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The Influence of Explicit Written Corrective Feedback on Linguistic Accuracy of EFL

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Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the influence of explicit written corrective feedback on improving linguistic accuracy of EFL learners at different proficiency levels. Two groups of elementary and intermediate students (n=18) were selected using convenience sampling. The participants were administered a pre-test, four treatments and a post-test over six sessions. During the pre-test, they completed a picture description task, a multiple-choice test and a cloze task. The second to fourth sessions involved two practice sessions, which followed the same format as the pre-test. After practice sessions, they were given written corrective feedback followed by oral explanation on the same week. The post-test, identical to the pre-test, was administered during the final session. The findings indicated that the high proficiency learners did not show a significant change with the written corrective feedback. In contrast, the low proficiency learners demonstrated significant improvements in both gain scores from pre-test to post-test and linguistic accuracy rate. It can be suggested that teachers should tailor their feedback strategies according to proficiency levels; while for low-proficient learners, providing explicit written corrective feedback in grammatical features might be beneficial, for high-proficient learners, alternative instructional approaches, such as encouraging autonomous learning, might be more effective.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the important skills that is challenging for students as they strive to express their ideas coherently and cohesively. For second language (L2) learners, the occurrence of errors in writing is an inevitable part of the learning process. To assist learners in identifying their errors, educators provide corrective feedback, which serves a crucial function by offering various forms of information. Corrective feedback is defined as "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learners' utterance"

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(Chaudron, 1977, p. 31; Shen et al., 2023). This form of feedback is essential for preventing the fossilization of errors and facilitating learners' progress along the continuum of learning.

Nevertheless, many L2 scholars have raised inquiries regarding the efficacy of feedback, leading to extensive research aimed at assessing the outcomes of various types of corrective feedback. L2 researchers have particularly focused on written corrective feedback, notably within the context of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) writing. While considerable attention has been directed toward its advantages in addressing learners' writing errors, there exists a paucity of information concerning the alignment of this feedback with the needs of learners across different proficiency levels. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), educators must be aware of the need for meticulously considering the learners' L2 proficiency level to make informed decisions regarding the provision of feedback. This perspective has been corroborated by subsequent studies highlighting the significance of tailoring feedback to the individual characteristics of learners to enhance language development (e.g.Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009). The effectiveness of feedback is not uniform and is shaped not only by the nature of the feedback provided but also by individual characteristics of learners, including socio-emotional factors such as motivation and enjoyment, cognitive engagement, and in particular, their proficiency levels. Higher proficiency learners may respond differently to feedback compared to lower proficiency learners. Understanding whether corrective feedback effectively supports learners at varying levels of proficiency remains a key research question. To fill this gap, the present study aims at analyzing direct written corrective feedback and its relationship with learners' proficiency levels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner Proficiency and Preference for Written Corrective Feedback

Written corrective feedback (WCF) has long been of interest not only to L2 writing instructors but also second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Crosthwaite et al., 2022; Nassaji & Kartchava, 2017). This is evident from the extensive body of literature, including experimental, survey and meta-analysis on the topic focusing on the types of errors to address (global vs. local), the timing of feedback (immediate vs. delayed), the methods of correction (direct vs. indirect), the individuals responsible for providing feedback and their conceptions of feedback (teachers vs. peers), and channels of providing feedback (oral, written, video/audio and computer-assisted) (Bitchener et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2023; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kang & Han, 2015; Li & Vuono, 2019; Wisniewski et al., 2020). Theoretical perspectives on WCF address these topics by considering whether WCF effectively helps L2 learners improve writing accuracy and enhances language acquisition as well as situational factors influencing the effectiveness of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Guénette (2007) argues that the success of conducting corrective feedback depends on classroom situations, kinds of errors learners produce, levels of proficiency, kinds of writing, and accumulation of other unknown variables. Thus, there are different factors contributing to the efficacy of corrective feedback one of which is the proficiency level of learners in choosing appropriate corrective feedback techniques (Havranek & Cesnik, 2001; Kennedy, 2010).

The existing body of research on WCF and learner proficiency level highlights the possible relationship between feedback preferences, effectiveness, and learner characteristics. Yu and Yang (2021) reviewed 64 empirical studies over a decade on teacher written feedback for ESL/EFL learners. They found a significant variation in learners' responses to teacher written feedback based on proficiency levels. Their findings further emphasize other learner variables such as age

and socio-cultural background that may influence the effectiveness of feedback in enhancing writing proficiency. The study highlights the importance of considering multiple learner variables when investigating WCF impacts.

