Metalinguistic Corrective Feedback and Students' Response to Feedback in L2 Writing

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Abstract

The study of corrective feedback (CF) has been gaining more prolific attention in the field of Second language Acquisition (SLA) up to this time. Theorists, researchers, educators have been investigating which forms of CF are effective. The study determined the use of metalinguistic corrective feedback and students' response to such feedback in L2 writing. It also investigated the students' belief on which features of their writing teachers should pay attention to. Forty students (8=males, 32=females) were given two writing tasks in which the teacher coded the errors using metalinguistic clues in their essays. The students revised their first draft following the given linguistic error codes. From these tasks, the teacher analyzed the preponderant linguistic errors and the types of revisions the students incorporated employing the list of error codes adopted from Corpuz (2010), Ellis's (2009) typology of written corrective feedback and Ferris's (2006) types of revisions. The results showed that the most prevalent linguistic errors committed by the students were *punctuation* and the most common type of revision category in the redrafts of the students was *error corrected*. Further, the survey conducted to the students revealed that *error in grammar (82%)* is the top most feature the students would like their teacher to correct in their writing. This seemed to suggest that the students have positive perception on corrective feedback. The results suggested that during the revision, the metalinguistic clues were not enough to rectify the errors and that the linguistic competence of the students was needed to make the corrections. Essentially, most of the participants strongly agreed that the use of metalinguistic corrective feedback with the use of correction symbols facilitate their revision tasks.

Keywords: *Corrective feedback; Metalinguistic corrective feedback, grammatical errors, SLA*

1   Introduction

Corrective Feedback (CF) has been a prolific ground for research up to this time. "Corrective feedback refers to any signal that a learner's utterance may be erroneous in some way" (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021, p.1). "It is also a response that is provided by a teacher, a researcher, or a peer in reaction to an error committed by the second/foreign language (L2) learner"(Leow & Driver, 2021, p. 65) A CF can be oral or written.

The role of written corrective feedback (WCF) has been a topic of immense interest in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research to date, according to Brown (2007). Lightbown and Spada (2009) broadly define CF, also known as negative feedback, as "any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect." Van Beuningen (2010) affirms that "CF is a widely applied pedagogical tool and its use finds support in SLA theory, yet practical and theoretical objections to its usefulness have been raised" (p.1). To extend this definition to the written discourse, written corrective feedback (WCF), refers to "various ways a reader can respond to a second language writer by indicating that some usage in the writing does not conform to the norms of the target language" (Sun, 2013, p.1). The literature on corrective feedback also received several reviews particularly on their roles in the L2 class, and researchers were interested "if and how CF can help students to become able and self-employed writers" (Van Beuningen, 2010, p2.)

The present study analyzed the metalinguistic CF coded in the L2 writing of high school students. It determined how the learners responded to the corrections provided. The learner's response frequently took the form of revision of the initial draft – an important stage in process writing. Much of the research that has investigated written CF has also

centered on whether learners are able to make use of the feedback they receive when they revise. Thus, the study also investigated this aspect. It looked into the types of revisions the students used in their drafts which the teacher marked using metalinguistic clues and identified features of the students' writing that they believed teachers should pay attention to.

1.1 Review of Related Literature

Studies on written CF were conducted in various settings such as in the classroom, in computer mediated communication, in training and even in areas dealing with students with disabilities. Its types of feedback were also found to produce different effects and results. One of the main findings of research on written corrective feedback was that CF was helpful in facilitating L2 writing of students but the lack of knowledge on the rules of grammar make CF counterproductive (Ferris, Liu, Sinha, and Senna, 2013; Sauro, 2009). Essentially, in the study conducted by Van Beuningen (2010), she concluded that by offering learners opportunities to notice the gaps in their developing L2 systems, engaging in metalinguistic reflection, written CF has the ability to foster SLA and lead to accuracy development.

Furthermore, it was found that the use of written CF is strengthened when it is followed by a teacher conference and peer-peer interaction than receiving only CF and teacher conference (Chuang, 2009). On the one hand, there were also factors which influenced CF as found in the study of Ferris, Liu, Sinha & Senna (2013). The analysis in this study was focused primarily on the students' description of their own self-monitoring processes as participants revised marked papers and wrote new texts. Individuals and contextual factors appeared to influence their writing development.

