

Effects of Electronic Feedback on EFL Learners' Second Language Writing



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ABSTRACT: In the era of technological globalization, educators are encouraged to incorporate online synchronous communication (e.g., chatting) and statistical approaches (e.g., error-identification automatic annotator) into the writing curriculum (Hosseini, 2012; Li, Link, & Hegelheimer, 2014). Electronic feedback is playing an increasingly vital part in modern writing instruction. It improves learners' revision and reduces teachers' workloads associated with error correction and delivering insightful comments. However, the deficiencies of e-feedback have been noted by both learner and instructor roles (Li, Link, & Hegelheimer, 2014). This paper is to review relevant studies on how electronic corrective feedback facilitates writing instruction in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

With the availability of technologies, electronic media, such as social network services, instant messaging, blogs, e-mails, online classrooms, and other computer-mediated formats, have innumerable effects on giving feedback in language writing learning. According to the widespread use of computers and the internet in writing classrooms recently, a distinction between traditional error correction and e-feedback has been significantly noticed (Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014). In the classroom, learners are generally hesitant to submit their work for fear of looking unintelligent in front of their classmates while receiving teachers' comments (Chiu & Savignon, 2006). Conversely, computer-mediated communication can provide a non-threatening environment for learners to get feedback and practice their literacy skills (Tafazoli et al., 2014). Moreover, Allah (2008) studied electronic feedback and found traditional feedback difficulties in the teacher section. The study showed that teachers might deliver vague and abstract comments that fail to assist learners in rewriting their composition and need more time to set face-to-face conferences for correcting learners' errors which entails insufficient interaction. Nevertheless, different types of computer-based facilities may support teachers in providing corrective feedback to their learners regarding errors, mistakes, and contents (Abuseileek & Abualsha, 2014) as effectively as enhancing learner interactions with teachers and other people through online sites (Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012).

Furthermore, in the age of digital education, electronic feedback has played an essential role in making learners' text revision more efficient and reducing teachers' workload (Saadi & Saadat, 2015). E-feedback provides immediate error correction and extensive comments from online readers (Saeed & Ghazali, 2016). Allah (2008) stated that online writers could connect to the certainty of receiving some forms of reply, such as interpersonal e-mail notes from keypals located at a considerable geographic distance and syntactical correction by automated essay assessment programs. In addition, software-generated feedback's potential usefulness and effectiveness can help teachers focus less on ungrammatical mistakes as electronic features are invented to ease the teacher load of assessing large amounts of learner writing (Ware & Warschauer, 2016).

ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK

Electronic feedback is the provision of corrective response or negative evidence through the use of a computer, which is a quick and convenient way to make learners aware of syntactic errors and mistakes resulting in developing learners' interlanguage according to Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990; Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017). Heift (2010) additionally clarified that electronic feedback or e-feedback refers to computer-assisted feedback provided by instructors or peers using a computer and supplied electronically to the writing owner. Computer-assisted feedback, such as comments, track changes, or feedbacks provided in synchronous or asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC), differs from computer-generated feedback or automatic writing evaluation (AWE), which provides algorithm-derived feedback transferred from an existing database of comments or corrections (Heift, 2010; Ware, 2011; Hosseini, 2012; Li, Link, & Hegeleman, 2014). In addition, computer-assisted feedback includes both explicit and implicit feedback. Explicit electronic feedback specifies grammatical explanation or overt error correction (e.g., annotating comments next to errors indicated or private discussion regarding errors in the inbox) while implicit electronic feedback merely indicates that an error has been made (e.g., highlighted errors in an automated program) (Beuning, 2010; Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014).

CHARACTERISTICS AND EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK

E-feedback has become common in learning writing, especially in university contexts, for learners to submit their papers through online classroom platforms and for teachers to provide feedback on learners' papers electronically in chats, forums, or via word-processing softwares (Ene, 2014). Conforming to electronic feedback classification by many scholars (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017; Li, Link, & Hegelheimer, 2014; Heift, 2010; Ware, 2011), this paper manifests electronic feedback into the online networking services as well as automatic error correction programs.

Online networking services are channels available for learners and teachers to engage in processes of generating comments and feedback to particular posted written works (Alipanahi & Mahmoodi, 2015). These internet-based communication platforms also deliver learners cultural exchanges in terms of linguistic styles and patterns; besides, keypals or one-by-one online partners are a major essential part of this giving feedback due to the interaction of asking-answer question regarding founded errors or mistakes (Allah, 2008; Liu, et al., 2010). The use of the internet offers learners an unthreatening environment to rewrite their works, additional time to solve their multiple drafts outside of the classroom, and critical feedback promoting writers' and reviewers' linguistic competence (Chiu & Savignon, 2006; Grami, 2012; Ciftci & Kocoglu, 2012).

Additionally, Computer-mediated error justification programs can generate instantaneous evaluative feedback on available learners' writing (Al-Olimat, & Abuseileek, 2015). The programs rely on various machine learning methods such as artificial intelligence (AI), natural language processing (NLP), and latent semantic analysis (LSA) (Landauer, Foltz, & Laham, 1998), which are invented to recognize and transfer individualized reports, syntactical inputs, organizational patterns and mechanical aspects on grammatical errors assessment. Notably, the greater these protocols, the more productive software is catalyzed (Saadi & Saadat, 2015). Therefore, the software can investigate lexical complexity, structural diversity, and topic-comment parsing to create both scoring rubrics and immediate feedback in grammar. Some well-known automated evaluation systems are Criterion®, My Access!, and Markin4. Without question, the speed of an electronic rater can outstrip the fastest human reader (Dikli, 2010), which effectively mitigates teacher duty (Dikli, 2010; Lavolette et al., 2015; Saadi & Saadat, 2015).

