The Attitude of Chinese Undergraduate Students with Low English Proficiency towards Written Corrective Feedback

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the attitudes of Chinese undergraduate students with limited English proficiency towards teacher's metalinguistic, indirect, and direct written corrective feedback (WCF). Participants were 50 Chinese second-year undergraduate students with a relatively low English proficiency level from a provincial-level university. A written questionnaire was used to collect information on (1) participants' views on WCF and (2) the types of WCF that they feel are the most beneficial for their L2 writing. The questionnaire was composed of several closed-ended items including Likert-scale forms and multiple-choice questions. As a result, this study revealed that (1) participants had a favorable attitude towards teacher's WCF and (2) direct mistake correction, particularly direct feedback with the metalinguistic remark, was their preferred method.

Keywords: *Written corrective feedback, Direct written corrective feedback, Indirect corrective feedback, Metalinguistic written corrective feedback*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is considered an indispensable part of the second language (L2) education to equip language instructors with the capability of addressing students' mistakes. In this case, the majority of the daily tasks for educators include correcting errors and remarking on students' writing projects [1]; therefore, the written corrective feedback (WCF) in L2 writing studies has become a point of contention [4]. Although there are other subtypes of WCF that are worth mentioning, the emphasis of this study was on metalinguistic, indirect, and direct WCF [7]. To illustrate, direct WCF encourages teachers to locate the errors and provide the corresponding correct form [1]. Indirect WCF refers to merely emphasizing the presence of an error inside a certain text [6]. Metalinguistic WCF is the statement demonstrating the substance of mistakes such as 'wrong sentence construction' and this usage is frequently accompanied with either indirect or direct WCF [7].

Previous research has provided a penetrating insight into the way undergraduate students perceive teachers' WCF in L2 writing; however, students' attitudes seem not to be thoroughly investigated when it comes to undergraduate students whose English writing proficiency remains at a relatively low level [5]. Furthermore, less research probes into which kinds of WCF would exert the most significant effect on enhancing the writing skills of undergraduate students with low English proficiency [9][14]. It should be acknowledged that low proficiency learners' challenges with L2 writing may be attributable to their insufficient linguistic competence rather than a lack of composing abilities [2] [3]. Also, in order for instructors to deliver outstanding and appropriate feedback, it is vitally essential to be comprehensively aware of students' perspectives about teachers' WCF as well as their nuanced interpretation of why they hold these views.

As a result, the purpose of this study was to investigate: (1) the perspectives of undergraduate students with low English proficiency on teachers' WCF; and (2) the types of WCF that students find most beneficial. The following are the research questions that will be addressed:

1. How do Chinese second-year undergraduate students with a limited level of English proficiency feel about teachers' WCF?

2. Which type of teachers' WCF do these students believe would be most favorable and desirable in strengthening their English writing skills?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

50 second-year undergraduate students ranging in age from 20 to 22 took part in this study, including 22 males and 28 females. They were chosen from a provincial-level university in the north-eastern part of China, all of whom have participated in a 2020 IELTS exam with scores reaching between 5 and 5.5. Participants have acquired English for at least seven years because of years of mandatory English-language classes starting from junior high school. However, in terms of linguistic correctness, they can merely produce essays with limited vocabulary, illogical structures, and simplistic linguistic patterns rather than the one sufficient in grammatical structures and pragmatic connotations.

2.2. Data Collection

A printed questionnaire (see Appendix) was employed containing closed-ended items in a five-Likert scale and multiple-choice questions. This was designed to obtain data on (1) participants' opinions regarding teachers' WCF and (2) the type(s) of WCF that students believe are the most useful.

2.3. Data Analysis

Participants were required to provide their self-perceived opinions as well as score their preference for WCF and the effectiveness of each type of WCF on a scale of 1-5, with 1 indicating that the participant considered the item to be the least favourable and 5 indicating the most favourable one. The survey responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet before being imported into SPSS 26.0 for statistical analysis.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Research Question 1

As shown in Table 1, participants regarded teachers' comments as a critical component of their L2 learning, with 'comments on content/idea mistakes' being the most popular type of remark, followed by 'comments on organizational faults.' However, the least desirable written feedback among participants tended to be 'comments on grammatical faults'. Therefore, students anticipated that their teacher can not only enrich their grammatical structures but also pay attention to their content development.

3.2. Research Question 2

Table 2 demonstrated that the combination of direct WCF and metalinguistic comment was considered the most effective type, followed by direct WCF and indirect WCF respectively.