On the types of feedback, Shirazi and Shekarab (2014) investigated the effect of direct and indirect feedback on Iranian learners studying Japanese language. They found that the group which received direct and indirect CF every other session had higher mean than the group that received only direct feedback. Further results showed that direct CF had little or no role to play in the writing practices of the group that received it. This finding seemed to strengthen the result of the study conducted by Parreno (2014) which suggested that using coded corrective feedback was a better approach than direct correction or indirect correction, although its efficacy on second language learning/acquisition needed further investigation.

Moreover, McNulty (2007) found out that recasts was the most commonly used feedback type, yet it was least effective in terms of student uptake, while the most successful feedback are repetition, metalinguistic, elicitation and clarification which were least used by the teachers.

In addition, more than investigating which among the types of CF is more effective, the belief of the learners on CF must also be investigated for CF to be useful. Lennane (2007) in his descriptive analysis on the preferences for types of errors to correct and effective reactions to error correction found that explicit correction ranked the highest followed by recasts and then prompts. Diab's (2006) study shed light on an important role in providing feedback. She recommended that teachers should incorporate classroom discussions on error to help their students understand how feedback is intended to affect their writing and why it is given in a particular way.

These studies supported the present study. Indeed, there are much more significant features of written CF that still can be explored through scholarly research.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study sought to answer the following questions:
1. What are the most preponderant linguistic errors committed by the high school students in L2 writing?
2. What types of revisions do the students incorporate in their texts when they were provided with corrected feedback in the form of metalinguistic clues?
3. Does receiving written corrective feedback facilitate the linguistic accuracy of L2 writing among the students?
4. What features of students' writing do they believe are the most important for their teachers to correct?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The potential benefits of employing written corrective feedback to language learning depend on various

theoretical grounds. The present study is anchored on the following theoretical frameworks/models.

1.4.1 On Corrective Feedback

Ellis (2009) identifies a typology of teacher options or strategies for correcting students' written work. He focuses on one kind of correction which is the correction of linguistic errors.

1.4.1.1 Direct CF

In this strategy, the teacher provides the students with the correct form.

1.4.1.2 Indirect CF

In utilizing this strategy the teacher indicates that an error exists but does not provide the correction. This type of CF can be (a) indicating + locating the error and (b) indicating only. The former takes the form of underlining and use of cursors to show omissions in the student's text while the latter takes the form of an indication in the margin that an error or errors found in a line of the text.

1.4.1.3 Metalinguistic CF

In this strategy, the teacher provides some kind of metalinguistic clues as to the nature of the error. The teacher can use two types of metalinguistic clues: (a) Use of error code and (b) Brief grammatical descriptions. The former has the teacher write codes in the margin or above the location of the error while in the latter has the teacher number the errors in text and writes a grammatical description for each numbered error at the bottom of the text.

1.4.1.4 The Focus of the Feedback

This concerns whether the teacher attempts to correct all (or most) of the student's errors or selects one or two specific types of errors to correct. This distinction can be applied to each of the above options. This type can be (a) unfocused CF and (b) focused CF.

1.4.1.5 Electronic Feedback

The teacher indicates an error and provides a hyperlink to a concordance file that provides examples of correct usage.

1.4.1.6 Reformulation

This consists of a native speaker's reworking of the students' entire text to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original intact.

The present study employed the metalinguistic CF using error codes.

1.4.2 On Student's Response to Feedback

Ellis (2009) provides the typology of student's response to feedback as follows:

1.4.2.1 Revision Required

1.4.2.2 No Revision Required

This can take the forms of (a) students asked to study corrections and (b) Students just received corrected text. In this study, the teacher required the students to do a revision following the error codes marked on their texts.

1.4.3 CF as a Focus-on-Form Intervention

Focus-on Form approach by Long (Long 1991; 1996; 200; Long & Robinson, 1990, as cited in Van Beuningen, 2010), is a pedagogical intervention that has received considerable attention and which has been advocated in the SLA.

According to Long (2000, p. 85 in Van Beuningen,2010, p. 4), focus on form "involves briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements […] in context as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication. The temporary shifts in focal attention are triggered by students' problems with comprehension or production." One of the most crucial characteristics of a focus-on-form intervention is that it is provided within a communicative context. Long implied that focus– on form episodes are unplanned (i.e. incidental). This implication had contrasted the definition of other scholars.

