ERRORS! SHOULD THEY BE CORRECTED?
A TEXT-BASED QUANTITATIVE STUDY ABOUT ERROR CORRECTION IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

There is an ongoing controversy about whether error correction has a benefit in second language (L2) learning, development, and acquisition or not. Some researchers believe that direct and explicit corrections work best while others consider indirect and implicit corrections a better method because they help students think about their errors and generate their own corrections. Some researchers assert that error correction should be abolished altogether. This text-based quantitative study examined written paragraphs of two groups of students at the university level in an English language program in a non-English speaking country. The two groups were from two different proficiency levels, remedial and intermediate. The paragraphs were written at two different periods during the semester, one at the beginning and one at the end. Following certain grading criteria, the paragraphs were then compared and examined for the English language learners' (ELLs) written language development. It is expected that this case study will help answer the following four questions: (1) Does error correction, in its various types, help ELLs improve in their writing skills in the long run (from the beginning to the end of the semester)? (2) In general, can English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education benefit ELLs in English language programs in non-English speaking countries? (3) Is there a difference in the development of writing skills between students in the remedial and the intermediate classes? (4) Which English language skills should be the focus in EFL classrooms in English language programs in non-English speaking countries? This text-based quantitative study was conducted in hopes that the results not only help EFL teachers become more inspired and assertive in teaching but also to encourage students to become motivated ELLs.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Over the past decades, error correction has been a topic of discussion. Arguments always appear on whether English language teachers should provide error correction or not. Truscott (1996; 1999), on one hand, strongly argued that grammar correction is unnecessary, is a waste of

time, and should be abolished. He claimed that students will not benefit from teacher corrections as they will end up repeating their mistakes in the long run.

Ferris (1999), on the other hand, argued against Truscott's claims. In her study, she found that, with time, error feedback can help students improve their writing skills. Ferris (2006) also summarized that several studies (Ashwell, 2000; Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris and Roberts, 2001; Kepner, 1991) agreed that providing error correction helped students produce better and clearer texts than those who did not receive any feedback. She also found that others (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 1995a; Ferris and Helt, 2000; Frantzen, 1995; Lalande, 1982; Robb et al., 1986; Sheppard, 1992) came to an agreement that over a period of time, students were able to improve and progress because of error correction provided to them. Ferris additionally noticed that there is very little research (Polio et al., 1998; Cohen and Robbins, 1976) that argues against the two former points.

Some (Lalande, 1982; Frantzen, 1995; Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris and Helt, 2000) also found that different types of feedback, direct and indirect, could have different effects on language accuracy and development. Others (Semke, 1984; Robb et al., 1986), on the other hand, believed that different types of feedback do not really make a difference in correctness. Ferris (2006), however, stated that different students have different levels of learning and understanding, and she thus suggested that because of the different range of errors, each error type will need a different treatment and solution.

In contrast to the previously mentioned studies, this text-based quantitative study examines written texts of two groups of students who come *from two different levels*, remedial and intermediate. It also compares the differences in *L2's written progression* between those two group levels. In addition, this study examines the written performance of *female students only*, unlike

other studies which have mixed-gender subjects. Most studies on error correction were limited to English as a Second Language (ESL) students in English speaking countries. However, this study looks *at EFL students in an Arabic speaking country*.

This text-based quantitative study aims to investigate Truscott's (1996; 1999) idea about abandoning grammar correction. It is also targeted to examine Farris' (1999; 2006) claims that varied error treatments and feedback will help students improve their writing skills over time.

RESEARCH METHOD AND EVALUATION

Participants

Students

This study, conducted during a 15-week semester in 2011, was performed on two groups of female students whose first language (L1) is Arabic. The students were taking an intensive English language program at the university level in a non-English speaking country. The first group, or group A (GA), consisted of 26 students in the English remedial pass or fail course English 090[1]. The intensive syllabus of this course consisted of varied grammar points, writing, reading, and vocabulary. The grammar, taught through Azar's *Fundamentals of English Grammar (2003)*, focused on the English articles, the present tenses, the past tenses, the future tenses, the perfect tenses, the passive voice, capitalization, asking questions, nouns and pronouns, and modals. As for the writing, the students learned the basic parts of a sentence, the parts of a paragraph, connecting sentences and paragraphs, punctuation, writing about the present, writing about the past, writing about the future, and describing actions. Folse's *Great Sentences for Great Paragraphs 1 (2010)*

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[1] The students were placed in this class after having failed the admission test at the university or having not taken it at all.

was used to assist with the teaching of the written skill. The reading and vocabulary came from

units of Barton and Sarina's *NorthStar Reading and Writing 3 (2008)*.