Zhang et al. (2021) further examined how language proficiency and foreign language enjoyment influence preferences for different types of WCF among Thai university EFL learners. The researchers looked at four specific types of WCF: feedback on grammatical, lexical (word choice), orthographic (spelling), and pragmatic (contextual use) errors. Analysis of questionnaires indicated that learners generally preferred more explicit WCF types (metalinguistic explanation and overt correction) for most errors, regardless of proficiency. The results also indicated that learners' proficiency levels influenced their preferences for certain WCF types. High proficiency learners were more receptive to less explicit forms like underlining and error codes, while low proficiency learners did not find them helpful. This suggests a developmental trajectory where learners' capacity for self-correction and interpretation of feedback evolves with proficiency. Similarly, Shen et al. (2023) explored the effect of computer-generated feedback on writing quality and perceptions of EFL learners with varying proficiency levels. Their findings indicated that most students concentrated on error correction when using automated writing evaluation. While unskilled learners benefited most in accuracy, skilled learners showed gains in lexical complexity. This finding points to proficiency-specific effects of feedback modalities on distinct writing components.

Synthesizing these studies reveals a clear pattern: lower proficiency learners favor and benefit more from explicit, direct WCF such as metalinguistic explanations and overt correction, while higher proficiency learners respond well to more implicit feedback such as error codes, reflecting their greater capacity and awareness for self-correction, autonomy and self-regulation. The studies collectively suggest that teachers should align feedback types with learners' proficiency levels, providing explicit correction for beginners and fostering autonomy in advanced learners through implicit ways (Yu & Yang, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

Learner Proficiency and Effectiveness of Written Corrective Feedback

Research on the role of proficiency in the effectiveness of CF has produced mixed results. Some of the studies indicate no significant interaction between proficiency level and types of feedback (e.g., direct CF and indirect CF), suggesting that learners benefit from CF regardless of proficiency level(Van Beuningen et al., 2012). Bonilla López et al. (2017) investigated how comprehensive CF influences grammatical accuracy in foreign language writing among low and high proficiency students. They compared three feedback types: direct CF, metalinguistic CF with rule reminders and self-correction across four writing tasks. Results show that all feedback types improved immediate and overall grammatical accuracy for both proficiency groups, but proficiency mediates learners' attitudes and preferences for different types of feedback. While high-proficiency learners are more receptive to metalinguistic feedback, low-proficiency learners prefer direct feedback.

Similarly, Budianto et al. (2020) investigated the effects of direct and indirect corrective feedback on the writing skills of university-level EFL students two different proficiency levels (High and low). Both global and local writing aspects were addressed through feedback over 14 weeks. The study found that direct CF was more effective than indirect CF in improving students' writing, and this effect was consistent regardless of the students' proficiency level. Therefore, DCF benefits both low and high proficiency learners in enhancing their EFL writing skills. This finding challenges the assumptions that indirect CF is more suitable for advanced high proficiency learners.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that CF effectiveness is highly influenced by learners' writing proficiency, cognitive readiness, educational background, and motivation

(Guénette, 2007). Jang (2014) examined whether learners' proficiency level influences the effectiveness of different types of WCF on SLA specifically targeting English article errors. In a quasi-experimental experiment with EFL college students divided into groups by proficiency (higher vs. lower) and CF types (indirect, direct and metalinguistic), participants completed three narrative writing tasks and took pretest and pos-test measuring explicit and implicit knowledge. Findings indicated that proficiency level mediated the effectiveness of indirect CF for explicit knowledge acquisition but not for implicit knowledge or with direct/metalinguistic feedback. The study highlights that learner proficiency is an important factor in the effective use of WCF, particularly the capacity to benefit from indirect feedback, which requires higher metalinguistic awareness.

Xu and Zhang (2021)'s study, grounded in sociocultural theory, investigated the effects of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems on English learners' writing abilities, particularly focusing on learners with varying proficiency levels in an EFL classroom. They found that AWE feedback significantly improved writing accuracy and reduced the accuracy gap among learners of different proficiency levels. However, AWE feedback did not influence syntactic complexity or fluency. The number of revisions made by learners was also measured and depending on the level of proficiency, learners had various perceptions on the usefulness of AWE feedback. This finding underscores the need to tailor feedback according to proficiency to enhance L2 writing instructions.

