

Does E-Feedback Impact Minimizing ESL Writing Errors? An Experimental Study

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Abstract—Researches around the world have examined how electronic feedback (e-feedback) assists English (ESL) language learners improve their writing by minimizing errors. This current study examines the use of online written peer feedback (OWPF) and automated written corrective feedback (AWCF), analyzing morphological and syntactical errors in writing. The study used a quantitative method to analyze the data. The study participants included one hundred forty-one first-year senior students. They were divided into three groups: two experimental groups received treatment through OWPF and AWCF, and one control group received through the communicative language teaching approach. Regarding writing improvement and minimizing morphological and syntactic errors, the data show that OWPF is significantly more helpful than AWCF and CLT in maximizing writing effectiveness. The study explores and highlights the implications of the study's results for pedagogical training and future research.

Keywords—e-feedback, online written peer feedback, automated written corrective feedback, ESL, writing error

1 Introduction

Writing is a challenging skill for ESL students when they try to convert their ideas into the form of writing. Most students are confused about the target language's grammar because of their limited proficiency [1]. Thus, ESL writing instructors have pondered how to enhance the level of students' writing through the use of effective teaching techniques. Most teachers in India spend most of their time teaching grammar and writing skills by giving feedback on their writing. E-feedback as a technological process of teaching has been included to improve writing; hence, it is being considered an approach in the process of writing improvement [2], [3], [4], [5], [6].

Instructors have been employing various kinds of e-feedback modes in ESL writing classrooms. Online written peer feedback (OWPF) is one e-feedback which provides feedback to the peers of ESL writer who has done with their writings and uploaded text through an online tool [7]. OWPF aims to address mutual writing challenges to improve writing [8]. Previous research has shown that OWPF helps enhance the target

language's grammar [9], [10]. Furthermore, OWPF emphasizes both linguistic accuracy and content enhancements [11], [12]. However, previous studies by Liu & Carless, [13] also revealed dissatisfactory results in using online written peer feedback. Specifically, ESL writers with low proficiency cannot give more beneficial peer feedback and corrective remarks than more proficient learners need to enhance their writing [14]. Peers' late and sometimes no responses may affect ESL writers' motivation and OWPF application performance [15].

Another kind of e-feedback is automated written corrective feedback, which provides an instant response in place of a late response to the ESL writers in terms of self-correction to enhance their writing proficiency [16], [17], [18]. The purpose of AWCF is to empower learners to rectify their writing errors using a web-based editing system. The more engaging nature of AWCF enables learners to take advantage of immediate feedback for self-editing and corrections in order to improve the quality and correctness of their writing [19], [20], [21] [22], [23], [24], [25]. AWCF is an intelligent tool to improve learning effectively, giving instant feedback with corrections in the text so that learners learn, and avoiding committing the same errors [26]. Contrarily, Shintani et al. [8] stated that ACF is unproductive for less proficient ESL learners because they cannot find and correct their grammatical errors.

Even though e-feedback has been examined to improve writing through revision, none of the studies examined the effects of online written peer feedback and automated written self-correcting feedback on minimizing morphological and syntactic errors. Hence, the current study investigates the impact of OWPF and AWCF mode on ESL learners' writing enhancement in terms of minimizing grammatical errors. The study findings can give ESL writing instructors a better understanding of what occurs throughout the OWPF and AWCF processes. Also, ESL writing instructors may choose the employment of these two types of revision activities in a balanced way so that they do not have to spend too much time correcting students' grammar errors to improve their writing.