The second group of students, group B (GB), consisted of 19 students in the intensive

English intermediate course English 141[2]. The syllabus of this course consisted of several grammar

points, writing, reading, and vocabulary. The grammar, taught from Milada Broukal's *Grammar*

Form and Function Level 3 (2010), covered the present tenses, the past tenses, the future tenses,

and nouns and expressions of quantity. The writing was explained through Folse,

Muchmore-Vokoun and Solomon's *Great Paragraphs: Great Writing 2 (2010)* that focused on the

paragraph and its parts from topic sentences to supporting sentences and concluding sentences.

Punctuation and capitalization were also taught. Additionally, students learned how to write

definition and descriptive paragraphs. The reading and vocabulary were taken from Ackert and

Lee's *Cause and Effect: Reading and Vocabulary Development 3 (2005)*.

Teacher

The teacher of both groups, GA and GB, was a native speaker of Arabic who earned a

Master's Degree (MA) in Teaching English as A Second Language (TESL) from an English

speaking country. She had been teaching EFL at the English language program for one year.

The Teacher's Teaching Methodology During the Semester

In accordance with Ferris's opinions about error correction and feedback (1999; 2006), the

students in this study were exposed to different types of error corrections and feedback over a long

period of time. During the semester, the teacher provided oral and written error corrections[3] for the

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[2] The students were placed in this class after passing the admission test at the university or having passed the remedial course, English 090.

[3] Error corrections as well as instruction provided by the teacher were all English-only.

various skills taught. The teacher used a combination of direct and explicit as well as indirect and implicit error corrections.

Oral error corrections were often indirect. For example, when a student made an oral mistake, the teacher would repeat the mistake and try to reinforce a student-generated correction. Peer-generated corrections were also encouraged. Following the corrected error, a detailed explanation (feedback) was provided. Feedback will be elaborated upon later.

On the other hand, written error corrections were more direct and elaborate[4]. They consisted of explicit corrections of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, and sentence and paragraph formation. In addition, spelling was directly and explicitly corrected. Even though spelling was not part of the course syllabus, it was implicitly taught through reading and vocabulary. Students were also told that correct spelling was required for well written paragraphs. All corrections involved recasting the error to its correct form.

As for feedback, the teacher focused on praise of a student's achievement and provided consistent positive feedback. Oral feedback was either given one-on-one or in front of the whole class. In the latter case, the teacher was extra careful not to offend any student and to stay positive towards student generated errors. For example, if a student made a mistake in grammar, the teacher would use it as a teaching opportunity for the whole class. She would commend the mistake as being eligible for the learning situation and elaborate on how to turn it into correct usage. Written feedback included positive comments and suggestions about how to enhance and improve the written texts.

The students in GA and GB were given a writing exercise in which they had to write a descriptive paragraph. To complete this task, students answered a list of ten personal questions[5].

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[4] The teacher's overall evaluation of each written assignment during the semester included form and content.
[5] See appendix #A, *Writing Exercise: Getting to Know You.*

This included questions about the student's name and age, marital status, home location, spoken languages, hobbies, and future plans. Students were given the same writing exercise at two different points of time in the semester, one on the first day and one on the last day of the semester.

On the first day of the semester, students were required to write the first paragraph (P1). They had about 30 to 40 minutes to complete the paragraph in class. P1 was then collected and corrected by the teacher. Clear, direct, and explicit written corrections and feedback were provided for each paragraph. This included corrections of errors and mistakes in the following criteria[6]: sentence formation[7], paragraph formation[8], capitalization, punctuation, grammar, word choice[9], and spelling. To clarify, the teacher would cross-out the error or mistake and replace it with the correction. Additionally, missing words were added, and extra words were deleted. Irrelevant content[10] was also penalized. Students also received positive written feedback which included comments on how to improve their paragraphs. While grading, one point was deducted for each error or mistake found in the criteria mentioned respectively. The teacher then returned the paragraphs to the students in the classroom, so they could have a look at their errors and mistakes and read the written feedback given to them. Before taking back the paragraphs, the teacher gave the students a chance to orally discuss their errors and mistakes with the whole class during the lesson.