Additionally, studies by Bitchener et al. (2005) and others highlighted that WCF may be particularly beneficial for low achievers or certain proficiency groups. The recent review (Shen et al., 2023; Xu & Zhang, 2021; Yu & Yang, 2021) deepens this by illustrating that learner engagement with feedback varies by proficiency. Lower proficiency learners tend to focus on basic error correction and may exhibit reduced receptiveness to multiple feedback types, potentially reducing engagement. Similarly, Shen et al. (2023) demonstrate that higher-proficiency learners engage more deeply with feedback targeting language sophistication and prefer subtler feedback forms, while lower-proficiency learners focus more on basic error correction. It appears that multiple feedback formats may overwhelm lower proficiency learners, reducing engagement, implying that feedback quantity and complexity should be managed carefully. This variation in engagement in feedback reflects developmental readiness and strategy use, emphasizing the necessity of feedback differentiation. These findings align with socio-cultural theories emphasizing the importance of scaffolding and tailoring feedback to the learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and cognitive load considerations (Vygotsky, 1978).

Despite a growing body of research investigating the role of proficiency level in the effectiveness of WCF among EFL learners, findings remain inconclusive regarding how proficiency interacts with feedback type to influence linguistic accuracy and written output. Several studies report no significant interaction between proficiency and feedback type, suggesting benefits across proficiency levels (Budianto et al., 2020; Van Beuningen et al., 2012). Conversely, others emphasize that proficiency is a critical mediator, especially for indirect or metalinguistic feedback that requires higher metalinguistic awareness (Bonilla López et al., 2017; Jang, 2014). Recent studies further reveal that learner engagement with feedback varies by proficiency, with lower-proficiency learners focusing on basic error correction and showing reduced receptiveness to complex feedback formats, while higher-proficiency learners engage more deeply with complex and sophisticated feedback (Shen et al., 2023; Xu & Zhang, 2021; Yu & Yang, 2021). However, these insights predominantly derive from studies involving university-level learners, leaving a

notable gap concerning younger EFL learners whose developmental and cognitive differences may affect their capacity to process and benefit from WCF effectively. This gap is critical as feedback tailored for adults may overwhelm or confuse younger learners, thereby impeding their linguistic development. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate how written corrective feedback impacts the improvement of a specific linguistic feature (simple present & past tenses), and overall output and accuracy of grammatical features among EFL learners at high and low proficiency levels, highlighting a pressing need for research that addresses this understudied population and refines feedback strategies accordingly.

Research Questions

The present study was carried out to address the following research questions:

1. How does the provision of written corrective feedback affect the improvement of the target linguistic feature among young EFL learners at high and low proficiency levels?
2. How does the provision of written corrective feedback affect the improvement of the written output and accuracy of grammatical features among young EFL learners at high and low proficiency levels?

3. METHODS

Participants

At the outset of the study, two classes comprising elementary and intermediate students were carefully selected from a private language institute in the northern region of Iran. Each class was composed of 4 to 5 students, resulting in a total of 18 participants__12 female and 6 male. These students were engaged in learning English as a foreign language in this private institute, where the first author of this article was actively teaching English to young learners across various proficiency levels. The participants' language proficiency was determined through the institute's standardized placement test, which had already assigned them to either elementary level (n=9) or intermediate level (n=9). The elementary students' age ranged from 10 to 13 years old and the intermediate students' ranged from 11 to 15 years old. Before conducting the study, a consent form was distributed to the students, seeking formal permission from their parents to ensure ethical compliance and voluntary participation. Additionally, the students' demographic information and previous language learning experiences were recorded to provide a comprehensive background for the study.

Instruments

The study employed a range of tasks and tests, including picture description, cloze, and multiple-choice tests, all of which were piloted with a similar group of students at another institution to enhance the validity and reliability of the instruments. Piloting these instruments helped identify and rectify potential issues related to clarity, difficulty level, and cultural relevance, thereby improving content validity and ensuring that the tasks were appropriate for the target population.

