

The Impact of Dynamic Written Corrective Feedback on the Accuracy of English Passive Voice Usage in Foreign Language Narrative Writing

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Abstract

The present study aimed to assess the effectiveness of dynamic written corrective feedback (WCF) in helping students to write better narrative essays. In fact, this study investigated the effect of dynamic WCF on writing abilities such as accuracy, fluency and complexity. Fifty-four students from intermediate level from two classes in Iranian Academic center of Education, Culture, and Research (ACECR)-Guilan Branch were selected for the study. The subjects were being prepared for the IELTS exam. They were assigned to two treatment groups, first an experimental group that received dynamic WCF, and second a control group that did not receive dynamic WCF approach but they were taught based on traditional approach. Each group was given eight forty-minute sessions of treatment time. The subjects were tested before treatment, and also after the treatment. In order to answer the research questions, independent t-tests were run and it indicated that dynamic WCF affected students` performance on writing accuracy and grammar instruction, fluency and complexity more.

Key Words: dynamic written corrective feedback; accuracy; fluency; complexity

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Introduction

Writing in English in the context of EFL has been considered a difficult task for EFL learners to master because the learners barely have an opportunity to write in English (Alsamadani, 2010). Therefore, producing a piece of English writing without any errors is a challenging task for them. There are a great number of studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and Error Analysis (EA) that reveal that EFL students' written work contains several types of errors (Huang, 2006; Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sermsook et al., 2017; Zafar, 2016; Zheng & Park, 2013). Among those errors, grammatical ones can cause thoughtful difficulties for EFL students since the grammatical rules of English and those of their native language are relatively diverse (Nonkukhetkhong, K., 2013). These grammatical errors lessen the efficiency of students' writing and may result in written miscommunication. A great number of researchers accepted the effective role of Corrective Feedback (CF) and also dissimilar types of Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) in the use of language features. With regard to the importance of writing accuracy, fluency and complexity in language learning, this quasi-experimental study can be a step to investigate the effect of dynamic WCF on improving Iranian EFL learners' performance on writing accuracy, fluency and complexity in their narrative writing task.

Literature Review

In an effort to provide ESL teachers with guidance and assistance for the best methods to teach L2 writing, many studies over the past few decades have observed the effects of error correction or written corrective feedback and its succeeding effects on the field of language learning. For instance, some researchers such as Truscott (2007) believed that WCF is a 'clear and dramatic failure'. Ferris (1999) disputed this claim, insisting that it was not possible to dismiss correction in general as it depended on the quality of the correction – in other words, if the correction was well-defined and constant it would work. Nevertheless, a growing body of evidence recommends that WCF can improve writing accuracy in limited contexts.

Sheen (2007) examined the effects of written corrections on intermediate ESL learners' use of English 'articles' in narratives and compared direct CF alone and direct CF in combination with metalinguistic CF. Overall, the results of this study revealed that direct CF in combination with metalinguistic CF was more efficient than direct CF. Bitchener (2008) examined and compared three kinds of direct corrective feedback: an integration of direct feedback and written and oral metalinguistic explanation; direct feedback and written metalinguistic explanation; and direct feedback only. It was realized that the performance of students who received corrective feedback in the immediate post-test

was better than those in the control group who received no corrective feedback in the use of the referential definite 'the' and referential indefinite 'a'. Result of this study revealed positive influences of written corrective feedback on specific linguistic features in students' writing.

Ellis et al., (2008) examined and compared the impacts of focused and unfocused WCF on the accuracy of university students in Japan who used the English indefinite and definite articles to denote anaphoric reference in written narratives. The unfocused group received correction of 'article' errors alongside corrections of other errors while the focused group received correction of just 'article' errors on three written narratives. The CF was similarly efficient for the focused and unfocused groups. This study revealed that written CF is efficient, at least where English 'articles' are concerned, and thus strengthens the case for teachers providing written CF.

All the above-mentioned and so many others lead us to make a conclusion and put an end to all our indecisiveness and uncertainty. Therefore, this work is an effort to contribute to this line of research.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were fifty-four students in Academic Centre for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR) – Guilan Branch. They were preparing themselves for IELTS test. Their ages range between

twenty four to twenty nine years. The participants were divided randomly into two classes. Therefore, the researcher used one class as experimental and the other class as control group. The experimental group was made up of 30 students and the control group included 24 students.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

Q(1): Will the dynamic WCF produce greater linguistic accuracy on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional instructional method?

