The Effect of Grammatical Error Correction

On the Development of Learning English Writing as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language." (Chastain 1988: 244). This study considers the effect of grammatical error correction on the development of English writing among Persian learners of English as a foreign language. The participants of the study are forty students at the age of 17 – 22 fourteen male and twenty six female. The subjects were divided into control and experimental groups. A pretest was carried out to have homogenous groups. After the pretest the subjects were asked to write samples about given topics. Each student wrote ten samples. The period of instruction lasted for twelve weeks. Both groups received grammatical error correction, and the errors were identified with red pen for both groups. However, the experimental group received a detailed list with clarification and the possible accurate answer. Moreover, an oral explanation was given to them at the time of delivery of the samples. They were also asked to pay attention to the comments. Concerning the control group, after viewing their grammatical error their papers were collected and kept by the instructors, whereas the experimental group kept their papers. Finally a post test was carried out to assess the results. The post test includes two writings about the topics suggested by the instructors. They have to write one at home and one in the class within twenty five mints. Two raters were used to correct the final tests. The results of the post tests show that there is difference from number of the errors for the sample written at home, but the difference is not significant with the samples written in the class under time pressure.

Keywords: Grammatical error correction, English writing, EFL

1. Introduction

Grammar is important in learning English as a foreign. Celce-Murcia believes that, the ability to express one's ideas in written form in a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable accuracy and coherence is a major achievement (1994, 233). "Within the communicative framework of language teaching, the skill of writing enjoys special status" (Olshtain,1994: 235). There is no doubt that every piece of writing for being understood by others should have some features among them acceptable grammar of it is unavoidable." This study is concern with the effect of grammatical error in writing.

The efficacy of teacher's grammatical correction in second language writing classes has been the subject of much controversy (Ferris, 2004). Truscott's (1994, 1996, 2004) believes that error correction is not very productive, whereas Ferries (1999) has a contrary view.

Ferris (2004) suggests six practical generalizations on error correction in L2 writing. She believes: Firstly, error treatment, including error feedback by teachers, is a necessary component of L2 writing instruction. Secondly, in the majority of instances, teachers should provide indirect feedback that engages students in cognitive problem-solving as they attempt to self-edit based upon the feedback that they have received. (Exceptions may include students at lower levels of L2 proficiency, who may not possess the linguistic competence to self-correct). Thirdly, different types of errors will likely require varying treatments. Students may be less capable, for instance, of self-editing some lexical errors and complex, global problems with sentence structure than more discrete morphological errors. Fourthly, students should be required to revise (or at least self-edit) their texts after receiving feedback, ideally in class where they can consult with their peers and instructor. Fifthly, supplemental grammar instruction (in class or through individualized self-study materials recommended by the instructor) can facilitate progress in accuracy if it is driven by student needs

and integrated with other aspects of error treatment (teacher feedback, charting, etc.), and finally, the maintenance of error charts, ideally by the students themselves with guidance from the instructor, can heighten student awareness of their weaknesses and of their improvement (Ferris, 2004:59 – 60).

The grammatical error feedback given to the subjects were based on Ferris' outlook.

2. Statement of the Problem

This study investigates the possible relation between grammatical error feedback and improvement of writing of the students. In other words, this study handles the outcome of error grammar correction on writing skill of EFL Persian learners of English.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study are forty students at the age of seventeen to twenty two: fourteen male and twenty six female. The subjects were divided into control and experimental groups. Each consists of twenty students, seen boys and thirteen girls in each group. All of them are at the level of Interchange two. The instructors were different but they follow the same procedure in giving feedback.

3.2 Procedures

At the outset a pretest was carried out for both groups. It includes 30 valid and reliable items on grammar. A questionnaire has been arranged for the English teachers. In this questionnaire the teachers are asked to answer the questions about their views toward writing of the students in classes, and the outcome of error correction.

3.3 The Methods

The subjects were asked to write samples about given topics. Each student has written ten samples after the pretest. The period of instruction lasted for twelve weeks. Both groups received grammatical error correction, and the errors were identified with red pen for both groups. However, the experimental group received a detailed list with clarification and the possible accurate answer. Moreover, an oral explanation was given to them at the time of delivery of the samples. They were also asked to pay attention to the comments. The control group had the access to look at their writing after being corrected by the instructors. The errors of this group were only identified but they were not provided with the accurate answer. Plus there papers were collected after being viewed for almost fifteen mints.