Three picture description tasks were employed in the current study. Picture description tasks are widely recognized in ESL/EFL research for eliciting narrative discourse samples, offering a flexible and convenient tool to assess a variety of linguistic and pragmatic features such as grammatical accuracy, the quantity and type of information conveyed, and overall communicative effectiveness (Barkaoui, 2024). The specific task used in the pre-testing session was validated and frequently employed in previous research focusing on verbal morphemes (e.g.Abadikhah & Zarrabi, 2011), which supports its construct validity by demonstrating that it effectively measures

the intended linguistic features. To enhance the reliability of the measurement, the same picture depicting outdoor activities was used in both the pre-test and post-test sessions, ensuring consistency and reducing variability caused by differing stimuli.

In the testing sessions, students completed a cloze passage requiring the correct use of 32 verbs in the simple present and past tenses, adapted from Fowler and Coe (1970). Cloze tests are established measures for assessing overall proficiency and productive language knowledge at word level. Additionally, a 15-item multiple-choice test, adopted from (Bloor et al., 1970), was administered to assess receptive skills. The multiple-choice format offers objective scoring, thereby enhancing reliability through clear correct/ incorrect distinctions.

The cloze and picture description tasks functioned as written elicitation measures to evaluate participants' productive knowledge at the word and sentence levels, respectively. Using multiple measures to assess productive skills contributes to convergent validity by cross-verifying results across different but related tasks. Conversely, the multiple-choice test assessed receptive language skills, providing a complementary perspective on learners' overall language competence. During the treatment sessions, two distinct sets of activities were used, each comprising a picture description task, a cloze exercise, and a multiple-choice test. The use of varied but systematically related tasks across sessions helped maintain participant engagement and reduced practice effects, which can threaten internal validity. Furthermore, the repeated use of these tasks across session allowed for monitoring of consistency in participants' performance, contributing to test-retest reliability. For the treatment sessions, two picture description tasks from Chabot and Julich (2006) were utilized, involving narration based on a sequence of pictures featuring a character engaged in routine activities. This familiarity was essential to maintain ecological validity by ensuring that the tasks reflected contexts meaningful to participants. Students were instructed to write a sentence for each numbered picture using the simple present or past tense. The structured nature of this task minimized ambiguity and helped maintain inter-rater reliability during scoring. Overall, the careful selection, piloting, and consistent application of these tasks and tests, along with their grounding in prior validated research, provided a robust framework to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected in this study.

Research design

Due to the absence of random selection of participants, the study employed a quasi-experimental design, which is particularly suitable when random assignment is not feasible but there is still a need to examine causal effects of an intervention. The design allowed the researchers to work with naturally existing groups, in this case, learners categorized by their proficiency levels into distinct groups: high and low proficiency.

Both groups participated in a sequence of assessments and instructional interventions arranged chronologically. Initially, a pre-test was administered to establish baseline proficiency levels and to enable comparisons of learning gains attributable to the interventions. This was followed by four treatment sessions, designed to provide targeted learning experiences and instructional input using tasks intended to influence the learners' development in linguistic and in particular verbal morphology. Finally, a post-test was conducted to measure the outcomes of the intervention and to assess any progress or changes that occurred over the treatment period.

Data collection procedures

The data collection was carried out over a four-week period, organized into six well-structured sessions. At the outset of the study, one of the researchers — who also served as the teacher for the four participating classes— took great care to ensure that all participants were thoroughly

familiarized with the procedures involved in both the testing and practice sessions. The researcher provided sample tasks and clear instructions on how to complete each assigned task, emphasizing clarity and understanding to ensure that learners could engage confidently with the activities. Each session was carefully timed, allocating thirty minutes per session for participants to complete the tasks. Figure 1 below illustrates the detailed procedure of the study, outlining the timeline of assessments and instructional treatments for both the high and low proficiency groups:

