THE USE OF ONLINE CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN WRITING AMONG ESL LEARNERS

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Education

Kulliyyah of Education
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SEPTEMBER 2022

ABSTRACT

Covid-19 is an unprecedented situation resulting to abrupt changes being made from conventional teaching and learning to online distance learning. Educators are forced to adapt to the changes by making classroom as authentic as possible for online learning. Corrective feedback is still very significant for language learning specially to adapt to the aspect of writing in classroom. This present study aims to explore students' performances and preferences towards method of corrective feedback given to them. Experimental design was carried out between control group and experimental group who received online corrective feedback and conventional corrective feedback respectively. Comparison was made between two groups of 48 students to study whether corrective feedback given was effective in assisting them to produce better writing draft. This study found that students who received conventional corrective feedback performed better than students who received online corrective feedback. It has also been found that students' opinion and preferences are significantly different based on the method of corrective feedback given to them. Interestingly, the result showed that online corrective feedback is least effective for students in this study thus further improvement should be made in future considering that we are still amidst pandemic with no guarantee to end soon.

ملخص البحث

إن جائحة كوفيد-19 هي وضع غير مسبوق ينتج عنه تغييرات مفاجئة من التدريس التقليدي والتعلم إلى التعلم عن بعد عبر الإنترنت. ويُجبر المعلمون على التكيف مع التغييرات من خلال جعل الفصول الدراسية أصيلة قدر الإمكان للتعلم عبر الإنترنت. كما لا تزال الملاحظات التصحيحية مهمة جدًا لتعلم اللغة خاصة للتكيف مع جانب الكتابة في الفصل الدراسي. تهدف هذه الدراسة الحالية إلى استكشاف أداء الطلاب وتفضيلاتهم تجاه أسلوب التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية المعطاة لهم. تم تنفيذ التصميم التجريبي بين المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية الذين تلقوا استجابات تصحيحية عبر الإنترنت واستجابات تصحيحية تقليدية على التوالي. تم إجراء مقارنة بين مجموعتين من 48 طالبًا لدراسة ما إذا كانت الملاحظات التصحيحية المقدمة فعالة في مساعدتهم على إنتاج مسودة كتابة أفضل. لقد وجدت هذه الدراسة أن الطلاب الذين تلقوا ملاحظات تصحيحية تقليدية كان أداؤهم أفضل من الطلاب الذين تلقوا ملاحظات تصحيحية عبر الإنترنت. وقد وجد أيضًا أن آراء الطلاب وتفضيلاتهم تختلف اختلافًا كبيرًا بناءً على طريقة التعليقات التصحيحية المقدمة لهم. ومن المثير للاهتمام، أن النتيجة أظهرت أن التعليقات التصحيحية عبر الإنترنت هي الأقل فاعلية للطلاب في هذه الدراسة، وبالتالي يجب إجراء مزيد من التحسين في المستقبل بالنظر إلى أننا ما زلنا وسط جائحة مع عدم وجود ضمان للانتهاء قريبًا.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Education.

