

## What Makes Error Feedback Effective in Second Language Writing?

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses different types of error feedback (EF) in second language (L2) writing. Writing is very demanding in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) context and choosing the best method to give students the feedback they need on their writings appears to be a challenging task in L2 pedagogy. ESL/EFL learners often commit mistakes and errors in L2 writing not having appropriate linguistic knowledge. To identify and correct learners' errors, EF is considered the best way of improving students' error free L2 writing. EF also helps develop learners' English linguistic knowledge, particularly grammatical range and accuracy. Generally, EF takes place in the classroom where learners can feel the teachers' motives when they (teachers) correct learners' errors without pressurizing the learners. To conduct the research, the researcher explores books and research articles in EF as secondary source. From this literature review article, one can learn ways of practicing EF as well as its pedagogical effectiveness in L2 pedagogy. Moreover, this paper will facilitate L2 learners to improve L2 writing efficiency and English teachers to take appropriate strategies of EF and to minimize learners' errors in L2 writing.

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**Keywords:** Mistakes, Errors, Error feedback, L2 writing, ESL/EFL context

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### INTRODUCTION

What are the ways to follow to minimize errors in L2 writing? It is a crucial question and one of the major concerns in English language teaching and learning. One of the possible solutions can be EF. EF plays a key role in L2 learning and has been shown to be effective both in the oral and written domain [1]. EF is essential both for the learners and teachers because through EF teachers can learn about their learners' progress, on the other hand, learners also know what strategies they should follow to learn a language. Therefore, EF is an effective method to improve students' L2 writing efficiency. Generally, EF takes place in the classroom where learners can feel the teachers' motifs when they (teachers) correct learner's errors without pressurizing the learners. Additionally, teachers can provide EF mainly in verbal, written, and technology-mediated ways based on learners' needs and expectation. The purpose of this paper is to highlight effective strategies of EF to make L2 writing error free.

Feedback can generally be classified into five types: confirmation feedback, corrective feedback, explanatory feedback, diagnostic feedback, and elaborative feedback [2]. It plays a vital role in school-level and higher education [3]. It is also noteworthy that learners wish to receive EF on their errors from peers too. In order to give appropriate and timely feedback, learners should have certain abilities. The ability of students to generate high-quality feedback for their peers that benefits both parties in

the provider/recipient relationship should be encouraged.

According to [4], students must "recognise and assess criteria, judge the quality of their peers' work, and make decisions." Peer feedback provision requires certain capacities as students engage in the reflective and evaluative skills required as providers. Peer feedback has many advantages, including improved critical thinking and evaluative judgement and better student work [5]. Students must create a constructive feedback message that highlights areas for improvement in another person's work while also paying attention to the tone of delivery in order to become proficient feedback providers [6]. Generally, in ESL context, students prefer and feel comfortable more in teachers' feedback. The following oral feedback mentioned by a teacher is a good example: [7].

S: I **went** to the train station and **pick** up my aunt.

T: Use **past tense** consistently.

T: Oh, you **picked** up your aunt.

S: I **went** to the train station and **picked** up my aunt.  
So, EF can help L2 writers acquire target structures and improve the accuracy of their texts overtime. Additionally, through EF English teachers also instantly can correct learners written and verbal errors. Now, I will explore literatures in line with some of the major strategies of EF.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of EF, both oral and written, in the process of learning L2 writing has been a topic of discussion among researchers and theorists in second language acquisition (SLA). The question of whether and how EF can assist students in becoming more competent and independent writers have been of primary interest to researchers in the field of L2 writing [8]. Researchers also explore effective ways of providing EF in L2 writing. Teachers can provide EF mainly in verbal, written, and technology-mediated ways based on learners' needs and errors [9]. There are several theoretical reasons why language learning can benefit from error correction. Some of the theoretical underpinnings of using EF in L2 writing will be outlined in this section. In EF, teachers' positive role facilitates L2 learning, and learners' get the opportunity to correct their linguistic errors. Making rapport with students will foster a good learning environment to make EF effective.