On the last day of the semester, students were asked to write the second paragraph (P2) at home using the same writing exercise they used for writing P1. The students returned the paragraphs to the teacher three days later. This gave the students more time to focus on writing,

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[6] See appendix #B, *Student Error Correction and Progress Evaluation Sheet.*
[7] Full and complete sentences with correct word order.
[8] A paragraph must have a title, indentation, a topic sentence, supporting sentences, a conclusion, and hold the form of a paragraph with correct alignment and margins.
[9] Words used must fit into and be appropriate to the content.
[10] The student must remain within the topic and not use repetition.

editing, and rewriting their own paragraphs. After collecting P2 from the students, the teacher used the same grading criteria for P1 to correct P2. Unlike P1, P2 was not returned to the students for review or discussion.

Both P1 and P2 were compared. Errors and mistakes in both paragraphs were counted to see how many were produced and to check if there were fewer, more, or if they remained the same. P1 and P2 were also evaluated for the student's development and progression in writing. The progress in the students' writing skills were also compared between both GA and GB. These comparisons were done to see if students' writing skills got better, worse, or stayed the same in all the grading criteria.

RESULTS[11]

TABLE 1
Number of Student Writing Errors

Group	Paragraph	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT	Total
A	P1	51	22	90	137	149	127	21	3	600
	P2	30	10	69	111	81	64	23	7	395
B	P1	54	8	43	89	126	95	22	1	438
	P2	40	5	48	70	72	57	16	6	314

TABLE 2
Grand Total of Errors of Both GA and GB

Paragraph	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT	Total
P1	105	30	133	226	275	222	43	4	1038
P2	70	15	117	181	153	121	39	13	709
P1 & P2	175	45	250	407	428	343	82	17	1747

TABLE 3
Percentage of Increased or Decreased Student Produced Errors

Group	DEC/INC	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT	Total
A	Decrease	41.1%	54.5%	23.3%	18.9%	45.6%	49.6%	-	-	34.1%
	Increase	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.5%	133.3%	-
B	Decrease	25.9%	37.5%	-	21.3%	42.8%	40%	27.2%	-	28.3%
	Increase	-	-	11.6%	-	-	-	-	500%	-

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[11] See appendix C and D for detailed rubric results.

| A & B | Decrease | 33.3% | 50% | 12% | 19.9% | 44.3% | 45.4% | - | - | 31.6% |
| | Increase | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9.3% | 25% | - |

TABLE 4
Percentage of Produced Errors out of 100%

Paragraph	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT
P1	10.1%	2.8%	12.8%	21.7%	26.5%	21.3	4.1%	0.3%
P2	9.8%	2.1%	16.5%	25.5%	21.5%	17%	5.5%	1.8%
P1 & P2	10%	2.5%	14.3%	23.2%	24.4%	19.6%	4.6%	0.9%

Keys:

DEC: Decrease number of errors   INC: Increase number of errors
SF: Sentence Formation   PF: Paragraph Formation
SPL: Spelling   GRAM: Grammar
PUNCT: Punctuation   CAP: Capitalization
WC: Word Choice   CONT: Content

The results of this study can be explained by answering the proposed questions:

(1) Does error correction, in its various types, help ELLs improve in their writing skills in the long run (from the beginning to the end of the semester)?

As can be seen from tables 2 and 3, there was a general improvement in most of the skills evaluated. The total number of errors dropped from 1038 errors in P1 to 709 errors in P2; that is a 31.6% decrease in error production.

Even though the overall decrease of error production was *not* major, many students learned from their errors in P1 and corrected them in P2. For instance, student #19 from GA corrected her spelling and capitalization error of the word *aribc* in P1 to *Arabic* in P2. Student #4 from GB corrected the sentence formation and punctuation of her topic sentence from "My name is Hadeer Osama and 19 years old" in P1 to "My name is Hadeer Osama, and I am 19 years old" in P2. Also, student #10 from GB corrected her spelling error of the word *techar* in P1 to *teacher* in P2. Student #21 from GA chose a better wording for her topic sentence: "My age is 19 years old" in P1 and "I'm 19 years old" in P2.

Therefore, enforced error correction might have been a factor in the students' progression in their writing skills. In other words, error correction and feedback provided by the teacher over the long period of time, whether it was oral or written, direct or indirect, or explicit or implicit could *possibly* have assisted with the students' improvement. Consequently, the results of this study agree with Ferris' study (1999, 2006), among others (Lalande, 1982; Frantzen, 1995; Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris and Helt, 2000), that different types of error correction helped ELLs in the development of their L2 over a period of time.

One must understand, however, that error correction might not have been the sole factor in the improvements of students' writing skills. It is possible that the lack of a control group and the availability of other teaching methodologies and variables could be a reason for the weakness of the above conclusion. This will be further addressed in the latter part of this paper under "Problems."

(2) In general, can English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education benefit ELLs in English language programs in non-English speaking countries?

