# The effect of focused and comprehensive written corrective feedback on writing accuracy: A comparative study

**Arshad Iqbal**

English Language Institute
King AbdulAziz University, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**Mohammad Azannee Saad\***

Department of Language and Literacy, Kulliyyah of Education
International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia

*email: a69iqbal@gmail.com, azannee@iium.edu.my*
*\*Corresponding author: Mohammad Azannee Saad*

**Abstract:** Although a vast body of research has investigated the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy, there is relatively fewer studies that compared the effectiveness of focused and comprehensive written corrective feedback. Determining the relative efficacy of feedback focus is crucial for writing instruction as it can make error correction less tedious for the teacher and more manageable for the learner. Writing teachers need to know whether students can better internalize a selected number of error categories at a time or cope with feedback provided on all errors simultaneously. This research reports a quantitative study that compared the effectiveness of focused and comprehensive corrective feedback on Saudi Arabia English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' essay writing accuracy. Written essays were collected from 18 Foundation Year, Health Sciences students where they were divided into two experimental groups (N=6) and one control group (N=6). A pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test design was employed to measure the effects of the two types of written corrective feedback on learners' writing accuracy. The results showed that focused written corrective feedback was not significantly more effective than comprehensive written corrective feedback although it caused lower error means on both the selected error categories as well as on total errors. The results suggest that students and teachers need not view the two types of feedback as mutually exclusive as far as their relative effectiveness is concerned.

**Keywords:** comprehensive written corrective feedback, English as a Foreign Language, focused written corrective feedback, writing accuracy

# INTRODUCTION

Accuracy in second language writing is a concern with both writing teachers and students in EFL contexts. Learners make all types of errors, including errors of syntax, morphology, vocabulary, cohesion, punctuation and spelling when writing.The process approach to writing lays emphasis upon the wider issues of discourse organization and ideas generation, but it relegates linguistic accuracy to a secondary position (Ferris, 2011). While teaching students the discoursal aspects of writing, the process approach tends to put relatively less emphasis on the needs of students who have problems with linguistic accuracy at the level of the sentence (Polio, 1997). In the absence of such basic linguistic competence, the process approach becomes less effective for learners who are struggling with the sentence-level constituents, such as correct syntax, appropriate vocabulary, and accurate spelling and punctuation. Since linguistic inaccuracy adversely affects written expression, such students show little progress in the development of their written proficiency. Therefore, it becomes imperative for writing teachers to provide corrective feedback to improve their students' writing accuracy.

Writing in a second language is an overly complex and challenging task (Hyland, 2003). Second language writers encounter difficulty in both generating and organizing ideas as well as writing accurately. However, according to Ferris (1999), real-life teachers know that it is students' language errors that are really bothersome. The researcher adds that students are themselves concerned about their errors and it is the most challenging part of a writing teacher's job to correct such errors. In instructional contexts, learners mostly rely on teachers' written corrective feedback (WCF) to improve their writing accuracy. Crosthwaite et al. (2022) defined written corrective feedback as "the provision of handwritten and/or electronic markings, symbols, or text notes on written texts for the purposes of correcting linguistic errors at local and/or global levels of production" (p.1).

Language-focussed WCF research spans across three decades, and in this period of time, various aspects of the construct have been researched (Li & Vuono, 2019). One of the many outcomes of this research endeavour is the classification of WCF into focused and comprehensive WCF. In the former type of WCF, the teacher provides feedback on a few selected categories of errors, while in the latter type, feedback is provided on all errors in the written script (Brown, 2012; Stefanou & Révész, 2015, as cited in Lopez et al., 2021).

However, despite so much research about WCF over the last three decades, not all questions have been definitively answered, and the findings are at best inconclusive (Mao & Lee, 2020). One such major area of concern is the extent to which teachers should respond to students' errors in writing (Li, 2017), that is, whether teachers should correct all errors in students' written scripts providing comprehensive or unfocussed feedback, or they should select a few selected error types giving selective or focussed feedback. This is a question that can concern both students and teachers. From the students' perspective, comprehensive WCF has been criticized for adding to leaners' cognitive load (Bitchener, 2008; Sheen et al., 2009; Ellis et al., 2008) and, therefore, preventing their internalization of the feedback, and from the teacher's point-of-view, correcting all errors is thought to lead to teacher burnout (Hyland, 2003; Truscott, 1996). On the other hand, it is also claimed that focused feedback, because of its manageability, helps students to develop a better understanding of their errors (Ferris, 1995). Furthermore, while studies have investigated the effects of WCF on comprehensive- and selected error categories separately, only three studies (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen et al., 2009; Frear & Chiu, 2015, as cited in Mao & Lee, 2020) have compared the effects of these two types of feedback.

