# Assessing Feedback Strategies In English Language Writing Among Second Year Students Of English

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#### Abstract

This study investigates the efficacy of corrective and directive feedback strategies in enhancing writing proficiency among second-year English students. Drawing on a framework proposed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), the research examines the impact of feedback on mechanical errors, structure errors, content errors, and rhetorical errors in writing tasks. A pre-test-post-test experimental design was employed, with participants randomly assigned to corrective and directive feedback groups. Results reveal that directive feedback significantly outperforms corrective feedback in reducing structure errors, content errors, and rhetorical errors. However, no significant difference was found between the two feedback types in reducing mechanical errors. These findings highlight the importance of employing diverse feedback strategies tailored to specific error types to optimize writing proficiency. Further research is recommended to explore the underlying mechanisms of feedback effectiveness and investigate learner perceptions regarding feedback strategies.

Key words: corrective feedbacks, directive feedbacks, mechanical, structure, content, rhetoric errors

#### I. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Foreign language writing is a crucial aspect of language learning, as it allows learners to develop their linguistic skills, express their thoughts and ideas, and communicate effectively in real-world contexts (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Feedback plays a pivotal role in foreign language writing instruction, providing learners with guidance, correction, and encouragement to improve their writing proficiency (Ferris, 2003). However, despite its importance, the effectiveness of feedback strategies in foreign language writing remains an area of ongoing research and debate (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

The rationale for this study stems from the need to systematically evaluate feedback strategies in foreign language writing instruction and their impact on proficiency development and learner motivation (Ellis, 2009). While numerous studies have investigated the effects of feedback on writing outcomes in first language contexts (Russell, 2009), fewer studies have focused specifically on foreign language writing and the unique challenges and considerations it entails (Lee, 2008). By addressing this gap in the literature, this research seeks to contribute to our understanding of effective feedback practices in foreign language writing instruction.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore the interplay between feedback strategies, proficiency development, and learner motivation in foreign language writing contexts (Dörnyei, 2005). Proficiency development encompasses not only linguistic accuracy but also fluency, complexity, and coherence in writing, while learner motivation encompasses learners' attitudes, engagement, and persistence in writing tasks (Van Beuningen et al., 2012). Understanding how different feedback strategies influence these factors can inform the design of more effective and learner-centered writing instruction.

Additionally, this research is motivated by the practical implications for foreign language teachers and curriculum developers (Storch, 2005). By identifying feedback strategies that are most conducive to proficiency development and learner motivation, language educators can refine their teaching practices, tailor feedback interventions to meet learners' needs, and create supportive and empowering learning environments for foreign language writers.

In summary, this study seeks to address the pressing need for empirical research on feedback strategies in foreign language writing instruction and their effects on proficiency development and learner motivation (Ellis, 2010). By shedding light on this important aspect of language learning and teaching, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing enhancement of foreign language writing instruction and pedagogy.

## 1.2. Purpose of the study and research question

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This study aims to investigate the efficacy of feedback strategies in enhancing writing proficiency among second-year English students. Drawing on the framework proposed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), the research will assess the impact of corrective and directive feedback on students' mechanical errors, structure errors, content errors and rhetoric errors in writing tasks. The research attempts to answer the following question.

- What is the comparative impact of corrective feedback versus directive feedback on the reduction of specific error types in student writing?