1.5   Conceptual Framework

Following the theoretical underpinnings of the present study, the researcher focused on the use of the metalinguistic CF. Metalinguistic CF involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of the errors committed. Lyster and Ranta (1997 as cited in Rezaei, 2011) categorize metalinguistic feedback as "comments, information, or question related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form" (p. 657). Metalinguistic comments, the most minimally informative method than recasts, simply indicate the occurrence of an error. The metalinguistic CF which the present study is referring to here is the

metalinguistic unfocused CF in which the researcher labels the errors of the students using error codes. An example from the data is shown below.

P C
I agree. Because in our family my parents are
S/V
the one who supports us.

Following the error codes, the student will do the revision as follows:

I agree because in our family my parents are the ones who support us.

Furthermore, CF can be focused or unfocused corrective methodologies. The present study employed the unfocused approach which involves correction of all errors in a learner's text, irrespective of their error category.

For feedback to work for either redrafting or language learning, learners need to attend to the corrections (Ellis,2009, p.99.). The taxonomy by Ferris (2013 as cited in Ellis,2009, p. 105) was used by the researcher to determine the learners' response to the feedback.

The study employed a descriptive research design that utilized writing tasks in the form of essay writing and the written output of the students received metalinguistic clues. The representation of the overall conceptual research design is shown below.
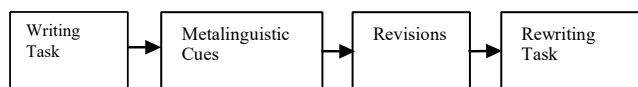

Figure 1. Conceptual research design

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Given the nature of the investigation, the present study used the descriptive qualitative approach. Frequency counts and percentages were also used to determine the number of errors that occurred during the writing, to determine the frequency of the types of revisions the participants incorporated in their responses to the coded error; and to determine the preponderant features of the students' writing the students believed the most important for their teacher to correct.

2.2 Setting

The setting of the study is an accredited private high school in Bulacan. The administrators and faculty are really working to produce quality instruction to respond to the needs of times. The school is a prominent school in the province where most of the students are considered well-off. The teachers are mostly new, but they are under the close supervision of the academic coordinator and school directress. The writing sessions were done through the English subject.

2.3 Participants

Forty (male=8; female=32) private high school students enrolled for the school year 2014-2015 participated in the present study. They belonged to the first section of the graduating class. Their ages ranged from 15 to 17 years. Their final accumulated grades in the third year ranged from 80 to 96.

2.4 Data Collection

Data collected by the researcher were primarily through the written output of the students. The researcher administered two writing sessions and two sessions for the students to revise their corrected essays. For additional data, the researcher administers a brief survey to determine which features of the students' writing they believe to be important for their teacher to correct.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Approval from the school head was sought primarily to conduct data gathering. The approval was given, and the school head asked the researcher to coordinate with the English teacher of the fourth year students. The researcher was facilitated by the English Language teacher to conduct the writing and revision sessions which took place in a week.
The participants were given two writing tasks in the form of essay writing. The students accomplished each writing task in thirty minutes.

After each writing task, the researcher checked the writing by indicating the error codes above the location of the error in the texts of the students. The teacher gave back the coded written output on the same day for the students to do the revision. The participants also did the revision or rewriting for thirty minutes. A list of error codes was provided to the participants during each revision. The Error codes, which the researcher used, were adopted from the study of Corpuz (2010). The revised written output and the original written output were collected again.

In the coding stage, the researcher listed all the errors and classified them according to linguistic errors based on the list of error codes.

The researcher counted the number and frequencies of these errors to determine the most preponderant occurrences of each. The linguistic errors are: use of wrong word, missing word, punctuation, capitalization, tense, word form, subject-verb agreement, plural/singular, spelling mistake, preposition, word order, article use, extra word, cannot be understood sentences, register, active/passive, awkward sentence and pronoun use.

Moreover, the researcher also counted the types of revisions the participants incorporated in their drafts. These types of revisions were based on the taxonomy of Ferris (2013. in Ellis, 2009, p. 105), which are : error corrected (Error corrected per teacher's marking), incorrect change (Change was made but incorrect), no change (No response to the correction was apparent), deleted text (Participants deleted marked text rather than attempting correction), substitution, correct (Participants invented a correction that was not suggested by the teacher's marking) and substitution, incorrect (participants incorrectly made a change that was not suggested by the teacher's marking). The two essay topics given by the researchers were (a) Describe Your Hometown and (b) Do you agree with the statement that parents are the best teachers.