A simple answer to this question would be *yes*, *EFL education did benefit ELLs in the English language program*. By examining the various student written paragraphs, it was noted that many students *actually* learned from their errors, as mentioned above, and applied newly learned skills too. For example, one student[12] used a compound sentence[13] correctly in the topic sentence in P2 when she did not form one in P1. Many other students[14] learned that they should end an English sentence with a full stop instead of a comma, which is something that they transferred from their L1.

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[12] Student #19, GA, P2.

[13] A skill that was learned during the semester. A compound sentence is made by connecting two sentences using connecting words like *and, or, but,* and *so.*

[14] Student #8, GA, P2. Student #17, GA, P2.

EFL education might not tackle all ELLs' L2 learning problems, but it might allow students to learn new skills and help them improve by learning from their errors and mistakes as mentioned previously. These improvements, even though minor, will benefit students academically and later on, professionally. Further research is definitely needed to confirm this assumption.

(3) Is there a difference in the development of writing skills between students in the remedial (GA) and the intermediate (GB) classes?

Table 3 summarizes that there was a slight difference in the decrease of error production between GA and GB. Overall, GA actually performed better by 5.8%. More specifically, they improved more in sentence formation, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. GB, on the other hand, did better in grammar and word choice. In terms of content, both groups suffered from an increase in error production. GB, however, had a larger increase in error production than GA.

It is very possible that the reason GA performed better in general is that they lacked abilities in the tested skills from the beginning. Students of the remedial class came into the EFL classroom with gaps in their L2. Because there were many gaps, they were easier to fill. With the aid of error correction and direct written feedback, it was possible for students in GA to be able to abandon most of their wrong usage of the L2 and replace it with correct usage.

This, however, was harder to accomplish for GB. Students at this stage had most of their L2 gaps already filled. The reason GB was slightly better in grammar than GA was probably because a lot of the grammar taught in the remedial class (GA) was also taught in the intermediate class (GB). The majority of the students in GB had already taken and passed the remedial course, 090. Thus, learning similar grammar points in both courses made it easier and helped the students in GB to apply the grammar of the L2 more correctly. In other words, repetition of grammar points in the remedial and intermediate classes helped GB improve in grammar more than GA; as Zig

Ziglar (n.d.) once said, "Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment." -Quoteswise.com

(4) What should be taught in EFL classrooms in English language programs in non-English speaking countries?

Looking at the overall results (tabsle A.3.), it can be seen that students had the greatest improvements in paragraph formation (50%), capitalization (45.4%), and punctuation (44.3%). This probably means that these skills were the easiest for students to learn. It can also be seen from table 4 that the students had the most errors in grammar (23.2%), punctuation (24.4%), and capitalization (19.6%).

Grammar

Grammar is the foundation for language structure. Without it, a language may be understood; however, it may sound awkward and noncoherent. Therefore, focus on teaching grammar is essential in EFL classrooms. This is said because by looking at the results, grammar was **not** one of the skills that had the greatest improvement or progression. Error count in grammar decreased by only 19.9% from P1 to P2 compared to paragraph formation (50%), capitalization (45.4%), and punctuation (44.3%). These three latter skills saw the highest progression. One must keep in mind that this minor decrease in grammar error production was probably due to the method used to teach grammar compared to the methods used to teach the other skills during the semester.

Additionally, grammar was one of the students' most produced errors (23.2%). One must keep in mind that this was probably because students were experimenting with newly learned and more complex grammar structures. This led them to produce more grammatical errors and mistakes. For example, student #3, GB, tried to apply parallel structures in P2 when she did not in P1 which caused her to produce a grammatical error which she did not have before. In P1, she

wrote "In my free time[,] I like to watch TV and talk with my friends." In P2, she wrote "In my free time[,] I like to read books, watch~~ing~~ TV[,] especially historical programs[,] and talking with my friends and mom." Another student[15] tried to write a time clause in P2 when she did not in P1. In P1, she wrote "I'm planning to work," while in P2, she wrote "I plan~~ned~~ to work after [I graduate from] ~~the~~ university." Starting her time clause with *after* and not adding a subject or a verb caused her to lose a point in grammar.

The number of errors declined in general from 1038 errors to 709 errors, which is a 31.6% decrease. The decrease of error production should be credited mostly to the improvement of skills other than grammar. In other words, students made up for their errors by improving mostly in paragraph formation, capitalization, and punctuation. This can be explained by noting that students took risks and experimented with the grammar learned throughout the semester. However, in other skills, it was hard for students to take the same risks because of the fixed rules of paragraph formation, capitalization, and punctuation, unlike grammar which has broader rules.