#### **II. Literature Review**

## 2.1. Theoretical Framework: Feedback in Foreign Language Writing

Feedback in foreign language writing plays a crucial role in language acquisition and proficiency development. Constructive feedback helps learners identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing, provides guidance for improvement, and enhances language skills in various aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and coherence. Effective feedback can also boost learners' motivation, engagement, and confidence in expressing themselves in a foreign language. Research has shown that timely and specific feedback tailored to individual learners' needs lead to better language learning outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The theoretical framework of feedback in foreign language writing encompasses various models and theories that elucidate the role, types, and effectiveness of feedback strategies in enhancing writing proficiency and learner motivation. Drawing on sociocultural theory, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in language development, viewing feedback as a form of social mediation that scaffolds learners' writing skills. Feedback models proposed by Ellis (2009), Hyland and Hyland (2006), and Bitchener and Knoch (2009) delineate different approaches to providing feedback in writing instruction, focusing on error correction, task guidance, or learner autonomy. Cognitive theories of SLA, such as Anderson's (1983) information-processing model, posit that feedback triggers cognitive processes of error recognition and restructuring of knowledge. Motivational theories, including self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), highlight the influence of feedback on learner motivation, autonomy, and engagement in writing tasks. Dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) underscores the complex, nonlinear nature of feedback processes, shaped by interactions among various factors. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, educators and researchers gain insights into the underlying mechanisms and practical implications of feedback in foreign language writing instruction.

#### 2.2. Categories of writing errors

Writing errors encompass a wide range of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in written language that hinder clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of communication (Ferris, 2003). Understanding the nature, types, and causes of writing errors is crucial for language educators and learners alike. Writing errors can be categorized into various types based on linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, syntax, and discourse coherence. Common grammar errors include subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency, and sentence structure. Vocabulary errors may involve incorrect word usage, misspellings, or limited lexical range. Punctuation errors include missing or misplaced punctuation marks, such as commas, periods, and apostrophes.

Conducting error analysis involves systematically identifying, categorizing, and analyzing errors in written texts (Leki, 1990). Error analysis helps educators diagnose learners' language proficiency levels, identify recurring patterns of errors, and tailor instructional interventions to address specific areas of weakness. By analyzing errors, educators can gain insights into learners' language development and provide targeted feedback for improvement.

Certain error patterns are prevalent among language learners, often influenced by their first language background, proficiency level, and learning context. For example, learners may struggle with verb conjugation patterns, article usage, preposition placement, or tense and aspect distinctions. Identifying common error patterns allows educators to anticipate learners' challenges and design instructional activities that target areas of difficulty.

Writing errors may stem from a variety of factors, including incomplete or inaccurate language input, interference from learners' first language, inadequate mastery of language rules, lack of vocabulary knowledge, or cognitive processing limitations. Errors may also result from inattention to detail, rushed writing, or lack of revision and editing skills. Understanding the underlying causes of errors can inform instructional strategies and interventions aimed at error correction and prevention.

## 2.3. Writing feedbacks

Writing feedback refers to the information, guidance, and evaluation provided to students on their written work with the aim of facilitating improvement in their writing skills (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). It is an essential component of the writing process, enabling learners to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in their written communication.

Feedback in writing can take various forms and serve multiple purposes in language learning contexts. Common types of feedback include direct correction, where specific errors are pointed out and corrected, and feedback that provides explanations and examples to help learners understand writing rules (Ferris, 2003). Modelling feedback demonstrates correct writing conventions through examples or guided practice activities (Russell, 2009), while error highlighting prompts learners to identify and correct errors themselves (Truscott, 1996). Focused feedback on content addresses clarity, coherence, and organization, while process-oriented feedback supports learners at different stages of the writing process (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Peer feedback involves students reviewing and critiquing each other's writing, fostering collaborative learning and critical thinking skills (Hyland &

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Hyland, 2006). Teacher-student conferences offer personalized feedback and guidance tailored to individual student needs (Russell, 2009). By employing a variety of feedback strategies, educators can address multiple aspects of writing proficiency and promote continuous improvement among learners.

## 2.3.1. Corrective feedbacks

Corrective feedback plays a pivotal role in language learning, particularly in helping learners identify and rectify errors in their language use. It encompasses various forms of feedback aimed at addressing linguistic inaccuracies and promoting language proficiency. In their seminal work, Lyster and Ranta (1997) define corrective feedback as "any indication to learners that their use of the target language is incorrect, with the aim of helping them to notice the error and to trigger a process leading to its correction" (p. 37). This definition highlights the dual purpose of corrective feedback: drawing learners' attention to errors and facilitating their correction process.

