

How to Use Written Corrective Feedback in High School English Writing Teaching

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Abstract

English writing, as an important expressive skill, is the key to English writing teaching. However, the current situation of English writing teaching in senior high school is not optimistic. One of the reasons for this is that teachers and students don't pay enough attention to the use of feedback. Written corrective feedback is the main way for teachers to evaluate students' writing, which can promote students' writing level. Ellis (2009) classifies written corrective feedback into direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective feedback, unfocused corrective feedback, electronic feedback and reformulation based on the strategies for providing feedback and the students' responses to the feedback. Therefore, this paper is devoted to exploring the characteristics of these six types of feedback and how to better apply them in English writing teaching. Thus, feedback can play a positive role in writing teaching and improve the accuracy and level of students' writing.

Keywords

English Writing Teaching; Written Corrective Feedback; Writing Level.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Writing is an important English skill, which can reflect students' comprehensive capacity to use English. In recent years, the requirements of College Entrance Examination on English writing ability have been continuously increasing. But in the current situation of English teaching, there are some common problems, which make it difficult to achieve good effects in writing teaching. Written corrective feedback as an important part of English writing teaching has not been paid enough attention by teachers. Students cannot receive feedback from the teacher on the composition, so they cannot correct it. On the other hand, some students do not take the feedback from teachers seriously. General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 edition, 2020 revision) emphasizes the importance of "coordinating the relationship between teaching, learning and evaluation" to achieve the purpose of promoting teaching and learning through evaluation", which includes teachers providing timely feedback and help to students.

Written corrective feedback, abbreviated as WCF, is the written feedback information provided for learner's language errors in writing (Keh, 1990). Ellis (2009) classifies WCF into six types: Direct WCF, Indirect WCF, Metalinguistic WCF, Unfocused WCF, Electronic Feedback and Reformulation. In China, written corrective feedback has been a research hotspot in the field of second language writing for over 20 years. Li and Sun (2019) use meta-analysis to investigate the effect of WCF, and the results show that WCF has positive effect on the improvement of EFL learner's writing quality and second language learning.

Therefore, here comes the question: how should teachers use effective written corrective feedback in English writing teaching?

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The study mainly analyzes the usage of WCF in current English writing teaching through literature review, identifies problems, and explores effective WCF strategies to improve students' English writing proficiency. Through this paper, we can gain a deeper understanding of the role of written error correction feedback in English writing teaching. And teachers can adopt appropriate written corrective feedback strategies in English writing teaching to improve writing teaching effectiveness.

This paper explores how to use written corrective feedback in high school English writing teaching, which has the following theoretical and practical significance.

The purpose of this study is to explore the practical application of written corrective feedback by teachers in English writing teaching, and to provide new ideas for theoretical research on English writing teaching by comparing the effects of different feedback methods.

The results of this study will provide specific feedback usage suggestions for English teachers, helping them to more effectively utilize written corrective feedback in writing teaching, and improve students' writing ability and level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Feedback

Keh (1990) states that feedback is the revision suggestions provided by teachers to students in their compositions. Through feedback, the students can find out the incomplete information in his/her compositions, the illogical organization or the inappropriate word-choice or tense, and then correct it. In the field of second language writing teaching, feedback is to evaluate learners' composition performance for the purpose of improving their writing level. For writing teaching, the teacher's corrective feedback is that the teacher corrects the learner's mistakes or asks the learner to correct them, and the first correction content is grammar (Zhao & Liu, 2016).

2.2. Classification of Written Corrective Feedback

Ellis (2009) classifies written corrective feedback into direct corrective feedback, indirect corrective feedback, metalinguistic corrective feedback, unfocused corrective feedback, electronic feedback and reformulation based on the strategies for providing feedback and the students' responses to the feedback. This classification is widely accepted by scholars.

Direct WCF means that the teacher provides the students with the correct form, so it does not need learners' self-correction. At the same time, he also introduces several concrete ways including crossing out unnecessary words, inserting missing words, writing the correct form above or near to the erroneous form. Indirect WCF means that the student has made an error without correcting it. This can be done by underlining the errors or using cursors to show omissions in the students' text. Ferris and Roberts (2001) propose direct WCF is probably better than indirect WCF with student of low levels of writing proficiency. But it is time-consuming. Indirect WCF is preferred to direct WCF because it could enhance guided-learning and problem-solving (Lalande, 1982).