According to [10], the teacher's desire to establish good "rapport"—that is, a favourable relationship between the students and their "coach" as well as between the students themselves—is rooted in their concern for the students' feelings. If L2 pedagogy takes place in a context where learners are from different cultural and linguistic diversities, in such a context, teacher-student rapport is mostly needed to make EF effective in ESL teaching. EF is an "interface issue [that] brings together the concerns" of both teachers and learners [11] in the classroom. Teachers' EF should be helpful and encouraging for learners to get motivation to learn. Thus, a teacher should have socio-affective and technological skills, pedagogical knowledge, subjective expertise, and interpersonal qualities for providing meaningful EF.

In discussing the effects of EF, [12] discuss direct factors such as grammatical error, teaching focus, audience, learners' individual differences, teaching experience, and class time and indirect factors like empathy, cultural stereotypes, and learners' emotions. Many researchers have empirically explored different types of EF in L1 and L2 contexts in their research. Based on a selection of articles published in EF, this paper offers a thorough and critical analysis of the research on different facets of EF in developing L2 writing efficiency in the ESL/EFL context. The aim of this paper is particularly to addresses literature in details about the needs and effectiveness of complete error feedback and direct feedback in making L2 pedagogy, particularly in L2 writing.

## DISCUSSION

### Which Is Better: Giving Selective or Complete Error Feedback?

Whether the EF should be for all or merely some of the repeated errors in ESL teaching is a key issue. The comprehensive feedback approach fixes each and

every error in students' work by teachers, regardless of the types of error. The selective approach, on the other hand, only corrects certain linguistic features and ignores any errors that are not within the focus domain. Selective feedback helps make it simpler to determine the most severe and recurring patterns of errors made by individual students and is less challenging for both teachers and students. According to [11], selective EF can be more useful in developing the students' grammatical accuracy. However, students themselves expressed concerns about this trend. In order to prevent missing anything, learners may choose to that all of their errors pointed out. According to some researchers, fossilization can occur from errors that are not corrected [13]. Furthermore, some experts have stated that students required to learn how to correct their texts entirely rather than selectively, and indicating only a few errors at a time could be inadequate to help them do so [14].

One important benefit of comprehensive feedback is that continually addressing all students' errors reduces error rates [15]. and improves accuracy when rewriting a specific text [16]. [17] examines the justifications for comprehensive feedback, indicating that instructors are interested in students' overall performance. Students won't be aware of the types of errors they have made if teachers don't mark each error. [18] states that since L2 learners can look at several fixes for a single error, a selective approach might work better. L2 learners may thus have the opportunity to learn the proper form in addition to gaining a deeper comprehension of why their writing was incorrect. It was found that learners' accuracy in identifying grammatical errors was significantly impacted by selective feedback. When corrections focus on a particular type of error, students are more likely to notice and comprehend them. Selective feedback can help learners bridge the gap between their current and desired interlanguage states by helping them refine their output and linguistic errors. [19] claims that teachers can accurately identify problem areas and, as a result, lower the possibility of students becoming confused. They also successfully use a targeted strategy to improve the grammatical accuracy of students' writing. Some ESL researchers primarily value selective feedback. The fact that it offers in-depth information on specific metalinguistic errors rather than all subjects is a minor drawback. In contrast, in many articles, ESL researchers show that complete EF benefits more, as learners get the opportunity to know about their each and every error.

### Which Is Better for Feedback: Direct or Indirect?

It is a debatable issue in error correction that whether teachers should provide direct or indirect feedback. Direct feedback includes pointing out students' errors in the useful format such as verbal, written, or technology mediated way. However, indirect

feedback necessitates students to self-correct while suggesting that they have made an error (e.g., underlining, circling, and an error code). Although indirect feedback may be less explicit, it can still inspire learners to self-edit, while learners with lower skills may find challenging to identify where they need to improve [20]. Students seem to acknowledge that they will benefit more from indirect feedback when asked about their choices for EF [21]. Direct correction, on the other side, may be helpful for lower-level learners who are struggling with self-correction even after being pointed out to their errors.

It has been hypothesized that direct feedback might be more advantageous for ESL teaching because learners can more effectively identify the difference between their current performance and the target features when they receive direct feedback, which gives them instant information about the correct version [22]. According to [23], receiving direct feedback enhances the use of grammatical forms accurately. Since direct feedback requires little cognitive processing, it is criticized for being too passive, ineffective, and meaningless. For instance, [24] identified direct feedback as the teacher-dominated style of instruction, which left little room for discussion or error-sharing.