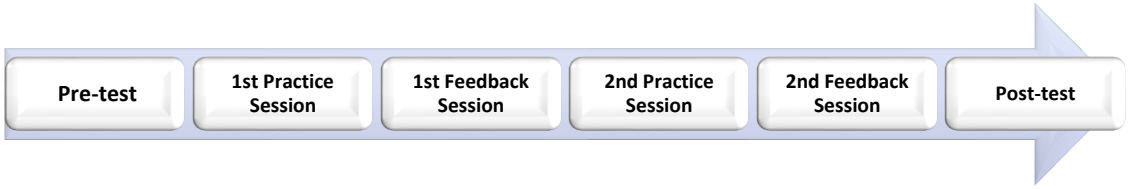

Figure1. Procedure of the study

The pre-test was thoughtfully designed to require students to perform three distinct tasks: a picture description task encouraging spontaneous language production, a multiple-choice test assessing recognition and comprehension, and a cloze task focusing on contextual use of language forms. The linguistic focus of these tasks was on the simple present and past tense, chosen deliberately due to the specific processing difficulties young learners often encounter with these verb forms. Many learners struggled particularly with expressing temporality through verbs and encoding time reference, especially when dealing with both regular and irregular verb forms. This challenge was acknowledged and addressed with sensitivity to the learners' developmental stage. Additionally, selecting three forms allowed the researchers to explore the potential impact of instructional feedback on enhancing learners' acquisition of these grammatical features within the classroom context. This focus was supported by previous research indicating that children respond positively to corrective feedback presented as negative evidence—for example, the correct irregular past tense forms—highlighting the motivational and cognitive benefits of such instructional approaches (Kim, 2004).

The subsequent four sessions functioned as treatment sessions, mirroring the pre-test format to maintain consistency and allow for reliable measurement to progress. These sessions included two picture description tasks and cloze exercises, as well as two multiple-choice tests, providing a diverse range of activities to engage different language skills and learning styles. After each treatment session, the participants' completed tasks were collected and meticulously reviewed by the researchers to identify possible errors. Particular attention was paid during the third and fifth sessions, when participants received explicit WCF on their narrative outputs related to the picture description task. This feedback was detailed and clear, designed not only to correct errors but also to support learners' understanding of the language forms. Learners were encouraged to actively engage with their corrected handouts, allowing them to reflect on their errors and the appropriate forms, thereby reinforcing the learning process. For the cloze and multiple-choice components, correct responses or answer keys were provided on separate sheets, ensuring that learners had access to accurate models without conflating correction with assessment. To deepen their understanding, learners were prompted to compare their own responses with the correct forms and were invited to ask for further explanation if needed. This interactive and learner-centered approach underscored the researchers' commitment to supporting learners' development and fostering an open, supportive classroom atmosphere.

The final session was dedicated to administering the post-test, which was designed to be identical in content and format to the pre-test. This deliberate replication allowed for a direct

comparison of learners' progress before and after the interventions, providing a robust framework for evaluating the effects of the instructional treatments across different proficiency levels. The study carefully incorporated a one-month interval between the pre-test and post-test to allow for meaningful language development, while maintaining a two-day interval between practice and feedback sessions to optimize retention and reflection without overwhelming learners. Throughout the research, both the learners' well-being and the integrity of the data collection process were prioritized, with thoughtful scheduling and clear communication ensuring a smooth and effective study experience for all involved.

Data Analysis

In the current study, two research questions were addressed using quantitative statistical methods. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (version 26, 2019). Due to the sample size, which violated parametric assumptions such as normality of distribution, all analyses were restricted to nonparametric statistics. To examine the improvement of high- and low-proficient participants in their accuracy of linguistic feature and output, their performance on the pre-test and post-test was compared following the treatment. More specifically, their written narratives were evaluated in terms of the accuracy of grammatical features through "errors per 100 words" (Mehrnet 1998, cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In addition, content analysis was conducted on the participants' written narratives to examine sentence structure and T-units on the picture description task. To assess their performance on the target linguistic feature, participants' scores on cloze task and multiple-choice test were calculated; these tasks were used to evaluate their ability to select and use the correct verb form during the pre-test and post-test. All test responses were scored by assigning one point for each correct answer and zero point for each incorrect one. Each test's data was scored independently by two researchers. Due to the variations in the number of items on each test, the scores from each assessment were converted into percentages.

4. RESULTS

Findings related to the first research question

The first research question examined the effectiveness of WCF in enhancing the target linguistic feature among both high- and low-proficiency learners. The descriptive statistics for the high-proficiency group's performance on cloze and multiple-choice tests are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for cloze and multiple-choice tests (high-proficiency)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Multiple Choice	Pre-Test	9	53.08	22.85
	Post-Test	9	68.86	15.98
Cloze Task	Pre-Test	9	25.50	21.67
	Post-Test	9	30.53	10.80

It was observed that, overall, participants in this group achieved higher scores on their post-tests following the treatments. To assess whether these observed changes were statistically significant, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was employed. This non-parametric test was chosen due to its suitability for comparing paired samples without assuming a normal distribution of the data. Contrary to what might be suggested by a superficial examination of the score improvements, the statistical analysis revealed no significant difference between the median scores pre- (Md=39.15)

and post-treatment (Md=52.27) in overall score of high proficient participants (z=-1.71, sig=.086; p >.05). This indicates that, despite the apparent increases in individual scores, the treatments did not produce a statistically reliable effect on participants' performance on verb form.