However, to make error correction less tedious for the teacher and more manageable for the learner, determining whether focused- or comprehensive WCF is more effective is crucial for writing instruction. Writing teachers need to know whether students can better notice and

internalize a selected number of error categories at a time (focused WCF), or they can better cope with WCF provided on all errors (comprehensive WCF) simultaneously. Thus, the relative effectiveness of comprehensive and focused feedback on learners' writing accuracy needs to be established empirically, so that teachers and students may adjust their beliefs and practices about WCF in the light of the findings from research. This study, therefore, set out to compare the differential effects of focused- and comprehensive WCF on students writing accuracy to find out how effective they were in maximizing student learning as well as to make some useful contribution to the research in the field.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The extent and amount of feedback that teachers should provide on learners' written output is known as feedback scope, that is, whether teachers should provide their students feedback on each and every error in their written scripts, or they should give feedback on a few selected categories of errors (Mao & Lee, 2020). As empirical evidence in favor of the utility of WCF has mounted overtime, more and more attention has been paid to feedback strategies. Consequently, feedback scope, an area of direct relevance and importance to frontline teachers, has fallen into relative negligence (ibid).

The key terms in the domain of feedback scope are "comprehensive WCF" and "focused WCF". The former means comprehensive correction of all errors in students' writing (Beuningen et al., 2012, as cited in Mao & Lee, 2020), while the latter refers to providing feedback on a selected number of error types (Lee, 2013, as cited in Mao & Lee, 2020). Although the terms "comprehensive feedback" and "unfocused feedback" have been used interchangeably in the literature, the latter term has not been necessarily used to imply feedback on all errors. For instance, Ellis et al. (2008) and Sheen et al. (2009) have defined the notion to mean feedback on a range of errors and on several errors respectively.

Ellis et al. (2008) is in fact one of the earliest studies that studied the contrastive effects of focused and unfocused WCF. The study investigated the effectiveness of WCF on English articles. The participants were Japanese University general English students assigned to two experimental- and one control group The students wrote three narratives and took a grammar correction test. The experimental groups received corrections on their writing, but the control group only got general comments. The results showed that WCF was effective in getting the students to use articles consistently accurately, showing long-term gains in accuracy. Both experimental groups improved in their use of articles from the pretest to the delayed post-test and more successfully corrected articles in the sentences on the error correction test as compared with the control group. However, no significance difference was found between the focused and unfocused groups.

Sheen et al. (2009) investigated the effects of focused and unfocused feedback both on a single error category, articles, and on a wide range of errors, such as articles, copula, regular past tense, irregular past tense, and prepositions. 80 participants, who were at intermediate level, took part in the study. There were four feedback conditions: a) a focused written CF group b) an unfocused written CF group c) a writing practice group and d) a control group. The results indicated that the focused group outperformed both the unfocused and control groups in post-test 1. This implied that feedback given on selected forms of the articles, indefinite article (first mention) and definite article (second mention), was more effective than feedback directed at a range of errors, including articles, copula, regular- and irregular past tense and prepositions.

Similarly, Frear and Chiu (2015) investigated the differential effects of unfocused indirect and focused indirect WCF on Taiwanese EFL learner's weak verbs and total accuracy in new pieces of writing. It was a quasi-experimental study that employed a pre-test, immediate post-

test and delayed post-test design. The participants were university-level English students in Taiwan. Three feedback groups were formed: two treatment groups and a control group. The two treatment were a) focused indirect WCF(N=12) b) unfocused indirect WCF(N=14) and c) a control group (N=16). The focused indirect WCF received feedback only weak verbs (regular verbs) while the unfocused indirect WCF was provided CF on all errors including weak verbs. The results demonstrated that both treatment groups outperformed the control groups in the immediate post-test as well as the delayed post-test as for as accuracy in weak verbs was concerned. Whereas the control group did not demonstrate any improvements from the pre-test to the post-tests, the treatments groups did. Both treatment groups improved in accuracy of the target structure across the three tests. However, there were no significant differences between the two WCF groups.

Rahimi (2019) also inquired into the relative impact of comprehensive and focused feedback on French EFL learners' improvement of accuracy in the use of word and sentence in relation to focused WCF and in the use of all other categories including word and sentence structure errors for the unfocused WCF. The participants were 78 French Canadian, ESL learners, 28 male and 50 female. They were assigned to four feedback conditions: a) comprehensive-revision b) comprehensive without revision c) focused-revision and d) focused without revision. The target linguistic structures for the feedback were word and sentence errors. The results demonstrated that the focused feedback was significantly more effective than comprehensive feedback in word error reduction at T3, whereas focused revision was more successful than comprehensive feedback regarding sentence errors at both T2 and T3. Overall, the study indicates that focused feedback was more effective than comprehensive feedback with regard to word and sentence errors.