The researcher also conducted a brief survey to get additional data on the perceived belief of the participants as to which of the features of their writing they believed were the most salient for the teachers to correct to. Their responses were also subjected to frequency counting.

2.6 Method of Data Analysis

To answer research questions 1 to 4, the researcher used frequencies and percentages to determine the preponderant occurrences. These frequencies were the result of the coding done primarily with the data using the typologies used in the study.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

The study delved on the metalinguistic CF marked by the teacher on the essays of the high school students and what types of revisions the students employed on these coded errors on their essays.

3.1.1 On the Types of Linguistic Errors Committed by the Participants

Table 1 shows the types of linguistic errors the students committed in writing their essays.

Table 1
Linguistic errors committed by the students

	Linguistic Errors	First Essay		Second Essay		Total Errors	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Punctuation	241	21.71	97	17.60	338	20.34
2	Wrong Word	155	13.96	54	9.80	209	12.58
3	Awkward	126	11.35	43	7.80	169	10.17
4	plural/ singular	83	7.47	81	14.70	164	9.87
5	Cannot be understood	83	7.47	29	5.26	112	6.74
6	Missing word	62	5.58	48	8.71	110	6.62
7	Capitalization	44	3.92	56	10.16	100	6.02
8.	Word form	78	7.02	20	3.62	98	5.90
9.	Subject-verb agreement	30	2.70	42	7.62	72	4.33
10	Preposition	43	3.87	23	4.17	66	3.97
11	Tense	41	3.69	23	4.17	64	0.03
12	Pronoun use	37	3.33	18	3.26	55	3.31
13	Article use	41	3.69	11	1.99	52	3.13
14	Spelling mistake	18	1.62	4	0.72	22	1.32
15	Word order	16	1.44	2	0.36	18	1.08
16	Register	9	0.81	0	0	9	0.54
17	Active/passive	3	0.27	0	0	3	0.18
	Total	1,110	100	551	100	1,661	100

The data recognized 1,661 occurrences of different linguistic errors. Table 1 shows that the most prevalent committed error by the students is punctuation in which the occurrences is one-fifth of the total occurrences recognized in the data. The results also reveal that there were slim proportions of other linguistic errors committed by the participants during the writing of essays such as wrong word- 209 (12.58%) occurrences, awkward sentence – 169 (10.17%) occurrences and plural/singular -164 (9.87%) occurrences. The very least linguistic errors are register- 9 (0.54%) and active/passive -3 (0.18%) occurrences. It is worthwhile to note that the participants seemingly do not have sufficient mastery of the use of comma, semicolon, apostrophe and period. The results also suggest that the participants have difficulty in vocabulary as revealed in their use of wrong words and wrong register and lack of clarity in written expressions as they produced awkward sentences. They do not also show accuracy in the use of plural and singular forms of the words.

Furthermore, it can be observed also that the participants' linguistic errors in the second essay had decreased tremendously. This can be accounted for by the researcher's observation that the students became conscious of their writing during the administration of the second essay.

3.1.2 On the Types of Revisions Performed by the Students

The data recognized a total of 1,574 occurrences of different revisions performed by the participants during the revision. This number is smaller than the number of linguistic errors marked by the teacher. This can be accounted for by the way a participant revised his or her coded essay. A long stretch of sentence having five linguistic errors, for instance, can be deleted by a participant during the revision. Thus, reducing the number of the types of revisions used by the participants.
When the participants rewrote their coded essays, fifty percent of the total revisions show that they corrected the errors appropriately while an accumulated percentage of less than fifty percent of the revisions performed are incorrect, deleted, incorrectly

substituted and ignored or unchanged and only seven percent shows correct substitution for awkward sentences as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Types of revision incorporated by the participants

Types of Revisions	First Essay		Second Essay		Total	
	f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**
Error Corrected (EC)	522	46.52	229	50.66	751	47.71
Incorrect Change (IC)	176	15.68	71	15.70	247	15.69
Deleted Text (DT)	167	16.01	44	9.73	211	13.40
Substitution Incorrect (SI)	136	14.88	35	7.74	171	10.86
No Change (NC)	76	6.77	41	9.07	117	7.43
Substitution Correct (SC)	45	4.01	32	7.07	77	4.89
Total	1,122	100	452	100	1,574	100