As previously discussed, the target linguistic feature of verb form (present and past tense) was operationalized as the total scores obtained from both the cloze and multiple-choice tests included in the assessment instrument. These scores were analyzed separately for each component, with the detailed resulted presented in Table 2. Notably, the findings from the low-level learners' group indicated to be more revealing than those obtained from the high-level participants. Specifically, the initial analysis of test scores for the low-level learners demonstrated a substantial improvement in their performance particularly on the cloze test.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for cloze and multiple-choice tests (low-proficiency)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Multiple Choice	Pre-Test	9	27.36	11.27
	Post-Test	9	31.07	12.48
Cloze Test	Pre-Test	9	8.32	5.40
	Post-Test	9	13.53	6.04

While these gains in scores appear promising at first glance, it was essential to verify the statistical significance of these improvements. To this end, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was employed, ensuring that the observed differences were not due to chance. Subsequent analysis revealed that, unlike their high-level counterparts, the linguistic feature of verb form in the low-level learners showed significant improvement over the course of the study. This contrast in pre- (Md =17.11) and post-test (Md =19.54) underscores the differential impact of instructional intervention across proficiency levels, suggesting that low-level learners may benefit more substantially in acquiring verb forms as measured by these tests (z = -2.66; sig = .008, p<.05).

Findings related to the second research question

The second research question examined the effectiveness of WCF in enhancing the written output and accuracy of linguistic features among both high- and low-proficiency learners. To enable the measurement of the written output variable, it was operationally defined as a composite measure of two components: Total words and the number of T-units produced by participants during the picture description tasks on the pre- and post-test session. This approach ensured that the variable captured a comprehensive representation of participants' responses in the task. In the initial phase of the analysis, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the distributions and central tendencies of both total words and T-units separately for the pre-test and post-test sessions. These preliminary analyses, summarized in Table 3, provided an overview of participants' performance before and after the intervention, highlighting any observable trend or changes.

Table 3: Total words and T-units produced in the picture description task (high-proficiency)

		N	Total Words		T-Units	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Written Output	Pre-Test	9	36.33	(17.63)	7.56	(2.35)
	Post-Test	9	31.78	(7.93)	7.89	(1.45)

The initial descriptive results, presented in Table 3, showed a noticeable decrease in the participants' total produced words scores. In contrast, the learners' T-unit scores remained relatively stable across the two phases. However, to determine whether the observed changes between the pre-test (M = 21.94, SD = 9.94) and post-test (M = 19.83, SD = 4.52) in the output variable were statistically significant, further inferential analysis was necessary. Consequently, consistent with the approach used for the first research question, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was applied to assess any significant differences in learner performance. The test results indicated that although participants experienced a decline in total words by the end of the course, this change was not statistically significant ($z = -.56$, $p < .05$). This test compared scores from the pre-test and post-test phases to evaluate learners' improvement resulting from the treatment. Therefore, the initial analysis concentrated on the detailed scores of the output components, as reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Total words and T-units produced in the picture description task (low-proficiency)

	Phase	N	Total Words		T-Units	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Written Output	Pre-Test	9	23.22	(7.27)	5.44	(1.42)
	Post-Test	9	29.11	(5.37)	6.77	(1.09)

Unlike the high-proficiency participants, the low-proficiency learners demonstrated clear improvement in their picture description output. This progress was evident not only in the total number of words but also in the number of T-units they produced. To confirm the significance of these findings, the data were analyzed inferentially using a statistical test of Wilcoxon Signed Rank for the pre-test (Md = 14.00) and post-test (Md = 17.50) of the output. The final results showed that the low-proficiency learners experienced a significant increase in their scores following the written corrective feedback provided during the treatment ($p < .05$, $z = -2.45$).

To evaluate the accuracy of general linguistic features, the participants' descriptions of the picture were subjected to a second, more detailed analysis using a comprehensive set of linguistic criteria. These criteria included capitalization, spelling, word formation, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, incorrect word usage, word order, plural versus singular forms, and omission of words. By employing such a detailed checklist, the learners' scores were examined with greater precision, allowing for the identification of potential areas for improvement with enhanced accuracy.