One of the key features of corrective feedback is its reactive nature, as it is typically prompted by observed errors in learners' language production. Ellis (2008) categorizes corrective feedback into various types, including explicit correction, metalinguistic explanations, recasts, and clarification requests. Explicit correction involves directly pointing out errors and providing the correct form, while metalinguistic explanations offer explanations about the nature of the error and its correction. Recasts involve reformulating learners' erroneous utterances into correct ones, implicitly providing feedback on the error. Clarification requests, on the other hand, prompt learners to self-correct by seeking clarification or repetition of the erroneous utterance.

Research on corrective feedback has shown its effectiveness in promoting language accuracy and proficiency. While there have been debates regarding the optimal timing and form of corrective feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), studies have demonstrated its positive impact on learners' language development (e.g., Sheen, 2007). Corrective feedback helps learners internalize linguistic rules, increase their awareness of language forms, and refine their language production skills (Ellis, 2008). Moreover, by providing learners with explicit guidance on error correction, corrective feedback contributes to the development of metalinguistic awareness and language autonomy (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

However, it is essential to consider individual differences in learners' responses to corrective feedback, as well as the potential affective factors involved. While some learners may welcome corrective feedback as constructive guidance for improvement, others may perceive it as discouraging or demotivating (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Therefore, instructors need to strike a balance between providing corrective feedback effectively and maintaining learners' motivation and confidence in their language learning journey.

## 2.3.2. Directive feedbacks

Directive feedback, also known as guiding or facilitative feedback, offers learners suggestions, recommendations, or guidance for improvement in their language use without explicitly correcting errors. Unlike corrective feedback, which focuses on error correction, directive feedback aims to guide learners toward more effective language production and communication. In their study, Lyster and Ranta (1997) define directive feedback as "any indication to learners about the correct form without explicitly providing the correct form". This definition underscores the proactive nature of directive feedback, as it offers learners constructive suggestions for improvement without directly pointing out errors.

One of the distinguishing features of directive feedback is its focus on providing guidance and support for learners' language development. This type of feedback may take various forms, including providing alternative expressions, vocabulary suggestions, structural recommendations, or stylistic advice. By offering alternatives and suggestions, directive feedback encourages learners to explore different language options and develop their language skills creatively (Ellis, 2008).

Research on directive feedback has highlighted its positive impact on learners' language development. Sheen (2007) found that directive feedback, such as providing alternative expressions or vocabulary suggestions, contributed to learners' acquisition of target language features, particularly in areas such as article usage in English. Additionally, Hyland and Hyland (2006) emphasized the importance of directive feedback in promoting learners' awareness of stylistic and rhetorical conventions in writing, enhancing their overall communicative competence.

Moreover, directive feedback fosters learners' autonomy and metacognitive awareness by encouraging them to reflect on their language choices and make informed decisions about their language use (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). By providing learners with guidance and suggestions rather than explicit correction, directive feedback empowers them to take ownership of their learning process and develop strategies for self-improvement (Ellis, 2008).

However, it is essential for instructors to strike a balance between providing directive feedback effectively and avoiding overcorrection or excessive guidance, which may inhibit learners' creativity and autonomy (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Additionally, instructors should consider learners' individual preferences and learning styles when delivering directive feedback to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

## III. Methodology

## 3.1. Research Design

In order to investigate the effect of corrective feedback versus directive feedback in students' writing, an experimental design was selected due to its appropriateness for investigating the effect of different types of feedbacks on students' writing. The independent variable was feedback types and the dependent variable was writing performance. By randomly assigning participants to different feedback conditions, the researcher can control for confounding variables and attribute any observed changes in writing

performance to the specific feedback intervention. This design also provides control over extraneous variables, enhances the internal validity of the study, and allows for replication of findings under similar conditions. Additionally, experimental designs offer precision and accuracy in measuring the effect of feedback types on writing skills, ensuring consistency in data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations, such as fairness in treatment allocation and protection of participants' rights, can be addressed through the implementation of ethical safeguards within the experimental design.