2 Review of previous studies

2.1 Online written peer feedback (OWPF)

Prior research [9] has shown that the electronic peer feedback feature can help improve writing by eliminating grammatical errors. Tuzi [11] examined the impacts of online feedback on ESL writers. The study's findings demonstrated that students' revisions benefited most from online peer feedback, which enabled them to improve their original texts by adding new content and positively affecting grammatical accuracy by revisions. A study was conducted by Shang [10] to compare the effectiveness of online corrective feedback and automated corrective feedback on EFL writing proficiency. This research showed that online corrective feedback significantly outperforms ACF in enhancing writing's grammatical precision and vocabulary. In a study by Ge [27], 36 Chinese students who participated in an online peer review course were split into three groups depending on their writing proficiency in English. The research results showed that individuals with lower writing skills improved more than those with

greater levels. The impact of online peer criticism on the weblog posts on ESL learners was examined by Liou and Peng [28]. Results showed that the ESL learners improved their writing more successfully in the blogging environment and made more comments for their peers. However, Chang [29] found that OPF significantly increased writing dissatisfaction when students could not understand what their reviewers were trying to communicate. Due to the apparent absence of visible and physical clues in online communication, there were more misunderstandings amongst peers [30]. Additionally, several problems, including unfavourable responses to critical feedback, peers' lower proficiency in writing skills, and delayed, incomplete or sometimes no peers' responses, become barriers to the employment of OPF effectively [7], [31]. It is significant to critically assess the impact of OPF implementation on ESL writing progress since students' unfavourable impressions influence the quality of writing [32].

2.2 Automated written corrective feedback (AWCF)

Another aspect of the study is the automatic corrective feedback (AWCF) mode to aid in correcting ESL writing by explaining grammar [26], [33], [34], [35]. Kim [36] examined the effectiveness of Google docs in improving ESL learners' writing. The result of the study showed that features of Google Docs impact writing quality due to instant response and automatic error correction characteristics. Wang et al. [37] designed a study employing a control and experimental group to assess the influence of automatic writing corrective feedback on student writing improvement. The study's findings showed that after receiving the automatic writing corrective feedback intervention, students in the control group committed more errors than in the experimental group.

Additionally, AWCF via Grammarly was the subject of a quasi-experimental study by Barrot, [25], to examine how it impacts EFL learners' writing correctness. The results show how effective AWCF is at helping learners write more accurately. Students can enhance their grammar by obtaining diagnostic feedback from automated writing evaluations and concise explanations. Also, Ranalli [22], Li et al. [34], [38], and Van et al. [39] all showed that ACF successfully enhances ESL learners' writing after revising their original text. Such a model assists students in correcting their improper use and reformulating their errors [40]. Furthermore, Shintani et al. [8] investigated the effect of direct corrective evaluation on Japanese students' writing improvement. The outcome showed that the most efficient response was direct corrective evaluation with the revision. Link et al. [21] compared automated writing evaluation and a teacher-only feedback condition. The study's findings demonstrated that teacher feedback is more beneficial than automated writing evaluation improving writing.

As stated previously, e-feedback has become a contentious subject in improving ESL writing skills [41]. Therefore, the research aimed to examine the effects of OWPF and AWCF modes on ESL writing progress in terms of decreasing errors within the framework of error analysis (inter-intra language influence) [42], with a focus on morphological and syntactic writing errors. One primary research question is formulated under the study's purpose:

(1) How do OWPF, AWCF and CLT affect students' English writing in minimizing morphological and syntactical errors?

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

The present study was carried out with English majors in their first year of writing class at a public senior secondary school in India. The sessions were conducted in a computer lab five times a week for an hour for 12 weeks. The primary goal of the course was to improve students' writing skills by reducing writing errors through a process writing model. The study included 141 first-year students, including 89 males and 52 females. The participants were randomly separated into three groups of 41 students (two experimental and one control group). Each group was involved in pre and post-writing tasks. The participants spoke Hindi as their primary language, and none had previously resided in an English-speaking nation. The participants' background information, including age, gender, years of English writing study, and so on, were collected using a demographic questionnaire. The survey's findings revealed that the study's participants' ages varied from 19 to 22. Ethical permission was sought to include the subjects in the experiment, and they all consented to participate (informed consent).

3.2 Instruments

Moodle as an online written peer feedback tool. OPF model used a modular, object-oriented dynamic learning environment (Moodle) tool during the writing course. After completing the assignment, participants in the study submit their documents using Moodle, a computer-mediated platform for peer assessment outside the classroom. Moodle is a platform where students can upload text documents for peer evaluation and browse previously submitted texts and reviews in Moodle mode.