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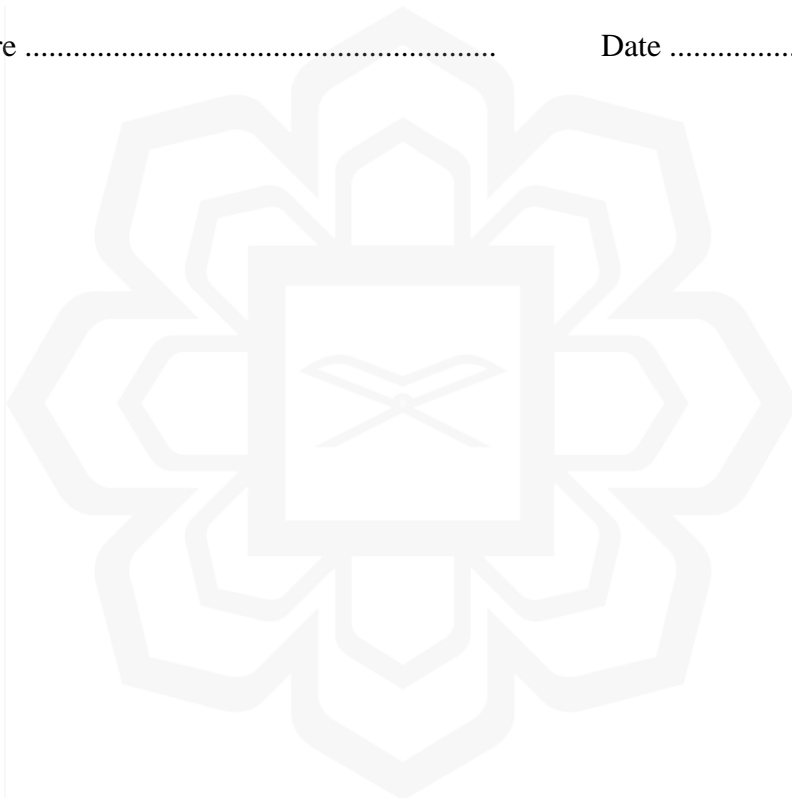……………………………..
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Nur Rawaidah binti Rossli

Signature ....   Date ....

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, all glory is due to Allah, the Almighty, whose Grace and Mercies have been with me throughout the duration of my study. Although, it has been almost impossible for me to endure, His Mercies and Blessings on me ease the herculean task of completing this dissertation. This is the moment I have been waiting for since the past 12 years. Along this journey, I have personally affected by pandemic and lost few family members and friends that will be missed dearly. The completion of this study would make them proud.

My deepest appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zainurin Abdul Rahman, whose guidance, kindness, patience, and understanding have facilitated the successful completion of my work. The support and prayer he extended to me is in no doubt a boost that helped in building and writing this research work. There were many times that I felt like he is more than just a supervisor to me, and that memory will remain forever. I am also grateful to my close friends and colleagues whose support and cooperation contributed to the outcome of this work. They have provided unconditional support, motivation, and love to guide me through this journey.

To my parents, this dissertation is a proof that I managed to get through the hardship for all the things I want in my life. Thank you and I hope you are proud of me. Finally, my gratitude goes to my beloved husband and lovely girls. Thank you, Abd Raif, for your compassion, 'wicked' motivation and loving companion. To my three girls who have seen me battled to reach the completion of this dissertation, you are my strength and I really hope you will all see how important knowledge is from me. Once again, I glorify Allah for His endless mercy which enable me to successfully round off the efforts of writing this dissertation. Alhamdulillah.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Interaction inside and outside of the classroom is partially different for both teachers and students. In the education system context, interaction provided by the teachers in the classroom is always formal and assumed important to the students. Students perceived interaction as feedback on how they progress in their learning. However, both teachers and students cannot have the same interaction during all allocated time given to their studies. Students come in different characteristics and preferences which needs serious consideration among teachers. Variables lay among students are partially different and are to be tailored to meet the learning objectives. Numerous studies have been done in finding the co-relation of human biology and language acquisition. Covid-19 pandemic has altered the landscape of education, including language acquisition where teaching and learning now take place virtually (Sharif, Nordin, Zabidin & Dellah, 2021). This unprecedented pandemic has left everyone unprepared and responsible for results taken by unplanned actions. Educators and students are forced to get used to open and distance learning (ODL) to ensure that the teaching and learning process takes place at any most feasible condition. Thus, corrective feedback is highly important to accelerate the outcome of ODL.

Corrective feedback has been in teaching and learning since education exists. Some scholars perceived that corrective feedback is a natural approach that prohibits both structured grading and error correction to keep students' affective filters low (Russell, 2009). However, some scholars remarked on the negative effects of corrective feedback giving heated discussions among researchers (Trusscot, 1996; Burgos, 2011). Ferris (2010) suggested that the arguments to stop; instead researchers should find ways to collaborate for the betterment of language acquisition. Hence, providing feedback in class is not a simple or clear-cut process as there are many different types of feedback and each type can have a specific effect on learners' errors (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010). By exploring corrective feedback, teachers would be

aware of the feedback given to their students later to help their students utilize corrective feedback in acquiring a second language.