The studies on the relative merits of focused and comprehensive WCF reviewed for this research have certain shortcomings, which creates the need for further research. Firstly, Ellis et al. (2008) lacked ecological validity because it was conducted in lab-like controlled environment to measure the effects of corrective feedback on language acquisition. Moreover, the number of error categories used as the dependent variable in the two types of feedback, comprehensive and focused, was not discrete enough to clearly distinguish between them. So, this study proposes to make up for this by operationalizing the two types of feedback as clearly as possible. The comprehensive WCF in this study targeted all formal errors, including the five categories which were the focus of the focused feedback. Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2008) targeted a single error category, articles, as the focus of the focused feedback. This renders the research ecologically invalid because in real classrooms, teachers cannot narrow their feedback focus so much as students have many more errors in their writing, and they expect teachers to identify and correct them. Thus, the focused feedback in this study has been operationalized as "mid-focused", so that it would be ecologically valid.

Sheen et al. (2009), also suffers from similar limitations. The focused feedback is too narrow, focused only on articles, and the unfocused feedback is not comprehensive enough (in fact, only mid-focused). Therefore, the study falls short on ecological validity. Friar and Chiu (2015) found that although both focused and unfocused feedback groups outperformed the controls, they were similar in their effects on accuracy on the selected error categories. The study ends in inconclusiveness as far as the comparative merits of the two types of feedback are concerned; therefore, more research is required into the area as an endeavour to look for more conclusive evidence.

Finally, Rahimi (2019) compared mid-focused and comprehensive feedback in his investigation of feedback focus. However, the error categories in Rahimi (2019) and in this study are not the same with a few exceptions, as each study would obviously take into account its respective context. In the former study, the five categories that are the target of the focused feedback are word, sentence structure, noun ending, articles and verb-each category subsuming

a large number of sub-categories, which would make the mid-focus feedback a bit too expansive. The present study was, therefore, conducted to make up for the shortcomings of the studies mentioned above.

# METHOD

## Participants

18 students, on the health track of the Foundation Year and registered for an English course participated in this study. The course focuses on enhancing students' English language proficiency by teaching them an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course centred around medical topics. There is a special focus on the development of academic writing skills. The students were in trimester two of a three-trimester course, having passed Trimester 1. They were aged between 21-23 years and are all enrolled in one class taught by one lecturer. As far as their English language proficiency is concerned, they were placed at Level B1 on the CEFR (Common European Framework Reference for Languages) evident in the results of the Oxford Placement Test. They had studied English from Grade 6 in primary school and have had about six years of exposure to the language in terms of formal instruction. However, factors such as exposure to social media that provides them with the language inputs are not considered. This is also taking into consideration that while such exposure significantly helps to improve their spoken English, it does not necessarily extend to writing. The group overall had little exposure to formal academic writing and were struggling both with regard to content organization and linguistic competence at the start of the course.

## Instruments

Data for the pre-test and post-test experiment came from five student essays written at different time intervals: T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5. A total of 18 essays were collected from three groups of students: experimental group 1 that received focused feedback (FFG, N=6), experimental group 2 that received comprehensive feedback (CFG, N=6) and a control group (C, N=6). In general, the three groups help the experiment which was to measure the comparative effects of focused- and comprehensive written corrective feedback on students' writing accuracy be realized.

Writing tasks were used as data collecting instruments in this study because the academic writing course the students were studying used this genre, and the students were, therefore, familiar with it. The course included several types of essays such as descriptive essay, comparison and contrast essay and the argumentative essay. The model essays in the course are five paragraphs; hence, the students were asked to write 250-word, five-paragraph essays on various topics related to healthcare.

A combination of direct feedback and metalinguistic feedback was used as treatment in this study. Direct feedback was only used where it was felt that an error was too complex for the student to correct by interpreting the code. The focused WCF group (FFG) received feedback on four error categories, namely, articles, verb forms, subject-verb agreement and word choice errors, whereas the comprehensive WCF group (CFG) was provided feedback on all errors including those of the FFG. The control group, for both ethical and ecological reasons, was given feedback on content.

## Data Collection Procedures

As previously mentioned, the students were made to write five essays at five different points in time: T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. The essays were all of an average length of 250 words. All essays were written in actual class time under exam conditions. Students were not allowed to use their cell phones or look up dictionaries. T1, the pre-test, was administered in the first week. The students wrote an essay on the topic "Why I want to be a doctor." The essay was hand-written, and the time allotted was 50 minutes. Feedback on the pre-test was provided after two days in the same week, each group receiving feedback according to the feedback condition applicable to it. T2 was administered in Week 2. The students were asked to write an argumentative essay on the topic "Some health-conscious people think that junk food should be completely banned in educational institutions. Do you agree or disagree?" The student hand-wrote the essay in the allotted class time of 50 minutes. In the following week, the students were given feedback on T2, and were asked to write T3. The topic was "The use of robots in healthcare".   Feedback was provided on T3 the following day, and then T4 was given in Week 4. The topic was "Discuss three ways vaccines have improved public health". T5 was administered in Week 7, the topic being "Compare and contrast Type 2 diabetes". No feedback was given on T4 or T5.