To conclude, it is evident that to improve students' writing abilities, grammar must be part of the EFL syllabus. Teaching grammar using varied and up to date methods should be a priority in EFL classrooms in English language programs.

Capitalization and Punctuation

Capitalization and punctuation rules are as important as teaching grammar. Capitalization and punctuation were two of the most produced errors. Capitalization and punctuation errors in both P1 and P2 combined were 771 out of 1747, which is 44.1% of the grand total of errors. This makes sense. Punctuation rules of the students' L1, Arabic, are very different from English. In fact, Arabic does not have capitalization rules.

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[15] Student #10, GA.

Because of this variation between L1 and L2 language rules, some students need more time to grasp the notion of English's capitalization and punctuation rules. In terms of capitalization, one student[16], for example, continued to write the pronoun *I* in small letter in both P1 and P2. Another student[17] wrote the first letter of her first name and father's name "wadha fawaz" in small letters in both P1 and P2. As for punctuation, one student[18] did not put a comma when writing her compound sentence in both P1 and P2, "My name is Brouj Shuaib[,] and I am eighteen years old." Another student[19] ended the same sentence with a comma instead of a full stop in both P1 and P2, "My name is Munirah, I'm 20 years old."

Since these rules are very detailed and new to most of the students, students need time and practice to apply them. They cannot be learned in one session because students need to constantly be reminded to use and apply them to their writing. Thus, capitalization and punctuation rules should also be included in the EFL syllabus and taught over the entire academic semester or program.

Word Choice and Content

Even though word choice and content did not make up a major part of the total number of errors (table 4), they slightly increased in number in P2 (table 3).

The reason content errors increased was probably due to two reasons: (1) the students' increase in confidence in using the L2 and (2) the students' inability to differentiate between the spoken language and the written language.

As for the first reason, when students gain confidence in their L2, they want to write more and thus probably produce more errors. This may not be of great benefit to the student's overall

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[16] Student #3, GA.
[17] Student #21, GA.
[18] Student #26, GA.
[19] Student #1, GB.

performance. Specifically, student #16 in GB (P2) wrote an extra sentence that had no relation to the guided questions asked[20] nor to the rest of the paragraph. She wrote, "[I] am good at cooking. I used to go to school since 2009. I'm [an] Arts [C]ollege student at Kuwait [U]niversity." Her extra sentence (underlined) caused the student to not only get penalized for content but also for grammar. The verb *used to* is used to talk about past habits, and the time word *since* means *from a time in the past until the present* which should be used with a perfect tense. A correct sentence would be, "I have been going to school since 2009," or "I used to go to school in 2009." Even if the student had written correct grammar, she would still have missed a point for content.

In terms of the second reason, it is in human nature to speak of many topics in one setting. Therefore, it gets hard for some students to separate the rules of writing from the spoken language. Students will end up writing what they say instead of focusing on the content and topic of the writing assignment. Student #18 in GB (P1) wrote, "I'll choose my job depending on my husband's opinion, because[e] I'm confused between a teacher and a traslater." This student's sentence might sound okay and might be understood if it was said within a conversation. However, in written language, this sentence is noncoherent and confusing. Fortunately, this student improved this sentence in P2 and wrote, "I would like to be a translator when I graduate."

Like content, word choice error production also increased in P2. One must keep in mind that it is not an easy skill to acquire. Plenty of reading and exposure to the target language is needed to achieve this skill. For instance, student #16 in GB (P2) wrote, "Also, I can speak English and French[,] beside my *real* language, Arabic." The word *native* would have been a better word choice instead of the word *real*.

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[20] See appendix A.

Sometimes, other factors could affect word choice like learning a third language (L3) while learning the L2. For instance, student #20 in GA wrote *Francais* instead of *French* in P1; many other students committed the same error. Those students learned French as an L3 and might have transferred their knowledge about the L3 to fill in the gaps in their L2. It is evident that the students know the differences between their L2 and L3. However, they may simply forget to use the target word, may not know the new word, or might unconsciously code-switch between the two. It is important that teachers try to make clear the differences between languages that are similar to the target language, English and French in this case, in order to avoid such errors in word choice.

Word choice and focus on content are skills that are hard to teach. They are skills that need to be acquired[21]. For teachers to help students with these two skills, they will need to expose ELLs to a realistic and natural communicative atmosphere that focuses on the target language. If the L2 is not available outside the classroom, a teacher needs to recreate a natural L2 atmosphere in the classroom and use exercises that focus on developing these two skills, content and word choice.