Students should also be aware of the corrective feedback given to them. Students should fully utilize the feedback given to them for them to self-correct and improve their second language acquisition. The education system has popularized anatomy learning especially for adult and advanced learners. Hence, by knowing of different types of corrective feedback, students will be able to self-correct themselves and improve their learning of the second language despite minimal feedback given from the teachers or instructors. These are important as they provide an awareness of the feedback practices employed in the classroom and the significant effects on classroom interaction and students' learning (Noor, Aman, Mustaffa & Seong, 2010).

Various relations to written corrective feedback are studied by scholars and researchers. Not only teachers' variants may affect the type of corrective feedback given but students' variants should also be put into consideration. Teachers, therefore, need to understand their students' various needs, concerns, and expectations toward corrective feedback. Lack of research in relating possible variants and corrective feedback may lead teachers in giving the same feedback to each learner without considering their preferences. Having the education to be tailored for post-Covid-19 is surely not making the giving of written corrective feedback any easy. For language instructors, practices in teaching and writing and providing corrective feedback must be modified to stay in line with the course objectives and online distance learning (ODL) medium (Sharif., et al, 2021). Hence, it is also essential to know students' attitudes and preferences towards corrective feedback. Instructors need to know their learners' preferences for corrective feedback to maximize its potential positive effect on language development (Burgos, 2011).

1.2 HISTORY OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia has developed many years in enhancing their education field including the methodologies of teaching second language acquisition. The usual ways of teaching the language were formerly Grammar Translation and the Audio-lingual method. Historically, the behaviorist teaching models that were practiced in the 1950s and 1960s such as the Audio-lingual method stressed error correction at all costs (Russell, 2009). However, researchers have doubted the behaviorist approach of correcting students' errors which does not result in improvement of the second language acquisition (see Brooks, 1960, Krashen, 1981). It was at that time that the government moves forward in revising the whole curriculum.

Communicative language teaching was later materialized in the West in the 1960s and adopted in Malaysia as early as the 1970s. As communicative language teaching focuses on meaning over form, the correction of grammatical errors is not of primary importance. However, when learners' accuracy is assessed, it is always done in context (Hadley, 2001). In the 1990s, much research has been done by prominent scholars on assessing error correction, explicit grammar instruction and form-focused that promotes second language acquisition. This leads to the replacement of 'error correction' to 'corrective feedback'. Corrective feedback applies to different types of feedback given by teachers in correcting their students. Since then, the education system has set a new rule in applying a communicative-based approach throughout the learning process. The Cabinet Committee Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy 1979 states that the teaching of English is to enable all school-leavers to use English in certain everyday situations and work situations. It also allows students to pursue higher education in the medium of English. This is to show that Malaysia puts greater emphasis on the communicative aspect of the new syllabus.

Adapted from the Ministry of Education in the year 2000, a new syllabus on teaching the English language (KBSM) has been revamped from the previous syllabus and is continuously used at present. Teachers and students need to communicate efficiently to improve their performance. The practices have given much positive feedback and improved the learners' performance (Othman, 2012). In 2022, KBSM