3.1.3 Does receiving written corrective feedback facilitate the linguistic accuracy of L2 writing among the students?

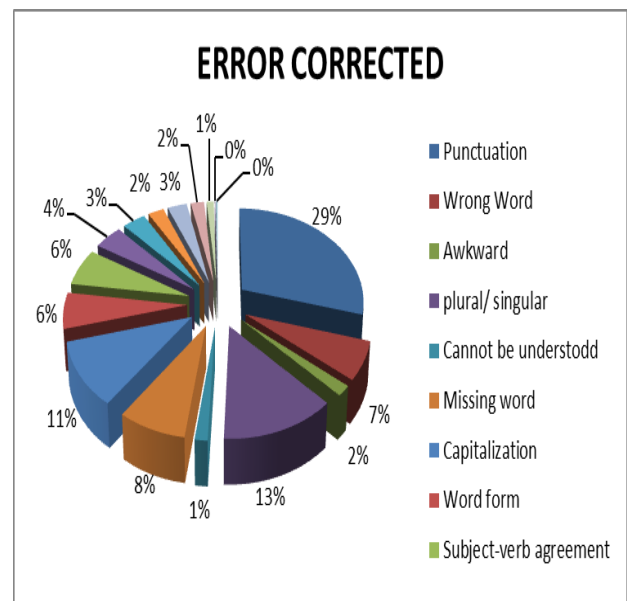Figures 2 and 3 show the errors corrected and incorrect changes made by the students.

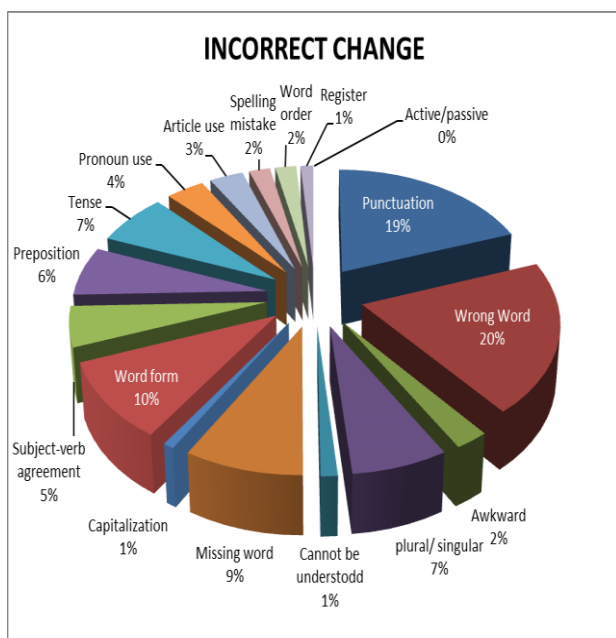*Figure 2*. Percentages of Errors Corrected

INCORRECT CHANGE

Figure 3. Percentages of Incorrect Changes

In order to answer this research question, the researcher looked closer to the types of revision done by the participants on each of the linguistic errors.

The results show that error corrected type of revision is the most preponderant type of revision. It occurs less than fifty percent of the total types of revisions recognized in the data. Its preponderant use is evident in greater occurrences in punctuation, wrong word, plural/singular, missing word, capitalization, word form, subject-verb agreement, preposition, tense, pronoun use, article use, spelling mistake, word order and the use of active and passive than in awkward, cannot be understood sentences and register. This further implies that the participants have difficulty correcting linguistic errors appropriately on awkward and cannot be understood sentences and register as shown in Figure 2.

The results also show that the second most preponderant type of revision incorporated by the participants is incorrect change that have instantiations of 247 (15.69%). The linguistic errors which have the most incorrect changes are punctuation, word order, plural/ singular, missing word, word form, preposition and tense while the linguistic errors which have the least incorrect changes are awkward and cannot be understood sentence, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, pronoun, article, spelling mistake, word order and

register as shown in Figure 3. Incorporating incorrect revision with a slim percentage implies that the student found a slight difficulty in correcting their errors during the revision.