Q(2): Will the dynamic WCF produce equivalent levels of fluency on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional approach?

Q(3): Will the dynamic WCF produce greater levels of complexity on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional approach?

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

H0 (1): Dynamic WCF will not produce greater linguistic accuracy on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional instructional method

H0(2): Dynamic WCF will not produce equivalent levels of fluency on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional approach.

H0(3): Dynamic WCF will not produce greater levels of complexity on L2 learners' use of 'passive voice' structures when compared to the traditional approach.

Research Instruments

Proficiency Tests

A sample of the *Nelson English Language Test* (section 200 A), adapted from Fowler and Coe (1976) was used to determine the learners' level of general English language proficiency and ensure the homogeneity of the participants. The other instrument utilized in the present study was the multiple choice grammar test administered to the students in both control and experimental groups to make sure that subjects were not familiar with 'passive voice' statements.

Target Structure

Passive voice was chosen as the target structure because of three reasons: The first reason was to address Storch's (2010) 'ecological validity' issue because it was part and parcel of the participants' curriculum and their classroom context. Secondly, as part of the participants' learning outcome, the passive voice was expected to be learned and utilized by the students in their TOEFL writing preparing course. Third, and following Storch (2010) argument against CF's narrow scope, a less researched (Algarawi, 2010) target structure was selected.

Writing Tests

The writing test was administered at the beginning and the end of the study to find out whether the students have improved the quality of their argumentative writing with regard to the newly learned grammatical structure (passive voice) from the pre- to post-test or not. In the writing tasks the students had been given obligatory occasions to generate passive voice structures.

Research Procedure

Fifty-four non-English major students in English language department of Academic Centre for Education, Culture, and Research (ACECR) - Guilan Branch had been selected for this study. Their level as intermediate had already been determined with a sample of the *Nelson English Language Test* and they were divided randomly into two classes by ACECR. Therefore, the researcher used one class as experimental and the other class as control group. Two groups were pre-tested using a narrative essay topic given obligatory occasions to generate passive voice structures. During the course students in two groups received writing materials and they were taught by the same teacher. In fact, students who participated in this study received lessons on other skill areas as well as grammar during the course of this study. The experimental group received dynamic WCF as the researcher

marked them for linguistic accuracy, fluency and complexity, using a specified set of error symbols put under or above the place where the error occurred. The students were asked to identify the types of errors based on the error symbols given by the researcher and to fix the problems by themselves while the control group worked based on traditional way of learning and practicing writing skill. Finally, at the end of the course participants of two groups sat for a narrative writing task with obligatory occasions to generate passive voice as post-test. Their performances were evaluated and the means obtained were compared to those obtained from pre-test.

Research Design

This study is a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control type in which we investigated the cause-effect relationship between adapting the dynamic WCF and writing performance. Two groups at intermediate level of language proficiency were pre-tested using a narrative essay topic given obligatory occasions to generate passive voice structures. Then, the experimental group was taught passive voice structures receiving dynamic WCF, while the control group worked with traditional way of learning and practicing writing skill. After eight weeks, the two groups wrote on the writing post-test,

which was the same test as the pre-test. In fact, this study involves an exploratory design with quantitative data collection and analysis in which the impacts of the two independent variables, dynamic WCF and traditional writing approach, on the writing scores (dependent variable) were measured. In this experimental study, the control variable was the students' intermediate language proficiency level. For quantitative data, the scores from the experimental and control groups (dependent variable) were used to find out whether the students improved their narrative writing with regard to the newly learned grammatical structure (passive voice). After the data collection, and scoring we used an independent t-test in order to determine if the means of two groups were significantly different from one another.

Analysis

To make sure that the learners' scores in writing pre-test and post-test were reliable estimate of their ability and to explore the consistency of the scores, the inter-rater reliability of the scores was assessed through Spearman-Brown through SPSS (.77 for pre-test; .92 for post-test). The learners' writing accuracy scores were measured using two different kinds of measure: holistic scoring and the percentage of correct usage of target structure. In accordance with Wolfe-

Quintero et al. (1998) in order to assess writing fluency; total number of structural units written in 20 minutes was measured and in order to measure complexity; total number of dependent clauses written in 20 minutes per total

clauses was calculated. Group means and standard deviations were then calculated for each group on pre-test and post-test occasions. Tests of statistical significance were carried out by means of independent t-test.