would be in the final year to be implemented and perhaps a new policy would be used. On the other hand, more modification is being put into the English language syllabus with the introduction of school-based assessment (SBA) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). This is where the practice of giving corrective feedback is essential and being put forward by educators.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Feedback is defined as an immediate response to learners' errors and for feedback to be effective, it needs to inform the learners whether their answers are correct or not, as well as provide them with enough information and guidance to produce the correct target form (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010). Having faced that, not many teachers are aware of the relation of corrective feedback on students more even to acknowledge to students that corrective feedback is to help their study. Malaysia has produced students and curriculum that focus too much on exam orientation. Teachers' marking is very much influenced by the Lembaga Peperiksaan Malaysia (LPM) types of marking symbols, which appear to be the only reference teachers have in providing written corrective feedback (Mahmud, 2016). With this scenario in our education, students and teachers often forget the necessity of having proper feedback for the students' improvement. Instead, they focus more on getting the questions right and this does not fit the purpose of having real education. Teachers in Malaysia are not trained to give the right corrective feedback to students (see Razali et al., 2021; Vasu et al., 2016; Mahmud, 2016). By knowing more about corrective feedback, teachers would not only help students in correcting themselves thus improving their learning progress simultaneously.

Nevertheless, correcting students' errors is not an easy task to be done. Teachers might have dealt with various errors from different students all over again for a very long period despite their time-spending and efforts-paying feedback (Wang & Jiang, 2015). Students, on the other hand, might not know that they are being corrected or that the correction given to them is not efficient enough to make them not repeat it in the future. Both teachers and students may have different perceptions of

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corrective feedback, and one must acknowledge that there is a relation of it to the process of teaching and learning. It has been repeatedly observed that sometimes the techniques teachers use to correct students in the classroom do not meet the students´ preference which consequently brought some negative attitudes which can make the learning process unsuccessful (Burgos, 2011). Thus, corrective feedback is important for teachers to correct the students by trying to meet their preferences as well for students to do their self-discovery. When the students are aware of the feedback used, they will be able to choose the best option that will work best for them.

Dealing with the pandemic leaves both teachers and students with no certainty except hope. It seems to become even more challenging for teachers to give feedback during the Covid-19 pandemic due to school closure and the accompanying massive shift to online education (Jiang & Yu, 2021). This condition has also forced the teachers to work persistently hard in the teaching and learning process (UNESCO, 2020; Suwanda, Nurlaila & Nasir, 2021). Teachers are having diverse perceptions of transmitting conventional feedback to online corrective feedback and many are struggling of finding the most authentic way for feedback to reach their students. Written corrective feedback is still very highly demanded and functional to assist language learning. On the contrary, there is no mention of how an English teacher should mark and give feedback to students' writings and there is little emphasis on it within teacher training courses, especially in Malaysia (Razali et al, 2021). We do not know whether this will work considering that conventional ways of giving written corrective feedback marked on students' output have abruptly changed to online written corrective feedback. Therefore, this study is purposely designed to identify students' performances based on the method of written corrective feedback (conventional or online) given by teachers later to discover students' preference of corrective feedback given to them.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to investigate students' performance being given online corrective feedback as opposed to the conventional ways of written corrective feedback given in the language learning classrooms. It further attempts to find out the students' preferences on corrective feedback given by their teachers to them in response to their writing output.

Research Questions

1) To what extent does the feasibility of giving corrective feedback affect students' results and grades?

2) What are the students' perceptions of corrective feedback given by teachers?

Research Hypothesis

Teachers' preferences on the type of corrective feedback given to students may vary from one class to another (Cohen & Cavalcanti,1990; Fathman & Whalley,1990 and Saito, 1994). Students respond and benefit from feedback given differently for their improvement. Students' strategies for handling feedback may depend on the type of feedback they receive in the ESL classroom (Saito, 1994). This study intends to investigate the relation of corrective feedback on teachers and students specifically to the extent of the different methods of corrective feedback given to students and how they respond to it. Therefore, from this present study, the researcher expects that:

H_O1: There are differences in students' grades and performance based on the mode of corrective feedback given.