Finally a post was carried out to assess the results. The post test includes two writings about the topics suggested by the instructors. They have to write one at home and one in the class within twenty five mints. Two raters were used to correct the final tests.

4. The Results

Apart from considering the quality of writing from grammatical point of view, statistical analysis was carried out. This consists of descriptive statistics or inferential statistics. The results of the post tests show that there is difference from number of the errors for the sample written at home, but the difference is not significant with the samples written in the class.

4.1 Pretest of control group

Statistics are shown in Table 1.

<Table 1 about here>

Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown in Table 2.

<Table 2 about here>

4.2 Pretest of experimental group.sav

Statistics are shown in Tables 3 & 4.

<Tables 3 & 4 about here>

As shown there is no significant difference between the means of pretest of control group (mean=24.6500) and experimental group (mean=25.9000), so both group are homogeneous and their level of grammatical knowledge in test is at the same level.

As mentioned before, both groups were given the same topic for each sample and they have the same time interval between each session to deliver their writings to their teachers. Samples of control group, after showing to the subjects

and considered by them, were kept by the researcher but the samples of the experimental group were corrected and then given back to them.

4.3 Descriptive statistics

<Tables 5 & 6 about here>

4.4 T-test results

<Tables 7 & 8 about here>

The result of t- test shows low significance difference between the mean of control group and experimental group. This means error correction has no effect on L2 writing and also it doesn't decrease the number of errors in writing.

<Figures 1& 2 about here>

5. Conclusion and Discussion

It is assumed that grammatical error correction is important for learning writing. Concerning this study, there are three major assumptions. Firstly, the former students i.e. the experimental group (those who received detailed grammatical support) should be better writers, on the average, than the latter. Secondly, if the abilities of the two groups do not differ, then correction is not helpful, and finally, if the control group acted better then correction is apparently harmful.

The results show that there is not enough evidences in favor of error correction based on the subjects' action in the class within a limited time. This might support Truscott's (1994, 1996, 2004) view. Truscott is not in favor of error correction. Truscott also believes that there was no enough control over activities outside the classes. It should not be forgotten that Truscott is not against all kinds of correction in classes, he disagrees with grammar correction in writing classes.

The writings of the experimental group at home show priority over the control group. The writings show less grammatical errors, and more coherent texts. This might be due to having plenty of time to concentrate on their writings and/or to review their early assignments. Consequently they avoid previously committed errors.

Ferris (1999) has a different view. While Truscott is against grammatical error correction in writing, Ferris states that there are good results in grammar correction in writing classes. Based on the gained results from this study, Truscott's position seems more logical and the findings support his view for class activities and writing within limited time, whereas this is not the case with writing activities outside the class and without time pressure. However, compared with the devoted time for correcting the papers and writing notes plus oral discussion with the learners, it seems that the outcome of grammatical error correction is very scanty.

The results also portray that there is no direct relation between the number of the errors and receiving feedback in the form of error correction in experimental group. In addition the results show that there is not any direct relation between the number of the errors and a clear progression or regression in writing skill of control group. Finally concerning the class activates it is very hard to predict any progression or regression.

In addition, there is another support concerning Truscott's position. There are evidences not in favor of error correction. The results of the questionnaire administered among English teachers both in institutions and schools show that almost all teachers who previously use error correction in their classes after observing no remarkable effects gave up this procedure. So it is possible to argue that grammar correction has very trivial effect on writing under control situations.

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Table 1. Participants' score

N 20	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Valid	24.6500	87140	25.0000	20.00(a)	3.89703	15.187	11.00	19.00	30.00

Table 2. Participants' score

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19.00	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	20.00	3	15.0	15.0	25.0
	21.00	1	5.0	5.0	30.0
	22.00	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
	24.00	2	10.0	10.0	45.0
	25.00	3	15.0	15.0	60.0
	27.00	2	10.0	10.0	70.0
	28.00	2	10.0	10.0	80.0
	29.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	30.00	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Participants' score

N 20	Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Valid	25.9000	.65253	26.0000	27.00	2.91818	8.516	10.00	20.00	30.00