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK ON WRITING

Since the introduction of the internet and extensive use of the computer, many scholars (Yusof, Manan, & Alias, 2012; Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014; Lavolette, Polio, & Kahng, 2015; Saadi & Saadat, 2015) have increasingly paid attention to digital pedagogy in order to enhance learners' learning. In writing class, providing e-feedback has been generating considerable interest in using online networking services and working on automated software.

Yusof et al. (2012) discovered that one of the main constraints faced by writing teachers is providing timely face-to-face feedback on the learners' written works in a writing process that consists of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Their study investigated the possibility of using Facebook Notes to mediate peer feedback on learners' writing pieces. They assumed that the guided peer feedback via Facebook Notes could promote learners' revision and consequently improve the quality of their written works. Additionally, twenty Malaysian diploma learners participated in this action research. Twelve learners who posted their essays on Facebook Notes were in the experimental group. The remaining eight who gave feedback without submitting their compositions were treated as the control group. After three stages, including the instruction of the academic writing process, feedback training, and feedback exercises, the results concluded that the problem of providing timely and effective feedback typically encountered by writing teachers could be solved if learners conveniently access the 'Notes.' Furthermore, the limited class time could be expanded by letting the learners learn in their own time outside class as well as being peer reviewers who criticized others' writing which demonstrated better self-editing on their works. In conclusion, EFL teachers gained another teaching tool for their pedagogy, making their writing classes more exciting and efficient.

In addition, some studies (e.g., Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014; Huang, 2016) on written feedback in order to develop learners' second language writing have explored more about online feedback. Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, and Hosseini (2014) sought to address the effects of direct-indirect corrective feedback via email. This study employed the pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design, and the forty-eight learners aged nineteen to twenty-one years old were separated into two equivalent groups (control and experimental). As for the three experimental groups' assignments, the implicit-explicit feedback process through email comprised three patterns: underlining and circling the errors, underling and indicating symbols beside the errors, and correcting the errors. On the other hand, no corrective feedback was given to the control group's written paragraphs. The result conclusively elucidated that the indirect-direct e-feedback helped learners feel relaxed and recognize the errors they suffered, and using email also freed learners to process language content.

Huang (2016) also indicated that incorporating the task and peer feedback through blogs could enhance an authentic and motivating writing environment. The subjects consisted of fifty-seven applied English or English-major learners at two southern Taiwan universities. Learners were initially assigned to register their blogs on Blogger.com, and subsequently post their compositions. This could help learners access peer blogs and leave comments on posts. Likewise, the blog owners attained an

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interactive mode of communication by viewing the comments and responding to them. The research finding exhibited that blogging offers a creative and communicative platform for peer feedback as well as facilitates productive writing instruction.

Drawing on the research of providing feedback using computer programs involving its advantages and drawbacks, several studies have examined various kinds of automated software that can simultaneously reduce teacher workload and prove error correction. Lavolette, Polio and Kahng (2015) conducted on the accuracy of computer-assisted feedback and learners' response. Thirty-two learners adapted Criterion®, a program developed by Educational Testing Service which could detect ungrammatical terms and mostly brief grammatical explanations as a research instrument. The result revealed that the Criterion could identify determiner errors (e.g., articles or subject-verb agreement) and generate indirect feedback. It represented a slight reduction of teachers' duty in the case of coding perfect command on the program. Nevertheless, the uncertain outcomes and delayed feedback entailed complexity for both learners and teachers.

Despite the hindrance of Criterion program (Lavolette et al., 2015), Saadi and Saadat (2015) investigated how e-feedback developed the learners' writing accuracy. The objectives of this study were to examine the efficacy of using software in providing Iranian EFL learners with metalinguistic electronic corrective feedback and direct electronic corrective feedback. In the study, twenty-nine learners were organized into two groups. The first group received direct electronic corrective feedback (DECF) using Ginger software. In contrast, another group was given metalinguistic electronic corrective feedback (MECF) in error codes provided through Markin4 software. The findings showed that both groups equally improved their writing accuracy; moreover, this was in contrast to some early research studies which claimed that computer-mediated feedback given on the learners' writing had no negative effect on learners' revision. Saadi and Saadat (2015) also reported that the automatic correction programs would perform systematically and precisely on checking learners' writing only if teachers program the e-correctors perfectly. Hence, the feedback programs in this study accurately improved the learners' work since the feedback provided was well-organized.

In summary, using technology to help learners engage with their feedback provides greater flexibility of accessing corrective feedback (Yusof, Manan, & Alias, 2012), and the worryless environment enables learners read and respond to their feedback without worry (Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014; Huang, 2016). Meanwhile, the significant benefit of receiving corrective feedback from automatic error identification software is the reduction of teacher duties when teachers fully understand and systematically key the set of functions into the operating process of the program (Saadi & Saadat, 2015). Nonetheless, without successful functional data, the error-detective program may cause invalid output as well as delayed comments (Lavolette, Polio, & Kahng, 2015).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this review, the positive effects of electronic feedback are demonstrated; however, a few hindrances are still a concern (Lavolette et al., 2015; Saadi, & Saadat, 2015; Tafazoli, Nosratzadeh, & Hosseini, 2014; Beuningen, 2010; Hosseini, 2012). Examining different areas of research and instruction in which the concept of electronic feedback has been addressed, three proportions regarding e-feedback for second-language writing are encapsulated. Firstly, comparative studies illustrate the distinction of beneficial effects between online feedback and automated error-detective program on ESL writing. The former possesses interaction to reach the correct language, while the latter emerges high-speed error assessment. Secondly, analogizing with traditional face-to-face feedback, both types of e-feedback provide less anxiety due to the non-threatening surrounding. Finally, software-generated feedback is persistently sophisticated for teachers due to operational and pilot prompts.

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