspects. The first one is that the researchers believe that WCF has a positive effect on L2 learners' writing accuracy; the second one holds the opposite view that WCF does not contribute to L2 learners' writing accuracy.

On the one hand, some researchers, such as Lalande (1982) held the view that indirect WCF can help learners process and intake the feedback information deeply and promote long-term second language acquisition (Bitchner & Knoch, 2008). By using

an error-coding feedback technique, Storch (2018) found that although WCF may slightly exceed the learner's current level of cognition, it still has a facilitating effect on improving grammatical accuracy in second language writing. Xiao Pingfei and Liu Xinting (2021) pointed out that both direct focused WCF and direct unfocused WCF help students effectively acquire English prepositions in writing. Zeng Dongmei and Shao JinYE (2017) examined the role of three different forms of written feedback on the learning of explicit and implicit knowledge of English general past tense rule forms, and the results showed that all three types of written feedback can promote the learning of explicit knowledge of the target structure.

On the other hand, there are some inevitably skeptical voices. By analyzing the error correction rate of written error correction feedback, Plonsky (2012) found that there was no significant difference between the WCF of the experimental group and the control group in different writing contexts, and thus concluded that WCF had no facilitating effect. Besides, Mao and Crosthwaite (2019) showed through empirical research that WCF did not have significant effect for promoting writing accuracy.

In conclusion, the final differences in the experimental results were caused by the different factors considered and variables controlled in different experiments. In subsequent related experiments, the effects of feedback scope, feedback timing and feedback sources of WCF should also be considered to further enrich the results of empirical research.

3. Problem Solutions

It can be seen from the above analysis that some researchers believe that the facilitating effect of WCF on writing accuracy is not significant or lasting. Researchers can optimize and breakthrough the subsequent experiments in the following four aspects in order to idealize the experimental results and provide feasible suggestions for actual second language teaching.

First, when conducting WCF-related research, researchers should consider the effects of multiple factors on the experimental results as much as possible, such as the individual differences of the participants, including the existing language level, level of motivation, level of education, age, gender, and so on. Multiple factors can be set as independent variables of the experiment if the experimental conditions allow. For example, DeKeyser (1993) proved through his study that participants with good previous grades, high language level, and low classroom anxiety are more likely to benefit from WCF. Caras (2019) argued that the educational level of the participants not only affects the degree of comprehension of linguistic form and content of second language writing, but also affects the developmental process of writing cognition and processing. The types of feedback also has an impact on the experimental results. Kang and Han (2015) argued that indirect feedback is more effective than direct feedback from a long-term perspective. Moreover, indirect feedback can better lead learners to deeper writing engagement and feedback processing which help

learners internalize grammatical forms and linguistic knowledge.

At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure sufficient experimental period, experimental length, and sample size as much as possible. For example, before the experiment, it is essential to make sufficient preparations to determine the significance of the study, the purpose of the study and the research questions. Then, according to the expected experimental results, determine the research object, sampling method, research design and so on. Sufficient time also needs to be set aside for data organization and analysis after the experiment. Besides, in order to make the results of the study more generalizable, a sufficiently large sample size should be ensured as much as possible to avoid errors.

In addition, pre-tests, post-tests and delayed post-tests of the experiment should be conducted as much as possible. Pre-tests can test participants' writing accuracy before receiving the experimental intervention, and post-tests can test the immediate change in writing accuracy after receiving the experimental intervention, i.e., under the influence of the WCF. Delayed post-tests, on the other hand, can test whether the effects of the experimental intervention will have a lasting impact. The researcher should analyze the results of multiple tests to explore the reasons for the corresponding findings, in order to identify research gaps and innovations to help subsequent researchers.

Finally, it is also possible to combine quantitative and qualitative research. For example, in the experiment, both questionnaires can be used to collect data and semi-structured interviews can be used to provide more complete information and data. The information from the semi-structured interviews can supplement the data from the questionnaires and help the researcher understand the subjects' true feelings about whether WCF promotes writing accuracy.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, according to the relevant domestic and international academic literature collated and analyzed, it is clear that WCF needs to be improved in terms of research object, research period, feedback strategy, feedback timing, feedback source, and language form. In order to ensure that WCF has a sustained positive effect on second language acquisition, especially on writing accuracy, future research can also make breakthroughs in the following aspects: (1) expanding the research object, taking full account of the participants' language proficiency and writing proficiency; (2) improving learners' feedback literacy from the perspectives of learning commitment, interpersonal relationships, and contextual interactions to improve corrective feedback practices in second language teaching and learning (Hou et al, 2022); (3) continuing to explore the influence of multifaceted factors on the effect of WCF; and (4) ensuring sufficient experimental cycles and experimental processes. Students' perceptions or attitudes toward the WCF can also be explored through qualitative means, such as interviews and audible thinking, to provide strong sup-

port for the data of the quantitative study.

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