## 3.2. Participants and Procedures

The participants in this study consisted of 51 students enrolled in two writing classes at Dai Nam University. The classes were selected because the researcher herself was the classroom teachers in these classes. The participants were 2nd-year undergraduate students majoring in English language. The sample was evenly distributed between the two classes, with approximately 25 students in each class, ensuring a balanced representation across the feedback conditions.

Initially, a pre-test was administered to assess the baseline writing abilities of the participants, using a task of paragraph writing in the Great Writing textbook. Following the pre-test, participants were assigned to a corrective feedback group and a directive feedback group, ensuring balanced representation across both groups. Throughout the intervention period, which spanned eight weeks, participants received feedback according to their assigned group. The corrective feedback group received explicit correction of mechanical, structure, content and rhetorical/stylistic errors while the directive feedback group received guidance, suggestions, and recommendations for improvement without explicit error correction.

During the intervention period, participants engaged in writing tasks designed to assess various aspects of writing skills (mechanical, structure, content and rhetorical/stylistic errors). These tasks were carefully crafted to reflect the language learning objectives of the course and to provide opportunities for students to apply the feedback they received.

At the end of the intervention, a post-test was administered to evaluate any changes in the participants' writing skills. The same writing tasks used in the pre-test were administered to ensure consistency and comparability between assessments. Writing samples from both the pre-test and post-test were collected for analysis. A statistical test (ANOVA) was used to determine if there were significant differences in writing improvement between the two groups.

## **IV. Results**

## 4.1. Baseline of the errors made by students when writing

The descriptive statistics (table 1) reveal valuable insights into students' performance on various types of errors in a pre-test measure. On average, students made approximately 11.08 mechanical errors, 7.25 structure errors, 9.00 content errors, and 9.00 rhetorical errors. The spread of scores around these means, as indicated by the standard deviations, varied across error types, with mechanical errors exhibiting the highest variability (Std. Dev. = 5.868) and structure errors showing relatively lower variability (Std. Dev. = 3.129). The range of errors varied widely across all types, indicating diverse levels of proficiency among students. These findings highlight specific areas of weakness that may require targeted instructional interventions, such as addressing mechanical errors, which showed the highest average, and ensuring clarity in structural organization, where students demonstrated notable variability. Additionally, the consistency in mean scores between content and rhetorical errors suggests a potential interconnectedness between these aspects of writing, warranting further investigation and instructional support in these areas. Overall, these insights serve as a foundation for designing effective instructional strategies tailored to address students' specific writing needs and enhance overall proficiency in written communication.

		Pre-test			
Types of errors	Ν	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Mechanical Error	51	1	21	11.08	5.8
Structure Error	51	2	16	7.25	3.1
Content Error	51	1	16	9.00	5.0
Rhetorical Error	51	2	16	9.00	3.6
Mean	51	4.25	14.25	9.05	2.1
Valid N (listwise)	51				

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of pre-test errors made by students

## 4.2. Analysis of corrective feedback effectiveness

The post-test results for the corrective feedback group reveal participants' performance across different types of errors, including Mechanical Error, Structure Error, Content Error, and Rhetoric Error. On average, participants made approximately 6.90 mechanical errors, 5.92 structure errors, 6.78 content errors, and 6.61 rhetoric errors on the post-test. The range of errors varied across categories, with mechanical, structure, and content errors ranging from 1 to 16 errors, while rhetoric errors ranged from 2 to 9 errors. Standard deviations indicate moderate variability in error scores across all categories, with rhetoric errors showing relatively lower variability compared to other types. The overall mean error score for the corrective group is 6.24, suggesting participants made errors consistently across various categories. These findings offer valuable insights into participants' areas of weakness and can guide targeted interventions to improve writing proficiency and address specific error types effectively (table2).