## Data Analysis

Testing the causal relationship between two variables necessitates quantitative data because the outcome can be measured numerically. Samples t-tests and ANOVAs are used where the effect of one or two independent variables is measured on one dependent variable. Since this study compared the variance in score means of three groups with two dependent variables at separate time intervals, a Mixed-Model MANOVA was employed. Hence, the selection of a quasi-experiment using repeated measures MANOVA was made for this component of the research. WCF was the independent variable (Iv) and writing accuracy was the dependent variable (Dv) with two levels; focused and comprehensive. The two levels of writing accuracy were treated as separate dependent variables, focused error ratio per 100 words (FER) and total error ratios per hundred words (TER) measured in terms of errors per 100 words of written text (Chandler, 2003).

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the overall group means and standard deviations for each dependent variables for 5 different time periods. Group means for FFG are lower for both dependent variables across the five-time periods and group means of C are higher for both dependent variables across the five-time periods and the same is depicted in Figure 1 and 2. Group means of the CFG for both dependent variables lie somewhat in the middle of Control and FFG.

*Table 1: Descriptive statistics for two dependent variables for three groups over five time periods*

| | Groups | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Control | | CFG | | FFG | |
| | Mean | Std Deviation | Mean | Std Deviation | Mean | Std Deviation |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | 6.26 | 1.53 | 3.28 | .61 | 1.87 | .68 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post1) | 6.55 | 1.25 | 2.60 | .67 | 1.69 | .72 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | 5.93 | 1.16 | 2.27 | .44 | 1.45 | .83 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | 5.98 | 1.37 | 1.81 | .47 | 1.16 | .58 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | 5.75 | 1.29 | 1.18 | .08 | 1.09 | .51 |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | 13.10 | 5.48 | 7.49 | 2.96 | 4.52 | 1.99 |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 1) | 12.08 | 5.23 | 6.04 | 2.45 | 3.82 | 1.86 |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | 12.11 | 4.87 | 5.68 | 2.41 | 2.46 | 1.69 |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | 11.58 | 5.14 | 4.49 | 2.44 | 1.91 | 1.46 |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | 11.35 | 4.58 | 3.83 | 1.34 | 1.65 | 1.29 |

Table 2 presents the MANOVA results. The results were examined based on an alpha of .05. The *p*-values for and any interaction with these within-subjects factors were calculated using the Greenhouse-Geisser corrections to adjust for the violation of the sphericity assumption. According to Greenhouse and Geisser (1959), this is the appropriate way to adjust for violations of the sphericity assumption. Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were not applied to Dv Factor, since Dv Factor did not violate the sphericity assumption.

Between-Subjects: The main effect for groups was significant $F(2, 15) = 19.09$, $p < .001$, indicating that there were significant differences in FER and TER between the levels of groups.

Within-Subjects: The main effect for Time Factor was significant $F(4, 60) = 49.32$, $p < .001$, indicating there were significant differences in FER and TER across the levels of Time Factor ignoring Dv Factor. The main effect for Dv Factor was significant $F(1, 15) = 33.15$, $p < .001$, indicating there were significant differences across the levels of Dv Factor, FER and TER, regardless of Time Factor. The interaction effect between Time Factor and Dv Factor was significant $F(4, 60) = 9.83$, $p < .001$, indicating that the relationships between the levels of Dv Factor differed significantly across the levels of Time Factor.

Within-Between Interactions: The interaction effect between Time Factor and GPS was significant $F(8, 60) = 3.41$, $p = .003$, indicating that the relationships between the levels of Time Factor differed significantly between the levels of GPS ignoring Dv Factor. The interaction effect between Dv Factor and GPS was significant $F(2, 15) = 4.54$, $p = .029$, indicating that the relationships between the levels of Dv Factor differed significantly between the levels of GPS regardless of Time Factor.

The interaction effect between Time Factor, Dv Factor, and GPS was not significant $F(8, 60) = 1.08$, $p = .387$, indicating that the relationships between the combinations of Time Factor and Dv Factor were similar between the levels of GPS.

*Table 2: Mixed Model MANOVA Results*

| Source | df | SS | MS | F | p | $\eta_p^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between-Subjects | | | | | | |
|   GPS | 2 | 1,553.22 | 776.61 | 19.09 | < .001 | 0.72 |
|   Residuals | 15 | 610.31 | 40.69 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Within-Subjects | | | | | | |
|   Time Factor | 4 | 85.92 | 21.48 | 49.32 | < .001 | 0.77 |
|   GPS:Time Factor | 8 | 11.87 | 1.48 | 3.41 | .003 | 0.31 |
|   Time Factor Residuals | 60 | 26.13 | 0.44 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
|   Dv Factor | 1 | 566.76 | 566.76 | 33.15 | < .001 | 0.69 |
|   GPS:Dv Factor | 2 | 155.34 | 77.67 | 4.54 | .029 | 0.38 |
|   Dv Factor Residuals | 15 | 256.44 | 17.10 | | | |
| | | | | | | |
|   Time Factor:Dv Factor | 4 | 15.58 | 3.90 | 9.83 | < .001 | 0.40 |
|   GPS:Time Factor:Dv Factor | 8 | 3.41 | 0.43 | 1.08 | .387 | 0.13 |
|   Time Factor:Dv Factor Residuals | 60 | 23.77 | 0.40 | | | |