Ellis (2009) defines metalinguistic WCF as providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of the errors they have made. Ellis divides metalinguistic WCF into error code and metalinguistic explanations of their errors. The first way means put abbreviated labels for different kinds of errors near the errors or in the margin. If the teacher chooses the latter, it takes more time to spot the errors first. Ferris and Roberts (2001) report that error code help self-edit their writing but no more than indirect WCF. The second way is providing students with metalinguistic explanations of their errors. But this way is much more time-consuming because it requires the teacher have enough metalinguistic knowledge to explain various errors.

Focused WCF and Unfocused WCF are also two opposite types. Focused WCF refers to the errors that only belong to one type. For example, when the teacher only corrects tense errors, it is called focused WCF. Unfocused WCF means the teacher corrects all errors including various aspects. Focused WCF helps students correct errors in one aspect and gives attention to them, such as grammatical errors. Unfocused WCF emphasizes correcting extensive errors and is more effective in the long run than focused WCF.

Electronic feedback refers to the feedback provided by electronic devices through software programs. In this way, students can receive timely and accurate feedback on their writings, which can also help teachers reduce their burden. However, electronic devices are banned in many high schools in China, and the use of electronic devices to give feedback on students' compositions also has some problems, such as teachers' inability to personally recognize the errors students make in their compositions. Reformulation includes direct correction and revision which means students re-writing their compositions.

3. Measures Taken to Use Written Corrective Feedback

3.1. Different Feedback Methods are Adopted for Students with Different Levels

The writing level of students in a class may be uneven, so different feedback methods can be adopted for different levels of students. Direct written corrective feedback is suitable for students with lower writing proficiency, while indirect written corrective feedback is fit for students with higher writing proficiency (Park et al, 2016). Therefore, teachers can adopt direct written corrective feedback or indirect written corrective feedback for students with different writing levels. For students with intermediate writing proficiency, indirect written corrective feedback should also be adopted. Teachers use detailed annotations to guide students in identifying errors and let them know how to correct them. Meanwhile, for students with higher writing proficiency, it is possible to allow them to use electronic resources for feedback to train them in self-correction and develop their autonomous learning ability.

3.2. Aided by Modern Technology

Nowadays, with the development of science and technology, some modern electronic tools also provide convenience for writing correction and feedback. There have been studies that have introduced human-computer feedback into English classroom instruction, and the results have shown that this approach can promote revision, rewriting, and improve the quality of written text (Huang & He, 2018). Another empirical study has also show that online automated grading systems can promote students' writing learning (Zhang, 2019).

Therefore, as an English teacher, we must master the new educational technology and guide students to use it, but at the same time, we must realize that it cannot completely replace teachers, so we should combine artificial feedback.

3.3. Encourage Student Participation

Peer feedback is also an important form of feedback. Students cooperate with each other to give feedback on their writing. Based on the current situation of foreign language teaching in China and the research on peer feedback training and its effects abroad, it is found that peer feedback is suitable for the national conditions of foreign language teaching in China and can reduce the pressure of teachers (Cui, Gai & Zhang, 2019).

The following are the specific steps. The teacher divides the students into groups based on their writing level and randomly distributes their compositions to peers for review and feedback. Before the feedback, the teacher provides a feedback form to help students clarify the evaluation standards. After the review, students discuss and exchange their feedback, and the

teacher can guide students to focus on specific issues in their compositions and provide necessary guidance and suggestions. Finally, students need to carefully consider their peer feedback and combine their own thoughts to revise or rewrite their composition.

4. Conclusion

There are some differences between these types of feedback. Direct written corrective feedback allows students to see the correct form directly, but it is time-consuming and inefficient for teachers. Indirect corrective feedback only points out errors, which can lead students to reflect. Compared to direct written corrective feedback, it improves efficiency. Metalinguistic feedback is divided into two forms: error code and metalinguistic explanations. Both forms of metalinguistic feedback are effective, but it requires teachers to have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2009).

Focused written corrective feedback refers to correcting only one type of error, such as grammatical errors, vocabulary errors. Unfocused written corrective feedback means correcting all errors. Mohammad's (2021) research reported that focused written corrective feedback can effectively reduce students' words errors and sentence errors in the long term. Unfocused written corrective feedback helps improve students' overall written accuracy. Electronic written corrective feedback helps students revise the text themselves. This way can encourage students to be independent. Reformulation can as a technique to help students correct errors.

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