Results

Initially to make sure participants were homogenized, the Nelson proficiency test was administered. The results of descriptive statistics are given in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Nelson proficiency test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	30	33.60	34.00	33.6553	.13763
Control	24	31.50	33.59	33.279	.65898

The first research question investigated the effect of dynamic WCF on writing accuracy. A t-test was conducted for experimental and control groups before the treatment to compare the means of two groups. As illustrated in Table 2, the mean scores of pre-tests in the experimental and control groups were 11.86 and

11.77 respectively. The Standard Deviations of the experiment group was 0.75 and that of control group was 0.85. As table 3 demonstrates there is not any significant difference in the mean scores of experimental and control groups since the t-test analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference (t=0.43).

Tables 2 and 3. Pre- writing accuracy t-test for experimental and control groups

Table 2. Group statistics

Group Statistics			
Std. Error Mean	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	30	11.8667	.75354
Control	24	11.7708	.85946

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 3. Independent samples test

Independent Samples Test							
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
Error	F	Sig	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference Interval of the
		95%Confidence					
Equal variances assumed	.679	.414	.436	52	.664	.09583	.21967
Equal variances not assumed			.430	46.145	.927	.09583	.22295

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-.35290 .54456

** Significant at the 0.05 level (p<0.05)*

As obvious from Table 4 for the post-test in writing accuracy, the performance of the two groups differed widely. As the experimental Group`s mean (18.13) is higher than the control group`s mean (13.70). It

can be claimed that the participants in the experimental group had a better performance than the participants in the control Group as the t-test on the post-test (23.21) showed.

Tables 4 and 5. Post- writing accuracy t-test for experimental and control groups

Table 4. Group Statistics

Group Statistics			
Std. Error Mean	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	30	18.1333	.47222
Control	24	13.7083	.83297

** Significant at the 0.05 level (p<0.05)*

Table 5. Independent samples test

Independent Samples Test							
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
Error	F	Sig	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference
		95% Confidence					Interval of the
							Difference
							Lower
							Upper
Equal variances assumed	11.563	.001	24.605	52	.000	4.42500	.17984
	4.06412	4.78588					
Equal variances not assumed			23.211	34.537	.000	4.42500	.19064
	4.03780	4.81220					

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

The second research question investigated the effect of DWCF on writing fluency. A t-test was conducted for experimental and control groups before the treatment to compare the means of two groups. As illustrated in Table 6, the mean scores of pre-tests in the experimental and control groups were 11.81 and 11.65

respectively. The Standard Deviations of the experiment group was 0.74 and that of control group was 0.85. As table 7 demonstrates there is not any significant difference in the mean scores of experimental and control groups since the t-test analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($t=0.73$).

Tables 6 and 7. Pre- writing Fluency t-test for Experimental and Control groups

Table 6. Group statistics

Group Statistics			
Std. Error Mean	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	30	11.8167	.74837
Control	24	11.6522	.85858

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 7. Independent samples test

Independent Samples Test							
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
Error	F	Sig	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference Interval of the
		95% Confidence					Difference
							Interval of the
							Difference
Lower	Upper						
Equal variances assumed							
	.996	.323	.744	51	.460	.16449	.22110
	-.27939	.60838					
Equal variances not assumed							
			.730	43.816	.469	.16449	.22521
	-.28944	.61842					

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

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As obvious from Table 8 for the post-test in writing fluency, the performance of the two groups differed widely. As the experimental Group's mean (18.03) is higher than the control

group's mean (13.60). It can be claimed that the participants in the experimental group had a better performance than the participants in the control Group as the t-test on the post-test (22.19) showed.