One important benefit is that indirect feedback enhances the correct usage of non-grammatical forms. Indirect feedback also has the benefit of strengthening students' grammatical knowledge [25]. Through repeated practice of challenging grammatical or other English language errors, indirect feedback promotes autonomous learning behaviors and deeper cognitive processing and learning. [26] shows that learners are more likely to benefit from indirect, coded feedback if they possess a strong metacognitive understanding of grammar. Additionally, students directly connect the coded feedback to learning more and exerting more efforts. Since it requires students to respond more actively—that is, by applying their prior knowledge to solve the problem of correcting the indicated error—indirect feedback will better promote ESL [27].

Indirect feedback is not free from disadvantages, too. The term "wasted time" refers to indirect feedback, which requires greater focus and metacognitive knowledge. [28] demonstrate that students who have learned their English in an immersion-type setting and who have little metacognitive knowledge of grammar are unlikely to respond positively to indirect feedback. Another area of difficulty with indirect feedback is frustration not knowing whether the correction of an error is correct or not.

### **Should Error Feedback Concentrate on Greater or Smaller Types?**

It is significant to know whether EF should be given to larger or smaller categories. For EF, what sorts of assignments need to be chosen? Students can be given more learnable categories. Topics that are easier to cover in practice exercises and mini-lessons in the classroom maybe taken as examples. This approach does not imply that every student's work should have errors marked; rather, it implies that students deserve regular feedback from both their teachers and their peers. Moreover, in course of my teaching and learning in ESL context, I think that both students and teachers may become disinterested in essays or other large topics. I have first hand experience in line with this and I found that students prefer to get feedback on small category writing like paragraph writing, story writing, email writing, and creative writing.

### **Which Techniques Are Used to Provide Error Feedback?**

If a teacher selects any particular feedback strategy as the primary technique, another correction option to think about is whether the errors should be recognized by their type (with labels or correction codes) or if they should just be pointed out or marked. A clue of the type of error could bring about earlier learned rules that students can then apply to the self-modifying task. This is the reason why the labeling option is preferred. Determining errors only could fail to give enough knowledge or information to allow successful self-rectification. Some teachers decide to apply checkmarks in the margin or even verbal end comments about error patterns, with or without some in-text errors pointed out for illustrative purposes, even though many provide direct or indirect in-text feedback at the error location. Even though students mostly prefer point-of-error feedback, teachers may be willing to use less explicit feedback over time as a meaningful teaching strategy if they are deliberately assisting students to become distinct self-correctors [29].

### **Which Tools Are Helpful for Providing Error Feedback?**

It is true that the instruments teachers use can have an impact on both how well students use and respond to feedback. The use of unusual codes and symbols, handwriting and clarity, and grammar feedback in general are challenges to their comprehending teacher feedback [30]. Teachers must carefully consider the legibility and visual impact of comments and corrections on a students' writing page. Otherwise, teachers may be incapable to support them and, worse, may irritate them. The comments ought to be readable. In addition, the use of electronic feedback records the teachers' suggestions in a permanent form for the students to read further. Teachers can provide comments on students' writing using different tools.

To include summary comments or embedding margin comments, teachers can give students additional feedback through *PEG Writing* [31]. Even students using a tool can give their peers feedback. For instance, in *Pigai*, students have an opportunity to review, comment on, and evaluate the writing of their peers [32].

Several teachers have even used technology to provide EF in more complicated ways. [33] stated how to use color coding to figure out error patterns (for example, green for verbs and orange for noun plurals). He found that his own students thought the colors more memorable and noticeable than the error. Instead of writing their comments, some teachers now record them on audio. Some students learn more effectively by hearing than by seeing. Thus, I believe that this might be an effective substitute.