Grammarly as an automated written corrective feedback tool. This study used the Grammarly tool for instant self-editing and correcting errors in the text. Grammarly is an English writing tool that automatically detects problems in grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, syntax, and language style. It delivers real-time feedback as users enter text into the textbox, enabling them to rectify errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation immediately. Grammarly's editing feature and function may make it effective for language teaching and learning [33], [16].

Data collection procedure. As a course requirement, participants took part in pre and post-essay writing. Essay I (what are your future goals?) was given to the participants before the experiment, and essay II (A Memorable Event) was given to the participants after the experiment. All of the participants participated in a series of e-feedback training sessions. The following sections provide more thorough summaries of the training:

Training students on online written peer feedback. During the online peer feedback procedure, helpful comments were made to the first experimental group (OWPF group). The instructor modeled how to spot grammatical errors and provided helpful information to the peer before the writing task. Then, students wrote an assignment in the class and then uploaded it on Moodle. The students then paired up to examine one other's assignments on Moodle. They were expected to offer comments outside of class hours. After receiving feedback from a peer, students are required to revise the text accordingly.

Training students on automated written corrective feedback. The second experimental group (AWCF group) was treated employing AWCF. After completing writing tasks in the classroom, students uploaded their work to an automated system (Grammarly) to instantly correct their writing. Specifically, grammar errors were highlighted with recommendations for instant error corrections. Students can modify them and rewrite their write-ups until they are satisfied.

Training students on a communicative language teaching approach. In the control group, an instructor has given training through the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) based on the regular curriculum. CLT is a method of language instruction that stresses interaction as a means of learning and as the desired outcome. Students who are taught ESL through the CLT approach learn while interacting with each other and the teacher.

Data analysis. Morphological and syntactic errors in writing were assessed to compare pre and post-OPF, ACF, and CLT. The study aimed to investigate one primary research question: how do OPF, ACF and CLT affect students' writing in minimizing morphological and syntactical English errors? This research question primarily assesses the effects of OPF, ACF and CLT in learning ELS writing errors among students. Further, this study categorized errors into the (morphological) article, preposition and (syntactical) tense and word order [43].

Additionally, this study utilizes Corder's [42] method of EA, which consists of three stages: a collection of data (recognition of errors), describing the errors (accounting for the errors) and then explaining the errors of learners (description of errors). Later, it adopted Dulay's [44] taxonomy of general language production errors; the study also looked into three different errors: omissions, additions, and misformation. A checklist was employed to record the committed errors and their frequency in the essays.

4 Results

4.1 Impact of OWPF, AWCF and CLT on english writing errors

Table 1. Overall error rate on the pre-test, the post-test, and the difference between the two tests

	OWPF			AWCF			CLT		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
Mean	6.9	4.9	2.0	6.6	5.8	.8	7.2	6.7	0.5
SD	1.1	2.1	1.0	1.5	2.2	.7	1.5	1.8	0.3

A one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) was performed for samples that were unrelated to one another. According to the statistical analysis, the groups were statistically insignificant, $F(3, 138) = 2.360, p = .098$. It implies that the three groups' error frequencies at the start of the course were not similar (see Table 1).

The results of the statistical analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the three groups' pre-test scores. Additionally, in the pre-test, the CLT group's total mean of errors was (.3 higher than the OWPF group and .3 lower

than the AWCF group), outperforming the experimental groups. Therefore, this was assumed that the three groups began the course with equivalent levels of English language proficiency.

To determine the correlation, the individual error frequencies of the pre-test and post-test for 141 participants were statistically analyzed, $r = .294$ ($p < .001$). In light of the strong correlation, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted (after measuring the participants' error frequencies based on the pre-test across three groups) to assess the statistical significance of the variations in post-test error frequencies across the three groups. The outcomes of the one-way analysis revealed a significant group effect, $F(1, 46) = 8.879$, $p = .001$.