H_O2: There are variations between teacher's corrective feedback and student's preferences.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As mentioned, there has been a lot of arguments and research being made on the use of corrective feedback in a second language classroom. However, there are limited studies about corrective feedback and online distance learning platforms used before the spread of the worldwide health crisis, Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 (Hazaymeh, 2021). Based on the search by the researcher, the mode of corrective feedback given by teachers to students especially relating to post-pandemic situations has so far not rigorously been studied. Therefore, this study is intended to fill the gap in the literature. In the Malaysian context, several studies have been done to investigate the use of online corrective feedback in academic writing specifically by L1 Malay learners (Soo, Rajendran, Sain, Kamaludin, Nawi, Yusof, 2013; Shaid et al, 2021). However, there is a need for a recent and closer look from the current perspective considering the abrupt shift to online learning due to the pandemic. Therefore, this study would enable us to understand the different modes of corrective feedback given by teachers and how students perceived corrective feedback in a Malaysian tertiary ESL classroom context.

Being well-informed about the benefits of online and conventional written corrective feedback, it is hoped that educators namely teachers and instructors will acknowledge the importance of feedback and its effect on the whole learning process especially in the aspect of teaching second language classrooms in the Malaysian context. In a long-term effect, this study is hoped to raise awareness on the importance of teaching future educators to give appropriate feedback to students. Perhaps, with better awareness of the modes, preferences, and corrective feedback, we will find an answer to comprehend Malaysian students' proficiency in the English language. Most importantly, this study aims to assist teachers and students in teaching and learning during the time of pandemic which surely will be longer than we ever wanted. The findings are important as they will provide an awareness of the written feedback practices adopted in the classrooms and the significant effects on students' overall learning and their opportunities to use language for communication (Noor, Aman, Mustaffa & Seong, 2010).