     The results are graphically displayed in Figure 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows the reduction in the error means of the three groups, CFG, C and FFG across the five time periods.　There is a within-subjects as well as a between-subjects reduction in error means of the three groups for the FER (Dv1) over time. FFG and CFG can be observed interacting as well. Figure 2 demonstrates the decrease in TER (Dv2) for the three groups. Similar trends can be observed here, too. There is both a within-and between-subjects decrease in the error means of the three groups across time. FFG and CFG are headed in the direction of an interaction.

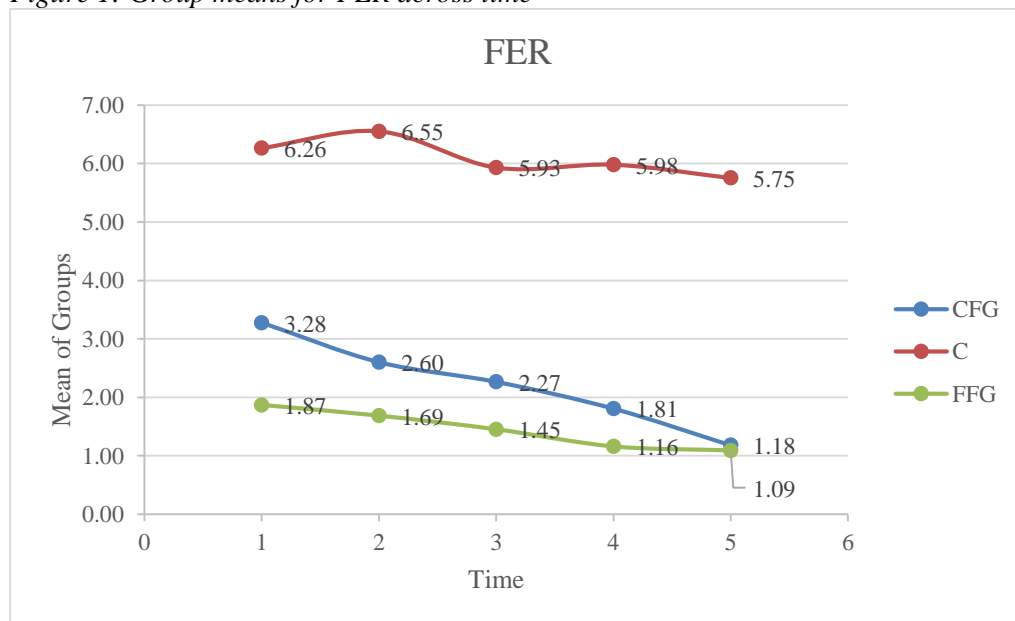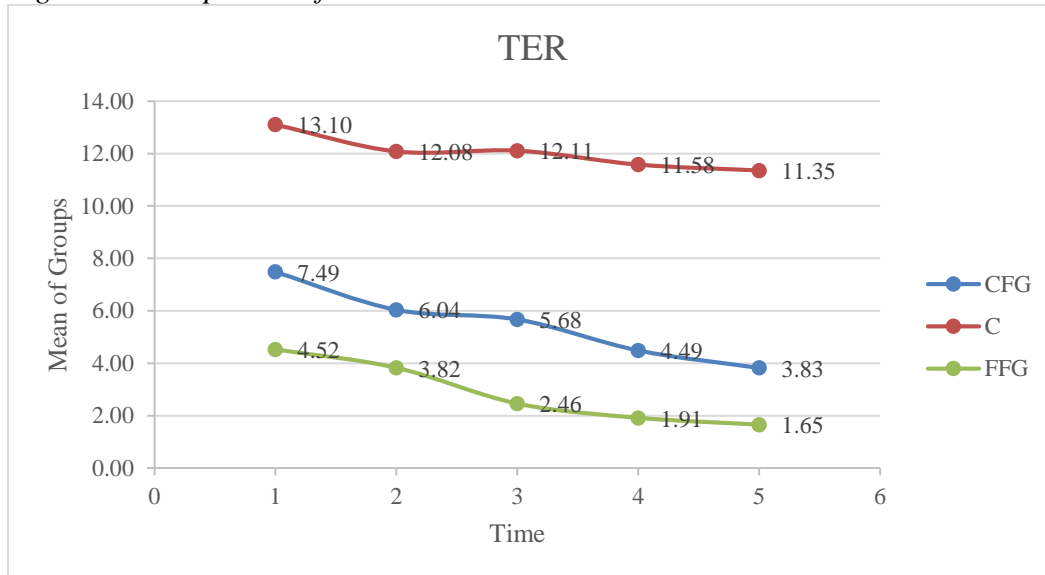*Figure 1: Group means for FER across time*

*Figure 2: Group means for TER across time*



To find out if significant means differences were there between- or within-subjects, univariate analyses (Omnibus test) were conducted. Table 3 and Table 4 display the results of these analyses. It can be observed that for both FER and TER, the univariate analyses indicate that the differences of means are significant (p = .000) between the groups but not within the groups. This trend persists across all five-time intervals.