Spelling

Spelling is another important skill that should not be overlooked. Looking at the students' paragraphs, it was noted that many students got confused with spelling words that have a similar pronunciation or almost the same spelling (homophones and homonyms). For example, student #16 in GA spelled the word *bake* incorrectly, *back*, in P2. Another student, #24 in GA, spelled the word *went* instead of w*ant* in P2. Teachers must help students differentiate between the various

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[21] Acquisition of a language happens unconsciously and naturally like learning an L1. Learning a language, on the other hand, happens in a controlled formal atmosphere like in a classroom. Stephen Krashen makes this distinction in his paper *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* (1981).

spellings of certain words by providing them with spelling exercises that target this problem. Good spelling will help students produce strong, well-written texts.

Sentence and Paragraph Formation

Without correctly formed sentences, there cannot be a unified, correctly formed paragraph. The number of student-produced errors in sentence formation (10%) and paragraph formation (2.5%) were minimal (table 4) in both P1 and P2 combined. However, this does not mean that we should ignore teaching these skills. In terms of sentence formation, some students did not add a verb. For example, one student[22] did not write the subject of the sentence a couple of times, "[I] am 19 years old," and "[I] am good at cooking and teaching." Another student[23] did not add the "to be" verb *am* and wrote, "I good at cooking." She should have written, "I am good at cooking." Another student[24] switched around the verb, object, and prepositional phrase of place, "My plan to study at university is history," when she should have written, "My plan is to study history at [the] university." As for paragraph formation, a few students[25], for example, had their margins off. The sentences were more centered than aligned to the left. Also, many students[26] did not have indentation. Another student[27] did not add a title to the paragraph. Therefore, to help these EFL students perfect their writing and move up to professionalism, sentence formation and paragraph formation should not be eliminated from the EFL syllabus.

Capital and Small Letters

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[22] Student #6, GB, P1.
[23] Student #16, GA, P1.
[24] Student #18, GA, P1.
[25] E.g. Student #7, GA, P1. Student #8, GA, P1. Student #16, GA, P1.
[26] E.g. Student #2, GA, P1. Student #6, GA, P1. Student #9, GA, P1. Student #13, GA, P1. Student #15, GA, P1. Student #18, GA, P1. Student #20, GA, P1. Student #22, GA, P1. Student #23, GA, P1. Student #6, GB, P1. Student #8, GB, P1. Student #9, GB, P1. Student #11, GB, P1. Student #12, GB, P1. Student #13, GB, P1.
[27] Student #14, GB, P2.

Lastly, upon examining the students' paragraphs, it was obvious that many students did not really know how to make a clear written difference between the capital and small forms of certain letters. This contributed to the increased number of errors in capitalization because it was confusing to tell whether the letter was capitalized or not. For example[28], letters like U and u, F and f, Y and y, K and k look very similar whether they were in capital letter form or small letter form. Students need to be retaught how to make a difference when writing those letters both in capital and small forms. Simple exercises can be given at the beginning of the semester to target this issue and prevent it from happening during the semester.

PROBLEMS

Content

A few problems came up when conducting and analyzing the results of this study. First, the students' progression in the content of P1 and P2 was not easy to evaluate. Students received a guided paragraph writing exercise[29] in which they had to answer a set of questions in both assignments leading to a controlled outcome. Thus, there was not much development in content. If anything, there was a slight increase in the total of errors from 4 errors in P1 to 13 errors in P2[30]. As mentioned earlier, this might have been due to the fact that some students gained more confidence in writing leading them to write more. This, unfortunately, resulted in content that was out of context.

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[28] E.g. Student #21, GA, P1 and P2.
[29] See appendix A.
[30] 9 new errors which is a 69.2% increase in errors.

Assignment Setting

Another issue that could have hampered the results of this study is the fact that the students wrote P1 and P2 in two different settings. For P1, students had to write their paragraphs in the classroom under the teacher's supervision and during a specific amount of time. Time is constraining. It could have limited the students' actual abilities and chances of performing well overall. On the other hand, for P2, students were given the assignment to complete at home and return after three days. This could have given the students more time and a chance to write, review, edit, and rewrite their paragraphs. They could have also had some sort of *outside* assistance under no teacher supervision. Thus, the uncontrolled setting of P2 could have delivered false results for this study.

No Control Group[31]

Having no control group was a big limitation. Due to the lack of a control group, it was not possible to know whether it was instruction or error correction that affected the students' performance in writing. Comparing the performance of a control group with the performance of GA and GB would have solidified the results.