For the benefit of the institute, this study is served as a baseline for any improvement to be made on the teaching and learning process in the future. Students from the institute who are all Malay learners are hoped to be aware of the feedback given and their best preferences of corrective feedback. In a long-term effect, the institute could use this study to create a comprehensive module on how lecturers should respond to students' language output and to eventually improve the process of teaching and learning among students and lecturers. Stakeholders and policymakers would benefit from this study by having an authentic example of the necessity of corrective feedback to be integrated into the teaching and learning process. With the full participation of stakeholders in education provision, the policymaker should provide viable and concentrated measures of effective implementation to ensure quality education not only in the institute but to the whole education system generally.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research is designed to study the mode of corrective feedback given by teachers to students in different classes of diploma level further extent to compare students' grades and performances as a result of the writing component of the second language classroom. The study does not include other levels of students or other types of education levels in Malaysia. The mode of corrective feedback (online and conventional written feedback) is given great emphasis in this study as it contributes to the data result of this study. However, it is to better note that this study is aimed at looking at the relation of students' results and mode of corrective feedback given but not to compare its effectiveness on any other aspect. Besides that, the researcher has carefully picked the sample groups in collecting the students' perceptions towards corrective feedback. Hence, it can be understood that the result of this study cannot be generalized to other types of educational levels, but rather to address the issues stated in the problem statement above.
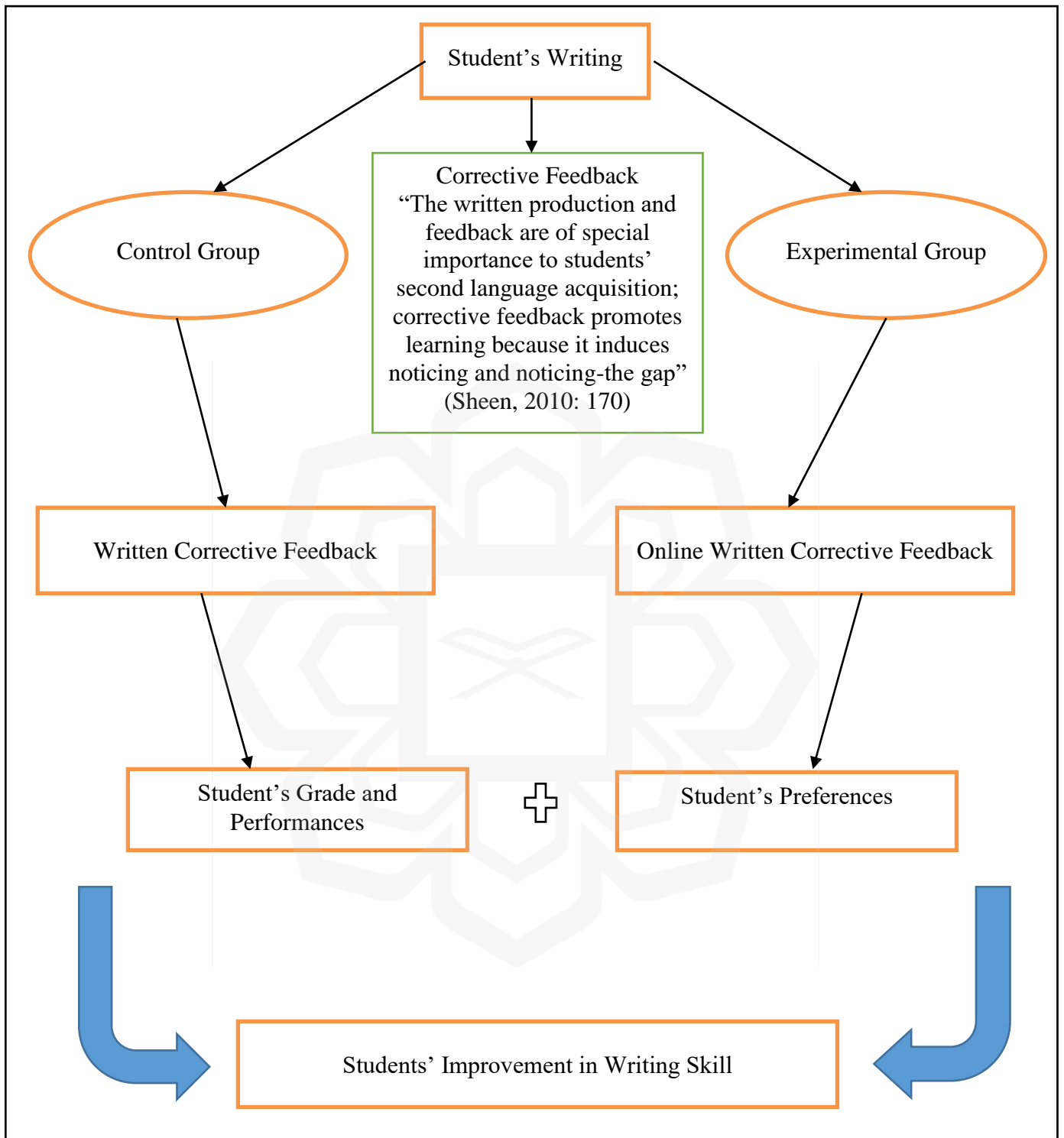
1.7 THEREOTICAL AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Figure 1.1 Research Framework of Online Written Corrective Feedback (OWCF)

For the purpose of this study, this figure is conceptualized after the work of Sheen, 2010 As shown in Figure 1.1, the conceptual framework of the study is based on Sheen (2010) highlighting that "corrective feedback promotes learning because it induces noticing and noticing-the-gap". This study provides a thorough understanding into the significance of given corrective feedback using online mode of communication. Many studies have been conducted on corrective feedback but less highlight is given to the integration of technology in providing written feedback and how actually teachers and students deal with it. According to Maqbali & Mohin (2022), theoretical model of written corrective feedback can become one of the influential techniques that allows opportunities of communicating whilst increasing students' willingness to improve writing skills. This is crucial in parallel with the necessity of distance learning.

According to Sheen (2010), two main forms of written corrective feedback utilized by teachers are direct and indirect corrective feedback. The direct corrective feedback is a detailed correction in the form of linguistics, organization and content of writing where it concerns correcting errors of linguistics forms or structure such as crossing word or phrase, the inclusion of a missing word or phrase or the correct form of structure provided by the teacher (Bitchener, Young and Cameron, 2005). The research framework of Online Written Corrective Feedback is a detailed distinguish on the student's writing output outlining students' preferences and performances.