Table 4. Participants' score

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20.00	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	23.00	2	10.0	10.0	20.0
	24.00	1	5.0	5.0	25.0
	25.00	3	15.0	15.0	40.0
	26.00	3	15.0	15.0	55.0
	27.00	4	20.0	20.0	75.0
	28.00	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
	29.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	30.00	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean (con. G.)	10	12.35	14.80	13.1600	.71872
Valid N (listwise)	10				

Table 6. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean (Ex. G)	10	14.15	15.60	14.8050	.54235
Valid N (listwise)	10				

Table 7. T-test: one-sample statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean (Ex. G)	10	14.15	15.60	14.8050	.54235
Valid N (list wise)	10				

Table 8. T-test: one-sample statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
mean	2	13.9800	1.15966	.82000

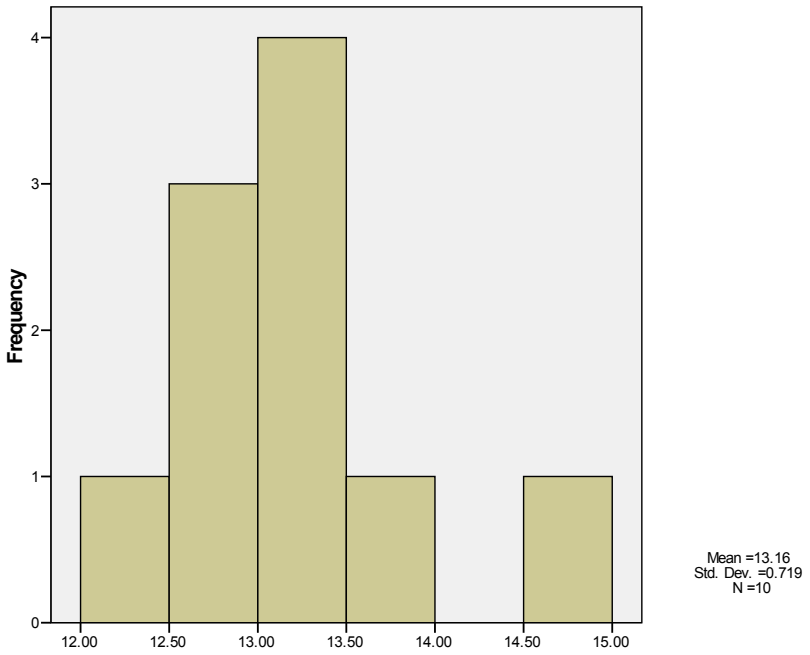

Figure 1. Control group samples' scores

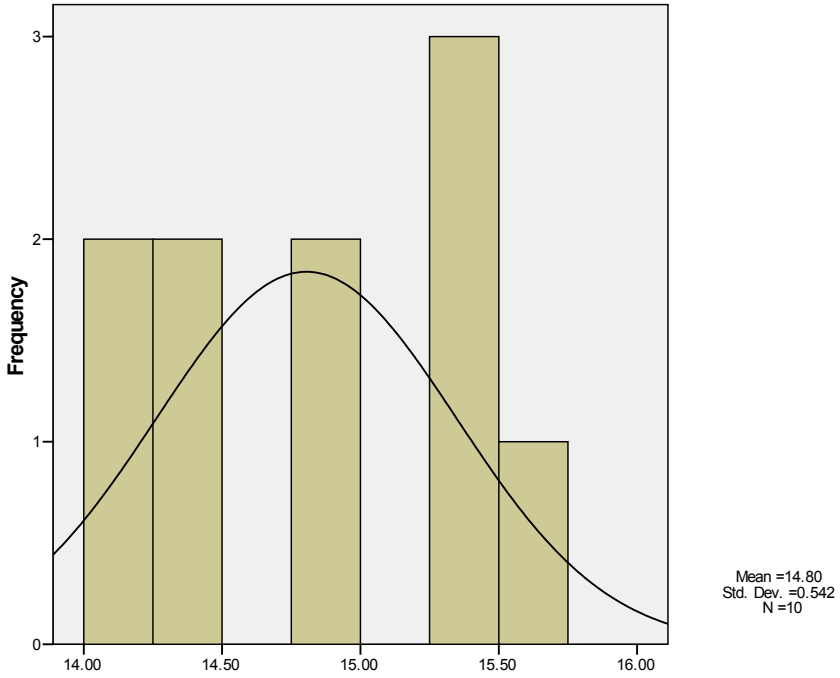

Figure 2. Experimental group samples' scores