Other Variables

Error correction and written feedback might have been a possible factor in the students' improvement in their writing skills. However, it should be noted that there might be other variables that affected students' progression. This includes pedagogies used by the teacher to teach students new writing skills, punctuation, spelling, and grammar on a daily basis.

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[31] A control group is a group that receives the same instruction as the study groups (GA) and (GB) but receives less to no error correction or feedback.

Mistakes vs. Errors

In addition, some students made mistakes[32] instead of errors[33]. Those were confusing to address, especially when evaluating spelling and capitalization. For example, a student[34] spelled the word *English* in its correct form once and in an incorrect form, *Engilish,* another time in the same paragraph. The word *language* was spelled correctly and incorrectly, *languge*, by another student[35]. One more student[36] kept switching back and forth between writing the pronoun *I* with a capital letter and a small letter. Another student[37] faced the same problem and with other words too. The student kept mixing up the capitalization in the word *English* and *english* alternatingly. Every fault, whether a mistake or an error, was penalized. Therefore, counting mistakes as errors might have affected the results of this study.

L1 and L2 Punctuation

Confusion between L1 and L2 punctuation rules was another major problem that many students suffered from. Students[38] kept transferring their L1 punctuation rules into their L2. In Arabic, a sentence must end with a comma while a paragraph ends with a full stop. This is what the students did; they ended their English sentences with commas instead of full stops. *This problem contributed to a big portion of the error count in punctuation, which could have affected the overall results.* On the positive side, however, the majority of students were able to learn from their P1 punctuation errors and repair them in P2.

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[32] A mistake is the student's failure in producing correct L2. The student is able to recognize and self-correct a mistake.

[33] Errors are caused due to the student's lack of knowledge about the L2 rules. The student does not know the correct form of the error.

[34] E.g. Student #2, GA, P2.

[35] E.g. Student #9, GB, P1.

[36] E.g. Student #3, GA, P1. Student #14, GA, P1.

[37] E.g. Student #6, GA, P1. Student #9, GA, P1. Student #17, GA, P1.

[38] E.g. Student #2, GA, P1. Student #6, GA, P1. Student #10, GA, P1. Student #8, GA, P1. Student #21, GA, P1. Student #6, GB, P1. Student #15, GB, P2.

These problems were not possible to address during the progress and completion of this study due to time restrictions. However, it is suggested that these issues be addressed in future studies to help deliver results that are more accurate.

CONCLUSION

There was great anticipation that the error count between P1 and P2 would be a drastic decrease. However, the results were unexpected, and there was no great decrease in error production. It is safe to assume that because of error correction and written feedback, many students learned from their mistakes, learned new skills, and improved their writing skills. Yet, more research is needed in this field to confirm and support this assumption.

It is our duty as teachers to address student-produced errors; students need guidance in order to improve. As teachers, we must cater to our students' needs and design error correction methods that suit and fit those needs. Using varied and different methods to error treatment is the best. Keeping feedback positive and encouraging is also important. As Ferris (2006) states "Error treatment, including error feedback by teachers, is a necessary component of L2 writing instruction. We must prepare ourselves to do it competently, we must [as teachers] plan for it carefully in designing our courses, and we must execute it faithfully and consistently."

It is hoped that this text-based quantitative study benefits teachers and students alike. EFL teachers should deliver correct L2 knowledge to their ELLs and keep motivating them during the L2 learning journey. EFL teachers must educate positively and committedly. Error correction is important, but using it to degrade a student is a negative. Creating a positive learning environment will facilitate learning and encourage ELLs to become excited learners. When learning becomes enjoyable, it becomes easier to learn. To end this paper, I conclude with Horace Mann's piece of

wisdom, "A teacher who is attempting to teach, without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn, is

hammering on a cold iron."

THE AUTHOR

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APPENDIX A

WRITING EXERCISE: GETTING to KNOW YOU

Directions: Write a paragraph describing yourself. Answer the following questions to help you.

1. What is your name and age?
2. Are you single, engaged or married?
3. If married, do you have children? How many? Their names? Ages?
4. Where do you live?
5. What languages do you speak?
6. What do you like to do in your free time?
7. What things are you good at doing?
8. Where did you go to school?
9. What do you plan to study (major) at the university?
10. What do you plan to do when you graduate?