As a result of this classification, the analysis revealed that the overall linguistic feature scores of the participants in the post-test (M = 96.26, SD = 2.39) were higher than their pre-test scores (M = 89.90, SD = 10.99) following the provision of written feedback. To further examine the differences between low-proficient and high proficient learners, a series of Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests were conducted, as presented in Tables 5 and Table 6, respectively.

Table 5: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests of linguistic features (low-proficiency)

Component	N	Mean (SD)				Median			
		Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Pre-test	Post-test	z	Sig.
Capitalization	9	64.55	28.89	89.44	9.47	74.5	86.00	-2.66	.000
Spelling	9	79.12	28.29	89.84	6.54	89.90	92.25	-1.01	.31
Word Formation	9	100		100		100	100	.00	1.00
S-V Agreement	9	87.01	29.86	100		100	100	-1.60	.10
Verb Tense	9	73.10	25.90	87.23	13.10	76.65	90.85	-1.96	.05
Wrong Word	9	86.85	29.20	98.54	2.50	95.05	100	-1.52	.12
Word Order	9	97.91	6.60	100		100	100	-1.00	.31
Plural/Singular	9	100		100		100	100	.00	1.00
Missing Words	9	81.66	23.38	94.14	95.35	88.20	95.35	-2.31	.02

The results indicated that among low-proficient learners, significant improvements were observed in the areas of capitalization, verb tense, and correction of missing words. These findings highlight that the treatment was relatively effective in enhancing the linguistic accuracy and overall written expression of learners who initially had lower language skills. In contrast, as detailed in Table 6, the high proficient participants did not exhibit significant changes in any of the linguistic components following the intervention. Their scores remained relatively stable, suggesting that the written feedback did not substantially alter their already developed linguistic abilities.

Table 6: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests of linguistic features (high-proficiency)

Component		Mean (SD)				Median			
	N	Pretest Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	Pre-test	Post-test	z	Sig.
Capitalization	9	77.17	23.04	86.71	10.77	81.8	88.00	-.93	.35
Spelling	9	96.76	3.67	98.53	1.86	96.90	100	-1.01	.31
Word Formation	9	96.54	10.36	100		100	100	-1.00	.31
S-V Agreement	9	99.86	0.41	100		100	100	-1.00	3.1
Verb Tense	9	91.60	15.08	95.53	6.79	97.30	97.00	-1.01	.31
Wrong Word	9	97.13	4.37	100		100	100	-1.60	.10
Word Order	9	100		99.66	1.00	100	100	-100	.31
Plural/Singular	9	100		100		100	100	.00	1.00
Missing Words	9	93.35	7.39	93.86	10.34	93.10	100	-.10	.91

This disparity in outcomes implies that the direct written feedback was particularly beneficial for learners at lower proficiency levels, exerting a more pronounced impact on their development in targeted linguistic domains.

5. DISCUSSION

An initial objective of the research was to examine the effect of direct WCF on improving the target linguistic feature among learners at high and low proficiency levels. The study found no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of high-proficient participants. This

outcome aligns with the literature suggesting that the efficacy of direct or indirect feedback is moderated by learner proficiency. Nicolás–Conesa et al. (2019) argued that "direct feedback is more beneficial to low L2 proficiency students, while indirect feedback is more effective in advanced learners, as low L2 proficiency learners may lack the ML [metalinguistic] awareness to interpret indirect feedback" (p. 851). This indicates that high-proficient learners might not benefit from certain types of corrective feedback due to their greater metalinguistic knowledge and self-regulation abilities (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Sheen, 2011). These observations are consistent with findings reviewed by Yu and Yang (2021), who emphasize that learner proficiency significantly influences responses to teacher written feedback, suggesting that differentiated feedback strategies are necessary for effective learning outcome.

Moreover, the treatment applied as WCF did not appear to positively influence the written output of high-proficient learner. Notably, there was a decrease in the total mean of output components, such as the number of words and T-units, after receiving intervention. This complexity in advanced learners' responses is supported by prior studies reporting limited improvements in writing complexity and fluency following corrective feedback (Jagaiah et al., 2020; Lee, 2020; McNamara et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2023).