In contrast, indirect corrective feedback is the form of underlining an error without correcting it. This is done by using a code to show the type and where the errors occurred instead of giving the explicit correction to it. Students are left to figure out and correct the errors they committed in the writing as highlighted by teachers. Ferris and Roberts (2001) are in the view that indirect corrective feedback is more likely to lead to long term learning. Indirect corrective feedback could promote cognitive skills and helps students internalize the correct forms.

This research framework also illustrates three main parts of OWCF. The first part is the students' writing and this is divided into two groups which are control and experimental group. The second part is students' grade and performances and the third part is students' preferences. Students' preferences will be taken into consideration

including two elements of corrective feedback which are direct and indirect corrective feedback. All of the three parts would have an impact on the students' improvement in writing skill.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- **Corrective feedback:** in respect of this study, corrective feedback is best defined as an immediate response to learners' errors and for feedback to be effective, it needs to inform the learners whether their answers are correct or not, as well as provide them with enough information and guidance to produce thecorrect target form (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010)

- **Written corrective feedback:** in respect of this study, written corrective feedback is defined as a form of explicit written information provided by the teacher to the learner about incorrect grammatical usage in their writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012)

- **Online corrective feedback:** in respect of this study, online corrective feedbackis best defined as replication of approaches used in face-to-face English writing course and the transformation to the online learning environment where instructors offer learning via tools, teacher feedback is given in the electronic written form and all activities completed online without face-to-face communication (Xu, 2021)

- **Operational Definitions of Preference:**

i.   Questionnaire for Corrective Feedback Approaches (QCFAs)

The scale of preferences towards corrective feedback can be examined using The Questionnaire for Corrective Feedback Approaches (QCFAs)proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) which was then modified by Othman, 2012; Ferris, Liu, Sinha, and Senna (2013) as well as Diab (2005). The questionnaires consisted of two main parts: Part I talks aboutthe respondents' demographic information and Part II is divided into three sections which are Section A, Section B, and Section C. Firstly, the Likert Scale with the system of scoring is employed referring to 1 to 5; the high scale 5 (Strongly

Agree) for the favorable attitude and the low scale 1 (Strongly Disagree) for the unfavorable attitude. The final section used dichotomous type questions indicating either 'Yes' or 'No' to the close-ended questions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

The concept of corrective feedback in teaching and learning has been studied for more than 60 years from the 1950s until the present time (Rizi & Ketabi, 2015). Corrective feedback is information given to learners regarding a linguistics error they have made (Loewen, 2012; Sheen, 2007). It is formerly related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which started in the 1980s where giving feedback in the learning process is important to learners. Feedback or corrective practices in teaching and learning are believed to give a huge impact on students' learning. This promotes teachers to be communicative in teaching and learning where giving verbal feedback after each lesson is part of the pillars. According to Corden, (1967) errors are systematic which give teachers information about what learners still need to learn. Later, Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) differentiate errors to explicit feedback and implicit feedback as well as input-providing versus output prompting (Ellis, 2006; Lyster, 2004). Lyster and Ranta (1997) in their study of corrective feedback further developed a taxonomy of interactional feedback which consists of six salient types of corrective feedback.

Nevertheless, a few things have been overlooked in determining the effectiveness of corrective feedback on the learners. Corrective feedback given by teachers creates different impacts on the learners. Teachers give different discreet feedback to their students (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010; Park, 2010; Karimi & Asadnia, 2015). Specifically in Malaysia, teachers are not formally trained to deal with the method or process of giving feedback to students. Instead, teachers are increasingly promoting two other alternative methods; which are peer feedback and self-assessment (Vasu, Ling & Nimehchisalem, 2016). This needs much attention as other countries such as Singapore are practicing and enhancing the use of corrective feedback in the classroom. In 2004, the Scotland Higher Education Academy conducted a study on developing teachers' feedback on students as well as enhancing