Furthermore, the third most preponderant types of revision done by the participants is deleted text followed by incorrect substitution, no change and very slim percentage of substitution correct. In summary, Table 3 shows errors corrected by the participants and substitution corrected only mark 52.60% while incorrect change, no change, deleted text and substitution incorrect mark equivalent to 47.38%. These results suggest that the students can correct errors but at the same time also lack the linguistic competence to rectify errors. The errors that they found most difficult to correct during revision are correcting awkward sentences and sentences that cannot be understood and registered. During the revision, some of these were deleted and incorrectly substituted.

Moreover, the question as to whether metalinguistic CF facilitates the writing of the students is explained by the previous discussions of the result. In other words, receiving written corrective feedback in the form of metalinguistic clues may lead participants to see the nature of their error and help them produce the corrections, but this does not warrant that their corrections are appropriate. The participants also need to apply their linguistic competence to rewrite difficult errors (e.g. awkward, cannot be understood sentences and register) appropriately. If they did not develop, in all likelihood, they will commit errors and at the same time cannot rectify the errors. The results are in consonance with the findings of Sauro (2009) when she investigated the impact of two types of computer mediated corrective feedback in the form of recasts and metalinguistic information on the development of adult learners' L2 knowledge. Sauro (2009) found no significant advantage for either feedback type on immediate sustained gains in knowledge of target forms, although the metalinguistic group showed significant immediate gains relative to the control condition. The longitudinal study conducted by Ferris, Liu, Sinha and Senna (2013) found that students found the techniques used in the study (focused WCF, revision, and one-to one discussion about errors) useful, but

formal knowledge of language rules played a limited and sometimes even counterproductive role in their self editing and composing.

3.1.4 Features of the students' writing they believe are the most important for their teachers to correct

Table 3
Writing features students believe teachers Should correct

Writing Features	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
a. error in grammar	28(82.35%)	5(32.78%)	1(2.94%)			34
b. error in spelling	25(73.52%)	9(26.47%)				34
c. vocabulary choice	25(73.52)	9(26.47%)				34
d. use of correction symbols	19(55.88)	7(20.58%)	4(11.76%)	4(11.76%)		34
e. organization of the paper	17(50%)	15(44.11%)	2(5.88%)			34
f. error in punctuation	15(44.11%)	13(38.23)	5(32.78%)			34
g. comments on the ideas expressed	10(29.41%)	13(38.23%)	9(26.47%)	2(5.88%)		34

Thirty-four (34) from the original 40 participants answered the survey. The results show that the participants strongly agree that teachers should point out errors in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, and use of corrections symbols. They agree that teachers should make comments on the ideas expressed in the paper as shown in Table 3. The results imply that students have a positive attitude on the written corrective feedback provided by the teacher.

4 Conclusion

Providing written corrective feedback in the form of metalinguistic clues is a productive strategy in facilitating the L2 writing of the students. It can also be used as an assessment tool for both the teacher and the students. For the former, he or she can further design his or her instruction on the immediate needs of the students, and for the latter, they can revisit their past grammar lessons and may have a self-study approach to strengthen their linguistic competence. Using metalinguistic clues has also been beneficial for the students to be aware of the writing skills that they have, and this realization should lead them to possess some measures that can improve such skills.

4.1 Recommendation

As a teacher and researcher, I share the same recommendation in the study of Ferris, Liu, Sinha & Senna (2013, p. 307). Their findings suggested that teachers should have a more finely tuned approach to corrective feedback and that future research designs investigating written corrective feedback should go beyond consideration of students' written products only. The present study also recommends that teachers incorporate classroom discussion on error correction, feedback, and writing in order to help their students understand how feedback is intended to affect their writing and why it is given in a particular way. It is also important that teachers should become aware of their own beliefs about error correction and feedback to student writing.

4.2 Implications

3.2.1 On Pedagogy and Instruction

The results of the present study are beneficial for the institution concerned. From the results, the English area can design an effective program targeting the needs of its clientele. The school curricular revision can identify specific targets to address the needs of the students in writing, since writing is one of the most important skills a student should develop.

3.2.2 On Research

Conducting research is always part of any scholarly endeavor in his field of specialization. It is the researcher's contribution to the discipline. The results of the present study hopes to contribute ideas on the field of research particularly in the Philippine school setting. Other

means of improving student writing skills should be explored by teachers in the field.

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