*Table 3: Univariate ANOVA for FER (omnibus test)*

|  |  | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | Between Groups | 60.362 | 2 | 30.181 | 28.287 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 16.004 | 15 | 1.067 |  |  |
|  | Total | 76.366 | 17 |  |  |  |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post1) | Between Groups | 80.098 | 2 | 40.049 | 47.382 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 12.679 | 15 | .845 |  |  |
|  | Total | 92.777 | 17 |  |  |  |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post2) | Between Groups | 68.263 | 2 | 34.132 | 46.117 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 11.102 | 15 | .740 |  |  |
|  | Total | 79.365 | 17 |  |  |  |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | Between Groups | 82.111 | 2 | 41.056 | 50.234 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 12.259 | 15 | .817 |  |  |
|  | Total | 94.370 | 17 |  |  |  |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | Between Groups | 85.249 | 2 | 42.624 | 66.354 | .000 |
|  | Within Groups | 9.636 | 15 | .642 |  |  |
|  | Total | 94.885 | 17 |  |  |  |

*Table 4: Univariate ANOVA for TER (omnibus test)*

| | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | Between Groups | 227.795 | 2 | 113.897 | 7.994 | .004 |
| | Within Groups | 213.721 | 15 | 14.248 | | |
| | Total | 441.515 | 17 | | | |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 1) | Between Groups | 219.085 | 2 | 109.542 | 8.918 | .003 |
| | Within Groups | 184.254 | 15 | 12.284 | | |
| | Total | 403.339 | 17 | | | |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | Between Groups | 289.800 | 2 | 144.900 | 13.394 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 162.276 | 15 | 10.818 | | |
| | Total | 452.076 | 17 | | | |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | Between Groups | 300.338 | 2 | 150.169 | 13.065 | .001 |
| | Within Groups | 172.416 | 15 | 11.494 | | |
| | Total | 472.755 | 17 | | | |
| Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | Between Groups | 310.734 | 2 | 155.367 | 19.054 | .000 |
| | Within Groups | 122.313 | 15 | 8.154 | | |
| | Total | 433.047 | 17 | | | |

The next step in the analysis was to find out which of the three groups had significant means differences, so a post-hoc analysis was conducted. The multiple comparisons revealed that there were significant differences of means between the control- and the focused group as well as the control- and the comprehensive feedback group for both FER and TER across all five time points. No significant differences of means, however, existed between the focused- and comprehensive group for either of the two dependent variables, FER and TER at any point of time. Although the focused group had lower means compared with the comprehensive group at all time periods, they never achieved significance. Table 5 exhibits these trends.

*Table 5: Post-hoc Analysis*

**Multiple Comparisons (LSD)**

| Dependent Variable | (I) GPS | (J) GPS | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | C | CG | 2.98667* | .59636 | .000 | 1.7156 | 4.2578 |
| | | FG | 4.39167* | .59636 | .000 | 3.1206 | 5.6628 |
| | CG | C | -2.98667* | .59636 | .000 | -4.2578 | -1.7156 |
| | | FG | 1.40500* | .59636 | .032 | .1339 | 2.6761 |
| | FG | C | -4.39167* | .59636 | .000 | -5.6628 | -3.1206 |
| | | CG | -1.40500* | .59636 | .032 | -2.6761 | -.1339 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post1) | C | CG | 3.94667* | .53080 | .000 | 2.8153 | 5.0780 |
| | | FG | 4.86167* | .53080 | .000 | 3.7303 | 5.9930 |
| | CG | C | -3.94667* | .53080 | .000 | -5.0780 | -2.8153 |
| | | FG | .91500 | .53080 | .105 | -.2164 | 2.0464 |
| | FG | C | -4.86167* | .53080 | .000 | -5.9930 | -3.7303 |
| | | CG | -.91500 | .53080 | .105 | -2.0464 | .2164 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | C | CG | 3.66500* | .49669 | .000 | 2.6063 | 4.7237 |
| | | FG | 4.47667* | .49669 | .000 | 3.4180 | 5.5353 |
| | CG | C | -3.66500* | .49669 | .000 | -4.7237 | -2.6063 |
| | | FG | .81167 | .49669 | .123 | -.2470 | 1.8703 |
| | FG | C | -4.47667* | .49669 | .000 | -5.5353 | -3.4180 |
| | | CG | -.81167 | .49669 | .123 | -1.8703 | .2470 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | C | CG | 4.17167* | .52195 | .000 | 3.0592 | 5.2842 |
| | | FG | 4.82000* | .52195 | .000 | 3.7075 | 5.9325 |
| | CG | C | -4.17167* | .52195 | .000 | -5.2842 | -3.0592 |
| | | FG | .64833 | .52195 | .233 | -.4642 | 1.7608 |
| | FG | C | -4.82000* | .52195 | .000 | -5.9325 | -3.7075 |
| | | CG | -.64833 | .52195 | .233 | -1.7608 | .4642 |
| Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | C | CG | 4.57000* | .46274 | .000 | 3.5837 | 5.5563 |
| | | FG | 4.66167* | .46274 | .000 | 3.6754 | 5.6480 |
| | CG | C | -4.57000* | .46274 | .000 | -5.5563 | -3.5837 |
| | | FG | .09167 | .46274 | .846 | -.8946 | 1.0780 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FG | C | -4.66167* | .46274 | .000 | -5.6480 | -3.6754 |
| | CG | -.09167 | .46274 | .846 | -1.0780 | .8946 |