Post-test (Corrective group)								
Types of errors	Ν	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.			
Mechanical Error	51	1	16	6.90	4.2			
Structure Error	51	1	16	5.92	3.2			
Content Error	51	1	16	6.78	3.5			
Rhetoric-Error	51	2	9	6.61	1.8			
Mean	51	1.0	11.5	6.24	2.8			
Valid N (listwise)	51							

Table 2: Analysis of corrective feedback effectiveness

## 4.3. Analysis of directive feedback effectiveness

The post-test results for the directive group display participants' performance across different types of errors, including Mechanical Error, Structure Error, Content Error, and Rhetorical Error. On average, participants in the directive group made approximately 7.49 mechanical errors, 5.67 structure errors, 5.25 content errors, and 5.43 rhetorical errors. The range of errors varied across categories, with mechanical errors ranging from 1 to 21 errors, while Structure, Content, and Rhetorical errors ranged from 2 to 9 errors, 2 to 9 errors, and 3 to 16 errors, respectively. Standard deviations indicate moderate variability in error scores across all categories. The overall mean error score for the directive group is 5.96, suggesting participants made errors consistently across various categories. These findings provide insights into participants' areas of weakness and can inform targeted interventions aimed at improving writing proficiency and addressing specific error types effectively (table 3).

Post-test (Directive group)									
Types of errors	Ν	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.				
Mechanical Error	51	1	21	7.49	4.42				
Structure Error	51	2	9	5.67	1.75				
Content Error	51	2	9	5.25	1.70				
Rhetorical Error	51	3	16	5.43	3.03				
Mean	51	3.75	9.25	5.96	1.26				
Valid N (listwise)	51								

Table 3: Analysis of directive feedback effectiveness

## 4.4. Comparative analysis of effective types of feedback

The paired samples test conducted to compare the differences between the post-test scores for Mechanical Errors in the Corrective and Directive groups yielded non-significant results. The mean difference between the two groups was found to be -.588, indicating slightly fewer mechanical errors in the Directive group compared to the Corrective group on average. However, the 95% confidence interval ranged from -2.123 to .946, encompassing zero, suggesting that the observed difference was not statistically significant. This conclusion was further supported by the t-value of -.770 with 50 degrees of freedom and a corresponding p-value of .445, which failed to reach statistical significance at the 0.05 level. Therefore, based on this analysis, there is no compelling evidence to suggest a significant difference in the post-test scores for Mechanical Errors between the Corrective and Directive groups (table 4).

_			Paire	ed Sample	es Test 1				
			Paired Differences						Sig. (2-
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				tailed)
				Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Mechanical Error Cor. Mechanical Error Dir.	588	5.456	.764	-2.123	.946	770	50	.445

Table 4: Comparative analysis of effective types of feedback: Mechanical errors

The Paired Samples Test compares the differences between post-test scores for Structure Errors in the Corrective and Directive groups. The mean difference in scores between the Corrective and Directive groups for Structure Errors is 1.333. This suggests that, on average, there were 1.333 more errors in the Corrective group compared to the Directive group. The standard deviation of

the paired differences is 4.511, indicating the spread of the differences around the mean difference. The standard error of the mean difference is .632, providing an estimate of the variability of the sample mean difference. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranges from .065 to 2.602. Since this interval does not include zero, it suggests that the observed difference is statistically significant. The t-value is calculated as 2.111 with 50 degrees of freedom, and the corresponding p-value is .040. Since the p-value is less than .05, the observed difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.

In summary, based on this analysis, there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test scores for Structure Errors between the Corrective and Directive groups. The Corrective group exhibited, on average, a higher number of errors compared to the Directive group (table 5)

	Paired Samples Test 2										
			Paired Differences					df	Sig. (2-		
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Cor Interval Differ	l of the			tailed)		
					Lower	Upper					
Pair 2	Structure Error Cor. Structure Error Der.	1.333	4.511	.632	.065	2.602	2.1	50	.040		