The study revealed that the L2 learners upheld a normally positive attitude towards teacher's WCF in writing classes, which was similar to the research findings of Alharbi [1]. Also, Ferris' [8] assertion about the multidisciplinary nature of WCF research can be supported by participants' interest in rectifying their content inappropriateness. According to Ferris [8], the research methodologies used by L2 writing scholars and second language acquisition (SLA) researchers differed from those used by WCF researchers. Generally speaking, SLA research highlights the supportive function of WFC on the SLA process, whereas L2 writing research focuses on whether WCF improves the quality of learners' L2 writing in general.

4. CONCLUSION

This study used WeChat to conduct a survey of 50 low-proficiency second-year undergraduate students in order to investigate their attitudes towards teacher's WCF in a Chinese university context, as well as the most beneficial types of WCF from L2 learners' perspectives. The quantitative data of the surveys revealed that participants possessed a generally positive perception towards teacher's WCF, especially the combined correcting methods of direct feedback and metalinguistic remark. Students' reliance on teacher's WCF and their desire to receive timely and accurate corrections indicated that they were not only accustomed to the teacher-centred teaching mode but also that they were concerned about their grades. This is mainly because their writing assignments were graded using a four-category rubric including vocabulary, content, sentence complexity, and grammatical control, which was in accordance with the content of teacher's WCF.

5. IMPLICATIONS

The findings might have some implications for the implementation of teacher's WCF in China where English language teaching places an excessive emphasis on form and precision [9]. Despite the fact that many students are dissatisfied with the over-emphasis on grammar, they still consider it an indispensable part of SLA as it may be beneficial for them to pass proficiency examinations [13]. In this case, language teachers should adjust their WCF strategies to avoid students' grammatical fatigue [10].

Table 1. Participants' preference for WCF

N	Type of comment
1	Comments on organizational errors. (e.g., sentence order and paragraph structure)
2	Comments on grammatical errors. (e.g., word order, sentence structure)
3	Comments on content/idea errors. (e.g., comments on opinions)
4	Comments on punctuation errors. (e.g., !)
5	Comments on spelling errors. (e.g., word is spelled wrong)
6	Comments on vocabulary errors. (e.g., wrong choice of a word)

Table 2. Effectiveness of each type of WCF

N	Type of WCF
1	Indirect with study suggestions
2	Indiret
3	Direct with metalinguistic comment
4	Direct
5	Indirect with metalinguistic comment
6	Content-only

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APPENDIX

We are directing a questionnaire on Chinese undergraduate learners ʹattitudes toward teacher written corrective feedback (WCF), and the type of WCF they find the most helpful. We would deeply value your help in completing this survey.

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

IELTS overall score: _____

1. What is your attitude toward your instructor(s) ʹ correcting your mistakes in your English writings? Put a (✓) beside the number that describes your preference.

1= least favorable; 2= slightly favorable; 3= neutral; 4= very favorable; 5= most favorable

N	Type of comment	Degree of fondness				
1	Comments on organizational errors. (e.g., sentence order and paragraph structure)	1	2	3	4	5
2	Comments on grammatical errors. (e.g., word order, sentence structure)	1	2	3	4	5
3	Comments on content/idea errors. (e.g., comments on opinions)	1	2	3	4	5
4	Comments on punctuation errors. (e.g., !)	1	2	3	4	5
5	Comments on spelling errors. (e.g., word is spelled wrong)	1	2	3	4	5
6	Comments on vocabulary errors. (e.g., wrong choice of a word)	1	2	3	4	5

2. The sentences below all have the same mistake and your teacher has offered diverse types of WCF for each. Put a (✓) beside the number that best describes its effectiveness.

1= least helpful; 2= slightly helpful; 3= somewhat helpful; 4= very helpful; 5= most helpful

N	Type of WCF	Example	Degree of effectiveness				
1	Indirect with study suggestions	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy. (Check out Unit 2 in the textbook.)	1	2	3	4	5

2	Indiret	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Direct with metalinguistic comment	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy. (Should be "felt". Wrong tense.)	1	2	3	4	5
4	Direct	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy. (Felt)	1	2	3	4	5
5	Indirect with metalinguistic comment	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy. (Wrong tense)	1	2	3	4	5
6	Content-only	When I saw her, I <u>feel</u> happy. (Good to hear that.)	1	2	3	4	5