The total post-test error frequencies for the control group were almost identical to their pre-test outcomes. Compared to the pre-test, the mean score for the AWCF group improved in reducing errors by 0.8, while mean score for control group decreased by 0.5 in terms of minimizing errors. Regarding writing improvement, the OWPF group's score dropped by 2 points from the pre-test, lowering it to 4.9 in post-test. Additionally, repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that the impact of groups on pre-and post-test scores was statistically significant, $F(3, 43) = 11.033$, $P = .001$, $2p = .329$.

4.2 Analysis of errors

Morphological errors. Errors related to article and prepositions were committed in the morphological category, which was taken from pre-test (an essay I) and post-test (essay II) writing of students and indicated with an asterisk*:

Errors in article.

1. Omission of the definite article (Pretest): (...) *to complete in *fastest time* (...). (to complete in the fastest time).
2. Addition of indefinite article (Post-test): *I see *a stories that I will* (...). (I see many stories that I will...)

Errors in preposition.

3. Misuse of preposition (Pretest): I sleep **in* early night because (...). (I sleep early at night because...)
4. Omission and misuse of preposition (Post-test): *We went *5 o'clock on* restrorent gate*. (We went at 5 o'clock to the restaurant gate).

Syntactical errors. The examples presented below reveal that learners make tense and word order errors. Errors are marked with an asterisk*:

Errors in verb tense.

5. Present continuous instead of Simple Present (Pretest): we are* living* in village and some are living in very big cities. (Some live in villages, and some live in very big cities.)
6. Present continuous instead of Present Perfect Continuous (Post-test): Many people are* sitting* in park from* morning. (Many people have been sitting in the park since morning.)

Errors in word order.

- 7. Pre-test: *We in school *sat.* (We sat in school)
- 8. Post-test: *Some my friends told we live India *in.* (Some foreigners said that we live in India.)

5 Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate how students’ morphological and syntactic errors in ESL writing are impacted by the employment of OWPF, AWCF, and CLT modes. This study yielded significant conclusions. OWPF feedback was considerably more efficient than AWCF feedback for reducing morphological and syntactic errors in writing. There has not been any prior study to date to examine students’ writing improvement in morphological and syntactical revisions. The study’s results still partly corroborate those of Shang [10], Chang [29] and Sachs and Polio [45], showing that while utilizing the OWPF mode, students are more likely to make corrections after receiving peer feedback and remark more often on grammatical errors. DeKeyser [46] and Shintani [26] indicate that grammatical self-correction is more successful under the automated corrective feedback environment because students can comprehend the suitable linguistic form to improve writing correctness. This study’s findings align with other study findings [47], [48], [49], [50], [51] demonstrating that students revise their work more effectively because OWPF encourages interactions via peer feedback and discussion. However, the most frequent negatives of using OWPF are peers’ delayed reactions, a lack of prompt feedback, or perhaps no revisions. This outcome is consistent with that of [52].