In contrast to the high proficiency participants, the low proficiency group demonstrated significant improvement in post-test scores, suggesting that the corrective feedback was beneficial for learners at this level. This finding supports substantial body of research indicating that low-proficient students are more likely to gain from WCF in language contexts (Ellis, 2009; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Liu, 2008). Consistent with these studies, the current research observed that low-proficient learners produced higher scores on cloze tests, a common measure of feedback effectiveness, indicating enhanced linguistic accuracy and processing (Bitchener et al., 2005; Lyster et al., 2013). Further analysis revealed significant increases in the number of words and T-units produced by this group, which is in line with earlier research demonstrating that corrective feedback can foster improvements not only in accuracy but also in written complexity, and fluency among lower proficiency learners (Kim & Emeliyanova, 2021; Sheen, 2007). For example, Kim and Emeliyanova (2021) reported that experimental groups receiving corrective feedback showed significant gains in both accuracy and the number of T-units produced in their writing, highlighting the role of feedback in enhancing syntactic development. These findings align with meta-analytic reviews (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wisniewski et al., 2020) underscoring the power of feedback to improve learning outcomes, particularly when tailored to learner needs. These findings align with meta-analytic reviews (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wisniewski et al., 2020) underscoring the power of feedback to improve learning outcomes, particularly when tailored to learner needs.

A critical focus of this study was the differential performance between low- and high-proficient participants. Results indicated that certain linguistic features, namely, capitalization, verb tense, and missing words, were significantly improved in low-proficient learners, whereas no such specific improvements were observed in the high-proficient group. These findings reinforce the notion that learner proficiency is a key moderator of corrective feedback effectiveness (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009). Indeed, proficiency may be one of the primary factors accounting for variability in feedback outcomes, as it influences learners' ability to notice, interpret, and incorporate feedback into their interlanguage systems (Lyster et al., 2013). The current study's outcomes lend support to the position that corrective feedback mechanisms must be tailored to learners' proficiency levels to maximize efficacy, a conclusion echoed by recent meta-analyses and reviews(Li & Vuono, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Kennedy (2010) similarly emphasizes that teachers' feedback choices should consider learner proficiency to effectively support language development.

In sum, the findings suggest that while low-proficient learners benefit from WCF in measurable ways, high-proficient learners may require different feedback approaches, possibly involving metalinguistic explanations or opportunities for self-regulation and reflection (Bitchener, 2008; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Future research should explore how feedback type and learner characteristics interact to better inform pedagogical practices addressing the diverse needs of L2 learners across proficiency levels (Shen et al., 2023; Yu & Yang, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021)

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of WCF for young EFL learners at different proficiency levels, aligning with previous research that suggests low-proficient students benefit more from direct written feedback (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ellis, 2009). However, a significant limitation of this study is the low number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader learner populations. The absence of a control group further limits the ability to definitively attribute improvements to the feedback intervention. Consequently, caution must be taken in applying these results universally across different contexts. Importantly, this study highlights several considerations that can inform future research designs. First, the findings suggest that the type of feedback provided plays a crucial role in learner uptake and development. Future studies should explore a wider range of feedback types, including indirect feedback, to determine their relative effectiveness across proficiency levels. This could help establish more nuanced feedback strategies tailored to learners' specific needs and profiles. Second, the study focuses on young learners, and it underscores the importance of considering learner age in feedback research. Developmental differences may influence how learners perceive and respond to feedback, so future research could investigate how age interacts with feedback type and linguistic targets to better understand these dynamics. Third, the study's design points to the necessity of examining the long-term impact of WCF and including control groups. Incorporating both immediate and delayed post-tests in future longitudinal and mixed-methods designs would provide critical insights into how well learning gains are maintained over time. Such designs could also address potential issues of attrition, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of findings. Furthermore, the indication that high-proficient learners may require different feedback approaches, or may have already reached mastery in certain areas, suggests that future research should investigate adaptive feedback models. These models could dynamically adjust feedback based on learners' ongoing development proficiency, and individual differences such as gender and personality features, offering a more personalized learning experience. Overall, while this study contributes to understanding WCF's role in young EFL learners' development, its limited sample size and design constrain the extent to which its conclusions can be generalized. By addressing these limitations and expanding research to include larger, more diverse sample, control groups, varied feedback types, learners age and gender considerations, and longitudinal perspectives, future studies ca build a more comprehensive and generalizable body of knowledge on effective feedback practices in language learning.

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