Tables 8 and 9. Post- writing fluency t-test for experimental and control groups

Group Statistics			
Std. Error Mean	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	30	18.0333	.52413
Control	24	13.6087	.83878

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 9. Group statistics

Independent Samples Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	9.952	.003	23.546	51	.000	4.42464	.1879	4.04739	4.80189
Equal variances not assumed			22.194	34.779	.000	4.42464	.19937	4.01981	4.82946

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* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

In order to investigate the third research question, Complexity was defined as number of dependent clause divided by the total number of C-units for a given essay. A t-test was conducted for experimental and control groups before the treatment to compare the means of two groups. As illustrated in Table 10, the mean scores of pre-tests in the experimental and control groups

were 11.88 and 11.72 respectively. The Standard Deviations of the experiment group was 0.66 and that of control group was 0.84. As table 11 demonstrates there is not any significant difference in the mean scores of experimental and control groups since the t-test analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference ($t=0.73$)

Tables 10 and 11. Pre- writing complexity t-test for experimental and control groups

Group Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	11.8833	.66544	.12149
Control	24	11.7292	.84672	.17284

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 10. Group statistics

Independent Samples Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed									
	2.010	.162	.750	52	.457	.15417	.20568	-.25856	.56690
Equal variances not assumed									
			.730	43.016	.470	.15417	.21127	-.27189	.58022

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 11. Independent samples test

As shown in table 12 for the post-test in writing complexity, the performance of the two groups differed widely. As the experimental Group's mean (17.96) is higher than the control group's mean (13.58). It

can be claimed that the participants in the experimental group had a better performance than the participants in the control Group as the t-test on the post-test (20.95) showed.

Tables 12 and 13. Post- writing complexity t-test for experimental and control groups

Table 12. Group statistics

Group Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	17.9667	.58624	.10703

Control	24	13.5833	.88055	.17974
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* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Table 13. Independent samples test

Independent Samples Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed									
	7.112	.010	21.890	52	.000	4.38333	.20024	3.98152	4.78514
Equal variances not assumed									
			20.953	38.376	.000	4.38333	.20920	3.95998	4.80669

* Significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$)

Discussions

With regard to the primary purpose of this study, and as tables indicate, the three null hypotheses were safely rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. In other words, the analysis of obtained data strongly suggested that using dynamic WCR feedback during teaching writing and correcting grammatical errors of the

students promoted writing skill. The findings of this study are in accordance with Ellis' (2009) statement that "dynamic WCR has the advantage that it provides learners with explicit guidance about how to correct their errors" (p.99). The present study also showed that intermediate students profited from dynamic WCR more because they may not to know

correct form or they may not be able to self-correct themselves. The result of the present research generally provided support to the results of previous studies (Archibald, 2001; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1999) that error correction has positive impacts and helps students to improve their writing accuracy. The current study also agrees with sheen's (2009) finding that CF is effective for learners at elementary or intermediate level because they are not proficient enough to detect the correct form and they may neglect the errors at lower level.

Conclusion

In response to the three research questions, data from holistic and evaluations indicate that the provision of dynamic WCF had a significant effect, enabling the learners to use the targeted functions with greater accuracy, fluency and complexity over the eight forty-minute sessions of treatment. These improvements are quite noticeable between writing samples taken from the beginning and end of the treatment period. The enduring effects on accuracy, fluency and complexity over the eight forty-minute sessions of treatment is clear evidence of the potential for focused WCF to help learners acquire features of a second language. In fact, learners' involvement in the

process of CF provides detailed information to teachers as to which linguistic features they may find more problematic. While working with learners, teachers can inform learners on the intention of providing feedback and on which specific error type they will focus on.

Consequently, dynamic WCF is superior to traditional grammar instruction for intermediate EFL learners when it comes to enhancing linguistic accuracy, fluency and complexity. The findings of this study prove the value of focusing on a single error category rather than using an all grouping of grammar errors. The results show that in order to support foreign language writers in improving linguistic errors in writing, it may prove effective to target one or two language errors rather than an unfocused approach. This assists learners to expand their focus on a few errors to which they can attend and learn to implement in future writing and in response to the question whether to correct or not. In fact, we can conclude that leaving the errors unnoticed might result in the fossilization of the incorrect structures. Consequently, the researchers severely disagree with too much error negligence and subsequently believe that errors should be corrected or revised immediately or with delay. Teachers can explore different varieties of CF strategies that might be better fitted in their

own contexts. The success or failure of corrective feedback, according to Guénette (2007), will rely on the classroom context, the type of mistake students make, their level of proficiency, the type of writing they are expected to do, and a collection of other variables that are yet unknown.

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