Table 5: Comparative analysis of effective types of feedback: Structure errors

The Paired Samples Test compares the differences between post-test scores for Content Errors in the Corrective and Directive groups. The mean difference in scores between the Corrective and Directive groups for Content Errors is 1.529. This suggests that, on average, there were 1.529 more errors in the Corrective group compared to the Directive group. The standard deviation of the paired differences is 4.012, indicating the spread of the differences around the mean difference. The standard error of the mean difference is .562, providing an estimate of the variability of the sample mean difference. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranges from .401 to 2.658. Since this interval does not include zero, it suggests that the observed difference is statistically significant. The t-value is calculated as 2.723 with 50 degrees of freedom, and the corresponding p-value is .009. Since the p-value is less than .05, the observed difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.

Based on this analysis, there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test scores for Content Errors between the Corrective and Directive groups. The Corrective group exhibited, on average, a higher number of errors compared to the Directive group (table 6).

			Paire	d Samples	Test 3				
		Paired Differences					t df		Sig. (2-
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 3	Content Error Cor. Content Error Dir.	1.529	4.012	.562	.401	2.65	2.72	50	.009

Table 6: Comparative analysis of effective types of feedback: Content errors

The Paired Samples Test compares the differences between post-test scores for Rhetorical Errors in the Corrective and Directive groups. The mean difference in scores between the Corrective and Directive groups for Rhetorical Errors is 1.176. This suggests that, on average, there were 1.176 more errors in the Corrective group compared to the Directive group. The standard deviation of the paired differences is 3.491, indicating the spread of the differences around the mean difference. The standard error of the mean difference is .489, providing an estimate of the variability of the sample mean difference. The 95% confidence interval of the difference ranges from .195 to 2.15. Since this interval does not include zero, it suggests that the observed difference is statistically significant. The t-value is calculated as 2.40 with 50 degrees of freedom, and the corresponding p-value is .020. Since the p-value is less than .05, the observed difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level.

In summary, based on this analysis, there is a statistically significant difference in the post-test scores for Rhetorical Errors between the Corrective and Directive groups. The Corrective group exhibited, on average, a higher number of errors compared to the Directive group (table 6)

Paired Samples Test 4			
Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				tailed)	
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 4	Rhetoric Error Cor. Rhetorical Error Dir.	1.176	3.491	.489	.195	2.15	2.40	50	.020	

Table 6: Comparative analysis of effective types of feedback: Rhetoric errors

## **VI.** Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that both corrective and directive feedback strategies have an impact on reducing specific types of errors in student writing, albeit to varying degrees. The research aimed to investigate the comparative efficacy of these feedback approaches in enhancing writing proficiency among second-year English students. Drawing upon the framework proposed by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), the study assessed the impact of corrective and directive feedback on mechanical errors, structure errors, content errors, and rhetorical errors in writing tasks.

The results suggest that directive feedback strategies, which offer guidance and suggestions for improvement without explicit error correction, are more effective in reducing certain types of writing errors compared to corrective feedback. Specifically, directive feedback shows significant effectiveness in addressing structure errors, content errors, and rhetorical errors. While corrective feedback plays a role in error reduction, its effectiveness appears to be limited compared to directive feedback. The study did not find significant differences between corrective and directive feedback in reducing mechanical errors, indicating that both strategies may have similar efficacy in addressing this error type.

The study highlights variability in error reduction across different error types. While directive feedback consistently outperforms corrective feedback in addressing structure, content, and rhetorical errors, both approaches may have comparable effects on mechanical errors. This variability suggests the need for tailored feedback strategies targeting specific error types.

The findings underscore the importance of employing diverse feedback strategies and tailoring instructional interventions to meet the specific needs of language learners. Educators should consider incorporating directive feedback approaches, alongside corrective feedback, to optimize error reduction and enhance writing proficiency effectively.

Further research is warranted to explore the underlying mechanisms of feedback effectiveness and investigate the long-term impact of different feedback approaches on language learning outcomes. Additionally, examining learner perceptions and preferences regarding feedback strategies could provide valuable insights for optimizing feedback practices in language education settings.

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