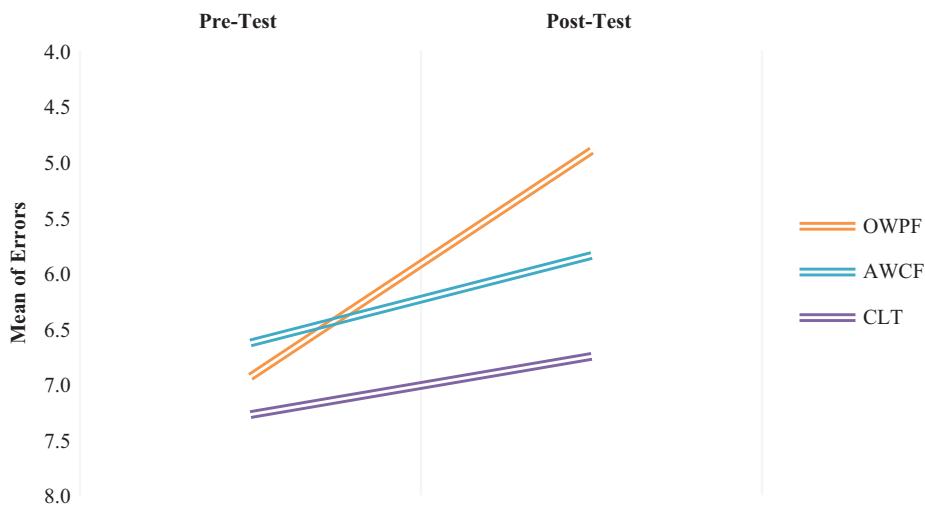


Fig. 1. Displays the total mean scores from the pre- and post-tests, split down into control and experimental groups before and after the intervention. For easier visual comparison, the total score has been reported here as the mean (rather than the sum) of the pre-test and post-test in the control and experimental groups

5.1 Morphological errors in writing

Morphological errors are learners' prime category of commitment in English writing. The current investigation found that interlingual and intralingual transfers were the primary sources of errors. The students were troubled to place the correct articles and prepositions. The current study's findings also contradict [53] findings, which affirmed that article and preposition errors made by students were primarily due to mother tongue influence. However, our findings were identical to [54] results, where he reported articles and prepositions as the most common errors among learners.

5.2 Errors in article

Students' writings (examples; 1) also show the omission of the definite article, which could be due to the L1 influence, as the definite article is not used in Hindi [55], [56], [57], [58], [59], and [60]. In addition, the errors in example 2 suggest that students over-generalized indefinite article use prior to all the nouns due to their incorrect hypothesis regarding using indefinite articles. The usage of the indefinite article with plural nouns could have been due to the incomplete application of the rules.

5.3 Errors in preposition

The two sentences in examples (3 & 4) above demonstrate that learners used incorrect prepositions. These prepositions "in, on, and at" were used interchangeably in their L1, which is why learners had trouble employing the correct prepositions [55], [56], [57], [58], [59], and [60]. The findings of [54], [61], [62] and [63] study also support our findings that Hindi learners made errors due to L1 transfer in TL. Such an error occurred due to the negative L1 transfer.

5.4 Syntactic errors in writing

The second category of errors made by students in English writing was syntactical ones. In this line, [54] findings revealed that students had made frequent errors in verb tense and word order categories but could not explain why. In this regard, the current study offers the sources of errors in students' writing as interlingual and intralingual errors but contradicts previous findings [64], [65], [66].

5.5 Errors in verb tense

Students substituted the Present Continuous instead of the Simple Present and the Present continuous instead of the Present Perfect Continuous (examples 5 & 6). The findings further report verb-tense errors, mainly analogous to [62] study and frequent errors in previous studies [54].

5.6 Errors in word order

As Hindi is a verb-final language (example; 9 & 10); consequently, the mother tongue's influence could be seen in writing by their incorrect word order [55], [56], [57], [58], [59], and [60].

6 Conclusion

This research explored the impact of electronic feedback such as OWCF and AWCF on ESL learners' syntactic and morphological writing errors. Students exposed to the OWCF fared better than those exposed to the AWCF, making the OWCF a potential pedagogical tool in ESL writing courses. The study's conclusions show that OWPF and AWCF may be helpful pedagogically for teaching ESL writing.

Writing needs motivation among learners' to develop and enhance accuracy [67], [75]. Different strategies can be used to achieve this accuracy and fluency in writing [68], [76]. Although, blended learning modules can be applied in ESL/EFL classroom pedagogy to achieve the desired learning outcomes [69], [70], [71]. However, pandemic has challenged pedagogues around the world to use different techniques and strategies in classroom teaching to maximize the learning outcomes [72], [73].

Future research should use a mix of these two modes; when students are writing, the automatic correction system may alert them to errors so that they can immediately amend their own errors. After finishing the composition, if students are still unclear about the comments supplied by AWCF or lack a complete understanding of the target structure, they may seek assistance from classmates with a higher competence level. Chang [73] also indicated that various writing styles might fulfill individual preferences and optimize writing efficacy.

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