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Similar trends were revealed by the pairwise comparisons between the three groups. Table 6 shows the comparisons between the three groups across time. The values in the same row with different subscript assume significance at p < .05. On the other hand, values in the same row with the same subscript are not significant. Keeping this in mind, it can be observed that C and FFG have dissimilar values, which indicates that the group means of those two groups were significantly different for both Dvs across all five periods of time. No other group means assumed significance.

*Table 6: Pairwise Comparisons of Group Means over Time*

| | | Groups | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Control | CFG | FFG |
| | | Mean | Mean | Mean |
| FER | Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | $5.22_a$ | $3.28_{a,b}$ | $1.87_b$ |
| | Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post1) | $4.68_a$ | $2.60_b$ | $1.69_b$ |
| | Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | $3.35_a$ | $2.27_{a,b}$ | $1.45_b$ |
| | Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | $3.23_a$ | $1.81_b$ | $1.16_b$ |
| | Focused Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | $2.83_a$ | $1.18_b$ | $1.09_b$ |
| TER | Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Pre) | $13.10_a$ | $7.49_{a,b}$ | $4.52_b$ |
| | Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 1) | $10.18_a$ | $6.04_{a,b}$ | $3.82_b$ |
| | Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 2) | $9.07_a$ | $5.68_{a,b}$ | $2.46_b$ |
| | Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Post 3) | $8.24_a$ | $4.49_{a,b}$ | $1.91_b$ |
| | Total Error Ratio per 100 words (Delayed post) | $7.81_a$ | $3.85_{a,b}$ | $1.65_b$ |

## DISCUSSION

The current study was conducted to investigate the differential effects of focused- and comprehensive WCF on learners' writing accuracy over time.

As reported in Table 3, the results have indicated that the main effect for groups was significant $F (2, 15) = 19.09, p < .001$. This means that the three groups FFG, CFG and Control had significant differences in their means with respect to FER and TER. Also, the main effect of time was significant $F(4, 60) = 49.32, p < .001$ for each of the three groups across the various time points, which signifies that each groups' means for FER and TER had varied across time or that time had a significant effect on group means. Furthermore, the main effect of Dv factor was also found to be significant $F(1, 15) = 33.15, p < .001$ meaning that FER and TER were significantly different from each other across time. Lastly, the interaction effect between time and Dv factors was significant $F(4, 60) = 9.83, p < .001$, which means that the levels of the Dv factor had significantly differed over time. To simplify the findings, one might say that both a between-subjects difference of means and a within-subjects difference of means was found. In other words, there was a progressive decrease in each groups' errors means over time, so that the error means varied between different time periods. Also, there were significant mean differences between the groups in terms of their error means.

Although it was found that there were significant differences between the means of the three groups, it was with the aid of post-hoc analysis that the groups comprising the significant differences were identified. Table 5 has shown the results of the post-hoc analysis. The multiple comparisons indicate that the difference of means between the control group and the focused group is significant for both FER and TER across all five time periods. Likewise, there are

significant means differences between the control and comprehensive group for both FER and TER across some of the five time points. However, the differences of means between the variables under investigation, i.e., focused feedback group and comprehensive feedback do not rise to the level of significance. The FFG exhibits lower errors means for both FER and TER over time compared with CFG, which implies that it may be more effective than CFG. However, because the difference in the means of the two groups does not attain significance, such a conclusion cannot be generalized. Similar trends can be seen in the pairwise comparisons in Table 6. So, answering the research objective, one may say that focused WCF was not found to be significantly more effective than comprehensive WCF as per the results of the current study. However, it affected lower error means on both the selected error categories (FER) as well as on total error categories (TER), which may be something encouraging. The fact that focused feedback produced comparatively lower error means over time may imply that, if provided on a long-term basis, it may yield significant differences. The interaction effect between the two groups, FFG and CFG for FER, may be pointing to such a prospect. In other words, if feedback sessions in the current study were to continue beyond the three points of time, the error means of the two groups may have assumed significance at some point.

