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Marking time: is there a differential effect on L2 written accuracy following focused or unfocused written corrective feedback?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Teaching and Learning at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand.

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Abstract

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(Under the supervision of Dr. Karen Ashton and Dr. Alyson McGee)

Educational assessment in Brunei Darussalam is currently in a period of change as it transitions from an emphasis on traditional assessment methods to School Based Assessment for Learning (SBAfL). This research investigated whether traditional feedback in the form of direct focused written corrective feedback (CF) or direct unfocused CF produced differential effects on the accurate use of grammatical forms by Bruneian secondary school ESL learners. The results were considered with regards to the aims of SBAfL. Using two secondary school ESL classes totaling 38 students, two groups were formed: a Focused written CF group (n=19) and an Unfocused written CF group (n=19). The results of a pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test quasi-experiment indicated that there was no differential effect in the overall accuracy rate between either group. However, the unfocused group demonstrated a significant decline in their accurate use of the irregular past tense in the post-test, although this differential effect was not present in the delayed post-test. Overall, these findings suggested that both focused and unfocused written CF were of limited pedagogical value and raised questions about their use within an Assessment for Learning context.
# Table of contents

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The context of the study ................................................. 9
1.2 Purpose of the study .................................................. 12
1.3 Significance of the research problem ............................... 13
1.4 Organisation of the thesis ............................................. 14

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Scope of the literature review ....................................... 15
2.2 Feedback ........................................................................
   2.2.1 Definition of feedback ........................................... 16
   2.2.2 Variability of effect of feedback .............................. 17
   2.2.3 Feedback and culture ............................................ 20
2.3 The process of writing and the place of feedback in L1 writing ................................................................. 21
2.4 The place of feedback in L2 writing ................................ 24
2.5 Arguments against written CF for L2 writing .................... 27
2.6 Arguments to support written CF for L2 writing ................. 30
   2.6.1 Arguments to support written CF: studies including a control group .................................................. 31
   2.6.2 Arguments to support written CF: studies using subsequent writing Tasks ............................................. 34
2.7 Summary of literature review .......................................... 38

## Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research approaches .................................................... 40
4.1.2 Testing for homogeneity of variance  
4.1.3 Testing for normal distribution of data  
4.1.4 Comparison of overall writing accuracy scores  
4.1.5 Comparison of writing accuracy scores for each linguistic feature  
4.1.6 Post-hoc analysis of the unfocused group’s irregular past tense accuracy score  
4.1.7 Summary of key results from the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test  
4.1.8 The feedback sessions  
4.2 The questionnaire  
4.2.1 Analysis of student perception ratings of usefulness of the written corrective feedback they received  
4.2.2 Content analysis of student perception of preferred type of corrective feedback  

Chapter 5: Discussion  
5.1 Research Question 1: Is there a differential effect on L2 written accuracy following focused or unfocused written CF?  
5.1.2 Similarities and differences of findings to other research  
5.1.2.1 The systematic nature of focused feedback  
5.1.2.2 Differences between secondary school students and university students  
5.1.2.3 Length of time taken to write  
5.1.3 The effect of written CF on individual linguistic features
Appendix 2: An example of student writing in the delayed post-test

Appendix 3: The first of the eight Mousedeer narratives used in the written CF Sessions

Appendix 4: Grammatical error tally sheet

Appendix 5: Graphs displaying linguistic scores for both the focused and unfocused groups which are not normally distributed
List of Tables

Table 1: Design of the study 49

Table 2: Levene test of homogeneity of variance 73

Table 3: Group Means and Standard Deviation for the Error Correction Tests 75

Table 4: Group Means for the Error Correction Tests 75

Table 5: Differences in medians for each linguistic feature 76

Table 6: Differences in medians for each linguistic feature 78

Table 7: Focused Group Irregular Past Tense Means for Error Correction Tests 79

Table 8: Focused Group’s Accuracy Scores in the Error Correction Tests 80