### **What Are the Challenges in Implementing Error Feedback?**

Some teachers found it hard to put the EF into practice in many EFL classrooms because of large class sizes, and heavy workloads. Hence, difficulty in providing timely feedback, as well as students' tendency rely on teachers [34]. It is unlikely for teachers to engender student active engagement and positive affective states in feedback practices [35]. Additionally, I come across a very unfavorable opinion from [36], who thought that error correction became worse than useless. He considers that it is detrimental since it takes time away from activities that could foster real learning and uses up a lot of teachers' and students' energy and attention. However, I also find the opposite views of EF. According to [37], L2 teachers frequently give students feedback that is error-focused, despite the fact that this can be overwhelming, frustrating, confusing and demotivating. Teachers' values about the role and purpose of feedback might also be influenced by their EFL work contexts dominated by an examination culture [38] where a primary emphasis is placed more on written production than learner autonomy. It is also crucial to distinguish between mistakes and errors to give appropriate feedback. According to [39], mistakes are like "slips of the tongue" and "slips of the pen". Likewise, "error" is characterized as a "deviation from the norms of the target language as a result of "lack of knowledge" and "lack of competence" [40]. It is generally noticed that when learners are given corrections by their teachers or peers in written or verbally, learners can instantly correct their mistakes. But in case of correcting errors, learners need understanding and knowledge about the errors.

### **Implications for ESL Teaching**

EF is a crucial issue in ESL/EFL teaching, particularly in L2 writing. EF plays catalyst role in improving L2 learners' error free writing. EF largely

contributes to enhancing ESL learners' metalinguistic knowledge and skills. As an ESL learner and educator, some recommendations are proposed, centering the drawbacks and necessity to improve the existing scenario of ESL teaching in general and L2 writing in particular.

- Teachers should find out how their students feel about EF, evaluate its value, and work with them to establish mutually beneficial EF goals. In this regard, students-teachers' interactions are required to facilitate EF in the English language teaching.
- In both spoken and written instructions, teachers should specify particular language targets that need to be corrected. Students also feel comfortable to keep pace with their language instructors.
- Both immediate and delayed oral EF are possible. Teachers must experiment with the EF's timing. Almost always, written EF is delayed. However, oral EF can be given as soon as errors are identified by teachers.
- Teachers should be ready to adjust who, when, and how they correct based on each learner's specific cognitive needs. This means that they are not required to stick to a common set of rules for every student. Teachers should give EF based on individual student's needs and expectations.
- It is important for teachers to let students know when they are being corrected. They shouldn't try to conceal from the students the corrective strength of their EF actions. Mutual understanding is necessary to make EF activities fruitful.
- The level of the students should be identified based on their previous ESL knowledge and placement test. An extroverted attitude should be raised among students about the necessity of EF to improve their L2 writing efficiency.
- Despite having some advantages of indirect feedback, direct feedback should be prioritized if students have lower metalinguistic knowledge. In contrast, in case of advanced students, indirect feedback can be more effective than direct feedback.
- Comprehensive feedback benefits more than selective feedback if students are unable to self-correct even in the case of minor errors. However, selective feedback will benefit more to the

learners, who are capable of self-correct their errors.

- Instructors should keep an eye on how much EF makes students anxious and modify their methods accordingly so that anxiety helps rather than impedes.

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this paper is that it has been written based on secondary data of feedback strategies in different contexts. If this research would be conducted based on primary data, it could provide more solid suggestions regarding feedback strategy in L2 pedagogy, particularly in L2 writing. In addition, this paper does not explore technology-mediated feedback, which is now practiced by many teachers in L2 writing.

### CONCLUSION

EF can in no doubt help learners achieve confidence, academic excellence, self-awareness, and interest for their study. Through EF, there is a continuous rapport building between L2 writers and teachers. Learners avail opportunity to develop their morphological, syntactic, and lexical errors in their L2 writing. EF is an eye-opening experience for the learners to achieve linguistic resources and implement in their written and spoken discourse. It is phenomenal that EF creates enough scope for learners to identify their errors in L2 writing. Through constant and consistent feedback from teachers and peers, learners can correct their own writing to bring perfection. Notably, EF makes L2 classroom interactive, meaningful, and reciprocal. Moreover, timely and insightful feedback support students to understand what is to be done and how to improve their writing English error free. This paper discusses the delicate balance in L2 writing, which includes the teacher's essential involvement in comprehending the needs of their students in order to optimise the advantages of EF.

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