The fact that the difference of error means between the two feedback groups, FFG and CFG, did not achieve significance may have to do with their relative linguistic proficiency. In other words, the two groups may have been at approximately the same level of linguistic proficiency, so that while the feedback affected their error means downwards across all time periods, the differences in their error means were not huge enough to become significant. In terms of comparison with other studies, the findings of this study concur with those of other studies. For example, Ellis et al. (2008) found that both focused and unfocused feedback were equally effective in reducing students' errors in the target structures, but their relative effectiveness was the same.

In Sheen et al. (2009), the focused group outperformed the control group in the delayed post-test, but the unfocused group did not, which means that even in the long run, the focused feedback proved better than the unfocused feedback. In terms of overall accuracy, too, the focused group did better than the control group at post-test 1, whereas the unfocused group did not. The findings of the current study concur with Sheen et al.'s (2009) to the extent that the focused feedback group showed lower error means on both selected error categories as well as on overall errors in absolute terms although not in a statistically significant sense.

Frear and Chiu (2015) also did not find any clear difference between the differential efficacy of the focused and the comprehensive feedback. Both treatment groups improved in accuracy of the target structure across the three tests. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups. Likewise, the present study also could not discover any significant difference between the two feedback strategies. Rahimi (2019) found focused feedback to be a more effective strategy for a few selected structures such as word and sentence errors and comprehensive feedback to be a more appropriate strategy for overall accuracy. In this regard, there is a difference with the current study as the focused feedback did not show significant improvement on the few selected structures over time. However, the current study could not gather evidence to support that finding. On the contrary, there was a moderate tendency suggesting that focused feedback may be more effective on both focused- and total accuracy in the long run.

To sum up, the current study was not able to produce conclusive evidence to settle the question of the differential effectiveness of focused- and comprehensive WCF. However, the study did record greater reduction in the error means of the FFG for both focused and overall accuracy over time, which may give focused corrective feedback some edge over comprehensive corrective feedback.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference in the effectiveness of the two types of feedback. They were found to be equally effective in reducing the learners' error means both on the selected error categories as well as on the total errors. Although focused written corrective feedback yielded lower error means compared with comprehensive written corrective feedback, the difference never attained to significance at any point of time. Therefore, until conclusive evidence comes along on the topic, teachers should vary their feedback practices in accordance with their teaching context. They may want to base their choice between focused- and comprehensive feedback on their students' proficiency level or on the type of errors. They should perhaps blend the two types of feedback in innovative and creative ways to maximize student learning.

## REFERENCES

Bitchener, J. (2008). Evidence in support of written corrective feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *17*(2), 102–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.11.004

Bonilla Lopez, M., Van Steendam, E., Buyse, K., & Speelman, D. (2021). Comprehensive corrective feedback in foreign language writing: The response of individual error categories. *Journal of Writing Research*, *13*(1), 31–70. https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr-2021.13.01.02

Crosthwaite, P., Ningrum, S., & Lee, I. (2022). Research trends in L2 written corrective feedback: A bibliometric analysis of three decades of Scopus-indexed research on L2 WCF. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *58*, 100934. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2022.100934

Ellis, R., Sheen, Y., Murakami, M., & Takashima, H. (2008). The effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback in an English as a foreign language context. *System*, *36*(3), 353–371. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.02.001

Ferris, D. (1999). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *8*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80110-6

Ferris, D. (2011). *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing, Second Edition*. University of Michigan Press.

Ferris, D. R. (1995). Student Reactions to Teacher Response in Multiple-Draft Composition Classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, *29*(1), 33–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587804

Frear, D., & Chiu, Y. (2015). The effect of focused and unfocused indirect written corrective feedback on EFL learners' accuracy in new pieces of writing. *System*, *53*, 24–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2015.06.006

Greenhouse, S. W., & Geisser, S. (1959). On methods in the analysis of profile data. *Psychometrika*, *24*(2), 95-112.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667251

Li, S., & Vuono, A. (2019). Twenty-five years of research on oral and written corrective feedback in System. *System*, *84*, 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.05.006

Mao, Z., & Lee, I. (2020). Feedback scope in written corrective feedback: Analysis of empirical research in L2 contexts. *Assessing Writing*, *45*, 100469. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2020.100469

Polio, C. G. (1997). Measures of Linguistic Accuracy in Second Language Writing Research. *Language Learning*, *47*(1), 101–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.31997003

Rahimi, M. (2019). A comparative study of the impact of focused vs. Comprehensive corrective feedback and revision on ESL learners' writing accuracy and quality. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(5), 687–710. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168819879182

Sheen, Y., Wright, D., & Moldawa, A. (2009). Differential effects of focused and unfocused written

correction on the accurate use of grammatical forms.

Truscott, J. (1996). The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes. *Language Learning*, *46*(2), 327–369.