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APPENDIX B

STUDENT ERROR CORRECTION AND PROGRESS EVALUATION SHEET

Group #_____   Student #_____   Paragraph #_____

Assessed Points	Number of Mistakes
Paragraph	
Sentence	
Grammar	
Spelling	
Word Choice	
Punctuation	
Capitalization	
Content	
Total Number of Mistakes	

Greatest Improvements	

Student GA	Paragraph 1								Total of Errors	Paragraph 2						
	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT		SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC
1	2	-	1	5	7	8	-	-	23	-	-	-	4	7	1	-
2	2	-	3	5	7	5	2	-	24	-	-	3	4	5	-	-
3	5	-	6	5	4	8	1	-	29	-	-	9	4	5	5	1
4	2	2	2	7	6	5	1	-	25	-	-	3	1	3	1	-
5	1	-	1	10	4	2	-	-	18	-	-	-	2	2	-	1
6	1	1	11	9	12	9	-	1	44	2	1	4	4	5	1	1
7	1	3	6	7	8	8	-	-	33	-	1	4	3	1	7	-
8	-	2	5	1	9	7	-	-	24	-	-	4	3	-	2	-
9	2	1	4	2	7	3	1	-	20	1	2	2	7	8	4	-
10	1	1	4	5	10	2	-	-	23	1	-	4	3	3	1	1
11	1	1	4	6	2	4	1	-	19	-	-	2	6	2	5	1
12	2	-	3	7	5	3	2	-	22	-	1	-	4	4	3	1
13	3	1	3	5	2	2	-	-	16	6	-	1	8	3	-	-
14	1	1	1	-	2	2	1	-	8	1	-	3	4	2	2	-
15	-	1	2	3	5	6	-	-	17	1	-	4	3	1	1	1
16	3	1	4	8	6	1	-	-	23	3	-	1	10	4	1	2
17	1	-	3	4	4	2	1	-	15	-	-	3	3	1	3	-
18	3	1	1	7	8	5	1	-	26	2	-	2	2	5	4	2
19	1	-	2	4	3	4	1	-	15	-	-	3	2	-	-	-
20	3	1	4	11	12	7	3	1	42	1	1	3	5	3	2	4
21	4	1	3	9	9	4	2	-	32	4	-	3	5	1	3	-
22	1	1	2	2	3	4	1	-	14	2	1	2	2	4	6	1
23	4	2	4	4	1	7	-	-	22	6	1	1	6	-	-	1
24	4	-	5	4	4	4	1	-	22	-	1	7	9	5	2	4
25	1	-	1	5	4	8	1	-	20	-	-	1	5	2	6	1
26	2	1	5	2	5	7	1	1	24	-	1	-	2	5	4	1
Total	51	22	90	137	149	127	21	3	600	30	10	69	111	81	64	23

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

Student GB	Paragraph 1								Total of Errors	Paragraph 2					
	SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP	WC	CONT		SF	PF	SPL	GRAM	PUNCT	CAP
1	3	-	3	5	9	4	1	-	25	2	-	4	12	16	4
2	-	-	4	3	3	5	-	-	15	1	-	5	6	5	2
3	2	-	2	9	9	4	4	-	30	-	-	2	-	4	3
4	4	-	2	5	1	2	-	-	14	-	-	2	8	2	5
5	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	-	6	-	-	-	1	1	-
6	4	1	-	4	14	9	1	-	33	3	1	4	6	4	4
7	-	-	-	4	6	3	-	-	13	3	-	1	1	9	1
8	2	1	2	-	5	5	1	-	16	1	-	2	1	1	3
9	8	1	7	17	25	16	6	-	80	5	-	2	3	10	2
10	2	-	4	5	3	2	-	-	16	3	-	2	2	-	2
11	4	1	1	2	5	5	-	-	18	1	1	5	-	2	3
12	2	2	3	4	3	3	1	-	18	2	1	1	4	4	2
13	6	1	-	6	6	9	2	-	30	5	-	3	-	1	8
14	1	-	1	2	1	2	-	-	7	-	1	-	1	-	-
15	3	-	-	-	10	4	1	-	18	-	-	1	3	3	3
16	5	-	2	2	4	2	-	-	15	3	-	2	4	3	4
17	4	-	4	9	6	6	1	1	31	6	1	8	9	1	2
18	2	1	6	3	4	3	1	-	20	1	-	3	1	3	3
19	2	-	2	9	11	7	2	-	33	4	-	1	8	3	6
Total	54	8	43	89	126	95	22	1	438	40	5	48	70	72	57

Keys:
GA: Group A   GB: Group B   SF: Sentence Formation   PUNCT: Punctuation
  PF: Paragraph Formation   CAP: Capitalization   SPL: Spelling   WC: Word Choice
  GRAM: Grammar   CONT: Content